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why we say “fuck the police”

a statement from pink peacock די פאָרע ראָזעווע av
5781 / july 2021

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further further reading

introduction to abolition: the full reading list, abolitionist
futures, 2020.

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further reading

all of the following links are to full and free texts.

links with * are specifically about the uk context or make extensive reference to it.

what about the rapists?: anarchist approaches to crime & justice,* anonymous (ed.), via dysophia.org.uk, no date (after 2013) [83 pages].

are prisons obsolete?, angela y. davis, seven stories press, new york, 2003 [128 pages].

what about the dangerous people? [video], reina gosset and dean spade, 2014 [8 minutes long].

“illusions of safety: policing hate crimes won’t make us safer”, naa hammond, LGBTQ nation, 9 june 2003 [1 page].

“three reasons advocates must move beyond demanding release for “nonviolent offenders””, micah hershkind, 14 april 2020 [13 minute read].

“transforming carceral logics: 10 reasons to dismantle the prison industrial complex through queer/trans analysis and action”,* s lamble, in in *captive genders: trans-embodiment and the prison industrial complex* edited by eric stanley & nat smith (ak pess: oakland, 2011) [16 pages].

“prisons cannot be places of rehabilitation”,* j m moore, centre for crime and justice studies, 10 november 2016 [4 pages].

“we are all survivors, we are all perpetrators: what to do when someone tells you that you violated their boundaries, made them feel uncomfortable, or committed assault (a start)”, puttingthesexybackinfeminazi (ed.), no date (after 2005) [7 pages].

“how to support victims of domestic violence (without calling the police)”*, SWARM, swarmcollective.org, 2020 [10 slides].

reading groups

- abolitionist futures
- manchester abolitionist reading group
- read and resist!

sex worker organizations

- english collective of prostitutes (ECP) in england
- SCOT-PEP in scotland
- sex workers advocacy and resistance movement (SWARM)
- umbrella lane in scotland

support for survivors of domestic and sexual violence

- bi survivors network online
- not your fault, support group for men & non-binary people in glasgow, edinburgh, and online
- sisters uncut, direct action group for survivors of domestic violence
- survivors library online

if you know other uk-based abolitionist groups that we can add to this list, please email us! hi@pinkpeacock.gay

pink peacock די פארווע ראָזעווע is a queer, yiddish, anarchist, pay-what-you-can café in glasgow, founded on values of food and economic justice, anti-racism, mutual aid, non-hierarchical organizing, and queer liberation. **our priority is the safety of queers and jews, especially queer and jewish people of color, sex workers, migrants, and poor people.** we prioritise queer and jewish safety over the comfort of cishet goyim (non-queer non-jews) due to our heightened vulnerability and lack of community spaces. our position as police abolitionists is informed by these values. you can read more about us and our values on our website.

police abolition is a political position which advocates for the full dismantling of the criminal justice system: this includes the police, prisons, the immigration and detention system, the military, state surveillance, and the punitive courts and legal system. “fuck the police” is not a comment on individual police officers, but on the violent system which, as individuals, they uphold.

a brief history of policing

this statement will focus on the police system in scotland. police abolition narratives are dominated by the american context, but scotland too has a lot to answer for. possibly the world’s first statutory police force was created in edinburgh in 1611 to collect taxes, break up fights, and apprehend beggars, vagrants, and “egyptianes”.¹ the first modern police force was the thames river police, organized in 1798 by a glaswegian, initially created to protect commercial property at london’s docks (the dock workers responded by rioting).² police today remain true to their racist and capitalist origins.

¹ “history of the society of high constable of edinburgh”, the society of high constables edinburgh, no date (after 2011).

² “the origins of police”, matthew wills, jstor daily, 11 november 2019.

the connection between slavery, the police, the legal system, and capitalism cannot be overstated, and scotland's history of slavery too often goes unmentioned. for almost two hundred years, from 1606–1799, miners in scotland were in a condition of permanent bondage to their bosses.³ scottish merchants began formally profiting from the transatlantic slave trade in 1707;⁴ with glasgow university alone benefitting from the modern equivalent of between £16.7 million to £198 million from slavery.⁵

legal systems in the uk have persecuted, punished, and killed queers and jews for hundreds of years; for the sake of space we'll only include examples from the 20th century onward. in 1905, britain began enforcing restrictions on immigration with the aliens act,⁶ which was created to appease antisemites⁷ and prevent eastern european jews from fleeing pogroms and poverty. these restrictions tightened in 1914 and 1919.⁸ between 1933 and the eve of the war in 1939, only 70,000 jews had been admitted, while half a million were denied.⁹

³ "act anent coaliers and salters 1606", scottish parliament, c 2; and "coaliers and salters (scotland) act 1775", parliament of great britain, 15 geo III c 28.

