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Femboys Against Fascism, The Final Straw Radio

“We Notice When Bigots Get A Win”

2023

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“We Notice When Bigots Get A Win”

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[ed. – A conversation from May, hosted by The Final Straw Radio. The group of whose members are here interviewed are based in the English city of Liverpool, scene at that time of local and national far-right mobilisations against refugees being housed in UK hotels, using the usual racist tropes about crime and safety, dovetailed with State and media demonisation of migrants crossing the channel from the mainland on small boats. This autumn, the same sentiment ignited across the sea in Dublin, with protests blocking in the Irish parliament and an anti-migrant “white riot” (though doubtless some of the associated looting was opportunistic) after a school stabbing. Aside from the first bystander to intervene in that incident being recently-arrived Brazilian, blame of migrants for the housing crisis there – previously manifested in the burning of hotels and camps housing them – also rarely mentions the gentrifying effect of big tech companies (see the supplement to Return Fire vol.4; Caught in the Net) flocking to tax breaks of the State.]

TFSR: Hi there! Thanks for coming and talking to us. Can you introduce yourself with your name, any pronouns that you want to use, and any affiliation that you want to share with the listeners?

Puppy: I am Puppy, she/her.

Thigh-highs: I'm Thigh-highs, they/them.

P: We are representing Femboys Against Fascism, an anti-fascist, absurdist joke, starting up in Britain quite recently.

TFSR: That's a great group name. I'm really happy to have you here. Before we get into the group itself, let's start with the situation that's kicked things off. Can you give us some background information about what's been going on, particularly in Liverpool? What's caused this conflict, and what's at stake in it?

P: The government had been ramping up anti-refugee rhetoric in the month before, and they've been previously housing migrants and refugees in hotels and having specific deals with private hotels. Like the Suites Hotel in Knowsley, where a fascist riot happened on the 10th of February. They burned a cop car. I'm kind of jealous of them. There were about a hundred anti-fascists to counter 400 to 500 fascists, mostly older people. There was some weird gender stuff going on that night, where the anti-fascists asked the young men to go front, which sounded very... not what you'd want. From that riot, there's been more anti-refugee backlash in the media. The politicians have had "Stop the Boats" on their plinth. There's been a wave of fascist protests across the country outside hotels and a rising fascist movement.

T: And these hotels are often in racist areas. They're not nice places to stay. They're quite far from anywhere the people being housed in them would really want to be hanging out.

TFSR: Who's deciding where the refugees get to have housing? Do you think they choose those, in particular, to put them in a place that will cause conflict?

P: Specific politicians have their own deals and relationships with small businesses and big businesses around the city. Mostly it's just a governmental issue, Parliament and the MPs, but local

ing them that they can't just take to the streets and be unopposed. Well, thank you so much for talking and sharing what's going on. As things come up, I want to get update. I'm sending solidarity to all the Femboys in Liverpool who are holding it down against the fascists despite a general laziness about doing that in the so-called socialist city.

P: Thank you so much. We love you. We'll stay in contact. We'll keep you in the loop.

TFSR: Sending all my love to you.

councilors have played a role, mayors have played a role. Right now there's a thing with one of the fascist leaders, because they owned hotels, and they wanted deals with the government, but the mayor worked with different small businesses and different hotels. All the politicians play a role. I don't know the extent to which any individual ones do.

T: I think some of it's just the government takes hotels, and it's done by bureaucrats, and they don't really care about where these people are being put. Some of the more rundown areas that have a lot of racism are the cheaper places.

TFSR: It's just striking me that it's a place that's particularly going to cause conflict, huh?

P: Yeah, out in the boroughs, not near the center of the cities, out in rural areas that have also been quite deprived since the '80s and austerity in Britain [*ed. – see 'The Position of the Excluded'*].

T: Also, very white areas.

P: Very white areas. There's been a reactionary backlash bubbling up for a long time. It's definitely more intense than it has been in the past 20 years.

TFSR: Where are the refugees coming from?

P: Right now there's a lot from Yemen...

T: Yemen, Syria...

P: Kurdistan.

TFSR: It's not Ukrainian refugees, right? We're talking about people fleeing conflict regions in the Middle East and those areas.

P: Yeah, the people targeted are definitely brown migrants. Ukrainians still get a fair bit. The far-right is also very pro-Russia and spray-paint "Z" about the place.¹ So it's gotten quite rough but definitely mostly [for] darker-skinned people.

¹ ed. – Letter painted in white on 1,000s of Russian military vehicles in the lead up to major Ukraine invasion, since then adopted by Russian media, nationalists, politicians and reactionary influencers; thought to stand for either for "Za pobedy" (for victory) or "Zapad" (west, i.e. from Russia).

T: The government had a separate scheme for Ukrainian refugees. I think that scheme's still got a lot of problems. But it was more trying to find spare rooms in people's houses and strange "We're all in this together" nationalism stuff.

TFSR: Also telling about how white supremacy comes out in how they treat the different migrants. But I wanted to go back to that initial riot you were talking about: the fash burned the cop car? And in that initial moment, what was the relationship between the police and the fascists? Because we often see that the police will be protecting fascists, rather than them having straight-up conflict.

