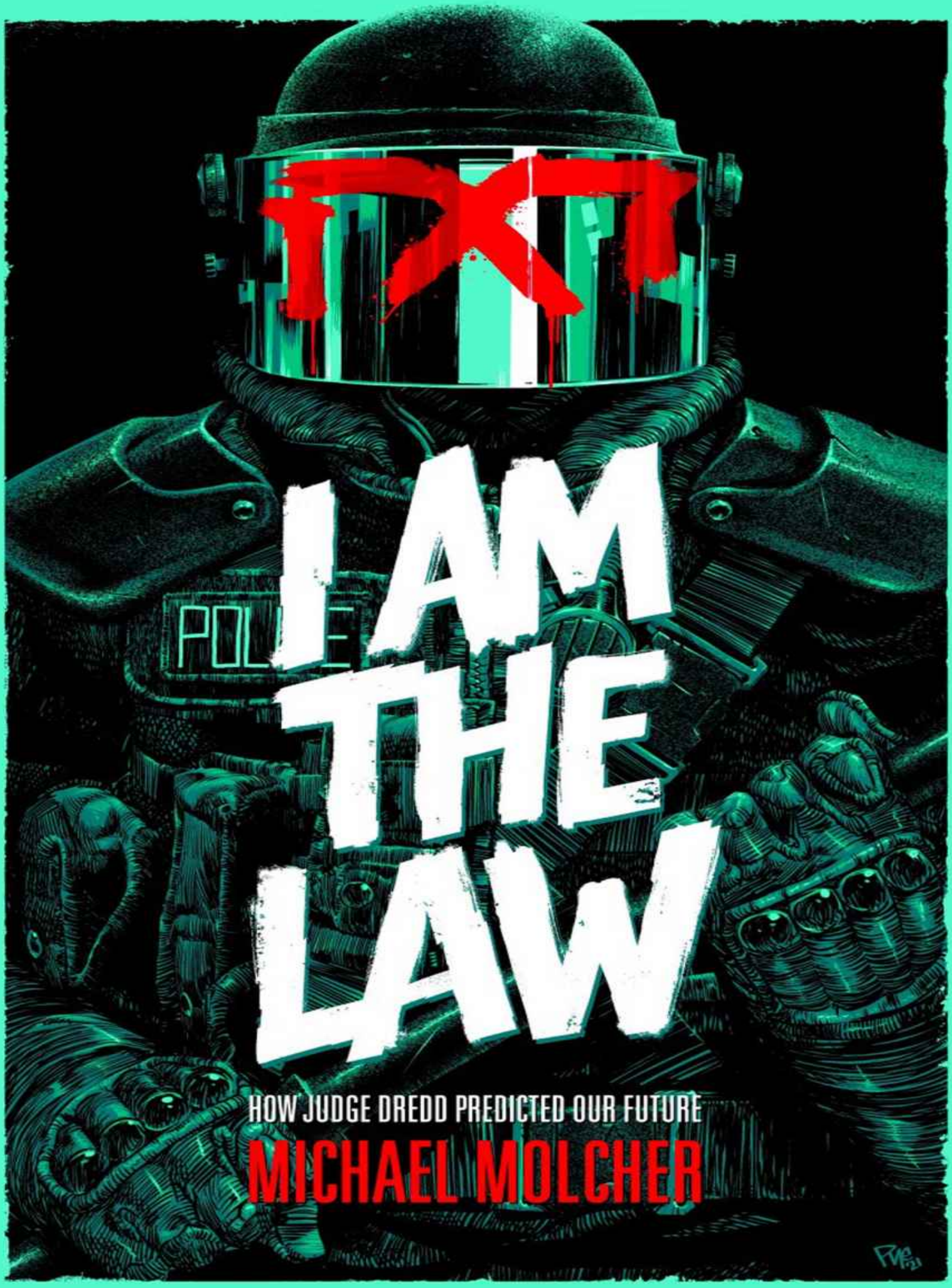


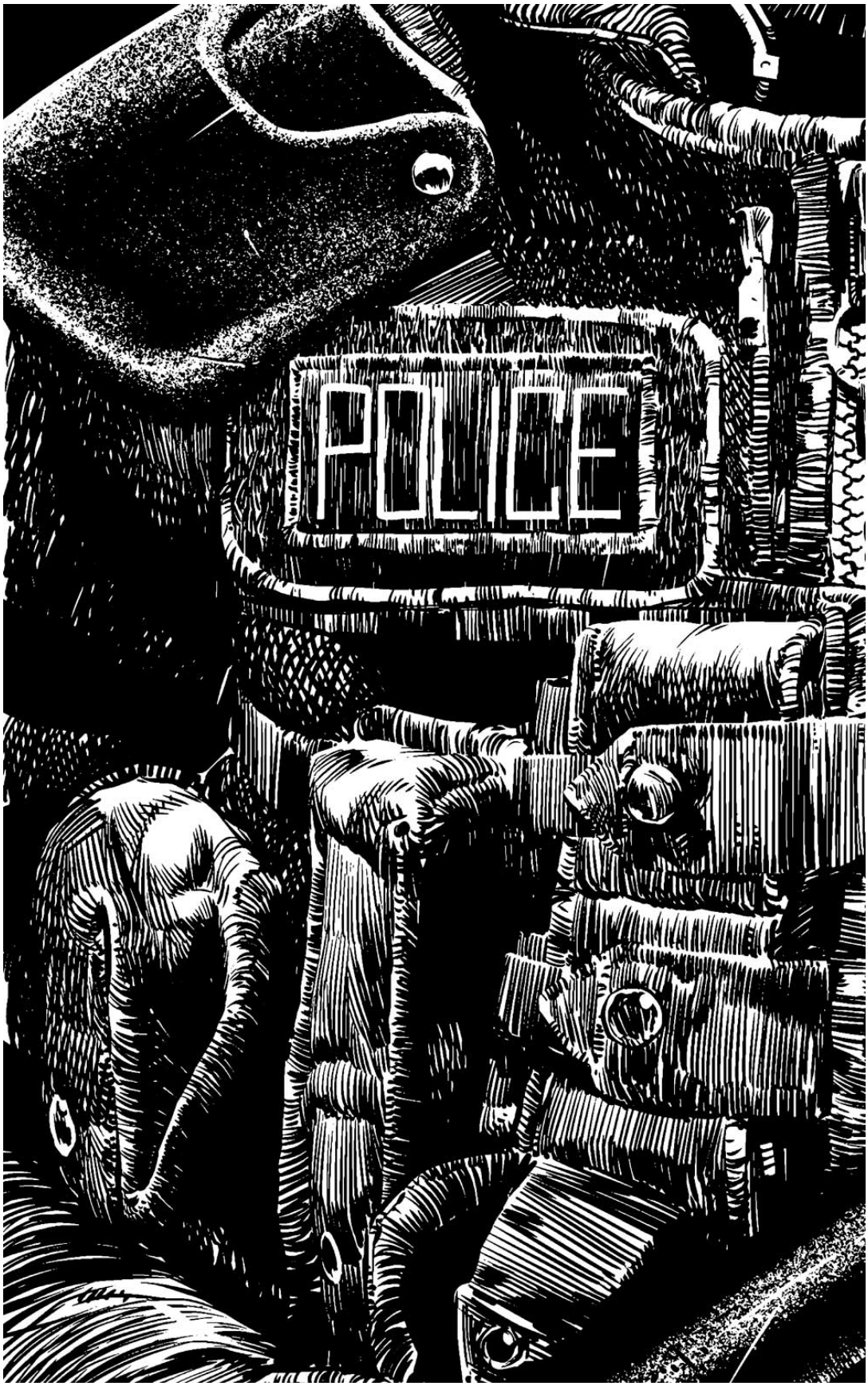
I AM THE LAW

HOW JUDGE DREDD PREDICTED OUR FUTURE

MICHAEL MOLCHER

'If you want to predict the future, just think about how bad it could be and make a joke out of it.'
– Ed Neumeier (2014) [1]

[1]Scott Tobias, '***RoboCop*** writer Ed Neumeier discusses the film's origins', ***The Dissolve*** (13 February 2014)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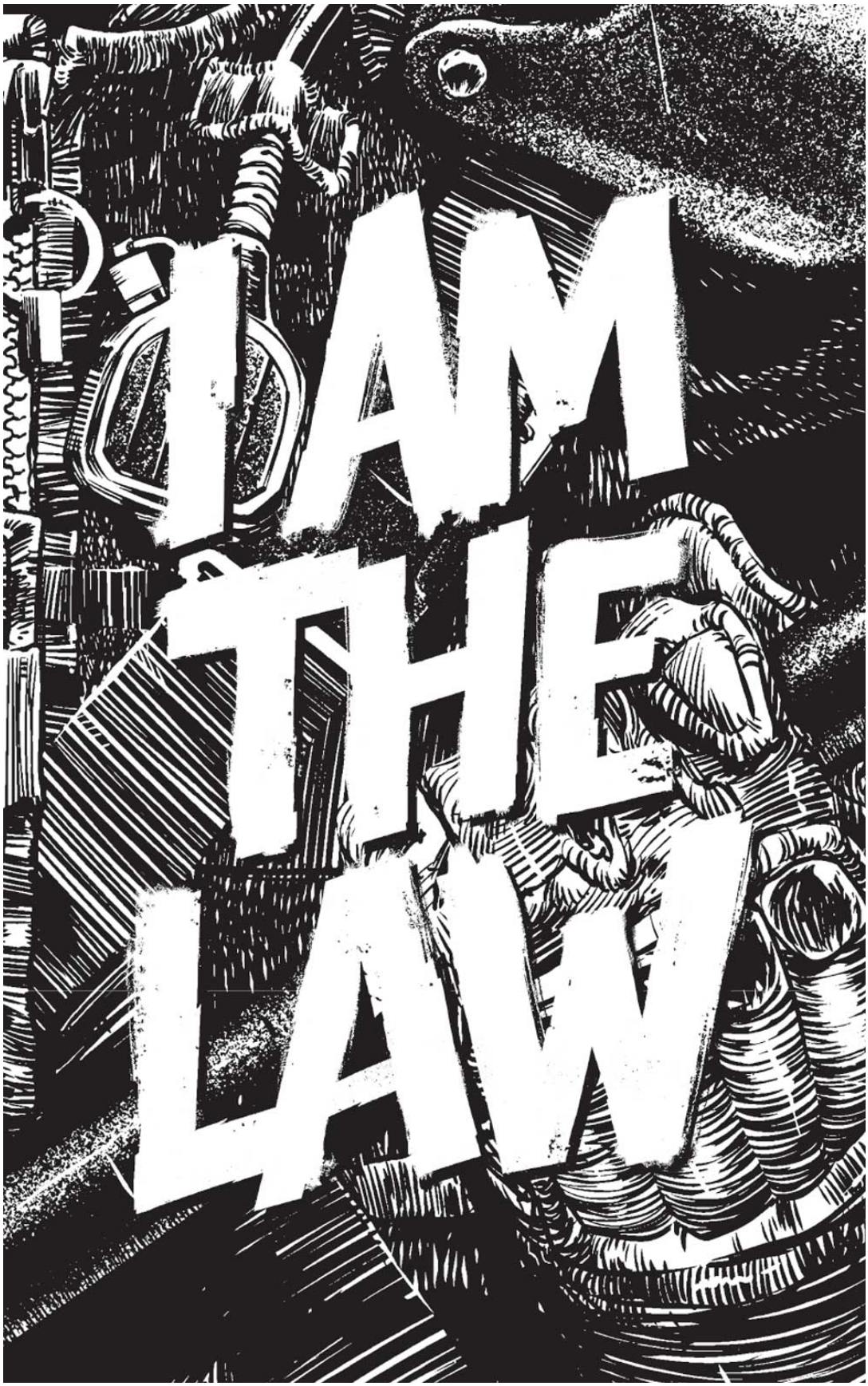
I AM
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For mum and dad,
for everything.

A NOTE ON COMICS

THIS BOOK DISCUSSES the 'Judge Dredd' stories from the pages of the British comic book ***2000 AD*** and its stablemates. First published in February 1977, after four and a half decades of near unbroken publication ***2000 AD*** is still published every week.

Every issue of ***2000 AD*** is called a 'Prog', which is short for 'Programme', evoking both episodic TV and the exciting world of computing that was appearing in the 1970s (it is pronounced so that it rhymes with 'slog' and anyone who tells you differently is not to be trusted). Since February 1977 there have been more than two thousand three hundred weekly issues published.

Judge Dredd: The Megazine was launched in 1990 as a sister title to ***2000 AD***. For ease of use it is referred to in this book by its current title, the ***Judge Dredd Megazine***, or simply 'the ***Megazine***'. Since October 1990, there have been around four hundred and fifty issues published.

The 'Judge Dredd' stories this book draws upon are taken from ***2000 AD*** and the ***Megazine***, as well as some examples of the daily ***Judge Dredd*** strip published in the ***Daily Star*** newspaper between 1981 and 1998. 'Judge Dredd' prose novels, audio dramas, and the 'Judge Dredd' comics published in the US under license by DC Comics and IDW Comics will not be referenced.

To distinguish between quotes taken from 'Judge Dredd' stories and those from other sources, the former are shown entirely in ***italics***.

Where there have been American spellings in quotes and the names of organisations or institutions, these have been changed to English for the sake of consistency, however the substance of any quotes remains the same.

This book broadly discusses policing in England and Wales, in particular the Metropolitan Police, which is the UK's first and largest police force. Scotland and Northern Ireland have different policing structures: the text makes clear when they are being referenced instead.

Initially presented in early stories as an ***elected*** elite paramilitary police force, one that supplemented the police rather than replaced them, within a couple of years of Dredd's debut the Judges came to be the shown as the only policing force. They are the definition of a police state – in story after story, Justice Department are shown to control every aspect of Mega-City One, from welfare to warfare, in a vast bureaucratic state based on and dedicated entirely to the policing and control of the civilian population, with the Chief Judge a 'bureaucrat-in-chief'.

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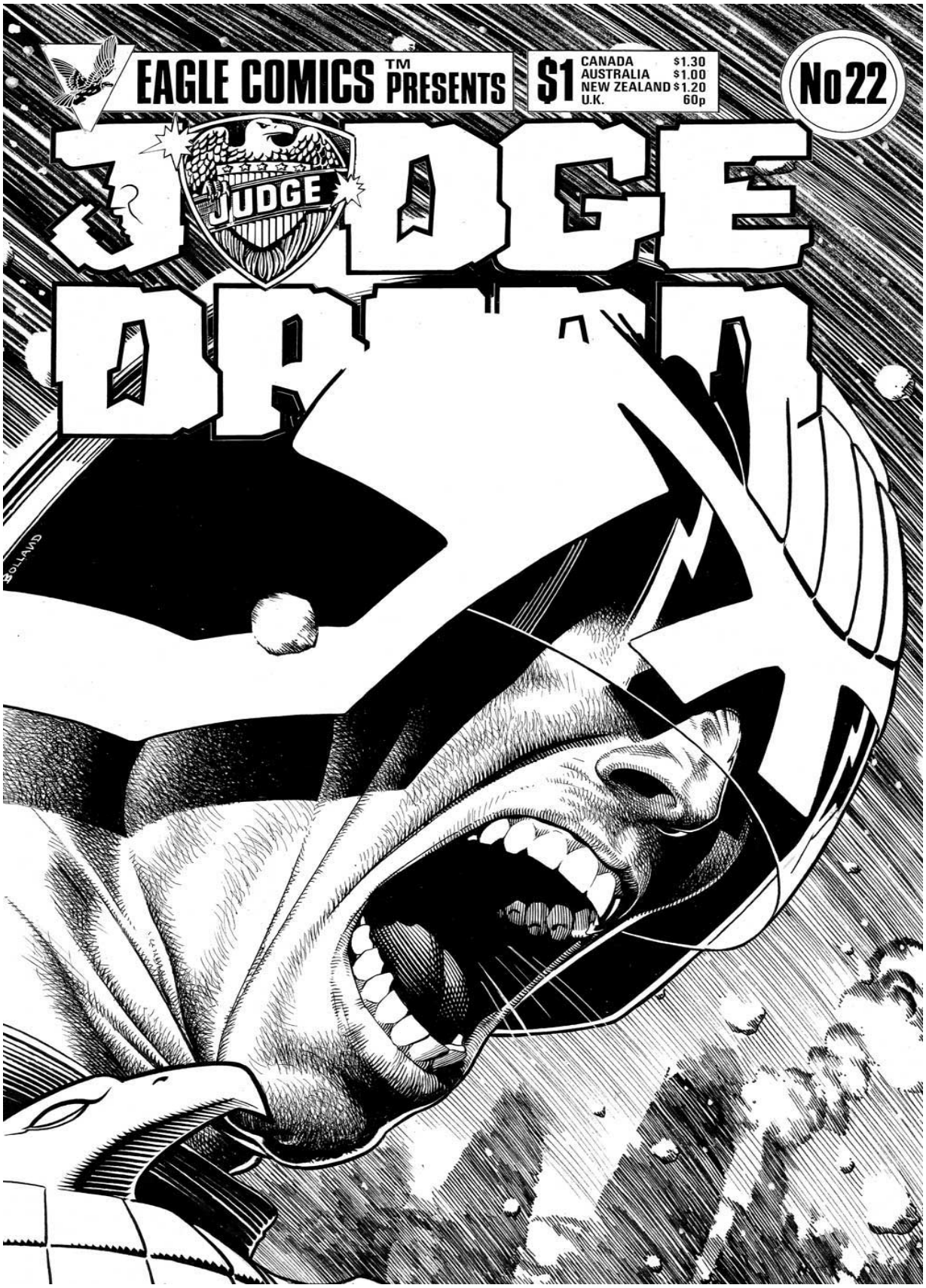
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INTRODUCTION

'He's supposed to be the Met Commissioner, not Judge Dredd.'

WHEN SHAMI CHAKRABARTI, the director of the human rights group Liberty, criticised then-Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Ian Blair for proposing an elite force of police who could dispense 'instant justice', she reached for a figure not from classical literature or cinema, but from a British comic book.

When riot gear-clad police brutally attack protesters in Chile, China, Turkey, America, and in countless other states, the metaphor spreads across the internet – some condemning the police as 'Judge Dredd', others demanding they become him. As Priti Patel sought to effectively remove the right to protest, internet wags plastered cut-outs of Dredd's helmet over photos of the then Home Secretary's face, its bifurcated visor adorned with twin flashes like the 'SS' of the Nazi Schutzstaffel.

What can an excessive, bombastic, violent future cop, created almost half a century ago, possibly teach us about our world today? Why is this figure such a potent means to describe authoritarianism?

The simple answer is because he is more relevant now than he has ever been.

Created by Scottish-American writer John Wagner and Spanish artist Carlos Ezquerra for a new science fiction-themed weekly comic called ***2000 AD*** just as Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher began her ascent to the halls of power, for decades this futuristic, armed-to-the-teeth cop, clad in a trans-Atlantic melange of fascist and American symbols, has policed the mile-high streets of a crowded dystopian city – a mega city – in a future one hundred and twenty-two years hence, delivering 'justice' from the barrel of his smart gun and from the end of his baton.

He is no mere policeman. He is the embodiment of the police state, a clone created to serve a legal system devoid of due process and

mitigating circumstances, one compressed down into a single figure – a judge, a jury, and an executioner all rolled into one.

Using key stories from forty-five years of 'Judge Dredd', this book examines how a comic strip originally intended for children reflected and predicted the ways in which policing and punitive politics would remake the world.

For it is not to Orwell or to Huxley that we should turn for a vision of the future's iron fist and velvet glove, but to Wagner and fellow writers Alan Grant and Pat Mills, and artists such as Ezquerra, Ron Smith, Brian Bolland, and Mick McMahon. Under their pens and pencils the strip turned the day's headlines upside down, exaggerated them to breaking point, and projected them onto the future in a riot of imagination that seemed to eerily predict how our modern world would take shape.

When Saudi Arabia proposes a linear one-hundred-and-ten-mile city across the Arabian desert and vast megalopolises sprawl across China, Indonesia, Latin America, India, and Africa, it is easy to imagine the crowded, mile-high city blocks of Mega-City One.

When the 'Fatties' rest their vast weight on belly-wheels as they campaign for 'pro-girth' politics, the strip seems to presage the 'obesity crisis'. When social media devotees bite into detergent capsules and hyper-capitalism creates endless mayfly fads we can see the thrill seekers encased in the 'miracle plastic' Boing®, the anti-identity Blobs, and the farcically situationist Simps. When the pipeline from reality TV to social media influencer grows ever shorter, into our mind pops the grotesque figure of Otto Sump ('***The doc says I'm deep-down ugly, the kind they can't get out***'), whose business empire of 'ugly products' inverted beauty norms.

The Smokatorium, which allows smokers to gather for a puff while wearing bubble helmets, seems to predict the ubiquitous smoking shelters outside pubs and offices. Meanwhile, surveillance devices are embedded into the very fabric of our homes, while automation causes mass unemployment and cars can drive – and kill – by themselves, and the American presidential elections seem to be a less-comedic reminder of another incomprehensible, orange-haired

pundit-turned-politician elected on a populist wave – the mayor of Mega-City One, Dave the Orangutan.

And, every day, new and exciting lethal and 'non-lethal' technologies are proposed and devised for law enforcement, from 'riot foam' for immobilising crowds to fingerprint scanners on guns, from guided bullets to drones and robot dogs.

Yet such serendipity is so much surface detail – these comparisons were fun sci-fi swipes at human folly and the march of technology – for this comic, originally intended for children, also says something much deeper about our world.

Beneath the 'future shock', the science fiction and the gallows humour is a searing satire on the 'law and order' politics that emerged in the 1970s, and which has come to dominate every aspect of our lives. Whether Wagner and Grant intended it or not, their work has parodied, lampooned, and torn apart this new 'tough on crime' punitiveness. As it has done so, 'Judge Dredd' has provided a unique wakeup call about our gradual, and not so gradual, slide towards authoritarianism.

As THIS BOOK was being written, Black Lives Matter protests swept the globe as demonstrators called for an end to police brutality and racial prejudice. In America, millions demanding the reform or defunding of police departments bloated with power and cash were met by the products of that investment: military-grade weaponry, brute force, and clouds of tear gas. In Britain, where the national myth speaks of 'policing by consent', Black communities continue to be disproportionately targeted for heavy policing, a vigil to commemorate a woman murdered by a serving police officer was violently broken up by his colleagues, and protests against new draconian powers being forced through Parliament have been met with riot shields and curfews. Desperate to avoid accusations of being 'soft on crime', politicians have vowed to make it almost impossible to protest or go on strike, all the while insisting that the police require greater and greater powers.

We live in an age marked by what criminologist Robert Reiner dubbed 'police fetishism', in which there exists the unchallenged

ideological assumption that the police ‘are a functional prerequisite of social order so that without a police force chaos would ensue’, a ‘thin blue line’ that must be reinforced at all costs. Indeed, so accepted are the police as a fact of life that we find it difficult to truly examine why they exist and understand the roots of the problems that lay at the heart of policing.[1]

In this context, a ‘harsh but fair’ comic book super-cop might seem a little too on-the-nose, too much like the ‘copaganda’ that already clogs TV screens and newspaper columns. Yet this is exactly the process that ‘Dredd’ has been satirising since 1977.

It is an imperfect satire – as any strip written weekly over the course of forty-five years would be. It is at times inconsistent, at others contradictory and, all too often, amidst the comedy and fun, the caricature can be missed. But such is the nature of satire, which must clothe itself in the garb of its target.

Indeed, ‘Judge Dredd’ explicitly demonstrates the allure of ‘law and order’ politics, which promises easy – and almost always violent – solutions to complex problems. The strip did not ‘predict’ our world of militarised policing so much as it teased from the headlines the growing sinews of the authoritarian impulse, the calcifying rot that pays lip service to democracy while ushering in the age of the truncheon and the riot shield.

This book is neither an exhaustive history of ‘Judge Dredd’ nor an internet listicle of his ‘best’ stories; rather it is an investigation into how the strip reflected the dawn of the ‘law and order’ age, and how it said something about the world we live in now. While it examines the alarming developments in American policing, the narrative focuses mostly on Britain and its police; for while ‘Judge Dredd’ is a series set in a future America, it has always been far more about ‘here’ than it is about ‘there’.

And while it does not treat the strip as anything other than what it is – a comic – it rejects the idea that the medium, disposable and ephemeral, cannot have wider import. Nor, merely because the primary audience was originally children, should it be rejected as somehow ‘non-political’, a claim that betrays a wilful ignorance of how

individuals and societies communicate and disseminate visions of themselves, the world as it is, and how they think it should be.

JUST AS THATCHERISM outlasted Thatcher, so the ‘law and order’ politics that lifted her to power have embedded themselves in our world and our minds, from the authoritarian crusade against the ‘anti-social’ of Tony Blair’s government, to the anti-immigrant 'hostile environment' and anti-‘gang’ rhetoric of the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government, and the dissent-adverse Tories under David Cameron, Theresa May, and Boris Johnson. Alongside them all, ‘Dredd’ has changed and adapted, bringing further nuance to its parody.

The strip has always been a cultural record of the present, a reflection of popular anxieties and events, from the influence of the vigilante cop genre to the ‘war on terror’, from images of mass joblessness to those of armour-clad riot police.

While sometimes silly and at other times irreverent, much like the police its central character is rooted in ambiguity – a ‘good’ cop who brutalises peaceful protestors, an honest man who lies, an individual who in the name of natural justice will bring down a system he helps maintain and refuses to help change.

This was never a planned satire, but a death by a thousand cuts. By increments, by slivers, by weekly satirical barbs, ‘Judge Dredd’ picked at the roots of ‘law and order’, exposing its assumptions, its emptiness, its brutalities, its hypocrisies and, ultimately, warning of what would happen if such a power were to be allowed to remake the world in its own image. And it has done this in five- or six-page instalments, every week, for almost half a century.

IT WAS NOT so much prediction, as projection. And now the world is catching up.

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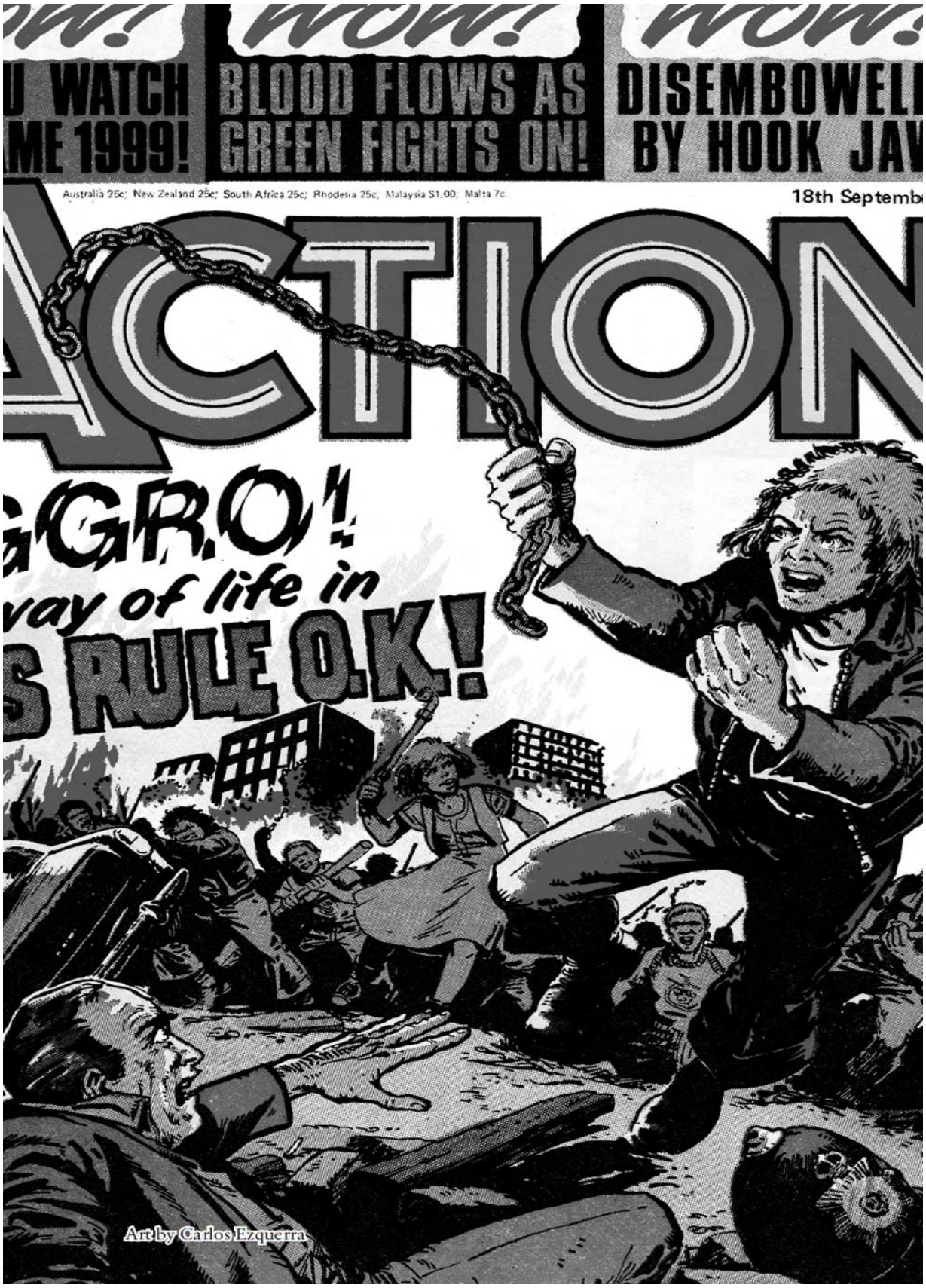
[1] Robert Reiner, ***The Politics of the Police*** (2000)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Art by Carlos Ezquerra

BATTLE, ACTION, CRIME

British comics at the dawning of the age of 'law and order'

'What d'ya mean "promoting lawless behaviour"? There ain't no law!'
– Ray Spencer, 'Kids Rule O.K.', ***Action*** issue 37 (1976)

THE LONG DRY summer of 1976 – the hottest since records began – finally broke on the August Bank Holiday weekend.

Forty-five baking hot days without rain, of melting motorways and water shortages, ended with apocalyptic downpours, flash floods, and sheet lightning.

On Monday 30 August, more than a hundred and fifty thousand people crowded into the streets of London's Notting Hill for the annual carnival celebrating Afro-Caribbean culture and pride.

There had been some minor scuffles in previous years, but this time the smell of brewing trouble hung heavy in the air. Sixteen hundred officers of the Metropolitan Police Force – an eight-fold increase in their numbers from the previous year – watched the crowds. The authorities had not been quiet about their desire to see the carnival cancelled and these numbers were just more tinder in an area that had already had its fill of the police.

It was the youth of Notting Hill, Britain's capital of Black culture and the epicentre of the nascent Black Power movement, who were targeted by seemingly never-ending harassment by the Met. Using one hundred and fifty-year-old 'sus' laws, they aggressively stopped and searched anyone in the street – but mostly young Black men. One corrupt officer alone was responsible for 'fitting up' four groups of young Black men he claimed were muggers – the 'Oval Four', 'Stockwell Six', 'Waterloo Four' and 'Tottenham Court Road Two' (the latter a pair of devout Jesuits).[2]

Meanwhile, the places Black people gathered – youth clubs, community centres, clubs – were repeatedly targeted by near constant police raids, motivated not by crime control but by 'racial hatred', as Judge Edward Clarke made clear when, in a landmark case, he acquitted nine Black leaders over riot charges following a protest demonstration.

Tensions over immigration were stoked by right-wing politicians like Ulster Unionist MP Enoch Powell – a member of the Conservative Party until 1974 – who was infamous for his inflammatory 1968 'Rivers of Blood' speech. Just months before the carnival, he claimed 'the nation has been and is still being eroded and hollowed out from within by implantation of unassimilated and unassimilable populations… alien wedges in the heartland of the state.' In local elections that year the far-right National Front, whose members regularly goaded and provoked Black communities, won forty-four thousand votes in Leicester and, with fellow travellers the National Party, claimed almost half of the vote in nearby Deptford.

Unemployment, poor services, and bad housing added to a seething anger toward the police among Notting Hill's young. Blaring out of sound systems, Junior Murvin and Lee 'Scratch' Perry's 'Police and Thieves'[3] – ***All the crimes committed day by day / No one tries to stop it in any way / All the peacemakers turned war officers –*** became the weekend's unofficial anthem. Like the heat, the unbearable pressure was about to break.

Police accounts were contradictory – they were rescuing a mugging victim or breaking up a fight or arresting pickpockets – but regardless of the spark, the conflagration began on the Monday afternoon. Even as the carnival continued, around the corner there were running battles. Ill-equipped despite their numbers, police used dustbin lids and traffic signs to meet a hail of bricks and bottles.

'It was a no man's land between the police and the crowd,' American photographer Robert Golden said.[4] 'A fight started, and it was used as the excuse for the police to charge. It was extraordinary; if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I wouldn't have believed it. There were women and children, and the police moved in with their batons out, pushing, shoving and beating people.' Shops were looted,

vehicles burned. More than two hundred and fifty people were injured. Sixty-eight arrests were made as the police sustained heavy casualties, with twenty-six officers sent to hospital.[5]

While some papers questioned the heavy police presence – the ***Evening Standard*** undersold it as 'an error of judgement' – others blamed 'marauding Black rioters'.[6] Politicians and the police were even less circumspect; Met Commissioner, Sir Robert Mark, staunchly defended the deployment: 'There are not going to be any no-go areas in London – we will police every street to uphold the law.'[7]

Hyperbolically comparing Notting Hill to war-torn Belfast and crime-riven Chicago, ***Daily Mail*** columnist Linda Lee-Potter declared that 'in our safe, comfortable homes in the provinces, we're all beginning to know fear.'[8] For Lee-Potter, there was evidence of the breakdown of society, of order, of authority everywhere – violent unions closing down factories, student protests, terrorists targeting London, crime rising. The country was undergoing, she insisted, the collapse of 'law and order'. More than all the strikes and protests, it was these three words that would define the coming age.

On the Saturday morning after the Notting Hill disturbances, newsagents across the country dutifully laid out dozens of new comic books on their shelves. Among them was the latest issue of ***Action***, the weekly title from International Publishing Company (IPC), based in the thirty-floor King's Reach Tower on the south bank of the Thames in the heart of London. Across the top of a bombastic cover showing the gun-wielding secret agent 'Dredger',[9] a strapline declared '***New story starts inside*** – '***Kids Rule O.K.!***'.

A riff on Dave Wallis's 1964 science fiction novel ***Only Lovers Left Alive***, this new series written by Chris Lowder (under the pseudonym 'Jack Adrian') was ***Lord of the Flies*** by way of ***Threads***. In a post-apocalyptic England where all adults have been wiped out by a virus, ordinary children ran amok in an orgy of anarchistic adolescent violence: the first episode opened with two youths gleefully kicking a man's bloodied face, a vicious knife fight, and a motorcycle gang running over people, all rendered in lurid, exacting detail by artist

Mike White. Few knew at that moment, but 'Kids Rule O.K.!' was to be the final nail in the coffin of Britain's most controversial comic.

THE STORY TOLD about Britain in the 1970s is one of unending crisis.

As Lee-Potter and newspaper columnists like her told it, the UK was 'the sick man of Europe', its post-war political and economic consensus falling apart under an 'unaffordable' welfare system and 'greedy' trade unions. This was the decade of power cuts and three-day weeks, of 'stagflation', recession, and rising unemployment. From the school gates to the factory gates to the gates of 10 Downing Street, the country seemed consumed by a mood of declinism and fear. 'Like everyone else,' one government advisor glumly replied when asked how he was in 1975, 'waiting for the collapse.' [10]

'Black Power' groups rose up in the inner cities, hippies flocked to 'free festivals', far-left terrorist group the Angry Brigade carried out dozens of attacks between 1970 and 1972, and the bombing campaign by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) terrorised English cities. There were dark mutterings about the inability of liberal democracy to meet such overlapping challenges. Britain had, the story goes, become 'ungovernable'.[11]

Amid headlines warning of 'rising crime', the Conservatives claimed Labour had lost control of the country and explicitly connected the dots between permissiveness, left-wing politics, and crime. 'The themes of protest, conflict, permissiveness and crime begin to run together into one great, undifferentiated "threat",' wrote sociologist Stuart Hall, 'nothing more nor less than the foundations of the Social Order itself are at issue.'[12]

'We have been eyeball to eyeball with the fanatics, the lunatics and the hooligans,' the chairman of the Police Federation told its conference in 1970, referencing the previous year's anti-Vietnam and anti-Apartheid demonstrations. Senior officers seized on fears of a 'disintegrating society' to position themselves as the 'thin blue line', the only thing holding back anarchy or Communist totalitarianism.[13]

Tub-thumping authoritarians and fringe right-wing economists insisted drastic measures were required, not just on the streets but in

the economy. Inflation, unions, criminals, demonstrators, youths – they all had to be brought to heel.

Yet little, if any, of this sense of crisis filtered down into the comfortable world of weekly British comics.

The million-selling days of visionary Frank Hampson's chisel-jawed 'Pilot of the Future' ***Dan Dare*** in ***Eagle*** were long gone. What was left were tame, formulaic 'juvenile papers' peddled by the industry's two mighty poles: the family firm of DC Thomson & Co. (DCT) in Dundee (home of the venerable ***Beano*** and ***The Dandy***) and the amalgamation of multiple publishers that had become IPC in London.[14] Any violence that existed in this world was funny or righteous, met by humorously bumbling flatfoots or dispensed by the even-handed and paternal arm of the law. While still read by millions of children every week, sales were declining as tastes changed. In response, the leading publishers tried new tactics to woo readers.

Warlord proved not to be a normal DC Thomson comic. Launched in 1974, uniquely for British comics at the time it was not the standard mix of genres and subjects – every story was a story of war, in one form or another. And, although still incredibly tame by today's standards, its characters were unrepentant rebels, its covers dynamic, its action gritty. It was a game changer and an immediate hit.

IPC's editorial director John Sanders knew they needed to respond, yet the company's boys' department remained firmly entrenched in the past. So instead, he hired two freelancers to develop a new title in secret.

PAT MILLS AND John Wagner first met while working for DC Thomson.

Both born in 1949, Mills was the younger son of a devout Irish Catholic widow and grew up as 'a poor kid' on Ipswich's Chantry council estate. Kicked out of school at fifteen and leaving home at sixteen, by his mid-twenties he was a flame-haired firebrand working at DCT on teenage girls' magazine ***Romeo*** ('I was told I wasn't trendy enough for ***Jackie***,' he recalled).[15]

Wagner was from Ohio, a 'war baby' of a Scottish mother and 'worse than useless' American father.[16] A hulking Scottish-American

with a sharp – even mischievous – wit, at the age of thirteen he had emigrated with his mother back to Scotland, where he lived with relatives in Greenock, near Glasgow, until his aunt suggested he apply for a job at DCT.

By 1971, the pair had gone freelance and were holed up in a shed on the opposite side of the River Tay to DCT's headquarters, pitching anodyne comic book properties to IPC such as 'Yellowknife of the Yard', a series for ***Valiant*** about a Native American detective in London, and 'Partridge's Patch', about a rural policeman and his dog, for ***Jet***. After a spell editing the doomed girls' comics ***Sandie*** and ***Princess Tina*** as IPC staff, Wagner had left comics and taken a smattering of odd jobs back in Scotland.

Tempting them to IPC as non-union freelancers to work on a new title, Sanders hid Mills and Wagner away in a small office within the publisher's girls' department, where they secretly worked alongside fellow editor and writer Gerry Finley-Day (who, as editor on IPC's ***Tammy***, had added a little social realism to the dreamy world of girls' comics) to create a reply to ***Warlord***. In six months, they created a comic that changed everything: ***Battle Picture Weekly***.

Inspired by American war films like ***Kelly's Heroes***, ***Battle*** was full of morally compromised characters and violent action. Its protagonists were mavericks ('Major Eazy'), criminals ('The Rat Pack'), and a former-enslaved-man-turned-mercenary ('El Mestizo'). Mills and artist Joe Colquhoun's meticulously researched drama 'Charley's War' portrayed the realities of World War One while Wagner and Mike Western's 'Darkie's Mob' conveyed the horrors facing Britain's 'Forgotten Army' in the jungles of Burma during World War Two, although its jingoistic language and brutal violence make for uncomfortable reading now.

The comic was a heady combination of Mills' energetic bombast and Wagner's glowering grit. 'By 1975, boys' comics seemed about to die, and everyone believed it was inevitable,' said Mills.[17] 'There was nothing anyone could do. That defeatist attitude was prevalent in British comics then and now. We aimed to prove them wrong.'

The trailblazing title not only captured a new audience but provided a place for Mills, Wagner, and a host of other creators, including

Spanish artist Carlos Ezquerra, to develop. 'It did feel like we were doing something different, a little dangerous,' said Wagner,[18] 'breaking new ground, pushing things to the edge and sometimes beyond. These days some of the content might seem a little tame – not back then.'

Battle was an even bigger hit than ***Warlord***. Sanders threw the bumper sales figures back in the faces of his critics at IPC and immediately commissioned Mills to repeat the winning formula.

Action WAS FULL of the same feverish, explosive, angry energy that Mills poured into its development. This time, the theme was not war but – as the title suggested – action. It did not disappoint.

Men were eviscerated, butchered, and blown up in new and gruesome ways every week by the killer shark 'Hook Jaw', during games of violent future sport 'Death Game 1999', or by the psychopathic secret agent 'Dredger'. 'Hellman of Hammer Force' was a World War Two story with a twist – Hellman was a German tank commander who hated Nazis as much as the Soviets. ***Action***'s voice was consciously irreverent and anti-establishment; the editorial page regaled readers with stories of drunken antics, letters were answered with droll, bullish banter, the 'Twit of the Week' feature took aim at the pretentious or swotty, and sub-editor Steve MacManus became the daredevil 'Action Man' performing challenges set by the readers every week.

It seemed there would be no limits to how far it would go, how many conventions it would smash. 'John [Sanders] actually encouraged us in our excesses,' said Mills.[19] 'I remember one episode of Hook Jaw, which was beautifully painted in watercolours. I recall John getting a paintbrush with red paint on it and saying, More blood, More blood!'

Part of ***Action***'s success was what editor Geoff Kemp called the 'dead crib'.[20] Given just three months to capitalise on ***Battle***'s success, they realised the quickest option was to create their own versions of big film successes, with added lashings of violence and gore. In 1975, it was unlikely a seven-year-old would get to see ***Jaws*** or ***Rollerball*** or had seen the X-rated ***Dirty Harry***. Yet they could pay

seven pence at their local newsagent and read something just as gruesome, if not even better, in the pages of ***Action***.

Such dead cribs weren't new – 'Major Eazy' had been based on James Coburn in ***The Magnificent Seven***, 'The Rat Pack' a fun reprise of ***The Dirty Dozen*** – but part of ***Action***'s appeal was it gave kids a way to engage with cultural material normally beyond their reach.[21] American youth culture had always come to Britain with what author Jon Savage called 'a tiny homeopathic dose of freedom' and Hollywood films filled with violence, blood, and wild, endless frontiers were an intoxicating contrast to the grey, small world of 1970s Britain.[22]

Backed by a nationwide advertising campaign, ***Action***'s first four hundred thousand print run sold out in February 1976 and it soon settled on impressive weekly sales of one hundred and eighty thousand. The backlash, however, was vociferous.

'THIS PUBLICATION MUST be doing an awful lot of harm to its young readers,' morality campaigner Mary Whitehouse told ***The Sun***.[23] Whitehouse, who had condemned the BBC's prime time science-fiction show ***Doctor Who*** as 'teatime brutality for tots', called ***Action*** 'dreadful'. She added that she would be informing the police and insisting IPC withdrew it from sale.

'In those days, before video nasties, ***The Guardian*** and ***The Sun*** newspapers would fall like packs of wolves onto anything that upset them in comics for what they saw as kids,' recalled artist Kevin O'Neill, who was an assistant at IPC at the time.[24] '***Action*** had been really close to the line for some time.'

Evoking the horror of the tawdry Victorian 'penny dreadfuls', ***The Sun*** condemned it as 'the sevenpenny nightmare' and 'decency' activists stuck warning parental stickers to copies as they were put onto the newsagents' shelves.[25] During an appearance on early evening BBC TV show ***Nationwide***, Sanders was lambasted by presenter Frank Bough, who tore up a copy of ***Action*** in front of him.[26]

It was not the first time comics had been targeted by such reactionary movements. In the 1950s, an unholy trinity of the British

Communist Party, religious groups, and teachers' unions sought to 'protect' British children from imported American crime comics they blamed for juvenile offending.[27] Psychiatrist Fredric Wertham's 1954 book ***Seduction of the Innocent*** had given America's similar panic over horror and crime comics a veneer of scientific legitimacy, leading many US comic book publishers to subscribe to the self-censoring 'Comics Code Authority'. The British panic was more of a nativist spasm, part of a wider 'crisis in authority' concerned with the behaviour of children – and the new, socially threatening phenomenon of the teenager – that condemned 'foreign' cultural imports, such as rock 'n' roll music. The resulting legislation was squarely intended for foreign imports – it did not concern itself with the already deeply traditional and conservative British comics industry. It was this 'kingdom of naff', as Mills put it, that ***Action*** rebelled against.[28]

'See a youth murder five policemen, see a body hurtle through a car window, see several limbs chomped off by today's most modish monster, the killer shark,' frothed the ***Evening Standard***. '***Action*** is a deliberate, calculated and commercially minded attempt to cash in on What The Kids Want.' Exactly, insisted Sanders, 'violence now is commonplace in all media. People are saturated with it, including children. There is a trend towards realism in action, and comics are bound to reflect this if they are to survive.'[29]

He was not wrong, but in the imaginations of his opponents the country was already well on the way towards the world of 'Kids Rule O.K.'. ***Action*** had, unwittingly, stepped into the headlights of the 'moral panic' that dominated the 1970s – a panic that centred on violence and young people.

In August 1972, after a night at the theatre, elderly widower Arthur Hills was stabbed to death by three teenagers, in an apparent robbery near London's Waterloo Station.

Three months later in Birmingham, a man was beaten by three youths who stole cigarettes and thirty pence then returned to attack him twice more, kicking and hitting him with a brick. These were just a few of the examples of the terrifying phenomenon of 'mugging'.

The papers dubbed it a 'frightening new strain of crime', imported from the American term for violent robbery. Despite already being well covered by English law, mugging smacked of lawless, 'alien' societies far removed from genteel and peaceful England. 'Britain seems to be edging too close for comfort to the American pattern of urban violence', warned one paper in 1973 as a headline fretted 'Will Harlem Come to Handsworth?'.

Drawing on the work of sociologist Stanley Cohen, in 1978's ***Policing the Crisis*** Stuart Hall rejected the idea that mugging was a 'new' crime or that the supposed rise in violent crime had actually taken place at all. This was, he argued, a 'moral panic'.[30]

This was the ongoing moral panic into which ***Action*** strode, a product for children that tapped into the darkening national mood. 'There are deprived children and there are ***depraved*** children,' fumed Chairman of the Police Federation, Leslie Male, in May 1976, as ***Action*** confirmed fears that Britain's youth was descending into anarchic degeneracy.[32] That, in the end, led to its downfall.

In the decade since England's World Cup victory in 1966, violent football hooliganism had become 'the English Disease'.[33] Dozens of incidents and mass brawls took place at matches between gangs of rival supporters – Manchester United's 'Red Army' caused nationwide mayhem while Leeds United were banned from European competition after their fans rioted in Paris. In 1974, the first fan to be murdered inside an English football ground, Blackpool supporter Kevin Olsson, was stabbed to death in Bolton. No child would have been ignorant of this – footage of fighting was even shown on ***John Craven's Newsround***, the teatime BBC news programme aimed at younger viewers. With the media and lawmakers already sensitive to any signs of a societal breakdown – or anything encouraging one – ***Action***'s 'dead cribs' came back to haunt it.

Written by Tom Tully and drawn by Barrie Mitchell, 'Look Out For Lefty!' was a dull football strip starring schoolboy footballer Kenny 'Lefty' Lampton. Ordered to liven it up, Tully decided to add a 'dead crib' too far – by incorporating some of the very real violence happening on the terraces.

In issue thirty-two, provoked by sabotage from Lefty's own team and abuse from opposition fans, Lefty's 'skinhead' girlfriend Angie picks up a glass Coke bottle and hurls it at one of Lefty's dirty-dealing teammates, knocking him unconscious. This 'hooligan' behaviour – which earned condemnation from the tabloid media, the Football Association and even 1974 World Cup referee Jack Taylor – was bad enough, but ***Action***'s fate was ultimately sealed by that issue's cover.[34]

Popular ***Battle*** artist Carlos Ezquerra had drawn an image straight out of tabloid newspaper nightmares: against the backdrop of a burning city, a crowd of rioting teens turned over a car as their long-haired, wild-eyed, denim-clad leader menacingly waved a chain in the air, charging at a terrified man cowering on the floor.[35] '***Aggro! is a way of life in Kids Rule O.K.!***' boasted the coverline, the first word a serrated buzz above the chaos of the riot. Its last two words – '***Rule O.K.***' – evoked both the violence of sovereign domination and an aggressive challenge to any defiance, and were by then deeply associated with the territorialism and violence of football hooliganism.

The real problem, however, was that Ezquerra had placed a policeman's custodian helmet, with its distinctive silver 'rose top', next to the trembling man's feet. Although the man was clearly not wearing an officer's jacket, the in-house IPC colourist was instructed or assumed that the helmet related to him, and coloured both it and his clothes the traditional deep blue of the British policeman's uniform.

Whether Ezquerra had intended it or not, the scene looked, to any casual observer, like the youth was attacking a police officer. At a time when images of police being attacked by demonstrators, hooligans, and picketers were beamed into sitting rooms, this was simply too much.

Despite Sanders' spirited defence, the two major newsstand distributors, John Menzies and WHSmith, effectively threatened to stop carrying IPC titles if nothing was done. In October 1976, John Smith, who had replaced Geoff Kemp as editor in late June and was told to bring ***Action*** to heel, was fired and the thirty-seventh issue was pulled from distribution and pulped. Only thirty copies are known

to still exist. John Sanders, holidaying in Italy, read of ***Action***'s demise in the ***Daily Telegraph***.[36]

Action's fate had actually had little to do with comics, or its young readers. Knowingly or not, Sanders, Mills, Kemp, and their writers and artists had stepped into the heart of the moral panic around crime that had engulfed all forms of dissent and disorder.

For this was the beginning of the age of 'law and order'.

FROM RICHARD NIXON to Donald Trump, from Ted Heath to Boris Johnson, these words have come to exercise a profound grip not just on our politics but on our imaginations.

Intoxicatingly simple, by summoning images of crime and violence, they create a sense that the world is in crisis and needs drastic correction. They resolve the ambiguities of every cause, every protest, every problem and make them clear-cut. They strip them of complexity, of their context and consequences to a simple dichotomy – all of society's problems become reframed as problems of ***crime***.

'Law and order' is a convenient symbol that allows politicians, who promise to be 'tough on crime', to bypass the need to build consensus and instead appeal directly to deep and troubling anxieties about the whole process of social change. 'Punitive responses are liberating because they are so simple,' political scientist Stuart Scheingold wrote in ***The Politics of Law and Order***.[37] 'We yearn to believe that seemingly intractable social and personal problems are actually responsive to direct and forceful action.'

As odd as it may now seem, given its ubiquity in our modern political discourse, crime had not been a major vote winner prior to the 1960s. But in the 1970s a major shift took place as it became highly political.

In America, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 ended the racial segregation of the 'Jim Crow' laws and made discrimination on the basis of race illegal. No longer able to talk about race directly, politicians tapped into white voters' fears about the upending of the social order and rising crime. Playing on stereotypes about Black criminality, they effectively drew a line from protest to crime and to

race. ‘Law and order’ became ‘a strategy for reaching suburban voters without having to say the ugly part out loud,’ Leah Wright-Rigueur, a political historian at Harvard University, said.[38]

Four years later, there were mass and often violent protests in more than a hundred US cities over racial injustice, police brutality, the Vietnam War, and the assassination of civil rights campaigner Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. In response, President Richard Nixon used the phrase ‘law and order’ as a codeword for race, culture, and generational backlash as he condemned the ‘mob’ that ‘surges through the street, shouting political slogans, battling the police, hurling epithets.’ ‘Something has gone terribly wrong in America,’ he said in a national broadcast: a year later, he claimed that he spoke for ‘the silent majority’.[39]

‘By getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and Blacks with heroin, and then criminalising both heavily, we could disrupt those communities,’ Nixon’s domestic policy adviser, John Ehrlichman, confessed in 2016.[40] ‘We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings and vilify them night after night on the evening news.’

The politicisation of ‘law and order’ in Britain began two years later, when the Conservative Party election manifesto explicitly linked crime with industrial disputes, protests, and terrorism in what it warned was ‘the age of demonstration and disruption’.[41] When the moral panic over mugging began in 1972, ‘law and order’ began to play in the background like a drumbeat.

This was greatly helped by the police, who openly emerged as a political lobby, backing up the Conservative’s ‘law and order’ agenda in advertisements and speeches. ‘What is political about crime?’ asked the Police Federation as it launched an unprecedented publicity campaign in 1975. Unironically modelling itself on the progressive pressure groups it had labelled ‘fanatics’, the Federation demanded politicians support ‘the rule of law’, increase officer pay, and reverse what they saw as ‘the liberalising trend in penal and social policy’.[42]

Meanwhile, police chiefs preached ‘at the drop of a helmet’ about crime and disorder that they blamed on liberal ‘permissiveness’. In

1973, Metropolitan Police Commissioner Robert Mark used the BBC's Dimbleby Lecture to question the need for juries and accuse lawyers of frustrating the legal process.[43] James Anderton, appointed as Manchester's police chief in 1976, backed penal labour camps and proposed violent criminals be flogged 'until they begged for mercy'.[44]

By this point, the Conservatives had a new leader, one very much receptive to the message of 'law and order'.

Margaret Thatcher was a grocer's daughter, Oxford graduate, and former education secretary under whose leadership the politicisation of policing accelerated. She accused the Labour government of using Parliament 'to undermine the rule of law and attack the liberty of the citizen', blamed them for rising crime and disorder, promised to boost the resources and powers of the police, and reverse the softness on crime.[45] 'We are not afraid to talk about discipline and moral values,' she later said.[46] 'To us "Law and Order" is not an election slogan. It is the foundation of the British tradition.' To Thatcher, the police symbolised not just the law but British 'civilisation' itself. The bible upon which her new 'Thatcherism' was founded was Nobel Prize-winning Austrian economist Friedrich von Hayek's ***The Constitution of Liberty***, a copy of which Thatcher slammed onto the table during a 1975 policy meeting after becoming party leader with the words 'This is what we believe!'[47]

Hayek blamed the post-war economic consensus, which had been founded on the ideas of fellow economist John Maynard Keynes, for the social, industrial, and monetary strife the Western economies were now dealing with. He rejected government intervention in the economy and believed 'the market' to be the most efficient, indeed the only, means of distributing resources.

AT THIS MOMENT of economic shock, when Keynesian solutions seemed incapable of dealing with the combination of rising inflation and rising unemployment dubbed 'stagflation', Hayek's brand of 'neoliberal' economics appeared to understand the problem and provide the solution. 'Only a crisis – actual or perceived – produces real change,' Hayekian acolyte Milton Friedman had famously said in his 1962 book ***Capitalism and Freedom***. 'When that crisis occurs,

the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. That, I believe, is our basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes the politically inevitable.'

In fact, there was only one area that Hayek believed the state should have any hand in: law and order. The free market needed protecting to ensure it ran smoothly, insisted Hayek. Only then could true 'freedom' be found.

As part of the emerging free-market evangelists of the radical 'New Right' within her party, Thatcher insisted on this inseparability of the 'rule of law' from the idea of ***order***.

By the time she was elected as prime minister in 1979, ***Action*** was no more. After pulling issues from newsstands, IPC management instructed new editor Sid Bicknell to remove 'all this adult, political stuff' and 'turn it back into a boys' adventure comic'. When it returned to newsstands six weeks later, the violence was notably toned down – as was the excitement. Sales plummeted and it would be merged with ***Battle*** barely a year later.[48]

During its absence, the Sex Pistols had released their seminal first single 'Anarchy in the U.K.' and made a notorious obscenity-laced appearance on Thames Television's primetime ***Today*** show. As punk went mainstream, its politicised, euphoric, seemingly nihilistic anger confirmed conservative fears about ***Action –*** that Britain's youth was about to be consumed by anarchic degeneracy.

In the story of the 'sevenpenny nightmare', we can see the crisis of the 1970s played out for a pre-teen audience. This narrative of growing violence – on the picket line, in the schoolyard, in the inner-city – produced a febrile atmosphere in which everything felt like it was in crisis, that there was no check to the literal disintegration of society. The 1970s was a pivotal moment, when arguments of 'decline' were used 'to unprecedentedly powerful effect', entrenching them in popular understanding in a way never before achieved.[49]

The sheer power of this image overwhelmed the reality: Britain had never been more equal or prosperous. Despite the lingering shock of the early decade, Britain's economy grew more quickly than it had for a century, millions had been lifted out of poverty with a standard of

living unknown to previous generations. The post-war welfare state was still strong, unemployment remained low, and polls found Britons considered themselves among the happiest people in the world. Meanwhile, 'huge cultural changes seemed to be ushering in a brighter, happier, more tolerant future,' wrote Hannah Rose Woods in ***Nostalgia: A Backwards History of Britain***, 'and while 'declinism' was fast-becoming one of the buzzwords of the age, people, it seemed, had never been more contented.'

Yet 'law and order' was not merely a manifesto policy or a newspaper headline, but the beginning of a process that was nothing short of a reordering of the nation's mind. Rather than dissipating, the moral panics over mugging and violence proved too successful at mobilising social forces in support of greater repressive powers. As a result, crime became a self-reinforcing and ***continuing*** moral panic.

'The demons proliferate,' wrote Stuart Hall. 'This is where the moral panic turns directly into a "law and order society". For if the threat from below is at the same time the subversion of the state from within, then only a general exercise of authority and discipline, only a very wide-ranging brief to the state to "set things to right" – if necessary at the temporary expense of certain of those liberties which, in more relaxed times, we all enjoyed – is likely to succeed.'[50]

A country that had long prided itself, rightly or wrongly, on values of liberty and freedom, now prepared itself for 'iron times'. The state had won the right, Hall said, 'and indeed inherited the duty, to move swiftly, to stamp fast and hard, to listen in, discreetly survey, saturate and swamp, charge or hold without charge, act on suspicion, hustle and shoulder, to keep society on the straight and narrow.' On TV and in movies, in newspaper columns and on the comic book pages, there was a growing 'fascination with something fiercer'.[51]

In the episode of 'Kids Rule O.K.' that never reached newsstands before it was pulped, young Ray Spencer discovers that not all adults died in the plague when he is captured by men commanded by Chief Inspector Ronald Stryde, an unhinged disciplinarian only too eager to dispense a little 'law and order' on the marauding teenagers.[52] ***'I'm the law…'*** Stryde sneers at Ray. ***'Judge, jury and executioner! All***

rolled into one, lad! And the way I work, we'll soon have little tykes like you brought to heel!'

It was an eerie foreshadowing of what was to come.

Ezquerra's ***Action*** cover had touched an already-singing nerve – it had been an attack on that most British of symbols: the policeman. As officers in custodian helmets waded into crowds on the streets of Notting Hill and the end loomed for ***Action***, he was already putting the finishing touches to a character that embodied the growing backlash against the folk devils of 'law and order'. This character would not only embody the new, punitive politics but issue a stark warning about their endgame.

'***Meet the toughest lawman of them all…'*** cried the headline, scoured like claw marks into the page. It was February 1977 and Judge Dredd roared into action in the pages of ***2000 AD***.

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[2] A former member of the Southern Rhodesian paramilitary police, Det Sgt Derek Ridgewell was the head of the British Transport Police's 'anti-mugging unit' and known by his superiors to be corrupt. Of his victims, the 'Tottenham Court Road Two' were acquitted in 1973 but the 'Oval Four' – Winston Trew, Sterling Christie, George Griffiths and Constantine 'Omar' Boucher – did not have all their convictions quashed until 2020, and it was not until 2021 that three members of the 'Stockwell Six' – Courtney Harriot, Paul Green and Cleveland Davidson – had theirs overturned. Ridgewell was jailed for conspiracy to steal and died in prison in 1982.

[3] 'Police and Thieves' was later covered on the debut album of rock band The Clash; the band's Joe Strummer and Paul Simonon had both witnessed the rioting at Notting Hill.

[4] Sarah Phillips, 'Robert Golden's best photograph: the 1976 Notting Hill carnival riots' – theguardian.com (13 March 2013) https://bit.ly/3ufbFjx

[5] Peter Jackson, 'Street Life: The Politics of Carnival' in Stephen Daniels, Roger Lee (eds.) ***Exploring Human Geography: A Reader*** (1996)

[6] David Tyndall, 'U.K.: Police Fight Running Street Battles At Notting Hill Carnival With Marauding Black Rioters' – Reuters (29 August 1977)

[7] ***BBC News***, 'Sir Robert Mark: the man who cleaned up the Met Police' – bbc.co.uk (1 October 2010) https://bbc.in/3NEfIwv

[8] ***Daily Mail*** (1 September 1976)

[9] '***What's got two cold eyes, two tough fists, one Magnum revolver... and the hitting power of six men? It's DREDGER!***'

[10] Andy Beckett, ***When The Lights Went Out: What Really Happened to Britain in the Seventies*** (2009)

[11] Beckett (2009) ***ibid.***

[12] Stuart Hall et al., ***Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order*** (1978)

[13] The police lost the right to join a trade union and take industrial action in 1919 after a series of strikes and the government's suppression of the National Union of Police and Prison Officers. The Police Federation, which is technically a professional association and not a union, was created as a statutory body to represent staff.

[14] Marvel UK, established in 1972, mostly published anglicised reprints of Marvel's American output but had just dipped its toe into creating new material with the launch in 1976 of ***Captain Britain***. Its production editor, Neil Tennant, would go on to find fame as a member of the Pet Shop Boys.

[15] Emily Townsend, "'I feared abuse by school monks was imaginary" – Judge Dredd author on experience at Ipswich school' – eadt.co.uk (12 September 2021) https://bit.ly/3zb963L & Pat Mills, 'There's No Such Thing As A Free Lunch' – millsverse.com (3 December 2019) https://bit.ly/3PWtDiW

[16] Interview, 'John Wagner – The Galaxy's Greatest: ***2000 AD*** @ 45' (26 March 2022)

[17] Pat Mills, ***Be Pure! Be Vigilant! Behave!*** (2017)

[18] ***Journey Planet*** #50 (2020)

[19] John Naughton, 'ACTION: How Britain's most brutal comic laid the real '70s bare' – https://bigmouthmag.wordpress.com/ (23 August 2016) https://bit.ly/3zIxZoS

[20] The phrase is a combination of 'dead' as a synonym for accurate and 'crib' meaning to copy or plagiarise. So, literally, 'an accurate copy'.

[21] British comics had always aped popular trends. At the height of the popularity of the ***Batman*** TV show in the 1960s, gothic sci-fi anti-hero 'The Steel Claw' had, albeit briefly, become a superhero.

[22] Jon Savage, ***Teenage: The Creation of Youth*** (2007)

[23] Chris Greenwood, 'The Sevenpenny Nightmare' – ***The Sun*** (30 April 1976)

[24] Jamie Lovett, 'Garth Ennis and Kevin O'Neill on Reviving the Infamous Kids Rule O.K. for Battle Action Special' – comicbook.com (18 May 2022) https://bit.ly/39EqOUb

[25] Moose Harris, 'A Brief History of Action' – downthetubes.net (16 February 2016) https://bit.ly/3BlfmIG

[26] Naughton (2016) ***ibid.***

[27] Martin Barker, ***A Haunt of Fears*** (1984)

[28] Mills (2017) ***ibid.***

[29] Moose Harris, 'Action: The Media Backlash' – downthetubes.net (22 August 2016) https://bit.ly/3s0ONTD

[30] Stuart Hall et al., ***ibid***

[31] Stuart Hall, 'Racism and Reaction' in Sally Davison, David Featherstone, Michael Rustin & Bill Schwarz (eds.) ***Stuart Hall Selected Political Writings – The Great Moving Right Show and Other Essays*** (2017)

[32] ***The Guardian*** (20 May 1976) (author's emphasis)

[33] Clifford Stott & Geoff Pearson, ***Football Hooliganism: Policing the War on the English Disease*** (2007)

[34] Issue #32, cover date 18 September 1976

[35] Although 'Kids Rule O.K.' ran in that issue, the cover did not portray a scene from within its pages.

[36] Harris (2016) ***ibid.***

[37] Stuart Scheingold, ***The Politics of Law and Order*** (1984)

[38] Beth Schwartzapfel, 'What Trump Really Means When He Tweets "LAW & ORDER!!!"' – themarshallproject.org (7 October 2020) https://bit.ly/3RSrOFD

[39] Richard Nixon, 'Remarks on the Mutual Broadcasting System: "Order and Justice Under Law"' – presidency.ucsb.edu (29 September 1968) https://bit.ly/3dYxoHs

[40] Dan Baum, 'Legalize It All: How to win the war on drugs' in ***Harper's Magazine*** (2016)

[41] David Downes & Rod Morgan, 'The Skeletons in the Cupboard: The Politics of Law and Order at the Turn of the Millennium' in Mike Maguire, Rod Morgan & Robert Reiner (eds), ***The Oxford Handbook of Criminology*** (2002)

[42] Reiner (2000) ***ibid.***

[43] Reiner (2000) ***ibid.***

[44] ***Telegraph Obituaries***, 'Sir James Anderton, Chief Constable of Greater Manchester dubbed 'God's Cop' for his fiery moralism' – telegraph.co.uk (6 May 2022) https://bit.ly/3J7U57e

[45] ***The Right Approach***, Conservative policy statement (1976)

[46] Margaret Thatcher, '1982 Speech to Conservative Party Conference' – ukpol.co.uk (1 December 2015) https://bit.ly/3ApHj1A

[47] Ian Dunt, ***How To Be A Liberal*** (2020)

[48] Harris (February 2016) ***ibid.***

[49] Jim Tomlinson, 'Thrice Denied: 'Declinism' as a Recurrent Theme in British History in the Long Twentieth Century' in ***Twentieth Century British History***, Volume 20, Issue 2 (2009)

[50] Stuart Hall et al., ***ibid***. (1978)

[51] Beckett (2009) ***ibid.***

[52] Martin Barker, ***Action: The Story of a Violent Comic*** (1990)


Art by Carlos Ezquerra

JUDGE WHITEY

Law and order, Dirty Harry, and the creation of Judge Dredd

'In my book, that's the only way to go… in defence of the law!'
– Judge Dredd, 'Judge Whitey' (1977)

IN THE 1970S, all cops were bastards.

This was the age of the vigilante cop, when the sense of impending crisis was matched on the screen by men with a badge, a gun, and a burning sense of what was right and what was wrong.

These weren't 'civilian' vigilantes who took the law into their own hands like Charles Bronson's vengeful architect in 1974's ***Death Wish*** or Robert De Niro's unhinged Travis Bickle in ***Taxi Driver*** (1976), they were no-nonsense cops who were prepared to do what the cowardly bureaucrats and corrupt politicians couldn't or wouldn't – and screw the liberal do-gooders who cared more about the ***criminal*** than the ***victim***.

Between 1975 and 1978, up to a third of the whole population watched John Thaw and Dennis Waterman play 'Flying Squad' detectives Jack Regan and George Carter in ***The Sweeney***. Punching, drinking and shagging their way through crime-ridden London, they railed against the 'suits' who stopped them taking down the violent criminals from whom, at times, they seemed almost indistinguishable.[53]

Earlier series such as the BBC's ***Z-Cars*** (1962-78) and spin-offs such as ***Softly, Softly*** (1966-9) had brought a degree of social realism to TV screens, with their own takes on bent coppers and rule-breaking 'bully boy' officers like Detective Inspector Charlie Barlow, played by Stratford Johns – even to the point where the police resented such unsympathetic portrayals.

However, ITV shows like ***The Sweeney*** and ***The Professionals*** (1977-83), starring Lewis Collins and Martin Shaw, and the BBC's controversially violent and short-lived response, ***Target*** (1977-8), were of another level – brash, violent, reactionary, and hyper-masculine.[54]

The world of British comics, long dominated by gentlemen detectives, unthreatening coppers, and comical flatfoots, was not immune from this new fashion.[55] Launching from the pages of IPC's ***Valiant*** in December 1975 came the tough, monocular New York cop Jack McBane, better known as 'One-Eyed Jack'.[56]

After the success of ***Battle***, John Wagner had been handed the unenviable task of trying to apply the same formula to IPC's ailing ***Valiant***. One of the new characters in a title relaunch, One-Eyed Jack sought vengeance after a young armed robber who cost him his eye walked free from court. Violently rousting his attacker, he then used a forklift truck to murder the mob boss who paid off the jury. '***I was a good cop,***' Jack declared unrepentantly. '***I played it by the book for ten years. But not anymore.***'

Drawn in gritty, dynamic style by Yorkshire artist John Cooper, Jack was another of this new uncompromising breed, who held the law he was meant to uphold in contempt and preferred his own brand of retributive 'justice'. 'Maybe I shouldn't have been let loose on a children's comic,' Wagner later joked.[57] 'Should I have been presenting that sort of stuff to twelve-year-olds? On the other hand, the readers loved him.'

