

THE
**Final
Straw**
A WEEKLY ANARCHIST SHOW

The Final Straw is a weekly anarchist and anti-authoritarian radio show bringing you voices and ideas from struggle around the world. Since 2010, we've been broadcasting from occupied Tsalagi land in Southern Appalachia (Asheville, NC).

We also frequently feature commentary (serious and humorous) by anarchist prisoner, Sean Swain.

You can send us letters at:

The Final Straw Radio
PO Box 6004
Asheville, NC 28816
USA

Email us at:

thefinalstrawradio@riseup.net
or **thefinalstrawradio@protonmail.com**

To hear our past shows for free, visit:

<https://thefinalstrawradio.noblogs.org>

**SUPPORT
RYAN ROBERTS AND
#KILLTHEBILL BRISTOL
DEFENDANTS!**



THE FINAL STRAW RADIO

OCT 21, 2021

of like his alleged role in that website. But yeah, he was raided quite violently and remanded earlier this year in prison, and was recently sentenced this last week to 3 years & 9 months for drugs charges, relating to mushrooms, and I think other drugs that he uses to self medicate around cancer and depression and things. The terror terrorism related charges were dropped mostly but he's happy for his details to be shared. I know it's his birthday on the 20th of October so people can send some birthday cards to him. We'll put his address in the show notes.

TFSR: Nicole and Tom, unless there's anything else I really appreciate the conversation that we've had and the work that you all do.

Nicole: Oh, thank you for all your hard work like putting out this really consistent, amazing show that people should support.

Tom: Yeah, thanks so much for inviting us and, and yeah for for making the amazing podcast.

on me the need for for prisoner solidarity.

The thing that really impressed on me, the need for solidarity for people going through repression, was just seeing several comrades really go through hard times. Even a couple of those comrades aren't with us anymore. Just seeing the needs to have that infrastructure there, to have the backs of people that are going through this State repression. I think that's a real motivation for for a lot of us.

TFSR: So in relation to the Bill and the Black Lives Matter protests, there was also the swim that statue of Edward Colston decided to take. I wonder if you could please tell us about the the 4 folks that are facing heavy charges and repression for alleged involvement in that.

Tom: Yeah. 4 people are facing charges for the toppling of the statue, and there's been a massive campaign in Bristol to support them. One thing I didn't say in relation to the Bill is that one of the parts of the policing bill makes the damaging of national monuments, punishable by 10 years in prison. And so that was specifically in response to the toppling of Colston and the toppling of other statues around the UK. That's part of the State's repressive response.

So, there's a massive campaign in support of the 4 people who arrested after the toppling of that statue and they're going to be in court for several weeks from the 13th of December. There are demonstrations being called at the start of that court case and there's fundraising fundraising taking place and public events taking place in Bristol, which you can find out about on the Bristol Defendants Solidarity Twitter account. That's also a focus of solidarity work this this year.

TFSR: Finally, another case of repression that's been in the news recently is the prosecution in Bristol of Toby Shone who the State has identified as the web admin, I believe, of the anarcho-nihilist website 325.NoState.net - It was taken down alongside other insurrectionary and counter-info anarchist sites from around the world by pigs in the Netherlands. Can you all talk about Toby's prosecution the level of international collaboration between police forces in different countries and how people can support Toby?

Nicole: Sure. So it's worth saying that the terrorism charge that Toby was arrested on was dropped due to lack of evidence, so it's all alleged in terms

On March 21st, 2021, thousands entered the streets of Bristol in the UK to vent their anger at deaths in police custody, police violence on the streets, as well as a slate of repressive laws including the SpyCops Bill, increasing impunity for government officials breaking their own laws, as well as the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, or simply The Bill, targeting Roma people, Travelers, lengthens youth prison sentences and criminalizing dissent and protest amidst some of the harshest Covid-19 lockdowns the UK had seen. What became known as the Kill The Bill riot led to running fights with police, burnt cop cars, a dizzying disinformation campaign by police centering themselves as victims, and over 80 people arrested to date, with more being detained and some facing years in prison. From Monday the 25th & Wednesday the 27th of October 2021, defendant Ryan Roberts will be facing trial and is calling for international solidarity.

For the hour, Tom and Nicole of Bristol Anarchist Black Cross talk about the #KillTheBill, police violence in the UK, the radical scene in Bristol, anti-repression work of Bristol ABC & Bristol Defendant Solidarity, the legacy of former Bristol resident Anna Campbell, the cases of the Colston 4 as well as that of Toby Shone, prison expansion in the UK and more. To learn more about their work and how to support and write to Ryan Roberts and other #KillTheBill defendants, visit **BristolABC.Wordpress.Com**, and to you can search that hashtag on social media for a demo in your area to join in on or to advertise your solidarity action! If you happen to be in Manchester, there's a demo on the 27th at 5pm at the Crown Court. And check the ongoing fundraiser for the defendants at GoFundMe!