P: It's been kind of weird. The fash were definitely antagonistic towards the police that night. The police protected the anti-fascists. They were definitely doing their thing, trying to maintain respectability for the violence inflicted on the refugees. They didn't want a pogrom happening. That's bad for their image, and it was quite shameful. The fash were definitely antagonistic toward the cops. I think that might be something quite local. There's a local antagonism towards the police in Merseyside.

T: Yeah, it has varying politics to it.

P: Whether you're fash or you're left-wing, you hate the police if you're in Liverpool, usually. It's a different... But then again, the cops were really on the side of the fascists in most of the protests, constantly misgendering and harassing anti-fascists, arresting anti-fascists and not fascists.

T: It was probably more the fascist [protest] was so antagonistic towards cops, they shot fireworks and brought sledgehammers.

P: And they shot themselves.

T: It turned into more of a fight between the cops and the fascists, even though ideologically they're not that far apart.

TFSR: That's the three-way-fight analysis, too. Sometimes they side together but sometimes they don't, and we have to fight both sides as anti-authoritarians. Is there a single group that's behind the fascist demonstrations or different groups? And what's the history with that, and who's involved?

P: Yeah, and this is an appeal from both of us to anyone. Please do what you can to prevent fascists from assembling. Please don't be complacent in a city's reputation. Please engage in direct action to protect our neighbors and our friends and just other people. The big result of all this is a lot more bigots are feeling a lot more emboldened just for street harassment recently. It feels like things are just getting worse. But we can fight back, and we can bash back.

If you're local to Liverpool, you don't need to get in touch with us. That's not what we would recommend. You can, and we'll happily do stuff with you. But you can do stuff yourself with your friends and form your own little groups of people you trust and do direct actions. Don't believe in the leaders of these socialist groups and these other groups being like "We need to sit around and do nothing." Believe in what you think is right.

TFSR: Is there a place to find you to keep up with what's going on?

P: We are on Twitter! Femboys Against Fascism! The @ is @FemAntifa.

TFSR: Great, so people can see what's going on there. Is there anything else you'd to share before we end our conversation?

T: I think this is like most places, I wish there'd be more protests that weren't just shouting at empty buildings. Don't get poured into these... There are a lot of alts and not nice groups that will try and redirect your energy. You just serve them or sell their newspaper.

P: "Preserve the group. We can't do this thing. We gotta keep the group going."

T: Like brand-building exercises. Try to get caught up in that.

P: Fuckin hell, the brand-building exercises... Ooof...

TFSR: There's a lot of frustration too in just repeating the pointless march or whatever. But I think it's important what you're all saying about showing up against the fascists because that's not just a symbolic chanting at an empty building but showing up where people are trying to do harm and countering it. And also just show-

are not in the area? And do you see things going for your struggle in the coming months? And then also places to fight to connect and find you all.

T: I think there is stuff that people in other cities can take and learn from our experiences. Liverpool has this mythos and reputation about being a left-wing city. I think that's actually been quite toxic for it, or for people in Liverpool taking things more seriously and organizing to actually counter rising fascism and hate, because you'll hear people talk about how "Liverpool's a left-wing city, it's a socialist city", last time. And before Knowsley, there was a lot of talk about a time when fascists tried to march in Liverpool and they got ran out, met by a big crowd.

P: The legendary day of 2015, when we, the Liverpool people, the brave Scousers [*ed. – slang for Liverpool folk*], defeated the fascists. Mythologized.

T: Yeah, people don't talk about that so much now because it was used to pretend that more would happen, or people rested on this mythology, instead of doing effective things. Knowsley probably wasn't the first time that showed that this mythology isn't really what it's chalked up to be. When there was a Labour Party Conference in Liverpool, there was a TERF⁵ meeting in the Liverpool, and if you believe the mythology, that would get strongly opposed by big crowds, and it wasn't. It was small crowds. People did stuff, they tried to shut down the meeting but it wasn't thousands of people. It was very small groups.

⁵ ed. – Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminists. Although becoming something of a general term for anti-trans women, more properly a specific tendency that today is increasingly leaving its pretenses of feminism (radical or otherwise) behind in a rush to collaborate with openly far-right transphobes, some openly bragging of their relationships with street movements like the Proud Boys, others attempting to more covertly cover their hateful agenda to try to influence policy-makers and win recruits. See The TERFs' Weekend from Hell for an example of the latter branch and some of their opposition.

P: Mostly, it's different social media explosions. Different groups have been vaguely associated with it. One is the People's Resistance in Liverpool. They've been associated with Liberate Liverpool, the political party, and also the fascist protests. There are also North West Infidels, which are a racist drug gang, and there's Patriotic Alternative. They've been doing a lot of stuff around the country. Students Against Tyranny, they're all part of similar networks, and they communicate with each other. It seems like a solid movement built out of different groups and people on social media. I don't know who organized specifically the first Knowsley [protest], but I know that Patriotic Alternative tried to capitalize on it. They claim to have leafleted houses in the area before.

TFSR: Patriotic Alternative is also a group that does a lot of anti-trans demonstrations too, right [*ed. – see Nicolas Casaux, Transphobe, is Lying to You*]?

P: Yeah. They all do.

TFSR: So Liberate Liverpool, is that an actual party?

P: I don't know if they're registered as a political party. There was a thing about that.

T: I think they registered too late for a particular deadline, but I think they are now.