⁴ "slavery and the slave trade", the national records of scotland (NRS), no date (after 2007).

⁵ "glasgow's slave trade history and how we remember the city's dark past", craig williams, glasgow live, 1 june 2020. glasgow continues to reward slavers with streets and neighbourhoods named after them ("every glasgow street name linked directly to slavery", craig williams, glasgow live, 7 june 2020.)

⁶ "aliens act, 1905", parliament of the united kingdom, 5 edw e c 13 [9 pages]

⁷ just one example: the antisemitic and proto-fascist "british brothers' league" would hold rallies protesting jewish immigration, declaring that britain should not become "the dumping ground for the scum of europe". ("immigration", david rosenberg, channel 4, no date (after 2006).)

⁸ "aliens restriction act, 1914", parliament of the united kingdom, 4 & 5 geo V c 12 [3 pages]; "aliens restriction (amendment) act 1919", parliament of the united kingdom, 9 & 10 geo V c 92.

⁹ "we've been here before", anne karpf, the guardian, 8 june 2002.

- irn-ju in scotland

- jewdas

migrant, asylum seeker, and refugee support

- refugee action

- refugee council

- scottish refugee council

- these walls must fall

- unity centre in scotland

mutual aid groups

- mutual aid trans edinburgh (MATE)

- queer care network in manchester

police and criminal justice accountability groups

- the #KillTheBill movement

- network for police monitoring (netpol)

- not one rogue cop in scotland

prisoner solidarity and abolition projects

- bent bars, queer prisoner pen-pal project

- books beyond bars, sending books to incarcerated queer people

- community action on prison expansion (CAPE)

- reprieve

“police, crime, sentencing and courts bill”, bill 133 58/2, house of commons, 24 june 2021 [308 pages].

“nationality and borders bill”, bill 141 58/2, house of commons, 6 july 2021 [87 pages].

abolitionist organizations in the uk

anti-raids networks

- anti-raids network
- edinburgh anti-raids
- haringey anti raids network in london
- leeds anti raids actions
- newham anti raids in london
- no evictions in glasgow

education

- no more exclusions
- no police in schools

healthcare

- action for trans health
- docs not cops
- queer care network
- stopSIM

jewish diaspora

during the war, britain imprisoned “enemy aliens” who were from (or suspected to be from) germany, austria, and italy, including jewish refugees. things didn’t improve after the war: “british postwar immigration policy deliberately excluded jews (and non-white immigrants) because it didn’t consider them assimilable.”¹⁰ anyone caught trying to immigrate illegally was imprisoned and often deported, sometimes to their deaths. the parallels to today’s racist “hostile environment” policies are impossible to justify or ignore.

queers have never been safe around police. in scotland, sex between men (or people perceived by the state to be men) was illegal until 1980.¹¹ between 1988–2000, teachers and local authority employees (like librarians) were effectively not allowed to talk about same-sex relationships under section 28.¹² the age of consent between two men was not equalized until 2001.¹³ “gross indeceny” and anti-sodomy laws weren’t removed from the books until 2009.¹⁴ until 2019, there was no process in scotland to remove these “crimes” from your criminal record.¹⁵ this is within living memory: the lawmakers and police officers who created and enforced these homophobic laws have not gone anywhere. police remain institutionally queerphobic

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ “criminal justice (scotland) act 1980”, parliament of the united kingdom, 1980 c 62. we note that during the 20th century, there was not a clear distinction between gay, bisexual, queer, and trans issues and identities; the criminalization of gay men was an attack on all of us.

¹² section 28 of the “local government act 1988”, parliament of the united kingdom, 1988 c 9.

¹³ “sexual offences (amendment) act 2000”, parliament of the united kingdom, 2000 c 44. in northern ireland, the age of consent wasn’t equalized until 2008 via “sexual offences (northern ireland) order 2008”, parliament of the united kingdom, 2008 no 1769 (n.i. 2).

¹⁴ sexual offenses (scotland) act 2009, scottish parliament, 2009 asp 9.

¹⁵ an earlier version incorrectly stated that there was no process for removing historical convictions of sex between men; even now, queer “criminals” need to apply to have convictions removed from their criminal records, and that application can be denied.

today. trans people in the uk are on indefinite waiting lists for healthcare but are criminalized for sharing (“supplying”) testosterone.¹⁶ as trans people and former sex workers, our very existence in public space is criminalized and under threat of further criminalization.¹⁷

policing in the uk is getting worse. our neighbourhood, gov-anhill, is already overpoliced because we are a neighbourhood of migrants, people of color, and poor people (gentrification notwithstanding; gov-anhill remains among the 10% most deprived areas in scotland¹⁸). during the first lockdown, scottish police used emergency coronavirus powers over 62,000 times, and were 12 times as likely to fine people if they lived in the 10% most deprived parts of scotland.¹⁹ the proposed 2021 “police, crime, sentencing and courts” bill²⁰ will, if passed, increase

¹⁶ testosterone is a class C drug: “list of most commonly encountered drugs currently controlled under the misuse of drugs legislation”, uk government, 2 december 2019.

