

THE FREE FORUM

END APARTHEID



1917



1948



1967



1995

INSIDE:

PALESTINE, HAITI, SOLIDARITY MUSEUMS, POETRY
HOUSING INEQUALITY, REFUGEE CAMPS, RUSSIAN ELECTIONS
DISSIDENT BARS, THE TIE & POLITICS

FOR COLOUR VERSION PLEASE COLOUR IN

EDITORS NOTE

The Free Forum is free both in that it is free to read and that it is open to all and any contributions. The idea was to create a space in which people could express opinions, share art, or just write on a topic they feel passionately about. Although it is not limited to any one subject, as we feel is important for a truly 'free' forum, the idea is to remain focused on social struggle and political issues (with the occasional exception). In this way, we hope that students will find a place to write in a non-academic style, *free* from constraints of marking criteria and guidelines. Naturally, in this current moment, the genocide of the Palestinians in reaction to the October 7th attacks on Israeli citizens takes precedence. It is difficult to sufficiently give justice to such a significant issue but we felt it was important to make at least some effort in highlighting the Palestinian struggle. To this end, both the cover and the first few contributions attempt, in different ways, to approach this topic. The rest of the collection covers a plethora of political and social struggles from UK housing inequality to the Haitian crisis,

and from pacifist poetry to dissident bars.

Contributors to this addition include ULIP students, charities, refugees, and collectives. Given the range of contributors and themes we hope there is something for everyone to engage with.

I would like to thank all contributors and our copy-editor for being so flexible with their timetables at such a busy time.

The objective of this project is to engage students in social struggles and political issues in a non-academic arena. We think this first edition has already succeeded in this task and we hope future editions will continue to do so.■

HJ.

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24H فلسطين 24 ساعة

PALESTINE

6 – 7

APRIL 2024

24 hrs/Palestine radio broadcast

Episode 2: 6-7 April 2024

Reverberating across numerous time zones and corners of the world, 24hrs/Palestine is a plurilingual programme that brings together a chorus of voices united in their solidarity with the Palestinian people. Over the course of 24 hours, we gather in physical spaces and on the airwaves with the aim of hearing from people all over the world about the necessities and possibilities of anti-colonial solidarity from local perspectives.

Through this virtual and physical gathering, this 24-hour call and response, our aim is to create a space for reflection on our respective practices, languages, impasses, hopes and desires, opening ourselves to other forms of struggle, organisation and expression through our current and historical solidarity with the Palestinian people and land. We wish

to consider anti-colonial endurance, its many challenges and its possible shortcomings and hypocrisies, so that together we can better build informed and generous paths for our collective futures.

Palestine is a land that urges and inspires us to act, to dream, to think and to participate in an internationalism that questions our interconnectedness and co-responsibility. The situation in Gaza is a parameter for justice everywhere. 24hrs/Palestine is a modest attempt to cultivate new and lasting collaborations and connections, to encourage an active listening to one another and a provocation to continue communing and reworlding.

The broadcast of the first episode began on Sunday 18 February in Palestine, at midday Palestine time, and journeyed listeners all over the globe, from Santiago to Algiers, Nouméa to Helsinki, Casablanca to Kampala, Beirut to Montreal, Bandung to Paris, Cairo to Tehran, Bethlehem, Ramallah, Cape Town to London and Tunis, as well Ukraine, Sudan, Italy and India, culminating at midday on Monday 19 February in Palestine. Bringing together a network of independent radio stations, the transmissions were composed of poetry, music, discussion and readings and aired simultaneously on Radio Alhara, Radio Flouka and others. In Paris, a collective listening session and live broadcast was held on 18 February at La Parole Errante

The second episode will take place on 6 and 7 April, starting and ending midday Palestine time. This edition will include a number of talks, discussions and other contributions (music, poems, statements, teach-ins), including those from the following geographies



Image by Mothanna Hussein

and collectives: Birzeit University (Ramallah, Palestine), Wonder Cabinet (Bethlehem, Palestine), Collectif La Réunion-Palestine (Reunion Island), various voices from Dakar (Dakar, Senegal), Radio OndaRossa (Roma, Italy), Palestine Speaks (Germany), POOR Magazine (Oakland, USA), KPFA, AROC and others (Oakland/Bay Area, USA), Kolektivradio (Kosovo), Palestinian activists from refugee camps in Lebanon (Tripoli, Beirut), 32 Degrees East (Kampala, Uganda), Radio Fantasia and others (Yerevan, Armenia), Radio Galère (Marseille, France), Egyptian Diaspora Resists (London, Berlin, New York), Radio Nopal (Mexico), a statement from G-

uinea and more to come. So far, the radios involved who will stream this 24-hour programme or parts of it are: Radio Alhara (Palestine), Dublin Digital Radio (Ireland), Radio Galère (France), Radio Liberté (Burkina Faso), KPFA (USA), Radio Oroko (Ghana), Radio Onda Rossa (Italy), Radio Karantina (Lebanon), Radio Nopal (Mexico) and others.■

For more information, see @24hrs.Palestine on Instagram - project website coming soon!

Listen live on Radio Alhara (<https://www.radioalhara.net>) and the radios listed above.

SS.

LAJEE CELTIC

In 2016, the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) fined Glasgow Celtic FC £8,616 for the use of an "illicit banner", during a home game against Israeli side Hapoel Be'er Sheva, contravening UEFA rules against "gestures, words, objects or any other means to transmit any message that is not fit for a sports event, particularly messages that are of a political, ideological, religious, offensive or provocative nature". The banners in question were dozens of Palestinian flags, which had been smuggled into the game and thrown onto the pitch in a demonstration organised by Celtic Ultras group the Green Brigade.