P: They're a whole other beast to jump into. Back onto the Knowsley stuff, what caused that? It would be a video spread on social media of a secondary schoolgirl being asked for a number by an older brown man. There's no evidence of this having anything to do with the hotel. So it's back to this thing of social media buzz that exploded as a thing, and local racists connected this incident to the Suites Hotel. It's been a groundswell. You hear it from taxi drivers and from your local bigots. A lot of people right now are believing the fascists' lies about refugees being dangerous.

T: Also, just... the ground has been primed a lot for this sort of stuff. It's in government messaging, and it's in the newspapers.

One of the current Prime Minister's big things is "Stop the boats." You'll see newspaper headlines about refugees arriving on boats.

P: They call it an invasion in the fucking daily papers. There are concentration camps that they're being sent to [*ed. – see 1 May 2021...*], and I don't think that's an exaggeration.

T: Yeah, it's fucked.

TFSR: So it's a general atmosphere that's both the media, the mainstream politicians, this social media stuff, and then these fash groups like Patriotic Alternative coming in and stoking the flames or just pulling on the energy that comes when [there's] something [like] that instance of the social media video. If there's some actual response to that in the neighborhood, then all these other groups can take advantage of that to further this anti-immigrant, nationalist, fascist idea and energy.

T: Patriotic Alternative didn't organize Knowsley. They previously tried to organize a protest outside the Suites a few days before and not got much traction. They'd also claimed to have leafleted. It's unclear if they did. But their organizing on their own didn't do this. Some of their people were at the riot, but in the footage I've seen, they're not on the frontlines doing stuff.

TFSR: As far as I can tell from the stuff I've learned about Patriotic Alternative, they come in and take credit for things that they just show up for.

P: The fascist Socialist Workers Party.

TFSR: Sounds like Nazis. But they present themselves more clean-cut and stuff?

P: That's a joke, sorry. The Socialist Workers Party [SWP] do that on the Left in Britain. [laughs]

TFSR: Right. Like the authoritarian communists do the same thing. [laughs] We've got a little bit about what's the general atmosphere of anti-migrant stuff that's coming from everywhere and who's showing up to these demonstrations, but what do you make of the people who are countering it? Is that organized? Is that also

P: Joe Anderson left and then Joe Anderson took over.

T: Yeah, it's quite funny. The Labour mayor was called Joe Anderson. He had stepped down and got replaced with a new Labour mayor, also called Joe Anderson. So they're really selling us on things changing there.

P: It's not hard to run against the Labour Party. That's the sad thing really. People don't feel like they have options politically. I feel like a lot of people are going to vote for the fascists out of spite to Labour this time around, maybe not even really going into it about what they're about.

T: I kinda disagree. I'm just gonna say it. I don't think they'll get in. I think they have a few chances to maybe get a councilor or two. There are council elections coming up on the 4th of May. There are some changes to Liverpool council in that the wards have been redrawn. There are less established candidates for places.

But the way these things usually go is nobody knows who any of the councilors are that much. You walk in and be like "Ooh, I'm a Labour voter," or "I'm a Green voter," and then you tick next to those people, and you don't really think about it too much. Independents didn't get in the last time there were council elections. Maybe the right-Liverpool could get a Councillor, but I'm not too worried about it [*ed. – in the end Labour retained control of the council, their group leader Liam Robinson becoming leader of the council*]. I feel like we're on different sides of this.

P: Oh, very different. My opinion of it is there's not been a fascist movement like this in Britain for a very long time. There's so little resistance right now that I think they could take a few council seats [*ed. – though finally not*]. They're running the People's Resistance. They're trying to worm their way in as much as they possibly can into, even if it's not the local council, it will be school boards, all that kind of stuff, trying to get into positions of authority and positions of power.

TFSR: Yeah, there's a similar tactic happening here. My last question is what kind of support do you need from people who

known fascists. They try and keep their chants subtle, to anti-corruption and just “Liberate Liverpool.” But they’re trying to have a pastiche of not being a fascist group. They’ve been running in local council elections. One of the people had to resign from running from that because anti-fascists went into social media and dug up them using excessive slurs and talking about the need to wipe out sexual degenerates.

There’s a lot of stuff in their social media, in their networking, that’s very tied to American conspiracism. You see a lot of stuff that’s QAnon stuff [ed. – see *About the Reactionary Drift of Some “Comrades”...*]. It’s really penetrated. That’s just some stuff I thought worth mentioning about them. Also, they’re trying to do a poster game. They seem to have money behind them. They seem to have small business money behind them, a bunch of different local small businesses, because they’ve got a lot of materials, and they’ve been having people put up their posters professionally, before they get ripped down, of course.

TFSR: It’s interesting, too, that the Liberate Liverpool name is confusing because that sounds like a good thing, to liberate Liverpool, but what they’re talking about is specifically for white Liverpool citizens, and they’re actually also talking about something more restrictive than anything else. I can see how that would be confusing to recruit people who are living in such hard means because I know even just with the winter and the oil shortage and everything, things have been difficult and getting worse for everyone in the UK and everywhere, obviously, too. Continuing on this line, I’m interested in what you think is the relationship between the struggle on the street and the political struggle. How is it playing out in the political realm?

T: I think the Liberate Liverpool stuff is opportunistic for a few things. They saw what happened in Knowsley and thought Liverpool is a bit more ready for a fascist political party. There was a big corruption scandal with the Liverpool council, enough that the mayor had to step down...

popular and people just are pulling in? Who’s part of the opposition to these fascist demonstrations?