¹⁷ there are constant efforts to ban trans people from single sex spaces e.g. bathrooms, changing rooms, healthcare facilities, support services, and sports; these threats of criminalization are in addition to the myriad ways trans people are punished under the current healthcare and legislative framework. sex workers are criminalized under existing laws about “brothel-keeping” (more than one sex worker working together), “pimping” (sex workers working with non-sex workers e.g. admin assistants or drivers), soliciting, and curb-crawling; and would be further criminalized if efforts to bring in the so-called “nordic model” are successful.

¹⁸ “scottish index of multiple deprivation (simd) 2020” interactive map, scottish government, 2020.

¹⁹ “short update: scottish police use emergency powers disproportionately against poor people”, fair trials, 20 august 2020.

²⁰ “police, crime, sentencing and courts bill”, bill 133 58/2, house of commons, 24 june 2021 [308 pages]. at the time of writing, the bill has passed through the house of commons and is being considering in the house of lords. we note that, while the bill would impact england and wales more than scotland, it would apply to anyone living in scotland who travels to england or wales, and to anyone who protests at westminster, which is ultimately the seat of government for this country.

“every glasgow street name linked directly to slavery”, craig williams, glasgow live, 7 june 2020.

“the origins of police”, matthew wills, jstor daily, 11 november 2019.

“highest to lowest – prison population rate”, world prison brief, prisonstudies.org, 2021.

“in case you’re wondering if the #PoliceScotland will do the right thing or the far-right thing...”, tweet by @_penguin-flight, twitter.com, 4:54pm 13 may 2021.

legislation cited

“act anent coalyers and salters 1606”, scottish parliament, c 2.

“coaliers and salters (scotland) act 1775”, parliament of great britain, 15 geo III c 28.

“aliens act, 1905”, parliament of the united kingdom, 5 edw e c 13 [9 pages]

“aliens restriction act, 1914”, parliament of the united kingdom, 4 & 5 geo V c 12 [3 pages]

“aliens restriction (amendment) act 1919”, parliament of the united kingdom, 9 & 10 geo V c 92.

“criminal justice (scotland) act 1980”, parliament of the united kingdom, 1980 c 62.

section 28 of the “local government act 1988”, parliament of the united kingdom, 1988 c 9.

“official secrets act 1989”, parliament of the united kingdom, 1989 c 6.

“sexual offences (amendment) act 2000”, parliament of the united kingdom, 2000 c 44.

“sexual offences (northern ireland) order 2008”, parliament of the united kingdom, 2008 no 1769 (n.i. 2).

sexual offenses (scotland) act 2009, scottish parliament, 2009 asp 9.

scottish budget, 2019–2020, scottish government [229 pages plus supporting files].

criminal proceedings in scotland, 2019–20, national statistics, scottish government [115 pages].

recorded crime in scotland, 2019–2020, national statistics, scottish government [117 pages plus supporting files].

“scottish index of multiple deprivation (simd) 2020” interactive map, scottish government, 2020.

SPS prison population april 2014 – june 2021, scottish prison service [1 page plus excel files].

17th prisoner survey 2019, scottish prison service [33 pages]. this is a self-reporting survey taken ever 2 years; in 2019 the response rate was 30%. as with all reports of discrimination, it’s safe to assume that violence is under-reported.

scottish prison population statistics 2019–20, scottish prison service [34 pages].

“history of the society of high constable of edinburgh”, the society of high constables edinburgh, no date (after 2011).

“more than 100 women accuse police officers of domestic abuse, alleging ‘boys club’ culture”, minnie stephenson, channel 4 news, 18 may 2021 [1 page].

“prison population set to soar”, tony thompson, police professional, 5 july 2021.

“uk journalists could be jailed like spies under proposed official secret act changes”, charlotte tobitt, press gazette, 20 july 2021.

“list of most commonly encountered drugs currently controlled under the misuse of drugs legislation”, uk government, 2 december 2019.

“stop and search”, uk government, 22 february 2021.

“MPs debate ‘cruel’ borders bill in parliament”, hannah westwater, the big issue, 20 july 2021.