The #MatchTheFineForPalestine crowdfunding campaign the Green Brigade set up to pay the fine raised £176,076 from the broader community of Celtic support and Palestine solidarity. The group donated this sum to British NGO Medical Aid Palestine and to the Lajee Center, a youth cultural institution in the Aida refugee camp in Bethlehem. It was with these funds that the Lajee Center was able to set up their own football academy in 2019, named Aida Celtic in honour of the act of solidarity that helped to create it. The Lajee Center was founded in April 2000, a

few months before the onset of the second intifada, by a group of 11 young people from the camp. The Center was conceived, according to its website, "to provide refugee youth and women with cultural, educational, social and developmental opportunities" through such programs as a traditional "dabka" dance group, circus school, library program, and an "Environment and Health Unit". It is located in the Aida refugee camp, a UNRWA camp established in 1950 which today is home to around 5,500 refugees. The camp's proximity to Israel's apartheid wall has severely limited access to water and transport infrastructure, as well as economic opportunities for its residents. The wall has also isolated the camp from the surrounding recreational area, making common spaces for sports and leisure a highly political locus of resistance for those living in the camp. The Lajee Center's mission to provide training, grounds and equipment to the aspiring footballers of the camp is in this sense a deeply political one.

Since the beginning of Israel's bombing campaign on Gaza in October of last year, the Green Brigade has continued to face repercussions for their support of the Palestinian cause. After repeatedly ignoring demands to stop flying the Palestinian flag at games, the group were banned from away games before being put under an indefinite ban from all matches after a pro-Palestine display against Atletico Madrid. After a two-month ban, the Green Brigade returned to Celtic Park for the 23 December fixture against Livingston where they unveiled a Palestinian flag alongside a banner reading "Many homes are sad tonight, they whisper someone's name by the candlelight,

20,000+ killed - 8000+ children". After an IDF soldier was photographed holding a Celtic flag belonging to the Khan Younis Celtic Supporters Club amidst the ruins of the utterly destroyed Khan Younis stadium, the Green Brigade began flying the Supporter's Club's flag at games. In an open letter to Celtic management urging them to relax restrictions on displays of support for Palestine, the Lajee Center pointed out that the Khan Younis Celtic Supporters Club was formed in 2016, the year of the #MatchTheFineForPalestine campaign, in recognition of Celtic fans' unflinching solidarity with the people of Palestine. The Lajee Center also tried to reach out to members of the Khan Younis Supporter's club but was unsuccessful.

Aida Celtic was inactive for four months after the October 7 attack, due to the intensification of Israeli military surveillance and incursion in the Aida camp. The pitch had been teargassed repeatedly, 84 residents of the camp had been arrested in nightly raids and one player's brother was shot and killed by the IDF. As of the 26th of February, however, the club has resumed its activities under the new name Lajee Celtic, illustrating the team's desire to represent all refugees within Palestine. The team also unveiled a new logo featuring the Key of Return, a symbol that can be seen on the gates of Aida camp, representing Palestinian refugees' right to return to their occupied homes under UN resolution 194, alongside the names of each UNRWA camp in Arabic and English. Now legally registered to play as a team, Lajee Celtic can begin to embody the extraordinary and resilient solidarity between Celtic

fans and the Palestinian people in official leagues. Whether they knew it or not at the time, each person who threw a flag or donated to the Green Brigade's fundraiser was building the power to express the solidarity they were enacting. Lajee Celtic, born out of those momentary acts, has been a fierce and tireless advocate for the relationship between Celtic F.C. and Palestine and for fans' freedom to demonstrate it. It has inspired and will continue to inspire others like the Khan Younis Celtic Supporter's club.

■

GH.

PAST DISQ - UIET

On the 21st of March 1978, in the basement hall of the Beirut Arab University the International Art Exhibition for Palestine was inaugurated. The exhibition was organised by the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organisation) under their Plastic Arts Section and the artwork came from across the world, donated to the PLO in a symbol of solidarity with the Palestinian struggle. This project represented not only the coming together of artist collectives, activists, and militants as a symbol of resistance, but also an active struggle against the erasure of Palestinian cultural identity.

This was a museum in exile, it belonged to the Palestinians but was forced elsewhere. It was thought that the museum and its art would one day return home to a free and democratic Palestine. This dream is yet to be realised. After 40 years, the artwork remains condemned to the archives. Past Disquiet is a project born out of the discovery of the International Art Exhibition for Palestine by co curators Rasha Salti and Kristine Khouri and discloses a history that had been theretofore untold.

The visit began with a brief introduction. Rasha Salti is a hum-

ble woman, she spoke quietly, unbothered by the inattentiveness of those at the back of the group, persevering through the noise of the fashion week event opposite. She commanded our attention without demanding it and we listened. Her talent for narration was immediately obvious as she described the history of her relationship with co-curator Kristine Khouri. Rasha is from Beirut and currently lives between Berlin and Paris. She is unserious, soft, and deeply interesting.



The exhibition is accessible via two pathways, there is, as she explained, no one entrance, and no one exit. We found ourselves liberated from institutional constraints and able to freely engage with the abundance of eclectic archival material. It must be said that this is an overwhelming collection of letters, artwork, posters, magazines, all carefully narrated by visual and audio prompts and longer-than-usual captions. These captions propel you between the historical moments and the methods of curation which in themselves provide wonderfully rich tales.