Jack's success wasn't enough to save ***Valiant***.[58] But Wagner's first attempt at translating the violence and grittiness of this new genre for children's comics had been a hit – for Jack had been a comic book 'dead crib' of the most famous vigilante cop movie of them all: ***Dirty Harry***.

STRIDING ACROSS THE baking asphalt while still chewing on his hotdog lunch, past would-be bank robbers he had just shot, and through the spraying mist of a burst fire hydrant toward another injured felon, the walk of Inspector Harry Callahan may as well have chimed with the chink of a gunslinger's spurs.

It was, after all, how audiences already knew Clint Eastwood – the iconic 'Man with No Name' of Sergio Leone's ***A Fistful of Dollars*** (1964), as well as half a dozen other Westerns before Don Siegel's 1971 neo-noir urban thriller, ***Dirty Harry***. Originally entitled 'Dead Right', expressing both Callahan's precision use of deadly force and his moral righteousness, the film transplanted Eastwood's no-nonsense cowboy into the streets of America's capital of permissiveness, San Francisco.

Spitting the word 'punk' through clenched teeth, Callahan was taciturn and masculine. He ignored rules and paperwork, preferring to deliver justice from the barrel of his totemic .44 Magnum revolver, 'the most powerful handgun in the world'. With his colleagues emasculated by bureaucracy and politics, lesser men made weak by the very civilisation Callahan fought for, he sneered at the constraining and ineffectual letter of the law while relentlessly pursuing Andy Robinson's 'Scorpio' killer, who exploited constitutional protections to evade justice.[59]

It was enough for film critic Pauline Kael to dub ***Dirty Harry*** a 'right-wing fantasy' while fellow critic Roger Ebert called its morality 'fascist'.[60] Siegel and Eastwood scoffed, the latter at times claiming the film was satirical, at others insisting it was merely 'the story of one frustrated police officer in a frustrating situation on one particular case'.[61]

Yet coming just a few years after Nixon's 'law and order' election victory and the US Supreme Court's 'Miranda' decision, which gave suspects new rights upon arrest, there was no avoiding the fact Siegel and Eastwood had birthed a new type of explicit 'law and order fable'. This gave voice to and fuelled the growing backlash of the 'silent majority', who blamed the civil rights movement for rising crime and disorder in a society 'so deeply threatened by extremes of evil that only the most drastic and unrestrained forceful measures could save it'.[62]

By the time 'One-Eyed Jack' brought the formula to weekly British comics, ***Dirty Harry*** was already the exemplar of a 'distinctly dystopian, even nihilistic' genre that promised to make simple what

seemed chaotically complex by applying society's ***only*** solution to crime – unrestrained police power.[63]

It all seemed such a far cry from ***Dixon of Dock Green***, the BBC TV series about fictional policeman PC George Dixon, played by actor Jack Warner over more than four hundred and thirty episodes since 1955. Dixon's creator, Lord Ted Willis, had been quick to condemn IPC for 'prostituting themselves to make money' with ***Action***, a comic that seemed the antithesis of the ***Dixon*** adaptation that ran in the pages of ***Swift –*** junior companion to the ***Eagle*** – between 1957 and 1961.[64]

After a shocking death at the hands of Dirk Bogarde's virile young robber in the 1950 Ealing film ***The Blue Lamp***, Dixon was resurrected for the BBC as the archetypal 'British Bobby', who walked his beat at the regulation two and a half miles an hour, solving problems with common sense and compassion. While the series did deal with themes of violence, as well as police corruption and malfeasance, and received praise for its social commentary, this has been erased in the remembering.

No other country has incorporated its police force into its 'national brand' like Britain and its 'Bobby' – a symbol representing the nation as it wishes to be seen, a land of calm, restraint and reason, watched over by a Platonic guardian of good sense and good order as natural and British as the stiff upper lip. Whatever strides it made to change with the times, ***Dixon –*** which commanded large audiences even in its final season – was still about a 'Bobby on the beat', contrasting sharply with the gun-wielding, car-chasing, all-out action of its competitors. It came to represent a world, as Stuart Hall succinctly labelled it, 'at one with itself'.[65] This was, however, an image as fictional as Dock Green.

And times were changing.

By 1977, the disorder, the paralysis, and the violence of the age reflected from newspaper headlines seemed to reach an apocalyptic crescendo. Recorded crime rates were already in 'hyper-crisis'.[66] Inflation hit twenty per cent. A simmering strike at a London photo processing laboratory would become the most violent industrial

dispute since the 1920s. Riot shields would appear for the first time on the English streets where fascists brazenly marched. There was talk of coups and private armies. The police threatened to go on unofficial strike and openly lobbied in favour of Thatcher's Conservatives.

Meanwhile, the rapid social and economic changes that brought new freedoms, lifestyles, and choices also produced waves of anxiety about the breakdown of the family and of social discipline.[67] The year's 'Silver Jubilee' celebrated Britain's empress without an empire while, in their banned alternative national anthem, ***God Save the Queen***, the Sex Pistols declared there was 'no future' as punk 'insinuated itself into the national psyche as the true face of England'.[68] Their anger contrasted with the cheery royal festivities, the raging new shining a harsh light on the death of the old.

This raucous noise was drowned out only by the dire warnings of police chiefs, politicians and newspapers. From lecterns, from front pages, across the airwaves, the message of 'law and order' was driven home: things had gone 'too far', crime was out of control, society was crumbling. What was needed was strength: more police, stiffer penalties, a return to 'traditional' values of discipline and corporal – even capital – punishment. 'PUNISH THE PUNKS!' ran a ***Sunday Mirror*** headline that June.[69] 'I do not intend to sit on the sidelines, wringing my hands,' Thatcher told her party conference while pledging more resources for the police, 'while London, Glasgow, Manchester, Birmingham and the rest of our cities go the way of New York.' [70]

'***New York 2099 A.D.!***' the narration spluttered like an excited newsreel announcer in the pages of ***2000 AD***, IPC's new sci-fi themed comic. '***Where huge star-scrapers soar miles into the air! Small buildings like the Empire State are in ruins… hide outs for vicious criminals!***'

It is 26 February 1977 and Judge Dredd bursts out of the page in the second issue of IPC's new science-fiction themed title, ***2000 AD*** – a Judge, one of the '***special lawmen of the 21st Century***', riding a futuristic motorcycle that is at once impossible and impressive, its giant exhaust pipes practically roaring from the paper. Styled on an

executioner's cowl, the opaque visor of his helmet sits above an implacable full-lipped mouth, his badge of office linking to the zip of his biker's leathers with a long, gleaming chain. A handgun sits in a holster on his boot, a rifle slung on his motorcycle's towering console.

His shoulders are crowned with pads like robes of office – the symbols of the Great Seal of the United States, split apart and rendered in three dimensions. On one side an imperious bald eagle, US revolutionary Charles Thomson's symbol of American identity, on the other a ribbed pad resembling either the bars of the 'Stars and Stripes' or a bulging ***fasces***, the Roman symbol of wooden rods symbolising the power of life over death that was purloined by Benito Mussolini for his fascist regime.

Next to him, his name is rendered in craggy black letters crackling with solidity, the creation of IPC's brilliant in-house designer Jan Shepheard. Borrowed from a popular English reggae musician, the double 'd' of his name transforms an already foreboding word into something even more sinister. He is a man utterly devoted to justice, the ultimate expression of 'law and order', an embodiment of the majesty and terror of the law. The shape of things to come.

He is policeman, judge, jury, and executioner – all rolled into one. He is Judge Dredd.

THE FURORE OVER ***Action*** had yet to come to a head when Sanders asked Mills to repeat its success. Despite the brickbats, it had been selling a steady one hundred and eighty thousand copies a week; the question was how to follow it without drawing the moralisers' ire.[71]

The answer came in a typed memo from IPC competitions editor Kelvin Gosnell: science fiction. Inspired by an ***Evening Standard*** article about how director George Lucas' forthcoming ***Star Wars*** heralded a new wave of American science-fiction movies, Gosnell insisted a new comic could not only ride the boom until it faded, but would also allow IPC to have their cake and eat it: robots and aliens were not policemen and teachers, such fantasy violence would not be as threateningly 'real' as ***Action***'s was.

Gosnell's idea initially fell on deaf ears – ray guns and little green men had long been passé, especially with ***Action*** and ***Battle*** serving

up gritty action – but an impressed Sanders soon commissioned Mills to create his third new title in two years. However, even by the bar set by its predecessor, ***2000 AD***'s debut was explosive.

Printed on cheap paper that smeared young fingers with probably toxic ink, the first issue – dubbed 'Programme 1' in faux computing language – arrived on Saturday 19 February 1977, its cover dominated by Doug Church's bold three-dimensional exclamation mark masthead, and the 'Space Spinner' – the cheap plastic frisbee that was the launch issue's free gift.

'***Galactic Greetings, Earthlets!***' intoned the vainglorious, green-skinned alien called 'Tharg the Mighty' who, as ***2000 AD***'s fictional 'editor', introduced strips designed to press the buttons of every pre-teen child.

Dinosaurs eviscerated time-travelling cowboys in 'Flesh' by Mills and artist Joan Boix. Cockney guerrilla fighter Bill Savage blasted barely disguised Russian invaders in Mills and Jesús Blasco's 'Invasion'.[72] 'M.A.C.H.1' ('Man Activated by Compu-puncture Hyperpower!') was Mills and Enio Legisamòn's 'dead crib' of the popular ***The Six Million Dollar Man*** TV series. Britain got its first, unheralded, all-Black lead characters in violent future sports series ***Harlem Heroes*** by Tom Tully and future ***Watchmen*** artist Dave Gibbons. And – despite Mills' reluctance – there was an attention-grabbing 'reboot' of ***Dan Dare*** by Mills, writer Ken Armstrong, and artist Massimo Belardinelli.

At just eight pence, this riot of violence, excitement, and dark humour had none of the lofty middle-class pretensions of the old ***Eagle***, which had been cancelled in 1969 – this was a comic that working class children could enjoy. ***Dan Dare*** was the biggest clue for how the times had changed, the ***Eagle***'s stiff-upper-lipped space hero replaced by a gruff rogue who didn't think twice about punching his commander or going renegade.

2000 AD's science-fiction theme created a distance that made violence seem less threatening and dangerous, while also being leavened by a clear moral code that surely would have appealed to the new Puritans who had brought down ***Action*** – had they only had the wit to see it. The violence was gory and extreme, but it was only

meted out to those who 'deserved' it; a sense of right and wrong that had long been present in the 'safe' comedic anarchy of British comics – from 'Dennis the Menace' to 'Faceache', where bullies got their comeuppance, the arrogant were brought low, and authority figures were hilariously chastened.

2000 AD drew its humour from this same source; rather than the open rebellion of ***Action***, it instead exposed the powerful – whether it was a hubristic dinosaur-farming cowboy, a greedy sports promoter, or a petty tyrant.

It not so much hid its sedition as showed it through a prism, away from the prying eyes of adults – a private place for kids to revel in its lack of boundaries and restraint. 'I actually saw sci-fi as a vehicle for increased action and violence,' said Mills.[73] '***2000 AD*** was not a vertical progression from previous comics, more a retreat into a darker world, where you could get away with anything.' That didn't mean that ***2000 AD*** played it safe. That conceptual distance – combined with both rebellion against authority and breakneck energy, gave it a satirical edge, presenting recognisable parts of the real world filtered through absurdist inversions; allowing Mills, for example, to have 'Lady Shirley Brown' – a transparent allusion to Margaret Thatcher – executed on the steps of St Paul's Cathedral in 'Invasion'.

While often labelled a 'punk' comic, such labels are pure hindsight – ***2000 AD*** had more to do with Frank Zappa (a particular favourite of artist Brian Bolland) than ***Never Mind The Bollocks***. Indeed, Mills looked to stylish, mature European anthology comics like ***Metal Hurlant*** rather than any punk music 'zine',[74] while many of his artists were more influenced by the satirical irreverence of the British underground 'comix' scene.[75]

But what ***2000 AD*** and punk ***did*** have in common was that Mills' disdain for authority and punk's anarchism had the same root – a raging discontent with the status quo and a deep desire to disrupt it. For Mills, ***2000 AD*** would provide a liberating catharsis, 'an antithesis to the social, political and cultural conservatism' of all that had come before.[76]

WHEN MILLS HAD turned to Wagner to help develop story ideas for the new paper, the Scotsman already knew what it needed – not a cop who broke the law, but one who ***was*** the law. 'We realised from the success of "One-Eyed Jack" this was the kind of story [*2000 AD*] should have – a really hard, tough cop,' he said.[77] 'Obviously, he would have to be harder, tougher, and mow people down without compunction.'

This futuristic policeman would have powers to arrest, sentence, and even execute criminals on the spot, a 'hard-hearted white fascist' who could deliver instant justice and hand severe penalties out for even the smallest of crimes – even shooting someone for ***littering***.[78]

It's not difficult to see the inspiration for this hard-line future cop – popular sci-fi movies were full of them, from the book-burning 'firemen' of ***Fahrenheit 451*** (1966) to the genetically engineered 'Sandmen' of ***Logan's Run*** (1976). Mills and Wagner were also taken with a 1973 story in American horror title ***Creepy*** by Bruce Bezaire and José Ortiz, in which a sci-fi cop executes someone for carrying a copy of that very comic,[79] and 'Manning', a 1969 one-page parody of hard-boiled police movies by American underground cartoonist Spain Rodriguez, in which a violent cop shoots a fleeing informant in the back, snarling '***Somebody gotta take a stand fa law and order***'.[80]

It was fitting that Mills approached Carlos Ezquerra to design their 'killer cop'. It would be his 'Kids Rule O.K.!' cover that would finally help draw down the censors onto ***Action***, yet the popularity of his work in ***Battle*** was unmatched. Born in the Spanish region of Zaragoza in 1947, Ezquerra moved to London in 1972 as British comics' demand for his work grew. Gritty and energetic, he brought the hard-edged aesthetic and louche attitude of the Spaghetti Western to the page in a way that few, if any, artists could match.

Provided with a newspaper advertisement for 1975 film ***Death Race 2000*** – showing a scarred David Carradine, wearing a black helmet and tight leather bodysuit, glowering at the viewer – Ezquerra was asked to create 'a menacing policeman' clad in black and driving a motorbike. What he produced was utterly unexpected. 'He looks like a fucking Spanish pirate!' Wagner famously exclaimed.[81] 'I'm not writing him; he looks fucking stupid!' Despite the writer's shock, this

grandiose, even baroque design of 'grim face, black suit, menacing helmet, armour, and gun' embellished with potent symbols would prove to be visionary.[82]

With a lunging shoulder eagle inspired by Spain's five hundred pesetas coin, the pads of an American Football player, and a gun based on the famous German Luger pistol, this was a canny trans-Atlantic merging of the symbols of American power and European fascism. Most importantly, it was clear from the start that this was not the outfit of a maverick, an outsider. It was a uniform. This man was no superhero but one amongst many, the standardised ensemble and opaque visor echoing the practicality and anonymity of the 'riot cop', a figure well-known across the British Empire and America but about to make a dramatic entrance on the streets of England.

As the only member of the team who had actually lived under an authoritarian dictatorship – Spain's fascist dictator, General Francisco Franco, had died less than a year before – Ezquerra understood, possibly better than anyone, what Dredd would represent in that moment.

His design also foresaw the fondness for the leather and chains of bondage wear of punk fashion, then still being defined by Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren, yet they were presented not with punk's transgressive subversion of such fetishistic symbols of power, but as an expression of it. 'I have always believed that successive generations went to the opposite extreme of their predecessor,' said Ezquerra.[83] 'I thought the peace-loving, flower-wearing hippies would be superseded by a spiteful, black anarchic generation. ***The Dredd generation***.'

Even as he drew a vision of out-of-control youth for ***Action***, he was crafting its antonym for ***2000 AD***. Dredd would be a different kind of hero. A comic book cop for this new age of 'law and order'.

On the very first page of his debut story, 'Judge Whitey', the figure of Dredd on his powerful bike erupted over a vertiginous cityscape filled with towers, haloed by impossible floating highways, that budded and bloomed like fungi and seemed to close in over the head of the reader. In its midst, the recognisable form of the Empire State

Building is overwhelmed; this is the gleaming future haunted by the barbarity of the old world, a place literally infested with crime.

'***Look! A Judge! He's coming to arrest us, Whitey!***' whines a criminal holed up in the Empire State as a silhouetted figure races towards them along one of the ribbon-like highways. '***Shut up!***' comes the retort. '***We'll deal with him… Judges can bleed too!***'

From a window of this crumbling symbol of modernity, gang leader Whitey fires a laser cannon that blasts the 'Judge' from his bike in a huge explosion. '***Ha, ha!***' a gang member gloats. '***You got him, Whitey! You wasted a Judge!***' Sadly for Whitey, despite the identical uniform and bike, it isn't his intended target – Judge Dredd, '***the toughest of the Judges!***'

Disappointed, the murderous Whitey scoffingly dons his victim's helmet; '***Look at me, you punks,***' he crows, '***I'm a Judge now! Judge Whitey!***' His victim, the unfortunate Judge Alvin, is sent back to '***Justice H.Q.***' handcuffed to the handlebars of his bike, a mocking note pinned to his chest.

Whitey's macabre message arrives just as we finally meet the indomitable hero from the opening page. Judge Dredd cuts the same laconic, even lanky figure as Harry Callahan, as he is praised by 'the Grand Judge' for single-handedly driving down crime in an entire 'sector' of their city. Like Callahan, Dredd embodies the individualist power of the urban cowboy, a guardian of his city totally dedicated to his work to the exclusion of all else.

Incensed by Whitey's taunt, the Grand Judge demands the Empire State be bombed in retaliation, but Dredd objects: '***Who's gonna have respect for the law, if we have to call in the heavy boys, as soon as the going gets tough? I'll go… alone!***'

Outflanking the gang with his own remote-controlled bike and coolly shooting Whitey's lackeys, Dredd punches the stolen helmet from the cowering murderer's head. For committing '***the most odious crime of all***', he condemns him to 'Devil's Island' – a huge traffic island in the middle of a grid of highways, where prisoners are marooned amid the ceaseless thunder from '***computer-controlled lorries roar[ing] past day and night at two hundred miles an hour!***'

It is a public show of punitive justice in a prison designed to send men mad. '***A stern sentence,***' muses the Grand Judge as Dredd adds his dead colleague's badge to an already crowded memorial wall of those who '***died defending the law***'. '***But a necessary one. The people must be protected from violent lawbreakers like him, Dredd.***'

It was a fantastical exaggeration of the 'New York' Thatcher evoked. As the real New York teetered on the edge of both social and financial bankruptcy, its streets stalked by the 'Son of Sam' serial killer David Berkowitz and his own .44 revolver, this fictional version was the Big Apple as it appeared to British eyes – a mythical land of 'exoticism and violent excess' where everything, from buildings to crimes, was ***big***.[84]

Into this world of dreams and nightmares came this perfect fictional expression of 'law and order'. When criminals brazenly owned the streets and killed lawmen with reckless abandon, the time was right for Judge Dredd.

'A BLOT ON BRITAIN,' roared the front page of the ***Daily Mail*** on 24 June 1977, above a photo of an unconscious PC Trevor Wilson of the Metropolitan Police lying on the street after being hit by a bottle during a fight with picketing trade union supporters outside the Grunwick Film Processing plant in north-west London.[85]

The strike by mostly Ugandan Asian women, dubbed the 'strikers in saris', had found support from a white, male trade union movement that normally resented immigrant workers but sensed that Grunwick was a make-or-break moment for their struggle against the government.

Violence on the picket line had broadly declined over the century, becoming a kind of 'sport' of pushing and shoving, the presence of determined resistance or sufficient police numbers enough to win the day. But this had fundamentally changed by the time of Grunwick.

By that summer, fifteen to twenty thousand people had joined the picket lines, including three Labour government ministers. In response, the Met deployed up to four thousand officers at a time, nearly a quarter of its forces.[86] Police vans escorted buses carrying

strike-breakers on high-speed runs to the factory gates, while officers formed lines, arms interlocked, to keep picketers back.

Reporting on Wilson's ten stitches and 'severed vein', the press lapped up every quotidian detail about this father-to-be and charity fundraiser. Even supporters of the strike condemned the attack, its leader, Jayaben Desai, visiting Wilson's hospital with flowers and chocolates. Just nine months after ***Action's*** controversial cover, here was another felled policeman. Wilson, though, was no ordinary 'Bobby'. He was a member of the Special Patrol Group.

These were the men of 'sus', who harassed the Black population of London, raided their shops and nightclubs, beat them in police cells and lied about their young men.[87] They were the men whose uncontrolled baton charges at Notting Hill had only helped to spread the rioting, who shot dead two Pakistani youths armed with replica firearms at the Indian Embassy in 1973, and were implicated in the death of anti-fascist protestor Kevin Gateley during the Lion Square Riot in 1974.

Grunwick was the first time they had been employed to tackle an industrial dispute, but long before the British government had become convinced that the country was under siege.

During the national miners' strike of 1972, the police retreated from the gates of a fuel depot near Birmingham in the face of overwhelming numbers of picketers. Stung by the humiliation at the 'Battle of Saltley Gate', and seeing in workers' strikes, terrorist attacks, student protests, and anti-war demonstrations the signs of revolution, authorities fretted about the capacity of the police to cope.

The idea of a French-style paramilitary ***gendarmerie***, a 'third force' plugging the gap between the role of the army and the police, had been officially rejected but this had not stopped the police fashioning them anyway. Created in 1965 to suppress crime – especially housebreaking – in London, the SPG had by the time of Grunwick been transformed into the Met's paramilitary riot squad, an 'elite' unit synonymous with police brutality that waded into crowds with truncheons, fists, and – it later transpired – coshes, knives, whips, and even pickaxe handles.[88]

At Grunwick, they did not hold back. On a 'women's day' of picketing, the SPG kicked and punched female strikers, dragging some by the hair as they were arrested.[89] As the strike escalated, the police violence grew harsher and there were five hundred and fifty arrests – the highest in any industrial dispute since the General Strike of 1926. Martin Flannery later told fellow MPs he was 'appalled' by what he had seen of the SPG at Grunwick.[90] Two years later, it was a member of the SPG who bludgeoned to death teacher Blair Peach during a demonstration against the National Front in Southall.[91]

The police, however, were unrepentant. The SPG were simply working as they had been intended. 'If you keep off the streets in London and behave yourselves, you won't have the SPG to worry about,' Met Commissioner David McNee warned. This was hardly the 'world at one with itself' that ***Dixon*** represented. Yet the violence of the SPG did not signal a break with the past, but a return to it.

VIOLENCE, ACCORDING TO the German sociologist Max Weber in 1919, is the definition of a modern state.

Or, rather, it is the creation and exercise of a ***monopoly*** on physical violence that legitimises it. The police, the military, and prisons all rely upon the deployment of or implied threat of force, which they – and only they – are permitted to use for the common good.

Prior to the creation of the Metropolitan Police in 1829, the army was often used to manage disorder, but violence intended for the battlefield translated poorly when used against demonstrations and strikes. This culminated in 1819, when militia troops charged peaceful sixty-thousand-strong crowds that had gathered near Manchester to hear radical speakers. In 'The Peterloo Massacre' (a bitter pun on the victory at Waterloo four years before), eighteen were killed – including a baby – and over six hundred and fifty injured.

Victorian society feared the rapidly swelling cities for the growing numbers of the poor and indigent as much as the authorities feared them as hotbeds of radicalism and dissent. Relying on brute force of arms was clearly not enough to manufacture order, indeed it could

help destroy it; so, by the 1820s, England had become fertile ground for the ***idea*** of a professional civilian police force.[92]

Yet when they first took to the streets in 1829, the thousand officers of Home Secretary Robert Peel's Metropolitan Police were not welcomed as protectors but condemned as 'blue devils' and a 'plague of blue locusts' by Englishmen suspicious they would be used to crush political opposition.[93] To allay such fears, Peel's 'Bobbies' wore dark blue long-tailed tunics in contrast to the army's redcoat, and wielded nothing but a truncheon, handcuffs, and the might of the law.[94] Most importantly, they came with a set of ideological armour.

'The police are the public and the public are the police,' Peel is famously quoted as saying. His 'Bobbies' – a friendlier moniker supposedly based on Peel's first name – would merely be 'citizens in uniform'. They would not be imposed from above by the state but would embody society itself. It is the idea that underpins the 'Peelian Principles' and the cornerstone of British policing now held in near-religious reverence by politicians and the police – 'policing by consent'.

But it is a myth.

THE SO-CALLED 'PEELIAN Principles' were a distillation by Charles Reith, the great post-war historian of British policing, of what he saw as its defining principles – that even as officers are sanctioned to use violence to maintain social order, the existence of the police is a strategy to make direct violence less necessary. The state ***could*** maintain its power through direct military oppression but, with a police force accepted by the majority of the public, it doesn't ***need*** to. For Reith, the British Bobby was unique, the envy of the world, a symbol of the peaceful 'rule of law'.

In the peace following World War Two, Britain rebuilt not just its cities, but its national mythology and the 'Bobby' was front and centre in this harmonious façade. 'Policing by consent' was part of the reason – Reith implied – as to why Britain had not succumbed to the fascist disease.

Despite its rose-tinted portrayal as an Elysian time of social and political harmony, the post-war 'age of consensus' was an aberration,

not the natural state of things. Contrary to the image of the kindly but firm George Dixon, to those it considered 'trouble' the state was always violent. 'This image of British policing did not develop because of some peculiar affinity of British culture with civil values, as conservative historians suggest,' wrote Robert Reiner.[95] '[It was] a myth deliberately constructed in order to defuse the virulent opposition to the very idea of police.' Over a century before, Peel had overcome this opposition by reassuring the middle classes that his new police were not there to pry into parlours, but to keep the 'dangerous classes' out of them. The police would now keep the growing industrial ***metropole*** in order.

'As enforcers of law and order [the police] were engaged in the administration of law and order of a certain type,' wrote criminologist Phil Scraton,[96] 'one which never possessed the consent, nor reflected the interests, of communities in working-class neighbourhoods. For the poor, the unemployed, striking workers and political demonstrators have persistently represented a threat to the established order. Working-class resistance to poverty, unemployment, casual labour… has been met directly, on the streets or on picket lines, by the police as the state's civil force of regulation and control.'

Heavy-handed policing of the poor and unemployed, oppressive laws against non-conformity in behaviour and sexual relationships, corporal punishment for misfits and the young, and the death penalty as the ultimate sanction. For property and those who rarely came into contact with the law, there was protection. For the people being policed, there would only be force.

'***This city's a jungle – crawling with crime!***' Mills had rejected Wagner's first attempt at Dredd. The script, which portrayed him as a near-future clone of 'One-Eyed Jack' 'hunting and burning "communist subversives"' had been too viciously violent.[97] But the Scotsman's idea of a cop so severe that he would shoot someone for jaywalking was too strong to discard. 'That was the original essence of Dredd,' said Wagner.[98] 'Okay, he's been toned down, and quite

rightly, but Dredd's still there – that nasty, rotten bastard you love to hate.'

This was evident in his second draft, written with Mills and drawn by Ezquerra. In 'Bank Raid', Dredd responds to an alert about a bank robbery. Roaring onto the page, he kicks one robber in the head and guns down two more before firing ricocheting 'dodgem' bullets into the bank vault where others have taken cover. '***No more! We surrender, Dredd!***' shout the survivors as they stumble out. '***There is no surrender!***' warns Dredd, before taking them onto the sidewalk and summarily executing them all.

'***Yeah! You give it to 'em Judge!***' an over-enthusiastic bystander yells as he steps out onto the road, whereupon Dredd sentences him to four hundred days behind bars for jaywalking. Panicking, the man tries to pay his way out of trouble and runs away, only to receive a heat-seeking bullet in the back.

All of the classic 'Judge Dredd' elements are there – the bike, the gun, the extreme sentences, the violence – yet there was still a callousness to Dredd. 'Originally Dredd did have the right to execute anyone he liked and that was one of the excesses that IPC decided to curb,' said Wagner.[99] I think they were probably right. A character like the original Dredd was just too unsympathetic.'

In the end, the breakthrough came from an accountant who wrote in his spare time.

When Dredd first appeared, he was neither written by Wagner nor drawn by Ezquerra. For different reasons, both had walked away by the autumn of 1976; Wagner due to a contractual dispute and Ezquerra because he preferred working on ***Battle***. Mills turned to art school graduate Mick McMahon to mimic, as best he could, Ezquerra's unique style.

For scripts, Mills tried multiple writers, but it was the previously unpublished Peter Harris who helped solve the conundrum of Dredd's violence. Rewritten by Mills, Harris' story – titled 'Judge Whitey' – did not tone down the violence of the strip but rather provided it with an emotional narrative – Dredd's ferocity both avenged Judge Alvin's murder and responded to the attack on authority. The first 'Judge Dredd' story to see print, it provided the crucial element that would

allow ***2000 AD*** to be just as violent as ***Action***: Dredd's violence was ***legal***.[100]

Just as the distancing effect of science fiction allowed 'hyper-real' violence, Dredd's legally permitted violence allowed him, as Sanders pointed out, 'to get around the charge of ***gratuitous violence*** by having an officer of the law inflict the violence – in the name of the law… We were able to do some really diabolical things which we couldn't have got away with in ***Action***.' [101]

When ***Action*** was censored, those working on it were under no illusions about why. As 'Death Game 1999' writer Tom Tully put it, ***Action***'s true crime was not really its violence, but the way it put 'two fingers up to authority'. This was backed up by the behaviour of the censors after this point – not all violent acts were erased from the comic, yet those that appeared to challenge symbols of power certainly were.[102]

It proved that the backlash had never been about the violence; it was about who gets to be portrayed heroically committing it. 'The violence of wrong-doing is wrong,' said film scholar Alison Young in her analysis of police movies, 'whereas the violence which responds to wrong-doing is righteous'.[103] Clothed in the garb of 'the law', Dredd's violence would be legalised, not rebellious. 'The formula was simple: violence on the side of justice,' said Sanders.

Under 'policing by consent', the state could not simply deploy its monopoly of violence at will, for it would be seen as illegitimate and tyrannical – it had to be justified. Images of injured police officers – like a dead Judge handcuffed to their Lawmaster – helped build the case that the state's recourse to violence was warranted to protect society from violent threat. The story tapped into the moment – the 'age of consensus' was becoming 'the age of enforcement'.

GRUNWICK WAS A gift to the 'New Right' and the Conservative opposition it was now dominating, cementing in the public perception the connection between strikes and violence, and justifying both a punitive response and the curtailment of workers' ability to take collective action.

Most importantly, it was not Jayaben Desai and her fellow exploited workers who were the face of the strike, it was the injured PC Wilson. As a 'Bobby', Wilson was the police as they wished to be seen – a 'thin blue line' of impartial 'guardians' who both protected and embodied society. As such, the strike became not a fight for justice but a threat to civilisation.

This was the rubric of 'law and order', an almost Manichaean view of the world espoused by politicians like Thatcher and police chiefs like James Anderton, appointed as Manchester's chief constable in 1976. She insisted she was in politics 'because of the conflict between good and evil, and I believe that in the end good will triumph',[104] while he saw the police as a means of providing moral enforcement against 'social nonconformists, malingerers, idlers, parasites, spongers, frauds, cheats and unrepentant criminals' who were 'an enemy more dangerous, insidious, and ruthless than any faced since the second world war'.[105]

Emphasised and reinforced by politicians and right-wing media eager to mobilise prejudices against progressive developments around race, gender, class, unemployment and poverty, the 'folk devils' of the 1970s – Black people, unions, scroungers, hippies, terrorists, criminals – were carefully cultivated to justify demands for a 'return to an old order, one based on the pillars of 'morality' and 'discipline', the claimed values of Victorian Britain'.[106]

This was the mobilisation of the police, the judiciary, and the government 'against those well-established "opponents" of liberal democracy: political protesters, pickets, anti-nuclear demonstrators and "alien" populations', the rhetorical groundwork for an unleashing of the state's monopoly of violence by the 'thin blue line' who were no longer impartial 'guardians of consensus' but enforcers of it.[107]

Dredd was part of an emergent culture that reflected this decisive turn towards what Stuart Hall termed 'a form of popular authoritarianism', wherein 'the recourse to the law, to constraint and statutory power, [became] the ***main***, indeed the only, effective means left of defending hegemony in conditions of severe crisis. It toned up and groomed the society for the extensive exercise of the repressive side of state power. It made this routinisation of control normal,

natural, and thus right and inevitable. It legitimated the duty of the state itself, in the crucial areas of conflict, to "go campaigning".' [108]

Shown through the prism of faraway America, Dredd mirrored the metamorphosis of the 'British Bobby' into the 'cop', no longer an avuncular guardian but a strict enforcer saving ungrateful children from their mistakes. And if said children must be beaten black and blue to get the message across… then that is a price the Judges are willing to pay.

It is no coincidence that the last episode of ***Dixon of Dock Green*** aired in May 1976, the year ***The Sweeney*** became a hit and ***Action*** hit newsstands, and just nine months before Dredd's debut. The rosy image of 'policing by consent' was unravelling as the state, challenged by calls for change and the new language of civil rights, donned the garb of force as society nerved itself for 'the distasteful but necessary exercise of 'more than usual law' to ensure, in a moment of crisis, 'more than usual order'.[109]

Demonstrators, squatters, criminals, hippies, hooligans, youths, Black people, and the militant working class were now lumped together into one, overarching 'recalcitrant class' that required surveillance, correction, and discipline. The velvet glove of ***Dixon of Dock Green*** was revealed to have been the iron fist of the SPG all along.

WITH HIS WILD hair and vicious grimace, Whitey could easily have been the grown-up version of the denim-clad rioter from the cover of ***Action***, and 'Judge Whitey' feels almost like a retort to the moral outrage over the prostrate bobby. Here was a policeman who wouldn't cower before a riot of schoolchildren, but was equipped, prepared, and willing to beat them back. While his roots lay with the vigilante cop, Dredd didn't fight the system, he ***was*** the system; a system made up of 'Dirty Harrys'.

In 'Judge Whitey', Harris and Mills tempered the 'violence sells' aesthetic of British boys' comics with the same kind of moral legitimacy 'law and order' was claiming for itself. The result was a violent, subversive figure that plucked more deeply at the sinews of these new politics than any vigilante cop.

In a reaction to the contestation of the civil rights era, ***Dirty Harry*** had worked as an exception rather than the norm, a man who steps outside of the system to repair its failings. Dredd turns this on its head, providing a warning of what happens when the state clothes itself in morally stark justifications. He is not a loner bending the rules, he ***is*** the rules. He represents the punitive logic of 'law and order': discipline for those unable or unwilling to discipline themselves.

Unlike his vigilante cop forebears, Dredd is not the righteous individual who has had enough of the weak state, but the righteous state that has had enough of the weak individual.

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[53] The Metropolitan Police detective unit's name came from its ability to work across the traditional boundaries between separate police forces, literally 'flying' from one to the other, while Cockney slang rhymed 'Flying Squad' with the name of the fabled homicidal barber 'Sweeney Todd'.

[54] Susan Sydney-Smith, ***Beyond Dixon of Dock Green: Early British Police Series*** (2002)

[55] Police characters were actually something of a rarity in British comics: such as the cosy adventures of 'PC 49' in ***Eagle (***adapted from a series of stories on BBC radio) or the misadventures of American motorcycle officer Zip Nolan in 'Spot the Clue with Zip Nolan', which ran in ***Lion*** from 1963, where readers were invited to turn detective and solve the mystery before the answer was revealed on the following page. 'The Big Palooka', which ran in DC Thomson's ***The Hornet*** in the 1960s, followed the lumbering Detective Sergeant Jim Ransom of Scotland Yard, who for some reason was sent on assignment to New York to help the NYPD with various dangerous cases. Meanwhile, ***The Beano***'s Dennis the Menace and Minnie the Minx ran rings around bumbling Sergeant Slipper (ironically also the name of a detective who investigated the 1963 Great Train Robbery) and PC Pimples. Even the police officer alter ego of homegrown superhero 'Thunderbolt the Avenger', who appeared in ***Buster*** from 1965 to 1968, was so mild-mannered that he was mocked by his colleagues.

[56] A name possibly influenced by 'Ed McBain', pen name of the author of the ***87th Precinct*** series of police procedural novels, Evan Hunter.

[57] John Wagner, introduction to ***One-Eyed Jack*** collection (2017)

[58] Jack survived ***Valiant***'s demise and transferred to ***Battle***, whereupon he left the force and became a secret agent.

[59] 'Scorpio' was unabashedly inspired by the 'Zodiac' serial killer, who murdered five victims in the San Francisco Bay Area between December 1968 and October 1969 but has never been caught.

[60] Joe Street, ***Dirty Harry's America*** (2016)

[61] Clint Eastwood Interview, ***Playboy Magazine*** (February 1974)

[62] Robert Reiner, ***The Politics of the Police*** (2000)

[63] Reiner (2000) ***ibid.***

[64] Chris Greenwood, 'The Sevenpenny Nightmare' – ***The Sun*** (30 April 1976)

[65] Stuart Hall, 'A world at one with itself' in Sally Davison, David Featherstone, Michael Rustin & Bill Schwarz (eds.) ***Stuart Hall: Selected Political Writings – The Great Moving Right Show and Other Essays*** (2017)

[66] Stuart Hall et al., ***Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order*** (1978)

[67] David Garland, ***The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society*** (2001)

[68] Jon Savage, ***England's Dreaming*** (1991)

[69] ***Sunday Mirror*** (6 June 1977)

[70] Margaret Thatcher, Speech to Conservative Party Conference (14 October 1977)

[71] Colin M. Jarman & Peter Acton, ***Judge Dredd: The Mega-History*** (1995)

[72] In a bizarre decision two days before going to press, Sanders insisted the invaders couldn't be Russian, apparently out of fear of offending the Soviet embassy. 'Sanders bottled out after the ***Action*** fuss,' said Kevin O'Neill, who came up with the 'Volgan Republic of Asia' as a replacement and then had to spend the night before going to press replacing every CCCP and Russian star in the story.

[73] Jarman & Acton, (1995) ***ibid.***

[74] Pipedream Comics, '"It's liberating us all from some of the tyrannies of paper" 2000 AD legend Pat Mills discusses the digital release of Nemesis the Warlock' – pipedreamcomics.co.uk (18 September 2013) https://bit.ly/3J2ZpJ4

[75] As detailed by Roger Sabin in ***Adult Comics*** (1993), the British underground 'comix' scene had been inspired by the mature, counterculture small press American comics of Robert Crumb, Gilbert Shelton, Barbara "Willy" Mendes, and Trina Robbins. Homegrown titles like ***Oz***, ***Cyclops***, and ***Nasty Tales***

brought up a generation of new artists such as Dave Gibbons, Brian Bolland, Kevin O'Neill and Bryan Talbot, who – as the underground declined in the late '70s – found a home at ***2000 AD*** and had a profound impact on its tone and direction until at least the late 1980s.

[76] Kelly Kanayama, ***Men of Steel, Cups of Tea: Transatlantic Narratives and Exchange in Contemporary Comics***, PhD thesis (2020)

[77] Jarman & Acton, (1995) ***ibid.***

[78] Jarman & Acton, (1995) ***ibid.***

[79] Pat Mills, blog post on patmills.wordpress.com (September 2021)

[80] Reprinted in Les Daniels, ***Comix: A History of Comic Books in America*** (1971)

[81] Jarman & Acton, (1995) ***ibid.***

[82] Carlos Ezquerra interview with Stewart Perkins, ***Class of '79*** (2000) https://bit.ly/3Mi6AxU

[83] Jarman & Acton, (1995) ***ibid.***

[84] Four years later, director John Carpenter's ***Escape from New York*** would visualise the same kind of image, its grizzled one-eyed hero actually bringing to mind, even if by sheer happenstance, Jack McBane.

[85] ***Daily Mail*** (24 June 1977)

[86] ***Washington Post*** (12 July 1977)

[87] Their reputation was so bad that it leached into popular culture: Vyvyan Basterd, the unhinged punk metal medical student from the TV show ***The Young Ones***, named his psychopathic killer hamster 'SPG', while the transfer of a brutishly and unashamedly racist constable to the SPG was a punchline on BBC comedy sketch show ***Not The Nine O'Clock News*** in 1981.

[88] These were weapons found in SPG officers' lockers during an investigation into the death of protestor Blair Peach in 1979.

[89] Working Class Movement Library, 'Grunwick strike, 1976-1978' – wcml.org.uk (27 September 2021) https://bit.ly/3bl2qbi

[90] Hansard, House of Commons Debate Vol.969 col.640 (28 June 1979)

[91] The government refused to hold an official inquiry into Peach's death but while a later investigation – the results of which were suppressed for three decades – failed to name the officer responsible, it found evidence that SPG officers

were going to demonstrations armed with unauthorised weapons such as coshes, brass handles, and knives.

[92] Stephen Bates, 'The bloody clash that changed Britain' – theguardian.com (4 January 2018) https://bit.ly/3Bbf9rD

[93] Reiner (2000) ***ibid.***

[94] 'Darby handcuffs' were manufactured by Hiatt and Company of Birmingham, founded in 1780 as a producer of 'felon's irons, gate locks, handcuffs, horse and dog collars'.

[95] Reiner (2000) ***ibid.***

[96] Phil Scraton, 'Unreasonable Force: Policing, Punishment and Marginalisation' in Phil Scraton (ed.) ***Law, Order and the Authoritarian State: Readings in critical criminology*** (1987)

[97] Pat Mills, ***Be Pure! Be Vigilant! Behave!*** (2017)

[98] Jarman & Acton, (1995) ***ibid.***

[99] Jarman & Acton, (1995) ***ibid.***

[100] 'Bank Raid' would not see print until September 1980 in the ***Judge Dredd Annual 1981.***

[101] Jarman & Acton, (1995) ***ibid.***

[102] Martin Barker, ***Action: The Story of a Violent Comic*** (1990)

[103] Alison Young, ***The Scene of Violence: Cinema, Crime, Affect*** (2009)

[104] ***Daily Telegraph*** (18 September 1984)

[105] Philip Jenkins, ***Intimate Enemies: Moral Panics in Contemporary Great Britain*** (1992) and ***The Guardian*** (17 March 1982)

[106] Scraton (1987) ***ibid.***

[107] Scraton (1987) ***ibid.***

[108] Stuart Hall, 'Racism and Reaction' in Sally Davison, David Featherstone, Michael Rustin & Bill Schwarz (eds.) ***Stuart Hall Selected Political Writings – The Great Moving Right Show and Other Essays*** (2017)

[109] Hall, ***Policing the Crisis***: 'We hear the closure occurring,' wrote Hall, 'the interlocking mechanisms closing, the doors clanging shut. The society is battening itself down for the 'long haul' through a crisis … Liberalism, that last back-stop against arbitrary power, is in retreat. It is suspended. The times are exceptional. The crisis is real.'

Art by Mick McMahon

THE RETURN OF RICO

Corruption, bad apples, and the pursuit of the perfect policeman

'***A bent Judge is the worst kind of criminal.***'
– Judge Dredd, 'Mutie the Pig' (1977)

'"***Anything to declare." Huh?***' ponders the mysterious hooded man as he arrives at Mega-City One's bustling Kennedy spaceport.[110] '***How about a heart full of hate for a man. Hate that's kept me alive through twenty long years of hell!***'

Calling Justice HQ from a public 'view phone', he demands to speak to Judge Dredd: '***Just tell him I called. My name is Dredd… Judge Dredd!***'

'***But, sir, that's impossible,***' says the shocked operator. '***There's only one Judge Dredd!***'

'***That's right, sweetheart,***' thinks the figure as he walks away. '***After tonight… there's only gonna be… me!***'

Within two pages, Dredd will be gasping for breath as the figure reveals that he is none other than his long-lost brother!

After dispatching Whitey to Devil's Island, Dredd had settled into a rhythm of standard sci-fi monsters – mutant gangs, a giant robotic gorilla – or common criminals with sci-fi trappings – a murderer changing his face, a rogue surgeon stealing body parts to order, smugglers of old copies of ***2000 AD.***[111] These were all crowned with a (sometimes rather strained) Dredd one-liner: '***No one can take liberties with the law,***' after a perp is skewered on the Statue of Liberty's crown, '***Worst case of sunburn ever!***' when a heat ray-wielding killer is put in orbit around the sun, '***Smoking can damage your health!***' after shooting a cigar-chomping robber. While quirky future crimes kept him busy, his was not the most popular strip – that was Mills and Legisamòn's superspy ***M.A.C.H.1*** – and for all of his

pontificating about the sanctity of the law and the importance of the Judges, Dredd's enemies were all clearly roughly cut monsters.

'The Return of Rico' did not just shake up this formula, it created a powerful metaphor for the dichotomy of police power.

HAVING WALKED AWAY after IPC pulled out of a proposed profit-share with him and Mills on the new title, Wagner returned from his self-imposed exile just as Mills handed over the editor's chair to sub-editor Kelvin Gosnell.[112] 'I'd thought "fuck you, I'm having no more to do with this",' he told the ***2000 AD*** podcast.[113] 'It was poverty that drove me back. I don't know, maybe three months later I came back, just because I needed the money and principles are one thing but food on the table's another. But ***2000 AD*** was a very vital thing, it had so much energy to it and the people working on it were really committed to it.' His return had an immediate effect. The eight-part 'Robot Wars', which saw the city's exploited and abused robot workforce rise up under demagogic carpenter droid Call-Me-Kenneth, was not only the strip's first multi-part story but it also helped seal Dredd's popularity.[114]

Yet even with the addition of a little light humour in the shape of his rhotacistic robotic servant Walter the Wobot, Dredd remained the same stoic and indomitable character he had been since the beginning. Having shepherded Wagner's original idea to publication, Mills now drew on classical duality – Cain and Abel, the 'founders of Rome' Romulus and Remus, Castor and Pollux of Greco-Roman mythology – to create an 'evil twin' imbued with the one thing that Dredd didn't have: humanity.

With a name evoking America's RICO laws used in the 1970s to prosecute the Mafia and organised crime, Rico was a storytelling masterstroke in a Geminic Shakespearean melodrama drawn by Mick McMahon and published in September 1977.[115] After ambushing Dredd in his apartment, Rico reveals that they are both genetically engineered clones, designed by Justice Department to be 'perfect' Judges. Despite years of brutal training at the Academy of Law, introduced just three issues earlier, once out on the streets Rico lived up to his name and turned bad – setting up a protection racket before

shooting a diner chef who couldn't pay up. The man who took him down? His own brother.

Rico now pulls back his hood to reveal a patchwork of grotesque tubes covering his face, his nose replaced by a vent, his mouth sealed shut against the vacuum of space. These grim scars are the mark of a twenty-year sentence at a Justice Department penal mining colony on Saturn's moon, Titan – the exceptional punishment handed down to Judges who break the law.[116]

His story told, Rico throws off his coat and seeks revenge in a Mexican standoff. But years on Titan impede his movements just enough for Dredd to beat him. A disbelieving Rico dies in the arms of his clone brother, who carries him to the street and past the crowds. '***He ain't heavy,***' he says as he refuses any help, '***he's my brother.***'[117]

'***Strange,***' ponders the Grand Judge, '***Rico and Joe, they were the same person, yet one grew up to uphold the law, the other to despise it. Good and evil. That's something the scientists can't control. They can't control men like… Judge Dredd!***'

'The Return of Rico' marks perhaps Mills' single most significant contribution to ***Dredd***, not least because the clash between Dredd and Rico formed the plot of director Danny Cannon's 1995 ***Judge Dredd*** movie. The story went far beyond any other in creating an inner tension in Dredd as a character. 'The heart of the Rico story is that it reveals the latent dark side of Dredd, the idea he is unwilling to face up to or show himself,' said Mills.[118] Published as the British police faced a profound crisis of legitimacy, the story asked the question that has dogged societies since the dawn of civilisation: who watches the watchmen?

THIS THEME OF dirty cops was all too timely – the British police had been mired in scandal for almost a decade.

In 1969, journalists from ***The Times*** had recorded a detective boasting of a 'firm within a firm', a network of bent coppers in London's two forces – the Metropolitan Police and City of London police – who operated with complete impunity despite being involved

in vice, violent crime and, following the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act, the boom in illicit substances.[119]

In 1978, just months after Dredd took down Rico, and as his unit was being lauded on screen in ***The Sweeney***, the head of the Flying Squad, Commander Ken Drury, was jailed for eight years for brazenly accepting cash, favours, and holidays from porn baron Jimmy Humphreys, distributing tens of thousands of pounds to high-ranking officers, and even framing innocent men.[120]

The Met's Drug Squad was implicated in fabricating evidence and, rather than cracking down on illegal pornography, Detective Superintendent 'Wicked' Bill Moody – head of the Obscene Publications Squad (the so-called 'Dirty Squad') – instead peddled 'licences' to sell it for up to ten thousand pounds a time.[121] Meanwhile his boss, Commander Wally Virgo, pocketed the equivalent of one and a half million in bribes.[122]

It was to the 'Lone Ranger' that the Met turned to try to solve its corruption problem. With a squeaky-clean reputation as an 'outsider' uncontaminated by the Met's cosy relationship with crime, Robert Mark – dubbed the 'Lone Ranger from Leicester' – became commissioner in 1972 with a mission to stop the graft. 'A good police force,' he confidently declared, 'is one that catches more crooks than it employs.'

He established A10, Britain's first specialist police anti-corruption unit, and nearly five hundred officers were either dismissed or resigned ahead of investigation. Although there were a mere handful of prosecutions, the boil seemed to have been lanced and Mark was knighted in 1973. Yet investigations had been hampered by high-level resistance, leaks, missing documents, and a culture of protective silence.

The same fate awaited the four-year Operation Countryman, launched in 1978, which was dogged by obstruction, smears, and sabotage, and achieved just two convictions in four years. The revelations about Drury, which came just as Mark stepped down as commissioner, showed that, although weakened, the 'firm within a firm' was still in business.

Corruption became a perennial subject of fictional police stories: 1973's ***Serpico,*** starring Al Pacino, told the real-life story of whistleblowers Frank Serpico and Sergeant David Durk, whose revelations about the NYPD led to the Knapp Commission into police corruption, and the 1978 crime drama series ***Law & Order*** caused such controversy with its depiction of a corrupt British law enforcement and legal system that the Met temporarily withdrew support from the BBC.

At the same time as they were being revealed to be corrupt, the police were also being shown to be brutal and incompetent. The British public were slowly realising that the rough tactics of Jack Regan and Charlie Barlow might get results on the screen, but routine physical abuse and psychological pressure regularly resulted in false confessions in real life. In 1972, three innocent teenage boys with learning difficulties were convicted of the death of Michelle Confait, a transgender sex worker whose body was found in a burnt-out London flat, and – just months before Dredd's debut – thirty-nine-year-old Gateshead electrician Liddle Towers was beaten so severely by eight police officers while in custody that he died three weeks later.[123] Meanwhile, Peter Sutcliffe – the serial killer dubbed 'The Yorkshire Ripper' – terrorised the north of England with the police seemingly incapable of catching either him or the murderer of seventeen-year-old Edinburgh schoolgirls Christine Eadie and Helen Scott in the so-called 'World's End Murders' of 1977.

While the 'law and order' lobby was busy promoting them as the ***only*** solution to prevent society's downfall, scandal dented the police's legitimacy, crime rose, and public esteem slumped to an all-time low.[124] It felt, at a time of growing crisis and rising crime, that the police seemed unable – even unwilling – to even police their own.

JUST AS ***DIXON*** was giving way to 'Dredd', the allusion to the Lone Ranger expressed a yearning for the upstanding 'good cop' who was above reproach. In response to this crisis of legitimacy, police reformers pushed 'professionalisation' as a panacea for incompetence and graft. 'The time has come,' said Mark in 1977,[125] 'when the police are abandoning their artisan status and are

achieving by our ever-increasing variety of services, our integrity, our accountability and our dedication to the public good, a status no less admirable than that of the most learned and distinguished professions.'

The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 brought in new regulations on the treatment of suspects, handling evidence, and tape-recording interviews, and replaced the old 'Judges' Rules' (which had not even carried penalties for breaching them). The new Crown Prosecution Service took responsibility for prosecutions out of the hands of the police.[126]

Such changes were intended to reassure the middle classes – upon whose 'consent' the police mostly rely – that policing ***could*** be made to be efficient and effective. Just as Peel had shaped the image of his new police, so police chiefs now crafted a comforting image of the police as dedicated, educated, modern and professional 'crime fighters', applying objectivity and expertise according to strict rules – especially against themselves.

In much the same way, 'The Return of Rico' codified the Judges as celibate, monk-like enforcers dedicated only to the law, trained from a young age and denied anything – family, money, influence – that could affect their judgement, who stand outside and above the corruption of the city. This was less a profession than a divine mission, a system that exorcises emotion so that the harsh job of judging the citizens can be delivered with robotic efficiency.

Joe and Rico were to be exemplars of this utilitarian eugenicism. Rather than being plucked from their parents at an early age, they were ***created*** to enforce the law. Inverting the 'virgin birth' of Christian creed they were birthed not by a mother (with cultural connotations of love, empathy, and warmth) but by their 'father' – cloned from the DNA of Chief Judge Eustace Fargo, the 'Father of Justice' who established the Judges in the mid twenty-first century.[127] Cold science was their wet nurse, the hard and unforgiving system their parent.

Yet not even genetic engineering can cleanse their DNA of corruption: Rico took bribes, committed murder, and even fathered a child, Dredd's niece Vienna.[128] He was the antithesis of his brother,

who is '***like a robot himself*** – as one Judge put it on the eve of the robot rebellion.[129] Just a few issues later, Wagner took up Mills' theme as Dredd faked his own death in order to reveal a murderous bank robber was his best friend – fellow Academy of Law graduate Judge Gibson. In another stand-off, this time played out as an instructional display for cadets, Dredd shoots Gibson after his friend hesitates in a final, redemptive glimmer of integrity.[130]

Rather than calling into question a system that enabled Rico and Gibson in the first place, such stories confirm Dredd as its champion. He is the rule-bound, detached, half-made man who dispenses justice, in the words of the Metropolitan Police's oath, without 'fear or favour'. In contrast to his brother, he represents the good orchard-keeper, able to prune trees of their 'bad apples'.

On the evening of 3 March 2021, thirty-three-year-old marketing executive Sarah Everard left a friend's house near Clapham Common in South London to make the fifty-minute walk to her home in Brixton Hill.

On the way, she was stopped by forty-eight-year-old off-duty Metropolitan Police parliamentary and diplomatic protection officer Wayne Couzens. Falsely telling her that she was breaching Covid-19 restrictions in place at the time, Couzens handcuffed her and placed her into the back of the car he had hired. Following a premeditated plan, he drove more than fifty miles to woodlands in Kent where he raped and, using his police belt, strangled her to death. He was caught days later, having dismembered, burned, and disposed of her body.

On the day that he pleaded guilty to kidnapping and rape, in a speech to the Women's Institute about violence against women and girls then-Met Commissioner Cressida Dick said, 'I have 44,000 people working in the Met… sadly, on occasion, I have a bad 'un'.[131] She was echoed by the senior investigator on the case, former DCI Simon Harding, who later said officers did not view Couzens 'as a police officer' but 'a murderer who happened to be a police officer';[132] and environment secretary George Eustice described Couzens as 'one bad apple'.[133]

This phrase – 'bad apple' – is now a common refrain, used to describe the officers who beat Rodney King in Los Angeles in 1991 and shot Michael Brown in Ferguson in 2014, who murdered George Floyd on a Minneapolis sidewalk and who took photos of murdered sisters Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman in a London park. 'You always have a bad apple, no matter where you go,' insisted US president Donald Trump as protests over Floyd's killing spread around the world.[134] 'I can tell you there are not too many of them in the police department.'

It has become an almost reflexive reaction to incidents of police malfeasance, portraying corrupt or criminal officers as lone operators, exceptions to the norm. It is, however, a means of protecting from scrutiny a system that puts incredible power into the hands of its agents.

'***I'VE HEARD ENOUGH, dirtwad!***' shouts Judge Sleever as he knocks an anti-Judge speaker from his soapbox and begins kicking him on the floor.[135]

'***Every day I risk my life trying to make the streets safe for creeps like you! And do you appreciate it? No! But maybe you'll appreciate some of this – straighten your brain out a bit!***'

'***That's as much as I wish to see, Sleever!***' shouts Dredd, drawing his Lawgiver. '***You're under arrest!***'

'***Arrest?***' scoffs Sleever. '***For teaching this little whiner a lesson in citizenship? It's what he needs – what they all need!***' Knocking Dredd from his feet, Sleever speeds off as Dredd announces a Code 99 Red – a '***Judge amok***'! As Judges race to respond, an embittered Sleever begins brutalising citizens, throwing one through a shop window and striking another who speaks up.

Sleever's sudden breakdown and violent escalation in '99 Red', drawn by Ian Kennedy and published in 1985, seems to come out of nowhere, but this is more than just a story about a Judge going rogue.

Just two issues before, readers had seen a young cadet jail his own mother: '***I was your son once, mother,***' he tells her as she is led away to the cubes.[136] '***Now I'm a cadet Judge. My first***

allegiance must be the law.' (He has, Dredd says as he passes him, '***the makings of a damned fine Judge.***')

Yet '***even with the most effective training in the world, the stresses of the streets can cause a Judge to crack,***' cautions the narration in '99 Red' as Sleever is packed off in a straitjacket – not to Titan or to the iso-cubes, but for psychiatric treatment. He may never recover, readers are told, but with '***careful laser surgery***' he could be back on the streets '***within days***'. After all, it adds, '***twenty years' experience is too valuable to throw away***'.

The idea that a corrupt Judge can return to duty, despite their crimes, is a powerful metaphor at a time when, rather than a problem with 'bad apples', it is increasingly clear that something is rotten with the tree.

After Wayne Couzens was jailed for life, it was revealed he had faced multiple allegations of public indecency and sexual assault as far back as 2015 and had earned the nickname of 'The Rapist' over how uncomfortable he made female colleagues. Just days before Everard's murder, he was caught on CCTV exposing himself at a fast-food drive-through.[137]

While his superiors tried to pass him off as a 'bad apple' who did not represent police officers, further allegations revealed a widespread culture of misogyny and racism in the Met. A 2018 inquiry by the UK's Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) found 'disgraceful' evidence of 'discrimination, misogyny, harassment and bullying' involving officers at Charing Cross Police Station in central London, with officers joking about rape, killing Black children, and beating their wives. Almost four hundred incidents of abuse of power for sexual gain by police officers were referred to the IOPC in just two years.[138]

The Met Police vowed to 'root out people who do not belong in the force' but the IOPC made clear that 'these incidents are not isolated or simply the behaviour of a few "bad apples"' and were part of a wider police culture, not just rogue individuals.[139] Louisa Rolfe, public protection lead of the National Police Chiefs' Council, admitted some

people were attracted to policing 'because of the power, the control and the opportunity it affords them'.[140]

Yet even when 'bad apples' are found, it has been revealed that they are not always thrown away. Between 2012 and 2018, there were fifteen hundred accusations of sexual misconduct (including sexual harassment, exploitation of crime victims and child abuse) but fewer than two hundred officers were sacked.[141] Researchers showed that fifty-two per cent of London officers found guilty of sexual misconduct between 2016 and 2020 kept their jobs.[142] In 2022, it was revealed that more than thirteen hundred officers and police staff across the UK had been accused of domestic abuse between 2018 and 2021 – more than a thousand kept their jobs, less than nine per cent were disciplined, and the conviction rate was less than three and a half per cent.[143]

The picture is similar in America, although there powerful police unions protect officers from the consequences of their misconduct, with contracts banning civilian oversight, destroying disciplinary records, indemnifying officers from civil suits, and limiting internal investigations.[144] Meanwhile, so-called 'qualified immunity' rules protect government employees from being held accountable for violating someone's constitutional rights if a court has not previously ruled that it was 'clearly established' those ***precise*** actions were unconstitutional.[145]

A 2017 investigation by the ***Washington Post*** also found that forty-five per cent of officers fired for misconduct in Washington, DC, were rehired on appeal, as were sixty-two per cent of officers fired in Philadelphia and seventy per cent in San Antonio.[146] Furthermore, an examination of police prosecutions from 2009 to 2010 found that, out of eight thousand three hundred credible reports filed against eleven thousand officers, only three thousand two hundred and eighty-three resulted in criminal charges. Only about one thousand of those officers were convicted, and only thirty-six per cent of those convicted were eventually incarcerated. Derek Chauvin, who murdered George Floyd, had eighteen previous complaints against him.[147]

The head of the IOPC described Wayne Couzens' conviction as a 'watershed moment' for policing. Just as with the murder of George

Floyd, there were calls for more training for officers, for new structures to encourage them to intervene when abuses occur or become whistleblowers, and for more stringent vetting of applicants. Yet despite all of this, few questioned why, after five decades of scandal and reform, it is still the police who police themselves.

As feared and hated by the Judges as much as the Judges are by the people, the Special Judicial Squad (SJS) is the ruthless unit dedicated to keeping officers on the straight and narrow. Introduced in Prog 86 in 1979 and modelled on the dreaded 'internal affairs' departments of the vigilante cop genre, the SJS is often portrayed in a similar manner – an inconvenient, even counterproductive intrusion upon the Judges' work.

Using 'random physical abuse tests' – brutal interrogations involving physical torture, 'truth drugs', and coercion – they search for the ***potential*** for corruption as much as the act itself. While maintaining a distaste for the SJS, Dredd accepts their necessity, even as he is subject to their ministrations: in 1987's 'The Interrogation', hours of intensive interrogation and physical abuse earn him a 'pass' chit and a clean bill of moral health.[148]

Such sadistic investigations and harsh penalties typify a system that is, at least on the face of it, even harsher on the sins of its own than it is on those of the citizens.[149] The Judges would seem to embody philosopher John Locke's insistence that lawmakers 'are themselves subject to the Laws they have made; which is a new and near tie upon them, to take care, that they make them for the publick good'.[150]

This is the 'rule of law' which, in its simplest form, means that no one is above the law – the same rules that bind the weakest also bind the strongest; laws must be transparent and clear, the judiciary must be independent, and people must be able to access the legal process. The cornerstone of liberal democratic government and enshrined in the US Constitution and the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it is more than just a means to enforce the law: it is a system of checks and balances designed to constrain power and protect the individual.

However, the Judges do not adhere to the 'rule of law'. In removing Bad Bob Booth and assuming control over the state, they removed the 'weak' liberal institutions and 'inefficient' due process they blamed for social collapse in favour of 'instant' summary justice. When Judge Dredd insists 'I am the law', he is not merely stating that he is a law enforcement officer, but that he embodies and represents the law itself. This is not the rule of law but the rule ***of*** the law.

The SJS represent a system that is acutely sensitive to, indeed has been created specifically to deal with, the 'bad apple'. Yet at the same time – as shall become clear in the next chapter – they are not geared towards spotting or dealing with systemic corruption. For the Judges are authority without balance, the law collapsed down to a single branch – accountable only to itself.

'In operational matters,' wrote one former police chief, 'a Chief Constable is answerable to God, his Queen, his conscience, and to no one else.'[151]

Holding the police to account has never been easy or simple. 'Answerable to the law and to the law alone,' as a famous judgement in 1968 put it, they have long rejected 'political' control and insisted they must enjoy 'operational independence'.[152] This suited Thatcher's 'law and order' government which, in return for the police's support in managing both the fallout of their neoliberal economic reforms and those who tried to stop them, deferred to police chiefs in 'operational matters'. And, fearful that local 'police authorities' (which replaced old 'watch committees' in the 1960s) were being taken over by left-wing groups that might seek to restrain the police's response to protests and strikes, the government sidelined and ignored them.[153] In 2012, they were abolished altogether – replaced by elected 'police and crime commissioners'.

'The modern state is deeply ambivalent about the way in which the police should be held accountable,' wrote criminologist Janet Chan,[154] and '[they] have become virtually impervious to any control by elected political bodies and are adamant in remaining so'.[155]

The police have long demonstrated an 'apparent pathological inability… to objectively investigate their peers'.[156] From the Police

Complaints Board – the first attempt at introducing civilian oversight of police complaints, created just months after Dredd's debut in 1977 – to its successors, the Police Complaints Authority, set up in 1984, and the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC), despite regular cycles of scandal and reform, the police have managed 'to retain control of complaints procedure and successfully resist widespread demands for independent investigation'.[157]

The IPCC lasted just fourteen years before a blizzard of controversies saw MPs deliver an excoriating verdict that it was 'not even first among equals' amid the country's forty-three police forces and 'yet it is meant to be the backstop of the system'.[158] Forces were often left to investigate themselves and there was a widespread perception that police were 'getting away with misconduct and criminality'.[159]

The IPCC's replacement, the IOPC, sought to stress the 'independence' of its title, yet the vast majority of complaints are still handled internally by each force's professional standards departments, such as the Met's Directorate of Professional Standards, which effectively operates as the Met's SJS – a huge department dealing with everything from standard complaints to covert operations. While the IOPC investigates only serious and sensitive cases, in what law lecturer Clare Torrible called 'an almost Alice-in-Wonderland level of circularity', the police effectively decide themselves whether any case warrants change or sanction.[160] In 2022, MPs voiced 'profound concerns' about the IOPC, said forces too often 'see complaints against them as matters to be deflected' and insisted that there needed to be a 'change of culture' as it 'should not be necessary to compel officers to cooperate with investigations'.[161]

Without remedy it has been left up to campaigners to seek justice when complaints fall on deaf ears. Sustained pressure from his family and friends of Black musician and music producer Sean Rigg, who died in Brixton Police Station in 2008, uncovered significant inconsistencies in police evidence and a bungled IPCC investigation while, after decades of campaigning, in 2012 it was finally revealed that police had systematically concealed evidence that they had

contributed to the deaths of ninety-six Liverpool Football Club supporters at the Hillsborough football stadium in 1989.[162]

Following the conviction of Couzens, revelations about a strip search performed on a menstruating schoolchild, and the continued disproportionate use of stop and searches against Black communities, Cressida Dick was eventually forced to resign. In her resignation letter, she bitterly echoed her predecessors in condemning what she called the 'politicisation of policing'.

Such a term, legal commentator David Allen Green said, is often misused by those who reject accountability for their use of state power: 'The goal of many with state power is to be free from any practical accountability, just as it is the goal of many businesses to be free from competition. To have a check and a balance – to have things contested – is not what many with state power want… what Dick is really criticising is accountability for policing.'[163]

'***We're Judges, aren't we?***' snaps Judge Manners. '***We make the rules.***'

Rico's graft, Gibson's greed, Bryce's lovelorn mania: there are many different kinds of bent Judge. There are those who succumb to 'noble cause' corruption, such as Judge Turpin, who is packed off to Titan after being caught beating a confession out of a suspect;[164] and those like Judge Barry Kurten (who believed he was instructed to brutalise perps by a small blue imp called Mo), for whom the powers of a Judge are a convenient outlet for their own psychopathic tendencies.[165]

So, whereas Sleever's corruption was sudden, that of Manners is like a slow-burning match. In 2001's 'Bad Manners', Wagner and artist John Burns introduced the petty tyrant, beating and framing suspects, taking bribes, and murdering those who threaten to uncover his crimes.[166] Like Rico, he is the truest expression of the corruption that the wide, discretionary powers of the Judges promote; part of the difficulty in uncovering his corruption is that so broad are these powers that Manners can easily manipulate them to frame his victims. It is power without check, which he knowingly uses against those who have no recourse.

'***What can he do against the might of the Judges? Who is there to turn to when the protectors become the oppressor?***' thinks one young victim, who is brutalised by Judge Manners after witnessing him beating a citizen. Watching TV, he sees that Dredd has been drafted into his sector, the story providing a handy reminder of Dredd's own virtue: '***Dredd's reputation for utter ruthlessness where crime is concerned is a legend,***' says the presenter. '***Having early in his career sent his own brother and fellow lawman Rico to the Judges' prison on Titan!***' Intercepted by Manners before Dredd can respond, the unfortunate teen is framed for drug dealing and Manners, having covered his tracks, returns to the streets of which he is king.

Manners is a dire warning of the dangers of giving too much power to those who would abuse it. Yet fifty years of the 'tough on crime' politics of 'law and order' have seen the police remorselessly handed more and more powers, while politicians have waved away concerns over the lack of safeguards – and have even eroded existing protections.[167] 'We asked the police what powers they wanted and gave them to them,' Prime Minister Tony Blair boasted in 2004.[168]

New laws such as the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act, pushed through by the government in 2022, and the draft Public Order Act effectively write 'blank cheques' for the police to exercise their powers against those they deem troublesome. Meanwhile, the means for citizens to hold the police to account have atrophied with political attacks on judges, lawyers, and human rights legislation, cuts to legal aid, and relentless false media stories about 'abuse' of the legal system by the 'undeserving'.