Search for this interview title at <https://thefinalstrawradio.noblogs.org/> to find links to further resources on this topic, featured music, the audio version, and files for printing copies of this (and more) episodes.

Nicole: I'm Nicole. I use she/her pronouns. I've been living in or around Bristol for nearly 30 years. And yeah, I organize with Bristol Anarchist Black Cross.

Tom: I'm Tom, I use he/him pronouns. I'm a relative newcomer to Bristol. I've been a defendant in trials myself and have I've done anti-repression work for comrades for quite a few years, too. And part of Bristol Anarchist Black Cross.

TFSR: **Thank you both so much for coming on and being willing to talk, I really appreciate it. Could you tell us a bit about Bristol? Maybe where it's at and its measurements? Who lives there and what it's like? And what it was like in the run up to the Kill the Bill demos?**

Nicole: Yeah, so Bristol is a city in southwest England. So under half a million people live there. It's pretty diverse in terms of class and race. So, over a quarter of the people in Bristol are not white, there's a really large Afro-Caribbean community. And there's a really long history, like there's a long history everywhere of police violence. But there's quite a long history of rioting and resistance and community organizing in Bristol. It's the 11th biggest city in the UK. And [ha!] thankfully, the Times dubbed it as one of the best places to live in the UK. But that means there's been increasing gentrification every year. People are attracted to the city because there's quite a lot of underground music scene, street art, this like alternative culture. But it sits in like a very rural region of England.

And I guess, just in terms, of the historical context the city was built on the slave trade. It's by the sea on the west coast. So there's a long history of slavery in the city. And yeah, in terms of local riots... we're going to be talking about a recent riot that happened in March this year. But there is this historical context to that in terms of riots in the center of Bristol, in places like St. Paul's, which have happened after police have really abused stop and search powers, where they've killed people. There was a famous riot in 2011, after a big squat eviction in the city. Just in terms of what we're talking about today... so if people aren't aware there was a riot in March.... March 21, against some some new legislation that we're going to be talking about. A lot of people have been arrested. 81 people so far, 41 people have been charged and there's already 10 people in prison. But we'll go into that more over the next hour.

ABC and BDS. Lots of challenges come up when organizing, right? And if you've already got an established group in affinity with each other, and systems. That really helps. There's a zine about how to start an Anarchist Black Cross group, It's got advice and resources if people are interested in starting an ABC.

And the thing is, I think we haven't mentioned it much, but repression really takes its toll on people and that support does need to be holistic. It's not just doing legal work for people. It is also offering emotional support. So there was an emotional support group, which has transformed a little bit now because I think defendants prefer to talk to people one to one. So, we're paying for counseling and therapy for some comrades and that's really helping people. And even in terms of people's health and stress and herbal support, things like that... I think it's really good to really humanize people and realize that the defendants are experiencing a really stressful time. They don't know what's going to happen with their lives. They don't know if they're going to get eight years in prison or two years in prison. They don't know if they'll be able to get a job in the future. Their relationships are getting trashed, maybe their children have gone into care. There's so many effects of State violence that we invisibilize. And I don't want us to come across that we're rubbing our hands as anarchists like "Ah, yes, theres this uprising in Bristol, and it's really politically exciting!" Actually, it's been really awful and traumatic for loads of the defendants. Especially people that already experienced domestic violence who are then getting beaten by male police officers, for example.

So I think having that broad overview is really important. And then if people do not know the film, there is an absolutely ridiculous, highly problematic, but hilarious film called Hot Fuzz So if you want to take the piss out of Avon and Somerset police, it's based in the West Country in England, you should watch it. It's the best film in terms of laughing at our local cops.

Tom: I was just gonna say about the effects of repression, the emotional effects of repression. When I was going through a trial 10-12 years ago. The tactics that the cops used in the run up to the trial, were designed to separate us from our comrades through bail conditions, saying that we couldn't speak to people, and were designed to make life as difficult for us as possible, through house raids, through arrests intended to come up with reasons to remand us in prison, etc. And I guess that really impressed

Nicole: Yeah, sure. So, there is there is an international call for solidarity, we'd just appreciate any crews, any groups, any organization's making that stuff happen. It could be writing Statements, it could be doing banner pictures, it could be dedicating actions to him. Also, things like letter writing. There's a bunch of people in prison now and they're new to prison. So, this is a critical time for support of getting loads of posts. A lot of the defendants have felt a bit of shame about their involvement, maybe they've had shame from their family, in the media. But showing them inside that loads of people on the outside support them and have their back is really important.