P: It’s being varied. For the first one we organized, [against] the first fascist one in Knowsley, it was 100 people turned up. That was all the Left groups and the unions. Then they got bored.

T: And scared.

P: And scared. Yeah, they got scared. From that, after the first swell... I think this happened in Knowsley and in the Wirral. I don’t think we mentioned the one in the Wirral, but there was also a fascist protest outside of a hotel in the Wirral. A similar thing, Wirral Welcomes Refugees and Care 4 Calais [ed. – see *Return Fire vol.3 pg7*] and all that came out for the first one, and then it was less people by the next one. And the fascists didn’t turn up that night, so that was good. But I think mostly, it’s just been small groups of trans people. There were consecutive protests in Knowsley after the first one, like every week on a Friday, and you’d have under ten trans people there for five hours. And on the other side of the street, there’s 50 to 70 local bigots, all revved up, shouting, “Send them back” and all that stuff.

I’m, frankly, really pissed off by the Liverpool Left, They’ve come out when it’s been easy. They’ve come out in the city center, but they don’t treat it like these refugees’ lives are in danger. They’re getting more attacks on the streets. They treat it like it’s something that they can just keep to the city center. “We only have to really come out when the fascists come to the city center.” I’m just very pissed off at that. A lot of people have very fancy reasons to do nothing. I’m not gonna take credit for that. The fancy reasons to sell the newspaper, and that’s the most politically effective thing, and giving speeches outside empty buildings. “You don’t want to put young activists in danger” and all these kinds of lines and excuses that people use to be like, “We’ll leave it on you, the most depressed people, on you refugees and trans people to defend yourselves.” This is my admonishment of the Liverpool Left.

TFSR: So the main Left is just sticking to more symbolic actions and not following out where all these protests are going into the different outskirts or rural areas.

P: Yeah, recently on Church Street, the main street of Liverpool, you've had the Socialist Workers Party, the Revolutionary Communist Group, Socialist Party, all on the same street. And then down the road, the racist party in the left-wing city of Liverpool, and none of them are doing anything about it. They're all ignoring it being like "Well, it's more important that we sell the newspaper here. That's how we're most politically effective." They're not going in front of the [right-wing] stalls. They're not trying to counter it. They're not counter-protesting it. It's really shameful because it's been left to a few activists to really put themselves at risk when they don't have to, when we're supposed to outnumber them anyway, when we do outnumber them, when there are twelve socialists on the street and four racists, and the four racists are just getting away with it.

TFSR: That's interesting that you're pointing out that the context of Liverpool politically is more of a Left city and known for that, but this issue is not really bringing out people. I'd like to hear a little bit about why you think it's trans people that are showing out? Is it because of previous organizations that the trans people in town have been doing? Or is it just because you find that there's solidarity amongst the trans people with refugees in the city?

P: There's a broad understanding a lot of trans people around the country are feeling, which is just "They're coming for us," that we're facing the biggest scale back in our legal rights ever in history. There was a murder of a young trans woman in Warrington, a county neighbor here. I think every trans person in the area was like "Well, it could be me or people I love next." We've come to a queer nihilist perspective with it. We'll probably go down fighting.

T: Hopefully not.

They've been holding street stalls against what they call "15-minute cities." You can explain this well, yeah?

T: Oh, it's an entire thing. But the short version of it is it's...

P: Anti-semitic...

T: Yeah, well most conspiracy theories, actually, when you dig into them. But 15-minute cities is one of the current right-wing things in the UK, because of some proposed changes Oxford City Council was making to how people can drive around Oxford to make it less congested. It's quite boring, technocratic stuff, but it has some scary-sounding proposals in it, like increased use of license plate readers to divide the city into zones...

P: And what they've taken from that, I just want to mention ... "show us your papers", it's fencing off communities.

T: Yeah, when it's only really about congestion zones. Lots of cities do this sort of stuff but usually do with infrastructure, like making roads one-way, or turning them into dead ends, so that annoying people can't just drive their cars through a small street. But because these people are very car-obsessed and identify it with their freedom, any move to make things a bit nicer for other people, like people cycling or walking, is seen as an affront for them.

Admittedly, the Oxford proposal is a bit weird because it entails way more license plate readers and keeping counts of how many times people have been in certain areas and charging them if they've done particular journeys too many. So there's changing infrastructure, which is a way more sensible thing to do. There have been weird protests in Oxford about this by right-wing conspiracy groups. It's become the new go-to thing that they're trying out, even if it isn't really that interesting. So they have to make it interesting by adding on a bunch of conspiracies about how the government is going to track everywhere you are and find you if you move outside your neighborhood. And usually just admit it's about tracking where cars go.

P: Quickly on to Liberate Liverpool. They've been including on their street stall ex-EDL [English Defense League] members,

T: Yeah, there are a fair amount of organized fascists in the UK. There are not loads of them, but there are some, and they don't all have the exact same ideology. You'll see, occasionally, people from different fascist tendencies will still turn up to the same demonstrations because they all have transphobia and racism. They'll still turn up at the things, but it is usually different groups organizing things. Not always. I think some of the anti-drag queen protests that have been called by particular fascist groups also usually call things around racism and trying to protest at hotels.