MANNERS, OF COURSE, is eventually found out and gunned down – another 'bad apple' exorcised from the system. As with his brother, Dredd corrects the deviance and reasserts his own impeccable credentials as an impartial enforcer of the law.

In the detective novels of Raymond Chandler and former detective-turned-writer Dashiell Hammett, pervasive police malfeasance was a necessary backdrop to accentuate the moral purity of the protagonist, and the corruption Dredd encounters forms a chiaroscuro contrast

that makes his virtue shine all the brighter. Unlike Chandler and Hammett's hard-boiled heroes, or even Harry Callahan, Dredd is not fighting a weak or corrupt system – he ***is*** the system. In such stories, he is pruning the tree of its 'bad apples', rooting out corruption and reasserting both his – and its – incorruptibility.

Such 'bad apple' rhetoric frames corruption as a matter of 'good' versus 'bad' police officers and has become, Kristian Williams wrote in ***Our Enemies in Blue: Police and Power in America***, 'a handy tool for diverting attention away from the institution, its structure, practices, and social role, pushing the blame, instead, onto some few of its agents. It is, in other words, a means of protecting the organisation from scrutiny, and of avoiding change.'

This is the bitter consequence of the 'bad apple' narrative, which inverts the original proverb – 'a rotten apple quickly infects its neighbour' – that warns that corruption easily spreads.[169] The exposure of individual wrongdoing is interpreted as 'testimony to the integrity of the system which dealt with it'.[170] Thus, such transgressions are understood to be expectations that prove the rule that the system is working. In the act of killing Rico, Kurten, and Manners, Dredd 'proves' the system works.

It is this legitimating myth of Dredd that was established in 'The Return of Rico', which echoed the project the police were carrying out in real life. In the face of the loss of public trust and confidence, they reframed themselves as technocratic 'professionals' who rooted out 'bad apples' while holding off criticism that the barrel itself was rotten.

It also established them as the 'experts' in 'crime-fighting'. Much like J. Edgar Hoover's promotion of his Federal Bureau of Investigation as cool, professional, and modern 'G-Men', the process of professionalisation positioned the British police as the only voice worth listening to on crime – as the people 'at the cliff face', their version of events is to be assumed to be based purely on 'the facts'. They are the first – and often only – voice listened to in regards of matters of crime, a rhetorical armour that also provides ***post facto*** justification for officers' actions, rejecting criticism as antithetical to 'difficult decisions' made 'in the moment'. The police become not just the guardians of society, but the purveyors of truth itself.

WHAT DREDD PREDICTED was how this process of mythmaking would go hand-in-hand with the development of a 'state within a state', a quasi-independent branch of state power, unrestrained by democratic oversight and with burgeoning powers that allowed them to impose their will in ways Peel's objectors had always feared.

It is with no small amount of irony that the same Covid-19 legislation that Couzens invoked to arrest Sarah Everard was the pretext for the violent suppression of a vigil attended by thousands of people – mostly women – on London's Clapham Common after her death. Even though he used them illegitimately, they were still powers that he had at his disposal. The problem is not bad apples, but bad power.[172]

IN THE CLONING of Judges and the dehumanising training of the Academy of Law, we can see an allegory for police reform which assumes that corruption and abuse can be bred and beaten out of the system, that with enough regulation, with enough training, the police can prevent the apples from going bad. Such reform avoids the uncomfortable truth that the problem resides not in the individual morality of officers but in how the system imbues all of them with power without restraint.

Rico did not die in the shootout at the end of 'The Return of Rico' – he lived on in his clone brother's DNA. Years later, Wagner would take that duality that Mills had created and explore the idea of the twin clone brothers representing the two columns of their clone father's double helix – one pure, the other corrupted. It is a powerful metaphor for the dichotomy of police power, which invariably contains the seeds of its own corruption.

'Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely,' the English historian and politician Lord Acton wrote in 1887. Fifty years of scandal surely proves the police need more constraint, not less of it. Yet the demands of 'law and order' politics continue to ensure that the police exercise almost unmitigated power.

And Dredd would soon discover the consequences of such power without check.

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[110] ***2000 AD*** Prog 30 (1977) Script: Pat Mills, Art: Mick McMahon, Letters: Tony Jacob

[111] Wagner's 'The Comic Pusher' from Prog 20 echoed the plot of the 1973 story from ***Creepy*** that had partly inspired the original creation of 'Dredd'.

[112] ***2000 AD*** Prog 16 (1977)

[113] ***2000 AD Thrill-Cast***, 'The John Wagner Interview: Part One' (10 February 2016)

[114] ***2000 AD*** Progs 10-17 (1977) Script: John Wagner, Art: Carlos Ezquerra, Ron Turner, Mick McMahon & Ian Gibson, Letters: John Aldrich, Bill Nuttall, Jack Potter, Tony Jacob & Peter Knight

[115] Passed in 1970, the 'Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act' was designed to combat the Mafia and other organised crime.

[116] It also meant that Dredd's face remains unknowable; the mythos of him never removing his helmet had already been established in Prog 8's 'Antique Car Heist'.

[117] A somewhat incongruous line from the 1969 Hollies song of the same name.

[118] David Bishop, ***Thrill-power Overload*** (2007)

[119] Matthew Moore, '***Times*** sting that blazed a trail for ***Line of Duty***' – thetimes.co.uk (10 April 2021) https://bit.ly/3BntIIs

[120] Neil Root, ***The Sweeney & the Dirty Squads: Police Corruption and Sleaze '70s style*** – thehistorypress.co.uk, https://bit.ly/3OHnZQU

[121] ***Bent Coppers: Crossing the Line of Duty***, BBC documentary (screened April 2021)

[122] Grace Macaskill, "We stopped bent Flying Squad coppers taking sex shop bribes from porn kings" – mirror.co.uk (8 May 2021) https://bit.ly/3Bnclru

[123] Phil Scraton & Kathryn Chadwick, 'Speaking Ill of the Dead: Institutionalised Responses to Deaths in Custody' in Phil Scraton (ed.) ***Law, Order and the Authoritarian State: Readings in critical criminology*** (1987)

[124] Clive Emsley, ***The Great British Bobby*** (1996)

[125] Robert Mark, ***Policing a Perplexed Society*** (1977)

[126] Dominic Grieve QC, 'The case for the prosecution: independence and the public interest' – speech at Queen Mary University of London School of Law (13 March 2013)

[127] A detail not revealed until seven years later in 'A Case For Treatment' in ***2000 AD*** Prog 389 (1984) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Ron Smith, Letters: Tom Frame

[128] ***2000 AD*** Prog 116 (1979) Script: John Wagner, Art: Ian Gibson, Letters: Tom Frame

[129] ***2000 AD*** Prog 10 (1977) Script: John Wagner, Art: Carlos Ezquerra, Letters: Unknown

[130] ***2000 AD*** Progs 34-35 (1977) Script: John Wagner, Art: Mick McMahon & Ian Gibson, Letters: Tony Jacob

[131] Alexandra Topping, 'Cressida Dick says there is occasional 'bad 'un' in Metropolitan police' – theguardian.com (8 June 2021) https://bit.ly/3GBw6w6

[132] Lisa Haseldine, 'Outrage after Sarah Everard detective says he 'doesn't view' Wayne Couzens as police officer' – mylondon.news (30 September 2021) https://bit.ly/3OGGAg2

[133] Rachel Wearmouth, 'Anger as Tory minister claims Sarah Everard killer was 'one bad apple'' – mirror.co.uk (1 October 2021) https://bit.ly/3oB5YcA

[134] ***News24***, ''You always have a bad apple' – Donald Trump rejects protesters' cries of racism, praises US police' – news24.com (12 June 2020) https://bit.ly/3ONQXhZ

[135] ***2000 AD*** Prog 423 (1985) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Ian Kennedy, Letters: Tom Frame

[136] 'Thirteenth Assessment', ***2000 AD*** Prog 421 (1985) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Ron Smith, Letters: Tom Frame

[137] Chiara Giordano & Joe Middleton, 'Police admit missed chances over Wayne Couzens and probe link to other unsolved crimes' – independent.co.uk (1 October 2021) https://bit.ly/3JjO07C

[138] Chris Burn, 'Sarah Everard murder 'must be watershed moment for policing', says IOPC boss' – yorkshirepost.co.uk (8 October 2021) https://bit.ly/3oJt00R

[139] ***BBC News***, 'Met Police: Misogyny, racism, bullying, sex harassment discovered' – bbc.co.uk (1 February 2022) https://bbc.in/3Je3Lgz

[140] Jon Sharman, '2,000 police officers accused of sexual misconduct in past four years' – independent.co.uk (11 October 2021) https://bit.ly/3wZ5ce5

[141] Sisters Uncut, 'Wayne Couzens is not 'one bad apple' in the Met police, so we're training people to intervene in arrests' – inews.co.uk (30 September 2021) https://bit.ly/3SdMPuD

[142] Sascha Lavin, 'More than half of Met Police officers found guilty of sexual misconduct kept their jobs' – bylinetimes.com (20 September 2021) https://bit.ly/3OOcRlt

[143] Rebecca Barry & Louisa Felton, 'More than 80% of UK police accused of domestic abuse in past three years kept jobs, ITV News finds' – itv.com (17 March 2022) https://bit.ly/3oEtZPO

[144] Ingraham (2020) ***ibid.***

[145] Killer Mike', 'We must end 'qualified immunity' for police. It might save the next George Floyd – theguardian.com (20 April 2021) https://bit.ly/3aAUuSN

[146] Christopher Ingraham, 'Police unions and police misconduct: What the research says about the connection' – washingtonpost.com (10 June 2020) https://wapo.st/3zhT8Vh

[147] Dakin Andone, Hollie Silverman & Melissa Alonso, 'The Minneapolis police officer who knelt on George Floyd's neck had 18 previous complaints against him, police department says' – edition.cnn.com (29 May 2020) https://cnn.it/3Q0CXIX

[148] ***2000 AD*** Prog 518 (1987) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Kim Raymond, Letters: Tom Frame

[149] While twenty years of backbreaking work on an airless moon is particularly cruel, Dredd has also sentenced citizens to 'hard labour' – usually to comedic effect (see chapter six).

[150] John Locke, ***Second Treatise of Government*** (1689)

[151] Sir Eric St. Johnston, ***One Policeman's Story*** (1978)

[152] Philip C. Stenning, 'The idea of the political 'independence' of the police: international interpretations and experiences.' (2007)

[153] Stenning (2007) ***ibid.***

[154] Janet B.L. Chan, 'Governing police practice: the limits of the new accountability' in ***British Journal of Criminology***, vol.50 (1999)

[155] Robert Reiner, ***The Politics of the Police*** (2000)

[156] Tim Prenzler & Carol Ronken, 'Models of Police Oversight: A Critique' in ***Policing and Society***, Vol.11, issue 2 (2001)

[157] Smith (2020) ***ibid.***

[158] Home Affairs Committee – Eleventh Report, Independent Police Complaints Commission (29 January 2013)

[159] Prenzler (2015) ***ibid***.

[160] Claire Torrible, 'Why the police in England and Wales must do more than just learn lessons' – theconversation.com (22 April 2022) https://bit.ly/3Q9RgEP

[161] House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, 'Police Conduct and Complaints' (23 February 2022)

[162] Graham Smith, ***On the Wrong Side of The Law: Complaints Against Metropolitan Police, 1829-1964*** (2020)

[163] David Allen Green, 'Cressida Dick's criticism of the 'politicisation of policing' is really criticism of accountability for policing' – davidallengreen.com (8 April 2022) https://bit.ly/3wZmms2

[164] 'Knock on the Door', ***2000 AD*** Prog 195 (1981) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Ian Gibson, Letters: Tom Frame

[165] 'Crazy Barry, Little Mo', ***2000 AD*** Progs 615-618 (1989) Script: John Wagner, Art: Chris Weston, Letters: Tom Frame

[166] 'Rotten Manners', ***2000 AD*** Progs 1306-1307 (2002) Script: John Wagner, Art: Paul Marshall, Colour: Chris Blythe, Letters: Tom Frame

[167] Reiner (2000) ***ibid***.

[168] Anthony Seldon, ***Blair's Britain 1997–2007*** (2007)

[169] Malorie Cunningham, '"A few bad apples": Phrase describing rotten police officers used to have different meaning' – abcnews.go.com (14 June 2020) https://abcn.ws/3a2DqEF

[170] Stephens Griffin, '#Notallcops: Exploring 'rotten apple' narratives in media reporting of Lush's 2018 'spycops' undercover policing campaign' in ***International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy***, Vol.9, issue 4 (2020)

[171] ***BBC News***, 'I invented Judge Dredd" – news.bbc.co.uk (28 February 2022) https://bbc.in/3SyfT0c

[172] Shami Chakrabarti, 'After Sarah Everard's murder, police powers need to be curbed not strengthened' – theguardian.com (1 October 2021) https://bit.ly/3bpdIR4

Art by Brian Bolland

4

THE DAY THE LAW DIED

Judge Cal, the age of walls, and the power to exclude

'***Let every man know that citizenship is a privilege – not a right!***'
– Judge Dredd, 'Punks Rule!' (1979)

'British citizenship is a privilege, not a right.'
– Home Office statement, November 2021[173]

WITH TWENTY-FIVE EPISODES stretching across most of 1978, 'The Cursed Earth' was the strip's first true 'mega-epic' and, like so much of Pat Mills' writing, it unfolded at breakneck speed.[174]

Now promoted to *2000 AD*'s prestigious colour centre spread, Dredd travelled across the hellish landscape between the east and west coasts to deliver a plague vaccine, encountering an American interior turned by atomic apocalypse into the realm of cannibals, mutants, and aliens.

'The city was about control, "The Cursed Earth" was about lack of control,' said Mills, whose story threw something new and startling at the reader with every episode.[175] Flying rats? Sure! Dinosaurs in the twenty-second century? Why not! The last president of the United States of America is still alive? Have him guarded by blood-sucking robots! Ever more extreme! Greater and greater thrills!

However, the same wild escalation that had brought ***Action*** crashing down now threatened to do the same to *2000 AD*. As Mills ran behind on his deadlines, John Wagner and Chris Lowder were drafted in to provide fill-in episodes, both choosing to lampoon American consumerism by incorporating dozens of major – and, most importantly, copyrighted – American brand mascots, including Ronald McDonald, The Burger King, KFC's Colonel Sanders, the Jolly Green Giant and Michelin's tyre-man Bibendum, into their stories, opening

IPC up to potential legal action that no defence of satire would have stopped.[176] At the same time, managing editor Bob Bartholomew was alarmed by the ***Action***-like levels of violence in 'Inferno', a sequel to 'Harlem Heroes' by 'Look Out For Lefty' writer Tom Tully and Italian artist Massimo Belardinelli.

Blame for these editorial slips landed on the shoulders of *2000* ***AD***'s young chief sub-editor Nick Landau, who had been left in charge while editor Kelvin Gosnell launched new stablemate title ***Starlord*** and was ignominiously shunted over to ***Battle***. 'I thought they were bloody stupid and showed their inexperience,' Mills said later.[177] 'I'd always known more or less how far to go, and when to throttle back, I'd had more than enough experience on ***Action***. They thought they were being very radical and following in the style I'd set, but it was far too risky.'

'One thing's for sure, whatever's waiting for me there – it can't be as bad as… the Cursed Earth!' thought Dredd as he departed Mega-City Two for home. He was right – the story had exposed a critical problem. The explosion of energy Mills had poured into *2000* ***AD***'s creation had ensured its success yet was near impossible to maintain without fading away or going too far. Similarly, his unashamedly heroic Dredd contained the seeds to its potential destruction: the breakneck, escalating pace of 'The Cursed Earth' was unsustainable in the long term and doomed to stall, probably sooner rather than later. Mills' 'Dredd' couldn't be eternal; like a firework it had to end with a bang… or a whimper.

After the boundless, endless frontier of 'The Cursed Earth', Dredd hit a wall. Or, more precisely, one was built around his world. For, in 'The Day the Law Died', 'Judge Dredd' warned us of the coming age of walls.

STRETCHING ACROSS THE 'Winter of Discontent' of October 1978 to April 1979 – and usually known by the title of its longest segment, 'The Day the Law Died' – the Cal Saga charted the rise of the unhinged and despotic Chief Judge Cal.[178] Until this point an indomitable, heroic champion of the law, Dredd has to become both law and outlaw in

order to defeat a despotic Judge whose reign of terror threatens to destroy the entire city.

After returning to the strip, Wagner had grown tired and restless; a six-month transfer to the more sci-fi setting of the moon as 'Judge Marshal' of 'Luna-1' ran out of steam with only a few standout episodes. But 'The Cursed Earth' had invigorated his view of Dredd. If Mills' 'Dredd' had been about external threats, Wagner's would be all about systems. How they work, how they go wrong, what walls Dredd will defend, and which he will tear down – figuratively and literally.

'Is Judge Dredd innocent or guilty?' screams Cal as he thumps the table in the opening flash-forward scene of 'Crime and Punishment'.[179] Readers barely have the chance to catch breath before their hero is on trial for his life, with damning video evidence of Dredd vainly and cold-bloodedly murdering a journalist and photographer for not putting him on their front page. There can be only one conclusion – guilty!

Cal is head of the SJS, and it is now that the lack of oversight, checks and balances in the Judges' system is revealed to be a weakness, rather than a strength. Turning the screws on the Chief Judge, Cal forces him to join the rest of the city's Council of Five in condemning Dredd and sentencing him to suffer the same fate as his dead clone brother. At first unable to understand why he cannot remember his crime and then enraged by this miscarriage of justice, Dredd hijacks a shuttle and returns to Earth to clear his name.

This plotline will be all too familiar to audiences who sat through the first third of the 1995 ***Judge Dredd*** movie, Sylvester Stallone chewing his way through an awkward script that, initially at least, tacked quite closely to its comic book inspiration. In one of the cultural feedback loops that dot the strip's history, it was a film influenced by a comic book influenced by a TV series. John Hurt's turn as the lunatic emperor Caligula in the BBC2 adaptation of Robert Graves' 1930s ***I, Claudius*** novels, had ended just two years before, catching the eye of Wagner, whose story ran just as Charles Lippincott, future producer of Stallone's movie, was becoming an avid ***2000 AD*** reader while in the UK promoting the ***Star Wars*** and ***Alien*** films.[180]

Introduced as a petty bureaucrat, Cal is revealed to be behind a Machiavellian plot to become Chief Judge, using a robot double of Dredd to frame him for murder. With Dredd seemingly assassinated and the well-meaning but weak Chief Judge Goodman out of the way – knifed to death in the street by a gang of assassins, just in case those classical allusions were still going over anyone's head – Cal assumes his mantle and begins a descent into madness befitting Hurt's virtuoso performance.

He proclaims himself to be 'the living law', his spoken word taking on the full force of legislation; he adds to his own Praetorian Guard of sycophantic Judges with legions of alien mercenaries called Kleggs, their payment to be made in human meat; mimicking his historical namesake's promotion of his horse he appoints a goldfish as his Deputy Chief Judge, whose pronouncements of 'bloop!' the citizens are expected to understand and obey; and his capricious and blackly funny mood swings backfire on the toadying Judges around him – Judge Cox is sent off to commit suicide after foolishly insisting he would give his life for the Chief Judges, while Judge Slocum is pickled alive ('the only cure for worry wrinkles', mocks the capricious Cal).

Both a classical tyrant and modern authoritarian 'strongman', even the slightest resistance bruised Cal's glass-fragile ego and brought a vicious retaliation. When the citizens riot, he sentences the entire city to death alphabetically (pity poor Aaron A. Aardvark, who changed his name by deed-poll just to be the first in the phone book). And, in an eerie prediction of Donald Trump's myopic insistence that crowds attending his January 2016 inauguration outnumbered those of his predecessor Barack Obama, Cal asks if he needs his eyes checking as he cannot see the crowds that he's sure should be lining the streets to mourn the death of Judge Fish. To punish this citizen boycott, he makes it illegal to do almost anything.

Throughout all of this, to borrow the phrase coined by journalist Adam Serwer about Trump's presidency, the cruelty is the point. There is no purpose or defined end to Cal's rule, only obedience… or death.

Even for citizens used to the boot-heel of the Judges it all proves too much and many choose exile, a river of humanity flowing out of the city's porous border and into the wastelands of the Cursed Earth on foot, readers only too aware of the horrors that await them. This affront to Cal's authority triggers a predictably extreme response: the Kleggs are sent in to cut off the exodus. ***'Rule over an empty city? Where's the fun in that?'*** Cal snorts, exposing the childish viciousness at the root of his megalomania. But how to stem the flow?

'***Build me a wall***,' Cal demands. '***And do it in three weeks***.' To comply with the impossible timeframe, prisons are emptied, every robot in the city drafted, and waves of arrests used to bolster work gangs that feverishly erect a mile-high concrete curtain that runs a thousand miles from Chicago in the north to Tallahassee on the Gulf of Mexico.

Veteran artist Ron Smith gave the wall a sloping convex shape like the Hoover Dam, towering over the city, its apex bristling with guns – all pointing inwards, ***'You are being watched'*** emblazoned on its city-facing side. There are few more startling images in 'Judge Dredd' history – a totalitarian police state in steel and concrete with the people forced to seal themselves in with a madman who is only ever a hair's breadth away from killing them.

'This surely is the perfect system!' Cal gloats as the narration reveals the black satire: ***'In truth, there was an air of perfection about Cal's style of government. Despite the mile-high concrete wall that encircled the city and held the people as securely as rats in a trap… Despite millions condemned to labour blocks and forced to work out their last miserable days maintaining that very wall… Despite the evening curfew, when no citizen could be abroad without danger of instant death… Despite the spy cameras and strip searches, the harsh laws that no one understood… Despite the hopeless, beaten look on the faces of the people… Despite all this, there was something to admire in Cal's brave new city… it was efficient! There were no strikes, no industrial disputes. For the first time in one hundred and seventy years the city's trains ran on time! Most amazing of all,***

the average time of delivery of a first-class letter was reduced from twenty-one days to four hours!'

This will have seemed like razor-sharp satire to readers who had just lived through the 'Winter of Discontent', when government attempts to limit pay rises to reduce inflation saw car workers, ambulance staff, bakers, lorry drivers, petrol-tanker drivers, bin men, and even gravediggers take part in uncoordinated strikes during one of the coldest winters for years.

In a country where piles of uncollected rubbish built up on the streets, schools closed for lack of heating, and bodies went unburied, the strip's evoking of the famous 'Mussolini's trains' excuse for fascism – the idea that while dictatorship might not be very nice, at least it got things done[181] – would have been especially powerful as the 1979 general election was dominated by questions of 'law and order'; ***2000 AD***'s readers could not have missed the running battles between British police, strikers, and protestors that played out on the nightly news.

Just two months after Cal's wall went up, Margaret Thatcher – still then leader of the opposition – delivered a speech in which she not only equated Britain's trade unions to street muggers but insisted that Labour's criticism of the police was undermining the 'rule of law', leading Britain towards brutal chaos. Her party would, she said, place a 'barrier of steel' across the path.[182]

The imagery she deployed could not have been more potent – in opposition to the braying, rowdy picket line was a wall made not of men but of steel, a cold, hard, impersonal and unassailable emblem of strength. It was, in short, the perfect symbol: against the forces of chaos, the Tories would be firm and unmoving. Walls, physical and oratorical, would defend. Protect. A simple idea made real – a barrier, a divisor. Within is safe, without is barbarous. The rhetorical landscape of Thatcherism would become filled with such monuments to rigidity: the 'steel barrier', the 'Iron Lady'.[183]

'The Day The Law Died' speaks to how the politics of division in the 1970s inevitably led to a world dominated by walls. While Dredd remained within Mega-City there had been no need to delineate its

boundary. It was futile anyway; surely this megalopolis was so vast that even Dredd could never need to breach its limits? Yet twice within his first year he had – once to the moon and then into the Cursed Earth. We had been outside, with less of an idea of what was within. So, the boundless city needed a fleshed-out boundary.

Before Cal, the border between Mega-City One and the Cursed Earth was shown only incidentally; the story that introduced this dark hinterland, 'Brotherhood of Darkness', suggested that the city was covered with a huge, protective dome.[184] But when Dredd's armoured Killdozer leaves the city in 'The Cursed Earth', it is through an airlock embedded in a transparent wall. No doubt influenced by the geodesic domes protecting humanity's remnants in 1976's ***Logan's Run***, the Mega-City is a bubble, a quarantined sanctuary of civilisation.

Outside there is the only logical contrast to the city of the future: an apocalyptic hell, black sky dotted with flying rocks, brick-strewn ruins bubbling with phosphorescent lava.[185] Out of this border between the fantastical and the apocalyptic citizens flee, led by their own bearded Moses, drawing a comparison with the Israelites escaping from Egypt in the biblical Book of Exodus, whatever Promised Land they find in this wilderness preferable to the despotic city beneath the dome.

Like all Pharaohs and tinpot fascists, Cal had a taste for infrastructure. But like all walls, Mega-City One's new border actually betrays weakness. The citizens' flight forces Cal to acknowledge the border as the limit of his power; rather than reach out to claw back the exiles, he instead hems the remaining citizens inside. Vengeance requires victims, so letting the citizens leave robs him of the one thing he craved – control. ***'Now the city is one huge prison!'*** screams the tyrant from atop his new wall. ***'There is no escape, citizens! I own you body and soul!'***

As the future British Prime Minister compared her policies to a steel wall, as walls of riot shields marched into England's inner-cities, Wagner pointed out that walls are the tool of tyrants – they can just as easily make a prison as a fortress.

In 1979, a wall still cleaved the German capital of Berlin in two, as it had since the early hours of 13 August 1961 when thirty miles of barbed wire barrier suddenly appeared along the border between the western sectors controlled by the former Allies of America, France, and Britain, and the eastern sector controlled by the Soviet-aligned German Democratic Republic.

Days later, the wire began to be replaced with concrete, workers reportedly in tears as they sealed one side of their city off from the other: streets, buildings, families – all cut in two. This was the front line of the Cold War. The GDR called it an 'anti-fascist wall' that 'protected' citizens from decadent capitalism. In truth, the wall was as much about keeping people in as it was keeping the West out.

Like the citizens of Mega-City One under Cal, for many the only option was to flee; as the wall rose, so too did the windows that people had to leap from to escape. Daring escapes became a feature of the border: just a year after the Kleggs shot down a citizen escaping on a home-made pedal-powered flyer, two families escaped East Germany in a home-made hot air balloon.

The East German economy could not cope with the ongoing 'brain drain' of skilled workers, professionals, intellectuals, or anyone with the means. So, the state did what states always do – it made escape illegal: in 1957, ***Republikflucht*** ('escape from the republic') became a crime. But laws are not magic, and the river of émigrés turned into a tide, passing four million by 1961. The day before the barbed wire appeared, more than two and a half thousand fled across the border.

Just hours before, West Berlin mayor Willy Brandt gave a prophetic campaign speech criticising the Allies' apparent indifference to refugees who were, he said, fleeing for good reason: 'They are afraid that the mesh of the iron curtain will be cemented closed. Because they fear being shut into an enormous prison.'[186] The next day, East Germany became exactly what Brandt feared.

The closing off of this escape route left millions trapped inside a prison dominated by 'the world's most perfected surveillance state of all time' and sustained by a bureaucracy of total fear.[187] Tens of thousands of Stasi agents were bolstered by a massive network of more than one hundred and seventy-three thousand official

informers. Multitudes were spied on, blackmailed, and murdered, the mourners at their funerals catalogued and placed under suspicion. Trapped, the citizens were at the total mercy of the state.

Having created his own prison state, Cal tries to exercise this same absolute power. To celebrate the apparent death of Dredd, he bestows a ***'token of his special favour'*** and suspends all laws. But the citizens understand that to descend into the ***Purge***-like anarchy the madman expects would be to legitimise ***'Cal's Law'***, so they refuse. Crime drops. ***'I demand that you love me!'*** Cal screams out of a window at the silent, protesting city.[188]

Driven into a rage by the snub and Dredd's reappearance, the megalomaniac turns to the one power he truly has – death. He plans to unleash deadly nerve gas, a genocide that will leave his ***'perfect city'*** intact as a monument to ***'its finest hour'***. He is thwarted at the last second by Dredd's rebels, who must break down yet another wall – the formidable 'anti-vandal' wall at the foot of the Statue of Justice – before Fergee, the giggling, fly-swarmed, baseball bat-swinging denizen of the Undercity who had befriended Dredd and joined his guerrilla war, drags the tyrant to his death from the top of the statue. Cal's insistence that his power will save him ends with a comical Road Runner-style 'SPLAT!'. Saved by Fergee's sacrifice, the city returns to normal in a single-page denouement: gone are the Kleggs, a new Chief Judge is appointed, and Dredd returns to the streets where he is ***'needed now more than ever!'***

In the light of subsequent world events, it might have seemed like this satire had lost its potency. Within a decade, borders physical and metaphorical began to fall. The Berlin Wall crumbled beneath pickaxes in 1989; the Iron Curtain of which it had been a part collapsed shortly after; the racist apartheid of South Africa fell through a series of negotiations between 1990 and 1993; 'free trade' agreements bloomed; from 1995 the Schengen Area allowed European Union citizens to travel across the borders between its member states freely. In this globalised, borderless world it seemed people would truly be 'citizens of everywhere'.

The opposite would prove to be true. With Cal's wall, 'Judge Dredd' foreshadowed our new millennium status as the 'Second Age of

Walls'.[189]

'BUILD THE WALL! Build the wall!'

It was the chant that became deafening at rallies and dominated the airwaves. Building a wall along the entire two-thousand-mile US/Mexican border to curtail 'illegal immigration' was a key promise of Donald Trump, who announced his bid for the White House in June 2015 saying he would 'build a great wall, and nobody builds walls better than me, believe me'.

It was never meant to be a signature policy, but a means devised by political consultants Roger Stone and Sam Nunberg to keep their addled boss 'on message' about immigration.[190] Although initially lukewarm on the idea, when Trump mentioned it at a rally in 2015, he saw his audience's ecstatic reaction. The idea became not just a rallying cry but a near obsession.

With his fragile ego and callous cruelty, it is difficult to think of any other politician who more easily evokes comparisons to Cal, but whereas Cal's wall took three weeks, Trump's wall – even by the most generous and partisan estimates – was never built. Unable to force Mexico, or his own government, to pay for it, within a year the promise had withered to an insistence that 'more than five hundred miles' of wall would be built 'within a year'. He didn't even manage that. By the time Trump left office, his administration had built just forty-seven miles of new border wall where none had existed before.[191]

His more 'liberal' predecessors had much better fortune. Just four years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Bill Clinton embarked on Operations 'Blockade' and 'Hold the Line' (1993), 'Gatekeeper' and 'Safeguard' (1994), and 'Rio Grande' (1997), while Bush and Obama both extended these walls even further. All too aware of the symbolism of a wall, these administrations rebranded them as 'fences'.[192]

Yet, in many ways, Trump's lack of success was irrelevant. We already live in a walled world.

In 1989, there were just six physical walls along borders across the world. By 2020 there were at least sixty-three. Fourteen were built in 2015 alone. Razor wire snakes across mountains in India, fertile Palestinian lands in Israel, and desolate deserts in Saudi Arabia, which itself has come close to becoming a fully enclosed state. Six out of every ten people in the world live in a country that has built walls on its borders and, since 1989, in Europe alone more than a thousand kilometres of walls – the equivalent of more than six Berlin Walls – have been built along borders.[193]

These borders have been turned into a 'dystopic testing ground' of intrusive electronic surveillance, facial recognition, drones, and biometric data, a five-hundred-billion-dollar 'Border Industrial Complex' fuelled by large arms companies such as Airbus, General Dynamics, Leonardo, Lockheed Martin, L3 Technologies, Northrop Grumman, and Thales, and Israeli companies such as Elbit and Magal Security.[194] This industry, wrote journalist Todd Miller in ***Border Patrol Nation***, 'has every intention of making not just the border but this entire world of ours its own'.

Meanwhile, an extreme politicisation of migration has taken place. The growing consequences of a rapidly warming planet, the fallout from failing states, and new wars in the Middle East and Africa have created concomitant humanitarian crises from which millions have attempted and continue to attempt to flee. Politicians on all sides have exploited this by using the language of fear, of 'floods' of 'undeserving migrants' to promote a stark but manipulative narrative, reframing political and humanitarian challenges as problems of security, which require securitized solutions.

'Law and order' politics has always required a threat, an 'other' – whether foreign or domestic – to justify entrenching and expanding the powers of the state. With its focus on the importation and expulsion of 'foreign criminals', the UK government's anti-immigration creates 'discourses and scenarios of fear so that the general public demands to be protected'.[195]

The walls that result are more than just objective structures. They manifest fantasies of control, of holding at bay, providing a false sense of protection and resolution, symptomatic of what Greg

Grandin called ‘the panic of power’. ‘We can be tempted to imagine,’ philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah warned, ‘like children who think they can hide by closing their eyes – that our human concerns can stop neatly at the border, with a wider world kept forever at bay’.[196]

Mega-City One’s wall imparts just such a false sense of security – it is virtually a permeable membrane; within weeks, the vine-clad eco-terrorist Father Earth[197] would tear a hole in it, the spider hordes of The Black Plague[198] would sneak through it, and mutated ‘Gila Munja’ assassins – with their Morlock manes and poisoned claws – would scale it.[199] Soviet spies sneak through it, mutant raiding parties sneak over it, and citizens armed to the teeth depart the city via its gates, venturing forth on hunting trips that visit violence upon the violent landscape beyond.

Whatever their shared demagoguery, the walls of Cal and Trump seem incomparable – they were built for different reasons. Cal’s to keep in, Trump’s to keep out. However, they are not mutually exclusive but the product of forces that wish to demonstrate the extent of their control.

The grand irony was that no sooner was Cal deposed than the Judges incorporated the greatest symbol of his tyranny into their own system. Within hours of the confirmation of his election victory in January 2020, President Joe Biden announced that construction of Trump’s wall would cease. He did not keep his word.[200]

CAL’S WALL BECAME, just as with the Berlin Wall in the public culture of the GDR, ‘everywhere and nowhere’ in Dredd’s world, defining not just the city’s edge, but its very essence. Explicitly shown in both big screen adaptations and as much a part of the city as the Judges themselves, the wall is not just Cal’s legacy but Wagner’s. In ‘The Day the Law Died’, he began the process of constructing what most readers would come to consider as the ‘true star’ of the strip – the city itself.

Previously this had been a fuzzy cityscape backdrop against which crazy future crimes were committed. But as he laid down the city’s physical boundaries, so Wagner also delineated its psychological landscape. The judges did not just police the city, they defined it and

it them. It came to symbolise the very health of the ***polis***, falling apart when the city is taken over by the Dark Judges in 'Necropolis',[201] replaced with a wall of napalm fire when its crumbling edifice fails in the zombie onslaught of 'Judgement Day',[202] projecting sharp, grey modernity against the ancient bone-white skin of the being calling itself Satan.[203] When it falls – and it repeatedly does – it is always rebuilt.

For it had already proven its worth. The bristling cannons now pointed outwards, rather than inwards, but that did not change what the wall was, what all walls and the borders they delineate are: structures of control. 'Where borders are drawn,' wrote academic Dieter Lamping, 'power is exercised'.[204]

And in the age of walls, the border is now everywhere.

DURING MASS PROTESTS in Portland, Oregon, in July 2020, Black Lives Matter supporters were snatched off the street by armed men and thrown in unmarked vans.

These were not vigilantes or even local cops, but US Border Patrol. The extra-Constitutional powers of these highly militarised federal agents extend a hundred miles inland from America's borders, covering nearly two-thirds of Americans – around two hundred million people and including all of Michigan, Hawaii, and Florida – allowing them to be deployed without the legal constraints supposedly placed on police and other state security officers.[205] Thus the police power becomes grounded in the power of the border.

Borders are intrinsically vulnerable spaces. Journalist David Patrikarakos describes the spaces around them as 'places of tinnitus' that 'hum with unresolved history and trauma'. And when the borders turn within, that zone of uncertainty, that climate of fear, seeps inwards.[206]

There is no better example than that of the 'Hostile Environment' implemented by then-Home Secretary Theresa May in 2012, which expanded immigration enforcement far beyond the border itself. Aiming to make life in the UK 'unbearably difficult' for those without the correct paperwork,[207] the government sought to cut undocumented individuals off from using fundamental services such

as the NHS and the police, while making it illegal to work or rent property.

With depressing inevitability, calamity ensued. People who had lived in the UK their whole lives were forced to emigrate to countries they had never known. The resulting 'Windrush scandal' in 2017 revealed that hundreds of people had been wrongly detained, deported and denied legal rights, the vast majority of them Black and the children of Commonwealth citizens who had come to the UK in the 1940s and '50s. Despite having been legal immigrants in an age without documentation, their lack of 'official' paperwork was then used against them – even though they had either been told they did not need it or were never notified of the need to update what documents they did have.

It followed years of hardening policy and rhetoric towards refugees and asylum seekers under the previous New Labour government – whose ministers were only too happy to make political scapegoats out of refugees to boost poll ratings.

Former Conservative Home Secretary Priti Patel delighted in the government's ending of 'free movement', the visa-free travel afforded by the EU to its citizens, after the UK narrowly voted to leave the European Union in 2016, which she claimed had prevented Britain from 'securing its borders'.

In 2022, the government's Nationality and Borders Act was passed despite much opposition, effectively criminalising anyone arriving in the country to claim asylum without a pre-approved claim, while also making it impossibly convoluted and ruinously expensive to apply at all. Shortly after, Patel announced people seeking asylum in the UK would be flown four and a half thousand miles to Rwanda. After previous deals with Albania and Ghana had fallen through, Rwanda agreed to accept asylum seekers in return for millions in development aid, a move condemned as 'simply an expulsion exercise'.[208]

Meanwhile, doctors, landlords, police officers, employers, and teachers became co-opted as immigration officers, tasked with checking the status of the people they help. In December 2020, three police oversight bodies insisted forces should stop sharing the

immigration information about victims of crime with the Home Office as it was leaving scared people vulnerable to further exploitation and violence.[209]

With dawn immigration raids, labyrinthine bureaucracy, and increasing surveillance, such an indiscriminate dragnet demonstrates the true purpose of such programmes – they are rarely about deporting criminals (after all, there are already plenty of laws to deal with them). They are, rather, about control.

And, as soon as they took control of the wall, the Judges immediately exercised its power.

'PUNKS RULE!' REMAINS one of the Dredd strip's most iconic single-episode stories, helped in no small part by the solidity and atmosphere of Brian Bolland's art.[210] In the story immediately following Cal's downfall, Sector 41 is declared a 'no go' area for Judges by the 'Cosmic Punks' gang. Teeth filed to fangs, leather and leopard-print everywhere, chains hanging from piercings, Bolland's designs for the gang are a tabloid vision of punk's excess.

With his pierced septum, toilet cistern chain hanging from his ear, and German army helmet sporting a totenkopf with the slogan ***'There's no justus, there's just us'***, gang leader Gestapo Bob Harris – a play on softly spoken TV presenter 'Whispering Bob' Harris – sentences a be-suited and protesting 'norm' (who looks remarkably like Superman's mild-mannered alter-ego, Clark Kent) to be stripped and ejected from the Punks' self-declared border post.

In essentially a repeat of the winning formula of 'Judge Whitey', Dredd rejects a plan to go in mob-handed to reclaim the sector, reaffirming the Judges' power and legitimacy by decisively 'cleaning up' the sector alone. In full ***Dirty Harry*** mode, Dredd clinically and calmly rounds up the gang, loading captives into an adapted garbage truck – the ranks of manacled prisoners unsettlingly evoking the famous 1787 diagram of the crowded Liverpool slave ship ***Brookes*** – which he then drives into Bob's lair, taking the '***cheap punk***' without a fight.

Having restored order, rather than condemn the captured gang to the thunder of Devil's Island or the torture of an iso-cube, Dredd

instead drives them to the freshly minted West Wall and banishes them to the Cursed Earth for a decade. Without irony, he takes the tool of a tyrant he helped depose and uses it almost immediately, not just disciplining the Cosmic Punks for their crimes but stripping them of their citizenship.

'Y-you can't do this! This place is hell on Earth!' begs one. ***'Give me twenty years – thirty – only please don't banish me!'*** pleads another. ***'Harsh but necessary,'*** thinks Dredd. ***'Let them serve as an example. Let every man know that citizenship is a privilege – not a right.'***

Forty-two years later, these same words were used, unironically, by the Home Office to justify its proposals under the Nationality and Border Bill.

Seventeenth-century jurists conceived of the relationship between the state and subject to be a reciprocal one: in exchange for a subject's allegiance, the state owed them protection. But as far back as the 1860s, the British government has sought the power to define citizenship as a privilege and protection as conditional. In the face of inward immigration from its colonies, legislation such as the British Nationality Act 1981 continued a process since the end of the war of constructing British citizenship as intrinsically 'white' and connecting race to crime, although this power was never used, and the UK's citizenship stripping powers fell into disuse.[211]

It was when Britain joined the 'War on Terror' after 2001 that it emerged as a world leader in the use of such measures in the name of 'counterterrorism', seeking to massively expand ministerial powers to revoke citizenship in 2002, 2006, 2014, 2015, and in 2021.[212] The election of the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government under David Cameron triggered a significant increase in their use – within a year six people had been stripped of their citizenship, between 2010 and 2017 a further thirty-three.

The most famous case is of Shamima Begum, one of three schoolgirls from east London who were groomed and radicalised online before travelling to Syria to join the militant Islamic State (IS) group in 2015. As a young and 'unrepentant' Muslim girl, Begum became a new 'folk demon' and attracted increasing opprobrium,

most of it centring on her 'rejection' of her right to citizenship. Despite never being tried or convicted of any crime, then-Home Secretary Sajid Javid stripped her of that citizenship, effectively rendering her stateless.

The UK government 'now have at their disposal laws to strip citizenship that are arguably broader than those possessed by any other Western democratic State', yet the Nationality and Borders Act went even further.[213]

Before being passed by Parliament in 2022, it was quietly amended to give the government the power to strip someone of their British citizenship without warning. They do not even need to possess citizenship of another country – so long as the government believes they are ***eligible*** for it, it claims the power to make them stateless. The wide-ranging powers require no burden of proof, no conviction, not even any evidence – it would merely require the Secretary of State to believe stripping them of their citizenship was 'conducive to the public good'.

Analysis of the 2011 census found five and a half million people in England and Wales who fell into this category, including more than four hundred thousand people born in the UK. Of these just one in twenty were white, while half of British Asians and thirty-nine per cent of Black Britons were potentially at risk. The bill was condemned as creating a two-tier system of citizenship – those who could rely on their status as 'natural born' and those who are considered a threat, no matter how long they have resided or 'obedient' they have been.[214]

As always, the government's focus is on 'security'. Those against whom the laws will be used are ***criminals***, they insist. That criminality makes them undeserving of rights afforded to the ***law abiding***. But it also gives the state the power to decide what is and is not ***criminal***. The wall gives the state the right to arbitrarily decide that someone is no longer 'us', but 'them'.

Citizenship has now become a bargaining chip, a promise of good behaviour. It is a Sword of Damocles, hanging forever over the heads of millions, who know that they could be snatched from their beds whenever the state demands it and making the condition of

Britishness a fragile one in which loyalty must be continually demonstrated.

'The bill reinstates powerful, yet insidious normative expectations that Black and brown people must watch what they say, how we behave,' wrote radical psychologist Guilaine Kinouani.[215] 'We must be compliant as the State may decide our country is no longer our country and dispossess us of our home.'

THE WALLS DRAWN between people by the Judges takes upon itself the power to divide and exclude. In a world scarred by nuclear and biological conflict, the Cursed Earth is a poisoned land, a hell on Earth. As first explained in 'The Cursed Earth', the unfortunate souls who already endure its corruption of their bodies must also face prejudice from those who consider themselves unaffected. Under the harsh 'Mutant Segregation Act', 'mutants' are barred from Mega-City One.

Evoking the eugenics of fascist regimes such as Nazi Germany, these unconscionable laws are created to prevent genetic 'contamination' of non-mutated 'norm' population. Primary amongst the penalties the Judges can impose is exile. Just like the Berlin Wall divided families, so too does the Judges' wall.[216] Expectant mothers are scanned for signs of foetal mutation, leading to mandatory abortion.[217] When Eleanor Groth contracts the incurable 'Arachnid Gene Virus' and begins turning into a giant spider, her husband is given the choice of euthanasia or exile to a specialist facility in the Cursed Earth.[218] Eric and Audrey Jeckle are blackmailed by a doctor over their son's feral mutation, leading the couple to murder and rob seventy-five people in the undersea waystation of Atlantis to pay him off.[219]

Like the militarised borders of today, this power to include or exclude reaches into every part of the city. In 'Ten Years',[220] Umma Bartlett succeeds in hiding her mutant child, Jimmo, for a decade. Yet a random check by a Justice Department's Public Surveillance Unit scours her purchase records and deduces that she is caring for an unregistered child. Bartlett is sentenced to two years, Jimmo to be consigned to a Cursed Earth 'charitable institution'.

As they are led away Bartlett sees a violent recidivist, who has torn a man's face off and threatened a Judge, sentenced to the iso-cubes. Enraged by the difference in treatment, Bartlett steals a transport, and they escape into the Cursed Earth. Dredd demurs from having them blown out of the sky; '***Mutant or not, the boy has never broken any law***,' he says. And yet, because of his very existence the city would send him away.

This demonstrates the power of the border, of the wall, of the state's arbitrary ability to examine, imprison, or exile. 'Ten Years' was published almost a year before 9/11, an event that led to the rapid expansion of state power in Britain and the United States to isolate, exclude, and examine, ostensibly in the name of securing borders from threats both external and internal. In practice, it gave full flight to the same impulses that 'Dredd' had warned about in 1979 – when walls are built, their power extends inwards.

Cal's wall made explicit the dystopia at the heart of 'Judge Dredd': that walls work both ways and protectors can just as easily be jailers, and that in claiming the power to exile, the state places us all on notice.

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[173] Haroon Siddique, 'New bill quietly gives powers to remove British citizenship without notice' – theguardian.com (17 November 2021) https://bit.ly/3GJ2E67

[174] ***2000 AD*** Progs 61-85 (1978) Script: Pat Mills, John Wagner & Chris Lowder, Art: Mick McMahon & Brian Bolland, Letters: Tom Frame, John Aldrich & Peter Knight

[175] Colin Jarman & Peter Acton, ***Judge Dredd: The Mega-History*** (1995)

[176] Luckily only the Green Giant Company, owners of the ***Jolly Green Giant*** brand, asked for a retraction. Printed in Prog 84, Mick McMahon refused to draw the half-page strip – in which the giant benevolently provides Dredd with much-needed supplies of tinned corn – and it was handled by Brett Ewins. IPC forbade the episodes from ever being reprinted and collections excluded them until a change in UK parody laws around the use of commercial characters allowed Rebellion to reprint the entire story in 2016's ***Judge Dredd: The Cursed Earth Uncensored***.

[177] David Bishop, ***Thrill-power Overload*** (2007)

[178] ***2000 AD*** Progs 86-108 (1978-9) Script: John Wagner, Art: Brian Bolland, Dave Gibbons, Brendan McCarthy, Brett Ewins, Mick McMahon & Ron Smith, Letters: Tom Frame

[179] ***2000 AD*** Prog 86 (1978) Script: John Wagner, Art: Brian Bolland, Letters: Tom Frame

[180] When asked to develop Cal's look, Bolland – who had never seen ***I, Claudius*** – instead based him on Hurt's portrayal of Quentin Crisp in ***The Naked Civil Servant***. Bolland insists similarities to his hard-driving editor were 'coincidental. (But fitting!)'.

[181] Debunked as early as 1954, this myth of fascist efficiency contains a grain of truth – Mussolini's regime ***did*** upgrade rail services, but only where they were politically useful and where the prejudices of foreigners would be most flattered: 'The story that Mussolini made the trains run on time arose in the late '20s and gained credence abroad mainly because of well-heeled British tourists who considered the hopelessly refractory Italians governable only by dictatorial means,' wrote Columbia history professor Victoria de Grazia in ***The New York Times*** in 1994.

[182] Speech to Conservative Rally in Birmingham (19 April 1979)

[183] Thatcher happily embraced the nickname given her by the Soviet Army journal ***Red Star*** for an anti-Soviet speech she delivered in 1976.

[184] ***2000 AD*** Prog 4 (1977). The story introduces both the Cursed Earth and the idea of 'mutants' to the strip. Clearly based on the mutants in the 1971 Charlton Heston film ***The Omega Man***, the light-sensitive Brotherhood kidnapped citizens to turn into slaves at their camp in the Cursed Earth.

[185] ***2000 AD*** Prog 62 (1978) Script: Pat Mills, Art: Mike McMahon, Letters: Tom Frame

[186] Quoted in Frederick Taylor's ***The Berlin Wall: 13 August 1961 – 9 November 1989*** (2012)

[187] Anna Funder, ***Stasiland*** (2003)

[188] The pathologically recidivistic population's refusal to indulge Cal's mania recalls the New York Police Department's seven-week 'slowdown', in protest at a court's decision to indict officers involved in the fatal chokehold of Eric Garner in July 2014. Officers temporarily reduced 'proactive policing' efforts on low-level offences, expecting crime rates to increase as their absence was felt – only for a study to find major-crime reports in the city actually fell by about three per cent.

[189] David Fyre, ***Walls: A History of Civilization*** (2018)

[190] Stuart Anderson, 'Where The Idea For Donald Trump's Wall Came From' – forbes.com (4 January 2019) https://bit.ly/335ORIt

[191] Christopher Giles, 'Trump's wall: How much has been built during his term?' – bbc.co.uk (12 January 2021) https://bbc.in/3cIspda

[192] Greg Grandin, ***The End of the Myth*** (2019)

[193] Fyre (2018) ***ibid.***

[194] Ayesha A. Siddiqi, 'Interview: Harsha Walia on the New Pillars of Border Imperialism' – ayeshaasiddiqi.substack.com (21 March 2021) https://bit.ly/3z2DVY8, and ***A Walled World: Towards a global apartheid*** in The Transnational Institute (TNI) (2020)

[195] TNI (2020) ***ibid.***

[196] ***BBC News***, "'Mrs May, we are all citizens of the world," says philosopher' – bbc.co.uk (29 October 2016) https://bbc.in/3PAUm52

[197] ***2000 AD*** Progs 122-125 (1979) Script: John Wagner, Art: Brian Bolland & Ron Smith, Letters: Tom Frame

[198] ***2000 AD*** Progs 140-143 (1979) Script: John Wagner, Artist: Ron Smith, Letters: Tom Frame

[199] ***2000 AD*** Progs 231-232 (1981) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: John Cooper, Letters: Tom Frame

[200] Priscilla Alvarez & Kate Sullivan, 'Biden administration to close border wall gaps in Arizona' – edition.cnn.com (29 July 2022) https://cnn.it/3wH8Mcr

[201] ***2000 AD*** Progs 674–699 (1990) Script: John Wagner, Art: Carlos Ezquerra, Letters: Tom Frame

[202] ***2000 AD*** Progs 786-799 (1992) Script: Garth Ennis, Art: Peter Doherty & Carlos Ezquerra, Letters: Tom Frame; ***Judge Dredd Megazine*** Vol.2 #4-9 (1992) Script: Garth Ennis, Art: Dean Ormston & Chris Halls, Letters: Tom Frame

[203] ***Judge Dredd Megazine*** Vol.3 #1-7 (1995) Script: Alan Grant, Art: Arthur Ranson, Letters: Steve Potter

[204] Dieter Lamping, ***Across Borders: A Literary Topography*** (***Uber Grenzen: Eine Literarische Topographie***) (2001)

[205] Grandin (2019) ***ibid.***

[206] David Patrikarakos, 'Borderland: Europe's Eastern faultline' – thecritic.co.uk (December 2020) https://bit.ly/3cDdrFh

[207] Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrant, 'The Hostile Environment explained' – jcwi.org.uk (17 July 2020) https://bit.ly/3OBbLt0

[208] ***The Guardian***, 'The Guardian view on Britain's Rwanda deal: a cruel, cynical pretence' – theguardian.com (14 April 2022) https://bit.ly/3m7ls6S

[209] Jamie Grierson, 'Police told not to share immigration data of domestic abuse victims' – theguardian.com (17 December 2020) https://bit.ly/3th16MW

[210] ***2000 AD*** Prog 110 (1979) Script: John Wagner, Art: Brian Bolland, Letters: Tom Frame

[211] Sangeetha Pillai and George Williams, 'Twenty-first Century Banishment: Citizenship Stripping In Common Law Nations' in ***International and Comparative Law Quarterly, 66***(3) (2017)

[212] Pillai & Williams ***ibid.***

[213] Pillai & Williams ***ibid.***

[214] Zoe Williams, 'Cruel ministers have made citizenship a tool of dirty politics' – theguardian.com (8 December 2021) https://bit.ly/3RXBhvv

[215] Guilaine Kinouani, 'The Nationality and Borders Bill: Imperial nostalgia, fascist resurgence and social control' – mediadiversified.org (13 December 2021) https://bit.ly/3q5TtXJ

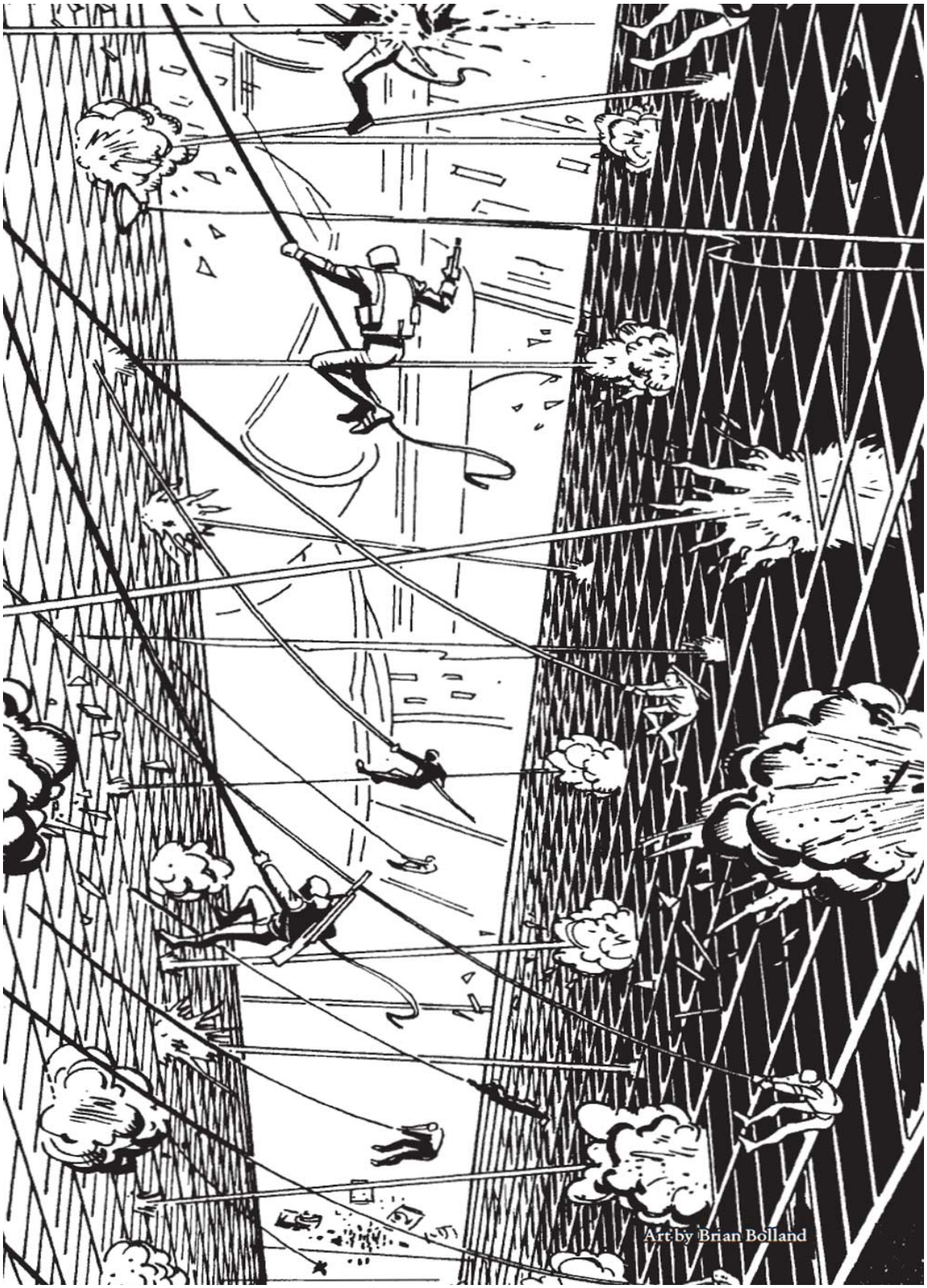
[216] It is revealed later that anti-mutant discrimination has been in place since the end of the Atomic Wars in the mid-21st Century.

[217] ***Judge Dredd Megazine*** Vol.1 #5 (1991) Script: Alan Grant, Artist: Jim Baikie, Letters: Tom Frame

[218] ***2000 AD*** Progs 603-604, 612 (1988-9) Script: John Wagner, Art: Will Simpson, Letters: Jack Potter

[219] ***2000 AD*** Progs 485-488 (1986). Young Leslie closely resembles Fredric March's portrayal of the eponymous monster in 1931's ***Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde***. In a piece of delightful Wagner/Grant wordplay, the Jeckles must 'hide' their son.

[220] ***Judge Dredd Megazine*** Vol.3 #70 (2000) Script: John Wagner, Art: Jock, Letters: David Bishop


Art by Brian Bolland

BLOCK WAR

Unemployment, violence, and the boiling pot

'***These blocks are under arrest!***'
– Judge Dredd, cover to ***2000 AD*** Prog 182 (1980)

WHEN ALAN GRANT turned up to his new job, he discovered he was actually unemployed.

'I was offered another job with a guy who published puzzle magazines,' he said, having quit as a sub-editor on ***2000 AD*** in the summer of 1980.[221] 'So I left, turned up on the Monday morning at the offices to start this job, and there was a guy I didn't recognise there, and I said "Hi, I'm Alan, I'm looking for Stewart, I'm starting work here today." And he said, "You're not starting work here today. This is my studio." And the guy had sold out the week before, but without bothering to tell me!'

Sharp-witted and intelligent, Grant was born in Bristol but moved to his parents' native Scotland as a child. While still a teenager in the 1960s he became a sub-editor at DCT, where he edited romance titles and wrote horoscopes.[222] Moving to London in 1970 and seeking work with rival IPC, he eventually became sub-editor on the short lived ***Starlord*** before moving onto ***2000 AD***. Yet, having been lured away by the promise of better-paying but non-existent work, he was now jobless.

Conversely, Wagner had too much work. Suffering from ill-health, he asked Grant – his housemate in London – if he could help with his weekly instalments of ***Judge Dredd***, mutant bounty hunter series ***Strontium Dog***, and wacky sci-fi private detective caper ***Robo-Hunter***. 'I think there are several times when we ended up writing all the stories in ***2000 AD*** between us,' he told the ***Comics Journal***.[223] 'So we started the nom de plumes. At last count we had about fourteen.'

This partnership of necessity began part-way through the sprawling 'Judge Child Quest' that occupied the bulk of 1980. In his own ***Odyssey***, Dredd hunted the cosmos for the powerful psychic 'Judge Child', encountering everything from carnivorous planets to a man vanishing in jigsaw-like pieces, and the murderous redneck Angel Gang, including the one-armed, headbutting maniac Mean Machine Angel.[224] Yet no matter how far he travelled, Dredd always had to return to the one place where he made sense.

The city.

As critic Tom Shapira points out in ***The Lawman***, Mega-City One was the strip's first star from the opening page of 'Judge Whitey'.[225] Like Devil's Island, it is a place of constant motion, a sprawling postmodern riot of architecture still with no canonical map of its boundaries or structure, its landmarks moving vast distances at the stroke of a pen. Like the image of Dredd himself, the city was Ezquerra's creation.

While still trying to pin down Dredd's character, Mills commissioned Ezquerra to expand backgrounds from the unused 'Bank Raid' into a full–page pin-up showing the city this future lawman would patrol.[226] What came back changed everything.

'I decided to make the buildings rounded and soar into the air, to house the many millions of people,' said Ezquerra, who produced a pin-up of a sweeping vista that combined the organic forms of Spanish architect Antoni Gaudí, the graceful curves of modernist architects like Eero Saarinen, and the psychedelic art of influential French comic book artist Jean 'Moebius' Giraud.[227]

'Pat was in raptures over it,' said art editor Doug Church, who coined the name 'Mega-City' after a feature in ***Time*** on the growing 'megalopolis' of America's eastern seaboard.[228] Used as the back cover of Prog 3, the image didn't just ignite Mills' imagination, it launched Dredd into the future – this could never be the near-future New York that Wagner had originally imagined, so Mills pushed the setting forward to the futuristic-sounding date of 2099.

A small map in the pin-up's corner explained that this was no longer merely the Big Apple, but a vast urban 'United States of the

West', analogous to Britain's original Thirteen Colonies. Saprophyte-like, Ezquerra's organic buildings would soon grow with the imagination of every artist that followed him and, by 1982, it had consumed the entire coast from Canada to Key West. Now ***this*** was the America of British imaginations: a land of unimaginable excess.

For Mills, Ezquerra's fever dream seemed beautifully utopian; ***Dan Dare***'s noble futurism had inspired architect Norman Foster,[229] perhaps this would give readers their own optimism about the future?[230]

But Wagner and Grant saw things very differently.

'***We've got a full-scale block war on our hands, Judge Dredd!***'

The week after Dredd returned from his cosmic quest, the narrow gap between the thin twin slabs of Rita Tushingham and Ernest Borgnine blocks was alive with gunfire, citizens shooting point blank at each other as raiding parties swung across the divide.[231]

'Block wars' '***were becoming an everyday feature of mega-city life,***' explained the narration, with rivalries between neighbouring housing blocks, sparked by some trivial incident, escalating into extreme violence. And with each block fielding its own heavily armed 'Citi-Def' ('city defence') militia, calling them 'wars' was no hyperbole. So, when Dredd returned from his quest, it was not to Mills' quixotic future city but to a crowded, polarised pressure cooker, where senseless violence was becoming a fact of life.

'***What makes people behave like this?***' one Judge asks, questioning why two 'well-off' blocks would attack each other. Forget the psychoanalysis, snaps Dredd: '***our business is to put a stop to it!***'

After the Judges fire shrapnel shells into the air, Dredd issues his final warning: surrender now and it's only five years apiece in the cubes. '***But how will he know we were fighting?***' questions one citizen. '***He's got no evidence!***' '***Judge Dredd always knows!***' answers his terror-struck comrade. He and hundreds of others file out, arms raised in surrender.

Readers had always known citizens lived in towers like these (even Dredd had his own apartment[232]) but it wasn't until 1979 that the two-

part ‘City Block’ revealed the realities of life within them, as Dredd – in the final (but decidedly more comedic) realisation of Wagner’s original conception – pursued a man for dropping a candy wrapper.

This story provided a seismic shift in the ***idea*** of the city – not a gleaming future utopia but a city on the edge, where bored and listless millions are ‘***crammed into vast cityblocks, each housing over 60,000 citizens! From birth in the cityblock hospital to death in the cityblock crematorium, it was possible for a citizen to spend his entire life without leaving his own block!***’[233]

These mimicked the tower blocks that blotted British skylines, including Wagner’s native Greenock and the ‘mini-Manhattan’ of Croydon in London, where Ezquerra settled after moving to the UK in 1972. The country’s mid-century mania for slum clearance and tower-building – beginning with the UK’s first tower block, a ten-storey affair in Essex opened in 1951 – was inspired by the vision of Swiss architect Le Corbusier, who dreamt of a ‘Radiant City’ of giant urban towers, ‘machines for living’.

Yet ‘the evil that Le Corbusier did lives after him,’ wrote urbanist Peter Hall, and these monuments to modernist utopianism soon became crowded concrete prisons for the poor and unemployed.[234] Built in 1972, London’s Trellick Tower was dubbed ‘the Tower of Terror’; the late ’50s Park Hill estate in Sheffield went from ‘streets in the sky’ to a ‘prison block’; in 1975, ninety-six per cent of residents said they wanted to leave Manchester’s Hulme Crescents, built just four years earlier and the largest public housing development in Europe; and the decaying, threatening Brutalist slabs of London’s vast Thamesmead estate became the backdrop of Stanley Kubrick’s violent 1971 film ***A Clockwork Orange***. These were the great failure of the post-war state: not glittering towers of modernity but vertical slums that bred social decay and violence.[235]

Similarly, Mega-City One’s blocks were overflowing with humanity and beset by petty tribalism. Each faceless tower has its own unique name, chosen ironically or drawn at random by Wagner and Grant from wider culture – one week a ***Carry On*** star, the next a philosopher – and with residents tied to their block physically, these identities ground their lives in intensely insular allegiances, a kind of

hyper-focused, violent, nationalistic rivalry matching any football team firm.

It is a recipe for disaster. '***One spark here and I've got a riot on my hands,***' Dredd said as he patrolled Charlton Heston Block in 'City Block'. '***Trouble has got to be stamped on instantly – without mercy – for the people's own good.***'

Not even the shooting galleries, punching-bag robots, and danger sports of the 'Aggro Dome', which debuted the very next issue (the '***latest in a long line of commercial attempts to cash in on – and control – the seething passions bred in a city of over 800 million close-packed people!***') are enough to quell the population's bubbling frustration.[236] A week later, the population of Charles Darwin Block were de-evolved by a science experiment gone wrong, literally creating a riotous 'urban jungle' that was only brought under control by letting it burn to the ground.[237]

Once again, the strip was reflecting the times: these stories were published just six months before Britain's inner-cities began to erupt.

On the afternoon of 2 April 1980, police raided the popular Black and White Café in St. Pauls, a poor, multi-racial inner-city area dubbed 'The Jungle' in a racist allusion both to its high population of Black Commonwealth immigrants and its reputation as a place of 'vice and shame'.[238]

The title of a ground-breaking 1979 study of Black life in Bristol, ***Endless Pressure***, summed up the atmosphere in an area regularly targeted by far-right groups and enduring constant police harassment under the 'sus' laws. The government's move away from manufacturing had led to fewer local apprenticeships and the local unemployment rate was fifteen per cent, three times the national average.[239]

Much like Notting Hill's Mangrove, the café was one of the few places left for unemployed young men to gather but was a frequent target of police raids. This raid, however, was the straw that broke the camel's back.

More than twenty officers – some from Bristol's equivalent of the SPG – were pelted with bricks, bottles and stones by a growing

crowd of angry Black and white youths. Police vehicles were overturned and one set on fire. A column of one hundred officers, some with riot shields they had only learned to use that afternoon, tried to march in but came under such a barrage they were forced to take cover under crates and behind dustbins. Whereas Dredd's decisive violence had ended the Tushingham/Borgnine block war, the police's show of strength only helped inflame it.

'Surely we should be advancing, not retreating?' one police chief forlornly pleaded as his men withdrew.[240] More than one hundred and forty people were arrested and sixteen, picked out as ringleaders, were charged with 'riotous assembly' – but all were later acquitted.

Coming a year after Thatcher's election, St. Pauls would prove to be a harbinger of what was to come.

Twelve months later, young people battled the police on the streets of Brixton in London in the biggest and most famous urban uprising in modern British history. Across two nights of rioting, almost three hundred police and at least sixty-five civilians were injured, vehicles were set alight, businesses burned down or looted, and Molotov cocktails were thrown for the first time on mainland Britain.[241]

It was followed by protests and violence across the country. The Black Parents Association branded the police station on Manchester's Moss Side 'the operational base of a racist army in occupation' and in July more than a thousand young people besieged the station during two nights of rioting.[242] The same month, similarly heavy policing and a botched arrest saw riots in the Toxteth area of Liverpool, which led to Merseyside police becoming the first English force to use tear gas in England to try to quell the unrest.

In the subsequent public inquiry into the rioting, Lord Leslie Scarman identified unemployment as 'a major factor in the complex pattern of conditions, which lies at the root of [these] disorders'. These were deprived areas, with large Black and Asian populations, which had already been badly affected by poverty, crime, and joblessness. In Brixton alone, more than half of young Black people were unemployed.

But this was now the age of 'law and order'. The government dismissed any explanation of systemic causes, instead framing the riots as merely 'criminal'. Thatcher insisted that boredom was no excuse because people had 'productive things to do' like cleaning and gardening, while employment secretary Norman Tebbit told people to get on their bikes and look for work,[243] a response satirised by Dredd when he rejects any analysis of block wars beyond countering the immediate violence with overwhelming force.