So yeah, we've got a list of prisoners and their addresses on the ABC site. We do circulate graphics as well, but it's always worth checking the site because people get moved to prison a lot and stuff like that. And yeah, funds are constantly needed. We send every prisoner at least 50 pounds a month, money's going people's families, to books, to clothes, and sometimes for legal costs, as well. Bristol Defendant Solidarity have a crowdfunder for legal costs. And ABC also has a crowdfunder for prisoner support funds. Yes, so there's definitely loads of ways that people can offer support.

Tom: And maybe it's worth saying I think the response to those crowdfund is really encouraging. It shows the level of support from people in Bristol and people outside for the defendants. We've raised over £45,000. But, the amount of money that's needed to provide financial support to people in prison and all the different types of support that Nicole mentions is really considerable, especially over the length of time that some people might be serving in prison. So, we'd really encourage people internationally to donate to those crowdfunders.

TFSR: Like I mentioned, it's heartwarming to hear about y'all taking lessons from cases of repression and people resisting and organizing and other places. What are some lessons or some takeaways that you'd like people listening to this to come back with and that you're learning right now through this process?

Nicole: I think one of the key takeaways is that it's worth building infrastructure now. Obviously repression and State violence is ongoing in every community, but I think Bristol... we had a slight advantage on other cities in the UK, for example, because we've got that infrastructure like

TFSR: Cool. And would you want to talk a bit about Bristol ABC, about Bristol Defendant Solidarity, and the anti-repression work that those two groups do?

Nicole: So there's two groups. So, we're representing Bristol Anarchist Black Cross and there's also a group called Bristol Defendant Solidarity (BDS). BDS was started after this riot in 2011. But before then there's always been ongoing informal support and solidarity for people that are arrested. BDS mostly focuses on defendant support work, and ABC focuses more on the prisoner side. But recently, with all the repression we've been working really closely together. In terms of Bristol ABC... if people aren't aware of the Anarchists Black Cross... It's debated how it started, but there is evidence that it was active in 1905 in Russia and there's ABC groups all over the world that are active, supporting people in prison. So I've been doing ABC for about 10 years now. How we've been supporting people, practically, financially, politically, not just in the UK, but also around the world.

So yeah, Bristol was fortunate with the riots that there was a lot of infrastructure that was already established that could respond to this situation. There was also groups that got started in the midst of it all. So there's an action medic crew that was set up and legal observers independently organized to attend the demos. And so what happened was there was obviously this mass arrest of people. And some people were known to us, were comrades, were in our communities already, and other people weren't. And so, BDS had to really publicize the fact that support is available. There was lots of poster in the city, lots of outreach on social media, word of mouth, and encouraged defendants to get in touch so that they could be supported with different things.

BDS help with legal work. So going through the police footage, helping people prepare for court, liaison with solicitors [lawyers], attending court hearings. And you know in that moment, they'll also do police station support, and support people if their house has been raided by the cops and they've lost their phones and stuff like that. And ABC will offer... like it'll do like pre-prison chats with people, because I did some time inside when I was younger. So, you know, few of us and ABC have been in prison. So we like to help people prepare, practically and emotionally.

We've also been doing fundraising and sharing details of people in prison who've consented and asked to have their detail shared so that they can receive letters, and solidarity and stuff like that. And there's also

an element of supporting people's families, quite a few defendants have been separated from their kids, for example. And ideally, when we're a bit less overwhelmed we really want to play a role in supporting prisoner resistance and organizing from the defendants who are inside. So, at the moment between ABC and BDS, we buddy people. Someone gets assigned, and you make sure that you're bottom lining the support for that person. You're checking in with them regularly, you're going to court with them, you're making sure that they have access to to what they need.

But beyond those two groups, there's also a lot of autonomous organizing in Bristol. So, people have been organizing fundraising, bar nights and organizing letter writing events and stuff like that. And, at the moment, there's a defense campaign in the making. We want to do something a lot more organized with defendants and their families and their supporters, and counter some of the State narratives and the mainstream media narratives about the riot and what happened. That's what's been going down.

TFSR: So Bristol has a history of radical leftist resistance, at least that I've been aware of, such as a chapter of the IWW or Industrial Workers of the World, those anti-repression projects like Bristol ABC and BDS, an anarchist bookfair that actually my co host William and I were able to attend a few years back, which was awesome. It's also been host to sabotage actions claimed over the last decade by insurrectional anarchists of the Informal Anarchist Federation/International Revolutionary Front FAI-IRF against police and capitalist infrastructure. So it's like a wide gamut of stuff that's come across my radar as things that are interesting about Bristol and exciting about Bristol. It seems like a hotbed of anarchy. Can you talk about what what the anarchist scene is like in Bristol?

Nicole: Sure! So, I think to the outside world, it seems like a hotbed, but I think when you've lived there a long time It feels like a retirement home. But that's probably a bit cheeky. There is a lot of stuff going on. I think there's different theories. My personal theory is that I think Bristol is big enough to have a diversity of anarchist tendencies. So there's these insurrectionary currents and then there's groups like the IWW and people that are doing community organizing, around housing or wages, things like this. But it's not as big as cities like London, it's like intimate enough for people to know each other. And also, there's been really long term anar-

to fight back. I think the defendant work is quite interesting in that way.