“glasgow’s slave trade history and how we remember the city’s dark past”, craig williams, glasgow live, 1 june 2020.

police powers, criminalize travellers²¹ (“unauthorized encampments” and “residing on land without consent in or with a vehicle”), and criminalize protests which, according to the police, cause “serious inconvenience” or “serious annoyance”. planned reforms to the official secrets act²² will criminalize journalists who publish leaked information which embarrasses the government.²³ the proposed “nationality and borders” bill²⁴ is explicitly designed to make asylum seekers “think again” before coming to the uk: it would establish offshore detention centres, and punish asylum seekers who arrive “irregularly” (i.e. without a valid visa, as is the case for most asylum seekers) with four years imprisonment.²⁵ in the next five years, the prison population of england and wales is estimated to rise by 25%, reaching nearly 99,000 people, due to the impact of increased police recruitment and proposed legislation.²⁶

“what about the rapists and murderers?”

the most common question for police abolitionists is “what about the rapists and murderers?”. but police do not prevent violence, act in survivors’ best interests, or secure justice. according to some recent statistics and reports from scotland, and england and wales:

²¹ “travellers” here refers to gypsy, roma, and traveller (GRT) communities.

²² “official secrets act 1989”, parliament of the united kingdom, 1989 c 6.

²³ “uk journalists could be jailed like spies under proposed official secret act changes”, charlotte tobitt, press gazette, 20 july 2021.

²⁴ “nationality and borders bill”, bill 141 58/2, house of commons, 6 july 2021 [87 pages].

²⁵ “MPs debate ‘cruel’ borders bill in parliament”, hannah westwater, the big issue, 20 july 2021.

²⁶ “prison population set to soar”, tony thompson, police professional, 5 july 2021.

- last year, police scotland recorded **2,343 rapes and attempted rapes**,²⁷ and **4,976 sexual assaults**.²⁸ only **6.1%** of reported sexual assaults, and **5.5%** of reported rapes and attempted rapes ended in conviction.²⁹
- by scottish government’s own admission, the justice system fails survivors of sexual violence: **“the criminal justice system places an onus on victims** to seek updates, decide about special measures, find appropriate support, deal with the shifts and uncertainties in scheduling of trials and narrate what happened in an environment over which they have no control.”³⁰
- children are also failed by the criminal justice system, even those who have suffered sexual violence. **there is “a significant gap in the availability of any advocacy or court based support for children** [survivors]. no agency or organisation provides such support on a national or systematic basis.”³¹
- police don’t prevent murder: between 2010–2020 there were **1,052 recorded homicides in scotland**.³²

²⁷ the legal definition of rape in scotland is insufficiently narrow: “penetration of the vagina, anus or mouth by the penis without consent” from the sexual offenses (scotland) act 2009. other forms of rape and sexual violence are categorised as sexual assault.

²⁸ “statistics and key information”, rape crisis scotland, 2021. this is over 20 incidents of sexual violence per day, and we know that sexual violence is under-reported.

²⁹ math from recorded crime in scotland, 2019–2020, national statistics, scottish government [117 pages plus supporting files], p.87; and criminal proceedings in scotland, 2019–20, national statistics, scottish government [115 pages], p.55.

³⁰ “thematic review of the investigation and prosecution of sexual crimes”, inspectorate of prosecution in scotland, 16 november 2017 [87 pages], p.9.

³¹ *ibid.*

³² supporting file excel sheet “recorded-crime-2019-20-bulletin-tables-final.xlsx”, table 1, from recorded crime in scotland, 2019–2020.

“woman deceived by spy cop sees relationship as rape, inquiry hears”, rob evans, the guardian, 10 may 2021.

“locked up in lockdown: life on remand during the pandemic”, fair trials, july 2021 [44 pages].

“short update: scottish police use emergency powers disproportionately against poor people”, fair trials, 20 august 2020.

“police scotland stopped and searched 3,000 children”, connor gillies, bbc scotland news, 15 october 2019.

“‘my son was terrified’: how prevent alienates uk muslims”, jamie grierson, the guardian, 27 january 2019.

mental health in prisons: eighth report of session 2017–19, house of commons committee of public accounts, 6 december 2017 [82 pages].

“deaths in police custody”, inquest.org.uk, 2021.

“thematic review of the investigation and prosecution of sexual crimes”, inspectorate of prosecution in scotland, 16 november 2017 [87 pages].

“we’ve been here before”, anne karpf, the guardian, 8 june 2002.

“revealed: how ‘racial bias’ at the heart of criminal justice system means black people in UK more likely to be in prison than those in US”, benjamin kentish, the independent, 8 september 2017.

“slavery and the slave trade”, the national records of scotland (NRS), no date (after 2007).

“orange walks return to glasgow with hundreds on the streets after covid bans”, cheryl mcevoy, glasgow live, 4 july 2021.