As the right-wing press portrayed Britain's 'inner-cities' (distinguishing them from the lawful, productive suburban 'outer-cities') as savage, lawless places filled with people who were lazy and violent, Dredd evolved from being a sci-fi policeman fighting futuristic felons to a stern maintainer of order in a dystopian megatropolis, the ***only*** thing that would prevent society from slipping into a Hobbesian 'war of all against all'.

'***In this tightly-packed community, tension could flare into violence in a moment,***' said the narration in 'City Block'. '***It took an iron legal system to control it: the Judges, with their powers of instant sentence…'*** Now, just like Harry Callaghan and San Francisco, Dredd's city existed in symbiosis with the man engineered to patrol its streets – a mega-city that ***needed*** a mega-cop.

And it had been in the second episode of 'City Block' that the reason for this simmering tension was made clear – virtually nobody in Mega-City One has a job.

AFTER THIRTY YEARS, it is caretaker Arnold Short's last day at work.

'***You-you don't suppose I could come down sometimes and... and help you out?'*** he meekly asks his robotic replacement as it hands him his paltry retirement gift in the second part of 'City Block'. '***Sorry, Arnold,***' it laments blankly, '***you're too inefficient.***'

Arnold is not alone – only thirteen per cent of the city population has a job, as millions are replaced by a vast slave underclass of robots. Initially, citizens were condemned as 'lazy', unwilling to do more than a few hours of work and cruelly abusive toward their robotic underlings – which led to the 'Robot Wars' in 1977,[244] a thinly disguised slave revolt 'gone wrong' in which carpenter droid Call-Me-

Kenneth leads a rebellion put down by Dredd only with the cooperation of 'loyal' robots, like his obsequious servant droid Walter the Wobot.[245]

Two years later and the consequences of this 'robot economy' came home. Robbed of employment – and, with it, the dignity and purpose of work – the citizens become desperate and violent.

In Harriet Beecher Stowe Block (a pointed reference to the author of the 1852 anti-slavery novel ***Uncle Tom's Cabin***), latter-day Luddites smash up a cleaning robot so they can use its 'antique tools' to do its job; '***Hot diggety!***' cries one with a beaming smile. '***We're working! We're really working!***'. Nearby, for want of something to do, a gang robs a travel bureau advertising ***'working holidays to the mines of Mutieland'***,[246] and a block 'leisure counsellor' – a brilliant comedic inversion of a careers advisor – tries to help a newly jobless resident adjust to her new life of permanent inactivity. Having exhausted old-time dancing, flower arranging, origami and alien spotting, his client is still unsatisfied. ***'Why should you have a job – why not me?'*** she shouts as she maces the counsellor, ties him up, and takes his position.

Arnold's reaction is no different. '***Without my job, I'd rather be dead!***' he screams as he fires a laser rifle at passers-by from his apartment in Benjamin Spock Block.[247] Dredd sentences him to a lifetime of hard labour, which makes the former caretaker overjoyed – '***Oh, thank you, Judge Dredd,***' he cries. '***Thank you so much! You're not heartless like they say – you're a good man! Hard labour for life! Yippee! I hope they put me on rock breaking! Rock breaking is useful work!***'

This ironically '***merciful***' sentence takes account of the fact that Arnold is suffering from 'future shock'. Originally defined by futurist Alvin Toffler in 1970 as 'shattering stress and disorientation' brought on by the 'uncontrolled, non-selective nature of our lunge into the future',[248] 'future shock' was introduced in the strip in 1977 with 'futsies' unable to cope with the intensity of twenty-second century life and turning violent.[249] Yet it is not just the speed of change in Mega-City One, but its profundity.

What Wagner postulated was a world where humanity wasn't just struggling to keep up, it had lost the race. The robots and mass unemployment of Mega-City One are more than a simple parody of the Thatcher era or a science fiction staple, they are a prediction of the consequences of the capitalist reality we now find ourselves in, where the state chooses to discipline 'surplus' populations rather than help them.[250]

WIDESPREAD AUTOMATION AND outsourcing to cheaper countries was already well underway by the time of 'City Block' and 'Block Wars'. The welfare states and bustling industry of twentieth century 'Fordism'[251] had promised jobs and good health, but in 1979 Thatcher's government embarked on a fundamental reordering of an economy in crisis.

This new ethos would be dubbed 'neoliberalism'. It ditched the Keynesian orthodoxy of 'full employment' and state economic intervention, replacing it with the 'monetarist' mantra of free markets and small states advocated by economists such as Milton Friedman, who insisted no price was too high to defeat the spectre of inflation.

But the cure seemed worse than the disease. Cheaper imports reduced inflation but devastated domestic industries. Thatcher's Conservatives had needled their opponents with the campaign slogan 'Labour isn't working', but now the unemployment rate doubled. The industrial heartlands of northern England, south Wales, and Scotland were ravaged. One in five people in Northern Ireland was out of work.[252] Unemployment sailed past three million.

Few figures better encapsulate this time than Jimmy 'Yosser' Hughes, from screenwriter Alan Bleasdale's ***Boys from the Blackstuff***, which aired on BBC2 from 1980 to 1982. With his tragicomic catchphrases of 'Gizza job!' ('give me a job') and 'I can do that!', his hopeless pursuit of any job – however menial, however temporary – betrayed a profound desperation that easily boiled over into violence.

For many, having a job became a privilege, not a right.

Nowhere do Wagner and Grant reflect this better than in the 1985 story 'Sunday Night Fever', a perfect transposition of the tragedy of

mass unemployment with the comical desperation of the jobseeker,[253] taking the gnawing anxiety of a Sunday evening before the start of a new work week and turning it on its head: '***Tonight, you see, is the night before Monday. The night when the lucky few pack their lunch pails and roofer bags in preparation for that next day's toil. The night when the vast majority – the teeming millions of unemployed – look out on the prospect of yet another bleak week, another seven sad days in their empty hopeless lives.***' Such desperation causes some to throw rocks at the job centre (for which they receive a split skull and three months) or commit sponsored group suicide (the sole survivor gets twenty for complicity in his fellow leapers' deaths).

After hundreds of failed job applications ('***Thank you for your job application. Get lost,***' reads one rejection) Ruby Foulclough drowns her sorrows and mourns the one job she ***almost*** got – a literal 'canary-person' at a gas works. In a drunken rage, she mistakes a fellow customer for the man who got the job and beats him to death. Her fellow patrons quickly conclude that this can only mean one thing – there's a vacancy going!

Word quickly spreads of the phantom job and thousands turn up at the gas plant to claim it. ***'Emergency code red! We have a possible Job Riot!'*** shouts Dredd when he realises what is happening, his alarm suggesting this happens frequently enough that the phrase requires no explanation. Ignoring all protestations, the mob pushes aside the plant's very-much-alive gas sniffer and begins smashing pipes in a grimly enthusiastic enactment of the job they think they are vying for – except the broken pipes unleash a deadly cloud of gas, which strips the flesh from the bones of thousands.

Blame for the mass deaths falls on Foulclough's shoulder and, as she is sent to the cubes, the narration provides a sobering epilogue: '***In a way, Ruby Foulclough is lucky. For her, unemployment is no longer an issue. For millions of others, unfortunate enough to be at liberty, the agony must continue.***' That line – '***unfortunate enough to be at liberty***' – reads like a dagger. For millions, the 'liberty' under Thatcherism now meant only the freedom to be jobless, vulnerable, and bereft.

In this, Wagner and Grant predicted the global rise of the ***precariat***.[254]

COINED BY ECONOMIST Guy Standing in 2011, the precariat are an emerging class of people who suffer from job insecurity and low pay, who are mired in insecure 'zero-hour' contracts and enjoy none of the security or benefits of permanent work. But it is about more than just jobs – the lives of the precariat are defined by a constant state of anxious insecurity, dispossession, isolation, and marginalisation.[255] It is the outcome of the neoliberal agenda of deregulation, privatisation, fragmentation, and small government that began in the 1970s, a vision of society as individual units of production and consumption.

'Many millions of people are experiencing a precarious existence,' wrote Standing,[256] 'in temporary jobs, doing short-time labour, linked strangely to employment agencies, and so on, most without any assurance of state benefits or the perks being received by the ***salariat*** [those with long-term employment security and benefits]. Most lack any sense of career, for they have no secure social and economic identity in occupational terms… The precariat is socially and economically vulnerable, subject to anomic attitudes and without any social memory on which to draw to give them a sense of existential security.'

This is the nature of what work is left in Mega-City One, a situation that inevitably leads to crime. In 1983's 'The Suspect', in a parody of government surveillance programmes and increasing punitive measures against those working while claiming benefits, Dredd catches citizen John Kilroy Henders holding down multiple part-time jobs: as a living clothes dummy, a waiter, and an overnight 'bed tester'.[257]

Taking him in, Dredd lambasts him for his greed, echoing the rhetoric directed at the precariat: ***'Your selfishness denied two other citizens the chance of employment***'. ***'I-I just love working, I guess,***' Henders confesses. '***I know it was wrong but I couldn't help myself. I'm asking for two weekend jobs to be taken into consideration.***' In a city of mass joblessness, possessing more than one job is a serious offence.

Dredd should have been more sympathetic – he had already tasted the pain of the precariat. As part of a sting to draw out a dangerous criminal while serving as Judge Marshal of Luna-One, he pretended to quit as a Judge and took a job as a street sweeper. Unable to keep up with his robotic colleagues, a cowed and dejected Dredd was fired – convincing the criminal to break cover and try to kill what he thought was now a broken man.[258]

While some citizens work as 'trolley jerks' and place expensive goods in shoppers' baskets so they'll buy them mistakenly or out of embarrassment, and others lease body space for advertising, the strip comedically inverted such indignities, with some characters taking pride, and even finding fame and happiness, in such menial tasks as being human furniture and live wax-work figures. [259] [260] [261] [262]

But while they portrayed the blackly comic, they also depicted the darkly bleak. One citizen hands over his wife to loan sharks as collateral for a loan he can use to bribe his way into a factory job, only to be outbid and then mugged – his wife destined to be dismembered for transplants.[263] In a retelling of Daphne du Maurier's 1936 novel ***Jamaica Inn***, desperate communities living in sectors unfit for human habitation resort to causing pile-ups on the nearby motorway so they can raid the stationary vehicles.[264]

This all echoes what Standing calls a cocktail of 'anger, anomie, anxiety, and alienation'.[265] 'To dwell precariously is to live life in pieces,' Simon Hallsworth and David Brotherton wrote in ***Urban Disorder and Gangs: A Critique and a Warning*** in 2011. 'It is to live mired in stress, anxiety and insecurity. Unsurprisingly, a deeply internalized and often inchoate anger is never far away, often coupled by a sense of deep resentment.'

Hammered by hopelessness, Ruby Foulclough's rage led to thousands of deaths. Arnold Short became a killer because he was unwillingly stripped of a job that gave his life meaning. Residents of Harriet Beecher Stowe Block may have revelled in the novelty of stealing back work from robots, but soon the shock of the future wore off, leaving only frustration, anger, and boredom at being 'cast aside' by the demands of capital.

Taken together, the city's sardine-tin housing and the lack of work make disorder not just likely but inevitable. Like the precariat, the unemployed of Mega-City One become a new 'dangerous class' and so the state relies on the one power it has left: discipline.

'THERE ARE POCKETS of our society that are not only broken, but frankly sick,' Prime Minister David Cameron declared after riots spread across London and then across the country in August 2011.[266]

Emerging from a peaceful march protesting the police shooting of unarmed twenty-nine-year-old Mark Duggan in north London, the riots – the biggest in modern English history – lasted for five nights as fifteen thousand people took to the streets in towns and cities across England. Five people died, three hundred police officers were injured, there was widespread looting, and an estimated half a billion pounds of property damage.

Just as before, the language of 'law and order' framed the rioting as mere criminality, Conservative Justice Secretary Ken Clarke blamed 'a feral underclass' for what Liberal Democrat deputy prime minister Nick Clegg decried as 'needless and opportunist theft and violence'. Rejecting the need for a Scarman-esque public inquiry and depoliticising the disorder, the Prime Minister claimed the riots had been orchestrated by violent gangs (an assertion that was soon proven to be false) before declaring 'all-out war on gangs and gang culture'.

The state's response to the rioting was zealously punitive. Cameron gave the police permission to use rubber bullets and put six units of water cannon, a weapon never used in England before, on twenty-four-hour notice.[267] In courts running through the night, sentencing guidelines were formally abandoned as rioters were given sentences up to four times higher than those usually handed down for similar offences, including one person given six months for stealing a bottle of water. 'Justice, when it's swift, is most effective,' the Chief Crown Prosecutor for the North-West Nazir Afzal insisted,[268] 'it's about ensuring that they see the shock and awe of the criminal justice system.'

Yet the violence was not, as was claimed, an outbreak of feral behaviour, nor was it greedy 'chavs' obsessed with 'bling' using protests as an excuse to loot and rampage. It was instead a response to the new political order: austerity.

THE RECESSION THAT followed the global financial panic of 2008 was the worst since the Great Depression of 1929. Millions of people were suddenly thrown into lives of insecurity as jobs were lost, investments disappeared, and certainties evaporated.

At the same time, claiming it was necessary to protect the economy, the government embarked on an unprecedented slashing of the public purse in the name of 'austerity'. While the National Health Service and education were ostensibly protected, billions were cut from benefits payments, social services, and public services, including the police, road maintenance, libraries, courts, prisons, and local government. Between 2010 and 2012, the country saw a forty per cent[269] real terms cut in public investment. Youth services saw cuts of almost seventy-five per cent. In Haringey, where the 2011 riots began, the budget for youth services was cut by eighty-five per cent.[270]

Those most in need – the poor, the vulnerable, the already marginalised – bore the brunt of this 'organised state abandonment',[271] with already deprived areas facing the biggest cuts to services. The use of food banks increased exponentially. Child poverty rose. Health inequalities widened. As jobs went, the ranks of the precariat swelled. Unemployment shot up, what new jobs arrived were largely temporary, part-time, or on 'zero hour' contracts. Those between eighteen and twenty-four accounted for almost thirty per cent of the total rise in the unemployment rate brought about by the recession.[272]

If the 1981 riots had highlighted the crisis of the post-war welfare state, the 2011 riots highlighted the crisis of its neoliberal successor. As criminologist Tim Hope stated, 'momentarily, the lid was lifted on the simmering problems of social order in contemporary Britain, which the authorities seemed powerless to prevent from boiling

over… government has tried to shove the lid back onto the cauldron by depriving the rioters of ulterior motive.'[273]

'I STILL TO this day don't class it as a riot,' said one young man in Tottenham. 'I think it was a protest.' Interviews with rioters found that anger, frustration, and a 'pervasive sense of injustice' were a consistent theme from communities populated by members of the precariat, who were overwhelmingly young, poor, unemployed, educationally deprived, multi-ethnic and involved in petty crime.[274]

Asked what he would like to see change, one nineteen-year-old unemployed man from Birmingham said: 'I've gone past caring. Just think there's no point in me wishing, wanting things to happen'. This was the 'diffuse and generalised rage of a dispossessed population angry at a system that has failed them but with no vision of an alternative' beyond what philosopher Slavoj Žižek called a 'zero-degree protest, a violent action demanding nothing'.[275]

'In the face of such apparent hopelessness,' the 'Reading the Riots' report said, 'it is perhaps unsurprising that many of those we interviewed thought that further riots were likely. Not least, it seems, because many felt that little was likely to change.'

Yet rather than arrest austerity, the state quickly focused on the 'criminality' of the rioters and demanded the police manage the chaos government policies were causing.

Forty years before, 'City Block' had satirically identified exactly who benefits from a crisis of public order created by mass unemployment and desperation: the Judges themselves. '***For some there was work a-plenty – the Judges!***' the narration cried. For austerity wasn't just the cause of social unrest, but also the source of a new drive towards authoritarian policing.

'***MARX BROTHERS THEY may be, funny they ain't! Mow 'em down!***' Dredd shouts as the Judges pour fire into the midst of a four-way block war, as a cohort of academy cadets under Judge-Tutor Schwartz observes.[276]

In a mocking satire of the lofty ideals of town planners who believed they could engineer happy communities in housing

developments like Hulme Crescents and Thamesmead, these blocks – perfectly named Groucho, Chico, Harpo, and Karl – were built in close proximity to '***promote inter-block harmony and a sense of greater community***', yet '***like many Mega-City Housing Dept experiments it was an abject failure***'.

Using knock-out gas, truncheons, and riot foam that solidifies and incapacitates on contact, Dredd works his way through the chaos before handing down punitive sixty-year sentences to make an example of whoever jammed automatic 'riot doors' open and placing all four blocks under solitary confinement.

Schwartz comments that the high casualty rate is '***acceptable in the circumstances***' but one of her charges is not so sure. '***Wouldn't it be better if we changed the social situation? Make the citizens happy, so they didn't want to fight?***' he asks after witnessing the carnage.

'***What are you,***' Schwartz sneers, '***some kind of liberal?***'

Despite the massive human and material cost of such block wars, the one thing absent is any question of the Judges doing anything to prevent them. '***It is not our job to care,***' said Dredd in 'City Block', '***only to uphold the law!***', reinforcing the fact that the Judges, like the police, exist to maintain order.

Paul Rogers, a scholar on security issues, described this as 'liddism' – elites using violence to 'keep the lid on things' and maintain control rather than transform the social and economic structures that lead to the pot boiling over in the first place.

'The reality is that the police exist primarily as a system for managing and even producing inequality by suppressing social movements and tightly managing the behaviours of poor and non-white people: those on the losing end of economic and political arrangements,' said Alex Vitale, author of ***The End of Policing***.[277]

This is reflected in the origins of policing in Victorian London, where the urban poor, who used riot as a weapon of political expression, were the source of a moral panic about lawlessness and vice.[278] When the police were created in the 1820s, it was the promise to control the 'dangerous classes' of this first precariat that won them the support of the propertied upper and middle classes.

The interregnum of the post-war period, when rising wages and the welfare state allowed the police to pose as effective crime-fighters, fell apart in the 1960s and '70s as they were unable to stop rising crime rates or disorder. Instead, they were called upon first to discipline working class union power and then police the precariat of the new neoliberal order.

'It is a population for which the liberal social contract is effectively under suspension,' wrote Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff in ***The Truth About Crime***, 'for which the Leviathan seems merely nasty, brutish and short-sighted – being more concerned with surveillance, secrecy, securitization, and servicing capital than with serving civil society…ever more committed to forcing an ineffable distinction between respectable citizen-populations and lumpen-populations; again, those decommissioned, disposable workers.'

In America, police budgets have ballooned with every new disorder to allow them to deal with the problems created by a neoliberal system that refuses to invest in public services, whereas the British police were not spared from austerity. Decades of generous budgets, begun under Thatcher, came to an end as the total number of police officers decreased and funds shrank – but these increased demands mean that over-stretched police forces have fallen into repressive easy fixes.

Despite the police's own watchdog raising serious questions about the effectiveness of stop-and-search powers and their role in helping foster the riots, the police use of the tactic has boomed, creating even more anger and mistrust.[279]

'The police have been told that they are the solution to all this,' wrote Vitale.[280] 'They are to use systems of surveillance, harassment, arrest, and violence targeting the most vulnerable individuals and communities to produce social order; a social order that the targets of that policing rarely benefit from… Authoritarianism is, at heart, rooted in the world view that problems of social order must be addressed through repressive means, which is the fundamental method of policing.'

THE PAST DECADE has proven that we are closer to Mega-City One than even at the dawn of Thatcherism. And, like successive governments, the Judges refuse to act.

Even when the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic forced the British government to effectively suspend its neoliberal austerity programme and introduce the 'furlough' programme – in which workers left unemployed or idle received up to eighty per cent of their former wages from the state – it merely tacked our world even more closely to Dredd's.

With almost total unemployment, Mega-City One's citizens are no strangers to the dole queue, that great symbol of Thatcherite Britain, and city blocks are usually portrayed as state-owned and (badly) state-run. But this is not a kind of Fordist regime of welfarism or a progressive 'Universal Basic Income', but rather a system that – as political theorist Isabell Lorey points out in regard to neoliberalism – provides the bare minimum to keep the precariat it has created in line.

'Precarization has become an instrument of government [that] must not pass a certain threshold that it seriously endangers the existing order,' Lorey wrote in 2015's ***State of Insecurity***, 'in particular, it must not lead to insurrection. Managing this threshold is what makes up the art of governing today.'

The Judges don't provide welfare because they ***care*** about the population (the cruelties of their faceless bureaucracy prove that) but because to not do so would unleash forces even they could not control. It is not that they cannot solve such problems or learn from their mistakes, they choose not to. The city as a machine works perfectly – if the status quo maintains and justifies their existence, change would undermine it.

AS HE DROVE away from that first block war between Tushingham and Borgnine blocks, Dredd dismissed concerns of his future after his failure in the search for Judge Child with a gruff '***there's work to do***'. As a man of action, his gaze is micro, not macro; it is a means of depoliticising his work, converting it into a kind of simple problem-solving shorn of politics and wider context – the same 'ours not to

reason why' unthinking loyalty that Tennyson placed into the mouths of the doomed Light Brigade.

Inherited from his cowboy antecedents, this narrow, nonchalant apoliticality chimes with the response to the disorder of 2011, which framed it as mere criminality while depoliticising its causes. However, the material, organisational and political preparations of neoliberal governments and the police make it clear that they are all too aware that the system makes misery and its explosions inevitable.

'***Maybe the contamination is the city itself,***' ponders one Judge after hundreds of citizens calmly throw themselves from the roof of a city block, none of the survivors able to explain what compelled them to do so.[281]

The Judges dub this mass hysteria 'Lemming Syndrome', yet even when they understand the condition that led to it – '***Residents on permanent welfare – less than one per cent employment – boring, humdrum, hopeless lives… sometimes dying may seem no big thing***' – their response is a shrug that, perhaps, one day a cure will be found. '***Until then we keep the riot foam handy, huh?***' quips Dredd.

In the despair of mass unemployment and the violence of block wars we can see our own world of austerity reflected back at us, a pressure cooker constantly at the point of boiling over, where the lack of work has left millions without purpose or voice, and where spasmodic eruptions of violence are not cured but merely contained.

'Neoliberal regimes are doomed to become police states,' wrote French philosopher Frédéric Gros,[282] 'as it will become ever more necessary to contain the explosions of misery.' Judge Dredd presages our age of growing neoliberal authoritarianism, where the forces of 'security' increasingly exist not to help turn down the heat but to screw the lid down ever tighter.

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[221] Interview with Alan Grant by Andy Diggle, 2000AD.org (1997) https://bit.ly/3n0OyVK

[222] 'It became a competition between [Grant and fellow sub-editors John Hodgman and John Wagner] to see who could write the most ridiculous

horoscope,' Grant told the ***Judge Dredd Megazine*** in 2008. 'It got worse and worse. ***"Sagittarius, the stars are against you today – it might be safer to stay inside. Do not be surprised if a close family member suffers an accident!"***

[223] ***The Comics Journal*** No. 122 (1988)

[224] ***2000 AD*** Progs 156-181 (1980), Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Brian Bolland, Ron Smith & Mick McMahon, Letters: Tom Frame

[225] Tom Shapira, ***The Lawman*** (2020)

[226] Pat Mills, ***Be Pure! Be Vigilant! Behave!*** (2017)

[227] Colin M. Jarman & Peter Acton, ***Judge Dredd: The Mega-History*** (1995)

[228] The idea of northeastern America becoming one huge urbanised 'megalopolis' had been made famous in the 1960s by the work of French geographer Jean Gottmann, but was originally conceived by idiosyncratic Scottish town planner Patrick Geddes in his 1915 book, ***Cities in Evolution***.

[229] Jonathan Glancey, 'Sufferin' satellites! We've built the future!' – theguardian.com (28 April 2008) https://bit.ly/3O5ZLjX

[230] Mills (2017) ***ibid.***

[231] ***2000 AD*** Prog 182 (1980) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Brian Bolland, Letters: Tom Frame

[232] Dredd's block was later revealed to be named as 'Rowdy Yates Block', a reference to Clint Eastwood's character in 1960s TV western ***Rawhide***.

[233] ***2000 AD*** Progs 117-118 (1979) Script: John Wagner, Art: Ron Smith, Letters: Tom Frame

[234] Peter Hall, ***Cities of Tomorrow: An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design Since 1880*** (2014)

[235] Lynsey Hanley, ***Estates: An Intimate History*** (2007)

[236] ***2000 AD*** Prog 183 (1980) Script: Alan Grant & Kelvin Gosnell, Art: Mick McMahon, Letters: Tom Frame

[237] ***2000 AD*** Progs 184-185 (1980) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Mick McMahon, Letters: Tom Frame

[238] Simon Peplow, ***Race and Riots in Thatcher's Britain*** (2019)

[239] Laurie O'Garro, 'The 1980 St Paul's "Riots"', theeverydaymagazine.co.uk (7 October 2020) https://bit.ly/39DKkQY

[240] Martin Kettle & Lucy Hodges, ***Uprising! The Police, the People, and the Riots in Britain's Cities*** (1982)

[241] Lauren Collins, 'London's Burning' – newyorker.com (8 August 2011) https://bit.ly/3OsczR8

[242] Ed Glinert, ***The Manchester Compendium: A Street-by-Street History of England's Greatest Industrial City*** (2008)

[243] Simon Parker & Rowland Atkinson, 'Disorderly cities and the policy-making field: the 1981 English riots and the management of urban decline' in ***British Politics*** #15 (2020)

[244] ***2000 AD*** Progs 10-17 (1977) Script: John Wagner, Art: Carlos Ezquerra, Ron Turner, Mick McMahon & Ian Gibson, Letters: John Aldrich, Bill Nuttall, Jack Potter, Tony Jacob, Peter Knight

[245] Their rebellion crushed, the city's robots meekly returned to their labour and Wagner went on to portray them as comically resigned to their fate, sentient enough to understand the grim realities of their circumstances but unable to break free.

[246] ***'Gruelling 15-hour day! Dangerous! Risk of skin disease! Harsh overseers! Book now – 20% reduction for work clubs and family groups!'***

[247] Spock was an American paediatrician and best-selling author whose rejection of corporal punishment and stern discipline was criticised by conservatives for propagating 'permissiveness'.

[248] Almost eighty years before, Austrian physician Max Nordau had diagnosed the same malady, blaming growing cases of 'hysteria' on people who are exhausted by the hectic city's excess of stimuli and 'unable to keep up with the rapid development of modern society'.

[249] '22nd Century Futsie', ***2000 AD*** Prog 45 (1977). Script: John Wagner, Art: Ian Gibson, Letters: Tony Jacob

One of Wagner's better stories set on Luna-One, in which overworked office worker Arthur Goodworthy finally snaps under the extreme pressure of working for the exploitative Moonie corporation and begins attacking people.

[250] The word 'robot' itself is a Czech import from ***robota***, meaning 'drudgery' or 'hard work' – devised by the brother of playwright Karel Čapek and transplanted into English in his 1920 play ***R.U.R.*** (Rossrum's Universal Robots), which portrays a robot rebellion of synthetic workers.

[251] 'Fordism' arose in the 1920s to describe the system of mass production pioneered by American industrialist Henry Ford's Ford Motor Company, before

becoming shorthand for the post-war period of the political and social order of advanced capitalism.

[252] ***BBC***, 'The Thatcher years in statistics', bbc.co.uk (9 April 2013) https://bbc.in/3NczsY8

[253] ***2000 AD*** Progs 416-418 (1985) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Cam Kennedy, Letters: Tom Frame

[254] The portmanteau merges 'precarious' with 'proletariat'

[255] Guy Standing, ***The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*** (2011)

[256] Guy Standing, ***Work and Basic Income*** (2009)

[257] ***2000 AD*** Prog 342 (1983) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Cam Kennedy, Letters: Tom Frame

[258] 'The Oxygen Desert' ***2000 AD*** Progs 48-49 (1978) Script: John Wagner, Artist: Ian Gibson, Letters: Tony Jacob

[259] 'My Beautiful Career', ***Judge Dredd Megazine*** #215 (2004) Script: John Wagner, Artist: Simon Coleby, Colour: Chris Blythe, Letters: Tom Frame

[260] Advert in ***Judge Dredd Vol.1*** #1 (1990)

[261] 'The Rise and Fall of Chair Man Dilbert' ***2000 AD*** Progs 1012-1013 (1996) Script: John Wagner, Artist: Trevor Hairsine, Letters: Tom Frame

[262] 'What the Hitler Saw', ***2000 AD*** Progs 1728-1729 (2011) Script: Al Ewing, Artist: Leigh Gallagher, Colour: Eva De La Cruz, Letters: Annie Parkhouse

[263] 'The Body Sharks', ***2000 AD*** Progs 209-210 (1981) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Artist: Colin Wilson, Letters: Tom Frame

[264] 'The Wreckers', ***2000 AD*** Progs 374-375 (1984) Script: John Wagner, Alan Grant, Artist: Steve Dillon, Letters: Tom Frame

[265] Standing (2011) ***ibid.***

[266] Emma Thelwell, 'Were the rioters a 'feral underclass'?' – channelfour.com (6 September 2011) https://bit.ly/3xwbroY

[267] Andrew Sparrow, 'David Cameron: Police can use water cannon to control riots' – theguardian.com (10 August 2011) https://bit.ly/3CxRIcA

[268] Quoted in Connor Woodman, 'The End of Political Policing: why riots, the far-Right and shoplifting shouldn't be policed.' – versobooks.com (27 April 2018) https://bit.ly/3zNnoJF

[269] Emmanuel Onapa, 'Ten Years After the London Riots, Not Enough Has Changed' – tribunemag.co.uk (8 May 2021) https://bit.ly/3QPPLNd

[270] Niamh McIntyre, Pamela Duncan and Haroon Siddique, 'Conditions that led to 2011 riots still exist today, experts warn' – theguardian.com (30 July 2021) https://bit.ly/3zJre6r

[271] School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) seminar https://bit.ly/3jm4wYJ

[272] Simon Hallsworth and David Brotherton, ***Urban Disorder and Gangs: A Critique and a Warning*** (2011)

[273] Tim Hope, 'Riots, pure and simple?' in ***Criminal Justice Matters*** #87 (2012)

[274] Paul Lewis, Tim Newburn, Matthew Taylor, Catriona McGillivray, Aster Greenhill, Harold Frayman, & Rob Proctor, 'Reading the Riots: Investigating England's summer of disorder' (2011)

[275] John Lea & Simon Hallsworth, 'Understanding the riots' – ***Criminal Justice Matters*** #87 (2012)

[276] 'A Day at the Block Wars', ***2000 AD*** Prog 448 (1985) Script: John Wagner, Alan Grant, Artist: Ron Smith, Letters: Tom Frame

[277] Alex Vitale, 'The police are not here to protect you' – redpepper.org.uk (17 October 2017) https://bit.ly/3n37P90

[278] John Lea, 'From denizen to citizen and back: governing the Precariat through crime' in ***Criminal Justice Matters***, 93:1 (2013)

[279] Lewis, Newburn, Taylor, McGillivray, Greenhill, Frayman, Proctor (2011), ***ibid.***

[280] Alex Vitale, 'Cressida Dick isn't the problem. The police are the problem' – opendemocracy.net (12 February 2022) https://bit.ly/3O8lY0y

[281] 'The Lemming Syndrome', ***2000 AD*** Prog 445 (1985) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Artist: Ron Smith, Letters: Tony Jacob

[282] Frédéric Gros, ***The Security Principle: From Serenity to Regulation*** (2019)

Art by Ian Gibson

KNOCK ON THE DOOR

The 'crime swoop', suspicion, and criminalisation

'B-B-But we're innocent, Judge!'
'Nobody's innocent, citizen. We're just here to determine the level of your guilt.'
– Judge Dredd, 'Graveyard Shift' (1983)

'***A knock on the door in the middle of the night. It was the sound every Mega-City citizen dreaded to hear.***'

KNOCK! KNOCK!

'***A bell was normal, expected. A knock was different.***'

KNOCK! KNOCK!

'***You heard a knock right down in the pit of your soul. Judges never used a bell when they could knock, it was standard operating procedure.***'

From the insistent rapping to the ironic conclusion, in 1981's 'Knock on the Door' readers see the reality of life under the Judges not just through the fisheye lens of a peephole but through the eyes of the citizens.[283]

'***Open up, citizen!***' demands Dredd. '***This is a 59c – routine crime swoop!***'

One of the strip's most over-the-top, grimly black concepts, these routine searches can be carried out at any time on the home of any citizen, who must helplessly watch as Judges tear walls and furniture apart and cast suspicion over every aspect of their life. Fines and cube time are handed out for comically minor crimes, from overdue library books to lapsed goldfish licences.

Introduced in 1979's 'Battle of the Black Atlantic',[284] the 59c is the liberal ideal of law enforcement turned upside-down – warrants and the presumption of innocence replaced by a blanket assumption of

guilt as the population's everyday errors are turned into arrestable offences.

All of this is justified with a roundabout logic that the discovery of any malfeasance, no matter how small, legitimises the use of such despotic powers, a circular reasoning that says, 'because we are suspicious of you, there must be evidence of your guilt'.[285] '***Looks like we've got the wrong man,***' laments a Judge when he informs Dredd that they have staged a bust at the wrong address. '***There's no such thing as the wrong man! Book him!***' Dredd snaps, but his colleagues question what the charge should be? '***How long have you two been on the job?'*** Dredd snarls. '***For whatever you can find!***'

Sure enough, a permitless goldfish seals the luckless citizen's fate.[286]

Even the absence of crime is grounds for suspicion. When one search turns up nothing, Dredd orders twenty-four hour surveillance on the seemingly 'perfect' citizen: '***Everyone but everyone commits crime, often without knowing it,***' he snaps. '***Little things that aren't worth more than a caution. It's normal… but this joker hasn't done one thing wrong! He's so clean he makes me suspicious!***'[287]

The perversity of these powers is never clearer than in 1983's seven-part 'The Graveyard Shift'.[288] During a lull in the night-time barrage of crazies, suicides, block war, shootings ('***That inconsiderate sniper's made us late for the theatre! Kill him, Henry!***'), and illegal 'bite fighting' rings, Dredd and Judge Hershey while away their time performing random 'crime swoops' on the first block they come to.

In comic contrast to the far worse crimes raging outside, one citizen is caught with sugar (a now-prohibited substance), banned videos, an unlicensed firearm, and – horror of horrors – a dirty waste disposal unit. As he is sent outside to join others caught in this dragnet, the narration explains the rationale: '***Crime swoops are harsh, but effective. They serve to uncover much illegal activity and act as a positive deterrent to other potential lawbreakers.***'

Now, Dredd's own words from years before began to sound less heroic: as his shuttle returned to Earth after his tenure on Luna-One, he had waxed lyrical about the cityscape before him: '***Eight hundred million people,***' he thought, '***and every one of them a potential criminal.***' His penultimate word is redundant – to the Judges, ***every*** citizen is ***already*** a criminal.[289]

But far from the crime-ridden streets, it was a vision of the criminalisation of everyday life brought to life in the bucolic Essex countryside.

THE ***TELEGRAPH MAGAZINE*** posed them like partners in a buddy cop movie – in his leather jacket, wild-maned Alan Grant brandished an air gun as he stood over John Wagner, holding a ***Judge Dredd Annual*** in his arms.[290] Neither looks comfortable.

With their partnership now in its stride, their workload was phenomenal: weekly instalments of ***Dredd*** and ***Strontium Dog***, as well as ***Anderson, Psi Division*** – the spin-off series about Dredd's psychic partner, Judge Cassandra Anderson – the football-themed ***Roy of the Rovers***, ***Battle***, and the relaunched ***Eagle***, as well as the six-days-a-week ***Judge Dredd*** strip for the ***Daily Star*** newspaper.[291]

Interviewed in 1983 about 'Dredd's move into America',[292] the pair were shown on the living room floor of Grant's home with the raw material for their writing – the day's newspapers – between them as they pared away at its essence until its bare sinews sang with dark humour and violent irony.[293]

This partnership changed 'Dredd'. 'John is [a] very down to Earth, no-nonsense kind of writer,' said artist Arthur Ranson, who worked with them both.[294] 'Stuff happens and it's so real and concrete... Alan, his head's all over the place, in far-away places.' The way they complemented each other brought new dimensions to Dredd. Mills had seen him as harsh but heroic, while he was a necessary evil for Wagner, who was simultaneously appalled and attracted by his single-minded severity. Grant, however, held no such fondness – he saw Dredd purely as a jack-booted totalitarian.

Perhaps this was because he understood the unfairness ingrained in power. Not only beaten at school and regularly expelled, he was

also the first 'Dredd' writer with real first-hand experience of the criminal legal system – he served three months in 1968 for possession of half an LSD tablet and, after his release, the police staked out his flat.[295]

However, both writers brought their own particular distaste for authority. Raised in the mining community of Gordonstown, near Edinburgh, Grant was regularly beaten in front of his schoolmates for being naturally left-handed before being forced to write with his right hand. 'And because it was totally unnatural to me, everything came out backwards and I got belted further for that,' he said,[296] 'because the headmaster said I was doing it deliberately. So that was my dislike of authority established at a very early age.'

A pre-teen Wagner, by contrast, had started to get in trouble with the police in his native Ohio. 'I just did a lot of bad things,' he confessed.[297] 'Like I set an apartment block on fire. It wasn't deliberate! [...] it was probably bad parenting. My mum, she worked all the time, and my dad was pretty useless, worse than useless. I was just a wild kid, I didn't like being told what to do, I didn't like being bossed around by the cops. I've never really respected authority that much.'

Their Dredd soon developed into a mixture of gruff cynicism and even a touch of humorous cruelty. 'When we started working together it used to worry me an awful lot,' Grant confessed.[298] 'We used to have severe lengthy arguments about whether what we were writing was the correct thing to present to kids for reading material.'

This tension would eventually split the partnership apart, yet for now the 59c was a comical way to comment not just on the realities of being policed by Britain's supposedly benign 'Bobbies' but how being 'law abiding' is no defence against authoritarianism, and – in contrast to liberal notions of the rule of law as the guarantor of personal freedom – the law itself can be a tool of oppression and injustice.

This is never sharper than in the strip's satire of one of the most used, the most controversial, and the most criticised police powers: stop and search.

'I've seen thousands like you, Mullard,' says Dredd.[299] '***Look at you! Quiverin' all over – just itchin' to break the law. It's eating you up inside.***'

Fresh out of the cubes, Mullard is a 'petty crime addict' suffering from an irresistible urge to commit misdemeanours. Despite knowing that his next offence will result in a state-mandated lobotomy, he desperately fights the urge to smash windows and scrawl on walls.

But just as he is about to vandalise a phone booth, he sees the number for 'Perp-Aid': '***Tempted to crime? Stop!***' Seconds later, a recovery van pulls up, its over-concerned shorts-and-tunic-wearing attendants shouting through megaphones as they shepherd a panicky Mullard to one of the city's 'Perp-Aid' missions.

In this tabloid spoof of self-help organisations, Mullard's fellow recidivists help him overcome his urge to indulge in illegality. Buoyed by his liberation, a cheery Mullard leaves their meeting muttering positive affirmations… and walks straight into Dredd.

Published in 1986, 'Perp-Aid' parodied right-wing rhetoric about the futility of trying to rehabilitate 'habitual' criminals that formed the perfect excuse for harsher penalties and 'just deserts'.[300] The threat of lobotomisation is a grim joke when, as prison populations mushroomed, thousands of young people convicted of petty offences were being subjected to the infamous 'short, sharp shock'. Designed to steer them away from a life of crime, they instead brutalised and abused them in highly militarised detention centres, likened by one former inmate to a 'concentration camp, run on violence'.[301]

Suspicious that he is talking to himself, Dredd pushes a protesting Mullard against the wall – he knows it's only a matter of time before this citizen succumbs to his addiction. Of course, the stress overwhelms Mullard and he relapses, calls Dredd a '***stinkin' fascist pig!***', goes on a minor rampage of petty vandalism, and is soon at home, 'happily' lobotomized.

'***This is your fault, Judge!***' protests the Perp-Aid leader. '***Skid Mullard could have made it. You drove him over the edge.***'

'***He was going anyway,***' replies the Judge. '***I just hurried him along a bit.***'

From behind his opaque visor, Dredd's comically overbearing, cynical suspicion sees people for what he believes they are: criminals.[302] And he is in no doubt about what that insight permits him to do. As members of Perp-Aid rush to help Mullard, they accuse Dredd of harassment.

'I'm a Judge, loudmouth,' says Dredd, wielding his daystick threateningly. '***Harassment's my job.***'

'IT WAS SIMPLY stopping and searching any young Black man that happened to move,' one Metropolitan Police sergeant recalled about the events of 1981.[303] Just weeks after 'Knock on the Door' was published, 'Operation Swamp' was the spark that ignited years of simmering rage and frustration.

The moral panic of the 1970s over street crime demanded 'crackdowns' on inner-city Black communities, which were blamed and portrayed as inherently criminal. The tool for this disciplinary use of law – what sociologist Stuart Hall called the 'blind spasm of control' – was 'sus'.[304] Short for 'suspected person', 'sus' was the Met's imaginative interpretation of section four of the 1824 Vagrancy Act. Legislation predating even the formation of the Met itself, it allowed an officer to stop someone purely if they 'suspected' that they were going to commit a crime. No evidence, no witnesses, nothing was required for a 'sus' stop (and even conviction) beyond the officer's word.[305]

Just as in Notting Hill, the Met used 'sus' aggressively and disproportionately against young Black men in Brixton. Likened to 'an army of occupation', the Special Patrol Group's treatment of the Black community had caused many in Brixton 'to lose confidence in, and respect for, the police'.[306] The harassment and intimidation became so bad that Black parents were encouraged to not allow their children out at all. Yet raids on homes, community centres, youth clubs, restaurants – even council offices – seemed intended to remind them that nowhere was safe.[307] 'They could do whatever they want, basically, and they did,' resident Wayne Haynes recalled.[308] 'If they didn't like your face, if your face didn't fit, or you was a bit too lippy, as most Black kids are, you'd get a little kicking. Maybe then you'd get

taken down the cell and get a good kicking, which quite a few of us did as well, for nothing. And that's just how it was.'

As this was taking place, Wagner and Grant demonstrated the dilemma for those in 'high crime' areas who found themselves also under the suspicion of the police. In 'Alone in a Crowd', terrified citizens cowered first from muggers and then from Dredd, the man ostensibly meant to protect them. The story drew a direct parallel between the mutually predatory gazes of the criminal and the Judge, leaving them equally at risk from the terrifying attention of both.[309]

For the residents of Brixton, trapped in an area of poverty and crime but vulnerable to being arrested, charged and convicted simply for walking down the street, this would have been painfully familiar.

Launched at the beginning of April 1981 as a test run for a planned London-wide operation later in the year, 'Operation Swamp' saw a hundred and fifty plain clothes officers (including members of the SPG) flood Brixton over four days.[310] They stopped a thousand people, almost all of them Black, with only a hundred and fifty arrests.[311] But 'Swamp' seemed more like a show of strength – a reminder that no one but the Met ruled the streets.[312] To the people of Brixton, they were no better than Judges: brutal, arbitrary, criminalising.

In the aftermath of the April 1981 riots, Lord Scarman's inquiry found unquestionable evidence that the indiscriminate use of 'sus' by the SPG had been one of their major causes. Despite police insistence that such powers were vital to their work, 'sus' was condemned in Parliament as 'contrary to the freedom and liberty of the individual' and scrapped the same year, thanks mostly to a grassroots campaign by a group of Black women from Lewisham, led by campaigner Mavis Best.[313]

But where Brixton should have signalled the rolling back of such powers, the opposite would prove to be true.

As Dredd and Hershey made clear as they filled time between investigating more 'serious' crimes in 'Graveyard Shift', to the police, stop and search is the everyday 'bread and butter' work of policing. Despite the controversy it generates, it is staunchly defended not only

by the police but by politicians of all types – to the point that it has become something of a sacred cow, immune from reform.[314]

This is unsurprising – even before the police were created, the state insisted on having a general power to deal with those on society's fringes, from the 'vagabond' laws of the Tudors, to the 'Vagrancy Act' that allowed Peel's new police to deal with 'loiterers' and 'lurkers'.[315] Such powers are vital for the police, giving them wide discretion to stop, question, search, and detain whomever elicits their suspicion; to, in effect, 'do what the police want to do' in the name of 'good order'.[316]

'Sus' was gone but, as happened after the ending of similar vagrancy laws in the US, it had to be quickly replaced by other 'equally sweeping and indefinable powers'.[317] The 1984 Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) filtered such powers through bureaucratic proceduralism. A watered-down accountability took the shape of form-filling – regularly decried by 'law and order' politicians since as 'red tape' – and officers had to have 'reasonable grounds for suspicion'. 'Personal factors' such as clothing or skin colour were, they were told, no longer sufficient grounds.

But for the communities who had already suffered under 'sus', little changed. Mistreatment and harassment at the hands of the police led to more riots in 1985 in Brixton, Peckham, Toxteth and Tottenham's Broadwater Farm estate.

Even the bare minimum protection of 'reasonable' suspicion was soon being eroded. Locked in an 'law and order' arms race with his opposition counterpart, Tony Blair, to see who could appear 'toughest' on crime, and responding to concerns over football hooliganism, Conservative Home Secretary Michael Howard introduced the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act. Under Section 60, it allowed 'suspicion-less' stop and search, which police could use, without reasonable suspicion, across a given area.

Since then, there has been a steady stream of legislation expanding such powers – police are now able to stop and search under twenty-two different powers – and increasing numbers of those they are disproportionately used against.[318]

Until they were ruled unlawful and arbitrary by the European Court of Human Rights in 2010, for almost a decade the whole of London was designated a stop and search zone under Section 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000 – used not against terrorists but to stop and search Black and Asian people.[319]

The use of suspicion-less Section 60 stops also increased. 'Operation Blunt 2' in 2008 effectively reintroduced Sus laws across the whole of London for three years, as the police tried to tackle gang and knife crime. By spring 2009, a search was undertaken somewhere on average every twenty seconds and police appeared to be using Section 60 powers on an almost-permanent basis in response to low-level disorder.[320] [321]

After the London riots in 2011, research showed stop and search rates had been six times higher in areas affected by rioting.[322] Then Home Secretary Theresa May told Parliament that twenty-seven per cent of stops were being conducted without reasonable grounds, which amounted to an 'affront to justice'.[323] Such circumspection did not last long.

By the time of the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, its disproportionate use was worse than ever. At the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, the police were handed extraordinary powers to enforce unprecedented restrictions by emergency legislation, described as a 'golden ticket' to harass, that only magnified pre-existing inequalities.[324] Even as crime fell, suspicion-less searches hit a six-year high – yet only four per cent of stops led to an arrest.[325]

A 2022 report by the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) into the disproportionate use of stop and search concluded Black people are seven times more likely to be stopped than white people, while Asian people have two-and-a-half times more of a chance.[326]

Despite decades of such statistics, the police remain unable to explain why officers use stop and search so disproportionately against Black people and, in an echo of the excuses used to justify 'sus', claim that they only target them at areas of high crime.[327]

But seeing the accounts of those affected it is not difficult to see the darkly comic image of Judge Dredd staring back – an implacable

officer of a law that has no restraint, cannot be reasoned with and under whose suspicious gaze even the innocent are criminalised.

RACING THROUGH THE labyrinthine streets of Mega-City One, a desperate Eric Spendpenny tries to find a public bathroom.[328] His urgent pace is reported as 'suspicious behaviour' to Justice Department and Dredd is dispatched to investigate. The reader knows that Spendpenny is already doomed.[329]

Almost caught urinating in the street, an apologetic Spendpenny explains his predicament. Directed toward the nearest public toilet by a taciturn Dredd, he begins to jog away… '***Just a minute! I say you could go?***' barks Dredd before, despite him being doubled over in agony, forcing Spendpenny to wait while he checks his ID. Spendpenny is, Justice Control informs Dredd, '***a model citizen***'. '***Gotta be a few about,***' Dredd replies before letting him go.

As Spendpenny races away, he realises Dredd is still watching him. Five square panels run across the page as if in time with Spendpenny's racing heart, his bug-eyed urgency contrasted with Dredd's impassive glare.

Just yards from the toilet, he mops his brow with relief… only to accidentally drop his handkerchief, which lands at Dredd's feet. Ordered down from the walkway for littering, Spendpenny begs for mercy but is denied. Of course, he can no longer hold on. As he soils himself a single drop falls and splashes against Dredd's visor.

Scatological it may be, but the humour of this one-part story from 1995 rests in the fact that Dredd – and the reader – knows exactly what is going to happen. By his mere interaction with Dredd, Spendpenny is doomed – the lawman knows he need only wait for this '***potential***' criminal to slip up and commit an error, however small or unfair, on which he can pounce. When he does, it confirms all his suspicions – the innocent '***perfect citizen***' is therefore remade into a 'perp'.

Again and again, ***Dredd*** has returned to the image of the draconian stop and its criminalising effect on a citizen 'who is deemed to be suspect stands stripped of his canopy of rights, and the police can

lawfully take control over and work on his body and mind' as they are drawn into contact with the criminal legal system.

Just like poor Eric Spendpenny, once the gaze of the state is upon you, there is no way to live a blameless life.

'Every time you see me you arrest me. I'm tired of it. ***It stops today***.'

In 2014, when Eric Garner was first approached on the Staten Island sidewalk by the police who would soon kill him, he pleaded with the officers to leave him alone, tired and exasperated after a lifetime of such stops. Six years later, the death of George Floyd at the hands of police in similar circumstances prompted even greater demonstrations across the whole world.

Their recorded cries that they could not breathe as officers choked the life from them echoed decades of frustration at being viewed with endless suspicion. They were both tragic examples of lives marred by incessant harassment for small-scale infractions, experiences mirrored across the world.

'Every time I hear sirens I think the police are coming for me… I just don't want the police to stop me any more.'[330] In 2021, an unnamed fourteen-year-old Black schoolboy claimed he had been stopped by Metropolitan Police officers a total of thirty times in two years, including once as he carried rubbish to the refuse bins of the south London flat he shared with his mother. Another Black teenager complained that he had been searched more than sixty times – sometimes multiple times in the same day.

Even a brotherly fist bump is enough to get you stopped, handcuffed, and searched.[331] As is, as twenty-year-old Black entrepreneur Eric Boateng-Taylor discovered in 2022, wearing a thick coat on a warm day.[332] And the IOPC described how police suspected a Black child riding a bicycle near to a pedestrian during the Covid-19 lockdown of being involved in a drugs deal.

'It can happen anywhere,' London youth worker Ken Hinds, who has been lauded for his work tackling knife and gang crime but is stopped on average five to six times a year, said.[333] 'When I'm driving, or on the train, or when I step out of my house to go to the

sweet shop. It always starts with a question about something small, and then escalates to a search.'

This is the reality of life as 'police property'.

Emerging from the need to protect dominant communities from 'dangerous classes', the police have always distinguished between those they are meant to serve and protect and those they are supposed to control and punish. This latter group, defined by criminologist John A Lee in 1981 as 'police property', always bears the brunt of hard-line policing, officers using their discretion to harass and criminalise by applying the law more harshly and stringently than others.

This is the chilling warning of stories such as 'A Knock on the Door': for such groups – the young, the indigent, the unemployed, the non-white – the idea of 'policing by consent' does not exist. They suffer from policing by ***enforcement***.

'WE WOULD LITERALLY go out there and take a tape measure and measure the grass if somebody didn't want to cooperate with us,' former Florida police officer Royce Rodgers told the ***Tampa Bay Times*** in 2020. 'We'd get them one way or another.'

Like something from a Wagner and Grant story, a 'predictive policing' system in Florida that uses data to identify those it considers likely to commit crime and then sends officers to deliver 'directed harassment' against them – sometimes as often as six times in a single day – often without reason, a search warrant, or even any evidence of a specific crime. If they were not admitted or given cooperation, officers would write tickets for petty code violations, such as parking a jet ski trailer too close to a house, missing numbers on a mailbox, or an overgrown lawn.[334] Like the victims of a 59c or a street stop, the law exists not for their protection but a means by which to persecute and control them.

In Los Angeles, wearing the wrong sports jersey or having a conversation with the wrong person can get your details entered into 'CalGang', California's controversial and secretive gang database which stores details on nearly eighty thousand suspected 'gang members'.[335] Similarly, the Metropolitan Police's 'gang matrix',

created in the aftermath of the 2011 riots, uses previous offences, social media activity, and even friendship networks to subject young people, mostly Black, to near-daily stop-and-searches.[336]

Once applied, this stain of suspicion is near impossible to remove. In 2019, data watchdogs found some British councils kept informal lists of those who were supposed to have been removed from such databases and shared them with schools, job centres, and housing associations.[337] In one case, a disabled mother's council-provided car was seized after her son, who was her carer, was arrested, even though he was never charged.[338]

Even being a victim of crime can result in someone being placed on the matrix,[339] while in Chicago police monitor the social media of crime victims to determine if they are at high risk of committing a crime themselves.[340]

Police insistence that such powers and tactics are vital is undermined by the fact that they simply do not work. Research conducted over a decade found that its effect on crime is likely to be marginal, at best.[341]

The government's own study of an operation where the use of Section 60 was increased nine-fold found 'no statistically significant crime-reducing effect from the large increase in weapons searches' and disproportionality becomes even worse when the need for 'reasonable suspicion' is removed.[342] As few as four per cent of stops and searches lead to arrest, fewer than one per cent lead to confiscated weapons (the most common justification for the use of suspicion-less stops).

Stop and search's American cousin, 'stop and frisk', was wholeheartedly embraced to tackle gun crime by New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg after he won election in 2001. But, while trumpeting high-profile cases where stopping and questioning helped serious crimes, the overwhelming majority of stops turned up nothing. In 2008, the NYPD made nearly a quarter of a million stops for what they termed 'furtive movements', yet only one-fifteenth of one per cent turned up a gun.[343] Such stops are a blunt tool being used with increasing frequency on thousands of innocent people, who are caught in a dragnet. Research even suggests stops may actually

breed a sense of insecurity that leads to more people arming themselves.[344] And the impact can be profound – especially on those stopped regularly. 'We live in a place where police are constantly in our lives, acting as if they expect crime,' one campaigner told the ***New Yorker***.[345]

Students heavily exposed to stop and search have been found more likely to struggle in school and young men who are stopped regularly were more likely to experience symptoms of anxiety and depression.[346] American research has shown that stops do nothing to stop adolescent Black and Latino boys from engaging in 'delinquent behaviour', and in fact boys who were stopped without having broken the law were more likely to engage in illegal behaviour later in life.

Human rights groups have warned that widening police stop and search powers risks 'perpetually criminalising' previous offenders.[347] Law Professor Andrew Guthrie Ferguson argues that such practices can effectively criminalise otherwise innocent actions as the police cast a wider and wider net of suspicion over every aspect of life, creating a self-fulfilling feedback loop from which it is nearly impossible to escape.[348]

Problems of stop and search in London, with a quarter of stops not even recorded, as well as the use of strip searches on children – in 2022 the force apologised for its treatment of 'Child Q', who was searched at school while on her period – have added to a crisis in British policing. In 2022, the Metropolitan Police, along with five other forces including Greater Manchester, was placed under conditions known as 'engage', the term used by state regulators for 'special measures', which means the forces must accept additional scrutiny and support.[349]

DESPITE THE DAMAGE it causes, the government's increasingly authoritarian 'tough on crime' rhetoric casts it as a lesser evil, with the minority on the receiving end a price worth paying, as ***necessary*** to 'prevent crime'.[350] They insist it is the only 'answer' to crime, a punitive 'blind spasm' applied only to those who probably deserve it anyway. Prime Minister Boris Johnson even suggested stop and

search was a 'kind and loving' way to tackle knife crime.[351] 'The majority are prepared to let the police deal with their "property",' said former Met officer Victor Olisa said, 'and turn a blind eye to the way this is done.'[352]

Forty years ago 'Dredd' parodied the excuses that hold up the discovery of crime, however minor, as justification for blanket, draconian powers, even as the damage of them is made clear. '***If a few thousand screwballs is the price we've got to pay for law and order, I'm all for it,***' says Dredd upon encountering wards full of victims of 'Dredd Syndrome' – people driven mad by guilt over some minor misdemeanour and the fear of retribution.[353]

So committed is the government to Section 60 that former Home Secretary Priti Patel worked to expand its use still further. In 2022, she permanently lifted virtually all restrictions on their use, despite her own officials warning that it would damage community relations and lead to more people from minority ethnic backgrounds being targeted.[354]

Even more wide-ranging, discretionary and arbitrary stop and search powers were removed from the government's Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill in 2021 after strong opposition, only to be reinserted into a new public order bill working its way through Parliament in mid-2022.[355]

Sparked by disruption caused by the climate protest group Insulate Britain, the bill gives the police blanket powers to use suspicionless stop and search at almost any demonstration, and effectively stop anyone they ***think*** is on their way to a protest. The new offence of 'going equipped for locking on', referring to the tactic of protestors attaching themselves to the ground or buildings with glue and bicycle locks, threatens to criminalise the innocent behaviour of members of the public who may just be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

No longer are the ranks of 'police property' confined to the 'dangerous classes'. The uproar that has met these proposals points to a wider acceptance that such powers are already unacceptably wide-ranging and draconian.[356] Such powers are not effective, they criminalise populations, and can lead to unrest – so why does the state seek to extend them?

In 2006, as Wagner and Ezquerra explored the creation of the Judge system in 'Origins', Dredd and Rico are shown as cadets, being questioned by Judge Fargo himself, who asks them what the purpose of the 'crime swoop' is. Dredd replies that it is useful for uncovering crime.

'It gives them respect, sir,' adds Rico. '***Puts the fear of the law into them.'***

Thus, the truth is revealed. Strip searches in the street, invasive home searches, 'looking for crime'; it is not about effectiveness or justice, but about sending a message to those the state finds troublesome: you're our property, stay in line.

Such punitive policies are the latest stage on the 'law and order' turn towards authoritarianism, which allows the government to parade its toughness while scapegoating already marginalised groups. At the same time, it is preparing to give itself the ability to turn the same powers on other groups that oppose it, by also designating them as the 'property' of the police.

In the comedy of lapsed goldfish licences, overdue library books, dirty sinks, prohibited newspapers, tragic recidivists, and desperate bladders, Dredd's criminalising glare is funny rather than terrifying, but the strip warned of how 'law and order' politics exposed how 'policing by consent' would evolve into 'policing by enforcement'

'I've actually been thinking about what makes Judge Dredd popular,' Alan Grant said in 1997.[357] 'I figure it's because nearly everybody would like to break many of the stupid laws which we have, but they're afraid to do so. And instead of that fear translating into rebellion, it's translated in a more politically correct way which is enjoying other people being punished for breaking those laws.'

'Dredd' did not predict this authoritarian turn, as it already existed for those on society's margins, but it does show the consequences of it being applied to more and more of society, until the suspicious state sees us all as potential criminals.

For many, seeing the police deal with their 'property' is acceptable, even desirable, as they remain secure in the belief that such attention will never be visited on them. However, 'Dredd' warns that we are only ever a step away from being judged 'guilty' ourselves, simply

because of who we are or even due to our mere presence on the street.

'The liberties stripped from the weak today could be lost to us all tomorrow,' human rights activist Natasha Walter warned in 2007.[358] So long as people tolerate this – and even celebrate it – we risk joining the ranks of the 'guilty' ourselves.

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[283] ***2000 AD*** Prog 195 (1981) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Ian Gibson, Letters: Tom Frame

[284] ***2000 AD*** Progs 128-129 (1979) Script: John Wagner, Art: Ron Smith, Letters: Tom Frame

[285] Radley Balko, ***Rise of the Warrior Cop: The Militarization of America's Police Forces*** (2013)

[286] 'Wrongful Arrest', ***Daily Star***, (4 May 1985) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Ron Smith

[287] ***2000 AD*** Progs 128-129 (1979) Script: John Wagner, Art: Ron Smith, Letters: Tom Frame

[288] ***2000 AD*** Progs 335-341 (1983) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Ron Smith, Letters: Tom Frame

[289] 'Return to Mega-City', ***2000 AD*** Prog 59 (1978) Script: John Wagner, Art: Mick McMahon, Letters: Tom Frame

[290] ***Sunday Telegraph Magazine*** (15 April 1984)

[291] So prolific were the duo that IPC's John Sanders sent a memo insisting they use pseudonyms, in order to hide their real workload from readers.

[292] With a reported initial print run of ninety-three thousand copies, 'Eagle Comics' was an influential series launched by former ***2000 AD*** sub-editor Nick Landau's publishing company Titan (which had produced the first 'graphic novel' reprints of ***Dredd*** stories) that repackaged and coloured 'classic' ***Dredd*** stories for the emerging specialist American comic book store market, with new covers by Brian Bolland.

[293] 'Imagine it like a comedy duo like Galton and Simpson,' Wagner told ***The Comics Journal*** in 1988, referencing the writers behind ***Hancock's Half Hour*** and ***Steptoe and Son***. 'They sit down, one of them at the typewriter and the other in the chair and they talk, and as they talk they type, and by the end of it the story should have come out.'

[294] Interview, ***2000 AD Thrill-Cast***, 'Arthur Ranson, Part Two' (18 April 2018)

[295] 'I didn't really care, but the other guys were getting kind of paranoid,' he told the ***Judge Dredd Megazine*** in 2008. 'You don't want to drop a tab of acid and see two members of the drug squad looking back at you.'

[296] Interview, January 2021

[297] 'John Wagner – The Galaxy's Greatest: 2000 AD @ 45', ***2000 AD*** YouTube channel (26 March 2022) https://youtu.be/hsD7E454t0A

[298] ***The Comics Journal*** No. 122 (1988)

[299] ***2000 AD*** Progs 482-483 (1986) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Robin Smith and Ron Smith, Letters: Tom Frame

[300] Clive Hollin, 'To treat or not to treat? A historical perspective' in C.R. Hollin (ed.), ***Handbook of offender assessment and treatment*** (2000)

[301] ***BBC News***, 'Medomsley detention centre saw hundreds sexually abused' – bbc.co.uk (12 March 2019) https://bbc.in/3A5tDc2

[302] Richard Slotkin, ***Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth Century America*** (1992)

[303] ***The Battle for Brixton***, BBC2 documentary broadcast April 2006

[304] Stuart Hall, 'Drifting Into a Law and Order Society' in John Muncie, Eugene McLaughlin, and Mary Langan (eds), 31 ***Criminological Perspectives: A Reader*** (1996)

[305] So undeniably racist was the use of 'sus' that it was lampooned by satirical sketch ***Not The Nine O'Clock News*** in 1980, when a senior officer – played by Rowan Atkinson – takes Griff Rhys Jones' ominously named 'Constable Savage' to task over the increasingly ridiculous, illegal, and racist charges he has brought against a single Black man, from 'loitering with intent to use a pedestrian crossing' to 'looking at me in a funny way'. The punchline, met with howls of audience laughter, was that he was being transferred to the SPG where, presumably, he would fit in perfectly.

[306] ***The Times*** (6 June 1981)

[307] Julian Go, 'From Crime Fighting to Counterinsurgency: The Transformation of London's Special Patrol Group in the 1970s' in ***Small Wars & Insurgencies***, Vol.33, Issues 4-5 (2022)

[308] Interview quoted in Mike Phillips, Michael G. Phillips & Trevor Phillips, ***Windrush*** (1998)

[309] ***2000 AD*** Prog 205 (1981) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Steve Dillon, Letters: Tom Frame

[310] Even the operation's name was deliberately provocative, echoing Margaret Thatcher's assertion in January 1978 that 'People are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture'.

[311] Tony Jefferson, 'Policing the riots: from Bristol and Brixton to Tottenham, via Toxteth, Handsworth, etc', ***Criminal Justice Matters,*** Volume 87, Issue 1 (2012) https://bit.ly/3Btm4JS

[312] Many took it to be a punitive response to rising Black political resistance – just days before, twenty thousand Black people and supporters had caused major disruption with a march through London protesting police inaction over the deaths of thirteen young Black people who had died in a house fire.

[313] Hansard House of Commons Debate, 24 February 1981, Vol.999 Paragraphs 756-8 https://bit.ly/3HKvMLS

[314] Tim Newburn, 'Stopping and Searching for Reform: The Home Secretary's latest initiative may finally lead to a radical overhaul' – blogs.lse.ac.uk (9 July 2013) https://bit.ly/3boC8od

[315] The Tudor Poor Laws focused on punishing beggars and 'vagabonds', permitting them to be repatriated to their 'home' parish, whipped in the street, have an ear removed, and – if caught a third time – executed. Similarly, the 1824 Vagrancy Act dealt with the increasing numbers of homeless and penniless urban poor following the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 and the recession that followed, with thousands of wounded and jobless veterans labelled as 'rogues and vagabonds' for begging.

[316] Dr Costas Eleftheriou, 'Mark Neocleous: Capitalism was created by the police power' – enainstitute.org (27 May 2021) https://bit.ly/3tZpDpG

[317] Mark Neocleous, ***A Critical Theory of Police Power: The Fabrication of the Social Order*** (2021)

[318] Dr Rebekah Delsol, 'Private Wealth & Charities EP13, Part 1: In conversation with Dr Rebekah Delsol, StopWatch' in Herbert Smith Freehills Podcasts https://bit.ly/3jB4Kfa

[319] 'Despite almost 450,000 section 44 stops and searches between April 2007 and April 2009, no one was successfully prosecuted for a terrorism offence as a result, and according to Britain's independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, little if any useful intelligence about terrorist plots was obtained' – Human Rights Watch, 'Without Suspicion Stop and Search under the Terrorism Act 2000' – hwr.org (4 July 2010) https://bit.ly/3ng5gAA

[320] Rhydian McCandless, Andy Feist, James Allan and Nick Morgan, 'Do initiatives involving substantial increases in stop and search reduce crime? Assessing the impact of Operation BLUNT 2', UK Home Office (2016)

[321] Rebekah Delsol, 'England Riots: Time for a Public Inquiry, with Policing on the Agenda' – justiceinitiative.org (14 August 2011) https://bit.ly/3I8Y1nX

[322] John Drury, Roger Ball, Fergus Neville, Stephen Reicher and Clifford Stott,' Re-reading the 2011 English riots' (2019)

[323] Alan Travis, 'Theresa May announces reform of police stop-and-search powers' – theguardian.com (30 April 2014) https://bit.ly/3NpqYN4

[324] Scarlet Harris, Remi Joseph-Salisbury, Patrick Williams and Lisa White, 'A threat to public safety: policing, racism and the Covid-19 pandemic' in ***Institute of Race Relations*** (2021)

[325] Winifred Agnew-Pauley, 'Stop and search disproportionately affects Black communities – yet police powers are being extended' – policinginsight.com (13 August 2021) https://bit.ly/30Lm3U4

[326] IOPC, 'National stop and search learning report' (2022)

[327] Lizzie Dearden, 'Police 'unable to explain' why officers use force and stop and search disproportionately on Black people' – independent.co.uk (26 February 2021) https://bit.ly/39Rlopl

[328] 'Spend a penny' is a British euphemism for needing to urinate; although not recorded in use until the 1940s the phrase originates from when public toilets charging a penny were installed in London in the mid-1800s. Wagner's knack for mischievously funny or apt character names has never dimmed.

[329] 'Caught Short', ***2000 AD*** Prog 953 (1995) Script: John Wagner, Art: John Higgins, Letters: Tom Frame

[330] Diane Taylor, 'Black boy in stop and search '30 times' accuses Met police of racist profiling' – theguardian.com (15 November 2021) https://bit.ly/3Ujb4c7

[331] Sam Francis, 'Fist bump stop-and-search: Trust in police 'destroyed', man warns' – bbc.co.uk (30 October 2020) https://bbc.in/3yaSt8Y

[332] Thomas Kingsley, 'Black man stopped by Met Police "for wearing coat during warm weather"' – independent.co.uk (26 March 2022) https://bit.ly/3yawZZS

[333] Equality and Human Rights Commission, 'Stop and think: A critical review of the use of stop and search powers in England and Wales' (2010)

[334] Kathleen McGrory & Neil Bedi, 'Targeted' – projects.tampabay.com (3 September 2020) https://bit.ly/3qcGIv6

[335] Anita Chabria, Leila Miller & Nicole Santa Cruz, 'LAPD scandal opens window into California's secret gang database as reforms debated' – latimes.com (3 February 2020) https://lat.ms/3CXGR97

[336] In 2020, multiple LAPD officers were charged with falsely labelling innocent people as 'gang members' on CalGang and a thousand young Black men were removed from the Met's matrix in 2021 after a review found thirty-five per cent of those on the database had no police intelligence linking them to gang violence and had never been charged with a crime.