The different pathways through which one accesses the space follow a similar logic. Khouri and Salti did not not discover this story from the beginning (if this is possible at all), rather they entered through the side into a spectral network of his-

tories. These networks expand horizontally and vertically, connecting with each-other in a multitude of ways. With material hung from the roof, plastered onto the walls and rising up from the floor, the spatial construction confuses and disorients. This is the path we chose.



We are transported, accompanied by Rasha, to those initial steps of research. It was in Beirut where they first discovered a catalogue for the 'International Art Exhibition for Palestine' from 1978. This became a departure point from which they discovered the untold histories of solidarity museums through archival investigation and an interrogation of those involved: artists, collectives, visionaries and activists. In brief, the exhibition is the fruit of that labour and a window to a world that largely remains unseen. This world has four continents: the International Art Exhibition for Palestine; the Museo Internacional de la Resistencia Salvador Allende (MIRSA), as well as its earlier incarnation, the Museo de la Solidaridad, from 1971 to 1973; the Museo de Arte Latinoamericano en Solidaridad con Nicaragua; and the Art Contre/Against Apartheid collection. These museums of solidarity signpost the space, while activists, militants, artists, exhi-

bitions intersect, and weave a dense web of history around and between these posts.



There are so many special things about the exhibition, too many to mention here. In the talk Rasha Salti gave the following day in ULIP's lecture theatre she often stopped, paused and reflected. In these moments, the visual aid behind her simply read "[breathe]". This exhibition requires a similar reflectivity. To comprehend the vastness of this archive one visit, it seems, just isn't enough.■

HJ.

ENOUGH TO MAKE A CAT LAUGH

ALEKSANDR PODKABINEK ON THE RUSSIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

"Enough to make a cat laugh"—in the days of socialism that was how people characterized undertakings of the Soviet regime that it was not humanly possible to speak of seriously. The imminent "Russian presidential election" falls into that category. I don't think anyone is going to bother analyzing the upcoming circus from the standpoint of the law or just plain good sense. Why would they? Everything was said and said again long ago, the falsifications have been documented many times, and all the conclusions were drawn long ago. Who now would it occur to to try to prove what a sideshow the USSR Supreme Soviet elections were? Or to suspect the Gestapo and NKVD of breaking the law? It's the same here. As Jerzy Lec said, it's unseemly to suspect when you're absolutely certain. Meanwhile, the insoluble puzzle remains: the attitude of seemingly not entirely foolish people toward this circus as something significant and defining—epoch-making even. It's understandable that the Russian regime, stung by its lack of legitimacy, has been trying to lend the "elections" the semblance of a serious event. Hence the panicked concern about high voter turnout, t-

he linking of the "elections" with solving various problems, and serious-minded discussions of the possibility of the passage of unpopular measures before and after the election. And so this can be as if it were all among grown-ups, the Kremlin blackguards are severely scolding Western countries for attempts to interfere in Russian elections. As if it were all the real thing, the way it's supposed to be in rule-of-law democratic states, where elections are a political reality and not a pretty picture drawn on by the regime. The pretension to authenticity.

Everyone has to take part in the process; everyone has to be smeared with the lie.

An authoritarian regime's task is quite clear. We all have to be caught up in the foolish and fake game of "democratic elections." Everyone has to register their loyalty to the current regime. Loyalty does not consist in casting a vote for Putin (they'll record the number he needs anyway), but in everyone taking part in the process, everyone being smeared with the lie, everyone saying the fake is genuine. It was exactly the same in the Soviet Union: vote "for" or "ag-