“how govanhill defeated oswald mosley’s blackshirts in the 1930s”, christina o’neill, glasgow live, 19 august 2020.

freedom of information response on how many people have died in police custody, “IM-FOI-2021-0124”, police scotland, 3 february 2021 [2 pages].

“statistics and key information”, rape crisis scotland, 2021.

“immigration”, david rosenberg, channel 4, no date (after 2006).

scotland’s census (2011), scotland census.

sources

all sources are free to access in full.

independent review of complaints handling, investigations and misconduct issues in relation to policing, elish angiolini, 11 november 2020 [488 pages].

“watchdog finds ‘emergency’ conditions in scottish prisons”, libby brookes, the guardian, 11 october 2019.

“glasgow churches subjected to anti-catholic abuse after rangers win”, libby brookes, the guardian, 19 may 2021.

“scottish police officers lose disciplinary fight over racist messages”, severin carrell, the guardian, 16 september 2020.

“glasgow cop frothed at the mouth as he ‘suffocated’ girlfriend in terrifying campaign of abuse”, rory cassidy, glasgow live, 5 july 2021.

“police scotland faces ‘institutional racism’ claim in think tank report”, gina davidson, the scotsman, 15 july 2020.

“police breached fundamental rights at sarah everard vigil and bristol protests, inquiry finds”, lizzie dearden, the independent, 1 july 2021.

“today, on eid, the home office tried to detain and deport 2 people from our community” twitter thread by us (@dirozevepave), twitter.com, 6:48pm 13 may 2021 [thread of 16 tweets].

“here you can see a nurse and another support person talking to them under the van, and one of the many cops wearing a fascist ‘thin blue line’ flag”, twitter thread by us (@dirozevepave), twitter.com, 6:56pm 13 may 2021 [thread of 16 tweets].

“some of our directors have just had the cops show up at their home address to charge us with “breach of the peace” for displaying the fuck the police tote bag in the café’s window”, twitter thread by us (@dirozevepave), twitter.com, 1:46pm 15 june 2021 [thread of 10 tweets].

- just in 2019–20, there were 4,097 recorded attempted murders and serious assaults; 1,681 cases of domestic violence; 1,679 cases of ‘other violence’ in scotland.³³
- police scotland don’t bring “justice” with other crimes either: for example, only 6.1% of reported housebreakings end in conviction, and the robbery conviction rate is only 2.4%.³⁴
- as we’ve seen with the fraser ross case³⁵ in glasgow last month and the sarah everard case³⁶ in london earlier this year (2021), **sometimes the domestic abusers, rapists, and murderers are the police themselves**, and they brutalize mourners at vigils for victims.
- by the admission of a former scotland yard commander, **domestic abuse by london met police officers is an “epidemic”**.³⁷ between 2015–18, there were almost 700 reports of domestic abuse by police officers and staff.³⁸
- in england and wales, **police accused of domestic abuse are even less likely to be convicted** (3.9%) than the general public (6.2%).³⁹

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ math from supporting file excel sheet “recorded-crime-2019-20-bulletin-tables-final.xlsx”, table 1, from recorded crime in scotland, 2019–2020; and criminal proceedings in scotland, 2019–20, p.55.

³⁵ “glasgow cop frothed at the mouth as he ‘suffocated’ girlfriend in terrifying campaign of abuse”, rory cassidy, glasgow live, 5 july 2021. *edit on 29 september*: it has emerged that the cop who murdered sarah everard arrested (kidnapped) her on an imaginary covid charge.

³⁶ “police breached fundamental rights at sarah everard vigil and bristol protests, inquiry finds”, lizzie dearden, the independent, 1 july 2021.

³⁷ “more than 100 women accuse police officers of domestic abuse, alleging ‘boys club’ culture”, minnie stephenson, channel 4 news, 18 may 2021 [1 page].

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ *ibid.*

- we could not find statistics for domestic abuse committed by police scotland, but an independent report from 2020 found that the “common perception” among police scotland themselves was that “**officers who were guilty of serious wrongdoing could escape justice by retiring or resigning** before, during or after an investigation”.⁴⁰ this month (july 2021), fraser ross, the aforementioned police scotland officer who was convicted of assaulting and abusing his girlfriend, evaded gross misconduct proceedings by resigning. instead of jail time, he was given community service.⁴¹

in short, **police are bad at preventing crime, and bad at solving crime, especially when they are the perpetrators.** even when crimes are “solved” and criminals are sentenced, the police and prison system does nothing to address the cause of crime, support victims, or reduce the rates of future harm. instead, the “criminal” (often a victim of systemic and interpersonal harm themselves) is removed from their community and locked away. this is inhumane and makes them vulnerable to violence themselves from prison wardens and fellow inmates. all of this “justice” cost scotland upwards of **£2.3 billion** in 2020–21.⁴²

the “what about the rapists and murderers” question reflects the anxiety of people who are understandably afraid of abolishing what little access to justice they feel they have. however we must accept the reality that policing does nothing to prevent violence or procure justice. while police are bad at their

⁴⁰ independent review of complaints handling, investigations and misconduct issues in relation to policing, elish angiolini, 11 november 2020 [488 pages], p.33.