[337] Information Commissioner's Annual Report and Financial Statements 2018-19 (2019) https://bit.ly/3vxPXYx

[338] Liz Fekete, 'Police database spreads institutional racism' – irr.org.uk (17 May 2018) https://bit.ly/3zgiUJG

[339] Amnesty International, 'Trapped in the Matrix' (2018) https://bit.ly/2Bs8k5A

[340] Elizabeth King, 'Chicago Cops Use Social Media to Track Grieving Families of Gunshot Victims' medium.com (4 December 2019) https://bit.ly/3qvj3Gn

[341] Matteo Tiratelli, Paul Quinton & Ben Bradford, 'Does Stop and Search Deter Crime? Evidence From Ten Years of London-wide Data', ***The British Journal of Criminology***, Volume 58, Issue 5 (2018)

[342] Rhydian McCandless, Andy Feist, James Allan and Nick Morgan, 'Do initiatives involving substantial increases in stop and search reduce crime? Assessing the impact of Operation BLUNT 2', UK Home Office (2016)

[343] Tara Boyle, Jennifer Schmidt, Rhaina Cohen, Shankar Vedantam, Maggie Penman & Renee Klahr, 'How A Theory Of Crime And Policing Was Born, And Went Terribly Wrong' – npr.org (29 May 2017) https://n.pr/3I4Hzov

[344] ***BBC News***, 'Stop-and-search focus blamed for knife crime rise in London' – bbc.co.uk (11 October 2021) https://bbc.in/3Nq9cJV

[345] Ken Auletta, 'Fixing Broken Windows' – newyorker.com (31 August 2015) https://bit.ly/3KlXKPx

[346] Emily Badger, 'The Lasting Effects of Stop-and-Frisk in Bloomberg's New York' – nytimes.com (2 March 2020) https://nyti.ms/3y4PSfh

[347] Mattha Busby, 'Stop-and-search plans risk 'perpetually criminalising' people, say UK rights groups' – theguardian.com (7 November 2020) https://bit.ly/39VOVOp

[348] Andrew G. Ferguson, ***Predictive Policing and Reasonable Suspicion*** (2012)

[349] ***The Guardian***, 'The Guardian view on policing in crisis: the Met needs a superhead' – theguardian.com (30 June 2022) https://bit.ly/3uE9Ywn

[350] Rebekah Delsol, StopWatch interviewed on Herbert Smith Freehills Podcasts (12 October 2021) https://bit.ly/3jB4Kfa

[351] Adam Forrest & Lizzie Dearden, 'Boris Johnson says stop-and-search policy 'kind and loving' way to get weapons off streets' – independent.co.uk (27 July 2021) https://bit.ly/3NpCUPd

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Art by Ron Smith

UNAMERICAN GRAFFITI

Chopper, broken windows, zero tolerance, and war

'***It's time we cleaned this city up!***'
– Judge Dredd, 'Unamerican Graffiti' (1981)

'Something must be done about the graffiti on this city's walls!' Mega-City Mayor Jim Grubb complains to Chief Judge Griffin in the opening act of 1981's 'Unamerican Graffiti'.[359] '***It's everywhere! I was showing round some alien dignitaries today, and some of the wall-scrawls – well! I'm just thankful they couldn't read them!***'

'***I'm already dealing with the problem,***' Griffin reassures him. '***Judge Dredd is taking charge of a clean-up campaign.***'

By sheer coincidence, the teen craze for wall-scrawling arrived in Mega-City One at the exact same moment as American-style graffiti art came to Britain.

In overlapping layers of synchronicity, Notting Hill was the venue for the country's first large piece of New York-style hip hop graffiti by New York artist Leonard McGurr, whose nickname – Futura 2000 – was inspired (just like the futsies of Mega-City One) by Alvin Toffler's 1970 book ***Future Shock***. He had been invited to the UK to work with The Clash, whose members Joe Strummer and Paul Simonon had been moved to form a band after witnessing the Notting Hill Carnival riots in 1976, where our story began.[360]

Meanwhile, the streets of Brixton seethed on the eve of 'Operation Swamp', with anarchist graffiti directly referencing the riot in St. Pauls the year before and announcing – 'Bristol yesterday, Brixton today!'.[361]

But whereas a newspaper article about New York's graffiti culture had caught their attention, it was a young fan who provided the spark for John Wagner and Alan Grant to craft one of Judge Dredd's most

enduring and important opponents. 'We got a letter from a kid in Glasgow,' said Wagner.[362] 'I can't remember what he said, but he signed himself "Chopper" and we liked the cut of his jib. Though I don't know if what actually happened in Chopper's life had any relation to the kid's.'

Just a week before in 'Alone in a Crowd', readers had witnessed what life was truly like under the oppressive, controlling regime of the Judges. But now the system would meet its match in a story about youthful rebellion and individualism and the landscape over which this revolution would be fought.

In a city made of walls, the truest acts of rebellion are to deface or cross them. And the boy they called 'Chopper' would do both.

MARLON SHAKESPEARE WAS a spotty oik, a bull-ringed, feather-haired, leather jacket-wearing vision of teenage insolence dressed in commodified post-punk, brought to life by Ron Smith, the artist responsible for so many of Mega-City One's iconic comedic grotesques.

'***Pay attention!***' shouts his teacher as he slaps Shakespeare awake. The lesson is a pitch perfect piece of satire: '***We're talking about unemployment here – your future!***'[363]

Home life is little better. Shakespeare's parents are mediocre braindead 'dults who fill their time with inane hobbies; his father proudly practises head-butting eggs into a bucket, his mother dirties dishes in order to wash them over and over again. Pointless pursuits designed to pass the time. A parody of adult life. A lifetime of bored conformity on welfare awaits him; you can see the pitying fear in his eyes as he leaves his mother, trapped in her robotic behavioural loop.

But young Shakespeare refuses to succumb to this banality. His solution is to be a graffiti artist, a wall-scrawler. And his pen name – 'Chopper' – would be his own.

He is that rare creature – a recurring character who not only survives his encounters with Dredd, but stubbornly refuses to be cowed by him. When he first appears, he is a rebellious child scrawling on walls, pursuing notoriety as a means of defining his worth in a society of riotous but empty individualism.[364]

Introduced in 'Unamerican Graffiti', the story's name consciously inverts the title of George Lucas' breakout 1973 hit movie ***American Graffiti***. But whereas that film was a nostalgic study of youth culture in the 1960s California of Lucas' youth, Chopper's story was consciously anti-sentimental and trans-Atlantic, a story of youth amidst the heat death of punk and the grip of Thatcherite recession.

His tag appears before he does. The two dots and curving line of a hollow, smiling face replace the 'O' in 'Chopper'. Its ubiquity and anonymity confound his fad-following classmates, whose inexpert attempts to copy their idol lead to them being rounded up by the dozen and sent to juvenile 're-education'.

As this is Mega-City One, Chopper's tags are no mere scribbles – they are monumental art. '***I'm no deadhead like mum and dad! I'm somebody! I'm Chopper – King Scrawler!***' he insists, as he writes his name on ever-bigger targets, eventually using suction pads to climb and tag the entire side of a city block. Yet the adulation of his classmates is short-lived – his monumental scrawl has been vandalised: '***Chopper is a ninco, signed The Phantom***'.[365]

In a mirror of the long-running feud between pseudonymous street artist Banksy and graffiti artist King Robbo (which did not end even with the latter's death in 2014), Chopper and the Phantom attempt to outdo one another in an escalating 'scrawl battle'. The Judges are unable to stop either of them as they deface the White Cliffs of Dover (brought to the city like the London Bridge incongruously transplanted to Arizona in 1967), a highway, and even the underside of a Justice Department H-Wagon. Finally, The Phantom throws down the gauntlet – to see who can scrawl on the Statue of Justice itself, a target unmatched in both scale and daring.

Equipped with military-grade stealth equipment, Chopper is soon scrawling the statue's surface, but it is here, in the glare of Justice Department floodlights, that he comes face-to-face with The Phantom – who is revealed to be a malfunctioning robot.

'***Look at me, Chopper,***' it pleads, '***a city painting droid with no prospects – no future! I needed to stand out from the crowd, find the real me. Be somebody. For a while I was somebody. Now they'll mess with my circuits and I'll just be another city droid***

again! Well, I tell you, Chopper. They'll never make The Phantom a nobody again! I'm going out scrawling!' And, with that, The Phantom jumps to his death.

'***Would you believe it…? The Phantom was a robot!***' a bewildered Chopper splutters as he is dragged away by the Judges. '***And his life… it was no different from mine… Is… is that what people are? Are we robots too?***'

Even as he was packed off to the 'juve cubes', Chopper asserts his independence of the forces that seek to (figuratively and literally) cage him: '***You beat The Phantom, but you'll never beat me! I'll never lie down and die for you! I'm somebody, see!'*** And, as the sun rises, the heat sensitive paint of his scrawl reveals the giant smiling face of his tag, scrawled over the badge of the giant statue.

THAT HE WOULD be 'somebody' in Dredd's world was not immediately apparent. His appearance deep within the second major phase of world-building undertaken by Wagner and Grant – preceded by classics such as the parody of post-punk rock, 'Who Killed Pug Ugly?', and prelude to 'The Apocalypse War', 'Pirates of the Black Atlantic' was almost immediately followed by the popular 'Mega Rackets' that did so much to establish the city's reputation for crazy, off-the-wall crimes, and dark humour.[366] Alongside concepts such as the addictive candy of Uncle Umpty and the barbarous Stookie Glanders harvesting their youth drug from unfortunate aliens, Chopper's contest against The Phantom now feels almost pedestrian.

Yet there was something about Chopper that resonated. Even though he was, in reality, a vision of rebellious youth by middle-aged men, he was nonetheless a synthesis of the times: the Raleigh Chopper was the single best-selling bike of the 1970s, its 'ape hanger' handlebars and high-back seat giving the rider a laid-back, insouciant air, while the aesthetic of punk was, even with the dissolution of the Sex Pistols, still a metonym for adolescent anarchism. He was also the embodiment of Wagner and Grant's own distaste for authority, delivered not through a satire of the oppressor but by a revolt of the oppressed.

‘Chopper remains one of my favourites of all the Dredd supporting characters,’ said former editor Richard Burton.[367] ‘He is a free spirit in a structured, regimented world. I vividly recall, not long after this story, a rash of real Chopper graffiti appeared around London – even in the train I took to work each morning! I remember feeling both elated and disturbed at the influence ***2000 AD*** was having on society.’

Like so many graffiti taggers and artists, Marlon’s adoption of a new name – his ‘tag’ – represents a break from the structures that bind him, severing him from the name – Shakespeare – given to him by his parents, one that connects him to a cultural past he does not recognise. This new name represents him as an individual – a world on his terms, not those set by his parents or the Judges.

Graffiti has the power to drive power mad, with its disruptiveness, its unpredictability, its persistence, its ingenuity, its mimetic power. It expresses an individualism dedicated to drawing attention, to breaking the mundane. As such, it is a profound threat to any authority that seeks to maintain the status quo. As Jeff Chang wrote about New York in the 1970s: ‘The young graffiti writers were the advance guard of a new culture; they literally blazed trails out of the gang generation. Crossing demarcated turfs to leave their aliases in marker and spray paint, they said, “I’m here” and “Fuck all y’all” at the same time.” It was a political act: “Writing your name was like locating the edge of civil society and planting a flag there”.’[368]

With its fixed smile and pupil-less eyes, the smiling face is a perfect symbol for Chopper’s subversion of empty ‘normal’ life. Either created by American graphic artist Harvey Ross Ball in 1963 to raise the morale of an insurance company’s employees or combined with the slogan ‘Have a nice day’ to sell novelty items, it was already a part of American graffiti art, having evolved from the 1950s nuclear disarmament campaign’s ‘peace sign’ in a tag called a ‘wicked’ or ‘wicket’.

Chopper represents a particular trans-Atlantic cultural crossroads, his ‘British’ punk clothing mixing with the ‘alien’ American graffiti scene, while reflecting the origins of modern graffiti, which were also the product of a rebellious adolescent in trouble with the law.

In 1965, twelve-year-old troublemaker Darryl McCray was sent to a juvenile corrections facility in his home city of Philadelphia, a rough and violent place full of drug use and gang violence. Thanks to his persistent requests for his favourite food, McCray soon earned the nickname 'Cornbread'.

Rather than take part, Cornbread passed the time by adding his own unique signature to the walls plastered with gang names and symbols. Spending day and night hunting for fresh spots, scrawling his newly acquired moniker on nearly every surface, he tagged the visitor hall, food hall, church, and bathrooms, writing 'Cornbread' so obsessively that social workers thought he might be suffering from a mental disorder.[369] Once out, he plastered his new moniker across the city in order to win a classmate's heart. The relationship did not last, but the 'tagging' did.

He joined forces with friends (and future graffiti legends) like Cool Earl and Kool Klepto Kid to tag walls across the city, writing his distinctive new name everywhere he could. Like Chopper's classmates, imitators often found Cornbread's name already in their chosen spot, often in the most difficult spot to reach.

Catching the attention of Philadelphia's youth, media and authorities, Cornbread was the spark that ignited the whole modern graffiti movement.

'Taki 183' was to New York as Cornbread was to Philadelphia. Like The Phantom, his job as a bike messenger allowed him to go 'all city'. Armed with Magic Markers and spray cans, a hole cut in his jacket to allow him to hide his hand as he worked, from 1969 Taki tagged so many walls, lampposts, fire hydrants, and subway cars that his name became ubiquitous in New York.[370]

The pair also had a British imitator. Inspired by an article he'd seen in a Sunday paper, teenager Lee Thompson (later the saxophonist in ska band Madness) became an unwitting UK tagging pioneer. Spray-painting his nickname – 'Kix' – around north London 'out of boredom', including the garage door of jazz and blues singer George Melly, inadvertently finding fame through photographer Roger Perry's 1976 book ***The Writing on the Wall***.

But while American-style graffiti had come to the UK, British graffiti had its roots not in art, but in protest.

'Unamerican Graffiti' opens with a double page spread, drawn by then ***2000 AD*** art editor Robin Smith, of Dredd surveying a wall plastered in graffiti. Much of it references recent stories – 'Come back Cal – all is forgiven!',[371] 'Home rule for the Sonny Bono Block',[372] 'I'm dying to go Resyk', 'Revenge Sector 403',[373] and the call and response of 'Who Killed Pug Ugly?' and 'Big Jim C ya mug!!'.[374]

This is not a futuristic surface but the kind of brick wall common in post-industrial British towns and is covered in the same sardonic, cynical graffiti any child reading ***2000 AD*** may have seen on their walk to school. Just like the flowering of 'situationist' graffiti that accompanied the strikes and student demonstrations in France in 1968, graffiti in the UK blossomed in the early 1970s, a moment journalist Alexis Petridis called 'the final curdling of the hippy counterculture and the arrival of punk'. Whereas American graffiti relied on pseudonyms, British graffiti was often completely anonymous, the meaning of the slogans unclouded by the identity of their author.

As early as 1971, squads of plain-clothed police officers were being deployed in Manchester to catch artists in the act, with Chief Superintendent Jack Griffiths comparing it to 'smashing windows and ripping telephone booths'.

It became a symbol of the decade, often appearing on structures that were themselves emblems of the country's growing economic strife – abandoned factories, boarded-up shops, advertising hoardings, soot-covered monuments of Victorian industrial prowess like railway viaducts. It could be absurdist, reactionary, or just plain angry, it could praise or protest, critique or rage.

'Clapton Is God', praising guitarist Eric Clapton, began appearing on walls in London in the late 1960s. In a campaign to free a man jailed in 1974 for robbery, his friends painted 'George Davis Is Innocent OK' on walls and bridges across London's East End. Radical anarchist splinter group King Mob's staccato anti 'rat race' mantra greeted commuters on the London Underground.[375] Walls in Brixton were plastered with everything from 'We Hate You, You

Cunts' to 'SPG Killed Blair Peach'.[376] One canal wall in Walthamstow bore anarchist Mikhail Bakunin's words: 'All submission to authority humiliates; all exercise of authority perverts.'

'Graffiti was a shorthand way of accessing the mood of the time,' wrote Jon Savage,[377] 'like a secret code, the voice of the underdog. It was people telling you things you couldn't read in mainstream media and wouldn't necessarily think about. You'd get jokes, stoner and outcast humour, with serious points. It was another kind of language.'

HOWEVER, CHOPPER'S TAGS were not condemnations of the corporate rat race nor calls to arms. Just like Cornbread, Taki 183, and Kix, writing his name was not about territory, but acknowledgement.

'My name rang like Jesus Christ,' said Cornbread of prison guards asking for his autograph after he was jailed for breaking into Philadelphia Zoo and spraying 'Cornbread Lives' on both sides of an elephant.[378] 'I demand your attention. I had to have it. You had no choice but to give me your attention.'[379]

Just like Chopper, his escalating endeavours saw him tag the aeroplane of American pop band The Jackson Five, as well as police cars and a skyscraper, while Taki claimed to have tagged a US Secret Service car during a parade it was escorting. '***For the youth of Mega-City One***,' the narration in 'Unamerican Graffiti' opines, '***the scrawl war represented a revolt against the boredom and frustration of life in the future city. For Marlon Shakespeare it meant something more… Marlon would be unemployed all his life, but he would still be somebody.***'

'Writers are individuals seeking to build an identity within a structure that has largely ignored them and offered them little more in the way of opportunity other than menial or unemployment, or drugs and gangs,' wrote Tyson Mitman in ***The Art of Defiance: Graffiti, Politics and the Reimagined City in Philadelphia***.

Chopper asserts his personhood in a society that offers him no identity, no future: I am not faceless, the smiling face cries, nor with my new name shall I be unknown. In a bland world, Chopper wants to stand out. To not just ***be*** an individual, but to be ***valued*** for it.

Walls have a permanence to them, an authority that graffiti both borrows and subverts. It is a fundamentally disordered and individual practice, in contrast to the faceless, inhuman authority of the wall. 'It attacks not so much the property as the property relation,' wrote urban geographer Kurt Iveson.[380] 'Individuality is asserted not through property and commodity ownership but through a style of free communication with others.'

Just as the disembodied hand wrote a dire warning on the wall at the biblical Belshazzar's Feast, graffiti provides a voice that is hard to erase or ignore. 'Your phone or your computer – you can turn it off, can't you?' graffiti writer Paris 1974 told ***The Guardian***.[381] 'But something that's actually in the physical world is more lasting. It becomes part of the tapestry of the city. Thousands of people have no choice but to see it – it gets engrained in collective psyches.' As such, graffiti is an affront to order and authority.

'***It's time we cleaned this city up!***' exclaims Dredd while surveying the wall at the beginning of 'Unamerican Graffiti', echoing the battle cry of the forever war that was already being waged by municipal authorities and would come to define the city over the next four decades.

'***There's no end to the little beggars!***' one frustrated Judge declares at the beginning of 'Unamerican Graffiti' as they round up crowds of scrawlers. '***I don't understand these scrawlers, Dredd. What makes decent, ordinary kids go crazy like that?***'

'***Boredom, poor prospects, lack of self-expression,***' Dredd replies. '***The psycho boys have plenty of words for it… our only concern is the law, Churchill – and the law says stamp them out!***'

'I'm not an art critic, I'm a cop, I know what a crime is,' said Steve Mona, a member of New York City's infamous anti-graffiti Vandal Squad, on which Dredd's own 'Anti-Scrawler Squad' was consciously modelled.[382]

Founded in 1980, the squad hunted the graffiti artists who covered the city's subway cars in top-to-bottom paintings known as 'masterpieces'.[383] No sooner cleaned than they were covered again,

they became emblematic of the city's urban decay, the subway a violent and unruly symbol of a city on the edge of collapse.[384]

As the language of the unheard and marginalised young – particularly young Black men – graffiti presented a particular threat to authorities, a very visible example of their lack of control. And, as in Brixton, reactionary 'law and order' politics demanded a similar 'blind spasm of control'.

For politicians like Lindsay, stopping graffiti became a way to prove that they were in control, not the criminals. He formed the city's first anti-graffiti task force, spent millions on cleaning operations, and re-classified graffiti from a nuisance, like littering, into a crime. But the intensity of the anti-graffiti crusade of his successor, Ed Koch, was unprecedented.

Koch had run in 1977 on a 'law and order' platform and, in 1981, he placed a single railcar, painted entirely white, in a railyard and surrounded it with a $1.5 million 'Berlin Wall' of chain-link fences, barbed wire, and roving German Shepherds. Then he threw down a challenge: come and paint it.

The car remained graffiti-free, and Koch spent a further $22.4 million on razor wire fences.[385] But artists quickly learned that they could cut the wire and distract the dogs with raw meat. In response, Koch only half-jokingly suggested releasing wild wolves into the subway, which could be swapped out as they became 'domesticated'.[386]

In the media, a conscious connection was made between graffiti and the muggings, rapes and murders that also plagued the subway. 'While I do not find myself consciously making the connection between the graffiti-makers and the criminals who occasionally rob, rape, assault, and murder passengers,' neoconservative sociologist Nathan Glazer wrote, 'the sense that all are a part of one world of uncontrollable predators seems inescapable.'[387]

Such ongoing wars are costly and, often, violent. The NYPD's 'vandal squads' were infamous for heavy-handed tactics. 'Make no mistake,' Chang wrote,[388] '"quality of life" campaigns have had a body count.'[389] In September 1983, twenty-five-year-old artist Michael Stewart was arrested for tagging a subway wall and beaten, kicked,

and choked by police officers before dying days later from his injuries. A year later, self-styled 'subway vigilante' Bernhard Hugo Goetz shot four Black teenagers at point-blank range and was lauded as a national hero.

The pivotal moment came in 1989 when Koch declared victory. The last graffiti-covered subway cars were retired and replaced by trains with paint proof surfaces. Meanwhile, the crackdowns and surveillance continued.

Many artists and taggers dodged the crackdown by moving from the subway to the street, where a new battlefront was opened up, one justified by one of the most influential but flawed ideas in the history of law enforcement – one that 'Dredd' had already parodied dozens of times.

IN 1982, CRIMINOLOGISTS George L. Kelling and James Q. Wilson wrote a seven thousand-word article for ***The Atlantic*** that proposed a radical solution to this deterioration.

It was dubbed 'Broken Windows'.

Their theory drew on an experiment that used the fates of two abandoned cars – one in a rich neighbourhood, the other in a poor area – to conclude that noticeable neglect encourages people's tendencies towards destruction. Like those cars, they said, an unfixed window is a signal that no one cares about an area, which encourages further dilapidation as 'respectable' inhabitants flee and criminals move in.

They recommended police crackdown on low-level disorder – vandalism, fare-dodging, drug-dealing, drunkenness, prostitution, begging – to stop the 'escalation' to more serious crime. It sounded like common sense – 'little problems lead to big problems' – and appealed to Dickensian 'law and order' rhetoric about crime.[390] 'Broken windows' gave rise to the notion of the police as 'guardians of order', rather than merely responders who become involved only after a crime has been committed.

When he became New York mayor in 1993, Rudy Giuliani appointed Bill Bratton as NYPD Police Commissioner. A devotee of Kelling's, since becoming chief of the New York City Transit Police in

1990 Bratton had overseen a fifty per cent drop in crime on the subway. Together, they went all in on 'broken windows' with a policy of 'zero tolerance'. Graffiti artists, beggars, rough sleepers, and petty criminals were targeted with aggressive 'stop and frisk' tactics.

It appeared to work. Between 1993 and 1998, major crime fell by thirty-nine per cent while murders were halved, but the cost was high – the poor and marginalised, especially Black and Hispanic populations, bore the brunt of 'zero tolerance'. Indeed, none of this would have been a surprise for anyone who had lived in Brixton, Notting Hill, or St Pauls.

'In a sense, police officers have difficult, ill-defined jobs,' said Naomi Murakawa from Princeton University.[391] 'They are meant to enforce penal codes that are so enlarged they cannot possibly know how to prioritise everything that they're supposed to be doing.

'If police officers had no discretion and were just bureaucrats enforcing the law, they would be arresting people constantly… But then broken windows policing emerges. It announces that everything is a priority, because, as it argues, even tiny infractions produce a climate of rampant rule breaking that then leads to murder.'

This truly was 'Judge Dredd'-style policing – ***carte blanche*** for officers to employ the inflexible enforcement of any and all minor offences, without discretion and without mercy. '"Zero tolerance" served to parade a posture of unbending, punitive righteousness toward all sorts of ills and threats,' wrote historian Michael S. Sherry.[392]

'***Start letting the little crimes go by and before you know it they think they can get away with murder,***' thought Dredd in 'Full Earth Crimes' – published a full four years before Wilson and Kelling's essay – as he staged an intensive crackdown on disorder on Luna-One, including a graffiti artist, a suicidal man ('***Don't do it, citizen! Littering the streets is an offence!***') that he sentences to ninety days 'penal servitude',[393] a protesting bystander he fines and arrests for 'attempting to obstruct justice'; a driver going only five miles below the speed limit is fined and threatened with the cubes.[394]

After a hard day, he returns exhausted to his apartment where Walter the Wobot articulates the moral underpinnings of his master's

crusade: '***You work so hard and never stop, and people think you're gwim and nasty and far too stwict,***' he says. '***But Walter knows the twuth. You have to be the way you are to make the stweets safe for decent people. Dear Judge Dwedd, what would we do without you?***'

Claiming not just that the NYPD contributed to the fall in crime but were solely responsible for it, Bratton became a 'broken windows' cheerleader, exporting the idea to dozens of countries and hundreds of cities – despite there being no reliable proof that it actually worked. None of this mattered to politicians, who queued up for their own New York 'miracle'.

Future Prime Minister Tony Blair announced he would be 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime', as Britain's own 'zero tolerance' policeman, Ray 'Robocop' Mallon, imported 'broken windows' to the deprived north-eastern town of Hartlepool with Conservative Home Secretary Michael Howard calling him 'my kind of cop'.[395]

Under his successor, New Labour Home Secretary Jack Straw (depicted wearing a Judge uniform in satirical strip ***B.L.A.I.R.1*** in 1997), brought in the Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO) that targeted low-level annoyances, such as vandalism, intimidation, and drunkenness.[396]

In America, 'zero tolerance' policies in schools criminalise minor infractions by pupils, the ever-increasing presence of police in classrooms forcing students into suspension, expulsion and even arrest.[397]

This is how Wagner had originally conceived of Dredd – a po-faced, brutal, uncompromising soldier in the war against crime, handing out punitive sentences for matters both serious and trivial, the contrast between crime and sentence transgressively comedic, at variance with the readers' notions of natural justice.

It was this 'new punitiveness' that positioned graffiti as an existential threat to the fabric of society.[398] The war against it gave new impetus to the 'creeping militarisation of everyday life in the city' and opened the way to the paramilitary policing of Judge Dredd.

THE LANGUAGE OF war had been deployed against graffiti as early as 1972 when New York City Council President Sanford Garelik (mimicking the rhetoric of 'war on drugs' begun by President Nixon in the 1960s) called for 'an all-out war on graffiti'.[399]

Since the 1970s, tactics used to combat it have made a significant contribution to a blurring of the line between war and policing – something Kelling himself warned of in 1994: '[when] there are wars on crime and wars on drugs, don't be surprised when they abide by the rules of warfare rather than the rules of peacekeeping.'[400]

Chastened after the humiliating withdrawal from the Somali civil war in the early 1990s, when its army struggled to operate in the chaotic confines of large cities, US military planners concluded that the narrow 'broken cities of the world' would be the battleground of the future. To the military eye, urban spaces are unpredictable, and 'counter-insurgency' strategies now focused on controlling these chaotic spaces. It was not much of a leap to equate 'dangerous' cities such as Mogadishu with the 'broken' cities back home.

In the wake of the declaration of the 'war on terror' in 2001, this connection was only strengthened as the state sought to identify 'enemies' within its own cities. The idea began to take hold that, while graffiti writers and terrorists do not share the same motivations, they do exploit the same vulnerabilities. And so, graffiti was recast as a kind of 'visual terror' perpetrated by the 'enemy within'.[401]

'Graffiti writers have gone from being petty criminals and vandals to being something akin to terrorists out to destroy communities and respectable ways of life,' said Tyson Mitman in ***The Art of Defiance Graffiti, Politics and the Reimagined City in Philadelphia***. 'They became the reason neighbourhoods were mired in joblessness and poverty. And their presence, both physically and embodied through their graffiti, became a threat to a general standard of decency and order that a neighbourhood needed to maintain respectability and functionality.'

As a result, military technologies and tactics began to bleed into policing. Anti-graffiti teams took on increasingly military-sounding names, such as New York's Graffiti Habitual Offender Suppression Team (GHOST) – described by New York Magazine as Mayor

Michael Bloomberg's 'shock troops' – or the 'Eagle Teams' of retired NYPD officers who patrol railyards monitored by cameras, surrounded by vast banks of lighting and sturdy perimeter fencing.

These teams use surveillance tactics that go far beyond the confines of any railyard, developing complex intelligence and informer networks, infiltrating arts bodies and youth groups – and even the graffiti community itself – to gather information. There is also widespread evidence of a feedback loop emerging as military theorists look to the police experience in combating graffiti for inspiration in planning for urban operations.[402]

One can now understand the 'threat' posed by Chopper – he is not a teenager but an urban 'terrorist', breaking the rules of ordered space, and refusing to slot into the role society has ordained. The Judges now read as a chillingly accurate prediction of the adoption of military techniques, organisational structures, and technology designed to counter 'insurgent' threats – all in pursuit of youngsters with spray cans.

YET AS AN act of rebellion, graffiti has its weaknesses. Framed by authorities as mere 'crime' – a criminal act without worth or message – it has become co-opted and absorbed into mainstream culture, where it is robbed of much of its political meaning.

In 'The Gipper's Big Night', a gang of mutants scale the West Wall and head towards the mile-high Hen Broon Tower.[403] They are picked off by the Judges, each sacrificing their life to ensure that the smallest of them, the Gipper, can make it to the tower's summit. Dredd can only watch as this final insurgent launches a flare into the sky, which spells out a message: '***Mutants are people too!***'

'***That's a message from the Cursed Earth to this city!***' one of the mutants tells Dredd. '***We ain't freaks an' monsters! We're people, just like you! All over the city, they'll see it. Maybe – just maybe – it'll make 'em think!***'

'***I wouldn't… count on it… creep!***' says Dredd, before shooting the Gipper. '***Scratch one cutie incursion,***' he growls to control. '***No lasting damage.***'

In the uncaring city, Dredd knows he has an ally in the cynicism of the citizenry. There is neither 'lasting damage' to the tower nor the rule of Justice Department. Nor will the minds of citizens be altered. They are as intolerant of change, of disorder as any Judge. For all of the sardonic, ironic, angry graffiti on the walls of closed factories and empty homes in Britain in the 1980s, it appeared to change nothing.

YET WHEN CHOPPER returned in 1985, rather than getting caught in the militarised city, he escaped it.

After his time in the cubes, he was reinvented by Wagner and Grant in 'Midnight Surfer' as a sky-surfer, powering into the black Mega-City night on top of a powerboard – a sleek surfboard capable of flight.[404] Cam Kennedy took Ron Smith's geeky teen and imbued him with a confident weightlessness, the termite-like mounds of the city blocks mimicking the scale of the lone surfer against an ocean mega-wave.

Bare-footed, wearing wetsuit-like clothing, an umbilical cable tied to his ankle, he was no longer defacing walls… but transcending them. Looping, curving, plunging through the vertical city, following its contours and yet unconstrained; zipping over, around, and through.

Like the Vandal Squads of New York, the Judges watched him intensively, Dredd sending a warning by visiting him at volunteer skysurfing classes he ran for youngsters.[405] But it did not put him off from competing in Supersurf 7, the illegal competition where surfers from all over the world tried to complete a deadly course through the Mega-City urban jungle.

The choice to make him a surfer was inspired. While mid-century American 'waxploitation' films and bands like the Beach Boys presented surfing as a clean-cut, socially acceptable – and, most importantly, white – counterculture, Wagner and Grant's script instead namechecked James Dean, whose role in 1955's ***Rebel Without A Cause*** embodied the rebellion of the new 'teenager'.

The move connected Chopper to the 'dangerous' teenage subcultures – drag racing, graffiti, joyriding – that so terrified twentieth-century parents and authorities. But it also grounded his rebellion not in surly rejection of society but in stoic individualism.[406]

Based on his own teenage experiences of surfing at Malibu, ***Magnum Force*** writer John Milius imbued surfing with a mythic quality, positioning its practitioners as existing outside of social norms, in his 1978 coming-of-age film ***Big Wednesday***.[407] 'We were outlaws, juvenile delinquents, anarchists and rascals,' Milius later wrote.[408] 'And at the same time our lives were regulated by a strict chivalry code. We were samurai.'

This code of mutual respect is explicitly referenced in 'The Midnight Surfer' as Chopper and reigning Supersurf champion Yogi Yakamoto wish each other good luck: '***There is no rancour in the world of sky surfing,***' adds the narration. '***Only good, honest rivalry.***'

'The forces Chopper opposed are eternal to urban living; the oppression of un-negotiated space, the faceless mass of the crowd, the conformism of non-conformism,' wrote author Darran Anderson.[409] 'In scrawling his smiley face signature on buildings […] Chopper was trying to speak. In the later "Midnight Surfer", he was trying to breathe.'

The competition is brutal, as dozens die on the course and even more are shot from the sky by the Judges, but Chopper is finally victorious.

He would eventually perish taking part in another, more deadly Supersurf, but having emerged victorious as champion at the end of 'Midnight Surfer' he is led away by Dredd as the people chant his name, the word balloons almost overwhelming the page.

In any other context, the reader would expect him to be cuffed or even beaten, the mob broken up with daysticks and riot foam; indeed, in 'Unamerican Graffiti', it had taken a team of Judges to haul him to the prison transport. But now he walks, his face impassive, as Dredd accompanies him and the crowd chant: '***Chopper! Chopper! Chopper!***'

'Shakespeare – Chopper – you're just plain creep to me!' sneers Dredd, attempting to undercut both Chopper's individualism and his newfound fame. In doing so, he echoed the attempts to depoliticise the radical message of graffiti by reducing it to mere 'crime'.

But Chopper undercuts his sneering by refusing to fight, rejecting violence, and instead transcending the status of lawbreaker and becoming a symbol of freedom, of resistance: '***They'd tried to crush him before, but he'd shown them. He'd beaten them again. Now he was somebody – and the whole world would know his name!'***

'The only way to deal with an unfree world,' French existentialist Albert Camus said,[410] 'is to become so absolutely free that your very existence is an act of rebellion.' Chopper finally achieved what he had tried to do with graffiti – to be known by his own name and live on his own terms, even under the lengths the state would go to stop him.

Years later, it is what almost got him killed. In 1988, Chopper broke out of the cubes and flew across the Pacific to participate in the (now legal) Supersurf 10, taking place in the Australian 'Sydney-Melbourne Conurb', known as 'Oz'.[411] Surviving the perilous journey – involving a murderous robot cook and man-eating birds – he managed to compete, only to lose to rival, Jug McKenzie.

In the final pages, he decides he does not want to 'come quietly' and begins to fly into the Australian outback. Sent to retrieve him,[412] a furious Dredd raises his gun to shoot his fleeing quarry.

This is the moment that split the Wagner/Grant partnership apart. 'We had – very unusually for us, because John and I don't usually disagree – a vehement argument about what should happen at the end of Chopper,' said Grant.[413] 'John wanted Chopper to win the race, and escape from Dredd. I wanted Chopper to win the race and for Dredd not only to shoot him dead but to shoot him in the back.

'And John's agenda was, he wanted Chopper brought up as a hero, whereas my agenda was that I wanted Dredd painted as even more of a bastard than he already was. And shooting Chopper in the back – I don't think he would ever have been forgiven by the readers!'

Wagner won out. Chopper was able to float away into the Australian Outback.

The story of Chopper is a warning about a power that has waged a war on graffiti until the city itself has become a battlefield, but it is a war it cannot win. As a graffiti artist and then as a skysurfer, he finds the means and power to disrupt, to disorder. Unlike him, however, the option to fly away is not afforded to those communities most affected

by ‘broken windows’ policing, which fixes them as disorder that needs to be ordered.

‘A war to create and maintain social order can have no end,’ wrote Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in ***Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire***. ‘It must involve the continuous, uninterrupted exercise of power and violence. In other words, one cannot win such a war, or, rather, it has to be won again every day. War has thus become virtually indistinguishable from police activity.’

Chopper warns that the battle against such oppressive ‘order’ must itself be re-fought every day.

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[359] ***2000 AD*** Progs 206-207 (1981) Script: John Wagner, Artist: Brett Ewins, Ron Smith, Letters: Tom Frame

[360] Ellie Howard, ‘80’s graffiti artist Futura 2000’ – kidsofdada.com (2015)

[361] Tristan Cork, ‘St Paul’s riot DID spark 1981 race riots across Britain, as researchers find ‘direct connection’’ – bristolpost.co.uk (14 September 2017) https://bit.ly/3NpZs24

[362] Interview, January 2021

[363] The teacher’s board features a checklist of despair: ‘***1. find job (unlikely); 2. keep occupied; 3. keep off the streets; 4. keep out of trouble; 5. find a hobby***’.

[364] ‘Roaming across gang turfs, slipping through the long arms and high fences of authority, violating notions of property and propriety, graffiti writers found their own kind of freedom. Writing your name was like locating the edge of civil society and planting a flag there. In Greg Tare’s suggestive words, it was “reverse colonization”,’ wrote journalist Jeff Chang in ***Colorlines Magazine*** in 2002.

[365] Short for ‘nincompoop’, a clownish seventeenth-century term for an idiot, seems an odd insult to appear in American graffiti, but would have been easily understood by ***2000 AD*** British readership.

[366] ***2000 AD*** Prog 203 / ***2000 AD*** Progs 197-200 / ***2000 AD*** Progs 209-223 (1981) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Ron Smith, Colin Wilson, Letters: Tom Frame

[367] Colin M. Jarman & Peter Acton, ***Judge Dredd: The Mega-History*** (1995)

[368] Jeff Chang, ***Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*** (2005)

[369] Yerodin Carrington, ***The Semiotics of Graffiti*** (2021)

[370] ***New York Times***, 'Taki 183 Spawns Pen Pals' (21 July 1971) https://nyti.ms/3vTLYWH

[371] 'The Day the Law Died', ***2000 AD*** Progs 89-108 (1978-9) Script: John Wagner, Art: Mick McMahon, Brett Ewins, Brendan McCarthy, Brian Bolland, Garry Leach, Garry Leach & Ron Smith, Letters: Tom Frame, Tom Knight, Jack Potter

[372] Here Smith presages 'The Problem with Sonny Bono Block', which would appear in the following issue ***2000 AD*** Prog 208, (1981).

[373] 'Pirates of the Black Atlantic', ***2000 AD*** Progs 197-200 (1981) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Ron Smith, Letters: Tom Frame

[374] 'Who Killed Pug Ugly?'***, 2000 AD*** Prog 203 (1981) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Ron Smith, Letters: Tom Frame

[375] 'SAME THING DAY AFTER DAY – TUBE – WORK – DINNER – WORK – TUBE – ARMCHAIR – TV – SLEEP – TUBE – WORK – HOW MUCH MORE CAN YOU TAKE – ONE IN TEN GO MAD – ONE IN FIVE CRACKS UP' was written on the London Underground's Circle Line between Ladbroke Grove and Westbourne Park.

[376] Mike Urban, 'Brixton graffiti from the late 1970s and early 1980s' – brixtonbuzz.com (3 May 2018) https://bit.ly/3a41xTE

[377] Jon Savage, ***England's Dreaming*** (1991)

[378] Quoted in filmmaker Roger Gastman's documentary ***Wall Writers: Graffiti in its Innocence*** (2015)

[379] Philadelphia Weekly, 'Godfather of Graffiti' – philadelphiaweekly.com (2 July 2020) https://bit.ly/3AdYKlA

[380] ***Kurt Iveson***, 'The Wars on Graffiti and the New Military Urbanism' in ***City*** Volume 14, Issue 1-2 (2010)

[381] Alexis Petridis, 'Spraying the 70s: the pioneers of British graffiti' – theguardian.com (3 February 2015) https://bit.ly/3OMuKRX

[382] Rebecca Fishbein, 'Ex-graffiti Vandal Squad Cop Talks Banksy, Bloomberg and Street Art' – gothamist.com (19 October 2013) https://bit.ly/3P4VkpJ

[383] The first 'masterpiece' on a subway car was painted by 'Super Kool 223'. It marks the beginning of the transition to what is usually considered graffiti 'art'

with the use of elaborate colours, backgrounds, and figurative elements.

[384] Echoing Chopper's own revolt against the harsh world of employment, Puerto Rican artist Lee Quinones told author Ivor Miller in 2002's ***Aerosol Kingdom: Subway Painters of New York City*** that 'Subways are corporate America's way of getting its people to work. It's used as an object of transporting corporate clones. And the trains were clones themselves, they were all supposed to be silver blue, a form of imperialism and control, and we took that and completely changed it.'

[385] Less successful were the dozen all-white cars, dubbed 'The Great White Fleet', that Koch ordered. Little more than giant rolling canvases, they were soon covered in graffiti.

[386] Alex Davies, 'NYC Mayor Ed Koch Wanted To Use Wild Wolves To Stop Graffiti On Subways' – businessinsider.com (4 February 2013) https://bit.ly/39YZJeM

[387] Jeff Chang, 'American Graffiti', ***Village Voice*** (2002)

[388] Jeff Chang, 'The writing on the wall: why are graffiti and vandalism bad words on the left?', ***Colorlines Magazine*** (2002)

[389] Even those cleaning the cars faced death: the chemical washing of graffitied trains made hundreds of workers sick, and one man died of exposure.

[390] Jordan T. Camp & Christina Heatherton, 'How Liberals Legitimate Broken Windows: An Interview With Naomi Murakawa' in ***Policing the Planet: Why the Policing Crisis Led to Black Lives Matter*** (2016)

[391] Camp & Heatherton (2016) ***ibid***.

[392] Michael S. Sherry, ***The Punitive Turn in American Life*** (2020)

[393] The scene is a play on a scene in ***Dirty Harry*** where Callahan stops a man threatening to jump from a building by punching him in the face.

[394] ***2000 AD*** Prog 58 (1978) Script: John Wagner, Art: Brian Bolland, Mick McMahon, Letters: Steve Potter

[395] In 2002 Mallon pleaded guilty to fourteen disciplinary charges ranging from neglect of duty, falsehood and discreditable conduct. Chief Constable Barry Shaw described Mallon as 'a liar at the centre of an empire of evil'. This did not stop his successful run for mayor of Middlesbrough, where his increasing CCTV and neighbourhood patrols was credited with bringing crime to historic lows.

[396] It wasn't until 2007 that Transport for London, which runs the capital's transport network, issued its first graffiti-related ASBO against teenage tagger Billy Murrell, who was banned from carrying any kind of pen or paint, or sitting on the top deck of a bus.

[397] ACLU Michigan, 'For Naught: How Zero Tolerance Policy and School Police Practices Imperil Our Students' Future' – aclumich.org (4 February 2015) https://bit.ly/3yxPbg9

[398] John Pratt, David Brown, Mark Brown, Simon Hallsworth, Wayne Morrison (eds.) ***The New Punitiveness*** (2005)

[399] Kurt Iveson, 'The wars on graffiti and the new military urbanism' in ***Analysis of Urban Change, Theory, Action***, Vol 14, Issue 1-2 (2010)

[400] Sam Roberts, 'George L. Kelling, a Father of 'Broken Windows' Policing, Is Dead at 83' – nytimes.com (15 May 2019) https://nyti.ms/3nmJ1ci

[401] Iveson (2010) ***ibid.***

[402] Iveson (2010) ***ibid.***

[403] ***Judge Dredd Megazine*** Vol.1 #10 (1991). The story's title is a parody of the deathbed line 'Win one for the Gipper', uttered by future president Ronald Reagan in his first major role as George 'The Gipper' Gipp in the 1940 film ***Knute Rockne: All American***, a line later un-ironically deployed by him when he was seeking re-election. 'Hen Broon Tower' is a reference to the gangly member of the popular Scottish cartoon family 'The Broons'.

[404] ***2000 AD*** Progs 424-429 (1985) Script: John Wagner, Art: Cam Kennedy, Letters: Tom Frame

[405] The programme, like Chopper's school classes, ridicules government programmes intended to help the young at a time of rocketing youth unemployment. At the time, TV ads for the government's 'Youth Training Scheme' promised sixteen-year-old school leavers two years' training to improve their 'job prospects'. The YTS programme was widely derided and closed in 1989.

[406] One might even see in Chopper the figure of Wayne Lynch, a legendary Australian surfer, key figure in the 'Shortboard Revolution' of the late 1960s and early '70s, and inventor of 'vertical' surfing. Regarded as a child prodigy, Lynch eventually eschewed competition and became reclusive but was considered 'the Future of Surfing incarnate,' Hawaiian professional surfer Reno Abellira said, 'A boy wonder with searing eyes, a disarming choirboy smile, and an attacking style.'

[407] Coincidentally, the film counted among its investors one George Lucas.

[408] Davinia Thornley, ***True Event Adaptation: Scripting Real Lives*** (2018)

[409] Darran Anderson, ***Imaginary Cities*** (2017)

[410] Albert Camus, ***The Rebel*** (1951)

[411] ***2000 AD*** Progs 545–570 (1987-8) Script: John Wagner, Alan Grant, Art: Cliff Robinson, Jim Baikie, Garry Leach, Will Simpson, Dave Elliott as K. Edwards, Brendan McCarthy, Will Simpson, Steve Dillon, Barry Kitson & John Higgins, Letters: Tom Frame

[412] Chopper's journey was interspersed by Dredd's real mission – destroying the base of former Justice Department eugenicist, Morton Judd, who intended to use an army of Judge clones called the Judda to take over Mega-City One.

[413] Interview with Andy Diggle, 2000AD.org https://bit.ly/3QXA3j8


REMEMBER OUR CODE:
STRIKE HARD! STRIKE FAST! EAT UP!
Art by Ron Smith

THE LEAGUE OF FATTIES

Consumption, isolation, and the policing of the body

‘***Sometimes the law may seem harsh, citizen. But remember – the good of the community must come before the appetite of the individual!***’
– Judge Dredd, ‘The League of Fatties’ (1982)

‘***Beliwheels rumbling, teeth chomping, they lumbered into action – and wrote themselves a page in Mega-City history! They were the real heavy mob – the obese organisation known as the League of Fatties!***’

Among the many iconic images of the citizens in ‘Judge Dredd’, the Fatties are perhaps the most recognisable.[414] While some turn to violence to cope with the boredom and frustration of life in Mega-City One, others turn to gluttony to occupy their time.

First appearing in 1982, artist Ron Smith continued his definitive run of citizen grotesques with the rolling folds of the Fatties’ voluminous guts held up off the floor by groaning ‘belly wheels’, trays stuffed with junk food secured by straps around their bulging necks.[415]

When food shortages hit the Big Meg, corpulent citizens form the League of Fatties and demand larger rations than thinner cits – ‘***Food should be distributed by weight – fatter you are the more you get!***’ – but are met by stony refusal. While some hungry citizens suggest Fatties should go from being mere ***consumers*** of food to a ***source*** of it, Dredd – of course – treats everyone ‘fairly’ (being as quick to jail the potential cannibal as the protesting Fattie) but there is no sympathy towards the Fatties’ plight.

And so, they turn to crime to feed their ‘habit’. However, these are bungling bandits, their girth getting in the way as they ambush food convoys and break into food stores, only to be unable to make their getaway after scoffing the loot or destroying the very vehicles they

are trying to steal. Deemed unable to control themselves – their appetites threatening '***the common good***' – all Fatties must be disciplined, Dredd insists, into obedient thinness. Under an emergency 'Fat Control Law', the overweight are herded into segregation blocks where they are forced to diet.[416]

The reason for their crime spree and enforced abstinence: the apocalypse.

As touched on in chapter two, American 'bigness' was a theme of 'Judge Dredd' from the start – the buildings, the bikes, the city, the crime, and the response. But Wagner and Grant believed this had gotten out of hand. Beginning with the graphics added to Ezquerra's 'Futuregraph' in Prog 3, Mega-City One had expanded from being merely 'New York' to a 'megalopolis' taking up the entire Eastern Seaboard. Seeking to halt the spread, they elected for drastic surgery – slicing the city, and its population, in half. 'The Apocalypse War', a twenty-five part epic that took up a full half of 1982, opened with a massive nuclear bombardment by the 'Sov' forces of the Russia city state of East-Meg One.[417]

The first long-form 'Dredd' story to be drawn by a single artist, it marked the dramatic return of Carlos Ezquerra to the strip he co-created but left behind in 1977 and brought some ***Battle*** grit to 'Dredd', transforming him from Western sheriff to war hero just as a bona fide cowboy – or at least someone who had portrayed one – heated up the Cold War.

Elected US president in 1980, former actor Ronald Reagan brought with him not just the swagger of the gunslinger, but also the uncompromising attitude that marked his violent repression of student protests in 1969 and 1970, when he was governor of California.

With the decade of détente between the US and the USSR ending in 1979 with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Reagan boosted military spending and ramped up the rhetoric, declaring in 1982 that 'Marxist–Leninism' would be left 'on the ash heap of history'.

By sheer coincidence, in the prophetic issue of ***2000 AD*** that hit newsstands just three days beforehand, Dredd had achieved exactly

that – the ash, though, was radioactive fallout.

After staging a daring raid on a Sov missile silo, Dredd prepared to turn the Russians' own weapons against them. As a Sov Judge pleaded for mercy for his city, Dredd coldly replied '***Request denied***' before obliterating East-Meg One in thermonuclear inferno. It was clear what Wagner and Grant thought of Ron's rhetoric – the American cowboy had annihilated his enemies, later insisting that ***'next time, we get our retaliation in first'***.[418]

But it wasn't just Reagan's military budgets that were bulging. His predecessor Jimmy Carter had been roundly mocked for his 'crisis of confidence' speech, delivered at the height of the 1979 energy crisis, when he gently chastened Americans over their consumption and suggested that the post-war 'age of plenty' was over.[419]

Reagan, on the other hand, saw consumption as an American right. His New Right 'small government' individualism rejected all restraint or limit. It was a view of 'freedom' defined entirely by capitalist consumption. Invoking the fabled American frontier, he declared 'There are no limits to growth… Nothing is impossible.' The Almighty had placed the promised land in the hands of the American people; to spurn this continent of plenty was akin to atheism. There could be no limits to the new American mantra of 'more, more, more'.[420]

'Law and order' was part and parcel of this new hyper-capitalism, and the Fatties provide the perfect metaphor for the politics of neoliberalism, which uses the body as a means of control.

THE APPARENTLY INTRACTABLE collapse of the economy opened the door for neoliberal economists, whose ideas flowed into the 'policy vacuum' that now bedevilled governments.[421]

Led by Austrian economist Friedrich Hayek and his American counterpart Milton Friedman, and propagated by British businessman Antony Fisher's Institute of Economic Affairs (arguably the most influential think tank in British history), their formally fringe ideas of radical free-market economics and politics revived nineteenth-century ideals of ***laissez faire*** liberal capitalism.

Their 'neoliberalism' blamed the post-war Keynesian economic consensus for this social and economic strife, rejected government intervention in the economy, and believed 'the market' to be the most efficient, indeed the only, means of distributing resources.

Neoliberalism redefined the ***individual*** – liberalism's ultimate unit of human freedom – as the ***consumer***. Market freedom, argued its disciples, overruled democratic and personal freedom. Class, race, community, nation – these were all ties that bound and restricted the individual. Only the power of 'the market' could provide the freedom of ***choice***. Under Margaret Thatcher in Britain and especially Reagan in America, both neoliberal acolytes, consumption became king.

'Dredd' had lampooned this new consumerism before in 'The Judge Child', where a boss-eyed Pharaoh wearing a saucepan on his head ruled over a kingdom of trash in a parody of disposable culture, and in the 'Burger Wars' episodes of 'The Cursed Earth', where the warring mutant burger gangs are empty corporate avatars in an apocalyptic wasteland haunted by American avarice. These brands, still fresh and exciting to nine-year-old Britons in 1978, were the vanguard of a globalised economy that would come to consume cultures, economies, and even individuals.

With a succession of pathos-laden stories in the early 1980s, Wagner and Grant picked apart this new landscape of neoliberal consumption to expose not just its emptiness, but the means of control that lay within it.

'***Over the years thousands of bored citizens had turned to gluttony to occupy their time,***' acknowledges the narration in 'The League Of Fatties', echoing the Judge in 'The Lemming Syndrome' by suggesting that the city is its own '***contamination***'. From the residents of Rita Tushingham and Ernest Borgnine blocks in 'Block War' to Arnold Short, Ruby Foulclough and Marlon Shakespeare, the bruising, crushing conditions of life in Mega-City One leave citizens bored, depressed, and anxious.

In response, they turn to a plethora of fleeting fads and mayfly fashions to fill their lives with pointless distraction, whether it is synchronised leaping, encasing themselves in rubberised plastic ('***Boing®, the 22nd Century miracle that turns people into human***

pinballs!'), or donning 'bat suits' that allow them to glide between blocks.

These are the comic icons of 'Judge Dredd', a grand, near constant parody of chaotic consumerism from Wagner and Grant who, alongside artists Ron Smith and Cam Kennedy, seem always at their most gleeful and inventive when devising some new spasmodic mania for the citizens to pursue.

There is Otto Sump, too ugly even for a job as a 'rat scarer' but whose pathetic appearance on reality TV helped him found a cosmetics empire of products designed to make people ugly, rather than beautiful.[422] The 'Simps' paraded around in ridiculous clothes, acting bizarrely, and practising their official religion of 'Simpology'.[423] And there was James Fenemore Snork, who decided to grow the largest nose in the city, inspiring both a craze for colossal conks and repeated assassination attempts.[424]

Like the Fatties, all these characters lance the impermanence, ephemeralisation, emptiness, and social chaos of neoliberalism that robs people of jobs and then seeks to plug the resulting hopelessness and social alienation with frippery and, just like its 'fast food', empty calories.

THE 1960S AND 1970S had been the dawning of the true age of the individual.

Liberalism spoke of the individual as the ultimate unit of human happiness, and growing countercultures began to express individual identities in a way never before thought possible.

Identity became freer, more malleable. Social groups based on sex, gender, and lifestyle expressed themselves through clothing and music. The British Women's Liberation Movement protested the Miss World beauty competition in 1970, the UK's first Gay Pride march took place in London in 1972, newly militant trade unions and civil rights movements began to campaign for self-expression and equal rights beyond traditional boundaries of class and race. With tabloid contempt, 'The League of Fatties' poked fun at what seemed like the ridiculousness of this 'identity' politics, with the Fatties using slogans such as '***Fat pride***' and '***Gluttony will prevail!***'.[425]

In the 1980s, emboldened by electoral success, conservative forces confronted such movements just as they sought to strip them of their power by channelling calls for self-expression into the colourful, instant gratification of consumer culture.

By producing goods tailored for and targeted at precise consumer groups, who are defined by lifestyles, the commodification of identity not only offered simple solutions to existential questions but, through the sheer array of solutions, intensified and exacerbated the anxieties they promised to solve.[426]

The crazes of Mega-City One are a wry lancing of a consumerist society that sells individualism as a ***choice***, and yet strips it of its meaning. It is the homogenising tyranny of an atomised society, of infinite choice hiding conformity: any colour so long as it's black, any choice so long as you behave yourself.

But when the populace are denied any bonds of community, life becomes a desperate search for meaning in a world stripped of any, where the only option left is to consume. In the plethora of fads and fashions we see citizens trying to find identity, a sense of belonging in a society that has become ***atomised***.

When Friedrich von Hayek wrote that government planning crushed individualism and would lead inexorably to totalitarian control and that 'liberty and responsibility are inseparable' in his 1960 book ***The Constitution of Liberty***, he spoke deeply to Thatcher's Methodist upbringing.[427] It had been a childhood steeped in British lower middle-class values: individual self-enrichment, enterprise, 'respectability', personal responsibility. That last quality was her counter to the kind of social liberty that had blossomed in the 1960s and become such an opponent of Conservative policies. For Thatcher, economic liberalism did not mean social liberalisation.

'You do not get a responsible nation until you get a nation of responsible citizens,' she told ***The Times*** in 1988, echoing Hayek directly, 'and the price of freedom is the acceptance of responsibility and that if you have a problem you do not immediately say: "Well, the Government must do something about it!" You say: "Well, it is for me first!"'

While this had not been absent in the rhetoric in the lead up to the 1979 election, her vision of consumerism soon came with a moralising Victorian Puritanism. While the rich were at liberty to flaunt their growing wealth, those of the working classes who did not or could not trade class solidarity for the 'respectability' of property ownership were portrayed as avaricious and greedy.

To her rabid base, the growing underclass created by Thatcherism was full of 'benefit cheats', 'scroungers', and 'freeloaders', who 'abused' the system and did not 'deserve' to be helped. This new ethos of ***personal*** responsibility came with the violent repression of trade unions, the dismantling of communities, and the squeezing of the welfare state.

The 1987 interview in which Thatcher opined that 'there is no such thing as society' is often quoted without its context, but it was nonetheless the embodiment of her philosophy: individuals should look after themselves, not look to the government for help.[428]

Nowhere was this rejection of the social more evident than on the issue of crime. 'There's a breed of left-wing politicians who excuse violence on the grounds that it's not the criminal who is guilty – but the rest of us,' she said in 1988.[429] 'In effect it excuses, indeed even encourages, crime by absolving the criminal of guilt in advance. Weasel words can never justify the actions of the robber, the thug or the hooligan.' Criminals made a choice to break the law, she insisted – it was up to the individual to decide to behave and, if they didn't, the iron fist of the law was there to correct them.[430]

James Q. Wilson, the co-founder of 'broken windows', agreed. In his 1975 book ***Thinking about Crime***, he insisted on the 'sober view' that tackling the wider social issues that caused crime was impossible; if people didn't want to change, there were profound limits on what governments could do. His position had one central tenet: crime is a choice and the only way to stop people committing it is to make the act not worth the potential punishment.

If individuals are solely responsible for crime then there is no need to change the system. The solution is not to quibble over carrots, but to strengthen the stick.

Right-wing sociologists like Patricia Morgan blamed crime on selfish parents and 'lefty' teachers, while others accused criminologists of attempting to absolve the criminal of responsibility for their actions. From its earliest incarnation, this idea of a 'betrayal' by liberal or socialist schools, parents, and government formed one of the key pillars of the 'law and order' agenda.

These two policies – the shifting of the burden of responsibility onto the individual alongside patronising moralist condemnation for these 'bad choices' – is parodied again and again in 'Dredd'. It lies at the heart of his character: a rejection of context, of circumstance, of complication. When the individual will not behave as they should, is deemed to not be taking responsibility for their actions, the law is there to 'correct' their behaviour.

HOWEVER, IT CANNOT be ignored that 'The League of Fatties' plays its eponymous protagonists for straight-up laughs.

Wagner, Grant and Smith's inventions from this period can be seen as part of the British tradition of comically overweight characters from the plump lushes of William Hogarth's eighteenth-century etchings to satirical comic ***Viz***'s 'The Fat Slags' in which the 'grotesque' body is a metaphor for gluttony and selfishness. Though from their incompetent lawbreaking to the long protest march that breaks down into exhausted wheezing, the strip can feel almost indistinguishable from the very right-wing tabloidism it is meant to lampoon.

This exposes one of the weaknesses of satire, and of the satire in 'Dredd' particularly. Satirical exaggeration is meant to make the reader laugh, despite themselves, before the disjunction between the horrors on the page and their amusement makes them aware of the cruelty of their laughter. However, it is a fine line between satire and mockery. All too often, the citizens' hubristic outrageousness undercuts the cruelty in the way the Judges treat them, which is taken as 'necessary', the satire read 'straight' and without nuance.

In trying to understand the appeal of the acerbic satire of ***Viz*** (which launched in 1979) to such a socially and politically wide range of readers, critic Roger Sabin suggested that it represented 'reassuring humour, without strings' that as much bought into as it

parodied the Thatcherism's 'anti-culture culture' reaction against 1980s 'right-on' left-wing culture.[431]

However, these characters are often infused with a deep pathos, a hallmark of Wagner's writing, and of Russian anarchist philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the 'carnivalesque', which subverts and liberates the dominant social assumptions through humour and chaos.[432] For Bakhtin, as for the Fatties, the humour and satire of their plight is in the perpetual promise of a revolution to overturn the oppressive social order that will never come.

This is particularly striking in 'Requiem for a Heavyweight', published a year later with art by Ezquerra, which revealed the hidden world of 'competitive eating'.[433] This was not as outlandish as Wagner and Grant made it seem – Nathan's Hot Dog Eating Contest had been held on Brooklyn's Coney Island since the early 1970s; 1983's champion, crowned just a month before, had been twenty-five-year-old Bronx accountant Emil Gomez.[434]

While the fat jokes remained, Wagner and Grant now imbued them with the pathos of desperate athletes like Marlon Brando's Terry Malloy in 1954's ***On The Waterfront***,[435] as major stars such as 'Two Ton' Tony Tubbs and 'Abdominal' Arnie Stodgman competed to become – quite literally – the heavyweight champion of the world.[436]

In the case of the League, the laughter inspired by people who've been so appallingly treated by their own culture engaging in revolutionary activity reflects on the city, not the individuals. And while competitive eating uses and then discards their bodies, it is the only way for the Fatties to find agency in a system that denies them purpose.

Though hardly Spartacus' revolt or ***Rocky***, these fads, fashions, and sports are not the acts of simpletons or sheep; what other choice do they have in the face of an uncaring system? Already having attempted to discipline their consumption, the Judges are not slow in also policing their expressions of dissent.

Within them we can see both Thatcherite morality and its condemnation. In laughing ***at*** the Fatties, the strip exposes the cruelty at the heart of their situation – while they have their own failings, they are in this state as a reaction to their circumstances. But rather than

deal with the causes, the state seeks to control them for their 'wrong' choices.

In 2013, Turkish authorities suppressed anti-government protests with tear gas and water cannons before issuing a ban on demonstrations in the capital, Istanbul.

On 17 June, performance artist Erdem Gündüz walked into Taksim Square and stood silently for more than six hours.[437] His passivity – making no noise, no movement – did not break the anti-protest ban yet was clearly an act of defiance.[438] Turkish police attempted to provoke a response out of the motionless figure and eventually arrested him, but he was immediately freed.

Evoking the famous footage of a lone protestor blocking the advance of tanks in Tiananmen Square in China in 1989, Gündüz's protest revealed the power of the body to confound authorities that view crowds as hostile, but also exposed the way that the body is the site of the battle for control of the individual.

Consider the police power to stop and search, to arrest us and deprive us of our liberty – 'arrest' means, literally, to cease movement. From the SPG 'snatch squad' separating individuals from the crowd and the choke hold that ended George Floyd's life, to the interview room where a suspect's narrative is isolated from outside influence, the police seek to gain control over the material body. With it, they constrain the potential to move and to act; the arrested criminal is the free radical prevented from damaging the body politic.[439]

While a crowd is powerful and difficult to manage, individuals are vulnerable and easier to control. We can see this in the Judges themselves: unlike other comic book 'heroes', Dredd is not a unique individual but part of a larger group. The Judges' uniforms are designed to erase their individuality and sublimate them into a mass, making it more difficult to pick them out and easier for them to overwhelm the individual.

This is a city where the body no longer even belongs to the individual inhabiting it. After a lifetime in which they can be halted or violated at whim, as soon as death occurs a citizen's body is literally

torn apart, atomised into its constituent substances and recycled at the city's vast 'Resyk' ('recycling') facilities, where bodies are '***put to good use. In death, as they never could in life***'.[440] Meanwhile, citizens live in fear of body-harvesting 'organ leggers', who do the same but for the black market.[441]

But while the violence of the Judges happens to citizens as individuals, it is experienced structurally, communally, and as a result of an ideology of control. The body is good business in Mega-City One, but it is also the site of the battle between the forces of freedom and the forces of control, with the individual not free but isolated.

Mega-City One is a lonely city. This may sound antithetical for a crowded megatropolis of (formerly) eight hundred million people, but the idea of the city as a place of isolation and violence has a long pedigree; novelist Henry Miller compared experiencing the loneliness of the city to that of 'the caged animal', which brings on 'crime, sex, alcohol and other madnesses'.[442]

It is a notion rooted in the atomising effect of urbanisation; the city draws people together who have no existing connections of community or kinship yet makes new fraternities hard to forge. To the Thatcherite, the city was the Hayekian dream – a market without ties, without restrictions, where one could forge one's own economic path free from the ties that bind.

But in breaking all bonds, human beings – who seek meaning through social activity and identity – are left physically and psychologically unmoored. With its high unemployment, deindustrialization, underfunded services, lack of work, and social isolation, Mega-City One is the endgame of the neoliberal city – a place of violent madness and profound sadness.

While there is scant evidence of an 'epidemic of loneliness' beloved by headline writers, it has been suggested that by reducing people's sense of connection to others, neoliberalism increases loneliness and compromises well-being.[443] Research claims the heightened risk of death from loneliness is now equal to smoking fifteen cigarettes a day or being an alcoholic and exceeds the health risks associated with obesity.[444]

With clear links between loneliness and mental health distress, rates of suicidal thoughts and behaviour among under-eighteen-year-olds in America rose by almost three hundred per cent between 2009 and 2018.[445] [446] So-called 'deaths of despair' associated with alcoholism, prescription and illegal drugs, and from suicide have also risen, particularly in the US, where an 'opioid crisis' has seen the number of overdose deaths from prescription and illegal drugs quadruple since 1999.[447]

In his 2014 book ***What About Me?***, Dutch psychoanalyst Paul Verhaeghe documented how disoriented and atomised citizens may seek identity through nationalism or fundamentalism, or – more likely – seek solace in consumerism. This 'depressive hedonia', the sense that 'something is missing', and the anxiety of a precarious existence that does not supply meaning provoke waves of self-harm, eating disorders, depression, loneliness, performance anxiety and social phobia. Excessive eating, too, is now understood to be a symptom of depression.

'What does it feel like to be lonely? It feels like being hungry,' wrote novelist Olivia Laing.[448] 'Amidst the glossiness of late capitalism, we are fed the notion that all difficult feelings – depression, anxiety, loneliness, rage – are simply a consequence of unsettled chemistry, a problem to be fixed, rather than a response to structural injustice or, on the other hand, to the native texture of embodiment, of doing time, as David Wojnarowicz memorably put it, in a rented body, with all the attendant grief and frustration that entails.'

And with it comes the blame. Just as Thatcher had no time for 'social' causes for crime, she had no pity for those suffering the effects of their dislocation. This has grown into a reflex response to any structural analysis of social problems, an 'ideology of mercilessness' that 'dispenses with any notion of compassion and holds others responsible for problems they face, problems over which they have no control'.[449] Now we can understand the Fatties not as greedy objects of mockery, but as victims.

The crazes of Mega-City One reflect the moral panics around consumption, usually centred on young people consuming the 'wrong things', that have marked the post-war consumerist boom, from rock

and roll music to comic books, from 'alco-pops' to drill music. Each has brought with it their own repressive spasm. Just like the banning of American crime comics or the use of the Serious Crime Act to proscribe drill music lyrics, the Judges pass emergency legislation to place the Fatties on the wrong side of the law, allowing them to sanction their bodies and consumption. The response is not to challenge or change the conditions that led to the Fatties' plight, but to blame them for it and incarcerate them '***for the common good***'.

It is these conditions that drive the citizens to extremes, but rather than treat the symptoms the Judges use the one tool at their disposal: isolation.

'I BELIEVE THAT very few men are capable of estimating the immense amount of torture and agony which this dreadful punishment, prolonged for years, inflicts upon the sufferers,' Charles Dickens said after a visit to Eastern State Penitentiary in Pennsylvania, opened in 1829, where prisoners were held in 'rigid, strict, and hopeless solitary confinement'.[450] 'I hold this slow and daily tampering with the mysteries of the brain,' he added, 'to be immeasurably worse than any torture of the body.'

Since he killed so many of his enemies, the issue of where Dredd sent perps who didn't meet a terminal end took time to resolve. The cruel spectacle of Devil's Island in 'Judge Whitey' could never have been sufficient to house the endless felons of the crime-ridden megatropolis, while a 'time stretcher' that compressed long sentences into minutes was quickly dropped.[451]

It wasn't until Prog 22 that the ideal solution presented itself: the isolation cube.

Often depicted as transparent boxes stacked on top of one another, the 'iso-cubes' are where perps wait out their comically long sentences, the perfect expression of the Judges' punitive 'law and order' state. Bereft of either entertainment or employment, the cubes isolate the individual and effectively suspend them in time and space. In a city of crowded chaos, to be completely alone is the worst punishment imaginable.

For the prison reformers of the eighteenth century, isolation was rather the key to repentance. Long run as profit-making enterprises with prisoners crammed into unsanitary cells, prisons were recast as places of monastic contemplation and rehabilitation.[452] When Dickens visited Philadelphia in 1842 he discovered the truth – isolation is indeed a cruel and unusual punishment.

