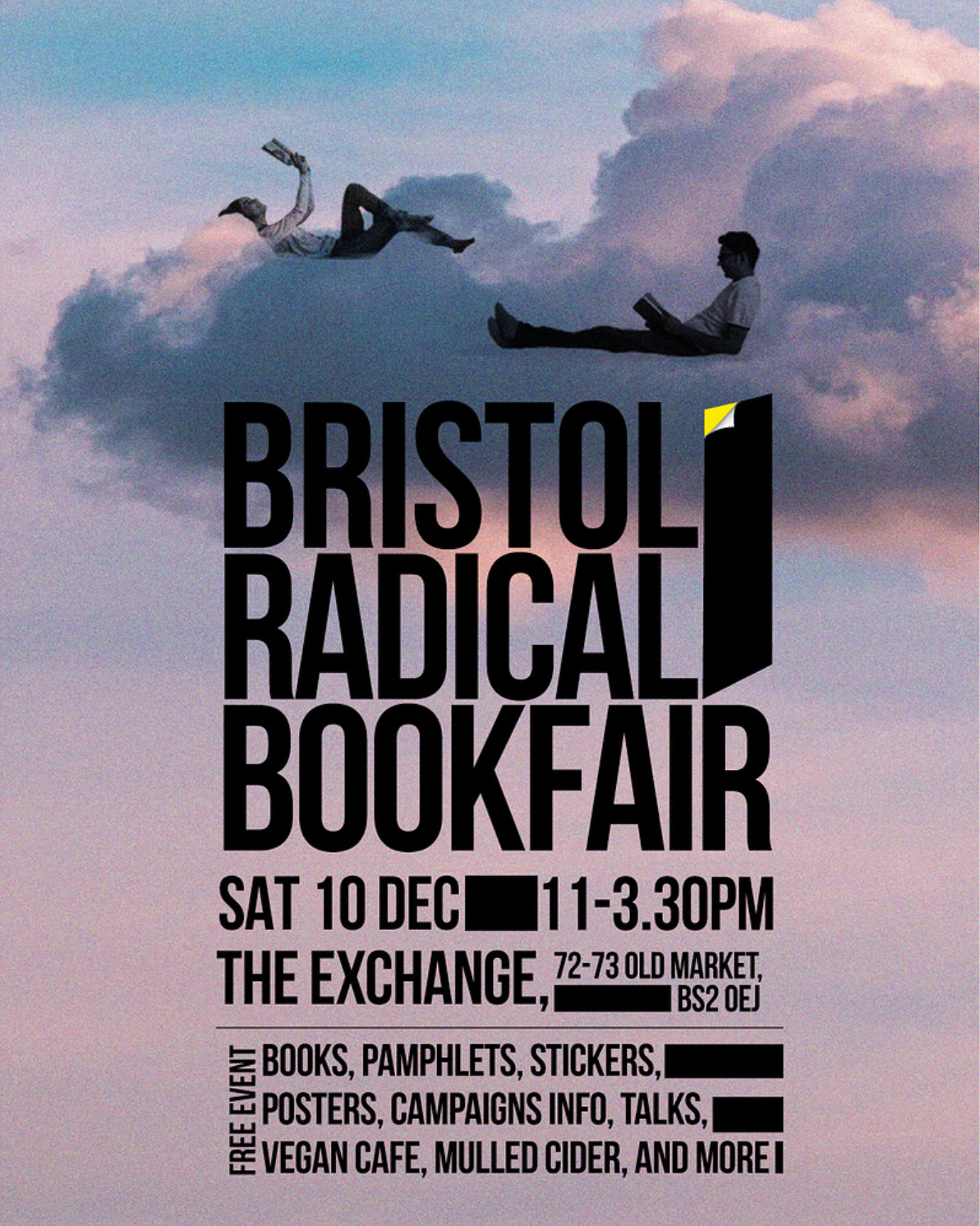


The Echoes of the UK's "Kill the Bill": Reflections on the Bristol Radical Bookfair

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BRISTOL RADICAL BOOKFAIR

SAT 10 DEC 11-3.30PM

THE EXCHANGE, 72-73 OLD MARKET,
BS2 0EJ

FREE EVENT BOOKS, PAMPHLETS, STICKERS,
POSTERS, CAMPAIGNS INFO, TALKS,
VEGAN CAFE, MULLED CIDER, AND MORE!

On Sunday morning (the 25th), the train station in North London was packed with travelers heading to various parts of the UK. On my way to the station, I received a notification that the train services for the day would be delayed. Upon arriving at the station, I waited for the train schedule information to appear on the big screen. Compared to other canceled train services, the train to Bristol was only delayed by a few

minutes, which made me feel somewhat relieved, yet I was also anxious about the chaos in the transportation system caused by the economic downturn. Since the start of the Ukraine war this year, Europe has been on edge due to energy shortages, and with rising inflation, the public's cost of living has significantly increased. Since the beginning of this year, the frequency of protests in the UK has steadily risen in response to the anticipated higher bills for this autumn and winter, with strikes occurring continuously across various sectors. Among these, strikes in the transportation sector are the most frequent and longest-lasting, directly impacting people's lives. In this context, the Bristol Radical Bookfair seems to be a powerful response to the current environment.

After arriving at the station in Bristol, I walked along the road to the site of the Radical Bookfair. During the 2020 Black Lives Matter movement, Bristol became a frontline city for the fight for racial equality. Bristol is a traditional industrial city in the UK, and since the Middle Ages, it has been an important commercial port city in England. Because of this, it has deep historical ties to the UK's history of slavery and the Black abolitionist movement. For instance, during the Black Lives Matter movement in June 2020, the statue of Edward Colston, an officer of the Royal African Company from the 17th-18th centuries, was toppled and dragged to the port, where it was thrown into the water. It was later retrieved and is now displayed in a museum. Violence, resistance, and struggle have been woven into the historical fabric of this city.