⁴¹ “glasgow cop frothed at the mouth as he ‘suffocated’ girlfriend in terrifying campaign of abuse”, cassidy, 2021.

⁴² scottish budget, 2019–2020, scottish government [229 pages plus supporting files], p.128.

mate goal of complete abolition. this is inseparable from our position as transfeminists, anti-racists, and anticapitalists.

we are not interested in the crocodile tears of queer or jewish police officers, for the same reasons that we are not interested debating transphobic jews or (cis) queer people. we value the work that other groups do in welcoming and educating these people, but our focus is on keeping our communities fed and safe, which means excluding dangerous people like police officers.

our position reflects our reality as queers, as poor people, and as jews. our directors have been harassed, beaten, arrested without cause, and jailed by police. police have assaulted us in the street and dragged us from our homes. we have been evicted and threatened with deportation, and watched as police have sided with our abusers. last month, police intimidated us at home and violated our right to freedom of expression by removing the “fuck the police” tote from our café window.⁷³

but this is not a personal beef either: it’s an ethical stance, and one that we’re proud of. as queers and jews, we stand in solidarity with all victims of police brutality, all prisoners, all migrants, all travellers, all sex workers, and all addicts, regardless of how “respectable” they are.

we do not just stand against police. **we are creating a safe space for queers, jews, and our comrades, which we hope will ripple out into the wider world.** we believe in a world where communities collaboratively solve problems; where we protect people, not property; and where no one is hungry. we are building the world we want to see.

everything is possible!
 everything for everyone!
fuck the police!

⁷³ “some of our directors have just had the cops show up at their home address to charge us with “breach of the peace” for displaying the fuck the police tote bag in the café’s window”, twitter thread by us (@dirozevepave), twitter.com, 1:46pm 15 june 2021 [thread of 10 tweets].

‘prevent’ as a black or brown child,⁷² the stress of being unhoused and harassed, or the horrors of the uk border regime haunting us from port to landlord to employer to hospital.

there is too much to say on police abolition to fit in one short essay. this is only the start of the conversation. and, **we’re just a café**. it was never our intention to be a writing collective or policy group, but “why do you say ‘fuck the police?’” is the most common question we get (“how are you going to make any money if you serve food for free?” is a close second). our answer leans heavily on the work of fellow abolitionists, and we strongly encourage you to explore the reading list below for information about the causes of crime and violence, alternatives to policing, and what we might do with the money currently spent on the ‘justice’ system.

by saying “fuck the police”, we are communicating our position on police abolition in a provocative and cathartic way. this slogan starts conversations in a way that milder wording would not. it allows us to foster community links with people who are also disenfranchised, and work together to build a future without police. it also lets us educate people who don’t yet know the realities of how violent the police are.

we are also communicating who our space is for: people who are targeted and victimized by police. this space is for you, not them. you will be safe here.

policing is not only violent, but unnecessary. we are not interested in reforming the existing system. we don’t want rainbow cop cars, diversity training, hate crime legislation, body cameras, non-binary prisons, or any other reform which expands the scope and budget of policing. we are only interested in reforms which reduce the police’s budget and shift power away from the systems which harm us, with the ulti-

⁷² “‘my son was terrified’: how prevent alienates uk muslims”, jamie grierson, the guardian, 27 january 2019.

jobs even on their own terms, we don’t want them to be “better” because policing is itself an obstacle to justice.

the justice system is institutionally racist

because they’re not spending their time and money solving crimes or supporting victims, police instead busy themselves by harassing people, mostly poor people and people of color. **we reject the dangerous delusion that institutional racism is just an english or american problem: it is a scottish problem too.** some more statistics and reports:

- in a 2020 report looking at scottish government’s approach to racial equality, a senior police officer claimed that **police scotland is “institutionally racist”**; this was covered up by scottish government due to fears that a public conversation would make the government “look terrible”.⁴³
- in 2019–20 **police in england and wales stopped and searched black people more than any other ethnic group** (with white people being searched the least).⁴⁴
- stop and search statistics for scotland don’t have breakdowns by ethnicity, but **police scotland stopped and searched over 3,000 children** aged 7–15 between 2018–19.⁴⁵
- police scotland ignore anti-catholic and anti-irish threats and violence from racist football fans⁴⁶ and ‘orange walk’

⁴³ “police scotland faces ‘institutional racism’ claim in think tank report”, gina davidson, the scotsman, 15 july 2020.