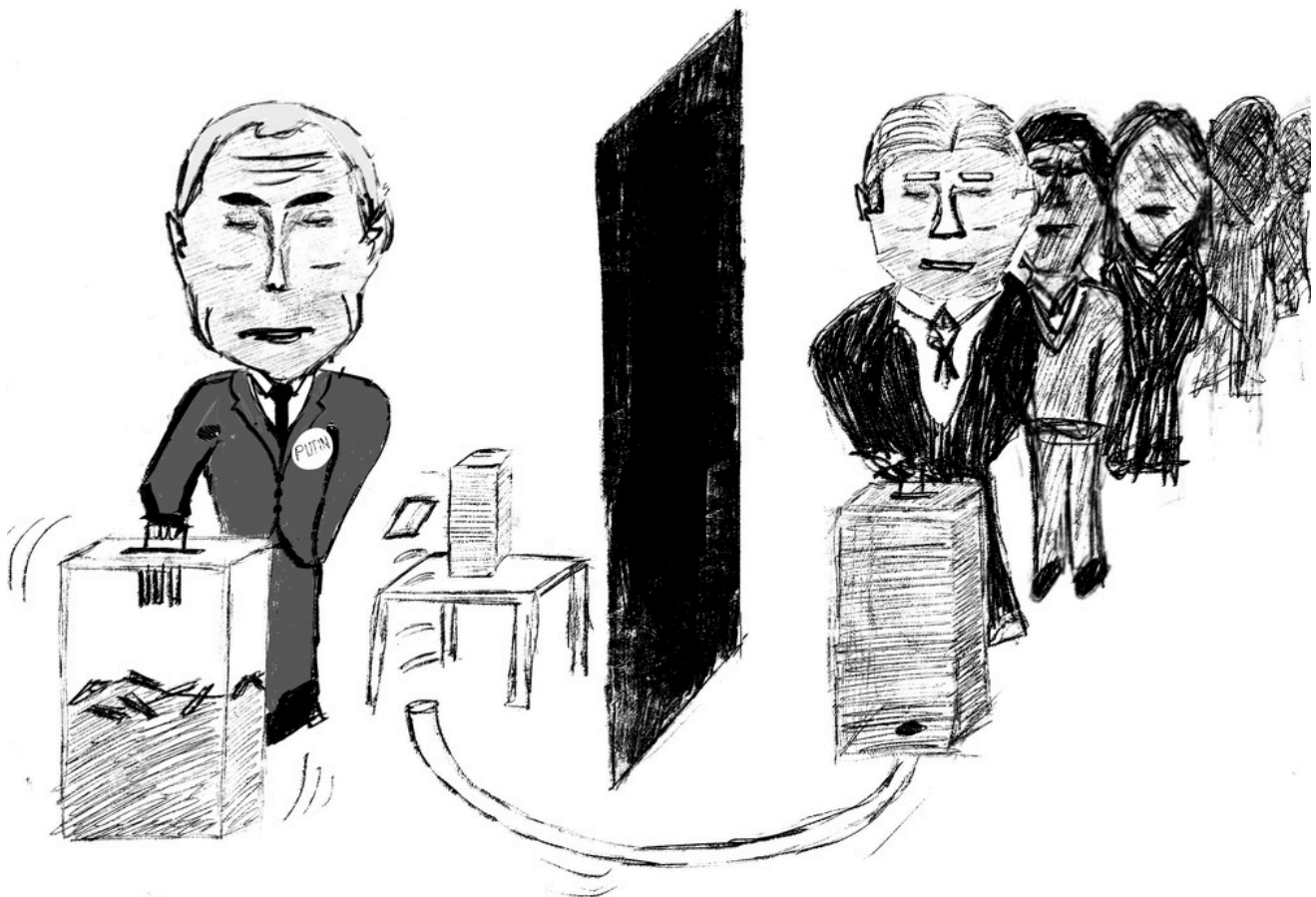
ainst"—no one cares. Go into the booth and draw what you want. The "total" was still going to be 99%. What was most important was showing up at the electoral precinct, taking part, showing your loyalty. On election day, deviationists were visited by political operatives who tried to convince them to vote and even brought ballot urns with them. They tried to tempt people with assortments of cheap food at the electoral precincts. (They came to our house, too, but instead of voting, my father told the operatives a joke: "God brought Eve to Adam and said, 'Choose yourself a wife.'" The operatives laughed, but they still asked him to vote. They were wasting their time, though.)

As far as the regime goes, everythi-

is quite clear. But what about those who criticize, who oppose it?

A picture of crowded electoral precincts would be a grand present for Kremlin propaganda.

Even Kremlin critics who understand perfectly well how much the "elections" are a game often reason they might still draw a 60% vote for Putin, but 80% would be hard. Why? Where's the difficulty? What prevents them at the final stage of vote tallying from drawing absolutely any number. This is secret knowledge held by electoral process specialists and unknown to everyone else. No one talks about this in detail, proposing trusting the pros. This is to say nothing of the fact that genuine elections mean not only



voting but also an election campaign, multiple parties, political competition, free speech and rallies, international observers, and an independent judiciary—everything Russia has not had for a long time. It's understandable that when there are no elections, election specialists have nothing to do, they're out of a job. Their plight is understandable, nonetheless it has to stop somewhere before the absurd prevails over reality.

The Kremlin's "presidential election" games are capturing not only Russia's attention. The politically active emigration has also been drawn into the process. The desire to participate in some way in political life has sometimes led to the ridiculous. Maxim Katz, an emigrant only vaguely competent politically, called on people to vote for Vladislav Davankov, the Kremlin jester given the job of presidential candidate, which has nothing at all to do with his position. When it comes to their popularity and degree of inanity, Katz and Davankov are approximately equal, which makes their campaign hullabaloo more like a joke.

Less funny is the call to show up at the precincts at noon on "election" day in order to condemn the alternative-free elections in this strange way. Of course, it would be very tempting to convince people that we, Putin's opponents, are so many. That would lift our self-esteem and add to our confidence in our powers. But it's worth thinking about the consequences, too. Yes, for participants, this action would probably be safe (and isn't that the main thing in opposition politics these days?), but the picture of crowded electoral precincts would be amazed yet gain at the unanimous support from the people for an auth-

oritarian regime, some would scoff at Russians' servile essence, and yet others would be relieved to rejoice at the correctness of their choice to emigrate, while "protesting" citizens would walk away from the electoral precincts with the sense of an obligation met. They would be able to sincerely tell themselves and their near and dear: "I did not stand by idly as my country was collapsing." And they wouldn't give any particular thought to which side they were supporting ultimately. One can, of course, ignore the consequences, guided by the maxim: "Do the right thing, and what happens happens." The question, though, is whether that is really the right thing. How important is this cautious and timid protest? Isn't it better to weigh whether these kinds of hybrid protests and acts of self-assuagement, such generous gifts to the Kremlin, are worth it?■

Aleksandr Podrabinek is a soviet dissident and former political prisoner. In 1977, he published 'Punitive Medicine' which examined the psychiatric repressions of the USSR.

This piece originally appeared in Radio Svoboda, an international, non-profit news organisation focused on promoting democratic values and freedom of the press. The article was translated from Russian into English by Rights in Russia a UK based charity organisation whose main work focuses on translating documents related to Human Rights violations in the Russian Federation. Rights in Russia gave us permission to use this article. For more information go to <https://www.rightsinrussia.org/>.