Although Bristol's shipping status declined after the 19th century with the rise of ports like London and Liverpool, it remained a center for several key industries, including aviation and automotive in the UK. As its shipping prominence faded, the city shifted its development focus to industrial growth. In the 1960s to 1980s, as the national economy relied on industrial development, the central and northern regions of England became industrial strongholds. This area is also traditionally recognized as a working-class city, and the social disparities stemming from wealth inequality made it one of the epicenters of social movements in the UK.

The Radical Bookfair was held in a venue in the city center, where most of the participating booksellers had firsthand experience in protest activities, with a diverse age range from young people in their twenties to

elderly individuals. They brought a variety of publications centered around the theme of anarchism. During the book fair, there were also several lectures taking place in the downstairs hall, covering a wide range of topics, from introducing the stories of Black female sailors in Bristol's maritime history to exploring the role of anarchism in the Rojava Revolution, as well as discussing how the government uses the prison system as a means of regulating the populace.

At this time, the Radical Bookfair was also discussing the "Kill the Bill" protests. Bristol has been at the forefront of the "Kill the Bill" protests, and since March 2021, the Bristol police have arrested and detained 21 individuals. The organizers of the Radical Bookfair hoped to support the demonstrators fighting on the front lines through practical actions. The origin of the "Kill the Bill" protests stemmed from a police killing case. In March 2021, at the peak of the COVID pandemic, cities across the UK were under lockdown. On the night of March 3, Sarah Everard, a woman living in London, was kidnapped and murdered while walking home; her killer was Wayne Couzens, a police officer from the Metropolitan Police. Following this incident, women across London and other major cities gathered spontaneously to hold vigils for Sarah Everard. During these vigils, intense clashes erupted between the police and the public, which subsequently sparked a series of social movements and public outcries against violence towards women, shaking the British political landscape and the police force. As tensions escalated, the UK government promptly proposed the highly controversial Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, aimed at granting greater powers to the police in England and Wales and imposing more restrictions on gatherings and protests. The purpose of these regulations was to enhance police enforcement powers and crack down on violent protests. Following the introduction of the bill, protests erupted in cities including London, Bristol, and Manchester, with the Bristol protests being the most violent, resulting in police vehicles being set on fire. Amid the clashes between the police and the public, several suspects were arrested, and varying degrees of punishment were imposed during their interrogations.

At the Radical Bookfair, we also spoke with demonstrators who participated in the "Kill the Bill" protests. From her account, it was clear that the police allegations against her lacked substantial evidence.

During her time in prison, she insisted on writing, documenting her experiences. When she entered prison, the guards searched her belongings, and although she had brought several books with her, the guards confiscated most of them due to sensitive titles, only allowing her to bring in one book titled *Bang Up and Smash*. She mentioned that the guard who checked her books assumed it was a cooking book just from the title, so they permitted her to keep it, while in reality, it was a book about the British women's prison system.

During her ten weeks in prison, she witnessed and experienced extreme control of women's bodies and minds by a violent institution. However, according to the UK legal system, upon her release, she was granted only a limited right to speak, meaning she could not directly or indirectly express any support for or opposition to the protests. While we spoke, many strangers approached her to greet her, expressing that her story helped them understand the violent conflicts occurring in the "Kill the Bill" protests.

In the course of the demonstrations, the transparency and completeness of information were crucial, as these were essential for the public to judge the rightness or wrongness of the events and to explore issues of justice. However, the conflicts in these protests often occur between the government and the public, between those in power and unarmed citizens, and between those biased toward a certain narrative and those opposing it. Due to the unequal resources held by both sides, information is often difficult to disseminate comprehensively, relying instead on government-released information. In the context of digital media, the public has access to diverse sources of information regarding the same events. This diversity and fragmentation of information can, to some extent, prevent the demands of demonstrators from being fully understood and heard.

In addition to the "Kill the Bill" protests, the book fair also discussed how to address immigration issues and featured related publications for sale. Although Bristol is not a major immigrant settlement in the UK, immigration remains an unavoidable "elephant in the room" for British society. At one of the booths at the fair, the publications and printed

flyers mainly called for local volunteers to provide food and essential supplies for prisoners with immigrant backgrounds.

However, the publishers candidly stated that they do not prefer to use social media, as it is not conducive to protecting the privacy of the inmates. Instead, their approach involves printing flyers to distribute in the streets and communities of the city. The promotional impact is not negligible, and they are not aiming to expand their outreach. At this stage, their goal is to collect more supplies to send to prisons, thereby assisting those individuals they care about and wish to help.

The train from Bristol to London departed on time, but upon returning to the London train station, the crowd had significantly diminished, replaced by the quiet of night after the morning's hustle and bustle. Several years ago, near the same station, I witnessed a march where the public demanded the government withdraw troops from Afghanistan. I remember that the procession was followed closely by a few police officers, and the atmosphere was relaxed, with neither side appearing tense.

In the UK, there are numerous protests and marches, large and small. Typically, as long as the organizers provide reasonable and appropriate information when applying to the government for a march, their requests are usually approved. At this moment, protests against the "Kill the Bill" legislation are still taking place in various cities across the UK. Although these events continue, their scale has diminished, and attention to the "Kill the Bill" protests has decreased compared to earlier, partly due to more pressing issues like the winter energy crisis.

As time passes, when we revisit the "Kill the Bill" protests, there will be opportunities to hear the accounts of those involved, allowing justice to be rightfully acknowledged.

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