Tom: Yeah, and just to say in terms of the number of people sentenced... 10 people have received sentences now to a total of 29 years in prison between them. I just wanted to say another bit of the context of all this against the backdrop of the riots across the the UK in 2011 [in the aftermath of the police murder of Mark Duggan in Tottenham in North London], which were really widespread by working class communities, predominantly, and people of color. I think one one criticism of the response by anarchists to those riots is that we really, really failed to provide infrastructure and support to the people that were arrested. There was a really strong State narrative. You had Boris Johnson going out with his broom and saying that "everyone should be part of this riot clear up." So there was a strong State narrative that was saying that the rioters weren't political, that it was thuggery or whatever. Sadly, I think actually people bought that a little bit I'm afraid.

With what's going on now with building infrastructure for supporting the people arrested on 21st of March, I really hope that we can do better in supporting people than we did back in 2011. That's not to say by the way that nobody organized back in 2011. There were some good attempts at defendant solidarity organizing but what was really needed was unconditional solidarity for those in court on a really, really large scale, and that didn't materialize.

TFSR: It's I mean, it's refreshing to hear people taking those sorts of lessons, though and saying "We lacked then, we've learned, we were trying to do this now." And being able to take the examples of international situations or situations in other countries. That's really impressive.

You had mentioned that Ryan was calling for people to come out and demonstrate. There's demonstrations on the 25th and 27th. And folks are going to try to pack the courthouse. For folks that can't make it, whether because they're abroad or ability or what have you, can you talk a little bit about other ways that they can offer solidarity, both to Ryan's case and upcoming ones? Ways that folks can donate towards legal costs or survival needs of the defendants moving forward? Or, I don't know, dropping banners in front of embassies and such abroad if that's helpful?

that's probably worth talking about. So there was a series of demonstrations, which happened after the 21st of March in Bristol. So Kill The Bill demonstrations continued two or three times weekly. And for the first few weeks at least, we were met by an army of riot police who were intent on revenge for the 21st of March. A few days after the 21st of March there was a gathering by supporters of Gypsy, Roma and Traveler People on College Green that was violently attacked by the cops. A line of riot police charged the entire gathering of people in tents etc. And slammed riot shields down on people's heads. And that set the scene for the policing over the next weeks and months where the cops really tried to exact revenge for what had happened on the 21st of March by using the maximum amount of violence against people when they were coming out on the streets in Bristol to resist against a bill.

Nicole: Yeah, maybe I can add one thing. I think it's worth saying with the defendants that, again, it's quite mixed in terms of class and race but the people that are getting smashed with the hardest sentences are working class people who have had previous convictions, or who weren't in touch with us who went guilty due to terrible legal advice, and they thought they were only going to get a couple of months, and instead they got four or five years.

So, I think that the riot itself was politically motivated in lots of ways but defendant support always crosses into different terrains. It's a class issue and a race issue and the people who will get smashed are those that don't have the same level of mitigation. And part of the defense campaign goals are to support people so that they don't make cutthroat defenses. So they don't set up narratives of good protesters and bad protesters.

We recently had a film screening of the Sub Media film about the J20 Resistance and while it's quite different contexts, I think it did inspire quite a lot of the defendants of how maybe without that sort of political support and education, they might have gone down the route of being like "I'm a good protester. I'm a good citizen. I didn't mean anything by it." And and I think it's nice to see people collectively becoming a bit more empowered and radicalized through this process. And I'm hoping, long term, that it will just backfire against the State. Bristol is already a very radical place and now we're going to have people organizing prisoner resistance on the inside that we can support. We're going to have an army of young people that have been dragged through the court system who want

chist infrastructure, Base, which is the local social center. You know, it got established in 1995. So it's part of the furniture really, in terms of contributing to the local resistance in the area, or there's something in the water.

TFSR: I want to get some of that water.

Yeah, that seems to make a lot of sense. And that's a thing that I've heard from other people in cities where there's a long standing activity and maybe even varied. But having that sort of infrastructure that people can plug into, and the collective community memory really makes the ability... it's something to build off of, which I think is really cool.

So, folks may recognize the name of Anna Campbell, Feminist and anarchist who had been active organizing in Bristol, who fell şehid (martyr in Kurdish Kurmanji) while fighting in the Women's Defense Units, or YPG, in Rojava, also known as the Autonomous Administration of Northern and Eastern Syria. She was killed by a Turkish missile strike, as I understand. I wonder if y'all would talk about Anna, who had been involved in the IWW, as I understand, and also BDS and Bristol ABC and a bit about her legacy.