A

A strange feeling is upon me,
One I haven't felt before.
The calm of peacetime dwindles;
Here comes the madness of the war.

P

P

The world will be torn asunder,
Friends and I will surely die.
There is nought here to live for;
The World of Promise was a lie.

A

I would flee far o'er the ocean
Sooner than to fight your war.
Why should I go die for you,
Whilst you cower forever more?

S

C

Not a one of us deserves this,
It is You who should be jailed;
Why should we foot these genocides
When it's our Elders who have failed?

A

I

Think. The years it took to make You
And the safety of your state;
A second, all, to break You.
It's Us below who hold your fate.

F

I would not kill adult or child,
It would add to our malaise;
Somehow we must make our case speak
Out from the podiums and dais.

L

I

Through conversation and debate
We must teach all to abhor;
Though it may be arduous,
We must fight fierce against the war.

S

M

T

May we stand against the mighty;
Bull against a matador.
Let the record always show
We tried our best to stop the war.■

HH.

A CALL FOR UTOPIA

Looking back at the Greater London Council's (GLC) 1968 plan for Thamesmead, one questions what happened to the once-ambitious attitudes towards social housing that aimed to transform working-class lives in post-war London. These flats, offering adequate shelter to those living in inner-city London's slum-like terraced housing, would have been life-changing for their new residents. Thamesmead, christened 'the town of tomorrow', was hailed as revolutionary for mid-20th century town planning. This development was not isolated, but rather representative of other proposed housing estates from the late 60s. These plans share an emphasis on the promotion of community-based living and the provision of locally accessible public services. Unfortunately, Thamesmead suffered from funding cuts brought on by Thatcherism, failing to fully realise the dream of 1968. Its downfall reflects broader societal shifts in attitudes towards council estates, the working class, and social housing. This resonates today amidst housing crises that cripple the working class, forcing us into a life of precarity in which necessities such as shelter become

unattainable. When will we be allowed to not only survive, but live and flourish like those residents of mid-century council estates before they were neglected? Thatcher's 1980 Right to Buy Act was a turning point in social housing history. The UK housing stock was depleted as private landlords bought up old social housing, driving up prices and engendering the gentrification of working-class areas. In this way, not only did the Right to Buy Act make it more difficult for low-income families to find secure shelter, but it also pushed them further out into the peripheries, excluding them from communities they once called their own.



These days, if someone qualifies for a council house, they spend years on waiting lists with no guarantee on where they will be housed, separating individuals and families from the communities in which they were raised. Meanwhile, those opting to rent privately find themselves allocating a growing portion of their income toward housing costs. This has forced many to take on multiple jobs, leaving little time to enjoy life to its fullest, while individuals in their 40s and 50s are forced into housing arrangements reminiscent of student accommodations. Despite potential access to some of the luxuries of m-

modern living, one is reminded of the slum-like living conditions that council housing was intended to prevent.

Society's normalisation of these living conditions stems directly from a culture which demonises the working class, branding them as lazy. The inability to afford a home in which they can take pride is attributed to a perceived lack of e-



ffort. Many on the right adopt this line of reasoning, ignoring the major factors contributing to the current crisis - working conditions, low pay, and the ever-increasing cost of living - which limit the opportunities available to the working class.

The situation is deteriorating. With the redevelopment, or more accurately, gentrification, of London estates such as the former Heygate estate and Thamesmead, the working class continue to be pushed out of London, unable to afford the skyrocketing rent. Without intervention to regulate the housing market, we risk reverting to Victorian and Edwardian attitudes; regarding the working class as simply means of production rather than human beings deserving of the security and stability necessary to thrive.

It is imperative that we have a return to this revolutionary thinking on social housing, spaces and leisure so that we have a happy and healthy population rather than a working class on the cusp of burnout and depression. Even the simple things in life, like having a secure home we aren't afraid to be thrown out of, has become a luxury in 21st century Britain. What we need is a call for Utopia.■

The first picture is from the Thamesmead Community Archives.

The second picture is from the opening scene of a 1974 film by Thames TV that covered the Thamesmead project.

SG.

TIES PARLIAMENT SOCIETY

We move now to a brief change of tone. Perhaps you don't think ties are important, ULIP's best dressed man would firmly disagree...



Attempting to stay up to date with the latest French political developments, I often find myself tuning into LCP, the television channel of the Assemblée Nationale. When watching, I am frequently put-off by certain uncouth practices. Naturally, there are the usual personal attacks, "gotcha" moments and langue de bois associated with politics, but there is another creeping phenomenon. It seems that our representatives have elected to forgo the tie.

In 2017, the Assemblée Nationale revoked the masculine tie requirement for its elected members. Since then, the self-proclaimed anti-elite "Sans Cravate" (tieless) movement spearheaded by the Hard-Left La France Insoumise (LFI) party within the institution has led many French MPs to ditch the tie. This follows a general societal trend against the tie in professional environments. However, LFI's efforts seem to have been counterproductive as the nationalist Rassemblement Nationale (RN) party have gained an edifice of respectability in the chamber by their party enforced tie-wearing policy. Interestingly, their

popularity has especially risen among low-income voters. What does this tell us about the state of our society?

I would argue that the fundamental error of LFI was misunderstanding the symbolism of professional attire. French sartorialist Hugo Jacomet often says, "one dresses not for oneself, but for others". By this, Mr. Jacomet means that dressing in a manner that suits the occasion is a sign of respect, reflecting the thought put into professional attire. In the case of the Assemblée Nationale, this respect is directed towards those who elected its members from amongst themselves. Indeed, to wear suitable dress for the people's assembly is in my mind and presumably those of many French men and women, the minimum a people's representative must do. The tie is thus not predominantly an elitist symbol in the assembly, but a symbol of respect.