P: Yeah, if I could just go into the People's Resistance and Students Against Tyranny. They're two of the ones that have organizing a lot of stuff.

TFSR: The fascist groups, right?

P: Yeah, those are openly hard-right. I'm not sure how much they admit that they're fascists, but the People's Resistance, they've got a public Telegram, on that stuff you see just slur after slur after slur by all their members.

And Liberate Liverpool is closely tied with the People's Resistance. I think it's worth just having a rundown of who they are and what they're about. They masquerade as anti-corruption. It's a classic fascist strategy to be anti-corruption because every politician is corrupt. They can use that as a wedge. There's a dissatisfaction with Labour because it's Labour enacting the austerity and enacting the racism and the transphobia in Liverpool. Labour's had power here for a very long time, so they're feeding on people's dissatisfaction with that. The leader is basically a local business owner who wanted deals with the mayor, but because the mayor dealt with other people, he started their own campaign.

It's built around a lot of different groups. They're basically quite tied to each other with the People's Resistance and also a soup kitchen, which is quite scary because that community connection is what they've really been trying to build out. They said, "House the homeless." And by that, they mean, "House the homeless, not refugees."

P: Hopefully not, but I think a lot of trans people have that view now of "We want to go down with some fight."² That's why it's usually those people doing direct action.

T: I think it's also we notice when bigots get a win or have successes. We notice it a lot in the streets because they're a lot more confident harassing us and stuff. Those connections are more transparent to us as trans people.

TFSR: That makes sense. It emboldens them, and the fascists will attack refugees and trans people. We're the targets for them, too. I want to talk more about the anti-trans antagonism, but before we get there, can I ask, are [there] connections with the refugees that you are forming? What other solidarity is being done besides countering the fascists? Is there any other work going on in the city or elsewhere to support the migrants?

P: Care 4 Calais have been supporting people in the hotel. I don't really know the details of that. Different anti-fascist groups, I think. Merseyside Anti-Fascist Network, who we don't get on very well with, they've been supporting some people in the hotel.

² ed. – "Anarchists have been fighting for sexual and gender freedom for well over a century, starting long before leftists or liberals. That gives us an additional interest in this fight and a longer heritage of resistance to draw upon. [...] In 1916 and 1917, Emma Goldman delivered sympathetic lectures on homosexuality to audiences across [the so-called US], changing the lives of hundreds of people we now might call queer who had never heard their experiences and desires publically discussed with compassion. One of them, Dr. Alan Hart, was so inspired by Goldman's anarchist and pro-queer ideas that he took a previously unprecedented step, securing what was likely the first gender-affirming surgery to take place in the US and living the rest of his life as a man. [...] A great proportion of those drawn to anarchist ideas today are trans and queer; materials that address gender and sexuality are in high demand. Many young trans and queer people are seeking out anarchist ideas as a pathway to gender and sexual liberation and many young anarchists are challenging gender and sexual norms. This makes it crucial for anarchist movements to confront this wave of anti-trans oppression. It's an opportunity to support a targeted population, to connect gender and sexual liberation with other struggles, and to mobilize around an issue that speaks to the priorities and needs of young radicals" (The Fight for Gender Self-Determination).

And the counter-demonstrations outside hotels did prevent fascists from being near the entrance and being audible to the refugees. There has been a groundswell of support. It's not nearly enough. Building community is a good thing in terms of supporting migrants, actually integration, not just vapid support from a megaphone or store-bought gifts. I think our support, a big part of it, would be just realizing that there are people out to get them. I keep repeating myself. Counter-demonstration is probably the most successful way of supporting them as individuals.³

T: But it's definitely a hard situation to make more personal connections because the hotel is quite locked down. They're very used to just having random bigots try to wander in and harass people. So it's not really a situation where you want to just go approach people. You know how there are small moments in the street you get with people, where it's sometimes not nice. It's been those sorts of things more.

P: Just solidarity that you can feel in other people in your daily interactions with a bigoted world.

TFSR: Right, they'll see the persistence of people supporting them, but I guess it also sounds like the conditions of housing them in a particular place that's under threat and is isolated and separated makes it harder to form solidarity. I don't know if these people are able to find jobs in town, or are they just relegated to the hotels most of the time?

T: Pretty much all of them can not find jobs because of how employment law is in the UK. If you apply for a proper job, you have to have the right to work in the UK, and that will get checked. If you're seeking asylum, or you are a refugee, you often just won't have that.

³ ed. – Aside from the limiting specifics that this interview refers to, we would point out a glaring weakness of Western anti-fascism tends to be preferring the moral high-ground of being “against the racists” to actually working out how to cross divides of racialisation; see *Memory as a Weapon*; *Barcelona Anarchists at Low Tide*.

selves in the front of it. Makes me proud. I'm already proud to be trans. But more.

T: Transphobia is also the norm for all the political parties in the UK. Both the main parties, Labour and Tories, use it and tolerate it within their ranks and will use transphobic rhetoric. There's also subtler aspects that come out in the government messaging. When they talk about refugees, they often talk about the figure of the male refugee as this violent figure and use this idea of an essentialized male threat.

TFSR: So they're using gender as part of the attempt to whip up violence against migrants with a typical appeal to fear from racialized men. I see that connection to the anti-trans stuff, too, because when they talk about trans women, they always are just saying, “These are actually scary men in disguise.”