Nicole: Sure, so yeah Anna was... I think she was probably involved in every group of Bristol at some point or another. She was, like, really well known locally, really active. She was active in Bristol ABC and BDS. And yeah, she really believed in solidarity and self defense in militant resistance. She definitely wasn't a pacifist. She was really inspired by what was going on in Rojava and she lost her life for that.

We've all been talking about her a lot with the repression because she would have just fucking loved it. She would have been all over it, coming to court and doing demos and painting banners and spelling them wrong and all sorts of stuff that she used to do. So yeah, we really, really miss her. It's really hard that she's not around. But you know, she was doing ABC just before she left. So I think it shaped her a lot politically. I think she could see the strategic value of supporting prisoner resistance. She organized quite a lot when there was the big prison strikes in the US in 2016. She was doing info events about that and banner drops. She was really inspired by that. She wasn't technically from Bristol, she was from the other side of the UK. But she she definitely made an impact in the city.

Tom: Yeah. Anna was a friend and comrade when she lived in that other part of the UK, in Sussex. I remember from other struggles, from an-

ti-militarist organizing and organizing in solidarity with the Palestinian anti-colonial struggle, organizing against the G8 summit... There were just so many struggles that she was involved in. Thinking about how those struggles can move in a more revolutionary direction... And also as Nicole mentioned, the importance of self defense and people's self defense were things that led her to join the revolution in Rojava.

TFSR: Thank you for sharing. So I guess switching topics a bit. Could you talk about how lockdowns were experienced during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic? What they were like around the UK and maybe in Bristol in particular.

Tom: Yeah, so in Bristol, as in lots of other places around the UK, anarchists were involved in mutual aid organizing, supporting people through the Coronavirus lockdowns. So in Bristol we have a project which was established at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic called BASE and Roses. It was established by the anarchist social center in Easton delivering boxes of food to people who needed it because of the Coronavirus lockdown and for any other reason. And that's still going on as a piece of mutual aid infrastructure in Bristol. There are also solidarity funds set up by mutual aid groups to help people survive through the lockdowns. So yeah, there was this mutual aid response to to the pandemic and to the fact that people were struggling because of inability to work because of the pandemic and the lockdowns.

Then there was the the police's authoritarian use of the Coronavirus legislation to repress dissent and mass mobilization. So in Bristol, for example, the police, Avon and Somerset police increase the use of technology like drones to surveil the population, to spy on people gathering during lockdowns, just use it as an opportunity to roll out the use of that new repressive technology which they've been wanting to use for a long time. They were using it before the lockdown but there was a double in the use of that technology after the start of the Coronavirus lockdowns.

During the Coronavirus lockdowns, you had the the murder of George Floyd in the US and the global response, Black Lives Matter response, people coming together in anti-racist demonstrations... Bristol had a really vibrant movement and people are still organizing. Bristol have been consistently organizing and they organized the protests last June, where 10,000 people, one of the biggest demonstrations in recent memory are gathered at College Green and marched through the city. As

terms of supporting our comrades going through this process of the State trying to repress them.

The narrative which has come out in Bristol actually is, so far, really the State's narrative. So when people have been sentenced in court after they've pled guilty, the judge has ruled out a long list of injuries sustained by the police a long list of Statements by the police saying that they were traumatized by people fighting back against them. At the same time, when the riot happened, Priti Patel, the Home Secretary, again, made Statements to the effect that the people who rioted were thugs. Avon and Somerset police called people a pack of wild animals. The mayor of Bristol also condemned people for rioting.

Nicole: I quite like that wild animals quote, we should do a T-shirt with to the effect of that.

TFSR: Good fundraiser.

Tom: I think it was a mob of wild animals.

Nicole: Yeah. We could have all the West Country wildlife. All the foxes and badgers. [laughs]

Tom: Aw nice! So what we have is a narrative really set at the moment, unfortunately, by people with the most power. You know, what we need to do is to put forward our own narrative, to show the people in Bristol support people for fighting back against the police, that we're proud of these people who fought back. And we also need to talk about the police violence on the 21st of March against the people who surrounded Bridewell [Bristol Central Police Station]. Not only on the 21st of March, but afterward, the police attack people as Nicole was saying, they smashed right shields over people's heads. They attack people with batons, attacked people with dogs, and that police violence needs to be centered too.

We hope that will come out through the different types of anti-repression work that we're talking about. Through the work of BDS and ABC, but also through the defense campaign and through the evidence of defendants in court cases. Ryan, as I said, wants to make his case as political as possible and that means talking about the police violence and talking about the violence leveled against people on the evening.

I alluded just then to what happened after the 21st of March. So

was lots of snitching that took place. So, the footage and the photographs of people that were wanted were put on the TV, they were also released on the front pages of national newspapers. And there was some snitching that happened where people called the cops and said “Oh, my neighbor was involved in the rioting.”