⁴⁴ “stop and search”, uk government, 22 february 2021.

⁴⁵ “police scotland stopped and searched 3,000 children”, connor gillies, bbc scotland news, 15 october 2019.

⁴⁶ “glasgow churches subjected to anti-catholic abuse after rangers win”, libby brookes, the guardian, 19 may 2021.

marchers,⁴⁷ and are widely understood to harbour anti-irish racism themselves.

- an independent report notes that **the institutional culture of police scotland is not only racist but sexist and queerphobic.**⁴⁸
- last year, 10 police scotland officers were disciplined for private whatsapp messages which a court found to be **“sexist and degrading, racist, antisemitic, homophobic, mocking of disability,** and included a flagrant disregard for police procedures by posting crime scene photos of current investigations”.⁴⁹
- **police don’t just harass us and fail to keep up safe: they kill us, and disproportionately kill people of color.** since police scotland was amalgamated in 2013, sixteen people have died in their custody; nearly half (7) of those people were categorized as not white or “unknown”.⁵⁰ in england and wales, 338 people have died in police custody since 2013; 48 (14%) were people of color.⁵¹ it’s worth noting that the numbers for police

⁴⁷ the orange walk is a protestant procession which celebrates the defeat of irish catholicism, and is strongly associated with british unionism. they tend to march through catholic areas of town, and are usually accompanied by anti-catholic and anti-irish violence, and a heavy police presence protecting the marchers. in a single weekend this month (july 2021), 10 orange walks were approved by glasgow city council (“orange walks return to glasgow with hundreds on the streets after covid bans”, cheryl mcevoy, glasgow live, 4 july 2021.).

⁴⁸ independent review of complaints handling, investigations and misconduct issues in relation to policing, 2020, p.30.

⁴⁹ “scottish police officers lose disciplinary fight over racist messages”, severin carrell, the guardian, 16 september 2020.

⁵⁰ freedom of information response on how many people have died in police custody, “IM-FOI-2021-0124”, police scotland, 3 february 2021 [2 pages].

⁵¹ “deaths in police custody”, inquest.org.uk, 2021. note that the police use the term “BAME” rather than people of color.

the most up-to-date figure the government provides is a 20 year old statistic that says 90% of prisoners have mental health issues.⁶⁶ scottish prison service has admitted that “the reduction of mental health services meant women with such issues were often criminalised instead [of getting treatment].”⁶⁷ the house of commons report declares “more excuses are not enough”,⁶⁸ but in the five years since its publication, things have only gotten worse, and conditions during the pandemic are even more harrowing than before. a report from this month (july 2021) found that self-harm rates among prisoners is at “crisis levels”.⁶⁹ remand prisoners (prisoners who are awaiting trial) in england and wales are being held in custody for longer than is legally allowed, especially if they are unhoused or foreign nationals; under these conditions many prisoners are coerced into pleading guilty to crimes they did not commit in order to shorten their pre-trial detention.⁷⁰

we are building the world we want to see

it would be impossible to detail all the harms police cause our communities. we don’t have space to enumerate all the violences within the prison system, the psychological toll of constant state surveillance (sometimes by secret spy police who rape activists by deception⁷¹), the cruelty of calling 999 in mental health emergencies and having cops throw you to the floor, the trauma of being branded an “extremist” under

⁶⁶ *ibid*, p.5.

⁶⁷ “watchdog finds ‘emergency’ conditions in scottish prisons”, brookes, 2019.

⁶⁸ mental health in prisons, house of commons, 2017, p.3

⁶⁹ “locked up in lockdown: life on remand during the pandemic”, fair trials, july 2021 [44 pages], p.4.

⁷⁰ *ibid*.

⁷¹ “woman deceived by spy cop sees relationship as rape, inquiry hears”, rob evans, the guardian, 10 may 2021.

are put underneath bunk beds to accommodate 3 people in double-occupancy cells.⁶⁴

this data affirms what we already know: **poor people, survivors of abuse and people of color are disproportionately incarcerated, and prison conditions are inhumane.** while marginalized people face barriers to accessing mental and physical healthcare outside of prison, inside it is fatally neglected. a 2017 report by the house of commons on prisons in england and wales summarizes:

record high numbers of self-inflicted deaths and incidents of self-harm in prisons are a damning indictment of the current state of the mental health of those in prison and the prison environment overall. ... government does not have reliable or up-to-date measure of the number of prisoners who have mental health problems and existing screening procedures are insufficient to adequately identify those who need support and treatment. people in prison are more likely to suffer from mental health problems than those in the community [outside of prison]. yet prisoners are less able to manage their mental health conditions because most aspects of their day-to-day life are controlled by the prison ... government's efforts to improve the mental health of those in prison so far have been poorly co-ordinated, and information is still not shared across the organisations involved, and not even between community and prison GP services.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ "watchdog finds 'emergency' conditions in scottish prisons", libby brookes, the guardian, 11 october 2019.