Through this respect, the tie also becomes a Republican symbol. Democracies are constructed on the principle according to which the people's elected representatives abide by and reproduce the practices that have traditionally surrounded the legislative process, lest the spirit of the institutions wither with time. Far from décorum, the pomp, pageantry and practices of our institutions serves to preserve their spirit. In this perpetual battle for the preservation of norms, seemingly small symbols like the tie that require thought to don by their colour, their knot and their width, are the bullwork against anti-convention salami tactics. As such, it would be ill-advised for a party to tie themselves to a tieless movement. T-

his rings particularly true for LFI, a party often accused of anti-republican behaviour.

Additionally, there are social reflections on a tieless society that make it particularly pertinent for a presumably "proletarian" party to praise the tie. Indeed, it is to many a symbol of the struggle against neoliberalism's excesses. For the formally employed, there used to be a segregation between one's workspace and one's rest space. However, with the casualisation of workplace attire, the mental segregation between the two has eroded. Interestingly, this correlates with a flexibilisation of labour as employees increasingly continue to work after leaving their office.

The point I attempt to make here is not one of direct causation but one of symbolism. In Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, Mr Samsa continues to wear his work uniform after work as a symbol of his never being free from it. In the real world, where once existed a distinction between the rigid and structured nature of the gentleman's lounge suit or morning dress and his smooth silk gown to be donned at his house, there now only exists the parodically ubiquitous polyester "pants" and T-shirt that suit the workplace and stay on at home. As we allow a homely state of mind to enter our workspace, so too do we allow our work mindset to infiltrate our homes.

All these factors considered, it is easy to see how the French population, would side with the tie-wearing group. Despite the self-proclaimed "anti-elitist" move led by Monsieur Mélenchon, a career politician and the leader of LFI, many only see disrespect and thus turn to his populist counterpart.

The symbol tailor-made for the Left's fight against neoliberalism has been left to the nationalists.

Given the Left's passion for the fight against nationalism, it is crucial they remember that politics is fought with symbols and that respect for one's voters is essential. Thus, if I were to give advice to the French Left today it would be those famous motherly words: "Put on a proper suit, do up your tie and sing the National Anthem".■

TMR

TOP TO TAIL IN A SINGLE BED

Book review of: *BFFs: The Radical Potential of Female Friendships*

On my 23rd birthday I sat down in a cafe with my best friend and next-door neighbour of 20 years. She slid a small wrapped book over to me, explaining that she had for a while been experiencing a bout of female rage, which influenced her choice of present. The book was aptly-titled, *BFFs: The Radical Potential of Female Friendships*, by Anahit Behrooz.

This short work of non-fiction uses a vast range of cultural productions as catalysts for thoughtful and incisive analyses of the female friendships portrayed within. It's beautifully written, and reads like an accessible work of critical theory, not necessarily presenting itself as revolutionary, but rather providing an interpretation that resonates deeply with its reader. It's remarkable how expertly Behrooz charts my own relationships, denying the insignificance of even the most short-lived through masterfully pithy phrases. She gives as much merit to the deliciously fraught, yet selfhood-constructing, female friendships of my early teens as she does to the difficulty maintaining

existing relationships in the face of romantic partners and academic pressure in my twenties.

I particularly enjoyed her assertion that friendships are as physically invested as they are emotionally, and thus inseparable from the politics of the body that discipline our lives. Behrooz writes: 'Amid the amphitheatre of female spectacle that constitutes our reality, there is a defiance to this language of silence, of reclaimed and wilfully rearticulated desire. It takes up the long-decided script of our skin and blood and flesh; it strikes out what came before and writes anew'. The hand squeezes, the bise, the sleepovers, aged twelve, where three of you squished top-to-tail in a single bed, shunning the mattress your mum had prepared on the floor; these are the voiceless acts of rebellion.

It's a fantastic book, leaving me seething at times, confidently optimistic at others. Behrooz's work, like the friendships it details, leaves a mark. She rightly states that it is 'so impossible to be a woman in this world, with millennia upon millennia of structural violence, eroding away at your life'. But I have to admit that strong female friendships make it a hell of a lot easier.■

ED.

THE ACT OF PUBLICALLY DISAGREEING WITH GOVERNMENT

In the darkened hours on Rue Richer, a shutter rolls to reveal a dark red womb. Its walls are pasted with words and canvases that write history in their own blood: tales of violence, domination, unity, and victory. Voices invite you in. 'Come,' they say in various tongues, 'come, and hear us. Come, and be heard'.

The womb is a refuge from silence. It is a refuge for those whose silence is demanded.

Inside, there is always noise. Poetry, music, oration, and art speak forbidden words, illumined by a crimson flame. Narrated here, suffering becomes solidarity. A declaration resounds: we shall be heard.

Silence is not the language of the dissidents.

If you are one who sees injustice, seek out this crimson space. Share a drink, a story, listen and receive. For this is the place where dissidents meet.■

Born from the bravery of one man whose pen yielded exile, The Dissident Club offers a place of refuge and community to journalists, activists, academics, and other like-minded individuals who speak out against systems of repression. Recognising the pernicious consequences these people face, many of whom are already in exile, the space opens itself as a café littéraire with a purpose: for dissidents to support one another as they continue to speak out against injustice.

Find The Dissident Club at 58 Rue Richer, 75009 Paris.

EM.

HAITIAN REVOLUTION ?