And, yeah, it has to be pointed out the complicity of the mainstream media, in doing the police’s work for them in putting out the photos of people in order for them to be repressed by the State. So, 41 people have been charged, and they’ve been being brought to court over the last month since since March. 3 people are currently on remand in prison. Being on remand means that you’ve gone through a court hearing, and the judge has refused to give you bail, and you’re in prison awaiting awaiting trial. People can wait for a year or more for their trial to take place and remain in prison for that entire time.

10 people have already been sentenced for the riot. So, those who’ve pled guilty to riot have received sentences of between three and five years in prison. And the remaining people have all pled not guilty. And so their cases will be between now. The first case is next week with a guy called Ryan Roberts, he’s in court in Bristol Crown Court on the 25th of October, and his case last until the 27th of October and he’s charged with Riots and Arson. Riot carries a maximum sentence of 10 years. The judge in the cases is saying that the starting point for sentencing is 6 years. And Arson carries a variable sentence, depending on the level of the arson, it can be a very serious charge also. So it’s a serious case. And Ryan has called for solidarity and he wants to make the case as politically as he possibly as he possibly can and he wants demonstrations outside the court.

We’re calling for people to pack the courtroom to show that there’s support for people to fighting back against police violence and defending himself against against the police. So, that’s next week. There’s also two demonstrations planned next week on the 25th and 27th in solidarity with Ryan.

The rest of the trials are scheduled between January 2022 and July 2022. People are still being charged so the people who are currently released under investigation are still going on people going on being charged. And unfortunately people are still being arrested also. The police are saying that there’s many more people that are wanted, unfortunately. We can see that it’s a long slog in terms of anti-repression work and in

they came to the statue of Edward Colston, who was a local personality who was involved in the slave trade, and who has many things named after him in the city: streets, schools etc. People had been campaigning, petitioning for the removal of this statue for... well, for decades. As the march went past the Colston statue, people put ropes around the statue and it was pulled down by the mass of the people and eventually was carried to the river Avon and thrown in the river.

The pulling down of the Colston statue was an important backdrop to what happened on March 21, which was when the riot that we’re going to be talking about happened. So, as the statue was pulled down, police stood back and didn’t make arrests at that point, and chose instead to try to identify people later on and to make arrests later on. And the police chief, Andy Marsh, said that was to avoid a riot taking place. He thought that if the police had intervened at that point there would have been a riot. And they were rebuked really harshly by Priti Patel, the Home Secretary. They were told that they should have intervened, they should have stopped what was happening.

And what happened was copied around the UK, other statues were removed. The government was pissed off about that and wanted a more authoritarian response by the police. So, that provided the backdrop to what happened on the 21st of March because the police were geared up to respond in a more authoritarian way to the next, big, mass demonstration which was against the policing bill. I guess the backdrop to that demonstration was the it came during the UK’s harshest Coronavirus lockdown. Some of the other lockdowns had included clauses which said that political protests would be exempt from the terms of the lockdown, whereas in March, those clauses weren’t in place. The police were were acting as if protest was completely illegal.

TFSR: In the United States, and in North America in general, there’s been a lot of back and forth about the Right-wing having cornered a lot of the anti-lockdown sentiment around the idea that the government is using this has an opportunity to clamp down on people’s freedom of movement, freedom of expression, or ability to defend themselves. And I was talking to a comrade in Germany the other day, we were talking about how anarchists have engaged in responses to lockdowns or repression against demonstrations by using public health language in France in a different way than he had seen in Germany and I’d seen in the US.

I don't know if you had any thoughts you wanted to share about the framing of public health measures being used as a way to... and maybe the importance in the framework that we're operating in to decrease the spreading of COVID-19 while still living under capitalism... But, the use of the of those things to repress people's ability to live safely and push back against government authoritarian measures. Does that make sense?

Nicole: Yeah, should I come in there Tom?

Tom: Sure.

Nicole: I think it's been quite complex in the UK in the sense that a lot of people that have been anti-lockdown have been either open fascists or anti-vaxxers, conspiracy theory-esque with quite strong links to Right-wing world-views and to fascist ideas and ideologies. But, I don't know if there's been like enough critique of the State with the lockdown. I don't know, it's difficult isn't it? Because obviously we want our communities to keep each other safe and if the State actually gave a fuck about anyone's lives, they would shut down the factories and the Amazon warehouses outside Bristol that are hotspots for the virus.

But I do think it's also exposed a huge amount of ableism like in anarchist scenes. At the beginning of the pandemic, it was really like "suddenly, let's look out for people with chronic illnesses who were previously pretty displaced from our communities." Like if you get sick, or you burn out, or you have a health issue, or a caring responsibility, it's quite difficult to participate in certain struggles because of people's ableism. So I think yeah, BASE and Roses has been a nice example of how that's been responded to proactively.