T: Thanks, that's precisely what I was trying to say. It's this idea of essentialized maleness [*ed. – see ‘The Scarcity Dynamo’*] that's placed upon people to say these people are bad and dangerous, and we should do bad things to them.

P: There's a problem in the movement. I think it's worth mentioning that local political groups, especially in Liverpool, because of the history of the socialist city, the supposedly anarchist groups, the socialist groups have a massive transphobia problem. The leaders of the local socialist groups will casually misgender their trans members and then fake-apologize afterwards. The anarchists in the city...

T: Some of them...

P: Some of them... I'd say a lot of them have proven that they're quite not willing to stand against transphobia. They're quite happy to have trans folks come to their events and participate in their stuff. Again, for security, I won't go more into that. But there's a local massive problem in the political groups that are supposed to be pro-trans just completely ignoring trans people. We mentioned feeling more harassed in the street and getting attacked more.

were fascist groups in the UK trying to do their own truckers' convoy, which just doesn't work the same way in the UK and just went nowhere.

TFSR: The "concerned parent" thing sounds familiar because that's the rhetoric that's being used by the right here, specifically in anti-trans stuff, but also in terms of fighting anti-racist education. It's interesting to hear that they're invoking that too. That's my other question. Since the UK is known for being a particular hotbed of anti-transness [ed. – see *Lies of the Land*], if you wanted to talk more about how you see beyond just Liverpool, where it's a trans group that's showing up, but how you see connections between this migrant support struggle and support for trans people against the attacks by the right wing and the state itself.

P: The anti-fascist movement, in response to the fascist protests and the fascist groundswell, has been almost entirely trans people. Almost everyone who's been on the direct actions, especially the more risky ones, and especially some of the longer ones – trans. That's all across the country. North to South, Wales to Scotland, we're all feeling it. There's specifically a groundswell of trans anarchists, who are quite furious with the state of things. They have this understanding that Britain's against them, and we've got to build our own communities and look out for each other and look out for people we can build community with. Trans people know that they're the target right now. It's all across the country. In any direct action anti-fascist group that's not ran in a hierarchical way, where they end up doing nothing, it's trans people throwing them-

action on a different front, responding to the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and other Black people [ed. – see *The Siege of the Third Precinct in Minneapolis*], and thereby changed the whole terrain of discourse. In fact, because of their brief friction with the police who were defending those government buildings, the far right took weeks to react to the uprising of May 2020, during which the uprising gained a tremendous amount of ground and temporarily eclipsed their entire agenda in the public eye. In short: anarchists were not reactive, but proactive, and it paid off."

TFSR: Right, it's just total isolation.

T: Yeah, the border regime in the UK is quite awful. It's quite diffuse because if you want to rent a house, your landlord has to check you have the right to be in the UK and will check your passport. And similarly just having a job. So the border penetrates.

TFSR: Going back to your group, how did you all get together? Did your group start just particularly aiming at this confrontation? Or was there other work that you were doing previously that led to this?

P: Anti-fascists were already organizing small stuff as individuals between friends. Different people in different groups who were also fed up with how their groups have acted, some people who aren't in political groups specifically. It's just a few people who trust each other. It's a joke. We're quite firm on, "We're not going to be a real group. We hate the real groups." They're pretentious, and they have these pretensions of grandiosity, and they end up being social cults. They restrict people's social lives. They can lead to situations of abuse quite easily. Our way of doing this is, "We're not a real group. We're a joke." And it exists as a piss-take of, "Those are the real groups." You'll see at demonstrations now the Trades Union Coalition, the Socialist Workers Party, Femboys Against Fascism, and the Revolutionary Communist Group, but I find that quite funny. We dislike the fascists' claims to...

T: Yeah, it is a joke as well, but the concept of the "femboy" is quite fun. I really enjoy it as a non-binary person. It's very annoying, this fascist claim to "femboys." We want to disrupt that and take that back and be like "No. That's our thing".

P: Also, there are so many groups that have, especially in Liverpool, it's "Class! Class! Class!" so we just thought "Tran!" We'll throw that as our first thing. We've spoken to other groups in the city, and we've prodded them and shamed them into doing stuff. They've seen us do stuff, and they were like, "Oh, we can't have them upstage us." They've done a bit themselves. We've made friends as well. And also from the entire country, we're hearing,

“Why is Liverpool’s political situation so fucked up?” Our theory on that is people are comfortable, people are complicit. You’ve got a good thing on this?

T: Before Femboys Against Fascism became a thing, we were hearing from a lot of people we know around the UK, “First Knowsley happened. What’s being done?”

P: “Leafleting!”

T: “We thought Liverpool was this left-wing place,” and this just seems to be rolling on here, and the effects are being felt all across the UK.

TFSR: It is funny to reclaim “femboys” because it’s so strange how that became a part of a fascist meme too. Because you’re saying it’s an absurdist formation, does that show up in the ways that you go to these clashes? Is it the absurdity beyond just having the signs of Femboys around the more formal Left organizations and the awful fascists?

P: We’ve decided to make posters. We’re gonna do some absurdist stuff. I’m not sure how much we want to tie ourselves to it right now. But we’ve been doing mostly just direct action. Because that’s what’s really been missing in Liverpool, direct action against this. What came about is, we’re the folk, and we’ve brought together the folk who were up for direct action, and that’s what we’re about.