⁶⁵ mental health in prisons: eighth report of session 2017–19, house of commons committee of public accounts, 6 december 2017 [82 pages], p.3.

scotland are provided by the police and only include people who died in police custody after being processed in a police station; the england and wales number reflects deaths not only in police stations but in pursuit, road traffic incidents, shootings, and following immediate contact with police. neither of these numbers reflects deaths in prison, or murders committed by off-duty police officers like the sarah everard case.

- many police scotland officers boast a "thin blue line"/ "blue lives matter" flag on their uniforms,⁵² worn by those who defend racist killer cops.
- as our local community has experienced firsthand, **police scotland side with the home office to attempt to deport our neighbours**; but if we stand together like we did at kenmure street,⁵³ they will fail and we will keep each other safe.

white supremacy threatens us and our neighbors, as queers, as jews, as migrants, and as people of color, and it's clear that **police are not fit to protect us from racist violence because they are violently racist themselves.**

⁵² five examples from kenmure street: "here you can see a nurse and another support person talking to them under the van, and one of the many cops wearing a fascist 'thin blue line' flag", twitter thread by us (@dirovepave), twitter.com, 6:56pm 13 may 2021 [thread of 16 tweets]; "in case you're wondering if the #PoliceScotland will do the right thing or the far-right thing...", tweet by @_penguinflight, twitter.com, 4:54pm 13 may 2021.

⁵³ "today, on eid, the home office tried to detain and deport 2 people from our community" twitter thread by us, @dirovepave, twitter.com, 6:48pm 13 may 2021 [thread of 16 tweets].

prison doesn't prevent violence; it just relocates it

prison ruins lives and does nothing proactive, preventative, or rehabilitative. instead, it takes the most vulnerable members of society and locks them away. some statistics on prisons in scotland:

- **scotland has the highest incarceration rate in western europe.**⁵⁴ the prisoner population in scotland in june 2021 was 7,459. **24% of the prisoner population have not been tried or convicted**, including 1,756 adults and 12 children.⁵⁵
- cornton vale is the only women's prison in scotland, and there is no high security state hospital for women.⁵⁶ **women (i.e. perceived by the state to be women) who are considered "high security" patients are removed from their communities and support networks and essentially deported to england.**
- black people in scotland are significantly more likely to be incarcerated than white people; proportionally, black people represent twice as many prisoners as white people, with mixed and 'other' ethnic groups also overrepresented.⁵⁷ **black people in the scotland (and the uk**

⁵⁴ "highest to lowest – prison population rate", world prison brief, prisonstudies.org, 2021.

⁵⁵ SPS prison population april 2014 – june 2021, scottish prison service [1 page plus excel files].

⁵⁶ the only high security hospital in scotland is the NHS state hospital in south lanarkshire, which holds people from scotland and northern ireland. though it is intended to only hold men, it has on a few separate occasions held women (cis and trans).

⁵⁷ scottish prison population statistics 2019–20, scottish prison service [34 pages], p.16.

as a whole⁵⁸) are more likely to be imprisoned than black people in the usa.

- **prisoners in scotland are three times as likely to live in the most deprived areas** than other, wealthier areas: 34% come from the 10% most deprived areas. this doesn't include prisoners who are unhoused or 'no fixed abode', who make up 7.5% of scotland's prison population.⁵⁹
- 38% of prisoners are disabled, and 41% have a long-term illness.⁶⁰
- 39% were diagnosed with depression before being incarcerated, and 29% with panic or anxiety disorders.⁶¹ there are no current statistics on other mental health issues, mental health issues arising since incarceration, or mental health issues which are not officially diagnosed.
- 32% of prisoners have been victims of domestic violence; 39% have witnessed violence between their parents or carers.⁶² as children, 47% were physically, and 58% were emotionally abused.⁶³
- **conditions in scotland's prisons are considered an "emergency situation"** by europe's anti-torture watchdog, noting a rise in drug-related violence, the overuse of segregation, confinement of inmates to cells for lengthy periods, and overcrowding to the point that mattresses

⁵⁸ "revealed: how 'racial bias' at the heart of criminal justice system means black people in UK more likely to be in prison than those in US", benjamin kentish, the independent, 8 september 2017.

⁵⁹ scottish prison population statistics 2019–20, p.19.

⁶⁰ 17th prisoner survey 2019, scottish prison service [33 pages], p.2.

⁶¹ *ibid*, p.10.

⁶² *ibid*, p.22.

⁶³ *ibid*, p.31.