"I spent six months in Ukraine when they started bombing Kyiv and this is worse than that,". Matt Knight, director of aid agency Goal Global, a man who has also worked in Sierra Leone and Sudan in the last decade; the situation in Haiti is so volatile, so desperate, it shocks a man who has operated in major international warzones, conflicts that have global flashpoint potential. How did Haiti get here?

A UN report published in January on 'Haiti's Criminal Markets', offers some insight into how such a level of chaos may have been carefully orchestrated for some time; of particular note is the report's section on 'Trafficking Infrastructure': "According to Haitian customs officials, different Haitian ports are associated with different types of contraband. [...] firearms and ammunition seizures are common [in] Port-au-Prince [...] whereas drug interdiction is a more common occurrence on the northern and southern coasts".

The prominent G9 federation of gangs, headed by Jimmy 'Barbecue' Chérizier, have clearly been importing their goods strategically in anticipation of prolonged fighting and G9 occupation of Port-au-Prince, which we are now well in

the throes of. 'Gang-leader' feels a somewhat inaccurate term for Jimmy Barbecue, but we'll continue to use it as that's ostensibly who he is.

In a past life, he was a member of the Haiti National Police, but now he controls the G9 (a group which claim to pursue armed revolution against Haitian bourgeoisie). He presents as what we might define as a 'Haitian Nationalist', in the sense that he advocates solely for the Black people of Haiti; those descended from the slaves who successfully revolted against the French.

Of course, the country suffered greatly since the revolution, since the time of The Black Jacobins, as the global system of trade and legal infrastructure sought to make an example of it. Extensive embargoes and attempts to exert control over the state have been enacted on it over the years, making some of the Haitian people suspicious of outside intervention, whether that be economic or political. Some might argue Haiti never escaped slavery, and this philosophy may be what has informed Chérizier's approach; consider that one of his main declared goals is to expel the foreign businessmen he perceives control the Haitian business sector, in particular Syrians and Lebanese. Worth noting that Haiti's only billionaire is a Syrian descendant, Gilbert Bigio.

If we think again about his background in the police, and look at the pattern of violence the G9 group have undertaken in the last two years, we see he has clear strategic goals in mind. This is not about financial gain, at least not wholly. He has his revolutionary philosophy, and is determined to enact it.

In Autumn '22, he took, and held,

control of the Varreux fuel terminal, a major strategic coup for a group many perceive to be mere armed thugs. This was after the government announced it would no longer be able to subsidise fuel, leading to chaos amongst the population, although this did not lead to the major shift in power dynamics within the state that he may have hoped for.

We know from the UN's findings that his gang (amongst others) have been concentrating weapon imports into the capital and elsewhere for some time now, and on the 2nd and 3rd of March, there were attacks on Haiti's two largest prisons, with a combined figure of at least 4,700 inmates escaping from both facilities.

A bold move, but the timing was not insignificant; at the end of February, the Prime Minister, Ariel Henry, signed an agreement with Kenya to have 1,000 policemen deployed to Haiti to help the government gain control of the territory. Chérizier could not accept this, and thus the prison break-out and subsequent actions were undertaken.

On the 4th of March, the same gangs assaulted the International Airport. Enormous pressure, both politically and militarily, was now being exerted on the Haitian government, and it has resulted not only in Henry stepping down as PM, but the 'pause' of deployment of Kenyan boots. The country remains in limbo, with attempts to install a president backed by Chérizier and those aligned with him having been struck down by Haiti's Caribbean neighbours in the form of CARICOM (not unlike the European Union).

We should not confuse observation of the impressive nature of Chérizier's strategic military successes with condonement of the extensive level

of violence he may have committed; "Accused of orchestrating massacres that left dozens [...] dead, he has succeeded in accomplishing the once unthinkable: uniting the warring gangs of Port-au-Prince into a powerful new confederation aimed at what he calls 'revolution.'"

A block of salt should generally be consumed with any dish served by a Bezos-owned publication, but the accusations do not come from The Washington Post alone. They are serious, and have considerable gravity. As romantic a concept 'armed revolution against the bourgeois' may be, the realities are horrific; we would do well to remember that, particularly as we may be seeing such a revolution being played out before our eyes in Haiti.■

HH.

ART AS AN ESCAPE

The following murals were painted by 20-year-old Peyman, from Herat, Afghanistan who spent 6 years in the Nea Kevala refugee camp.

P3YMON -as he prefers to be called by his artistic name - started drawing when he was fourteen years old and had just arrived in Greece with his family. It was his mother who encouraged him to embark on this creative journey and hone his talent by initially copying other artists' works and exploring different techniques and tools. He experimented with oil painting, acrylic, crayons, and graffiti-style drawing. However, what caught his attention, and what is now one of his main means of expression, is doodling. He developed a passion for this form of art which he regards both as extremely fun and challenging at the same time: he pays careful attention to details and he wishes to express as many emotions as possible in just one drawing.

In Greece, P3YMON lived for a while in a house provided by the ESTIA program for refugees. The Greek government is currently dismantling it and transferring asylum seekers to refugee camps. He explained that when you live for years in a house, with your own space and some privacy, and are all of a sudden forced to move out and be transferred to a refugee camp - where everyone gets at most 2 square meters of personal space - your whole life changes and, in consequence, your creativity and motivation as well. In the face of such tumultuous times his artistic expression may become even more vital, offering him solace amidst circumstances beyond his control.

