

The Bizzare shock to agriculture and food.

Farmers are throwing away food while ever more people are going hungry. This isn't surprising – supermarkets aim to make profits by keeping costs low and selling only to those who can afford it. But many miss out and governments, charities and mutual-aid groups are only able to fill some of the gaps.

What would it take for groups like Cooperation Birmingham to not only fill the gaps, but to become a normal way of distributing food? How can we create a system where everyone has access to good, healthy food regardless of their ability to afford it? How can we reconnect food producers and consumers in fairer and more ecological ways? These are questions about Food Sovereignty – about people having control over food and farming.

Today, we need money to survive. Farmers need money to buy seed, pay rent or mortgages, hire workers and so on. Cooperation Birmingham's chefs, drivers, coordinators need money to pay their rent and cover their bills. With the food system as it is, food cannot be provided without somebody, somewhere paying for it. The usual response to this is to do what charities do – ask for donations. Cooperation Birmingham has done this too. But what if there were a better solution?

We could build autonomous networks of reciprocity and exchange, in which money becomes increasingly irrelevant. Cooperation Birmingham could work with local farms and allotments to access food. It could work with participants to reduce their expenses (e.g. advocating for social housing, lower rents, better wages) that enable them to contribute more time to the Kitchen. If the people who grow, prepare, distribute and eat food can be freed from needing to spend and earn money, a fairer food and farming system is possible.

Over 8,430 meals delivered



SOLIDARITY IN SEPARATION

Punch Up! from Gym member Dave Stamp

Times are grim. The far right is on the ascendancy, and growing in confidence on the streets. They have asserted themselves with many attempts to intimidate and attack people of colour and organised workers. Donald Trump has effectively declared a war on protestors in the States.

In response to the division and misery of this resurgent fascism, a network of 'Red Gyms' – martial arts clubs with an explicitly leftist, inclusionary, working class ethos – have sprung up all across the UK, from Solstar in London to Manchester's 0161 Community Gym.

In Birmingham, we formed Punch Up – a sports club providing boxing and Muay Thai training to people of all ages, abilities and genders in a determinedly non-macho, non-homophobic environment. Before the pandemic hit we were training weekly in the city centre. We are low cost and have Pay As You Feel sessions which means we can subsidise the involvement of members of marginalised groups – such as undocumented migrants and those subjected to the DWP's violent sanctions regime – not as a charitable gesture, but as an act of practical solidarity. In doing so, we bring our politics into our everyday lives, building relationships of trust with other members and developing community links, defying the hopeless individualism of capitalism.

We want to provide a comradely, accepting – while we're at it, enjoyable – environment for working class people to participate in sport, where people can learn skills, strength and confidence together, away from commercial High Street gyms. We have had special session with trainers on Capoeira and Ju Jitsu.

Under the umbrella of Athletic Community Action Birmingham, we aim to work together to build one another's skills and capabilities, to a broader range of sports, from football to athletics to – well, you name it.

Join us! To find out more, go to facebook.com/BrumPunchesUp/.



How our chef Seb learned to cook

After Poland participated in the US-led illegal invasion on Iraq in 2003, justifying it with the US-fabricated evidence that Iraq produced and stockpiled WMDs and was involved in WTC terrorist attacks, an anti-war movement in Poland took on momentum. Several anarchists engaged in the political activity of the 26-year-old squat (and social centre) in central Europe, Rozbrat, and revived a Food Not Bombs (FnB) initiative.

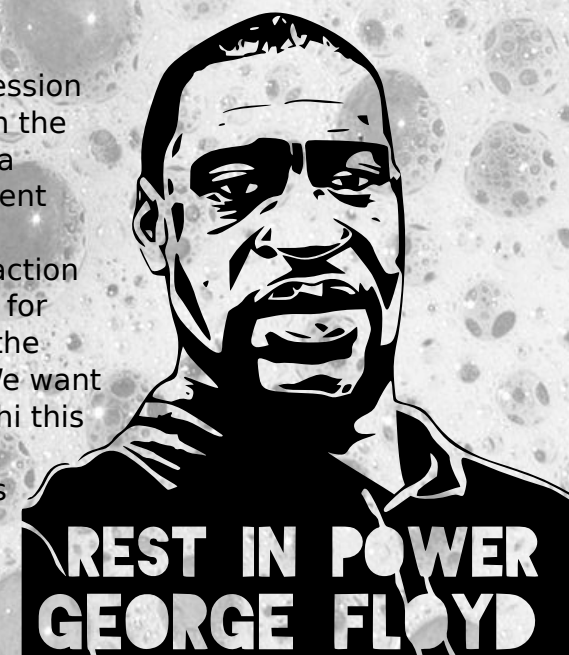
Many anti-war protests took place in the centre of Poznan and FnB prepared and handed over meals to the crowds of 400 and more. Local merchants from the vegetable markets donated raw produce every week and we kept organising concerts and festivals in Rozbrat to raise funds and equipment to keep the FnB initiative alive. It was all based on a radical bottom-up D.I.Y. idea and made possible because the Anarchist Movement in the city was already so well established and organised.

There were times members of the collective were intimidated by the police just because they were loud about the organisation's anti-militarist goals and nonconformist, NGO-challenging ways of standing against the state oppression and reclaiming social agency. Sometimes in winter, the weather also tried to demoralise the FnB crew when temperatures dropped below -15°C. Conditions in the kitchen were challenging and after all cooking, all the washing up had to be done outside and there was no hot water.

And yet, neither police or the freezing weather managed to shut our mouths and our kitchen. This is how I acquired my vegan chef education. Against the state-oppression. In radically democratic structures. Opposing US imperialism and Polish nationalist militarist actions.

Racism in the U.K

Let's be clear, racial discrimination and oppression is also happening here in the UK, where it is linked to a colonialist past and present (let's not forget Jimmy Mubenga). The chain reaction that is sparking protests for racial justice all around the world is long overdue. We want to stand in solidarity with this cause and therefore we provided food and drinks at this week's protest in the city centre.



A news bulletin for extraordinary times. Submissions to info@cooperationbirmingham.org.uk 05/06/20





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