T: In terms of dress, it’s really dependent on what we’re doing and when, because we have used black bloc and gray bloc tactics. Because we are a bunch of trans people, we do often have to be quite careful about fascists trying to dox us and stuff. But for some of the protests, we go with more of a fun look. These are usually the ones where we’re not gonna have to worry so much about negative things happening.

P: We’ve got a bunch of cis [*ed. – i.e. non-trans*] people to shroud ourselves in.

TFSR: Can we talk a little bit more about what the clashes have been like that you’ve seen? What the involvement of the police has been, if it’s changed over time? Because you said that, at first, it was

protesters consider vaccine passports “fascism” but also want to establish more border controls – to make it harder to get any kind of passport – should represent a vulnerability for them. [W]hen they complain about police checking for vaccine cards, but support police in arresting and imprisoning people by the million – when they object to the government placing limits on economic activity, but not to the vast economic disparities that force workers to face potentially lethal risks simply in order to pay rent – they are not taking a stand in favor of freedom so much as they are willfully changing the subject from the encroachments of state power as a whole to a few details of state policy. This is part of the process through which a spurious right-wing opposition functions to redirect rebellious impulses into ersatz movements that ultimately strengthen state institutions. It is possible that a consistent movement opposing state control in favor of medical autonomy could serve as a space in which those who oppose vaccine passports could go through a process of political development. But for this to be possible, these movements would have to foster a systemic analysis of power, whereas in fact, they are dominated by right-wing elements intent on limiting their political horizons. Therefore, at the minimum, it is necessary to oppose and outflank the right-wing elements in these movements – which is the subject of the following text. [...] In France, anarchists used the tactic of property destruction to carve out space in the Yellow Vest movement: much of the far right did not want to be associated with property destruction, whereas many of the random angry people who got involved in the movement were comfortable with it. Perhaps actually opposing the border itself could have a similar impact here? [...] Considering that at least one poll suggests that a third of Canadians surveyed felt they had “a lot in common” with the goals of the convoy when it initially rolled into Ottawa, it is imperative to understand that many of the people showing up to these actions do not have fixed political identities yet. They are less politically literate, less politically entrenched than we are, and therefore less likely to recognize the telltale signs of overtly racist, chauvinist, and otherwise objectionable politics in their fellow marchers, but also less likely to understand our arguments or be moved by them [*ed. – although, somewhat contradictory to this, the same author also says that “most commonly shared characteristics of most of the resident occupiers is that they were involved in right-wing street activism of some kind before 2022”*]. We need to identify what opportunities these events might open up, rather than simply seeking yet another confirmation that we are all doomed or that everyone else in our society has lost their minds. The political terrain itself is shifting. I do not think “the left” is going to be able to stop that shift simply by showing up and opposing the right-wing people who see themselves as opposing the current order. [...] In April-May 2020, when the far right were holding armed protests at government buildings in the US [*ed. – against COVID restrictions*], anarchists didn’t go and defend the city halls. Anarchists and many other people who hate the police took

movement in 2019, which was inspired by (an ideologically refracted view of) a decidedly more heterogenous social uprising in France [*ed. – see Capitalism & Electrification*] – albeit, ironically, there a predominantly Anglophone phenomenon – featuring a truck convoy to the capital city of Ottawa, airing grievances over Islam, immigration, border security, and any threat to oil and gas industry: such as, for example, indigenous-led resistance; see Eric Laursen *Owes Me a Lamp*). Far-right organizers and former cops held prominent positions in this movement, which blocked several border crossings and held encampments, and earned the admiration of the far-right internationally (cop-cat actions being proposed in Belgium, Australia and the US). The author of the aforementioned text thinks that (aside from “some truckers [being] business owners, not workers”) it isn’t useful to even term this as a truckers’ protest: “The “transportation industry” has been under threat for a long time now. At some point, it is presumed, automation – that is, self-driving vehicles and delivery drones – will become the new means of delivering goods from place to place. This will significantly reduce the need for human workers who drive big rigs, if not eliminate it entirely. “The trucker” might be a reasonable stand-in for a problem that faces large segments of the working class as a whole. In Canada, as many have noted, the vast majority of truckers are vaccinated already. About one in five people employed in the industry is South Asian, and there are more who are non-white and/or come from other countries. The convoy, the occupation, and the aligned blockades and rallies are not representative of “truckers” at all. Certainly, there are some truckers involved, but – are we talking about hard-working people who got fired over their vaccination status? Or those who own trucking companies – capitalists with fleets of big rigs and spare time? Whatever the case, I think it’s pretty clear that most of the participants in this event have historically made a living in some other way than trucking. This is especially true of the crowd that has been gathering on Saturdays and Sundays.” Distinct from the quite superficial paradox of fascists fighting police on Liverpool streets, the so-called ‘Freedom Convey’ represents something of a more complex issue that anarchists and other rebels opposing the new reactionary wave would do well to contemplate. The author continues (referencing the various fascist organisers present at the movement’s inception): “Just because these sorts set things off, that does not mean they control the movement, let alone own it. They are probably destined to fight each other over the remains of the movement at some point in the future. [...] If there is a contradiction inside the protests centered in Ottawa, it is that right-wing people love borders, police, and state power, but this is ostensibly a protest against the border, the police, and the power of the state under its current management. This could be a fault line along which we might force a rupture between the people who are there out of an ignorant desire to rebel and those who are there out of a cynical desire to advance a fascist, statist project. The fact that right-wing anti-mandate

a conflict between the fash and the police, but it’s changed towards the police harassing the anti-fascists. What repression have you faced, either from the police or from the fascists because of these different protests?