I think the pandemics just been this microcosm of class war, right? In terms of how the legislations used and all their repressive strategies and stuff. I think, as time went on, and people understood the virus more, there was more willingness to take to the streets and do demos and not be as pacified, thinking it was like a way of harm reduction. I was really nervous when all these big demos were happening because I live with someone who's shielding and that just like made me very nervous. But it was also really clear that people had to be on the streets and stuff.

I know anarchists everywhere have been thinking about this stuff. And I probably haven't answered your question [laughs]. I think there's

have historically experienced State violence, who like a lot more on side about criticizing the police... suddenly you just had the general population thinking about it. And I think there definitely is still quite a strong anti-police energy. It's easy to be in a left wing echo chambers, but I think there really is a sensation now in UK of where people are talking about abolition, like a lot more weightily, as you said.

Tom: I also went to Zoom meetings that were attended by many, many people during the summer of 2020... and talking about abolition. But just linking it back to the riot. One of the most beautiful things about the riot was that one of the last police cars to be set on fire, before it was set on fire, had the words "defund the police" written across the bonnet [US: hood]. And so, clearly the people who were fighting back against the police on that night did have those ideas and those visions in the minds.

TFSR: **So with the folks that caught charges... I think one of you had mentioned that folks are still being charged. But can you talk about the defendants? Can you talk about what charges and times that they face? What stages of conviction are they in. Also, most of our audience is based in the US and the criminal justice system has a specific shape to it here in terms of how the court process goes, and I'm wondering if you could sort of highlight some differences or some instances that would enlighten us to what the defendants are facing in Bristol courts.**

Tom: Yeah, so 81 people have been arrested so far. And of the people arrested, the vast majority are pretty young, mostly in their early 20s. And, as Nicole said, some people have been involved in our movements, but many hadn't so it was a challenge to get in contact with people and to establish connections with them for BDS and ABC. 41 of those 81 people have been charged now.

So what happens when you get arrested in the UK, is you get arrested taken to the police station, and you might be charged at the police station, or you might be released on police bail, or released under investigation. So if one of the latter two happens, it means you haven't been charged yet, the police are still considering whether to charge you and to prosecute you. Almost everybody wasn't arrested on the evening of the 21st of March. So, after the riot happened the police release photographs of people. They trolled through CCTV footage and they released photographs of people who they said had been involved in the rioting and there

yourself when you're being attacked by the police in a court of law, it's going to be all about whether or not you were threatened at that point.

But I think we should understand self defense in a much more broad way. that we need to defend our communities against State oppression. I have to say, I'm really proud to live in a community where people did defend themselves in that way. And yeah, that's one of the points that we've made as ABC and BDS is that we're proud of the defendants and their resistance.

TFSR: Another unscripted question, just out of curiosity... I know in the so-called US, one thing that was experienced and has been growing over the last few years, but last year really sort of blew up the idea of or made it super visible and part of discourse, the idea of Abolition in general, but abolition of the police. I know that within the US context and the white supremacist anti-Black former more-recently-slave-State that's still pretty contested, especially around the structure of prisons and racialization in the US. That's a lot of terms sorry.

Abolition has a weight to it I think that in a lot of other places it would not. But around this time when it becomes all the more blatant what the State is doing, whipping out its police forces and these clear instances of police murders like those ones in January in the area and also Sarah Everard in the the impunity of the pig in that instance... Has abolitionism, or has just getting rid of the police, moved from outside of subcultural discourse? Have people talked about this? Have they said like, "Oh, this is a clear sign that this is what the police do. We're just seeing it right in front of our faces right now?"

Nicole: Yeah, I think there's been this Abolitionist tendency that's been growing and growing, last year definitely escalated everything. I remember doing one webinar about resisting prison expansion with a group called "Community Action on Prison Expansion." And there was 400 people watching it, it was pretty wild how many people got interested in it. Unfortunately, there was a bit of a sensation of like "abolition is the flavor of the week." If that makes sense. I don't know how many people will continue to do consistent prisoner support, for example.

But I think the interesting thing about the COVID time was that for people who through privilege hadn't experienced State violence. Suddenly, everyone was witnessing the power of the State, if that makes sense. So, working class communities, people of color, other people that

like tensions in Bristol basically between opinions about this. But obviously everyone is against the State violence and the State surveillance and the State repression.

TFSR: Yeah, that's totally fair, and I appreciate you. Perfect answer: "It's complex and here's some of the perspectives that people are coming from." I appreciate you also pointing to the the ableism that was present, continues to be, but at least it's like visible around folks immune-compromised and and related issues. So thank you for letting me interject that question. Can you talk a bit more about what context the the Kill the Bill protest emerged from? And what did the protests look like?

Tom: The context that the March 21 protests emerged from was immediately because of the policing bill. But the wider context is around policing in general and State repression, State authoritarianism in general. So, for instance, you had that huge mobilization in Bristol in 2020, and the toppling of the Colston statue. But police attacks on communities in Bristol and in the UK, a constant policing which is racist and racialized in Bristol. If you're Black, for example, you're seven times more likely to be stopped and searched than if you're not.