In 1974, the idea of the prison as a place of rehabilitation collapsed. Work by sociologist Robert Martinson exposing the shortcomings of prisoner rehabilitation programmes was seized on by politicians of all stripes to announce that 'nothing works!'.[453] With crime rates in the West reported to be at historic highs, the idea of salvaging offenders was simply rejected. Against the background of 'tough on crime' politics, sentences became longer, and prison programmes were slashed.[454]

As a result, prisons have become places not of correction but 'of pure custody, a human warehouse or even a kind of social waste management facility…[which] promises no transformation of the prisoner through penitence, discipline, intimidation, or therapy. It promises to promote security in the community simply by creating a space physically separated from the community in which to hold people whose propensity for crime makes them appear an intolerable risk for society'.[455]

Since then, incarceration has become America's default response to crime, with seventy per cent of convictions resulting in confinement.[456] Driven by politics, fear of crime, and the parallel 'wars' on drugs and crime, even as crime rates have steadily fallen the American carceral state has swollen to almost mind-numbing size.

As reflected in Mega-City One's penitentiary state – '***[You know] we keep a greater proportion of our citizens locked away than any other city on this Earth?***[457] – not only does the US have the highest incarceration rate in the world but every single state now incarcerates more people per capita than virtually any independent democracy on Earth.[458] In England and Wales, the prison population has doubled since 1990. More people than ever – and

disproportionately people of colour – are now locked up for longer periods of time.

Solitary confinement, condemned in the US as a dangerous practice in the 1890s, was reintroduced on a large scale in 1983 and has since increasingly become the norm. The suicide of Kalief Browder in 2015 after two years of being isolated in a cell for twenty-three hours a day at the notorious Rikers Island prison and the 2019 death of Layleen Polanco, a transgender woman found unresponsive in her cell after suffering an epileptic seizure, led to promises to end solitary in New York's jails by March 2021. Yet, as correction officers chanted 'Bring back the box!', new mayor Eric Adams promised to reinstate it.[459]

It was revealed in 2017 that one teenager had been routinely locked alone in his cell in London's Feltham Young Offender Institution (YOI), for twenty-two hours a day for fifty-five days.[460] The use of segregation in youth custody has increased, even as the overall number of children detained has fallen. Meanwhile, the average length of periods of detention doubled, from eight to sixteen days, with seven out of ten episodes of segregation in YOIs lasting over a week.[461]

In an echo of Mega-City One's iso-cubes, in Canada in 2012 First Nations prisoner Adam Capay was segregated in 'almost total isolation' in a plexiglass cell under constant glaring lights for four and a half years, with prison staff mounting complete social and physical isolation.[462]

While it can serve a purpose – as extraordinary punishment or protection for vulnerable inmates – confining prisoners to tiny cells for up to twenty-four hours a day has devastating effects on their physical and mental health.

The data on those who self-harm or attempt suicide in solitary is staggering. Studies suggest that those held in solitary are six times more likely than other inmates to kill themselves, and that even a year after release they are at a higher risk of suicide.[463] Others have spoken of long-term consequences of their isolation, long after they have been released back into society.

In 2015, the UK Supreme Court ruled that routinely holding prisoners in solitary confinement for longer than seventy-two hours without external authorisation was unlawful. The same year, the United Nations adopted the 'Mandela Rules', named for South African leader Nelson Mandela, which define solitary confinement lasting longer than fifteen consecutive days as a form of torture, only to be used in exceptional circumstances.

However, a report from the Vera Institute of Justice revealed that the practice is not just widespread in the US but being applied to non-violent inmates, and for trivial 'disruptive behaviour, such as talking back, being out of place, failure to obey an order, failing to report to work or school, or refusing to change housing units or cells'.[464]

The Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 meant being held 'in a prison within a prison', as 'solitary' went from being extraordinary to the norm. Prisoners in the UK were held in isolation for up to twenty-three hours per day, often for weeks or months at a time.[465] Inspectors found a 'disturbing' decline in prisoners' emotional, psychological and physical well-being in 2021 and self-inflicted deaths in 2021 rose twenty-eight per cent on the previous year.[466] [467] The numbers in solitary in America – estimated at sixty-one thousand before the pandemic – exploded, with numbers soaring five hundred per cent to three hundred thousand.[468] [469] In 2022, the UK's Chief Inspector of Prisons warned that 'in the last year, more prisoners than ever have left custody after spending almost their entire sentence locked in their cells'.[470]

Both Britain and the US also use solitary confinement on immigrants, including two people isolated by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) for up to twenty-three hours a day for more than three hundred days.[471] The UK – the only country in Europe to use indefinite detention against immigrants – was condemned by the ***British Medical Journal*** for using extended isolation for people held in prison solely because of their immigration status, rather than for a criminal sentence.[472]

Meanwhile, the prison population is set to increase by twenty-five per cent by 2026, driven not by increases in crime but by 'law and order' posturing that demands people be sent to prison for longer.

More than two and a half times as many people were sentenced to serve ten years or more in 2018 than in 2006. Rates of self-harm and assaults are at the highest level ever recorded; and assaults on staff more than tripled in just five years.[473]

As the American carceral state booms, aided by a 'school-to-prison pipeline' that funnels teenagers – mostly Black and Hispanic – into the criminal legal system, and the UK government pledges to build 'super-prisons', the complete isolation of the individual, even within prison, becomes the supreme punishment.

Meanwhile, the disciplining power of isolation leaches out into the rest of society. The Children's Commissioner described 'horror stories' of 'disruptive' children repeatedly being put in isolation for days or weeks at a time, with schools even converting toilet blocks into rows of 'isolation booths', threatening to damage their mental health, with those already suffering trauma highly vulnerable to its use.[474]

Isolation is such a powerful tool because the individual is easier to control.

'***Let's face it, most criminals are apprehended because they're recognised,***' laments 'Cyclops' Pete Runcie as he and other '***top criminals***' try to plan the perfect crime in 'The Blobs'.[475] Runcie's bright idea is to spark a new fashion craze, one that will make everyone look the same…

'***There he is, gents!***' he announces. '***Fingers Patel – alias The Blob! My face-change machine has erased every distinguishing feature! Even his voice is electronically scrambled! In short, the unidentifiable criminal – the perfect perp!***' Patel's head has been surgically altered to resemble a near-featureless amorphous blob, leaving only pinpricks for eyes and nostrils, and a small grille for a mouth.

In another satire on consumerism, the criminals now set their Machiavellian plan in motion. Fashion vid-zines owned by the crime lords begin promoting 'blobism' as the hot new look: '***dungarees, glitter shirt, black toe boots and one kneepad, luminous green, worn low on the left knee! An exciting change from all that drab***

variety!'. By 1982, this was a standard Wagner and Grant plot – a new and exciting craze leads to crime and requires Dredd to clamp down. But ***this*** fad is not designed to make people stand out and therefore be easier to police, but to make the individual invisible to the eyes of the state.

'Get 'em mixed up and we'll never sort them out again!' admits a frustrated Dredd as a hall at Justice HQ fills up with identical suspects. His solution is to make the identical unique – every Blob is legally required to display an indelible identity number in a prominent place. Their fad bubble burst, Runcie and his fellow criminals – all now permanently converted to blobs – must come up with another bright idea!

While 'The Blobs' is a short, throwaway comedy, it does express the contestation of identity in a city that seeks to isolate an individual so that it may control them.

'It has frequently been observed that terror can rule absolutely only over men who are isolated against one another and that, therefore, one of the primary concerns of all tyrannical governments is to bring this isolation about,' wrote philosopher Hannah Arendt.[476] 'What prepares men for totalitarian domination in the non-totalitarian world is the fact that loneliness, once a borderline experience usually suffered in certain marginal social conditions like old age, has become an everyday experience of the ever–growing masses of our century.'

Power wants to know us individually, to see us, to be able to identify us, to expose us to its ministrations. From the birth of the rogues gallery to today's rise of facial recognition technology, which will be explored in chapter thirteen, the state is happy to wield its power to identify and isolate.

MUCH LIKE THE 'law and order' state, 'The Blobs' funnels questions of identity through the prism of consumerism and crime. It is the reality of being ***Homo economicus*** – liberal philosopher John Stuart Mill's 'economic man' – which dominates neoliberal ideals of individual freedom. ***Homo economicus*** is liberal individualism expressed in purely economic terms, an individual of the 'free market' – free to own

wealth and property, free to move, free to sell and buy labour, free to consume.

However, Wagner and Grant's satire of consumerism looked behind this and saw a system that rejects limits on consumption yet seeks to control those who consume 'incorrectly'.

As Dredd walks away from the gates of the segregation camps, he insists that they are harsh but necessary to prevent the '***appetite of the individual***' from overwhelming '***the good of the community***'.

Because, for all their talk of liberty, Hayek and Thatcher's 'freedom' only extended to the market – in every other respect they were authoritarians.

In 1973, the left-wing president of Chile, Salvador Allende, was overthrown by a right-wing military coup d'état, backed by domestic business elites, US corporations, the Central Intelligence Agency, and US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger – all alarmed by Allende's socialist policies.

After the coup, General Augusto Pinochet refused to hand power back to a civilian government. His brutal military dictatorship, which insisted it had 'saved' Chile from socialist totalitarianism, dissolved the country's Congress, suspended its constitution, and began persecuting and murdering thousands of alleged dissidents. Guided by acolytes of economist Milton Friedman, the country began a rapid neoliberalisation, its exports and labour market 'freed' from regulatory restraints.

Hayek was delighted. Neither he nor Friedman particularly cared about whether a political system was democratic or fascist so long as it secured a free-market economy.[477] For them, authoritarianism could even mean ***preserving*** freedom.[478] 'My personal preference,' Hayek said, 'leans towards a liberal dictatorship rather than toward a democratic government devoid of liberalism.'[479]

After meeting Pinochet in 1977, he recommended Chile to Thatcher as a model for her own free-market revolution.[480] Fortunately, she demurred, insisting Britain's democratic institutions made the idea 'quite unacceptable'. But it is not surprising that Hayek felt confident enough to make this alarming suggestion. Thatcher's regime had a deeply authoritarian streak, reining in civil liberties over everything

from horror videos to schools' treatment of homosexuality, from unions to immigrants.[481]

Hayek's suggestion betrays neoliberalism's authoritarian impulse; if there is no such thing as society, as Thatcher insisted, then conflicting individual interests can easily end in chaos.

'The anarchy of the market, of competition, and of unbridled individualism (individual hopes, desires, anxieties, and fears; choices of lifestyle and of sexual habits and orientation; modes of self-expression and behaviours towards others) generates a situation that becomes increasingly ungovernable,' wrote economic geographer David Harvey. In the face of this 'social anarchy and nihilism', neoliberalism insists that 'some degree of coercion appears necessary to restore order'.[482]

But blind repression on its own cannot produce willing acceptance, the bonds of solidarity must be broken forever. When they coalesce and organise for change, social groups become an 'enemy within'. Just as the Thatcherite state generated legitimacy for its attacks on the trade union movement and the recalcitrant poor by portraying them as threats to democracy, so the Fatties are shown as 'greedy' and a threat to other citizens. And so rather than find common cause, their fellow citizens – themselves isolated, anxious, and fearful – turn on them and help the state discipline them.

Put simply, we are easier to control when there is no one to come to our aid.

On one of *2000 AD*'s most famous covers, artist John Higgins portrayed a solitary figure standing in a tiny spotlight, his hand meekly raised as if asking for permission to speak.[483] Behind him, huge figures of implacable and faceless Judges loom menacingly, their gaze zeroing in on this isolated individual.

'***Um… democracy!***' he whimpers. In his timid isolation, both physical and political, we instantly understand both his fate and the reality of life under the Judges – you get to choose anything, so long as it's not another way. It is also the irony of neoliberalism: the supremacy of choice and markets does not extend to other ways of living. In a famous 1980 speech, Thatcher coined one of the defining slogans of her political career: 'there is no alternative'.

In the hyper-consumerist, neoliberal state of Mega-City One, you can do whatever you want to do, so long as it affects only you. You are 'free to move or choose but not so free as to think about redesigning the highway'.[484]

You can have all the freedom you want, so long as you behave the right way.

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[414] Even Alex Garland's 2012 ***Dredd*** film, while generally downplaying the crazier aspects of the city in its adaptation, features a very brief appearance of a Fattie, just as Peace Trees Block's defensive 'blast shield doors' close (themselves a reference to 'The Apocalypse War').

[415] ***2000 AD*** Progs 273-274 (1982) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Ron Smith, Letters: Tom Frame

[416] These blocks are named after portly Sir Toby Belch from Shakespeare's ***Twelfth Night***, Quinn Martin's overweight character 'Frank Cannon' in CBS detective show ***Cannon*** (1971-1976), writer Charles Hamilton's corpulent schoolboy 'Billy Bunter', and actor and director Orson Welles, who was well known for being overweight.

[417] ***2000 AD*** Progs 236-244 (1981) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Mick McMahon, Brian Bolland, Steve Dillon & Ron Smith, Letters: Tom Frame

[418] 'Meka-City', ***2000 AD*** Progs 271-272 (1982) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Carlos Ezquerra, Letters: Tom Frame. This line was then repeated at the conclusion of the incredible nine-panel encapsulation of the entire one hundred and fifty-three pages of 'The Apocalypse War' that was published in the ***Daily Star*** on 18 September 1982.

[419] Zachary J. Lechner, 'What Jimmy Carter's most famous moment can teach the Democrats running in 2020' – washingtonpost.com (15 July 2019) https://wapo.st/3SgaUkw

[420] Greg Grandin, ***The End of the Myth*** (2015)

[421] Shoshana Zuboff, ***The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*** (2019)

[422] 'Sob Story', ***2000 AD*** Progs 131-132 (1979) Script: John Wagner, Art: Ron Smith, Letters: Tom Frame

[423] 'Simp, ***2000 AD*** Prog 527 (1987) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Cliff Robinson, Letters: Tom Frame. Short for 'simpleton', i.e. a foolish 'simple' person, the term 'simp' has subsequently taken on alternative meaning as internet slang term for someone who, in pursuit of affection or a sexual

relationship, pays excessive attention toward someone who typically does not reciprocate.

[424] 'Citizen Snork', ***2000 AD*** Progs 356-358 (1984) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Ron Smith, Letters: Tom Frame

[425] Two years before, ***Not The Nine O'Clock News*** had similarly portrayed 'fat activism' in the 'Stout Life' sketch, where Rowan Atkinson's angry campaigner from FLAB (Fat Louts Against Bikinis) refers to 'flab riots'.

[426] Don Slater, ***Consumer Culture & Modernity*** (1997)

[427] Ian Dunt, ***How To Be A Liberal*** (2020)

[428] Margaret Thatcher, Interview for ***Woman's Own*** – margaretthatcher.org (23 September 1987) https://bit.ly/3a1DuVJ

[429] Speech to Conservative Party Conference (14 October 1988) https://bit.ly/3yDiJJ8

[430] In a wisely ignored memo to speechwriters working on her address for the 1979 Conservative Party conference, Thatcher wrote: 'Morality is personal. There is no such thing as a collective conscience, collective kindness, collective gentleness, collective freedom. To talk of social justice, social responsibility, a new world order, may be easy and make us feel good, but it does not absolve each of us from personal responsibility'.

[431] Roger Sabin, ***Adult Comics*** (1993)

[432] Mikhail Bakhtin, ***Rabelais and His World*** (1965)

[433] ***2000 AD*** Progs 331-334 (1983) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Carlos Ezquerra, Letters: Tom Frame

[434] Broadcast on sports channel ESPN since 2004, the contest has made stars of Japanese 'godfather of competitive eating' Takeru Kobayashi and his Californian successor Joey Chestnut as well as Sonya 'The Black Widow' Thomas (also called 'Leader of the Four Horsemen of the Esophagus') and Miki Sudo, who unseated her in 2014.

[435] '***I coulda been a contender,***' whispers William 'Pudge' Dempsey as he chokes to death on his own bed, echoing Brando's famous line from ***On The Waterfront***, in which he plays a former boxer battling corrupt union bosses running the New Jersey waterfront.

[436] 'Two Ton' Tessie O'Shea was a Welsh entertainer and actress who, coincidentally, appeared in ***Blue Lamp***, the 1950 film that introduced the character of PC George Dixon, later revived in ***Dixon of Dock Green***.

[437] Richard Seymour, 'Turkey's "standing man" shows how passive resistance can shake a state' – theguardian.com (18 June 2013) https://bit.ly/3NNs3Pi

[438] In 2014, Gündüz was awarded the 'Václav Havel Prize for Creative Dissent', named for the Czech writer and dissident who was a leading figure in the 'Velvet Revolution' of 1989 that ended more than forty years of communist rule.

[439] Mark Neocleous, ***The Politics of Immunity Security and the Policing of Bodies*** (2022)

[440] 'America', ***Judge Dredd Megazine*** Vol.1 #1-7 (1990-1) Script: John Wagner, Art: Colin MacNeil, Letters: Annie Parkhouse

[441] 'Shanty Town', ***2000 AD*** Progs 300-303 (1983) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Ron Smith, Letters: Tom Frame

[442] Henry Miller, ***The Colossus of Maroussi*** (1941)

[443] Julia C. Becker, Lea Hartwich & S. Alexander Haslam, 'Neoliberalism can reduce well-being by promoting a sense of social disconnection, competition, and loneliness' in ***British Journal of Social Psychology*** (2021)

[444] Jacob Sweet, 'The Loneliness Pandemic' – harvardmagazine.com (7 December 2020) https://bit.ly/3R0w3hZ

[445] Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, Department of Health and Social Care & Nigel Huddleston MP, 'New Government research identifies clear links between loneliness and mental health distress' – gov.uk (12 June 2022) https://bit.ly/3I86nw2

[446] Emily Brignone, Daniel R George, Lawrence Sinoway et al, 'Trends in the diagnosis of diseases of despair in the United States, 2009–2018: a retrospective cohort study' in ***BMJ Open***, Volume 10, Issue 10 (2020) https://bit.ly/3Oy4jzO

[447] Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 'Understanding the Epidemic' – cdc.gov (29 March 2018) https://bit.ly/3nuZP0U

[448] Olivia Laing, ***The Lonely City: Adventures in the Art of Being Alone*** (2016)

[449] Henry A. Giroux, 'Donald Trump and the Plague of Atomization in a Neoliberal Age' – truthout.org (8 August 2016) https://bit.ly/3I52MPc

[450] Charles Dickens, ***American Notes*** (1842)

[451] 'Time Stretcher', ***Daily Star*** (22 June 1985) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Ron Smith

[452] Wagner wrote several early Dredd stories under the pen name 'John Howard', the prison reformer whose crusade against overcrowding ironically led to the

barbarous 'separate system' of solitary confinement, designed to crush an inmate's identity and make them easier to control.

[453] Jerome Miller, 'The Debate on Rehabilitating Criminals: Is It True that Nothing Works?' – ***The Washington Post*** (23 April 1989)

[454] Ironically, Martinson – who committed suicide in 1980 – thought prisons were failed, crime-causing anachronisms that 'must gradually be torn down' and replaced with milder but more effective forms of social control.

[455] Jonathan Simon, ***Governing Through Crime*** (2007)

[456] Emily Widra & Tiana Herring, 'States of Incarceration: The Global Context 2021' – prisonpolicy.org (2021) https://bit.ly/3I7dKDD

[457] 'Tale of the Dead Man', ***2000 AD*** Progs 662-668 (1990) Script: John Wagner, Art: Will Simpson & Jeff Anderson, Letters: Tom Frame

[458] Widra & Herring (2021) ***ibid.***

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NEXT

RUMBLE IN THE JUNGLE

Militarisation, technology, and the 'imperial boomerang effect'

'***After seeing the Manta, I'm sure we'll all feel a lot safer on the city's streets… that's unless we're criminals, of course! Ha ha!***'
– 'Rumble in the Jungle' (1983)

SLEEK AND FLAT, the Manta Prowl Tank is the Judges' newest hardware in their '***never-ending fight against crime***'.

Despite its domed turret, shaped like a Judge's helmet, which carries a '***high-intensity laser cannon***', the Manta is less a tank and more an armoured personnel carrier; four Judges suspiciously monitor passers-by from inside it, ready to launch into action from its bay doors on their Lawmasters.[485]

'***A good enough machine,***' Dredd admits in Wagner and Grant's 1983's 'Rumble in the Jungle', with art by Ian Gibson, but '***personally I prefer to meet my perps eye to eye***'. He soon gets his chance – the Mantas are deployed just as Mega-City One's biggest youth gangs converge for a mass brawl.

Taking its name from the tagline of the boxing match between George Foreman and Muhammad Ali in 1974, the 'rumble' takes place in the Jungle, the crime-stricken Sector 230, introduced in Prog 39.[486] The Bob Marks Block Y-Bobs (named for former Metropolitan Police chief Robert Mark) raise the stakes by stealing monumental earth-clearing bulldozers and driving them toward the fight, cars piling into their massive scoops as they crush everything in their way.

The Manta immediately swoops into action, dropping Dredd onto the lead tractor to blast his way into the cabin and bring the convoy to a shuddering halt. '***We're not finished yet!***' he shouts. '***We've still got that rumble to deal with – and fast! Mantas – clear the way for us!***' Dredd leads the four giant tractors straight into the Jungle,

each herding a different gang towards a crossroads. There they are 'kettled' and, in the face of impending death, they surrender. The rumble is over.

The Manta passes with flying colours, but it isn't the only vehicle to prove its worth: '***These Rad-Traks sure made quick work of this little flare-up,***' comments a Judge. '***Yeah,***' says Dredd. '***I'll pass the news onto armoury. We could do with a few of them on permanent service.***'

IT HAD BEEN eighteen months since Dredd had been at war.

The Apocalypse War had been 'quite a grim story,' admitted Alan Grant,[487] and Dredd's return was consciously humorous (albeit grounded in the war's aftermath): a narcissistic wrestler robot, the League of Fatties raiding food convoys, people turning into mushrooms, violent game shows, more gross products from Otto Sump. Yet the debut of the Manta Tank showed Dredd had merely traded one war for another – the war on crime.

As weapons of war, armoured personnel carriers are potent symbols. When they rolled through the streets of Ferguson, Missouri, during protests following the police killing of Michael Brown in 2014, accompanied by officers dressed in full military garb and carrying military-grade rifles, there was widespread condemnation over policing becoming ***militarised***.

Whether it was at Black Lives Matter demonstrations in 2020 or protests against austerity in 2010, the vehicles, armour, tear gas, shields, drones, and guns of the 'riot cop' suggest some inviolable line between foreign wars and domestic policing has been crossed, that by ***becoming*** militarised the police break with a past when copper and soldier were separate.[488]

But the ease with which Judge Dredd switched between war-making and law-making reveals not just the adaptability of Dredd as a character, but about how policing has always been a process of waging war. Because, to paraphrase psychologist Abraham Maslow, if the only tools you have are hammers then it is tempting to treat everything as if it is a nail.[489]

'I SAW THE shields in front of me lifted and chopped down on top of protesters' heads,' an off-duty NHS nurse told the ***Guardian*** after police officers in riot gear were recorded slamming their long shields onto demonstrators. 'Not just bumps of a shield. I'm talking in excess of five-centimetre lacerations to the top of the skull.' The police later defended the practice as legal and 'appropriate'.[490]

Ironically, the protest had been against the government's Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill (PCSC), legislation massively expanding police powers that – just two days prior – a former police chief said threatened to make the British police 'paramilitary'.[491]

This was far from the careful self-image of 'policing by consent' that the British police seek to project. But the flow of military equipment, military tactics, and military thinking began long before this bill made its way into law. In Britain it began just as 'Judge Dredd' debuted. It began with riot shields.

'It looked spooky, fascinating even, the whole scene made menacing by blackened skies and the distant plume of smoke,' one person at 'the Battle of Lewisham' recalled upon witnessing the first use of police riot shields in England.[492]

Six thousand anti-fascist protestors had gathered to block a provocative 'anti-mugging' march by the far-right National Front (NF) through a racially diverse area of South East London in the summer of 1977. Between them stood a quarter of the Metropolitan Police's forces. When the fascists fled under a hail of bottles and bricks, the police looked to clear the streets.

AFTER THE HUMILIATION of officers hiding behind street signs and milk crates at the Notting Hill Carnival the year before, the Met had prepared for this moment. Made from thick polycarbonate sheets, unlike the opaque shields used by French gendarmes the Met's new metre-and-a-half-tall 'National Shield' was transparent, to make it appear 'less threatening' and 'purely passive and defensive'. If that was the case, it failed on both counts. 'If a police officer feels he is being attacked and you put something in his hand, he will use it,' a Federation spokesman said. 'I don't see how you can stop him using the riot shield to hit a person.'[493]

Lewisham was only the beginning – the 'National' reappeared within days at an anti-fascist protest in Birmingham and the Notting Hill carnival. One shield manufacturing firm reported police scepticism had turned into 'active interest'.[494] Alongside them, 'snatch squads' grabbed individual protestors, Land Rovers drove at high speed, mounted officers galloped into crowds, and ranks of police charged into the fray 'with a roared battlecry'.[495]

This was the new policing for the 'law and order' age.

SEVEN YEARS BEFORE, the chairman of the Police Federation had labelled as 'fanatics', 'lunatics', and 'hooligans,' the socialist, feminist, Black Power, anti-apartheid, anti-war, and anti-fascist movements that increasingly took to the streets, staged sit-ins, and waved placards. Since World War Two, British policing had maintained that it abided by a strategy of what Met Commissioner Robert Mark called 'win by appearing to lose', a doctrine of 'minimal force' that aligned with the image of the unarmed and non-aggressive 'British Bobby'. The police were there to facilitate protest, not prevent it. If violence did occur there was a tendency to under-react – better to be seen as the victims of a violent mob than oppressors.[496]

Public sympathy was 'a more powerful weapon than water cannon, tear gas, or plastic bullets'.[497] The Met had even, Mark claimed, trained a police horse to collapse and feign death on command – a sure-fire way to win sympathy from the animal-loving public.[498]

But in 'the age of demonstration and disruption', 'win by appearing to lose' became a luxury.[499] When striking coal miners forced a police retreat from the gates of a fuel depot at Saltley in Birmingham in 1972, it sparked a panic.[500] Having promised 'law and order', 'the miners' Agincourt' suggested Edward Heath's government had instead lost control. 'Law and order' politics demanded more aggressive public order policing – this was not protest, this was war.

After Lewisham, the ***Daily Mail*** insisted the country 'must look to its defences'.[501] The government told chief constables that water cannons, tear gas and plastic bullets were available if they wanted them. Some asked whether England needed its own paramilitary force, like the French ***gendarmerie***.[502] Yet it already had it – the

Special Patrol Group; the Met's own protest squad was aggressive and proactive, not holding crowds back but wading in to break them up.

During an anti-NF demonstration in Southall in 1979, they were front and centre. In one brutal baton charge, Blair Peach, a protestor and teacher for special needs children, was struck over the head and died. A police report, suppressed by the Met for three decades, concluded that he died at the hands of the SPG.[503] 'It was a case of the boot going in,' one protestor recalled, 'there was no attempt to arrest anybody.' [504]

Just three months later, Dredd echoed these same expectations of brutality on the cover to Prog 121: '***Judge Dredd to Justice HQ. Rioters in Spaceport have ignored my warnings,***' he declares as snarling armed men climb towards him. '***Stand by for casualties.***'

This was what Stuart Hall called the 'strong state' – neither fascist nor military, but nonetheless thoroughly authoritarian. But it was not something the government had to learn from scratch.

At Lewisham, two Northern Irish 'hardcases' were asked what they thought of the riot shields: 'Aww, you get this every Saturday back home when the pubs and betting shops close for the afternoon,' they replied.[505]

It was a revealing comment. The benign paternalism of ***Dixon of Dock Green*** and 'minimal force' were only ever for home consumption on the 'mainland' – everywhere else, British policing was already more akin to 'Judge Dredd'. Whereas Dixon asked ne'er-do-wells to 'come quietly', the Empire silenced 'unruly colonials' with the gun and the truncheon. Indeed, what ***Dixon*** disguised, but 'Dredd' revealed, is that policing has always been founded in the violence of the colony.

Whereas the state retreated at Saltley, in Northern Ireland it opened fire. In January 1972, fourteen civil rights protestors were killed in Derry by British soldiers that faced nothing more than people throwing stones. 'Bloody Sunday' was one of the most harrowing events in 'the Troubles' that erupted in the late 1960s.

It was here, in its oldest settler colony, that the roots of Britain's police lay – it was in Ireland in the early nineteenth century that a

young Robert Peel, then Chief Secretary for Ireland, established his first police force: the 'Peelers' were an armed paramilitary corps, made up mostly of former soldiers and used to swiftly and harshly quell riots and disorder. So when, a decade later, England faced a wave of domestic unrest, Peel – now Home Secretary – had the perfect model. Though recruited from and run like the military, the 'Bobby' was the image Peel and his successors projected to a wary public.

By the 1960s, politicians, security officials in the military, police, and the public had begun to join the dots between rebellions in Britain's colonies and the unrest among its immigrant populations at home.[507]

Major-General Richard Clutterbuck, a veteran of Palestine and Malaya, warned that the rebellions in the colonies could just as well happen in 'London, Liverpool, Cardiff or Glasgow'. An editorial in ***The Police Review*** warned in the wake of African American riots of 1969: 'some of the events in recent years [in the US] are also almost certain to come home to roost here'. 'The overriding fear was that the proverbial barbarians were at the gates,' wrote Julian Go, 'that the global insurgency that had been experienced by the British in Malaya and Cyprus or the French in Vietnam was coming to London's streets.'

With this fear in mind, the Empire effectively became the foundry for policing technology, weapons and techniques developed for war flowing back and forth between the military and the police from the latter's earliest days.[508] Colonial police slaughtered fifteen hundred Ndebele warriors in modern-day Zimbabwe using new 'Maxim' machine guns in 1893.[509] Blunt 'baton' rounds (initially sawn-off broom handles) were used by Hong Kong police against demonstrators in Singapore in the 1880s. Tear gas, a weapon banned from use on the battlefield after World War One, was repackaged and exported to the colonies for use in controlling unruly 'natives'.[510]

Nowhere was this more obvious than during 'the Troubles' in Northern Ireland. Following rioting in mainly Catholic areas in 1969, the Provisional Irish Republican Army began an armed paramilitary campaign to end British rule and reunify Ireland, which had been

partitioned following the Irish War of Independence in 1919-1921. Alongside the British Army, the paramilitary Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) fulfilled both military and policing functions as they waged a 'low-intensity war' of counterinsurgency against the Irish nationalists.[511]

Much of the technology developed was euphemistically referred to as 'less lethal': rubber bullets – a weapon of indiscriminate terror that would bounce like Dredd's own 'ricochet' rounds – and plastic bullets were developed specifically to manage crowds and riots in mainly Catholic areas.[512] Riot shields, already used during the Cyprus Emergency of the 1950s, had been deployed since the Troubles began. At the 'Battle of Bogside' in 1969, the use of tear gas 'became so commonplace that families lined their front doors with towels to stop it from seeping in'.[513]

So, when England, in turn, faced a new decade of discontent, the lessons of colonial control were there for use against the rebellious classes and 'dangerous' immigrant populations.

In what philosopher Michel Foucault dubbed the 'imperial boomerang effect', the techniques and technology of social control honed in colonial 'laboratories' turned inwards and were used against rebels and minorities in the metropolis, or so-called 'internal colonies'.[514]

The Met sent fact-finding missions to Belfast and Hong Kong.[515] In 1969, the SPG was sent to help restore order amid a coup d'état in the West Indies island of Anguilla and, from 1973 if not earlier, took courses in 'urban guerrilla containment'. New mutual support systems between forces were created. Tear gas was used for the first time on the British 'mainland' in Toxteth in 1981. During the similar riots in the Moss Side area of Manchester, Chief Constable James Anderton sent in his Tactical Aid Group (TAG) to clear the streets using 'snatch squads' strategies developed in Northern Ireland. The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) produced a secret new military-style riot control guide – the Public Order Manual – explicitly based on the 'lessons' learnt in Northern Ireland and Brixton.

While Dredd was busy travelling into the future to confront the mutated Judge Child and avert the destruction of the city in 1984's

‘City of the Damned’, his match in real life finally arrived.[516]

At Orgreave in South Yorkshire, striking coal miners faced Thatcher’s paramilitary ‘strong state’, which had been designed to break the power of the trade unions. This was no repeat of Saltley; six thousand officers armed with round shields and truncheons – the first time they had been used on the British ‘mainland’ – dog units, and police horses met picketers arriving at a coking plant. Their official purpose, stated in the ACPO tactical manual, was to ‘incapacitate’ demonstrators.[517]

In a ‘carbon copy’ of the tactics of colonial riot squads, they channelled picketers into a narrow field and attacked them.[518] Hundreds were injured. Overwhelmed and exhausted, the unions ended their strike within a year. The sheer ferocity of the police’s actions was shocking; not for nothing were they later branded Thatcher’s ‘private army’.[519]

WEEK AFTER WEEK, Dredd satirised this new militarised belligerence and colonial ‘boomerang’. His mission was truly a ‘war on crime’ that held no distinction between the soldier and the cop.

This overt militarism had been there from almost the first page – in retaliation for Whitey’s murder of a Judge, the Chief Judge had threatened to send an air squad to ‘***bomb that building and everyone in it off the face of the Earth!***’.[520] On the cover of Prog 168 in 1980, Dredd sits on bullet-riddled concrete letters spelling out the word ‘crime’ – ‘***Any questions?***’ he asks, cradling a huge machine gun. Driving home the metaphorical point, the following week’s cover showed him dauntlessly leading a battle charge against identically clad ‘enemy’ Judges, a scene from an aborted ‘Second American Civil War’ storyline.[521]

From ‘Heavy Weapons Teams’ looking like World War Two artillerymen[522] to ‘non-lethal’ crowd control[523] and even an arsenal of apocalyptic planet-destroying nuclear weapons, the strip seemed to presage modern policing’s fetish for ever more powerful crime-fighting technology. With twin cannons and ‘Cyclops’ laser cannon, so powerful is a Judge’s Lawmaster bike that, when it goes on a rampage after its artificial intelligence is damaged, Dredd is forced to

blow it up – and the monorail train it has hijacked – in order to stop it.[524]

Just a few years after the debut of the Manta Tank, the Notting Hill Carnival saw the first deployment on the UK mainland of bullet-proof Land Rovers with gun ports, also developed in Northern Ireland, in which the RUC's own heavily armed Special Patrol Group rode with the back doors open, ready to leap out at a moment's notice like a military strike team.[525]

Thirty-four years later, the story's Rad-Traks became real: after widespread anti-corruption protests across Russia, famous arms manufacturer Kalashnikov unveiled the 'Shield', an anti-riot vehicle with a huge shield mounted on its front. 'This Kalashnikov may not technically be a weapon,' wrote ***Popular Mechanics***, 'but it is as much an ominous show of force as any rifle an officer might carry.' [526]

Meanwhile, Dredd's Lawgiver handgun was a weapon worthy of a judge, jury, and ***executioner***. As he prepares to use it, Dredd shouts the name of one of its six types of rounds, as if each is a black-capped sentence of death – '***High Ex!***' '***Incendiary!***' '***Heat-seeker!***' Although a handgun, it is nonetheless a military weapon: as well as the 'ricochet' rubber bullets familiar to the streets of Northern Ireland, 'high explosive' and 'incendiary' are the names of the most common types of munitions used in the aerial bombing campaigns of World War Two.

'***When it comes down to it, any weapon is only as good as the person who's using it.***'

Tested by Dredd himself, the new model of Lawgiver – the 'Mark Two' – passed with flying colours. Just as the action hero succeeded the gunslinger in Hollywood's affections, so the Lawgiver – inspired by the six-shooter and Harry Callahan's .44 Magnum – succumbed to a more violent replacement.

Closer to a Heckler & Koch MP5, the firearm beloved of modern counterterrorism units, the Mark Two had more in common with the bloated semi-automatic wielded by Sylvester Stallone in the 1995 ***Judge Dredd*** movie and the stuttering 'Auto 9' from 1987's ***Robocop***. It was a gun that wore its militaristic capabilities proudly: gas rounds,

movement sensors, an energy pulse to stun whole groups, and a large under-slung magazine for 'rapid fire'.

In the mid-1990s, a creeping military fetishism had infiltrated 'Dredd', no doubt partly a consequence of Garth Ennis' interest in military history and the blunter, more action-oriented work of fellow writer Mark Millar. The Dredd of stories like 'Judgement Day' and 'Inferno' was more of an action hero in the Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger mould, while the gung ho violence of a Justice Department off-world 'fire team' in Ennis' spin-off series 'The Corps' in ***2000 AD***, and the vast Justice Department space fleets of Robbie Morrison and Colin MacNeil's 'Maelstrom' in the ***Megazine***, explicitly portrayed the Judges as a military organisation that perceived no difference between alien worlds and metropole.[527]

The one-part introduction to the new firearm was a prelude to 'The Doomsday Scenario', Wagner's vast crossover epic that spanned most of 1999, in which crime lord Nero Narcos attempted to take over the city by selling the Judges new boobytrapped Lawgivers.[528]

Narcos' plot failed, but the new Lawgiver design remained.[529] It was too powerful an image – not a scalpel to cut out crime but a machine to blow it away.

Coincidentally, the story that introduced the new, more military design, 1998's 'Gun Play' came as military weaponry began to flood into American law enforcement.[530]

BILLIONS OF DOLLARS' worth of military equipment – from mine-resistant vehicles and aeroplanes, to grenade launchers and rifles – have been funnelled to law enforcement agencies through the US Government's '1033 program', created as part of 1997's National Defense Authorization Act.[531]

Launched by the Clinton administration to help the domestic 'war on drugs', with an added bonus of providing 'value for money' for America's billions spent on military equipment, it has saturated police forces with munitions and vehicles intended for the battlefield.

The 'war on terror' following the 9/11 terrorist attacks supercharged the process, with further billions in equipment diverted under the guise of preparing local police forces for potential terrorist attacks.[532]

In 2011 alone, half a billion dollars' worth of equipment passed to law enforcement and, while the Obama administration eventually restricted the programme in 2015, following criticism over handling of the Ferguson protests, they were reversed by Donald Trump.

More than five billion dollars in military materiel went from US Department of Defence to over eight thousand law enforcement agencies between 1997 and 2020.[533] Police forces in rural communities with little, if any, violent crime now have access to military-grade weapons – such as a full-tracked tank in California's San Joaquin County, where the homicide rate is less than one tenth of one per cent – while at least one hundred and twenty police forces based in schools participate in the programme.[534]

Despite the controversy surrounding policing of the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, President Joe Biden initially held back from reinstating Obama administration restrictions on the program removed by Donald Trump, but finally did so – albeit with a significant loophole.[535] Yet it is not just weapons that have proliferated, but those who use them.

BURSTING INTO APARTMENTS unannounced and conducting searches for minor contraband, the 'crime swoop' is one of the defining images of the arbitrary and violent law of the Judges.

In March of 2020, Black medical worker Breonna Taylor was sleeping in bed alongside her boyfriend, Kenneth Walker, at her apartment in Louisville, Kentucky. Around midnight, plainclothes police smashed in the front door with a battering ram, believing an ex-boyfriend of Taylor's used the apartment to hide drugs.

Alarmed and fearing a break-in, Walker fired a shot from his licensed gun, which hit an officer in the leg. Three officers then fired thirty-two rounds, hitting Taylor three times. She died immediately on the hallway floor.

Her death came to international attention during the Black Lives Matter protests following the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis two months later, and raised awareness of the massive rise in so-called 'no-knock warrants'. A relic of America's 'war on drugs', these warrants allow law enforcement to quickly enter a

property without alerting the occupants, an element of surprise intended to prevent suspects from fleeing or help preserve evidence.

By 2010, sixty to seventy thousand of these raids were conducted in the US, the majority looking for drugs. Almost a hundred civilians and thirteen law enforcement officers died in 'no-knock' and 'quick-knock' raids in the US between 2010 and 2016, while many more were seriously injured. In 2014, police executing a search warrant in Georgia threw a flash grenade into a room with a nineteen-month-old child. In 2010, a police officer shot and killed a seven-year-old girl while raiding an apartment in Detroit.[536]

The public outcry following Taylor's death saw protestors demand an end to the practice, yet despite some bans and reforms, they continue unabated.

The controversy also exposed the use of paramilitary SWAT teams to execute such warrants and their explosive growth over the last four decades. From big cities to small rural communities, from drug enforcement agencies to schools and even intercity rail operator Amtrak, heavily armed 'Special Weapons And Tactics' teams have become a routine part of daily policing.[537]

Created by Los Angeles Police Department chief Daryl Gates in the wake of the Watts Rebellion in 1965, when a predominantly Black Los Angeles neighbourhood erupted into the largest urban rioting of the civil rights era, these hard-line, aggressive units became a key weapon in the 'War on Drugs', as the battlefield moved from South American coca fields to America's inner cities.[538]

In ***Rise of the Warrior Cop***, journalist Radley Balko detailed how, by 1995, seventy-seven per cent of all American cities with populations over twenty-five had a SWAT team. Between 1980 and 1995, the number of cities with ***more*** than one doubled to eighty-nine per cent.

Yet they are almost never used for their original purpose of dealing with hostage situations or sieges. By 2005, such teams were being deployed around fifty thousand times every year, almost always to serve warrants, back up low-level drug operations, or patrol 'high crime' areas.

Nor is Britain, whose police famously do not carry guns, free from weapons and their associated cultures of militarism.

In July 2005, Brazilian electrician Jean Charles de Menezes was followed onto the London Underground, dragged to the floor, and shot point blank seven times in the head by armed counterterrorism officers. On his way to work, de Menezes had been mistaken for a man linked to a failed terrorist attack in the capital that took place two weeks after four suicide bombings killed fifty-two people and injured hundreds. The bungled operation revealed the existence of 'Kratos' tactic, what was effectively a 'shoot-to-kill' protocol developed after 9/11 to deal with suicide bombers, whose use historian Clive Emsley said was an indication of how British officers were becoming 'caught up in the globalization of police tactics'.[539]

Although Boris Johnson, then mayor of London, was forced into a humiliating climbdown over the purchase of three second-hand water cannons from Germany, in 2014 the Association of Chief Police Officers stated that they expected water cannons to be required because 'ongoing and potential future austerity measures are likely to lead to continued protest'.[540]

There has also been a steady, even inexorable, rise in armed patrols. In 2014, Scottish Chief Constable Stephen House was forced into a U-turn over a policy that allowed officers carrying guns to be deployed on routine patrols.[541] Four years later, the Metropolitan Police pushed ahead with plans to allow armed officers to patrol areas with their guns visible and ready to use, in an effort to tackle gangs and knife crime. Even military units have patrolled in the streets; following the Charlie Hebdo killings in Paris in 2015, SAS units were deployed in London alongside 'Humint' units – covert intelligence gatherers usually used in Afghanistan and Iraq.[542]

The police themselves have begun to look less like street bureaucrats and more like soldiers. By the 1980s, the battle over police uniforms had been lost as the familiar 'custodian' helmet fell out of favour.[543] Uniforms began to shift from white shirt and tie to more militaristic uniforms of black T-shirts and combat trousers, despite a brief period in 2012 when forces sought to ditch this all-black 'paramilitary' look to make them seem 'less scary'.[544]

Meanwhile, officers carry around their waist a veritable arsenal. The straight wooden truncheon has been replaced by telescoping metal batons, which their manufacturers describe as having 'an incredible psychological deterrence'. Cans of pepper spray, illegal in the UK, can reach up to four metres and cause intense burning sensations that incapacitate its victim.

Meanwhile, weapons are being put in the hands of virtually every police officer, as the use of Taser guns becomes ubiquitous. These 'stun-guns' fire two small dart-like electrodes that deliver a fifty-thousand volt shock and can incapacitate and, in some cases, kill. Introduced to British police in 2003 for specially trained firearms officers, their use has exploded in recent years. Children aged as young as ten and an eighty-seven-year-old pensioner have been reported as being tasered, with more than thirty-four thousand incidents across England and Wales between March 2020 and April 2021.[545]

Marc Cole died after being repeatedly tasered – 'nearly continuously' for forty-three seconds – in May 2017. An inquest later concluded that the Taser contributed to the death of the thirty-year-old, who had been in the midst of a mental health crisis and had not posed a threat. Eyewitnesses told the inquest how officers made 'no attempt to de-escalate' the situation before running towards him, yelling at him to drop the knife, and when he did not immediately comply, tasered him for six seconds, then twenty-two seconds and then another fifteen seconds – almost ten times longer than the recommended amount of five seconds.[546]

Marketed as 'less-lethal' weapons, rather than 'non-lethal', Tasers have been involved in eighteen deaths in the UK, including the case of Andrew Pimlott, who died in 2013 after being engulfed in flames when he was Tasered by police while soaked in petrol.

In 2021, a police officer was jailed after tasering former footballer Dalian Atkinson for more than half a minute and then kicking him twice in the head in 2016, the first time in over thirty years a British police officer had been convicted of manslaughter in the course of their duties.

Despite reservations about their use, the government has pressed ahead to massively increase the number of officers carrying the weapons and, as the first coronavirus lockdown eased in 2020, then Home Secretary Priti Patel told police that she wanted to see them 'actually zapping the really bad people out there'. In 2022, she announced that even volunteer 'Special Constables' would be allowed to arm themselves with Tasers.[547] Seventy-five per cent of Metropolitan Police Federation members said they wanted all officers to have them and Federation chairman, Ken Marsh, called them a 'great deterrent' because people 'change the way they feel once that red dot's on them'.

This ignores the corrosive impact of such weapons technology on the police. By giving them access to machines that can immediately enforce compliance with their orders, officers in high pressure situations will instinctively reach for the weapons at their disposal.

In his 1919 paper, German sociologist Max Weber explained that modern states function and are defined by their monopoly on the legitimate use of force. Social order and the 'rule of law' relies on the use – or the implied threat – of this monopoly through institutions such as the police, the military, and the prison system. However, he also pointed out that a state must use force sparingly, as a government that relies wholly or easily on it risks becoming illegitimate.

The rise of 'law and order' disputed Weber's thesis. Challenged and contested in its efforts to remake society, the state – which had lost many of the ways it could legitimately apply violence with the abolition of the death penalty, as well as campaigns against corporal punishment and for civil rights – sought to deploy its monopoly not to protect society, but to order it.

From his belt packed with equipment to his protective padding and the shiny knuckle-duster domes on his gloves, Judge Dredd is a vision of militarist policing. Wagner had envisaged a 'plainer, more austere look' for the Judges, but as lines of officers dressed in armour and face-obscuring helmets became commonplace in the 1980s, the brilliance of Ezquerra's design became clear.[548] It blended the

practicality of a motorcycle cop's leathers with the martial uniforms of Spain's repressive ***Policía Armada*** (the 'Armed Police'), a consciously paramilitary figure drawing more on Ezquerra's work for ***Battle*** than ***Dirty Harry***.

Under the pen of Mick McMahon, the Judges' uniform became accentuated almost to an extreme, his 'big boots' style almost subsuming their bodies. These police uniforms are not merely utilitarian – they were designed to project ***power***.

This was a Judge who did not hesitate to use shrapnel shells on civilians to quell a block war and, at the climax of 'The Apocalypse War', obliterated half a billion people without compunction. By lancing the martial belligerence of Thatcher's 'strong state', Wagner and Grant predicted policing that relies not on consent, but domination.

IT CAN BE easy to get caught up in detailing how so many of the Judges' weapons have since become reality – stun guns, sonic[549] and heat weapons[550] developed for military use but increasingly used against protesters, guns activated by palm-print detectors,[551] even riot foam.[552] All of this was, in part, intended for young children enthralled by ***Star Wars*** and ***Kelly's Heroes***, who revelled in machines and sci-fi technology.[553]

'Rumble in the Jungle' is not just a story about cool future technology, but about what the use of that technology says. Dredd's uncompromisingly bellicose violence revealed the new rhetorical landscape of the 'war on crime', which framed the citizen as a '***potential criminal***' and the criminal not merely as someone who had transgressed the law, but as an enemy that threatened society itself.

'We. Are. At. War,' former Army Ranger David Grossman told police officers in 2017, many of them from small American towns, at a 'warrior mindset' training seminar.[554] 'And you are the frontline troops in this war… You are the Delta Force. You are the Green Beret. You are the British SAS. Can you accept that? Every single one of you is in the frontline of a live ammo combat patrol every day of your life.'

Spread to police forces across the US through seminars and teaching courses, Grossman's 'killology' training seeks to make

officers hyper-alert to threats while desensitising them to the use of lethal force.

'Teaching that in the academy, it does a disservice,' de-escalation trainer Ernie Stevens told the ***Washington Post*** after a series of high-profile police killings of African Americans by officers who had attended his training put his work under scrutiny, 'because what they're doing is they're preparing these cadets for war and they're scaring them upon graduation that the moment you graduate, you have to go out there and be careful because everybody wants to kill you.'[555]

Although Grossman has faced increased criticism, such military training for police appears to be widespread in the US. In 2022, it was revealed that members of the police department of the city of Tallahassee, Florida had trained in 'shooting and CQB [close quarter combat]' with military veteran Eddie Gallagher, despite him being accused of war crimes in 2019.[556]

This militarised mindset of 'us versus them', combined with a sense of righteous impunity and lethal weaponry, drives home the perception that police officers on the street are akin to soldiers on a battlefield, leaving people – especially those from already over-policed marginalised communities – looking like the enemy. Research into the effects of the 1033 program found that officers with military hardware and mindsets resort to violence more quickly and more often, while violent governmental responses mean protestors are more likely to act violently in the future, leading to a spiral of brutality that is hard to escape.[557]

We began with the confluence of Dredd's debut and the use of riot shields in 1977. It is a potent symbol of the new distance between the police and the policed in the twenty-first century, of the 'us versus them' rhetoric that has seen policing move from 'by consent' to, increasingly, 'by force'. In 1983, as Thatcher's 'private army' waged her 'unrelenting war on crime' and prepared to remake society in her image, Wagner and Grant explored how technology and the language of force fused the metropole and the colony, exposing the naked, martial force that always sat at the heart of policing.[558] With all

his lethal technology and symbols of domination, in his willingness to use overwhelming force, Dredd is a symbol of the final dislocation, the death of the myth of 'policing by consent'.

For Mega-City One is a warzone. And its citizens are the enemy.

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[485] ***2000 AD*** Progs 343-345 (1983) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Ian Gibson, Letters: Tom Frame

[486] The term 'rumble' for a gang fight had been used already in 'Meg-City Rumble' in the ***Judge Dredd Annual 1982***, published in Autumn 1981, and in dystopian crime film ***The Warriors*** (1979), which was blamed for three rumble-related deaths in the first week of its release.

[487] John Wagner & Alan Grant interviewed by Frank Plowright, ***The Comics Journal*** #122 (June 1988)

[488] Mark Neocleous, ***A Critical Theory of Police Power*** (2021)

[489] Abraham Maslow, ***The Psychology of Science: A Reconnaissance*** (1966)

[490] Tom Wall & Damien Gayle, 'Police accused of using shields as weapons at Bristol 'kill the bill' protest – theguardian.com (30 March 2021) https://bit.ly/3ul4beQ

[491] Vikram Dodd & Jamie Grierson, 'Protest laws move UK towards paramilitary policing, says former chief – theguardian.com (28 March 2021) https://bit.ly/3Ig3Sre

[492] Martin Lux, ***Anti-Fascist*** (1990)

[493] ***New Scientist***, 'Riot shields – protective or aggressive?' (22 September 1977)

[494] ***New Scientist*** (1977) ***ibid.***

[495] ***New Scientist*** (1977) ***ibid.***

[496] Reiner (2000) ***ibid.***

[497] Robert Reiner, ***Policing, Protest, and Disorder in Britain*** (1998)

[498] Reiner (2000) ***ibid.***

[499] Robert Reiner, 'Law and Order – A 20:20 Vision' in ***Current Legal Problems*** Vol. 59 Issue 1 (2006)

[500] Center Theatre Group, 'A community of strength: the compelling history behind Sting's hometown' – centertheatregroup.org (7 January 2020) https://bit.ly/3P5v8ei

[501] Tony McMahon, 'Riot police armed with dustbin lids' – thatchercrisisyears.com (17 March 2013)

[502] Reiner (2000) ***ibid.***

[503] Paul Lewis, 'Blair Peach killed by police at 1979 protest, Met report finds – theguardian.com (27 April 2010) https://bit.ly/3Aqq54g

[504] ***BBC***, '1979: Teacher dies in Southall race riots' – news.bbc.co.uk https://bbc.in/3L3qtbD

[505] Lux (1990) ***ibid.***

[506] Michael Brake & Chris Hale, ***Public Order and Private Lives: The Politics of Law and Order*** (1992)

[507] Julian Go, 'From Crime Fighting to Counterinsurgency: The Transformation of London's Special Patrol Group in the 1970s' in ***Small Wars & Insurgencies***, Vol.33, issue 4-5 (2022)

[508] Georgina Sinclair & Chris A. Williams, 'Home and Away': The Cross-Fertilisation between 'Colonial' and 'British' Policing, 1921–85' in ***Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*** Vol.35, Issue 2 (2007)

[509] Ramey Mize, "Whatever happens, we have got, the Maxim, and they have not': The Conspicuous Absence of Machine Guns in British Imperialist Imagery' – rar.rutgers.edu https://bit.ly/3upq50D

[510] Feigenbaum (2017) ***ibid.***

[511] Julian O'Neill, 'The Troubles: How 1969 violence led to Army's longest campaign' – bbc.co.uk (13 August 2019) https://bbc.in/3NE4ZlF

[512] Between 1970 and 2005, over one hundred and twenty-five thousand rubber and plastic bullets were fired, fifty-five thousand of them in the first five years – netpol.org https://bit.ly/3OMgsB0

[513] Feigenbaum (2017) ***ibid.***

[514] Stephen Graham, ***Cities Under Siege: The New Military Urbanism*** (2011)

[515] Connor Woodman, 'How British police and intelligence are a product of the Imperial Boomerang Effect' – versobooks.com (10 June 2020) https://bit.ly/3RkAeWj

[516] ***2000 AD*** Progs 393-406 (1984-5) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Steve Dillon, Ron Smith, Kim Raymond & Ian Gibson, Letters: Tom Frame

[517] Reiner (2000) ***ibid.***

[518] David McKittrick, 'John Alderson: Outspoken liberal policeman who angered Thatcher with his views' – independent.co.uk (22 October 2011) https://bit.ly/3NIfpAK

[519] Waddington (1994) ***ibid.***

[520] 'Judge Whitey', ***2000 AD*** Prog 2 (1977) Script: Peter Harris, Art: Mick McMahon, Letters: McGowan

[521] ***2000 AD*** Prog 169 (1980) Script: John Wagner, Art: Mick McMahon, Letters: Tom Frame

[522] 'The Vampire Effect', ***Judge Dredd Annual*** 1982 (September 1981) Script: John Wagner, Art: Mick McMahon, Letters: Tom Frame

[523] 'The Apocalypse War', ***2000 AD*** Progs 245-270 (1982) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Carlos Ezquerra, Letters: Steve Potter & Tom Frame

[524] 'Lawmaster on the Loose', ***2000 AD*** Prog 202 (1981) Script: John Wagner, Alan Grant, Art: Ron Smith, Letters: Tom Frame

[525] Benjamin Bowling & Coretta Phillips, ***Racism, Crime and Justice*** (2002)

[526] ***Popular Mechanics***, 'The Kalashnikov 'Shield' Is a Monstrous Anti-Riot Truck; A wall, with wheels' – popularmechanics.com (29 August 2017) https://bit.ly/3IdGQkT

[527] 'Fireteam 1', ***2000 AD*** Progs 918-923 (1994-5) Script: Garth Ennis & Si Spencer. Art: Paul Marshall & Colin MacNeil / 'Maelstrom', ***Judge Dredd Megazine*** Vol.2 #73-80 (1995) Script: Robbie Morrison, Art: Colin MacNeil, Letters: Ellie de Ville. The concept of a flexible 'fireteam' unit is believed to have been developed by Captain Evans F. Carlson and Major General Merritt Austin Edson of the United States Marine Corps during the US occupation of Nicaragua from 1912 to 1933. Carlson later popularised the term 'gung ho'.

[528] ***2000 AD*** Progs 1141-1164 (1999) Script: John Wagner, Art: Cam Kennedy, Simon Davis, Neil Googe & Charlie Adlard, Inks: Stephen Baskerville, Colour: D'Israeli, Charlie Adlard, Trevor Hairsine & Chris Blythe, Letters: Tom Frame; ***Judge Dredd Megazine*** Vol. 3, #52-59 (1999) Script: John Wagner, Pencils: Andrew Currie, Colin Wilson, Mike Collins, Janet Gale & Alan Craddock, Inks: Steve Tappin & Stephen Baskerville, Colour: Steve Tappin & Alan Craddock, Letters: Tom Frame

[529] A new design, created by Carlos Ezquerra and debuting in 'Dark Justice' (***2000 AD*** Progs 1912-1921, 2015) with art by Greg Staples, returned the gun to its origins as a Magnum-like hand cannon, but the design of the Mark Two

remains popular and formed the template for the weapons in the 2012 ***Dredd*** movie.

[530] 'Gun Play', ***2000 AD*** Prog 1122 (1998) Script: John Wagner, Art: Paolo Parente, Letters: Tom Frame

[531] Brian Barrett, 'The Pentagon's Hand-Me-Downs Helped Militarize Police. Here's How' – wired.com (2 June 2020) https://bit.ly/3P1CsHV

[532] Spencer Ackerman, 'US police given billions from Homeland Security for 'tactical' equipment' – theguardian.com (20 August 2014) https://bit.ly/3RbXrtG

[533] Victoria Chamberlin, 'As Federal Programs Continue To Militarize Campus Cops, Some Universities Reconsider' – gunsandamerica.org (9 July 2020) https://bit.ly/3IjMsdi

[534] Alex Vitale, ***The End of Policing*** (2017)

[535] Stephen Semler, 'Biden's clamp-down on military gear to local police has giant loophole' – responsiblestatecraft.org (27 January 2022) https://bit.ly/3P6pBEw

[536] Candice Norwood, 'The war on drugs gave rise to 'no-knock' warrants. Breonna Taylor's death could end them' – pbs.org (12 June 2020) https://to.pbs.org/3uO5N15

[537] Christopher Wright Durocher, 'Banning No-knock and Quick-Knock Warrants is the Only Way to Prevent More Tragic Killings' – acslaw.org (11 March 2022) https://bit.ly/3uri8rO

[538] 'SWAT' originally stood for 'Special Weapons Attack Teams', a phrase dreamed up by Gates who, in his memoirs, says being forced to modify the name by PR-conscious superiors made him feel 'crestfallen'.

[539] Clive Emsley, ***The Great British Bobby*** (2009)

[540] Alan Travis, 'Police to ask home secretary to approve use of water cannons across country' – theguardian.com (22 January 2014) https://bit.ly/3bjdIN7

[541] BBC, 'Police Scotland changes policy on armed officers' – bbc.co.uk (1 October 2014) https://bbc.in/3yJsiXf

[542] Marco Giannangeli & James Fielding, 'SAS rushed in to guard our streets as Al Qaeda warns 'you're next'' – express.co.uk (11 January 2015)

[543] Interview with Dr Chris A Williams of The Open University, 28 April 2021

[544] ***Metro***, 'Police looking to ditch 'scary' all-black uniform for more traditional clothing' – metro.co.uk (20 November 2012) https://bit.ly/3yinreb

[545] Rebecca Tidy, 'The deadly rise of Tasers in British policing' – huckmag.com (1 August 2022)

[546] Tidy (2022) ***ibid.***

[547] Emmanuel Onapa, 'The Police Don't Need More Powers' – tribunemag.co.uk (24 May 2022) https://bit.ly/3yL5OVy

[548] John Wagner interviewed by Stewart Perkins – 2000ad.org (2008) https://bit.ly/3nxpUwm

[549] Lawrence English, 'What's an LRAD? Explaining the "sonic weapons" police use for crowd control and communication' – theconversation.com (2 February 2022) https://bit.ly/3I9DteI

[550] David Hambling, 'High-Tech Crowd Control Weapon Sought For D.C. Protests Is Too Terrifying To Use' – forbes.com (17 September 2020) https://bit.ly/3R7ILvh

[551] Nick Allen, 'For your hands only: James Bond's smart gun becomes a reality' (11 January 2022) telegraph.co.uk https://bit.ly/3IiX10w

[552] Gage McWeeny, 'Weapons of mass reduction' – cabinetmagazine.org (2006) https://bit.ly/3yzRYW5

[553] It made sense to provide Dredd with such an armoury – young boys are traditionally obsessed with technology. Alongside the first episode of 'Rumble in the Jungle' were advertisements for electronic games such as Grandstand's 'Astro Wars' and Atari's 'Centipede', while ***2000 AD*** had already published technophilic cross-section illustrations revealing the 'secrets' behind Dredd's gun, bike, and even Walter the Wobot.

[554] Steve Featherstone, 'Professor Carnage' – newrepublic.com (17 April 2017) https://bit.ly/3IgTCz0

[555] Max Hauptman, 'Warrior mindset' police training proliferated. Then, high-profile deaths put it under scrutiny' – washingtonpost.com (12 August 2021) https://wapo.st/3RcAlD7

[556] Peter Maass, 'An Accused War Criminal Trained Florida Cops In "New Concepts Of Shooting"' – theintercept.com (12 August 2022) https://bit.ly/3CGHBlV

[557] Barrett (2020) ***ibid.***

[558] Margaret Thatcher, House of Commons debate – Hansard HC [31/17-27] (3 November 1982)


DEMOCRACY OR...
...DEATH...
Art by John Higgins

LETTER FROM A DEMOCRAT

Politics, referendums, and the fall of democracy

'***You can't trust the people.***'
— Judge Dredd, 'America' (1990)

DEMOCRACY WAS MEANT to be a joke. Mega-City One had, after all, elected an orangutan as mayor.

Bearing an uncanny resemblance to 'Bud' Clark, the colourful publican and underdog populist candidate who unexpectedly became mayor of Portland, Oregon, in 1985, Dave the Orangutan was an outsider, a joke candidate, an ape who went from sanguine bar fly to TV sports prediction star and then, in a landslide, mayor of the Mega-City.[559]

'***Judging by his predecessors, Dave could be a definite improvement!***' Dredd observed in 'Portrait of a Politician', published in the spring of 1984. He wasn't wrong. One former mayor had been turned by a Cursed Earth virus into fungus (his last words: '***Please don't eat me!***'), another used stolen body parts as garden fertiliser, a later candidate

revelled in the sleaze of his L.I.A.R. ('Libertarian, Idiosyncratic And Reactionary') Party – a barbed portrayal of the new Prime Minister Tony Blair – while the city's most successful mayor would turn out to be the disguised serial killer PJ Maybe.[560]

Such sham democracy was a pointless, pluralist nightmare. In one mayoral election, a total of two hundred and twelve separate parties vied for power as supporters of the 'Lib-Lab-Flab Party'[561] fought the 'Eldster Liberal Progressives', the 'Oddball Faction' lined up against the 'All Out War Party', and the 'Apathy Party' couldn't care less. It was a carnival of frivolous partisanship, a mockery of democratic choice. And, above it all, Dredd stood ready to crack heads as soon as crackpot ideologues turned protests over hilarious hair-splitting

absurdities into riots. '***It has the appearance of democracy,***' Dredd commented years later, before another election.[562] '***It keeps them happy for the most part, and it's far preferable to the real thing.***'

But there were no jokes in 'Letter from a Democrat'.

'[IT] ORIGINALLY STARTED off as a deliberate attempt to make Dredd look bad,' Alan Grant told ***The Comics Journal*** about 'Letter from a Democrat', published in 1986.[563] 'It didn't have anything to do with democracy. At first it was just a stupid terrorist group, the Baffin Island Nudist Liberation Front or something, but we couldn't find anything that satisfied us until we went through ***The Guardian*** and found a big piece on the Militant Tendency. Adapted to the Mega-City it became the Democratic Tendency – the perfect name.'

It is another classic Wagner/Grant inversion. While Ronald Reagan insisted that anyone who fought against America was a terrorist and not a freedom fighter, it made sense that in Dredd's world of authoritarian government the 'terrorists' would be those fighting not ***against*** liberal democracy, but ***for*** it.[564] 'That gave it a completely different spin,' Grant later said, 'made it a genuine story that meant something.' [565]

'***It is time to remove power from our self-elected overlords and return it where it belongs – in the hands of the people!***' declared Hester Hyman as the Democratic Tendency took over the Channel 48 studios to announce their demands for reform.[566] The outcome of the siege was never in doubt. Ordered to surrender, the group rushed the Judges and were shot dead.

Hester's last words: '***Democracy or… death***'.

IN 1986, DEMOCRACY was in the air. There were protests in Chile, Kazakhstan, China. Peaceful revolution removed Ferdinand Marcos, authoritarian dictator of the Philippines. The world did not know it, but it was already on the road to the epoch-changing events of 1989.

It was already Thatcher's high-water mark, a year before her final landslide. Her state seemed stronger than ever – after defeating the miners, suppressing fresh riots in Black areas of London, and teaching hippies on their way to a festival at Stonehenge a lesson,

the police were handed even greater powers with a new Public Order Act.

Her opponents were little better than a circus. The absurdist Monster Raving Loony Party, founded in 1983, was already a fixture of election night. A divided Labour was branded the 'Loony Left', their councils 'banana republics'. The radical Marxist 'Militant Tendency', inspiration for Wagner and Grant, almost bankrupted the city of Liverpool. The fruits of mad, seething 'democracy' were there for all to see – stagnation, unemployment, strikes, protests, the corruption of the family by homosexuals and feminists. Meanwhile, despite almost a decade of 'law and order' policies, crime kept rising. More police and harsher sentences, offered as a solution in the 1970s, were not delivering.

Against this backdrop, Wagner and Grant were concerned. Some of their readers seemed to believe that Dredd was 'the good guy'; letters appeared in ***2000 AD***'s letters page unironically praising his principles and dedication, portraying him as someone to admire.

Here the pair encountered the natural limitation of satire as a storytelling tool – there will be those who, either through innocence or ignorance, cannot see beyond the surface of the mirror that is being held up. So, they decided to put it beyond doubt, 'to set the record straight,' Wagner said, 'to show what a bastard Dredd really is'.[567]

They had already begun to give Dredd doubts. For the first time, he openly questioned the legitimacy of the Judges' rule in stories like 'A Question of Judgement', 'Error of Judgement' and 'A Case for Treatment'.[568] Two years later, 'Letter' made the same case, but this time from the point of view of the citizens themselves.

More stories followed. A year after a clerk at the Foreign Office, Sarah Tisdall, was jailed for alerting the press to the siting of US cruise missiles in Britain,[569] a journalist in the 1985 story 'The Man Who Knew Too Much'[570] was lobotomised for threatening to reveal the Judges' secret use of tranquilizer gas to pacify the population.[571] An alien 'nightmare gun' was repurposed for use against a critic of the regime.[572] An old man was arrested for hoarding old newspapers, their content unimportant but their very existence an existential threat to order.[573]

'***Suddenly I had a vision, a vision of little Simson and baby Gort, growing up in a world like ours,***' wrote Hester Hyman to her husband in the story's eponymous letter. '***Afraid to talk. Afraid to move. Afraid to do anything. Always knowing the Judges were there, watching, waiting to pounce. But that's not the life I want for our boys.***'

It was the day that her son accidentally hit a Judge with a rubber ball during a family outing to the park that radicalised Hyman. The crying child was not a '***perp***' but an innocent, terrified by a threatening authority figure. The same was true of his mother; she was not a future-shocked futsie to be incapacitated by Dredd – who is barely in the story – but a mother sacrificing herself for a cause, one grounded in very real, everyday concerns.

Afterwards, Dredd interrogated her husband, who denied all knowledge of her '***crazy mixed-up ideas***'. '***Then let this be a lesson to you, citizen,***' Dredd warned. '***Democracy's not for the people.***'

'That people should come out of that [story] thinking that he's the good guy surprises me,' Wagner told ***The Comics Journal***. 'We wanted to leave the reader with a bad taste in his mouth about Dredd, and make him wonder if all the other things Dredd has been doing are right.'

Not long after, one reader complained that the Judges were 'being shown in rather a harsh light'.[574] 'Obviously it didn't work,' Wagner added, wryly. So, a year later, they tried again.

1987's 'Revolution' opens with a vast hall filled with people listening to activist Blondel Dupre, leader of a jumbled alliance of pro-democracy groups that has coalesced around Hyman's martyrdom. Far from ending the calls for democracy, the Judges have inspired a movement – twenty million prepare to march on the Grand Hall of Justice, the biggest protest the city has ever seen.[575]

It is a trap. Wary of inciting unrest by banning the march, newly installed Chief Judge Silver authorises Dredd to take '***whatever action you deem necessary***' to prevent its success and Dredd begins a targeted campaign of barely legal sabotage. One democratic leader is arrested on trumped-up charges, another

erroneously accused of being a collaborator during the Apocalypse War, an elderly activist tortured until he is too weak to take part. Finally, Dredd threatens to send Hyman's children to the Academy of Law to become Judges.