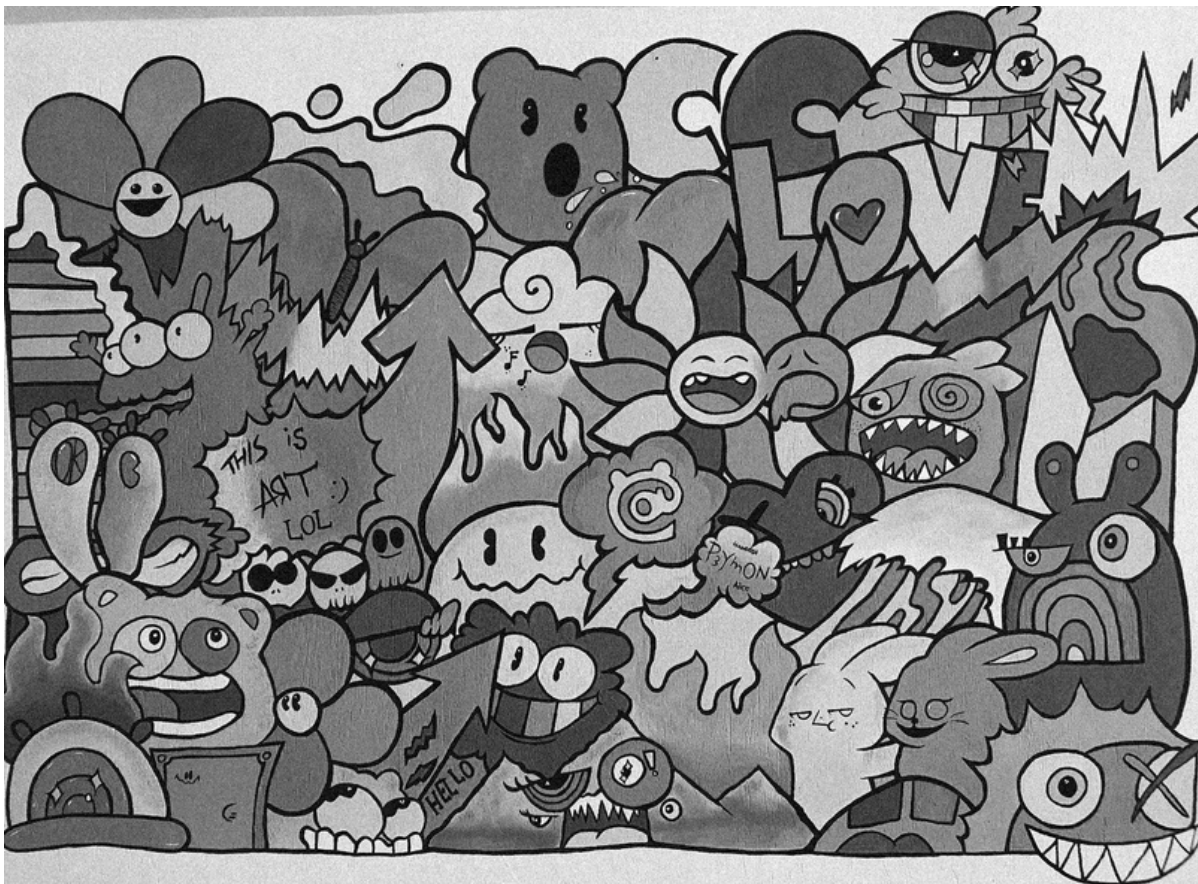
Throughout time he has persisted with his passion and his story serves as a reminder of the resilience of the human spirit and the transformative power of art. He now lives in Germany where he hopes he will one day pursue undergraduate studies in graphic design.

When asked what his art means to him he said:

"It has become a habit of mine to just draw something and not think.

I did that for years, I sat and drew for as long as I could, as long as I could forget how life had treated me. At least I could temporarily turn off my brain and look at something I made. I was proud and happy."■

TT.



TESTIMONY OF A KURDISH MOTHER

Do you remember your arrival at the Nea Kavala refugee camp?

It was in summertime almost 9 years ago. We had been arrested by Greek forces on the Macedonian frontier the day before. Footsteps shuffled on the bus all around me as people cued to disembark. I was talking to [REDACTED] about something, I don't remember what exactly. When we hopped off, the sun's brightness blinded me and once my eyes adjusted I saw towering high concrete walls, barbed wires coiled around the top. They went on forever, and around them, there was nothing, no town, just empty fields that stretched as far as I could see.

They took our fingerprints that day, gave me a birthdate that wasn't mine because our calendars are not the same, wrote my name in a language I didn't know and couldn't understand. We were put into containers that could house 4 people, either family or complete strangers. Thankfully, I was with my husband and with [REDACTED] who was 3 at the time, and [REDACTED] who was 6 months old. We were grateful to be safe from war, from violence. But it was not a good place, we weren't allowed to work outside the camp... so there was still hunger. There was still fear. We wondered what had happened to our families. When will we be able to leave? Where will we go? How will we be able to rebuild ourselves?

But as time passed my children grew up there, for them it was the only home they remembered. So for 8 years, we made the best with what we had. With others, we shared stories, food, music. The children would draw, run, play, and laugh together.

When we finally got our papers and left this October, we had to relearn what it was like to live on the outside.

Anonymous

Date of arrival: Tuesday 23rd June 2015

Date of departure: Monday 17th of October 2023

Time spent in the Nea Kevala refugee camp: 3038 days.■

This is an extract from an interview between an NGO worker and a refugee. The woman interviewed gave permission for her story to be shared here. It was an oral interview transcribed for this publication by TT.