In the context of this history of what Nicole was talking about there, the resistance against against racist policing in Bristol, and in the UK. Earlier that year, and in 2021, at least two people have been killed in custody close to Bristol. In January, a 24 year old man called Mohamad Hassan died after having been detained in Cardiff Bay police station, not so far away from Bristol. Five weeks later, another young man called Mouayed Bashir died in police custody, this time in Newport in South Wales. That that's the norm in terms of police violence. Since 1990 around 1,800 people, and this is recorded cases, have died in police custody or directly after being in police custody in the UK.

The backdrop is this really harsh Coronavirus lockdown where where protest is illegal. And at the beginning of 2021 the government passed the SpyCops Bill. At a time when it was very difficult for people to express dissent because of this lockdown that was going on. And the SpyCops Bill, basically, was the State's response to the ongoing legal cases that have been brought by women who've had intimate relationships with undercover police officers who posed as people that were involved in the radical Left and had relationships with them on this false pretext. There's

currently an inquiry going on about the undercover policing tactics that were used, but the SpyCops Bill made it expressly legal. Legal, not illegal, for State agents working for the police or for other State authorities, it could even extend to things like local authorities to break the law. It was essentially passing a piece of legislation which will make it legal for police officers to break the law in the future if they were on undercover duty. So, the State had done this and under the cover of the Coronavirus pandemic and lock downs.

The next thing that the State wanted to push through Parliament was the Police Courts and Sentencing Bill. It was, I would say, the most repressive piece of legislation since the the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act of the 1990's. Again, it was being done at a time when political dissent was very, very difficult. And the bill itself criminalizes the livelihoods of Gypsy-Roma and traveller communities, gives the police some increased powers to seize vehicles and also creates a criminal offense of trespass which is an attack on the livelihoods of Traveling people and a further attack on on squatters and generally on freedom in the UK. It introduces longer sentences which can be imposed on people and particularly for young people, it allows younger people to be sent to prison for longer. The bill gives police more powers to shut down and to impose conditions on public protests and processions, it widens police powers to arrest people for causing a public nuisance, it allows cops to impose conditions on protests if the cops think that the protest is too noisy or disruptive and it allows them to shut down protests encampments, too.

So it has a massive effect on protests in the UK. The other side of the coin is the State's new prison expansion program to create 18,000 new prison places in the UK. I don't know if you want to talk about that, Nicole?

Nicole: Yeah, so a major part of the bill which I think hasn't had as much attention as the other areas of harm is that the British State wants to build 18,000 new prison places through a series of mega-prisons, which will most likely be run by private companies. And this legislation gives them the opportunity to criminalize more and more people and also to keep people in prison for much longer than they already are. So yeah, it's pretty significant in the context of the prison industrial complex more broadly in the UK

TFSR: It seems like, outside of the shape of the bill, part of the context

or one of the sparks that really would have lit people and sent them into the street was the the situation of Sarah Everard. Would you mind talking about that?

Nicole: Sure, yes. So, quite an inflammatory situation in the UK that was creating a lot of rage and despair in people was that police officer in early March was arrested for murdering a woman called Sarah Everard and I don't know if people know the case at all or had seen it on the news, but he was a police officer called Wayne Couzens and he showed his badge and use the Coronavirus legislation to get Sarah into his car. And then he later raped and murdered her.

This was a really big deal. And there quite shortly after there was a huge vigil organized in London. And in this vigil there were 1000's of people protesting. And, again, using the Coronavirus legislation of the police to try to repress the demo, including holding women down and assaulting them, which in the context was like pretty horrifying. It's only one week after this vigil in London that the big Kill The Bill March took place in Bristol. So, there was a lot of anger about the police in the air.

In terms of the you know the actual demo and the riot, I actually had like a 38 and a half degree (Celsius) fever at home so I thought I had COVID. So I wasn't there. But obviously the footage got shared all over social media and all over the world. There was a really big march and then people started moving towards the police station, towards evening time. The police stations is right in the city center. Police officers attack the crowd with batons, riot shields, pepper spray was used, people were charged with police horses, some people were bitten by police dogs. People really defended themselves, seized riot shields, grabbed helmets and batons to defend themselves.

By the end of the night windows of the police station had been smashed, there was like various vehicles on fire, police vehicles. There was also some famous very Bristol related photographs shared of one kids skateboarding next to this burning cop van, which went pretty viral. Yeah, it got it got pretty wild west.

Tom: And I think it's important to understand what happened from the perspective of the community's self defense against authoritarian policing and the police itself, which is constantly attacking the community in Bristol and all of our communities. The legal system tries to understand self defense in a much more limited way. If you argue that you are defending