The dirty tricks work. Undermined and then brutalised on the street, the day ends in chaos and defeat for the marchers while the Chief Judge dismisses calls for reform: '***We tried democracy once,***' he insists. '***Believe me, it doesn't work.***'

Almost a century since the Judges seized power from President Robert 'Bad Bob' Booth, the hellish wasteland outside the city a constant reminder of the consequences of his martial belligerence, no one could argue with Silver's reasoning in which the problems ***of*** democracy became problems ***with*** democracy. The only thing to do was to wipe it all away.

BACK IN 1977, Dredd had raced to stop a spree killer from attacking the city's 'Justice Day' parade where, flanked by happy crowds waving banners reading '***Law***', '***Justice***' and '***Judges Rule OK***', a giant float bore a statue of a Judge, holding a sword in one hand and a book marked 'Law' in the other. On another float, a sign displayed the 'Covenant of the Judges': '***Show us your lawbreakers and we shall show them justice. Mega City will be crime-free. Trust in the Judges!***'[576]

In the mélange of competing, even contradictory ideas at the series' dawn, the Judges had initially been Greco-Roman authoritarians '***elected by the people to enforce the law***'; while that notion fell by the wayside, the idea that the citizens had traded freedom for security only gained in importance.

As the consequences of Thatcherism grew sharper, as crime rose and dissent grew, Wagner and Grant chipped away at the Faustian 'law and order' bargain – does giving up your freedom make you safer at all? Because a covenant has two sides; as bizarre as it may seem for such a harsh and unforgiving rule, the Judges nonetheless rely on the consent of the citizens to rule. In order to be just, all power must be legitimate.

In 1647, after five years of civil war against their monarch, an officer from the Parliamentarian Army stood up in a meeting of ordinary soldiers and generals in the London borough of Putney. In a single sentence, he articulated a brand-new idea – breathtaking in its brevity and profound in its consequences.

'I think that the poorest he that is in England hath a life to live, as the greatest he,' Colonel Thomas Rainsborough told the gathered officers, 'and therefore truly, Sir, I think it's clear, that every man that is to live under a government ought first by his own consent to put himself under that government; and I do think that the poorest man in England is not bound in a strict sense to that government that he hath not had a voice to put himself under.'

At the time this was an incendiary notion. Until that moment, and for long after it, the English crown based its authority on divine mandate. But Rainsborough was saying that a government's legitimacy was granted not by God, but by the people. The question was not settled at Putney, but the idea of government requiring ***consent*** came to be one of the foundations of the 'rule of law' underpinning British democracy.

Four years after Rainsborough delivered his speech, philosopher Thomas Hobbes published ***Leviathan***. Hobbes had also lived through the chaos of the English Civil War, albeit in French exile, but while he agreed with Rainsborough that the consent of the people was necessary for legitimate government, his conclusion was that this meant less democracy, not more.

To Hobbes, humankind was wicked and violent. Without laws and government, people would descend into a 'state of nature' that would be 'nasty, brutish and short'. Strong, undivided government was required, he said, to prevent a descent into a 'war of all against all'.[577]

In the illustrated frontispiece of his 1651 book, a single figure is shown wearing a crown and holding the mace – the symbol of government – and a sword. His colossal body, which towers over the bucolic countryside, is made up of a multitude of individuals. This is Leviathan. Under Hobbes' conception, this all-powerful figure is granted absolute power by the consent of the governed in a mutual covenant, in which the people choose total submission over violent

chaos. No other power can stand above this sovereign, whose authority can neither be punished nor questioned, as 'it belongeth to him that hath the Sovereign Power, to be Judge'.578

It is not difficult to see in Leviathan the self-image of the Judges – stern, all-powerful rulers holding sway over the land, holding back chaos with the sword. Nowhere in 'Judge Dredd' is this figure more visible than in the opening pages of 'America'.

Judge Dredd towers over the reader. One hand holds his Lawgiver, the other is a tight fist. His left leg is raised, his boot resting on the American flag.

'***Where do I stand?***' says the narration. '***I'll tell you where I stand. I stand four-square for justice, I stand for discipline, good order and the rigid application of the law – and Grud help any limp-wrist liberals who say different. The people, they know where I stand. They need rules to live by – I provide them. They break the rules, I break them. That's the way it works. Rights? Sure, I'm all for rights. But not at the expense of order.***'

The reader turns the page and is overwhelmed by symbolism. The flag is revealed to be a blood-stained shroud from which a limp arm and leg protrude. Behind Dredd is the familiar figure of the Statue of Liberty – now pock-marked and weathered, her torch and forearm broken off, her gown graffitied with the words 'Total War'. And behind her, the implacable figure of the Statue of Judgement, twice as tall, hands resting on hips as its implacable, suspicious, judgemental gaze stares down.

'***Justice has a price,***' says the narration. '***The price is freedom.***'

THE WAGNER/GRANT partnership had come to an end by the time the monthly ***Judge Dredd Megazine*** launched in September 1990. A sister title for ***2000 AD*** focusing on Dredd had been mooted ever since he became the Prog's standout character in the early 1980s. But it wasn't until the fad for 'mature comics' began in 1988 with the launch of ***Deadline*** magazine – home of the anarchic Alan Martin and Jamie Hewlett's ***Tank Girl*** – by ***2000 AD*** artists Brett Ewins and Steve Dillon and IPC's own consciously political ***Crisis*** that Fleetway finally gave the green light.

Published in the ***Megazine*** launch issue as the Thatcherite regime crumbled, and beautifully painted by Scottish artist Colin MacNeil, 'America' is an intensely political noir in which Dredd is the villain of his own comic.

The child of Puerto Rican immigrants, the story of America Jara is one of tragedy. Like Chopper, she yearns to be free from the Judges' oppressive rule. Like Hester Hyman before her, she is radicalised by a childhood incident in which she and her best friend, Bennett Beeny, are questioned by an overbearing Judge. The incident terrifies Bennett but instils in Jara a burning sense of injustice.

This is only heightened when Jara's boyfriend dies after the democracy march is broken up and she is sent to a re-education camp, where the Judges abort her unborn child for 'genetic abnormalities'. While Bennett finds success as a singer, Jara joins the anti-Judge terrorist group Total War, which murders Judges and plots to blow up the Statue of Liberty. It is only at the story's climax that we know for sure that the body under the blood-soaked Stars and Stripes is Jara's.

In the interplay between the idealistic Jara and her weak, conformist childhood friend (and would-be lover), we see how those who conform – who '***play by their rules***', as Bennett puts it – can expect to be left alone, while those who resist can expect only savage retribution. Order towers over all, as the story makes clear: '***That's why I like to see that Statue of Judgement standing there, towering over Liberty,***' says Dredd. '***Kind of a symbol.***'

In Hobbes' conception, as all-powerful as Leviathan is, he still requires the consent of those he rules. The Judges' covenant, however, is more like a Faustian pact, forged in a moment of crisis. And, as the citizens came to know, the devil is always in the detail.

RUNNING FROM MARCH to October 1990, 'Necropolis' had ended just as 'America' began.[579] Together, they represent both Wagner's intended swan song and a new template for the future. The 'Judge Minty' story in Prog 147 had introduced the idea of the 'Long Walk', where retired, disgraced, or disillusioned Judges journey into the Cursed Earth to bring '***law to the lawless***'; having penned Dredd continuously for

more than a decade, the last two years of which he was on his own, and frustrated at the lack of royalties he received from then-publisher Fleetway, 'Necropolis' was to be both Dredd and Wagner's 'Long Walk'.[580]

Introduced in 1981, the Dark Judges are undead zombie Judges from an alternate dimension where, in a grotesque twisting of the Judges' mandate, they had declared that life itself was a crime. Dredd and his psychic colleague Judge Cassandra Anderson had foiled Judge Death and the Dark Judges – Judge Fear, Judge Fire, and Judge Mortis – before, but now they returned to carry out their mission of transforming Mega-City One into a necropolis, a literal 'city of the dead'.

Dredd, however, was not there to stop them.

THE EPISTOLARY NATURE of letters carries remarkable weight in 'Dredd', allowing an intimate voice to be heard in a strip whose lead character has little in the way of internal monologue. Hyman's was followed four years later by a letter from a young child whose innocent insight, in a take on Hans Christian Andersen's folktale 'The Emperor's New Clothes', exposed the contradictions of the Judges' rule.[581] Overwhelmed by his doubts, Dredd takes the 'Long Walk' into the Cursed Earth.

Despite Dredd failing him on his final assessment, a Fargo 'Judda' clone named Kraken is surreptitiously inserted into his place.[582] Damaged by the Judda and Justice Department's reconditioning, he is easy prey for the Dark Judges and their spectral collaborators, the Sisters of Death. In one of the best shock twists in ***2000 AD***'s history, it is revealed that the lead character from 'The Dead Man', a series set in the Cursed Earth about a heavily scarred amnesiac that had begun weeks earlier, is actually Dredd, horribly disfigured after fleeing from the Sisters of Death. His memory restored, he returns to the city and captures or banishes the Dark Judges.

Although he had saved the day, Dredd understood that 'Necropolis' created a crisis of legitimacy for the Judges. The 'Covenant of the Judges' had been broken – they had failed to keep the citizens safe.

As mass graves filled with millions of victims, it was hard to claim that an alternative could be any worse.

A story about death and resurrection, 'Necropolis' marked the point at which Wagner walked away from ***2000 AD*** and tried to pass the baton to a new generation. Alongside his anointed heir, a young Garth Ennis, he planned a confrontation that even Dredd might not win – a referendum.

'***It's all too easy to forget that we are first and foremost the servants of the people,***' Dredd told his fellow Judges in 'The Devil You Know'.[583] '***And when we decide we have the right to impose our will – because we know best – to make law despite the citizens, rather than with their consent… That's where we go wrong. Because government without consent is dictatorship.***'

In the face of stern opposition and even an assassination attempt by hard-line Judges, Dredd forces through a city-wide referendum on the return of democratic government. For the first time, the man who had undermined the democracy movement and attacked protestors without provocation admitted that the technocratic dictatorship of the Judges only operated with the permission of the people.[584] But the way the Judges manufacture and maintain that consent provides a stark warning about how our world has taken a dangerous anti-democratic turn.

THE IDEA OF a referendum was a masterstroke. Just as 'Necropolis' began, the authoritarian dictator of Chile, General Augusto Pinochet, left office, replaced by a democratically elected government after a plebiscite in 1988. It marked the end of seventeen years of brutal repression, the 'disappearing' of thousands of dissidents, and excoriating neoliberal economics.

In a letter to Ennis, Wagner outlined his idea: 'It seems the Judges have agreed to take a hard line,' he wrote, 'go back to the old ways, even harsher in some ways (for instance, Judges may be urged to take fewer prisoners because of lack of iso-cube space). [Dredd's] attitude will be that he's all for tough judging, the city needs rigid control – but that it's not the judges' decision to take. They must let the people decide.' [585]

This would be a simple yes-or-no vote about which political system should govern Mega-City One: democracy or the Judges. No road map, no plan. Just yes or no.

When asked how the citizens should vote, Dredd is clear: '***When some creep's holding a knife to your throat,***' he tells an interviewer, '***who do you want to see riding up… me – or your elected representative?***' Two years later, ***Dirty Harry*** director Don Siegel's autobiography practically repeated him: 'When you're in trouble, possibly being mugged, raped, robbed, threatened*…* who do you call for help?[…] Without hesitation, all members of the police department will risk their lives trying to save yours.'[586] It is, of course, a standard 'law and order' straw man argument, reducing complex issues of rights and power down to a simple question of crime. But it was fitting for the director of a film that took the problems of the 1960s and answered them with a .44 Magnum.

It echoed the new phase of 'law and order' politics that was emerging in Britain. Attacked for being 'soft on crime' for their focus on civil liberties and links with the 'disorder' of the trade unions, Tony Blair's Labour would embrace Thatcherite neoliberal economics but also buy wholly into the agenda of 'law and order'.

This shift culminated in Blair's famous soundbite, 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime'. It was, said criminologist Robert Reiner (unconsciously echoing a line from the 1995 ***Judge Dredd*** movie), a 'double whammy of toughness… toughness, toughness, toughness – with frenzied partisan conflict on specifics – anything you can do, I can do tougher. Law and order politics has become a dominant discourse of the age: the 'culture of control'.'[587]

While, in many respects, Blair was not Thatcher and Bill Clinton was not George Bush, their differences belied their wider structural similarities that shaped their countries, no matter which party is in power.[588] Thatcher had insisted that there was 'no alternative' and, within three years of the publication of 'America', that was becoming as true at the ballot box as it was for the Judges.

For weeks ahead of the vote, the polling was clear. The Judges were going to lose. Dredd faced opposition from within Justice Department

and even an assassination attempt while commentators dismissed the notion that any other result than defeat was possible.

When it came to voting day, barely a third of the population voted. But those that did overwhelmingly chose the Judges.

The democrats immediately marched on the Grand Hall of Justice. It was a fix, they insisted; how else could anyone explain the result? In an echo of 'Revolution', they were met by lines of heavy weaponry and Judges in riot gear, but rather than provoke the crowd into disorder Dredd took the walk of the righteous gunslinger of 'Judge Whitey' and 'Punks Rule!', alone and unarmed, to confront Dupre directly.

'***We didn't fix anything,***' he told her. '***The referendum was carried out fair and square and the people voted for us because they can rely on us – because they know where they stand. We don't have to fix it. Democracy's not for the people – not because we say so, but because they don't want it. You people are dreamers, that's okay in its place but not when you want to rule – to make the law in this city.***'

With that, he insisted Dupre repeat his mantra – '***You are the law, Judge Dredd***'. The crisis had been averted. Legitimacy had been restored.

Except it ***was*** a fix.

Not in the sense that Dupre and her supporters claimed; the Judges had no need to fiddle the results or stuff ballot boxes like tinpot dictators because they had won before the vote was even taken. It seemed like Dredd had been right: the people didn't want democracy.

Yet while Ennis had been keen to move on – 'really I probably wanted to get the democracy stuff over with so I could get on with what I saw as straight Dredd stories,' he recalled – the story demonstrates how authoritarianism undermines the democracy it appears to participate in.[589]

Dredd's insistence that the citizens ***'know where they stand'*** with the Judges begs the question, after almost a century of brutalising rule, could the citizens even imagine life without the Judges?

On the eve of the vote in 'Twilight's Last Gleaming', Ennis echoed a recurring motif from previous Wagner and Grant stories – the unhappy family gathered around the flickering TV, a slovenly father, often stuffing food into his face, reacting angrily to the momentous events unfolding on the screen. '***Loada rubbish! Switcha channel!***' he snaps at the Democratic Tendency's earnest broadcast.[590]

In trying to explain how the liberal democracy of the Weimar Republic resulted in Adolf Hitler's Nazi regime, philosopher Theodor W. Adorno blamed a predisposition in certain people to the appeals of totalitarianism, what he termed the 'authoritarian personality', as well as the 'culture industry' of consumerist culture, which he said creates docile and passive individuals, unable and unwilling to endure the complexity and ambiguity of life.[591]

'Authoritarianism appeals, simply, to people who cannot tolerate complexity,' wrote journalist Anne Applebaum.[592] 'Use of force, cracking down, shutting up, making everyone be quiet, making everybody unified. These are things that make some people feel better. People who don't like disagreement, division, who don't like cacophony, who don't like heterogeneous societies, who don't like diversity. These are people who will then find that kind of politics appealing.'[593]

The embodiment of Plato's warning that the price of apathy 'is to be ruled by evil men', it does not seem that the citizens have no choice but that they do not care. 'Concentrated power,' wrote political theorist Sheldon S. Wolin, 'whether of a Leviathan, a benevolent despotism, or a superpower, is impossible without the support of a complicitous citizenry that willingly signs on to the covenant, or acquiesces, or clicks the "mute button".'[594]

'It's another instance of how the democracy stuff sits a little uneasily in "Dredd" history,' said Ennis, 'again and again the citizens are portrayed as largely apathetic, sometimes just a bunch of lunatics with too much time on their hands, and now we're being asked to take their desire for proper representation seriously?'[595]

However, in the preceding story, 'The Devil You Know', a citizen calls the 'freewill referendum hotline' to ask for details about the referendum. After the operator becomes exasperated at having to

explain the upcoming referendum multiple times, the caller admits that they are baffled by the very ***idea*** of voting: ***'What's all this about a referendum anyway? I thought we was gonna have a vote.***'

In 1831, French sociologist and political theorist Alexis de Tocqueville travelled to the United States to carry out a study of the American penal system and his subsequent account – ***Democracy in America*** – became one of the most influential books of the nineteenth century.

In it, he questioned how America's revolution had produced a stable democracy whereas his native France had descended into the chaos and bloodshed of the Terror. He concluded that democracy was embedded more deeply in American society – even aside from its federal structure, with individual states supporting democratic norms away from the distant capital, the country had strong traditions of local democracy too, from vigorous town halls to community organisations and associations. These 'give the people the taste for freedom and the art of being free,' he wrote.

This is what we now refer to as 'civil society', the formal and informal structures that encourage participation in society, buttressing and producing a healthy national democracy. In France, Tocqueville lamented, democracy was a lofty notion distant from the lives of ordinary people. Whereas Americans were good at democracy because they practised it every day, it was a way of life.

Despite its wild and ever-growing pantheon of clubs, associations, groups and societies, Mega-City One is not de Tocqueville's America. A fundamental break has occurred: rather than bolstering democracy, the complete control of the Judges and the sidelining of participatory politics has hollowed out civil society and dislocated it from power.

In amongst Wagner, Grant, and Ennis' parody of petty party politics, the strip shows how anti-democratic forces depoliticise citizens by turning politics into something they no longer recognise as meaningful or useful to their ordinary lives.

'***Democracy in action,***' says the third person narration as Dredd quells a riot between opposing parties on the eve of another mayoral election.[596] '***He's seen it all before. He remains to be impressed.***

Let the people decide, and the people gave you Dave the Mayor or worse. Power to the people – these people?'

It is easy to mock the carnival and claim that 'democracy isn't working', as Dredd declares on the cover to Prog 533 in 1987, pointing his gun at the viewer against a backdrop of bloodied pro-democracy banners. And it may well be that the citizens do not ***want*** democracy.

But how can it be a fair choice, when the very idea is as alien and threatening to them as a Klegg mercenary? Even the voting technology has not seen use for almost half a century and in a city where people routinely live beyond a century, who has any real experience of the time before the chaos and the bombs and the coup? They are a people who have fallen out of the ***habit*** of democracy.

At the same time, they live every day in the ruins of an old world laid waste by the excesses of democracy, excesses that the Judges say could only be contained by their iron rule. As both Dredd and Chief Judge Silver lays out in his Hobbesian pact, there are only two states of being – order or chaos.

In ***The Republic***, Plato criticised the Athenian assembly for giving liberty to demagogues, who used rhetoric and emotion to whip up the masses. Rather than democracy, which hands power to such venal men, he advocated instead a dictatorship by 'philosopher kings' who would rule based on 'knowledge', not 'power'.

In the twenty-first century, his critique of democracy seems more than applicable. Democracy can lead to orange-haired populists who are benign like Dave the Orangutan or dangerous like Donald Trump. It can disguise brutality as fairness and iniquity as justice. Tainted by its association with populism, support for democracy itself is waning.[597]

It is music to the ears of every autocrat and technocrat. 'He has turned the election into a prank,' one Chinese state-run website said of Trump during the 2016 presidential elections. For China, an authoritarian one-party state, this 'buffoonish, clownish, evil boss' perfectly captured the 'chaos of democracy'.[598]

Historian Timothy Snyder said that the attempted insurrection by a pro-Trump mob in Washington, DC in 2021 was used as evidence to reinforce the message of Russian leader Vladimir Putin that 'democracy is a joke everywhere'.[599] Even as his troops marched into Ukraine in February 2022, Russian state media promulgated the ideas that western democracies are weak, collapsing, decadent, and overrun by extremists.

The chaotic collapse in October 2022 of the Conservative government of Liz Truss, the shortest-serving Prime Minister in British history whose extreme libertarian policies immediately caused profound damage to both Britain's economy and political landscape, only provides more grist to such anti-democratic mills.

Even within democracies, the fear of demagoguery can stoke the desire for 'something fiercer'. Research by the University of Cambridge suggested in 2022 that support for populist politics had 'collapsed' during the Covid-19 pandemic, however it warned that this was not leading to renewed faith in liberal democracy. Instead, researchers found 'a disturbing erosion of support for core democratic beliefs and principles', including less liberal attitudes toward basic civil rights and 'weaker preference for democratic government'. In the US, the percentage of people who consider democracy a 'bad' way to run the country more than doubled, from over ten per cent in late 2019 to more than twenty-five per cent in late 2021.[600]

Another Cambridge study in 2020 found young people's faith in democratic politics is lower than any other age group, with just half of US millennials – those who became adults early in the new century – saying they were satisfied with American democracy.[601] In emerging democracies of Latin America, Africa and southern Europe, the research found what it called 'transition fatigue': generations without memories of previous dictatorships and fights for political freedom are also unsatisfied with democracy.

Instead, people now increasingly seem to favour ***technocratic*** sources of authority. And therein lies the warning of Dredd – in the long-term, the risk comes not just from the caprice of the fickle demagogue, but from what those who oppose them would throw

away to stop them. ‘Given the right conditions, any society can turn against democracy,’ wrote Applebaum. ‘Indeed, if history is anything to go by, all of our societies eventually will.’

In his essay ‘Through the eyes of the Wardens’, comics critic Tom Shapira compared the image of Dredd to the portrayal of special prosecutor Robert Mueller, who led the investigation into alleged Russian interference in the 2016 election and links to President Trump.[602] Mueller was regularly represented as the cure for the nation’s ills, ‘a crusading fighter for justice’ and, as ***Time*** magazine called him, ‘the Lie Detector’.

Even amongst Democrats, a group usually suspicious of and antagonistic toward state agencies such as the FBI, there was rising support for law enforcement – as long as it led the fight against Trump. TV hosts, newspaper columnists, and internet commenters all begged for him to remove the figure that threatened them, demanded that Leviathan be unleashed against democracy’s ‘mistake’. ‘It is not about the damage a figure like [Booth] causes by his actions,’ wrote Shapira, ‘but about the damage he might cause by the reactions necessary to stop him, about the way he corrupts even beyond his own end.’

THE STORY OF democracy in Mega-City One began with a joke. An ape elected as mayor, a symbol of the circus of democracy. In an age when the bluster, cruelty and lies of populist politicians like Donald Trump and Boris Johnson cheapen and erode democracy, Dredd’s words sound certain, clear. We can hear in them the same despotic urges of every plutocrat, oligarch, despot, and ruler – democracy has failed.

Ironically, it is only through democracy, although a truncated and imperfect form, that the Judges are able to compensate for their failings and regain their legitimacy. In securing the permission of the citizens, albeit a fraction of them, ‘Twilight’s Last Gleaming’ marked the beginning of a new Wagner-less era for the strip.

However, in the post-‘Necropolis’ period the strip was not refreshed but increasingly lapsed into empty, violent belligerence that played into the unintended satire of the democracy stories – the Judges are

a failed Leviathan. For all of Dredd's talk of order, justice and security, there are precious few of these qualities to be found in Mega-City One. 'The good guy with a gun' had stopped the Dark Judges, yet even with despotic rules and brutal enforcement Mega-City One is still riven with crime and disorder.

The citizens, having surrendered their freedoms in return for security, find themselves more insecure than ever, as ever greater crises engulf their city. And, like the British electorate, they also find themselves without a viable alternative.

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[559] 'Portrait of a Politician', ***2000 AD*** Progs 366-368 (1984) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Ron Smith, Letters: Tom Frame

[560] 'Fungus', ***2000 AD*** Progs 275-277 (1982) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Carlos Ezquerra, Letters: Tom Frame / 'Ryan's Revenge', ***Dan Dare Annual 1979*** (1978) Script: Unknown, Art: Kevin O'Neill, Letters: Unknown / 'Sex, Lies and Vidslugs', ***Judge Dredd Megazine*** Vol.3 #41 (1998) Script: John Wagner, Art: Lee Sullivan, Colour: Alison Kirkpatrick, Letters: Tom Frame / 'The Gingerbread Man', ***Judge Dredd Megazine*** #261-263 (2007) Script: John Wagner, Art: Henry Flint, Colour: Len O'Grady, Letters: Annie Parkhouse

[561] A pun on the doomed electoral 'Lib–Lab pact' between the Liberal and Labour parties in 1977.

[562] 'Day of Chaos: Nadia', ***2000 AD*** Prog 1744 (2011) Script: John Wagner, Art: Ben Willsher, Colour: Chris Blythe, Letters: Annie Parkhouse

[563] John Wagner & Alan Grant interviewed by Frank Plowright, ***The Comics Journal*** #122 (June 1988)

[564] 'Radio Address to the Nation on Terrorism' – reaganlibrary.gov (31 May 1986) https://bit.ly/3bUtcHc

[565] David Bishop, ***Thrill-power Overload*** (2007)

[566] ***2000 AD*** Prog 460 (1986) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: John Higgins, Letters: Tom Frame

[567] Plowright (June 1988) ***ibid.***

[568] ***2000 AD*** Progs 387, 388 & 389 (1984) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Ron Smith, Letters: Tom Frame

[569] ***The Guardian***, '2 October 1983: Sarah Tisdall' – theguardian.com (3 June 2011) https://bit.ly/3RFdIHw

[570] ***2000 AD*** Progs 438-439 (1985) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Carlos Ezquerra, Letters: Tom Frame. The story bears a greater resemblance to G.K. Chesterton's original 1922 collection of short stories than Alfred Hitchcock's 1934 and 1956 films of the same name.

[571] He also slapped a 'J Notice' on the investigation – mimicking the British government's famed 'D Notices', used to prevent publication of information that might damage 'national security'.

[572] 'Reasons To Be Fearful', ***2000 AD*** Prog 528 (1987) Script: John Wagner, Alan Grant, Art: Robin Smith, Letters: Tom Frame

[573] 'John Cassavetes is Dead', ***2000 AD*** Prog 627 (1989) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Colin MacNeil, Letters: Tom Frame. The story was published in the wake of the government enacting its controversial Section 28 regulation banning schools from 'promoting' homosexuality.

[574] Letters page, ***2000 AD*** Prog 494 (1986)

[575] ***2000 AD*** Prog 532 (1987) Script: John Wagner, Alan Grant, Art: John Higgins, Letters: Tom Frame

[576] ***2000 AD*** Prog 26 (1977) Script: John Wagner, Art: Mick McMahon, Letters: Tony Jacob

[577] Martin Cohen, ***Political Philosophy: From Plato to Mao*** (2008)

[578] Thomas Hobbes, ***Leviathan*** (1651)

[579] ***2000 AD*** Progs 674-699 (1990) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Carlos Ezquerra, Letters: Tom Frame

[580] 'Judge Minty', ***2000 AD*** Prog 147 (1980) Script: John Wagner, Art: Mick McMahon, Letters: Tom Frame

[581] 'A Letter to Judge Dredd', ***2000 AD*** Prog 661 (1990) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Will Simpson, Letters: Tom Frame

[582] See chapter seven, 'Unamerican Graffiti'

[583] ***2000 AD*** Progs 750-753 (1991) Script: John Wagner, Art: Jeff Anderson, Letters: Tom Frame

[584] Dredd's support for the referendum may be less surprising in light of research in 2022 which found that liberals support referendums as a decision-making process, regardless of whether they agree with the result, while conservatives seem to only support referendums if they expect to win (Liam F. Beiser-McGrath, Robert A. Huber, Thomas Bernauer, Vally Koubi, 'Parliament, People

or Technocrats? Explaining Mass Public Preferences on Delegation of Policymaking Authority' in ***Comparative Political Studies*** Volume 55, issue 4)

[585] John Wagner, letter to Garth Ennis (1989)

[586] Joe Street, ***Dirty Harry's America*** (2016)

[587] Reiner, Robert, 'Law and order: a 20:20 vision' in ***Current Legal Problems***, Vol.59, Issue 10 (2006)

[588] David Garland, ***The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society*** (2001)

[589] Ennis (2022) ***ibid.***

[590] ***2000 AD*** Progs 754-756 (1991) Script: John Wagner, Art: John Burns, Letters: Tom Frame

[591] From ***Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*** (1951)

[592] Anne Applebaum, ***Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism*** (2020)

[593] ***Stay Tuned With Preet*** podcast, 'The Authoritarian Impulse' (18 March 2021)

[594] Sheldon S. Wolin, ***Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism*** (2017)

[595] Ennis (2022) ***ibid.***

[596] 'Day of Chaos: Nadia', ***2000 AD*** Prog 1743 (2011) Script: John Wagner, Art: Ben Willsher, Colour: Chris Blythe, Letters: Annie Parkhouse

[597] Roberto S. Foa, Xavier Romero-Vidal, Andrew J. Klassen, Joaquin Fuenzalida Concha, Marian Quednau & Lisa Sophie Fenner, 'The Great Reset: Public Opinion, Populism, and the Pandemic' (2022) Centre for the Future of Democracy, University of Cambridge

[598] Tom Phillips, 'Democracy is a joke, says China – just look at Donald Trump' – theguardian.com (17 March 2016)

[599] Greg Sargent, 'How Putin badly misjudged the West, as explained by a Russia expert' – washingtonpost.com (24 March 2022) https://wapo.st/3uzz8Mu

[600] Fred Lewsey, 'Support for populist politics 'collapsed' during the pandemic – global report' – cam.ac.uk (18 January 2022) https://bit.ly/3SEzY51

[601] Fred Lewsey, 'Faith in democracy: millennials are the most disillusioned generation 'in living memory' – cam.ac.uk https://bit.ly/3InOut8

[602] Tom Shapira, 'Through the eyes of the wardens: Judge Dredd under the shadow of Trump' in Barbara Brodman & James E. Doan (eds), ***Utopia and***

Dystopia in the Age of Trump: Images from literature and visual arts
(2019)


I WANT THIS MOVEMENT CRUSHED, DREDD. ON THIS ONE YOU WRITE THE LAW.
Art by John Higgins

REVOLUTION

Order, disorder, and the end of protest

'***I'll do anything to protect this city against dangerous fools like you.***'
– Judge Dredd, 'Revolution' (1987)

'***We will march not with the clenched fist of anger, but with the open palm of peace – yet our demands will sound no less loudly… Power to the people!***' Blondel Dupre tells a packed auditorium in 'Revolution' in 1987.[603]

Everyone expects the Judges to ban the democratic march, but a smiling Chief Judge Silver reassures incredulous reporters that '***this… fallacy that we're somehow the enemy of the people – could not be more wrong. Why, we're their best friends.***'

Regarding the march, he makes his feelings clear: '***We are not tyrants***. ***We do not seek to deny our citizens the right of peaceful demonstration. Let them march. As long as they remain within the law, they will be tolerated.***'

Antithetical as it seems, Silver was right – the Judges ***had*** 'tolerated' protest but only up to a point. It was just another of those symbols of the mad, seething masses who had elected an ape to high office and who always had some new, petty demand: a protest to make it snow for Christmas, a march to save the relocated Parthenon that caused it to collapse. Against aliens, for guns, against Simps, for banned 'ugly' products.

And Dredd was always there. He didn't 'take sides', he wasn't 'political', he only restored order – always ready to wade in and crack heads, to put everyone back in their place with daystick, riot foam, the humorous application of bureaucracy, or weather control literally raining on everyone's parade.[604]

The march in 'Revolution' was different though. It was asking for ***change***. It had to be stopped at all costs.

In private, Silver is, of course, far less tolerant. '***If we allow a dangerous idea like democracy to take a hold on the people, we're lost,***' he tells Dredd, equating the threat to that of the Apocalypse War. He then delivers a chilling instruction: do '***whatever you deem necessary***' to ensure the march fails. '***Does that include exceeding the law?***' asks Dredd. '***I want this movement crushed, Dredd,***' Silver replies. '***On this one you write the law.***'

Dredd dives headlong into a coordinated dirty tricks campaign targeting the leaders of the democrat coalition; accusations of wartime collaboration are manufactured against one, another is branded a bigamist, an elderly campaigner is taken into custody and starved of sleep and food. In a final, grotesque twist of the knife, he threatens to forcibly enrol the grieving children of Hester Hyman in the Academy of Law, unless her widower denounces the demonstration.

The march goes ahead; smaller than hoped – some of Dredd's tricks work – but still totalling sixteen million. Artist John Higgins brings the same vivid colour sensibilities to the opening double-page spread that he employed on Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' influential ***Watchmen***, which was then coming to the end of its twelve-issue run.

A vast boulevard filled with banner-waving marchers zigzags between towers of blues and purples, contrasting an inset panel showing Justice Department's assault teams bathed in deep red light. 'Dredd' had long occupied this colour centre spread of *2000* ***AD*** but, appropriately, the rest of the episode is in stark black and white.

As the march proceeds, the tricks continue – sonic weapons are used to unsettle marchers, while disguised agitators within the crowds spread disheartening rumours and misinformation, before purposefully throwing stones at the lines of Judges. This piece of intentionally and carefully orchestrated violence is the excuse Dredd has been waiting for. Assault teams wade in, beating and shooting to break up the crowd.

‘***Leave us alone! This is a peaceful march!***’ pleads one protestor. ‘***Was!***’ shouts Dredd as he punches him.

IN A CITY where any crowd is a threat, Dredd has never been a fan of protest.

The democratic right to protest and the disordered crowds it produces does not sit well with the scion of order, but despite the backdrop of disorder and protest in Notting Hill, Lewisham and Southall, crowds feature little in the early years and it wasn’t until 1978, when Judge Cal took over the city, that the people first mobilised in protest.

‘I brain you in the name of the law!’ shouts SJS Judge Strong, his face completely covered in a gas mask, as he whacks a protester over the head with his baton. Around him, gas bombs rain down as Cal’s minions obey his order to ‘***teach them a lesson!***’. Such crowd ‘control’ is clearly meant to demonstrate the ruthlessness of Cal’s despotic rule, but it is impossible to distinguish it from how Dredd normally deals with protest.

‘***The city sympathises with your problem – but I cannot overlook lawbreaking!***’ Dredd shouts as he confronts marchers who have smashed up robots they blame for the city’s astronomical unemployment rate.[605] ‘***Rot the law, Dredd!***’ replies one of the protesters. ‘***We want jobs and we’ll fight for our rights!***’

‘***Lawbreakers have no rights!***’ Dredd shouts as he fires his Lawmaster’s guns point blank into the crowd.[606]

In this intolerant ‘no nonsense’ approach, Dredd both echoed and parodied ‘law and order’ politics that dismissed protestors as ‘the fanatics, the lunatics, and the hooligans’. He embodied the image of the British Bobby as an ‘apolitical’ figure ‘of the middle’, who stood between extremists of all stripes and believed only in the ‘good old cause of order’.[607]

But he was the right-wing fantasy of what law enforcement should be – strong, anti-political, and hard-headed. ‘***Harsh, but fair.***’

‘Revolution’, however, was different. Alarmed at how ineffective their satire seemed to have been with some readers for close to a decade, Wagner and Grant once again turned the world upside down

to reveal its absurdity – except this time they inverted the 'Dredd' formula itself.

Every week, readers had watched a crime occur and then relished the extreme means by which Dredd served the perpetrators their comeuppance in the pragmatic correction of the moral order. Importantly, Dredd was always shown to be ***right***. Harsh, yes – sometimes hilariously so – but like his forebears, the cowboy and the vigilante cop, his moral absolutism instantly and unerringly seemed to distinguish the guilty from the innocent.

He was imbued with the integrity of the 'good man with the gun', an integrity that saw him stand against Cal's tyranny, a moral certainty that meant he could kill half a billion people in retaliation for the Sov invasion and countless billions more in the future.

Yet here he was lying, inventing charges, beating peaceful protestors – this wasn't how he was meant to behave. This wasn't ***justice***.

'Revolution' is arguably the most consequential story in the strip's history, containing an important warning about how modern states would become allergic to protest, how states would seek to monitor and undermine protest movements, how blanket laws would come to equate 'protestor' with 'terrorist', and how the 'law and order' state now seeks the removal of the right to say 'no'.

'THESE DEMONSTRATIONS HAVE been subverted by thuggery,' then-Home Secretary Priti Patel declared on Twitter in June 2020. 'Justice will follow.'[608]

Edward Colston lay at the bottom of Bristol Harbour. The bronze statue of a man who ferried eighty-four thousand African men, women and children to lives of horrific slavery in the Americas – of whom as many as nineteen thousand died en route – had been deposited there by a crowd protesting racial injustice in the aftermath of the death of George Floyd in 2020.

Bristol was just one of the biggest series of anti-racism protests in Britain for decades, sparked by Floyd's death and the details of a life marred by unjust and brutal treatment at the hands of the police, a pain felt as sharply in Bristol as it was in Floyd's native Minneapolis.

But the government, citing regulations intended to combat the spread of Covid-19 and property damage, was quick to brand such protests 'illegal' and 'criminal'.[609] Even as government ministers vowed to tackle the issue of systemic racism, they sought to portray the protests themselves not as legitimate political expression but illegitimate criminal violence.

The news media leapt on any incidents of vandalism or disorder, no matter how minor, as proof. The 'Blue Collar Conservatives' caucus of MPs connected Colston's toppling to the burning of flags, vandalism of war memorials, and attacks on police. Former Chancellor and Bristolian Sajid Javid insisted 'If Bristolians wants [***sic***] to remove a monument it should be done democratically – not by criminal damage'.[610] In a repeat of the 'fast track' prosecutions after the 2011 riots that saw children as young as thirteen brought before courts without parents or appropriate adults, the government vowed to jail 'violent protestors' within twenty-four hours with a new offence carrying a maximum sentence of ten years.[611]

Shifting the focus away from the purpose of a protest is a strategy with a long pedigree. Thatcher condemned the urban uprisings of 1981 as 'sheer criminality', the trade unions were 'the enemy within' attempting to overthrow democracy itself, while Victorian legislation was used in 1985 to criminalise women taking part in anti-nuclear protests at Greenham Common in Berkshire.

All were treated as threats not just to individuals but to society as a whole, a process that places peaceful demonstrations and protest in the same category as riots, undermining their credibility, and justifying increasingly authoritarian and draconian restrictions.[612]

'The effect of the practice of criminalising protest is to undermine political struggle,' wrote legal scholar Nadine El-Enany.[613] 'Through its depoliticisation it is presented as disorder rather than as legitimate political contestation, the exercise of which is protected by the rights to free expression and assembly.'

MEANWHILE, WITHIN CHIEF Judge Silver's comments had lain a careful trap. When he insisted the protests could go ahead '***as long as they***

remain within the law' he signalled not tolerance, but the expectation of violence.

'***There will be no violence,***' insisted Dupre. '***We will give them no excuse to beat us down with their guns and their daysticks.***' Of course, the Judges needed no excuse, manufacturing the very violence they claimed to be tackling. The evoking of nonviolence was a test, reflecting how 'nonviolence, once a tool, today glows with the power of fetish'.[614]

The demand for complete and conspicuous non-violence lowers the threshold of mass protest to an impossible standard. Any disruption, any disorder, any vandalism is used to delegitimise an entire movement.

'You commit a crime, ANY crime, you are no longer 'peaceful',' announced conservative American podcaster Steven Crowder in August 2020 after months of Black Lives Matter protests, while President Donald Trump repeatedly painted protesters as 'rioters' even though ninety-three per cent were peaceful, and some of the violent incidents were simply opportunistic vandalism. Such rhetoric is intended for audiences amenable to such retributive messages, priming them to accept justifications for protesters – whether peaceful or not – being gassed, cuffed, maced, driven into, kettled, and shot with 'less lethal' weapons by police across the US.[615]

In the same way, Silver's words signalled the expectation of violence and pre-emptively laid the blame for it at the democrats' feet. This has been a common theme in media coverage since protests of the turn of the millennium, beginning with anti-capitalism protests in London and Seattle in 1999.

At the latter, forty thousand protestors – environmentalists, unions, Indigenous groups, nongovernmental organisations, and students protesting the deleterious effects of globalisation – blocked entrances to the Seattle convention centre where global trade negotiations were due to take place.

But when the Seattle Police Department deployed tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse the non-violent protests, it became 'the Battle in Seattle'; a state of emergency was declared, two battalions of Army National Guardsmen drafted in, a curfew and 'no-protest

zone' imposed. Local residents were treated as protestors and tear-gassed, while there was 'panic among police', fuelled by false rumours of the use of 'Molotov cocktails'.

Seattle became a synecdoche for protest. 'Politicians and security officials justified the ratcheting up of discipline by reminding the public of the danger of the uncontrolled crowd,' wrote Alasdair Roberts in ***The End of Protest***. 'The spectre of Seattle was raised over every subsequent economic summit, and major media, attracted by stories of potential conflict, helped to stoke public anxieties.'

The repetition of such coded warnings conveyed the message that protests are inherently 'a matter of violence, aggression, and imminent general danger' that require severe means.[616] An independent report on the G20 summit in Toronto in 2010 said that police were seen to be treating 'all demonstrators as threats to public safety' and one senior police officer 'continually referred to crowds as protesters/terrorists'. That two terms are conflated into one – protest and terror painted with the same brush – shows that in the police's eyes, any form of resistance to that status quo will not be tolerated. All terror is protest; therefore, all protest is terror.

The Judges consider the mere idea of democracy a direct threat and, when Dredd finally proposes a vote of the citizenry in 'The Devil You Know', a group of Judges conspires to murder him, considering his actions a sign of madness. Dredd did not support any form of violence, just a vote, but this is one and the same for many Judges.

Such equivalence goes beyond the rhetorical. A thousand people were wounded and one killed at anti-globalisation protests in Genoa, Italy in 2001, with more than six thousand tear gas grenades and twenty live ammunition rounds discharged by Italian police and paramilitary Carabinieri, who had been told that demonstrators might use guns and 'ball-bearings smeared with acid'.[617] 'They taught us only to repress, not to prevent,' one police officer subsequently revealed, 'the no-global movement was presented to us as the enemy, there was no training about the various components of the movement, no distinction between violent and peaceful groups'.

IN THE LIGHT of this it is tempting to focus exclusively on what happens to the democratic march.

After all, for more than three years General Augusto Pinochet's regime had been brutally attacking protestors and strikers calling for the restoration of democracy in Chile, the home of Hayek's authoritarian neoliberal dream, with soldiers setting two demonstrators on fire during a national strike in July 1986.

In Britain, many considered Thatcher's repression of the trade union movement to be a similar assault on democratic norms; just eighteen months before 'Revolution' was published, a thousand police in riot shields had stormed the ranks of thirteen thousand strikers and demonstrators during a bitter strike at a London printworks run by press baron Rupert Murdoch, who helped the Thatcher government deliver the final blow to British trade union power. Meanwhile, the consequences of Orgreave were already being felt – fifty coal mines had since closed.

So today, when protestors are killed, blinded or maimed by 'non-lethal' weapons, where crowds are bombarded by tear gas and high-tech sonic weapons, where parts of entire cities are effectively becoming warzones, and a peaceful vigil for a woman murdered by a serving police officer is violently broken up by the murderer's colleagues, the treatment meted out to Dupre and her followers seems all too real, all too current.

Yet the tactics and the violence are secondary to the story, occupying less than two pages of the whole three-part story. The key moment is, rather, in the first episode – when Silver holds his audience with Dredd and tells him '***on this you write the law***'.

This is often misinterpreted as uncharacteristic. Surely, as such a stickler for the proper and rigid application of the law, Dredd would not stand for, much less engage in, illegal activity? Dredd himself seems to hesitate, asking Silver if that means '***exceeding the law***'.

But that is not Silver's meaning.

Although not named directly in the story, the 'Security of the City Act' grants the Judges near-total power to act outside of their own law if they deem it necessary to protect national security. Originally created as the means to remove President Booth from office, the

Judges turned it into a blanket power to use as they see fit, deploying it to commit murder, wipe a democracy campaigner's mind, appropriate a lottery winner's takings, jail political dissidents, cover up miscarriages of justice, and suppress medical research.[618]

Silver's reply is a reminder to Dredd that he already has all the power he needs. In effect, he cannot break the law – because, as he regularly reminds the reader, he ***is*** the Law.

It is part and parcel of the irony of the Judges – the people must be protected at all costs, but mostly from themselves. Consider the many forbidden substances in the city, not just hard drugs but also caffeine and sugar. An early strip shows old comic books, including copies of ***2000 AD***, are banned in order to protect the youth from becoming addicted and paying any price for them (a wry comment on the nascent 'collectors' market' for comics of the late 1970s).[619]

Yet the joke of 'forbidden comic books' itself recalls the moral panic created by Fredric Wertham's ***Seduction of the Innocent***, which warned that children are so easily manipulated and so quick to turn savage that the slightest temptation, in the form of violent comics, would turn them into little terrorists. The paternalistic logic of ***Leviathan*** is quite similar – the citizens are always at risk of turning violent, therefore it is entirely appropriate to always treat them as if they are violent.

'***Any action we take to stamp out pernicious ideas like democracy is justified – for the good of the people,***' Dredd tells an injured Dupre, surrounded by the very people he claims to be protecting, broken and bleeding and bowed at his hands.

For the Judges, the ends justify the means.

This includes the undercover Justice Department infiltrators in the crowd, whose rock throwing provides the excuse of 'violence' that the Judges need to send in assault squads and break the protest up. In the ensuing melee, any of them caught in the fighting needed only to shout, '***Family man!***' to identify themselves.

ON THE VERY day that the first episode of 'Revolution' hit newsstands, it is alleged that a real undercover cop carried out a firebomb attack that was blamed on an 'anti-fur' campaign.[620]

Named under Parliamentary privilege in 2012, the officer was a member of the Metropolitan Police's Special Demonstration Squad (SDS). Founded in 1968 and active for forty years, SDS officers infiltrated anti-war, anti-nuclear, anti-apartheid, environmental, anti-racist, and animal rights protest groups, as well as trade unions.[621]

These groups claim infiltrators would often act as agent provocateurs, encourage illegal acts among peaceful protesters, and even participate in illegal actions themselves, including allegedly planting the incendiary device that destroyed a Debenhams store in Harrow on 11 July 1987.[622]

Without almost any oversight, the unit's members used the identities of dead babies, spied on the parents of murdered Black teenager Stephen Lawrence, and had long-term sexual relationships and fathered children with activists who were unaware of their true identities. In this light, the phrase 'family man' takes on an even more sinister tone.

Indeed, Dredd's words to Gort Hyman echo in the SDS's informal motto – 'By Any Means Necessary'.[623]

Yet the SDS was not unique. Since 1968, undercover police officers have spied on more than a thousand political groups. The LAPD had its own notorious 'Public Order Intelligence Division' from the 1950s until 1982, and undercover NYPD officers were accused of infiltrating protest groups and trying to provoke trouble in 2005.[624] In 2022, Black Lives Matter activists in South Wales closed down their group after police attempted to recruit one of them as an informant.[625]

And since the 'war on terror' began, states have come to reframe such groups no longer as merely troublesome 'protestors', but 'domestic extremists'. In the world of 'Judge Dredd', it is the Judges themselves who created this transformation. The live execution of Hester Hyman and her group, who used TV to agitate for democracy, gave way to more extreme groups as seen in the 'America' storyline. These same groups would later be further radicalised, resulting in the Total War group blowing up nuclear devices in the middle of the city in order to make their point.[626] The strip's point is crystal clear – when all crime, all protest, is seen as terror, then everyone would become terrorists.

JESSICA REZNICEK IS, according to a court in Iowa, a terrorist.

Using an oxy-acetylene cutting torch to burn holes in the Dakota Access Pipeline was just one of the acts of sabotage the forty-one-year-old climate activist committed to delay the completion of the controversial eleven-hundred mile-long underground oil pipeline, which cuts through sacred Native American lands and threatens the drinking water of millions of North Americans.

After admitting she was responsible for the ecotage, a judge used a provision in the Patriot Act to apply a 'domestic terrorism enhancement' to her sentence, turning three years of prison into eight and 'branding Reznicek a terrorist for life'.[627]

Two decades since it was rushed into law in the wake of al-Qaeda's terrorist attacks on America in 2001, the Patriot Act reads like the Judges' own 'Security of the City Act', granting the American government unprecedented powers to spy on its own people and punitively punish those it dubs 'terrorists'. But even as the US faces a rise in racist and anti-government acts of terror, the state has used the same powers against environmental protestors, who have been branded as 'extremists' for disruptive but non-violent protests. There is a growing tendency within security and police agencies to view dissent, protest, and criticism as dangerous and a fundamental threat to the status quo.

When Chief Judge Silver declares '***The revolution is over!***', he sends a message not just to the protestors who his officers had beaten, but to the city as a whole, a message that directly equates the act of protest with an illegal attempt to overthrow the government.

When President Donald Trump declared that BLM protesters were 'terrorists', he borrowed that same well-oiled tactic from authoritarian regimes.[628] Vaguely worded, overly broad, and prone to misuse, draconian anti-terror laws are increasingly being used to delegitimise and penalise people critical of government policies.

The 'war on terror' supercharged this process. Since 2001, as neoliberal 'austerity' policies have begun to bite, governments have become hypersensitive to any notion of the 'enemy within'. The politicised nature of the term 'terrorism' provides the means by which

a wide range of dissenters, protesters, and activists are constructed and responded to as 'terrorist tinged'.[629]

In Ethiopia, civic activists and opposition figures have been arrested under 'anti-terrorism' legislation while Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been accused of using similar laws to target the country's opposition. In 2020, the Philippines' House of Representatives passed anti-terror legislation that gave authorities a 'dizzying degree of power' to arrest and detain government critics.[630] A year later, following six years of a state of emergency following an Islamist terror attack, Tunisian president Kais Saied began governing by fiat after ousting the democracy that emerged from the 2011 'Arab Spring' revolution.[631]

Britain's own 'war on terror' had existed long before 9/11, with sweeping powers aimed at combating Irish terror groups like the IRA, but the government has not hesitated to use it against other 'domestic' enemies.

In 2003, the then-Home Secretary David Blunkett used Section 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000 to authorise the use of stop and search powers over whole counties in an attempt to control protests against the Iraq War, which had begun days earlier, outside an RAF base.

Such anti-terrorism powers – including the ability to hold people for up to a month without charge – were again used against demonstrators protesting an arms fair in London's Docklands in 2003 and those campaigning against the expansion of Heathrow Airport in 2007.[632] The powers were eventually repealed in 2010, when the European Court of Human Rights ruled that they breached protestors' human rights.

There is an irony to read Michael Posner, former US Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, declaring after the protests of the 'Arab Spring' that 'too many governments crack down in the name of restoring order when their citizens demanded universal human rights and a voice in how they were governed'. Although the attempted insurrection of 6 January 2021 was committed by a pro-Donald Trump mob, the US has seen a much broader 'crackdown on dissent' with a dramatic increase in anti-protest bills and sweeping domestic counter-terror strategy'.[633]

The strategy includes on its list of 'domestic violent extremists' groups such as environmentalists, anti-capitalists and animal rights activists.[634]

And after Met officers violently broke up a peaceful vigil held after the murder of Sarah Everard, the chairman of the government's All-Party Parliamentary Group on Democracy and the Constitution, warned that 'the police must not become the enforcement agency of the state against those who… call for change'.[635]

'***We're not leaving until the Black Atlantic's blue again!***' declare environmental protestors blocking the entrance to the five-thousand kilometre highway under the Black Atlantic, the heavily polluted ocean separating Mega-City One and Brit-Cit, the Britain of the twenty-first century. '***Protest all you want, creep – as long as you don't break the law. You broke it, you'll do time!***' shouts Dredd as one extremist threatens to detonate a bomb to destroy the sea wall. Kettling the protestors, Dredd allows poisoned seawater to pour over them until they surrender, in another ironic punishment.[636] Compressed down into a handful of panels, the daily 'Judge Dredd' strips in the ***Daily Star*** were particularly prone to such ironic endings; those advocating for democracy are all punished due to the actions of their own group's worst members. Democracy, so the story seems to argue, fails because it produces extremism. The protesters are children, playing with forces they cannot understand. A finger in an electrical socket on a mass scale.

With such stories, Dredd reflected the state's disdain towards protest: he doesn't care for causes, only order. Similarly, the police, a naturally conservative institution that draws its legitimacy directly from majoritarian views of 'the public', is often openly hostile towards protestors with left-wing or radical views, particularly those who are viewed as being 'anti-police'.

'This is not a riot!' chanted non-violent demonstrators, trapped in a police 'kettle' during protests that met the G20 summit in 2009, as they raised their hands in the air to try to avoid being beaten by riot officers

surging into the crowd, echoing both the plaintive cries at the democratic march and Dredd's callous reply.

At precisely the same time as peaceful protestors were hit in the face with shields, thrown to the ground and struck with batons, forty-seven-year-old newspaper vendor Ian Tomlinson died when he was shoved to the ground by a member of the Metropolitan Police's Territorial Support Group in a sudden and unprovoked attack.[637]

The 2009 protests, and Tomlinson's death, were a turning point. A major report, 'Adapting to Protest', suggested new forms of public order policing, based 'a commitment to 'facilitating' peaceful protest' that drew clearer lines between 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' protest. For one, there was the 'velvet glove', for the other the 'iron fist'.[638] This was enough for criminologist Peter Waddington, the inventor of the controversial crowd control tactic of 'kettling', to insist in 2009 that 'policing by consent is alive and well'.[639]

However, the experience of anti-fracking protesters in the UK suggests that non-violence is not sufficient to ensure that the police willingly facilitate a protest, as the police's boundaries between 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' protest are not based on the use of violence 'but on the target or goal of a protest and a desire to be disruptive'. This means that 'seeking to challenge the status quo is enough to break the rules as a transgressive protest' and an 'anti-fracking protest thus transcends the police definition of acceptable protest as "peaceful assembly" not because of a recourse of violence but because of what it is focused on, what it demands, and the form it takes.'[640]

Such anti-fracking groups have also been branded as an example of 'extremism' in police anti-radicalisation materials.[641] Another guide listed Greenpeace and PETA, as well as campaigns against ocean pollution, war, nuclear weapons, fascism, racism, and airport expansion alongside extremist right-wing groups such as Combat 18 and the National Front, and National Action, the latter of which has been banned for terrorist violence.[642]

In 2019, a ninety-four-year-old peaceful protester and war veteran won an eight-year legal battle to have his details removed from the National Domestic Extremism Database, while environmental

activists opposing fracking and oil pipelines have been monitored as a 'threat to national security'.[643] [644]

While then-Home Secretary Priti Patel did not hide her contempt for protest groups seeking to thwart arms sales to Saudi Arabia and deportations carried out by her Home Office, her ire seemed especially reserved for climate crisis campaign groups Extinction Rebellion (XR) and Insulate Britain (IB).

Since 2018, both campaigns' non-violent but highly disruptive protests, calling for greater government action against climate change, have brought parts of London, newspaper printing plants, and motorways to a standstill. After the High Court quashed a ban imposed by the Metropolitan Police on XR's protests across London, Met Commissioner Cressida Dick urged Patel to use the 'opportunity' to curb protest rights.

The result was the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill (PCSC), one of the UK's most draconian pieces of legislation, which effectively hands the power to the police – and the Home Secretary – to shut down protests at will.

The bill allows police to crack down on protesters if their actions cause 'serious annoyance' to the surrounding community, organisations and businesses, and even allows them to fine protesters for inadvertent breaches of restrictions they 'ought' to have known about.

Despite being defeated fourteen times in the House of Lords, the government took measures rejected from the PCSC and repackaged them into a different Public Order Bill, introduced in 2022. Even Patel's own Home Office warned her that the proposed 'Protest Banning Order' 'essentially takes away a person's right to protest', while 'Serious Disruption Prevention Orders' would allow courts to ban someone from attending, organising, or promoting protests, and electronically tag them.[645] Both laws risk creating 'a hostile environment for peaceful protestors', the joint committee on human rights (JCHR) warned, and would have a 'chilling effect' on the right to peaceful protest.[646]

In 1985, German criminalist Günther Jakobs described how criminal systems sometimes treated defendants not as citizens, who

are subject to fundamental rights, but as enemies of the social order.[647] This idea of the 'criminal law of the enemy' (or ***Feindstrafrecht***) frames rights as something only to be afforded to fellow citizens and not 'enemies of society'. This justifies the cancellation or restriction of fundamental rights for some people; in short, 'the enemy has fewer rights'. It is not difficult to hear in this Dredd's words about '***lawbreakers***' having no rights or from 'America' – '***Rights? Sure, I'm all for rights. But not at the expense of order***' – nor those of Priti Patel, who condemned 'criminal, disruptive and self-defeating guerrilla tactics' used by 'a selfish few in the name of protest'.[648]

This shift turns democracy from something that everyone can participate in into something that needs 'defending' from them. Yet the right to protest is indivisible from democracy, even – especially – when it inconveniences or disrupts. As former Home Secretary Theresa May put it: 'There will be people who will have seen scenes of protests and asked, "Why aren't the government doing something?" The answer, in many cases, may simply be that we live in a democratic, free society.'[649]

Patel's new laws demonstrate the state's growing allergy to dissent and disruption, an authoritarian, punitive response to challenge. It is an all-too-real manifestation of Chief Judge Silver's words to the city following the repression of the democratic march: '***So let me hear no more complaint. Let me hear no more voices raised against us… above all, let me hear no more fool's talk of democracy. Democracy is dead.***'

Nestled in the wider theme of democracy and freedom, 'Revolution' demonstrates how the regime is able to act without impunity by creating a legal framework that positions any action against the state as extremism and any act committed by the state as justified. The dirty tricks, the torture, the rioting infiltrators – all of it is justified and permitted by the law.

In 'The Man Who Knew Too Much', Dredd arrests a journalist threatening to expose how a Justice Department programme of mass sedation of the population has killed thousands from overdose.[650]

Invoking the Security of the City Act, Dredd offers him a grim choice: solitary confinement for life or immediate brain surgery.

'***It – it's immoral!***' the journalist cries. '***It's monstrous!***'

'It's the law,' Dredd replies.

For Dredd, the ends will always justify the means.

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[603] ***2000 AD*** Progs 531-533 (1987) Script: John Wagner, Alan Grant, Art: John Higgins. Letters: Tom Frame

[604] Published just six months after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, 'Simp City' – ***2000 AD*** Progs 1119-1120 (1998) Script: John Wagner, Art: Peter Doherty, Letters: Tom Frame – satirised the sectarian arguments over parades by the Protestant 'Orange Order' in Northern Ireland, which have long been a source of provocation, with Dredd defusing a standoff over a 'pro-Simp' march.

[605] 'Unemployment Riot', ***Daily Star*** (12 September 1981) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Ron Smith

[606] In a repeat of the sentence handed to poor Arnold Short in 'City Block', the remaining protestors are sentenced to '***one year's hard labour***'. '***Good old Dredd!***' says one. '***He's hard – but he's fair!***'

[607] Robert Reiner, ***The Politics of the Police*** (2000)

[608] https://twitter.com/pritipatel/status/1269917466702106624

[609] Torcuil Crichton, 'Priti Patel brands Black Lives Matter protests "illegal" over Covid-19 fears' – dailyrecord.co.uk (8 June 2020) https://bit.ly/3yWdZyK

[610] As was underscored at the time, just such a democratic campaign had been underway for thirty years – and had been blocked and ignored by local authorities. Even attempts to add a second plaque explaining Colston's slave trade profiteering had to be abandoned.

[611] Jason Okundaye, 'Criminalising Black Lives Matter' – tribunemag.co.uk (13 June 2020) https://bit.ly/3OSxBJs

[612] Tom Banbury, 'Britain's Long Fight Over the Right to Protest' – tribunemag.co.uk (2 April 2021) https://bit.ly/3asf33L

[613] Nadine El-Enany, '"Innocence Charged with Guilt": The Criminalisation of Protest from Peterloo to Millbank' in David Pritchard & Francis Pakes (eds.), ***Riot, Unrest and Protest on the Global Stage*** (2014)

[614] Tobi Haslett, 'Magic Actions: Looking back on the George Floyd rebellion' in ***Hindsight*** issue 40 (2021)

[615] Wil Sands, 'The Shot-in-the-Eye Squad' – narratively.com (20 May 2021) https://bit.ly/3AH0xQA

[616] Alasdair Roberts, ***The End of Protest: How Free-Market Capitalism Learned to Control Dissent*** (2017) ***ibid.***

[617] David Waddington, 'Policing Political Protest: Lessons of Best Practice from a Major English City' in David Pritchard (ed.) ***Riot, Unrest and Protest on the Global Stage*** (2016)

[618] 'Anderson, Psi-Division: The Possessed', ***2000 AD*** Prog 477 (1986) Script: Alan Grant, Art: Brett Ewins, Letters: Tom Frame / 'Politics', ***2000 AD*** Prog 656 (1989) Script: Alan Grant, Art: Jeff Anderson, Letters: Tom Frame / 'Megalot', ***2000 AD*** Prog 952 (1995) Script: John Wagner, Art: Carlos Ezquerra, Letters: Tom Frame / 'Blood Trails', ***2000 AD*** Progs 1440–1449 (2005) Script: Gordon Rennie, Art: Andrew Currie, Colour: Chris Blythe, Letters: Tom Frame / 'Caught in the Act', ***2000 AD*** Progs 1450–1451 (2005) Script: John Wagner, Art: Phil Winslade, Colour: Len O'Grady, Letters: Tom Frame / 'Cold Comfort', ***2000 AD*** Prog 1225 (2001) Script: John Wagner, Art: Anthony Williams, Colour: Chris Blythe, Letters: Tom Frame

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12

NECROPOLIS

The State of Exception in the city of the dead

‘***You cannot kill what does not live! I have come to bring law to thiss city! My law – the law of Death!***’
– Judge Dredd, ‘Judge Death’ (1980)

WITH HIS PORTCULLIS visor, rictus grin, and murderous mission, Judge Death ranks as one of comics’ most iconic villains.

Created by Wagner with wonderfully macabre designs by artist Brian Bolland, Death is an unkillable undead spirit that animates dead bodies to carry out the mission of exterminating all life.[651] First appearing in 1980, Death is a sinister panto Nosferatu, a skeletal frame dressed in a gothic perversion of a Judge’s uniform, hissing catchphrases and stalking the alleyways of Bolland’s shadow-wreathed city. Impervious to bullets – and therefore an ideal recurring villain – Death was proof that any story, even gothic horror, could work in ‘Dredd’.

Death and his cadaverous comrades, Judge Mortis, Judge Fire, and Judge Fear (each representing apocalypses far more relevant to our modern age – decay, deadly heat, fear itself – than their agrarian forebears, the Four Horsemen) were revealed to have been Judges in another, twisted dimension, where they were made undead by occult science.[652]

What set them apart in the pantheon of ‘Dredd’ villains was their grotesque philosophy. ‘***The crime isss life, the ssentence isss death!***’ is Death’s breathtakingly simple, grimly comical mission statement. Since all crime is committed by the living then, in order to stop crime, life itself is declared illegal. As a nihilistic abrogation of morality, this anti-life formula is as unimpeachable in its logic as it is grotesque in its conclusion.

Having exterminated all life on their own world, the Dark Judges crossed over to Mega-City One to attempt the same again and again, only to be repeatedly thwarted by both Dredd and Judge Cassandra Anderson, the irreverent but powerful psychic modelled by Bolland on singer Debbie Harry,[653] who debuted in the original 'Judge Death' story and was soon spun off into her own solo series.[654] Yet despite their immense popularity with readers, by 1990 it had been five years since the Dark Judges had last stalked the pages of ***2000 AD***.[655]

Beginning with the two-part prelude 'Dear Annie' in 1990,[656] and illustrated by Ezquerra in lurid tones and sickly ink washes, they returned to begin their work anew just as Wagner sought to bring his to a close. As detailed in chapter eleven, 'Necropolis' was intended as both a rebirth for Dredd and a swan song.

As stories such as the humorous 'In the Bath' touched on questions of ageing, 'John Cassavetes is Dead' and 'A Letter to Judge Dredd' grappled with doubt, and 'Young Giant' and 'The Shooting Match' spoke to themes of succession and replacement, Wagner ushered Dredd towards a final confrontation with death itself.[657]

Having passed through his Christ-like tribulation in the desert, he stopped the Dark Judges and the ghoulish Sisters of Death's attempt to turn Mega-City One into a 'city of the dead', once again overcoming death to save his city.

WHAT MAKES DEATH such a fascinating and chilling character is that, unlike many comic book villains, he is not an opposite or an abstract of Dredd, but rather his logical conclusion. His is certainly a monstrous argument, but a regime that criminalises every possible facet of human behaviour is forever a mere step away from reaching the same hideous judgement – after all, Cal did sentence the entire city to death well before Death jumped across dimensions.

What Judge Death exposes, not just about Dredd but about our own world, is the terrifying reality of what has become one of the most awesome of the powers of the state – the power to take a life.

The acknowledgement of the grotesquery of the death penalty – that it kills the innocent, that it does not serve as a deterrent, that it is

a grave hypocrisy in criminal legal systems whose avowed purpose is to protect life – is one of the great progressive victories of post-war liberal democracy in the twentieth century. In the face of much resistance, the power was steadily withdrawn: Britain in 1965, Spain in 1978, France in 1981, though – despite moratoriums and campaigns – it remains legal in more than half the states of the US. But striking the death penalty from their statute books does not mean that the state no longer wields the 'diabolical' sovereign power of death. Instead, death has come to dominate life.

'***Your kind of law is so final,***' the innocent child in 'A Letter to Judge Dredd' had observed of the Judges. And, in many ways, Judge Death's mission is redundant. Because Mega-City One was already a city of the dead.

IN THE 1984 story 'Question of Judgement', a busy Apocalypse War parade winds its way through the streets. It is a mad and jingoistic affair, with as many participants celebrating the war's beginning as those marking its end – and some belligerently demanding more conflict.[658]

As they police its fringes, Dredd seeks the counsel of his former mentor, Judge Morphy. We, as readers, see the events concerning him play out in flashback: Dredd kneeling over the victim of a robbery gone wrong, the perp fleeing, Dredd's shouted warning, the perp firing blindly behind him, and then Dredd shooting him through the head. This we see twice: the man's face contorted in agony, then his body lying on the floor with a shadowed Dredd standing over him.

Dredd's decision to execute the man, rather than incapacitate him, has left him troubled: '***I killed him, Morph,***' he laments, '***thing is, I didn't have to. I could've disarmed him. I know my accuracy… I could have taken his gun.***'

And we believe him – for years the strip had hammered home the preternatural skill and well-honed training of the Judges; their violence was meant to be like a scalpel, cutting out the cancer of the ***demonstrably*** guilty criminal. But here, Dredd knew that he had made a choice. '***He was just some more scum to be cleaned off the streets, not that he'd see it that way,***' he says. '***If I'd have***

given him the chance he'd have settled for a shattered hand and 20 years in the cubes.'

Here he was quibbling over the fate of a single perp as a parade celebrated him incinerating millions of East-Meg One citizens in nuclear fire. It contravened the nature of the standard 'Dredd' tale, the 'phantasm of sovereign authority' where every perp is guilty, every punishment righteous.[659] 'Question of Judgement' was the first of a trio of stories – followed by 'Error of Judgement' and 'A Case for Treatment' – that called into question the moral certainty that justified every bullet, every strike of the daystick, every missile strike.[660]

The story could not follow through the ethical implications raised by these doubts. That would come later. Morphy confidently assured Dredd that he had followed procedure and should feel no guilt. As a remedy, he recommended he wear boots a size too small – the pain would distract him from '***brooding***' and focus his mind on the job at hand.

To an extent these stories were an attempt to humanise Dredd, not in the way that Mills had attempted, but by creating inner conflict. Such doubts would continue to nip at his heels, with or without his 'tight boots', which would become a running joke in the strip under Wagner, shorthand for Dredd's focused and apolitical pragmatism. Potentially losing their best Judge, Justice Department also opted for distraction and sent Dredd on a mission into the future that reaffirmed that, for the Judges, duty would always triumph over doubt.[661]

With its talking-heads discussion of procedure and ethics, 'Question of Judgement' seems as far as possible from the gothic horror of the Dark Judges. And yet, in its final pages, the story brings with it a reminder that this is a story about death. '***Remember,***' Morph told Dredd, '***When it comes down to the bottom line, that creep's got no complaint. He knew the rules. He sacrificed his right to live as soon as he turned that gun on a Judge.***'

It is a grim utilitarian calculation, the institutionalisation of the 'righteous kill' of ***Dirty Harry***, the law of the 'brave, bad man' who would deliver the 'natural justice' of death on those who do not deserve the same protections as the 'law-abiding'. By their deviance, the criminal surrendered the right to protection, to mercy, to life, and

the police officer, as the representative of the sovereign power, has the right to remove it.

As discussed previously, in order for power to be exercised it must be legitimate. It had been miscarriages of justice that had finally undermined the legitimacy of the death penalty, but yet here in a comic strip the continuing allure of this ultimate sanction was made clear.

In order to legitimise judicial murder, Dredd's victims – for victims they are – are imbued with a quality of ***deathworthiness***. This concept from American jurisprudence, used in cases that can lead to sentences of death, is not just the moral logic of the police thriller but has also become central to the populist authoritarian rhetoric of 'law and order' politics, that those that die by the hand of the policeman deserve their fate.