P: After the first Knowsley riot, there was a second one. On the second Knowsley [one], there was a car search of anti-fascists, illegally, for information gathering. They took pictures of everything they could. There was a non-binary person who was searched by cis-men illegally. That was because there was a bunch of riot cops in a van, and they massively outnumbered the anti-fascists. Constant transphobia in every interaction we’ve had with them, intentionally misgendering us. We’ve got so much of it recorded as well and just out there.

That was quite a tough night for a lot of people. The anti-fascists managed to hold out as long as the fascists and prevent them from assembling in front of the gate. But then, from the night after that, there was a fascist protest at Lime Street Station, which is right in the city center, and the anti-fascists massively outnumbered the fascists this time round. The police were forming a line protecting the fascists. And as they got chased off, and people started to disperse, the cops started picking up and arresting anti-fascists, brutally attacking one of the anti-fascists, and constantly misgendering, intentionally misgendering, and trying to pin stuff on the anti-fascists. One person got slapped with caution, but there were no charges. So it was an illegal arrest. That’s not a judgment of morality, of course. That’s just by the police’s own logic.

T: We think the police, when they were just arresting people afterwards, they were probably just trying to gather information, maybe intimidate as well.

P: Yeah, they tried to get into people’s phones. They didn’t manage to, but they were trying to get into people’s phones. Then, two days after that, the fascists organized to have a protest at St. George’s Steps, which is one of those big, empty buildings that people like to get protests at. [laughs] 20 to 30 anti-fascists gathered,

and fascists kept coming in in small groups and getting told to fuck off. The cops kept an eye on that and hung about the area. Every single demonstration we've attended, they're trying to rile people up, trying to get people, just intentionally misgendering anti-fascists quite constantly, going right up to them and stepping on them and shit and forcing them back, saying some really weird shit.

T: With Knowsley, there were fascist protests. After the first one, there were basically ones almost every week. I think they were just trying to repeatedly call the same thing, get the same thing to happen. The anti-fascist crowd was smaller after the first Knowsley cause I think a lot of people were quite scared and shaken up by what happened.

P: I think by the end of it, it was just trans people.

T: Yeah. There were just countless Friday nights, where on one end of the road, you've got the fascists, trying to repeat an earlier success, and a small group of anti-fascists at the other end sticking it out. It was mostly just a battle of attrition, who could hold the space and who would keep coming out every week almost.

P: The anti-fascists outlasted them. I think that's because the anti-fascists brought music and food, and [the racists] brought racist banners. And also their love is stronger than hate. I think that's cool to mention. It was a demonstration of love, as well, as much as trying to drown out the fascists.

T: Yeah. I think you're right, the fascists aren't as good at preparing for protests. They don't think about, "Oh, maybe my friend might need some water or might want a snack."

P: First aid or...

T: Or bringing a first aid kit.

P: "What if the cops talk to us?"

T: They're often not as prepared for holding a space for as long. Eventually, the fascist protests at Knowsley did stop. I think that was in large part due to that fact that they weren't getting what they wanted to because of the anti-fascists, and their numbers were dwindling because of that. There were also a couple of fascist

demonstrations in another area of Merseyside, the Wirral, that were less big and eventually petered out. Currently, there aren't consistent fascist protests outside hotels in Merseyside.

Unfortunately, these kind of style of protest are still making their way across the UK. I think they're getting largely beaten in other areas of the UK, but there have been a lot of them inspired by the first Knowsley one. I might be rambling, but the first Knowsley one was not the first kind of attempt at this sort of protest. Various figures had been trying this sort of thing for a while. Like Nigel Farage [*ed. – former figure-head of the pro-Brexit UK Independence Party*] tried to get a similar thing going a couple of years ago, but it didn't really take in the same way, and it didn't really explode across the country in the same way.

TFSR: Can you talk a little bit more about how the struggle is showing up in the north, in Liverpool and that area, and how it connects to things going on in other parts of the UK? Since you're saying it seemed to spread but the show-up is different in other places, which is counterintuitive because you said that Liverpool seems like a place that would be showing up more in force.

T: I think some of it is that Liverpool has this reputation. It makes a success here count more for the right-wingers because they can say, "Oh, they did it in Liverpool. We could probably do it here where it's less left-wing."

P: They've got placards saying, "We're not far-right racists, just concerned parents." So they're trying to de-tie themselves from the openly fascist movements. Or at least not make it obvious.

T: I think there is also an element of, when right-wingers and fascists see something working, they'll try and repeat it elsewhere. So you can get a rash of copycats. This even results in some silly things. Like following the Truckers' Convoy in Canada⁴, there

⁴ ed. – Reference to a 2022 'Freedom Convoy' movement against mandatory COVID-19 vaccines for truckers crossing the US-Canada border (though, according to 'Ill Winds from Ottawa: Thinking Through the Threats & Opportunities as a Far-Right Initiative Gains Momentum', with a precedent in "the 'yellow vests'"