Comic book readers share a privilege few onlookers ever receive – the ability to see for themselves the circumstances of a crime. In 'Judge Dredd' we see the crime happening, we are ourselves the judge and jury, only awaiting the uniformed executioner to do his work. Therefore, we have the smug honour of 'knowing' the guilt of the dead. Like all privileges, it is a carefully constructed fantasy. In rejecting 'Courtroom' and 'Bank Raid', Mills walked the strip back from violence that seemed too cruel and arbitrary, and grounded it in violence that was ***righteous*** – regardless of what they have done, every perp had to deserve their fate. It is a dangerous logic, because it is only a short walk from the idea of death only being visited upon the guilty, to the dead being guilty by virtue of their death.

On 4 August 2011, three police cars forced a taxi to stop on Ferry Lane in the London borough of Tottenham. Armed police poured out and, as twenty-nine-year-old Mark Duggan emerged from the cab, he was shot twice.

Immediately afterwards, the police told the media that Duggan was a 'gangster', who had fired at police in a 'shootout', leaving them no choice but to fire back.[662] At the inquest into his death, the police insisted he was 'among Europe's most violent criminals' with media coverage painting him as a high-profile and dangerous criminal, a

‘major player’, ‘heavily involved in criminality’, who ‘lived by the gun’. Even the funeral, attended by over a thousand people, was portrayed as a sinister tribute to a gang leader.[663]

Except it wasn’t true. Duggan hadn’t shot anyone – it had been an armed officer who had accidentally shot one of his colleagues – and there was no evidence he had even held a gun.[664] The firearm in question was found metres away but none of the officers saw Duggan discard it or make any kind of throwing motion. Even the police admitted their claims that he was a dangerous criminal were extremely weak; his criminal record consisted of two minor convictions, both of which attracted only small fines.[665]

An image of an unsmiling Duggan, widely used to seal his image as an unfeeling criminal, had been cropped from a larger photograph of him holding a tribute to his dead daughter beside her grave, his expression not one of cold-bloodedness but of grief.

Duggan’s death triggered the biggest riots in modern English history, as communities once again rose up to protest racist police violence. But rather than reflect on the outrage, Prime Minister David Cameron connected the picture painted of Duggan with the violence that ensued; he blamed ‘gangs’ for the rioting and declared an ‘all-out war on gangs and gang culture’ that targeted the very communities that had risen up.

By the time the truth began to emerge, it was too late – irrespective of what he had actually done, Mark Duggan was labelled as deserving of death, his execution on the streets of Tottenham necessary and legitimate.

The messaging put out by the state about Duggan had made him ***deathworthy.*** Such ‘character assassination’ seeks to justify the state’s use of deadly force, regardless of the circumstances of its use. The individual is said to be responsible, by their own deeds, for their death – the blame for their execution laid squarely on their head, not upon the officer who shoots them.

‘They kill the person twice. The police killed him, and then their statement kills his reputation,’ said Ebele Okobi, sister of thirty-six-year-old Chinedu Okobi, who died in San Francisco in 2018 after being repeatedly tasered, beaten with a baton, pepper-sprayed and

held down until he became unresponsive – over an alleged jaywalking incident.

This is not unusual. Victims, particularly Black men, are easily cast as 'thugs' whose threatening presence or alleged criminal backgrounds justifies the use of force, regardless of their actions in the moment, as was the case with Michael Brown, whose shooting by police in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014, led to the creation of the Black Lives Matter movement.[666] Similarly, the past criminal records of the victims of teenage gunman Kyle Rittenhouse, who opened fire during BLM protests in Kenosha, Wisconsin, in 2020, were used as 'evidence' that he was right to kill them.

A review of police killings in California showed that law enforcement spokespeople frequently publish highly misleading or even false information about the people they have killed, omitting officers' actions and creating inaccurate narratives about the victims' behaviour.[667] In Okobi's case, 'the police claimed he had been running in and out of traffic' and 'immediately assaulted the deputy' but investigations proved this to be wildly false. 'They painted a picture of my brother as a wild, aggressive person, that they had no choice but to kill him,' said his sister.

Psychologists have highlighted how the strategy – whether intentional or not – seeks to shift focus away from questionable violence and onto the past unlawful behaviour of victims in order to make it easy for people to assume 'they had it coming', and to justify their deaths at the hands of the state. It is a 'blame game' that shifts culpability for the use of force from the officer to their victim, regardless of what they have done.

'If you don't want to get shot, tased, pepper-sprayed, struck with a baton or thrown to the ground, just do what I tell you,' former Los Angeles police officer Sunil Dutta wrote in the aftermath of disorder in Ferguson, Missouri, following the shooting of Michael Brown. Dutta's inflammatory instructions – 'if you want to emerge from a police encounter with your life and body intact, then you'd better comply, submit, obey orders, respect authority and generally do whatever a cop tells you to do' – betray the chilling reality of police encounters, particularly in America, but also in Britain, that can be deadly. The

reality of ‘comply or die’ policing is that the dead are always to blame for their fate.

THE LITANY OF such incidents boggles the mind. Oscar Grant was killed for being on public transport.[668] Alfred Okwera Olango had a ‘shooting stance’ while holding a vape pen.[669] Daunte Wright had an air freshener hanging from a rear-view mirror.[670] Twelve-year-old Tamir Rice was playing with an Airsoft gun in the park.[671] Deravis Caine Rogers was driving his own car.[672] Bettie Jones merely opened her front door.[673]

Even compliance is not enough to save someone. The experience of Black communities in both the UK and the US are tales of the constant threat of harassment and violence, where the city street becomes a place where death itself hangs like a pall. Many tolerate such violence by rationalising it in a utilitarian framework: perpetrated in the interest of the greater good, an acceptable loss to maintain the status quo.

But this allows the police to become executioners – no longer hooded and shunned, but honoured and revered, reproducing the law through legitimate violence. Whereas the vigilante cop breaks the law to uphold the law, in ‘Dredd’ that same principle of deathworthiness – of people who deserve death – is the law itself.

It is Morph’s utilitarian conception – ‘***he sacrificed his right to live***’ – that by firing the gun, the perp placed ***himself*** into a state of exception and therefore does not enjoy the protection of life. In that moment, the state had the right to kill him with impunity.

Morph’s equation is a difficult read in a world where even following the direct orders of a police officer can spell death, only for the blame to be laid at the feet of the victim. For we see in the response to deaths at the hands of the police the same rhetorical journey – a focus not on whether the police had the right to kill, but on the worthiness of the victim for death.

This is the horror of the police – not only can they kill you, but you will be to blame.

It is the politics of death.

DERIVED FROM THE Greek root ***nekros***, meaning 'corpse', ***necropolitics*** translates as 'politics of death', a term coined in 2003 by Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe.

Whereas Weber had defined the modern state as being based on the monopoly of violence, Mbembe defined it as the 'absolute power to give death anytime, anywhere, by any means, and for any reason' – the power to determine who lives and who dies. Necropolitics entailed, he said, the 'subjugation of life to the power of death'.[674]

Mbembe drew on the theories of Michel Foucault who, in the last chapter of ***The Will to Knowledge*** entitled 'Right of Death and Power over Life', described how the feudal sovereign's power had been, effectively, the power of the sword – 'the right to take life or let live'. However, since the nineteenth century, this sovereign power has been displaced by power that focuses on the well-being of the collective, a power able and willing to sacrifice individuals for it.

These individuals become a means to the end, a price 'worth paying'. Think back to the treatment of the Fatties, herded into camps for '***the good of the community***', or the hundreds condemned to die from the fungus disease that claimed Mayor Grubb ***'so that our city may live'***, and the half a billion souls in East-Meg One.

He also understood how the necropolitical act shifts blame from the perpetrator to the victim: 'through a strange transmutation, victims are now summoned to bear… the guilt that their executioners ought to feel,' he wrote in ***Necropolitics***. 'Instead of their tormentors, who are dispensed of all remorse and relieved of the necessity to make right the ravages they have inflicted, it is the victims who must expiate.'

Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben took this all a stage further. He developed the ideas of Nazi philosopher and jurist Carl Schmitt, who helped lay the legal groundwork for the horrors of the Holocaust, to explain that a state's power is defined by its ability to include or exclude – it is the state, he said, that decides who is afforded protection of life and freedom, and who is not. Those who are not inhabit 'zones of exception', where they persist in a kind of 'bare life' – life stripped of all rights, protections, and meaning. A life that can be killed without breaking the law.

Mbembe saw in this the logic of the colony, a place where – as previously discussed – high-handed British notions of benign and cooperative 'policing by consent' were absent. Instead, the policing of the colony was harsh, violent, authoritarian, and without remorse.

It is the law embodied by Guantanamo Bay, Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison, Yarl's Wood detention centre, and the Nazi concentration camps, where 'the so-called sacred and inalienable rights of man show themselves to lack every protection and reality at the moment in which they can no longer take the form of rights belonging to citizens of a state'.[675]

Such zones do not require the pretext of the prison wall or international border; just as with the Judges' 'crime swoop', they can exist as 'floating sovereignties' that may impose themselves on anybody at any time.

For Agamben, the police officer embodies this necropolitical power 'more nakedly and clearly than anywhere else'.[676]

WHEN DISCUSSING WHY the metaphor of 'Judge Dredd' remains so potent, it must be acknowledged that his conflation of the criminal legal process ends not with the jailer, but with the executioner – a figure absent from most Western countries for decades. Yet death is his trade and the root of his power. To challenge or resist him is to invite its use, virtually without check. None of the individuals he has killed ever had the chance to stand trial, be found innocent, or serve a sentence because a police officer, in a split second, tried them, found them guilty, and sentenced them to death – and is legally permitted to do so. This is what Mbembe referred to as 'domination without responsibility'.

More than eighteen hundred people have died in police custody or following police contact in England and Wales since 1990,[677] as many as American police have killed in under two years.[678] But the disparity between a country flooded with guns and one where they remain a rarity should not disguise the reality that officers who kill when on duty almost never face criminal charges.

In the US, the law of 'qualified immunity' broadly shields police who kill in the course of their duties, especially where the state cannot or

will not fire them. 'Policing in America today is born out of the nucleus of authoritarianism,' wrote rapper and activist Killer Mike in 2021,[679] 'the mindset of: "I can kill you, no matter the reason, and nothing will happen to me".'

Until the manslaughter conviction of PC Benjamin Monk, who claimed he was 'in fear for his life' when he tasered and then kicked Dalian Atkinson in 2016, only one British police officer had been convicted of manslaughter since 1969.[680] As mentioned in chapter three, two years before Dredd's debut, thirty-nine-year-old Liddle Towers was beaten so severely by police that he died three weeks later, his death at the hands of police ruled 'justifiable homicide'.[681]

Incidents such as the SAS shooting of three unarmed IRA members in Gibraltar in 1988 and the shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes in 2005 under the now-withdrawn 'Kratos' policy, neither of which led to prosecutions or accountability, both focused attention on so-called 'shoot to kill' policies. And following the exposure of a police cover-up over failures during the Hillsborough football stadium disaster in 1989, chair of the National Police Chiefs' Council, Sara Thornton, said the UK police suffer from a 'tendency to avoid straight answers at best, and at worse to hide the truth'.[682]

Meanwhile, the state has sought to indemnify itself and its operatives from accountability for their actions.

In 2021 the Conservative government pushed through another bill that allows covert agents, such as police officers, MI5 agents, or military personnel, to legally carry out what would usually be considered criminal conduct. The Covert Human Intelligence Sources (Criminal Conduct) Bill, which became law in 2021, 'essentially gives free rein for torture, murder, and sexual violence' by indemnifying secret service agents against prosecution for crimes committed in the course of their work.[683] A year later, allegations emerged that Special Air Service (SAS) personnel had repeatedly killed detainees and unarmed men in suspicious circumstances during deployment in Afghanistan, but the Overseas Operations Act – which imposes a time limit on current or former personnel being prosecuted or sued – makes it unlikely anyone will be brought to account.[684] And, gripped in a tightening spiral of anti-immigration hysteria, the government has

given border guards immunity from prosecution over the deaths of migrants and refugees attempting to cross the English Channel.[685]

Such laws codify the state of exception, moving the sovereign right to decide who lives and who dies from the process of the courts to the discretion of individual agents in the moment. Judge, jury and executioner. All rolled into one.

DREDD, HOWEVER, IS no mere blind executioner – as Wagner has conceded, he would not have existed for long if he was. He does, however, reveal something about how we view the actions of law enforcement, even as they kill. The character possesses a moral ambiguity, especially under Wagner's pen, which seeks to contrast the monstrousness of his brand of law enforcement with his unimpeachable integrity and, occasionally, flashes of humanity.

In 'Error of Judgement', Dredd tries to help an unfortunate child left only as a brain encased in a robot body, after she fell into one of the chemical pits littering the city. Despite his attempt to help, she dies in an accident and Dredd punches an accounting Judge who labels the child ***'another leech, feeding off the city'***. In 'Bury My Knee at Wounded Heart', he ensures the city pays for the internment of an elderly woman whose husband, unable to afford extortionate burial fees and unwilling to consign her to be recycled, is caught breaking into a cemetery.

In 'Death of a Legend', as the city's ruling Council of Five debate euthanizing the elderly and senile former Chief Judge Hilda McGruder, Dredd breaks her out of her nursing home and takes her on a mission against a mutant gang in the Cursed Earth. She dies in combat, granted a 'dignified' death the needle would not have given her.

And, of course, there is every baby rescued, every life saved, every murderer cubed or executed, every monster downed, every tyrant smashed. Such moments of cathartic pathos and heroism provide slight flickers of humanity for Dredd and seek to redeem him from being nothing more than a killer.

It reflects how we see law enforcement, particularly in the moment it deploys deadly force. Contemporary narratives of 'the thin blue

line', which draws a direct connection between the police and 'thin red line' of the military, create our own 'state of exception' around victims, weighing their lives against the wider 'need' of the law.

The Judges make the difficult questions, the tough calls, the noble sacrifice. They face the challenge of death and keep us 'safe'. It is the price worth paying.

In ***contrast*** to Death itself, surely Dredd is preferable?

In 'Dredd', as in our own time, the eternal 'war on crime' is the crisis that creates the state of exception and justifies the Judges' use of violence against individuals in order to protect the collective. The state has a duty to protect life, but its primary tool is death.

In Dredd himself, we see 'the horror of the police'. Think again about his own words regarding his own city – '***800 million people and every one a potential criminal***'. The citizens of Mega-City One are always a hair's breadth away from being the victim of crime or from being labelled with that designation of 'criminal', from the state deciding that they no longer 'deserve' life.

The sheer magnitude of such actions is meant to be humorously grotesque but, yet again, Wagner and Grant found themselves at the limits of their satire, as the moral economy of Dredd's violence reinforced the very forces they were attempting to satirise. 'We only said it half in earnest,' admitted Grant in 1997.[686] 'At the end of "The Apocalypse War", we had Dredd do a really terrible thing. He forced the East-Megs to select the centre of their city and then detonate a nuclear device in it, killing millions, as if the lives of all these people mean nothing at all. And actually, the way the world is, to the authorities – to all authorities – lives don't mean anything at all. Our lives are valueless. They don't care. They will kill all of us if they have to, if they thought that it would do them any good. And that is what Judge Dredd is. Judge Dredd is a fascist. Never mind all the rhetorical "do it for the good of the city".'

As the Sovs invaded in 'The Apocalypse War', the Judges evacuated the Grand Hall of Justice, but not before they flooded the building's iso-cubes to deny their enemies a potential supply of criminal collaborators. In a darkly comic panel we see a man, his face

barely poking out from the rapidly rising waters, lamenting that he was only there because of a parking ticket.

What is Judge Death but an extension of the arbitrary sovereign power of the Judges? What small trigger will be the point at which we are marked for death? Is not the constant threat of death a permanent part of life in Mega-City One?

NECROPOLITICS DOES NOT just occur through the 'quick' violence of the bullet and the club, but what environmentalist and literary scholar Rob Nixon called 'slow violence'.[687]

Rather than the immediate shock of personal violence, as its name suggests 'slow violence' occurs 'gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all', such as the long-term effects of pollution, climate collapse, and the impact of cuts to services that have left millions vulnerable.

In 'Error of Judgement', Dredd accepted that the case should have been '***left to welfare***'. Except that the city had no intention of helping. The open chemical pit, the parents' lifetime of debt, the objection to Dredd's attempt to help improve the life of a citizen – it is little wonder that he began to doubt his role.

'The country's leaders cannot quite bring themselves to say that the lives of people living in this country matter at all, let alone act as if they do,' wrote David Roth about the cruel Freudian 'death drive' of the American state at the end of Donald Trump's presidency.[688] 'The state fails daily; it has somehow forgotten how to do anything but hurt and cannot even agree that it would be good to try to help. It does not tell the truth as a matter of course, which gives licence to everyone adrift in this to believe whatever story they find most compelling,' he wrote. 'In the ways that matter most, in the places where it is needed most, the state barely exists. Where there is supposed to be strength is only power and brute force; what is supposed to be held in common has been openly looted; the triumphal national image is gnawed to bits by a frantically denied shame and raw fear.'

This soon became painfully obvious. While the British government reversed years of neoliberal austerity to introduce furlough schemes

during the Covid-19 pandemic to allow workers to isolate and work from home, low-paid manual workers – especially working-class women – were designated as 'essential' workers but often left to improvise their own protective equipment as they shouldered the burden of the pandemic.[689] And while claiming to have thrown 'a protective ring' around them, the government overruled advice to not discharge untested elderly patients from hospital and back into care homes, where Covid-19 killed thousands of vulnerable people.[690]

The situations in the US and Brazil were even bleaker. The authoritarian regimes of Trump and Bolsonaro actively decided that hundreds of thousands of lives were a price worth paying to maintain their power, using the necropolitical power to define 'who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not'.[691]

THE PANDEMIC EXPOSED how death is now both a consequence and a necessary part of living. Such systemic deaths are never 'caused' as such, merely 'allowed' in a passive event where the victims become collateral damage: 'In order that "we" may live, live well and live fully, "they" must die, the distinction between the virtuous citizen and the other excluded as bare life, disposable life.' [692]

With the threat of crime and the daily violence of the Judges, the citizens of Mega-City One find themselves in a trap of poverty, boredom, and constant danger, all backed by moral justifications from the eradication of crime to 'modern discourses of utilitarianism, materialism, and consumerism'.[693]

Life is dominated by 'small doses' of death that come from 'unbounded social, economic, and symbolic violence' that destroys their bodies and the value of their social existence. Although they possess housing and basic welfare, the slow violence and daily humiliations rob citizens of potential. Within a few weeks Wagner and Grant demonstrated this kind of existence in 'Sunday Night Fever'. For Ruby Foulclough and Arnold Short, it is a future-shocked life where they are not dazzled by the future's insane pace and marvellous technology but find themselves hollowed out by it. Reduced to 'bare life'.

In ‘America’, America Jara interrupted a university lecture to question her lecturer’s empty discussion of the famous ‘inalienable rights’ of ‘life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness’ from the American Declaration of Independence.

‘***You drop a piece of litter and the Judges can lock you up for it,***’ she says. ‘***Jaywalk and it’s practically a capital offence. They can break into your home any time they like. They can beat you up and torture you – and Grud help you if your genetic code doesn’t match up to their high standards.***

‘***And happiness – there’s a joke! Look around you! You see any happy faces? So much for liberty and the pursuit of happiness.***’

‘***At least we’re still alive, America,***’ replies the lecturer. ‘***One out of three’s not bad.***’

IN A TIME when poverty, medical bills, precarious employment can reduce someone to ‘bare life’ and when a petty misdemeanour, a traffic stop, a mental health crisis, or simple lack of money can kill them, it is clear that the purpose of civilisation has become less about living and more about death.

Whereas the horror of Judge Death and the Dark Judges is immediate, his declaration that ‘***the crime is life***’ speaks to something deeper in how Judge Dredd exposes the barbarity not just of ‘law and order’ politics but of our current neoliberal state.

The slow violence of the state places people into what Mbembe calls a ‘death-world’ in which ‘vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead’. The planet that the Dark Judges cleansed of life before heading to Mega-City One was called, simply, ‘Deadworld’, a landscape of endless crumbling bones out of which rose empty, echoing edifices that mimicked distorted screaming faces, monuments to the monomaniacal power of death.

Mega-City One is surrounded by death, not just by the ‘dead’ lands and waters of the Cursed Earth and the Black Atlantic, but the mass graves that run alongside the wall that separates the city from the wasteland, dimly remembered monuments to the crises that regularly

engulf the city. One of the regular comical figures Wagner and Grant pepper their stories with is the unsympathetic spouse or parent, watching with indifference their loved one being shot or taken away. This expresses a kind of voluntary numbness in the face of the overwhelming city, what writer Colette Shade called the 'political normalization of brutality: We adjust to greater and greater amounts of brutality, or we figure out ways to excuse or ignore them, because they are all too often the only thing offered to us by the state'.[694]

In a city of queues for 'euthanasiums', where entire populations are surplus to requirements, where people die from boredom, where the body is 'useful' only when it is recycled into constituent parts, where one can be legally executed over the most trivial of misdemeanours, death is everywhere, and 'bare life' is the best one can hope for.

In this way, Mega-City One has always been a city of both the dead and the soon-to-be-dead.

At the end of 'Necropolis', the Dark Judges were defeated. Dredd, symbolically reborn, re-established the mandate of the Judges with the democracy referendum, remaking and renewing the order he now re-joined. The people had chosen the Judges, in his words, because they knew what they stood for; they were 'the devil you know' – bringing security in return for freedom.

But what did that security actually mean? To cling to a sliver of existence on the edge of death? A bare life? An empty, pitiful existence packed into towering sardine cans? Not allowed to question, dissent or have any say over a life? A life that ends with a body being recycled into its 'useful' components? Is mere survival (and not even guaranteed survival) enough to justify the abusive brutality of the Judges?

And even then, as would be proven time and time again, with every new crisis death would come for the citizens whether they voted for the Judges or not. 'The only truly compliant, submissive and obedient citizen in a police state is a dead one,' wrote John W. Whitehead, author of ***Battlefield America: The War On The American People***.

In Judge Death's rictus grin we can see the cruel, nasty joke at the heart of the city – not just that the only escape is death, but that

authoritarianism makes life itself a kind of living death. Judge Death is not just a metaphor for the corrupted logic of the Judges, but of the necropolitical world of law and order, the authoritarian choice of 'obey or die'. But obeying is, itself, a kind of death – a vulnerable passivity which the state can choose to end at any time.

Death, ultimately, is Dredd stripped of illusion and pretension. While Dredd speaks in ideographs, Death speaks in truths. They exist in a tension, as comics critic Ritesh Babu has it – one promising an immediate end of this horrific nightmare, and one prolonging it eternally, in the name of 'life'.[695] 'That's the bloody heart-breaking joke of it all,' wrote Babu. 'It's the sad, depressive joke Judge Death constantly laughs at, like a cartoon villain.'

IN MANY WAYS, Judge Death is right – under the law of the Judges, a death sentence hangs over the heads of every citizen, a Damoclean sword whose fall is never the fault of the system, but of its victim. It is something that the marginalised and the poor have long known – we are increasingly entering into a state of exception, the law of the colony, where the state is reframed not as life-giving, but death-dealing.

We are all vulnerable to its power; while riches shielded some from the ravages of the pandemic, the Anthropocene age of accelerating climate collapse caused by human neglect and capitalist avarice will leave none of us safe. In the face of such existential threat, every life will become vulnerable to being laid bare, with everyone robbed of a right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Judge Death is a vision of what the law may become in such difficult times, while Dredd is what the police increasingly are – for better and, most crucially, for worse.

The power to decide who lives and who dies, who is worthy of guarantees against murder by the state, has become central to what a state is. No longer is its purpose to advance life, to maintain progress, but to deal in death either fast or slow.

The only real right, as Morph readily admits, is the right to obey or die.

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[651] ***2000 AD*** Progs 149-151 (1980) Script: John Wagner, Art: Brian Bolland, Letters: Tom Frame

[652] 'Judge Death Lives', ***2000 AD*** Progs 224-228 (1981) Script: John Wagner, Alan Grant, Art: Brian Bolland, Letters: Tom Frame

[653] Brian Bolland on ***The 2000 AD Thrill-Cast***, 28th April 2020 https://bit.ly/3LGYY8l

[654] 'Anderson, Psi Division: Four Dark Judges', ***2000 AD*** Progs 416-427 (1985) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Brett Ewins, Cliff Robinson & Robin Smith, Letters: Tom Frame

[655] Death briefly featured in the 1987 humour strip 'What If Judges Did Ads?' in ***2000 AD*** Prog 521 (1987) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Kevin O'Neill, and the 'Anderson, Psi Division' story 'Beyond the Void' in ***2000 AD*** Progs 612-613 (1989) Script: Alan Grant, Art: Mick Austin, Letters: Tom Frame

[656] ***2000 AD*** Progs 672-673 (1990) Script: John Wagner, Art: Carlos Ezquerra, Letters: Tom Frame

[657] 'In the Bath', ***2000 AD*** Prog 626 (1989) Script: John Wagner, Art: Jim Baikie, Letters: Tom Frame / 'John Cassavetes is Dead', ***2000 AD*** Prog 627 (1989) Script: Alan Grant, Art: Colin MacNeil, Letters: Tom Frame, / 'A Letter To Judge Dredd', ***2000 AD*** Prog 661 (1990) Script: John Wagner, Art: Will Simpson, Letters: Tom Frame, / 'Young Giant', ***2000 AD*** Progs 651-655 (1989) Script: John Wagner, Art: Carlos Ezquerra, Letters: Steve Potter / 'The Shooting Match', ***2000 AD*** Prog 650 (1989) Script: John Wagner, Art: John Higgins, Letters: Steve Potter

[658] ***2000 AD*** Prog 387 (1984) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Ron Smith, Letters: Tom Frame

[659] Jean & John Comaroff, ***The Truth About Crime*** (2016). Ironically, just a few years later, Wagner and Grant introduced PJ Maybe, the cunning teenage serial killer who remains unpunished by the law for the best part of a decade.

[660] 'Error of Judgement', ***2000 AD*** Prog 388 (1984) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Ron Smith, Letters: Tom Frame /
'A Case for Treatment', ***2000 AD*** Prog 389 (1984) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Ron Smith, Letters: Tom Frame

[661] 'City of the Damned', ***2000 AD*** Progs 393-406 (1984-5) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Steve Dillon, Ron Smith, Kim Raymond & Ian Gibson, Letters: Tom Frame. The story's conclusion sees a blind and beaten Dredd crawling across molten lava, reaffirming Dredd's commitment to his 'duty'.

[662] Betsy Barkas, 'Framing the death of Mark Duggan' – irr.org.uk (17 April 2014) https://bit.ly/3nYUdfA

[663] Barkas (2014) ***ibid.***

[664] Vikram Dodd, 'Mark Duggan's death: two shots fired and two conflicting stories' – theguardian.com (8 January 2014) https://bit.ly/3c3STW1

[665] Barkas (2014) ***ibid***.

[666] Torrence Brown-Smith, 'The hatred that killed Michael Brown and George Floyd labelled me a thug' – denverpost.com (5 June 2020) https://dpo.st/3lvKE1b

[667] Sam Levin & Alvin Chang, ''They kill the person twice': police spread falsehoods after using deadly force, analysis finds' – theguardian.com (19 May 2021) https://bit.ly/35B0SXa

[668] Alex Emslie & Sara Hossaini, 'Alameda DA Reopens Investigation Into Oscar Grant Killing, Nearly 12 Years Later' – kqed.org (5 October 2020) https://bit.ly/3O1XJ3p

[669] Ariel Bogle, 'Black man police killed over his 'shooting stance' was holding a vape pen' – mashable.com (29 September 2016) https://bit.ly/3ly5a0W

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[674] Achille Mbembe, ***On The Postcolony*** (2001)

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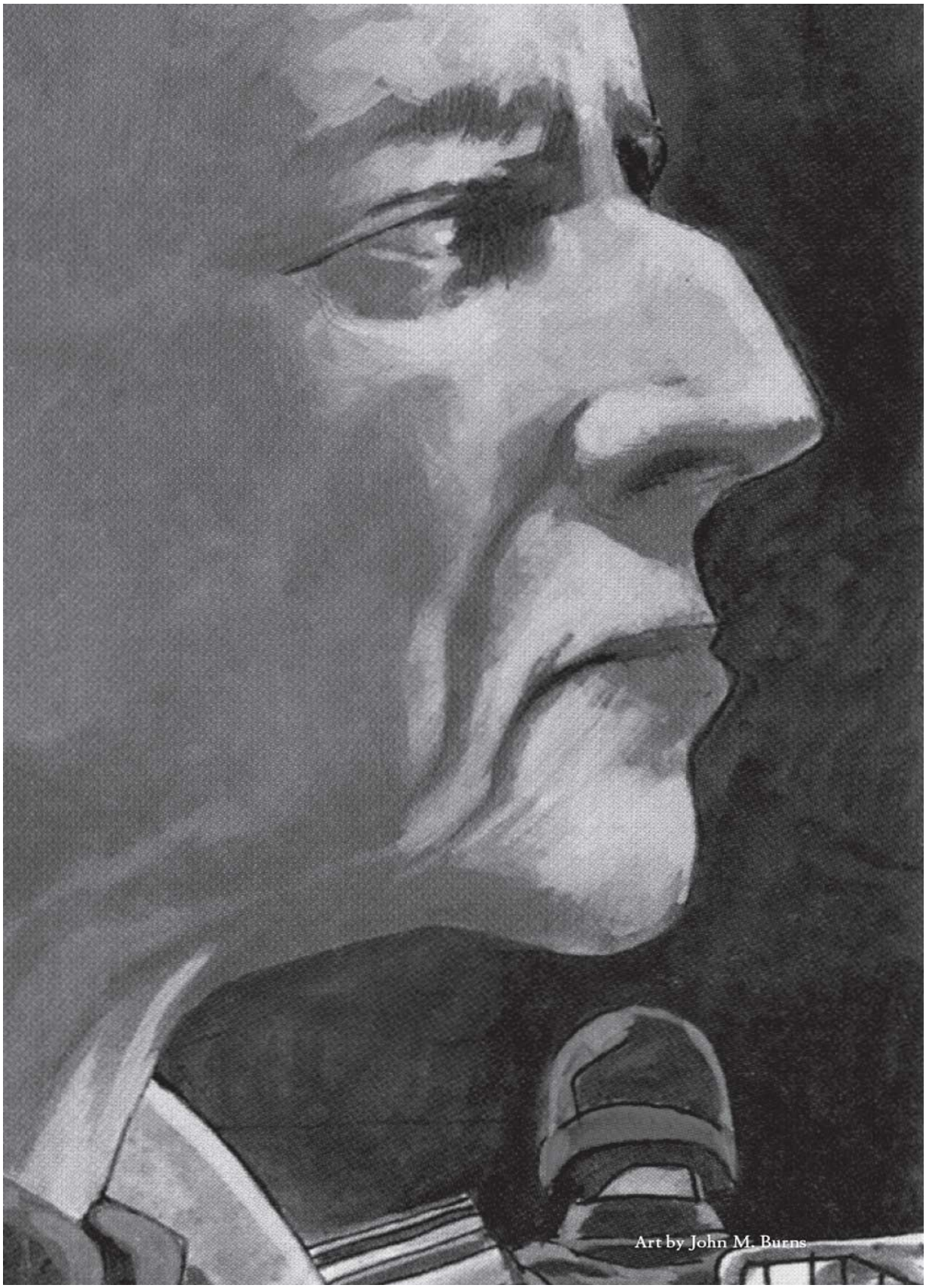

Art by John M. Burns

THE CAL FILES

Privacy and power in the surveillance state

'*If you have nothing to hide you have nothing to fear.*'
– Justice Department spokesperson, 'Mega-City Confidential' (2014)

AFTER MANY ABORTIVE attempts, in 1995 Judge Dredd finally made it to the silver screen. And it nearly killed him.

Despite a one hundred-million dollar budget, ***Rambo*** star Sylvester Stallone in the titular role, and design by ***2000 AD*** artists Kev Walker and Chris Halls, director Danny Cannon's ***Judge Dredd*** was a bloated, troubled mess that flattened out Dredd's ethical creases as it pitted him – without irony – against an attempted authoritarian coup. As he trundled off into the sunset on his wobbly Lawmaster past cheering crowds, there was not even a hint that Dredd was anything but a squeaky-clean hero.

In the preceding years ***2000 AD*** had done little to contradict this hollow machismo and monotone morality. After 'Necropolis', Wagner was writing some of his best work for the ***Judge Dredd Megazine*** but his inexperienced successors at ***2000 AD*** – Garth Ennis and, later, Scottish writers Mark Millar and Grant Morrison – increasingly relied on shallow Hollywood-style action that shared no such subtlety. After the high of 'America', 'Dredd' felt listless. After all, what place did a parody of 'law and order' have when Thatcher had been deposed and political scientist Francis Fukuyama proclaimed 'The End of History' with liberal democracy's final victory over totalitarianism?

This aimlessness had material implications. The Prog's readers were growing up, severing forever its connection to the pre-teen age bracket, while Marvel and DC were tempting key talent across the Atlantic. ***2000 AD***'s readership began its long, constant freefall. The movie seemed to offer a lifeline and then-publisher Egmont naturally

sought to cash in, sinking millions into merchandise, translations, and a raft of new titles – including a child-friendly ***Dredd*** title, ***Judge Dredd: Lawman of the Future***, based on a film children could not legally see. All were gone within a year, any bump in sales soon subsiding.

Having defeated Death, Dredd now faced a different kind of end – cancellation. However, when Wagner returned to the strip, he was to refresh it in keeping with the changing times: Dredd was about to enter the age of surveillance.

'***The business of the Public Surveillance Unit is information. Specifically, on the public. You and me,***' explained the story's opening narration, published in the autumn of 1995.[696]

Wagner, who had returned to ***2000 AD*** the year before with the ambitious but awkward crossover event 'Wilderlands', and the time travel detective story 'The Exterminator', had devised a new foil for Dredd.[697]

Bald and consigned to a wheelchair, Judge Jura Edgar was a Machiavellian politician explicitly modelled on former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, veteran artist John Burns giving her the nose and imperious gaze of a Roman senator.

That suspicious gaze was a fitting metaphor. Edgar was the head of Justice Department's Public Surveillance Unit (PSU), which runs a vast network of cameras across the city as well as a sophisticated intelligence network with complete access to citizens' financial and personal records. The PSU also maintains individual, cross-referenced, and indexed files on the lives of every citizen: '***The minutiae of your life, from birth to death. They've got your family history, your med and school reports, your work and welfare records. Every purchase, every card transaction is in your file. They can tell you where you shop, what you eat for breakfast, what size u-fronts you wear.***'

When a citizen shows up on any camera, anywhere in the city, PSU computers automatically log their ID and movements. The department's databases groan with quotidian details – '***political, sexual and social orientation. They know where you've been and***

who your friends are. They know your virtues and your vices'. Attending a demonstration will get you added to a watchlist, seemingly living beyond your means will earn you a visit from the Judges; every life is laid bare – and the accumulation of all this data comes with the chilling coda: '***And they're prepared to use it all against you.***'

Dredd and Edgar are an unlikely pairing, the practical street Judge and the consummate politician, naturally suspicious of one another but reliant on each other as Edgar asks Dredd to help retrieve the eponymous 'files' – blackmail material on senior Judges, compiled by Cal during his time as the head of the Special Judicial Squad and now stolen by a rogue Judge.

What unfolds is a meticulously structured procedural, with every clue cross-referenced with PSU's intricate records to instantly trace suspects by their favoured brand of gum, hair gel, or liquor, linking them to their criminal records and known associates.

The files are recovered, but not before Dredd investigates DNA records that appear to show he and Rico were the result not of cloning but of an illicit affair conducted by Chief Judge Fargo. This evidence turns out to be misleading – but demonstrates how easily incontrovertible 'proof' can be weaponised. As the introduction to the story made clear, any detail can be used against you.

However, the ethics (or lack thereof) of such sweeping surveillance are never questioned – PSU is merely a convenient crime-solving tool, a city-wide dragnet that provides instant crime-fighting intelligence. Even Dredd, who would become increasingly at odds with Edgar over the following years, has no problems with the PSU's seemingly limitless surveillance.

'The Cal Files' made explicit what had always been there: that surveillance is part of the very landscape of Mega-City One.

For all its utopian splendour, there were eyes everywhere in Ezquerra's original vision of the city – a camera staring from one building, another electronic eye embedded in the door of a pedestrian walkway, both marked 'Police Scan'. McMahon lifted this detail wholesale for his opening page of 'Judge Whitey', the squat box of a 'Police Control' camera gazing down onto the crumbling Empire State

Building. Such cameras had always been there, useful and used. But in 'The Cal Files' Wagner laid bare the implications of their ubiquity – with the Judges able to see everything citizens do, enter their homes on a whim, and interrogate them at will, the all-seeing eye is figuratively and literally part of their world.

'Spy in the sky' drones, first used by Judge Dredd to watch a suspected Sov spy in 'Battle of the Black Atlantic' in 1979, prefigured the police and military's use of drone technology by decades.[698] These tiny hovering cameras, which '***could follow a suspect anywhere, without being detected***' are a common sight in the skies over Mega-City and over modern-day Britain. Since 2015 their use has massively increased – especially in the monitoring of political protest – and half the country's forces now use them, many on a daily basis. Surrey Police played a recorded message from a drone, ordering groups to disperse during a Covid-19 lockdown – an image uncomfortably similar to the drones flying over the Chinese city of Shanghai that ordered residents on balconies to comply with lockdown rules.[699]

'The Cal Files' carries disturbing relevance to our times, an era of what socialist Gary T. Marx called the 'surveillance society', where personal information – where we go, who our friends are, what we read, eat and watch, and when we do it – is being collected and used against us.

In 1786, philosopher Jeremy Bentham visited his brother Samuel in modern day Belarus, where Samuel told Jeremy of his vision of an ideal factory – a circular building in the middle of a larger compound that would allow only a few managers to oversee a large workforce. Obsessed with the idea, Bentham took his brother's concept for a factory and applied it to the prison.

Derived from the Greek word for 'all-seeing', Bentham's 'Panopticon' is one of the most powerful images in the history of ideas. This 'model prison' would have rows of transparent cells facing a single observation tower containing a solitary watchman. The watchman can see into every cell, but the prisoners cannot see the watchman; unable to tell whether or not they are being watched, the

prisoners must always assume that they are and, to avoid punishment, they police their own behaviour. This, Bentham reasoned, was a rational and humane solution to punishment: 'Morals reformed – health preserved – industry invigorated – instruction diffused – public burthens lightened – Economy seated, as it were, upon a rock,' wrote Bentham in the preface to his 1791 book ***Panopticon or Inspection House***. 'The Gordian knot of the Poor Laws not cut, but untied – all by a simple idea in architecture!'

But to Michel Foucault almost two centuries later, the Panopticon represented a 'cruel, ingenious cage'. In his 1975 ***Discipline and Punish***, he argued it represented an 'automatic functioning of power' that had exited the prison and entered society through institutions like schools, factories, and offices. This 'disciplinary society' does not require demonstrations of power to cow its subjects into behaving, but rather it is the mere presence of observation that scares them into submission.

It is a metaphor embodied by Ezquerra's design for Dredd's helmet – in which we cannot see his eyes, cannot see where he is looking, but we know that he is and that his gaze may well alight on us. The eyes, famously, are a 'window into the soul,' which makes Dredd and his fellow Judges into metaphorically soulless individuals. A citizen approaching, or more likely being approached by, a Judge is at an automatic disadvantage; they are seen bare but cannot see back. All of which adds to the military atmosphere of the Judges – from the moment a reader sees them, they understand these are not 'civil servants' but soldiers at war.

The allegory carries over into the home of the PSU, the Statue of Justice, the monumental building in the shape of a stern Judge towering over the moribund Statue of Liberty. From its summit, Edgar figuratively and literally gazes out across the whole city '***and into every life***'.

Of course, neither Wagner nor Ezquerra invented the idea of the surveillance state. From Yevgeny Zamyatin's ***We*** to Orwell's ***Nineteen Eighty-Four***, such total surveillance was already the stuff of nightmares – however, they instinctively knew that it is a hallmark of tyranny. Indeed, even as Ezquerra drew cameras into the walls of

Mega-City One, there were millions living in 'the world's most perfected surveillance state of all time'.[700]

The Stasi were the all-seeing eye of the German Democratic Republic state, erasing privacy, spreading terror, enforcing conformity, with one agent for every sixty-three citizens and bolstered by a massive network of more than one hundred and seventy-three thousand official informers plus thousands more part-timers. They were the reality of totalitarian surveillance, a paranoid state whose only purpose is to constantly watch its own citizens and force its citizens to watch each other.

By the time of 'The Cal Files', not even the opening narration's solitary warnings about the sinister ubiquity of the Judges' total surveillance could shake the fact that this was being normalised. In referring back to the reign of Judge Cal, the story explicitly draws this comparison – Cal told a terrified population '***you are being watched***', yet how is this different to the Judges' total surveillance state? Like the wall that ringed the city, the Judges did not tear down Cal's regime, they appropriated it.

For the Judges, the line between utility and tyranny is very thin indeed. Like the bulldozers of 'Rumble in the Jungle', Dredd might be initially suspicious of this new development, yet he ends up not just using it but also endorsing it; everything becomes another tool in his arsenal. 'The Cal Files' is not a story about fighting a totalitarian surveillance state but a warning of how technology – rebranded as a 'useful' tool for law enforcement – would sleepwalk us into the state of total surveillance.

SURVEILLANCE HAS ALWAYS been a fundamental part of policing. The 'Bobby on the beat' with their suspicious eye, the 'rogues' gallery' of mugshots, fingerprints, DNA evidence – policing is all about the need to see, to identify, monitor, and punish deviance. Seeing what others do not is the supernatural power of the crimefighter – whether Sherlock Holmes or Dirty Harry – the missed clue, the suspicious idling car, the gap in the dragnet.

This changed in the 1960s as 'crime solving' gave way to 'crime prevention' and the police moved from a model of deterrence to

attempting to pre-emptively stop crime.[701] Dubbed 'speculative policing' by its critics, the 'intelligence-led' policing that developed from the 1990s was no longer about boots on the ground, but rather eyes. It placed information – and the surveillance that supplied it – at the heart of policing. 'The Cal Files' came at exactly the moment this shift was occurring. Britain was betting big on the all-seeing eye.

Installed in 1974 to monitor London's major roads and then its subway stations, early closed-circuit television cameras focused mainly on transport. As early as Prog 6 in 1977, Dredd uses the city's 'control cameras' to track an ambulance stolen by a gang of body snatchers – this was cutting edge technology: Automatic Licence Plate Recognition, which allows cameras to recognise and log licence plate details automatically, had been invented just three years before by Britain's Police Scientific Development Branch.[702]

In the second published ***Dredd*** story, 'The New You', the story is solved using a new kind of surveillance technology. Thanks to face-changing technology, escaped criminal 'Scarface' Joe Levine emerges from an 'Instant Genetic Surgery' saloon a new man and, so sure he is of his disguise, that when he sees Judge Dredd he hails him with a hearty '***Hi, Judge!***'

'***For you it is – judgement day!***' announces Dredd and captures Levine, who begs to know how he was recognised. Dredd explains that Justice Department has a voice print of every citizen – and the moment he spoke Dredd's bike computer told him he had a criminal on his hands. This was an entirely passive process, Dredd didn't do anything – the computer did it by itself, including sending information directly to Justice Department computers.

In Mega-City One there is no privacy, even if you change your identity. Even your voice becomes just another thing to be used against you. The US's 'Miranda warning' famously includes the line 'anything you say can and will be used against you in the court of law' – always 'against,' never 'for'. For Levine, all it took was two words.

But the police were not slow in seeing that a system introduced for one purpose could be used for another. With the rise in hooliganism, CCTV was used at football matches and deployed during the national miners' strike. In 1984, eight cameras were permanently installed to

watch the major rallying points for public protest in central London.[703] Yet by 1991, cameras still watched over just ten high streets in the whole country.

Two events in 1993 changed everything.

'I HAVE NO doubt we will hear some protest about a threat to civil liberties. Well, I have no sympathy whatsoever for so-called liberties of that kind,' Prime Minister John Major declared in 1994 as he paved the way for the CCTV boom.[704]

A year before, the grainy footage of two-year-old James Bulger being led away from a Merseyside shopping centre to his death rendered, in blotchy pixels, every parent's worst fear. Many felt failed by a technology that had not prevented his death, yet its key role in the capture of his ten-year-old killers, Robert Thompson and Jon Venables, leant an almost irresistible impetus to its ubiquity. The same year, an IRA bomb exploded in London, killing one person and injuring forty-four. In response to this brazen attack on the capital's financial heart, the government built a 'ring of steel' to protect it, based on a huge network of CCTV cameras tracking people and vehicles.

At the same time, the Tories were in near despair over a seemingly unstoppable rise in crime. More than a decade of protecting the police from budget cuts and handing them greater operational independence had failed to produce the disciplined society Thatcher had dreamt of. Instead, crime rates spiked, and coffers were empty.

CCTV seemed like the answer to all their prayers. Cheaper than employing more police, this was technology that promised to catch killers, stop terrorists, protect children, and deter crime. Privacy concerns were cast aside; these cameras would be benign to the innocent but terrifying to criminals. Dystopian surveillance was rebranded a protective tool, harmlessly watching over society. If you had nothing to hide, you had nothing to fear.

Home Secretary Michael Howard threw money at cash-strapped local councils: within a year of James Bulger's death, the whole of Liverpool city centre was under its gaze. By 1995, the Home Office was spending seventy-eight per cent of its 'crime prevention' budget

on CCTV schemes. In 1990 there had been only a hundred cameras dispersed throughout three separate town centres; by 1997 there were more than five thousand cameras in one hundred and sixty-seven different schemes across the country.[705] By 2000, Britain spent more on CCTV surveillance than any other European country.[706]

This accelerated under the 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime' mantra of New Labour, who devoted hundreds of millions of pounds to seemingly endless arrays of unblinking glass eyes overlooking roads, shopping centres, schools, alleyways. It is estimated that today the number is more than five million – one for every thirteen people – with ninety-six per cent operated by private businesses and homeowners.[707]

This is the modern, dispassionate, unbeatable solution to crime; a modern Argus Panoptes – the many-eyed giant of mythology – embedded in the very landscape. The problem is that it doesn't work.

It was known since the mid-'90s that such cameras do not really deter or solve crime. While they can help stop property crime, or rather 'planned' crime, they are useless for deterring 'unplanned' violent street crime and disorder. Unless constantly monitored by a human being, combing hours of footage can be counterproductive. An internal Metropolitan Police report admitted that only one in a thousand cameras had been involved in solving a crime,[708] research from America suggested they had 'no statistically significant effect on crime rates',[709] and a senior policeman later branded CCTV 'an utter fiasco'.[710] Big Brother had arrived, but it seemed he was mostly not paying attention.

In this context, 'The Cal Files' might seem like another alarmist sci-fi prediction of a surveillance state that did not come to pass. Yet within little more than a decade, it would be proven shockingly prescient.

TWO MONTHS AFTER 'The Cal Files', Wagner embarked on the ambitious 'The Pit' storyline.[711] In one of the longest-running stories in the strip's history, Dredd is sent to 'clean up' the crime-ridden Sector 301 – the 'pit' of the title – which had become a dumping ground for incompetent and corrupt Judges. 'The Pit' was a new style of 'Dredd'

story, less action movie and more ***Hill Street Blues*** (one of Wagner's favourite TV shows) with Dredd decentred in his own strip in favour of a wide ensemble cast.[712]

One supporting character was SJS Judge Roffman, an insecure, voyeuristic, cowardly and pompous paranoiac caught attempting to bug his own superior's office; while useless as a street Judge, Roffman's talents were spotted by Edgar. After she was removed as the head of the PSU over her retention of the Cal Files, Roffman found new purpose as Dredd's bloodhound.[713]

The disembodied voice of 'control' – the Judges' centralised control room – had long supplied plot-moving details and criminal record checks via radio, but now Roffman was a real-time investigative tool; scouring granular records of citizens' lives and patching into cameras in the street, on a fast-food stand, in a taxi – nowhere is safe from his gaze. As we watch Dredd – with Roffman's help – piece the jigsaw of clues together, the crime fiction influences in Wagner's writing come to the fore as the strip shifts decisively towards being a 'police procedural'.[714]

Tenacious and suspicious, Roffman embodies how central surveillance technology has now become to law enforcement and how capitalist surveillance has both been co-opted into and seeks to feed that demand. CCTV had been a blunt tool, but now the state is not just watching, but ***seeing***. And once these systems exist, they will be used… and expanded.

SIX YEARS AFTER 'The Cal Files' and even before the dust had settled from the 9/11 terror attacks, governments gave themselves – with little opposition – unprecedented powers to spy on their own people. 'While most Americans think it was created to catch terrorists,' warned the ACLU, 'the Patriot Act actually turns regular citizens into suspects.'[715]

Since then, intelligence agencies have used the 'war on terror' to construct an intrusive, global web of surveillance, almost entirely without scrutiny – and all justified to fearful populations as the only way to keep them 'safe' from terrorism.

America's Patriot Act embedded surveillance in cities, institutions, and minds like never before. The Act did away with decades-old legal protections and gave security agencies free rein to monitor and collect phone calls, texts, and emails, which would previously have required a court order. President Obama later claimed, without offering evidence, that such surveillance had foiled dozens of terrorist plots.

The leaking in 2013 of highly classified information about numerous secretive global surveillance programmes by National Security Agency whistleblower Edward Snowden created much uproar, public awareness, and a move by internet companies to make encryption commonplace. Yet the 2015 passage of the USA Freedom Act effectively doubled down on such powers and the UN's top human rights official concluded that mass surveillance was 'emerging as a dangerous habit rather than an exceptional measure'.[716] [717]

In Britain – which, in 2000, had only just replaced its patchwork of 'emergency' anti-terror legislation from its decades-long attempts to combat Irish Republican terrorism – the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act was described as 'the most draconian legislation Parliament has passed in peacetime in over a century'.[718]

While MPs rejected 'crude characterisations of our society as a surveillance society', the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 – dubbed the 'Snooper's Charter' – requires internet service providers and mobile phone companies to keep records of everyone's browsing histories for twelve months, including social media, e-mails, voice calls, and mobile phone messaging services.[719] [720] It gave a range of government departments – from the police to the military, from health authorities to the intelligence services – unprecedented access to that data, as well as powers to hack into computers and phones to collect communication data in bulk. So extreme are these powers that, in 2015, the Chinese government actually cited British surveillance legislation when defending its own intrusive anti-terrorism laws.[721]

SUCH POWERS ALSO work by co-opting citizens into the process of surveillance. In Mega-City One, the towering and tightly packed city

blocks afford ample opportunities to watch the everyday dramas of one's neighbours. When one peeping tom witnesses a murder in the next block, the Judges threaten to cube him for withholding information – unless he '***joins the secret army of criminals sanctioned by the Justice Dept to ply their trade***'.[722] This is a perversion of the theory provided in Jane Jacobs' ***The Death and Life and Great American Cities***, a book that both precedes and yet seems entirely in dialogue with 'Judge Dredd', in which people in good neighbourhoods can provide a true self-policing system. Not through suspicion but through cooperation, familiarity and friendliness. In Mega-City One people cannot afford to be friendly; it's not just that the Judges constantly watch, it's the knowledge that their fellow citizens might be informants in the service of Justice Department.

When Dredd arrests the titular 'Peeper', the Judges force him to reveal what he has seen and then threaten to charge him with hundreds of incidents of '***withholding information***'. For the Judges, his crime is not breaching the privacy of dozens of citizens for nineteen years, but the hoarding of information they could potentially use.

It is taken for granted that neither the Peeper nor the people he watched have any right to privacy – not even in their own homes. The doctrine of 'Fruit of the Poisonous Tree,' which holds that evidence obtained illegally is itself illegal, does not hold in Mega-City One.[723] Everything done in the service of the Judges is, ***de facto***, legal. The crime of peeping is an act of service once the Judges declare it so.

This was the strips' barbed contempt for the concept of the 'Neighbourhood Watch'. First created in a small village in Cheshire in 1982, within five years there were forty-two thousand schemes covering two and a half million homes. Easily mocked as 'a mostly middle-class self-defence league', such schemes did little to combat crime, but operated as a 'more humdrum, banal, ambiguous; an "ordinary", possibly clumsy – but nonetheless pervasive – form of Thatcherism' that co-opted 'curtain twitching' communities into crime-fighting.[724]

In 1990, just as new anti-terror legislation was introduced in the UK, cheery adverts in ***Judge Dredd Megazine*** introduced 'Judge Pal', the perpetually grinning mascot of Justice Department's 'Pals Club', which uses cheery adverts and cash prizes to encourage children to inform on their families and friends.

Gone were British notions of 'minding one's business', this was now a society that watched itself. As the journalist Duncan Campbell warned, it meant 'any citizen, certainly any socially uncharacteristic citizen, is a target for suspicion and observation. This quite explicit development in police planning has virtually put the whole of society under surveillance'.[725]

OF COURSE, SUCH surveillance is applied unevenly and falls heaviest on those already considered 'suspicious'.

In the aftermath of the terror attacks on New York in 2001 and London in 2005, such suspicion was institutionalised by the British government's 'Prevent' strategy. Intended to prevent future attacks by tackling extremist 'radicalisation', the programme has been dogged by allegations that it treats all Muslims as 'terrorists-in-waiting'. Teachers, doctors, social workers, and government employees have all been co-opted into becoming the 'eyes and ears' of security surveillance, with a legal duty to report 'suspicions' to the authorities. 'The logic of counter-terrorism was spread to every sphere of public life in Britain,' wrote New York University's Arun Kundnani, 'not to identify persons where there was a reasonable suspicion of criminal activity but according to a much vaguer category of ideological suspicion.'[726]

It is the kind of suspicion that allegedly led to a fourteen-year-old boy, who mentioned 'eco-terrorisme' in a French class on protecting the environment, if he was 'affiliated with IS', and that told two predominantly-Muslim communities of Birmingham that a 'ring of steel' of more than two hundred CCTV and Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras put up around them was to combat 'anti-social behaviour', only for those communities to later discover it was paid for through a counterterrorism initiative.[727]

‘The government response has been to play down such incidents as misapplications and anomalies that can be fixed,’ said Dr Layla Aitlhadj, the director of campaign group Prevent Watch. ‘However, such cases show quite the opposite: that Prevent injects suspicion and discrimination deep into the imagination of frontline workers to the detriment of Muslims.’[728]

Alongside this, posters – such as America’s ‘see something, say something’ advertising campaigns – encourage members of the public to report their suspicions to authorities, not just with the aim to secure useful information but also to help turn the public – through the repetition of messages of insecurity – into active supporters of the ‘war on terror’.[729]

AT THE SAME time as the growth of the state’s surveillance powers, the proliferation of high-speed infrastructure and services saw the internet give rise to what philosopher Shoshana Zuboff labelled ‘surveillance capitalism’.

Driven by convenience, from our mobile phones to our internet search histories, the technology we rely upon now constantly watches us, converting our lives into reams of data that act like breadcrumb trails – our every step and click is recorded, tracked, analysed, quantified and monetised, not just by technology giants such as Google and Facebook but also by a growing legion of private data companies, unfettered by even the scant restraint imposed on governmental agencies.

The potential to track people’s movements, to analyse every quotidian aspect of their lives is almost too tempting for law enforcement looking for what Zuboff called a ‘shortcut to certainty’. And such companies are only too eager to sell.

As protestors gathered in the streets of Ferguson, and at protests across America, to demonstrate against police brutality following the fatal shooting of Michael Brown in 2014, few of them would have been aware of a company that was tracking them and providing that data to the very institution they were protesting.

Using user data provided by Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, Chicago-based tech startup Geofeedia marketed its social media

monitoring product to law enforcement as a tool to monitor activists and protesters, according to documents obtained by the American Civil Liberties Union.[730] The company supplied detailed location tracking of activists and protesters, as well as the ability to surveil specific communities, to more than five hundred law enforcement agencies.[731] Meanwhile, police in San Jose used Geofeedia to monitor South Asian, Muslim, and Sikh protesters within days of acquiring it.[732]

In response to an outcry, the social media sites blocked Geofeedia's access to their data. One Maryland police chief bemoaned the loss of the service, claiming it could have helped them stop a man who killed five people at a local newspaper; 'it made our jobs a lot easier,' he said.[733]

In the UK, the British Transport Police, who police the UK's railways, and Transport for London (TFL), which runs the capital's transport infrastructure, spent forty thousand pounds on social media surveillance software 'RepKnight', which claims to help identify, investigate or prevent political unrest, criminal activity, and activists.[734]

And Geofeedia is not the only company selling police access to data – there is an ever-growing economy of third-party 'data brokers' from which government agencies can buy up data on millions of people. US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) uses databases of 'hundreds of millions of phone, water, electricity and other utility records while pursuing immigration violations'.[735]

IT IS NOT just mobile devices that can be used to track you – so can your face. Facial recognition software is being increasingly used to cast a Justice Department-like dragnet over entire populations, with cameras taking 'faceprints' of millions of people, often without them knowing about it.

Clearview AI's software culls billions of online images from millions of sites to create a global facial recognition 'rogues' gallery' that law enforcement can scan at will. The company, which claims it is 'essential to law enforcement' and helped track down individuals involved in the storming of the US Capitol in 2021, was fined seven

and a half million pounds over data privacy breaches in 2022 and ordered to delete the data of UK residents from its systems.[736] Canada, Greece, Australia, Italy and France have ordered it to do the same,[737] while Meta, Google, Venmo, Twitter and other platforms demanded that it stop scraping images from their sites.[738]

Police do not even need such third-party services – forces around the world are rolling out their own live facial recognition systems (LFR), which scan crowds and compare biometric data against databases. Such systems are fraught with danger. Even the most accurate LFR systems lead to innocent people being detained and forced to prove their innocence to police who unduly trust the technology, while research has consistently shown that they are most likely used on already over-policed communities, where they routinely inaccurately identify people of colour as suspects.

In reaction, New York became the first US state to ban the use of facial recognition in schools[739] and the technology was banned in San Francisco in 2019.[740] Following the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, IBM, Amazon, and Microsoft said they would either stop or pause police use of their own facial recognition technology until laws regulating their use were brought in. In July 2019, the House of Commons' Science and Technology Committee recommended that live facial recognition should not be used until concerns over its bias and efficacy are resolved.

A year later the Co-op supermarket chain became the first to use facial recognition to scan and track shoppers, while it was announced in 2022 that five chains would trial 'facial age estimation' technology under a Home Office scheme aimed at shops, bars and restaurants.[741] [742] And, in 2020, the Metropolitan Police quietly signed a three million pound, four-year deal with Japanese tech firm NEC Corporation to use facial recognition to compare historic images from CCTV feeds, social media and other sources against its own databases to try to find a match.[743] By the summer of 2022 it was also using LFR in live trials in the capital.[744]

Suddenly, the image of Edgar and Roffman scouring databases, using facial recognition software, and tracking citizens with cameras and digital breadcrumbs seems not so fanciful.

Meanwhile, the so-called 'Internet of Things' embeds surveillance into every surface of our home, physical objects constantly transmitting data about themselves, their surroundings, and us – from mobile phones tracking our movements to 'smart home' devices recording what we say to breathing machines for people with sleep apnoea secretly sending usage data to health insurers.[745] [746]

In the summer of 2022, Amazon announced that it was acquiring iRobot, the maker of the popular 'Roomba' robot-vacuum, millions of which collect data about the homes they clean. Along with its 'Alexa' voice-controlled virtual assistant, of which more than a hundred million have been sold, it will mean Amazon will have unparalleled access to the minutiae of people's lives and a near-monopoly on using that data to dominate markets and manipulate consumers.[747]

The company's 'Ring' doorbell camera system has been branded 'the largest civilian surveillance network the US has ever seen'. Heavily marketed at neighbourhood watch groups, one in ten police departments are able to access its videos without a warrant and sometimes even order people to aim their Ring cameras at their neighbours.[748] In 2022, Amazon admitted that it had provided Ring doorbell footage to police without owners' knowledge or consent,[749] and a function to automatically activate cameras near where a 911 call is made could be introduced in the 'not-so-distant future'.[750]

Meanwhile, the 'Neighbours' app, which allows people to upload footage from Ring products or other security cameras, has since developed a culture 'completely obsessed with crime and the self-policing of neighbourhoods, and users often resort to racial profiling'.[751]

In summer 2021, authorities in Jackson, Mississippi unveiled a pilot program that would give police livestream access to private security cameras throughout the city, including doorbell cameras placed in private homes, described by city mayor Chokwe Lumumba as 'an opportunity to better observe and fill in the gaps'.[752] It wasn't the first; a city in Florida had earlier approved a similar plan and a proposed law in San Francisco would allow police to co-opt private cameras in real time.[753]

YET WHILE POWER wishes to see us, it does not wish to be seen.

A new law in Arizona bans anyone within eight feet of law enforcement officers from recording police activity, with violators facing up to thirty days in jail.[754] When protestors in Hong Kong fighting a crackdown created an app to track police movements, just as they were being tracked by the government, Apple withdrew it after criticism from a Chinese state newspaper.[755] Meanwhile, partnerships forged between law enforcement and companies often remained clouded in secrecy; so new is such technology that it is often used without adequate safeguards or legal scrutiny.

'Security wants to exist without reply and thus seeks to nullify all dissent and suppress any rebellion even before such dissent and rebellion have begun,' wrote philosopher Mark Neocleous.[756] 'The point of the war on terror is to make security unanswerable and, in this sense at least, the war on terror is the ultimate police war.'

'MEGA-CITY CONFIDENTIAL' is not a subtle story. Published in 2014, it is a straight-forward retelling of Snowden's leaks the year before[757], with Erika Easterhouse, an evaluator of surveillance material gathered by the Judges as part of a secret program named Section 7. '***They can watch you every moment of the day,***' explains journalist Max Blixen, in whom Easterhouse confides. '***They can watch you in the lounge – they can watch you in the kitchen – in the hall. They can watch you in the washroom. They can watch you disrobing. They can watch you in your beds. They can listen to your dreams – and they do.***'

The revelation provokes widespread riots through the city, killing more than a hundred people, including two Judges. Blixen flees the country entirely, although he too ends up dead in mysterious circumstances.

'***Any actions we take are strictly for the protection of our citizens,***' a Justice Department spokesperson tells the press. '***It is our duty to root out crime wherever and however we can uncover it. If you have nothing to hide you have nothing to fear.***' (Another pundit defending Justice Department resembles then-Home Secretary Theresa May.)

In the wake of the riots, Section 7 – referred to by Dredd, fittingly, as the 'Total Surveillance Project' – is mothballed, with Chief Judge Hershey admitting that it was '***perhaps a step too far,***' adding, '***We have adequate surveillance. Besides, with the increase in arrests we're in danger of running out of space in the iso-blocks.***'

The narration makes it clear that Dredd himself is unhappy with the very existence of the project, but only so far… '***Certainly, he runs his share of 59s – but random house searches serve a useful purpose. This… this intrusion is clearly too much. There is a limit to what the citizens will take – the riots are proof of that. It can ultimately only make their job harder.***'

It is not that Dredd predicted the use of technology by a dystopian police force – this had already been the stuff of dystopian sci-fi for decades – but that it predicted its normalisation.

'I don't think the public is too concerned with us using technology to prevent crime,' former LAPD and NYPD chief Bill Bratton said in 2015. 'People don't get upset when doctors use technology to prevent illness.' Bratton helped introduce the 'CompStat' system of crime data collation to the NYPD in the 1990s and under his leadership, the LAPD massively expanded its 'data-driven' surveillance practices, including collection and mining of mass data, and the creation of 'fusion centres'. Dubbed 'spy garrisons' by campaigners, these centres are staffed by legions of Roffmans, who process, analyse, and share surveillance data in real-time, placing entire communities – almost always poor communities of colour – under constant watch.[758]

Fuelled by the rise of cameras and drones, such 'Real Time Crime Centres' (RTCC) have spread quickly across America – one organisation counted more than eighty, including in cities with populations below ten thousand people.[759] 'I think we should use all the tools,' said Mike Caldwell, mayor of the small Utah city of Ogden, which has its own RTCC.[760] 'The average everyday person wouldn't even know that these tools are out there or that anything is being monitored.'

In a 'law and order' society, crime-fighting is not a political act but a practical one, to be pursued at all costs. Driven by the same

assumptions that sparked the initial boom in CCTV, it is the logic of the Panopticon – there must always be the chance that we are being watched.

A few weeks later in 'Block Judge', which saw him temporarily reassigned off the streets and into a single block, Dredd approves installation of new security cameras throughout a problem city block as he struggles '***to bring order to the chaos***' – but knows that for the Panopticon to be accepted, citizens must know that they are being watched.[761] Such '***practically undetectable***' pinhead cameras, he reasons, '***may be unhelpful***' as '***residents should be aware they are under surveillance. In time the problem will ease. Until then the message must be driven home***'.

A single panel shows not the camera being installed but a warning label saying '***you are being watched***' – the same slogan Cal had plastered across his new wall.

As discussed in chapter six, the criminal legal system of the twenty-first century has only succeeded in making suspicion more ubiquitous and all too normalised.

Most people go through their daily lives believing that surveillance is not directed at them, but rather at 'criminals', and that they have nothing to fear. Yet as 'The Cal Files' makes clear, even when the monitoring of individual behaviour becomes routine, that does not diminish the potential for harm. It is a symptom of a 'law and order' worldview in which data-capturing technology is the solution to the existential threat of crime.

It does not matter that crime rates continue to fall, all that is required is the ***fear*** of crime – a fear that breeds suspicion. 'If you don't trust your neighbours,' said Evan Greer, deputy director of digital activist group Fight for the Future, 'it becomes okay to surveil in perpetuity'.[762]

As an abstract concept, privacy is almost always only noticeable when it is gone. The lens of 'law and order' unbalances the right to privacy, characterising it as a particular individual's concern that cannot be weighed against 'security', which benefits society. This is the chilling warning at the start of 'The Cal Files', of what Zuboff calls the 'instrumentarian power' – states of surveillance are only too

willing to use the quotidian details of our lives – however innocent – against us.

How easily innocent activity can be recast as criminal activity or presented as evidence of character or intent. There is always some aspect to be plucked from the granular detail of our lives that can be used against us. Consider how the victims of rape are still being asked to hand over their mobile phones to police, leading the UK's Information Commissioner to call for an immediate end to 'digital strip search' that 'treats them as suspects'.[763] One in five victims withdraws their complaints at least in part because of disclosure and privacy concerns.[764]

THERE IS A small moment during the fall of Judge Edgar when Judge Hershey, newly elected as Chief Judge, reshuffles the advisors of the 'Council of Five'. In the aftermath of the attempt by crime lord Nero Narcos to take over the city, Hershey asks for Judge Shenker, the head of Psi-Division, to step down.[765]

Following 'The Pit' and 'The Cal Legacy' the strip's more fanciful, fantasy-based elements were slowly phased out by Wagner, in favour of a more rigid science fiction approach. Criminals would no longer be caught by unreliable supernatural psychics, but by the omnipotent and omnipresent eyes of the PSU. Published in 2000, just before the 'war on terror' and surveillance capitalism converged, it is a handy metaphor for the moment that the suspicious gaze of the 'Bobby on the beat' began to be replaced by the suspicious gaze of the unblinking camera.

Despite this surveillance state, it does not keep the citizens safe. In the sprawling epic 2011 storyline, 'Day of Chaos', survivors of Dredd's destruction of East-Meg One in 'The Apocalypse War' release the 'Chaos Bug', a deadly flu-like disease that kills tens of millions. The chaos overwhelms the Judges, whose grip on power is only saved by the overwhelming ruin of the city.[766]

Amongst the institutions targeted is PSU; the Statue of Judgement is brought crashing down, effectively blinding the Judges.[767] Dredd laments the loss – '***they have come to rely on PSU too heavily, year by year the unit has taken on a greater share of the city's***

surveillance work' – but, in the aftermath, complains the unit failed to do its job properly in not preventing the terror attack.

Yet that was never really the point of the PSU – they weren't looking outward; like Cal's guns their cameras were only ever pointed inward. Today, the 'war on terror' justifies its intrusive powers by saying it will keep us safe, yet it has been shown that mass surveillance does not stop terror attacks.[768] Indeed, there is evidence that over-collection of data is counterproductive, as clues are lost in the 'noise' of irrelevant data.[769]

Yet every new crime, every new outrage leads to calls for more powers, more surveillance, more stripping away of the veil of privacy, which is framed as counterproductive to the ends of security.

'You have zero privacy anyway. Get over it,' former Sun Microsystems chief Scott McNealy said in 1999.[770] Since then, however, what little privacy that existed has vanished. A year later in the three-part 'SABs', drawn by Cam Kennedy in 2000, the 'Surveillance Action Brigade' takes to the skies.[771] They are citizens who object to the constant watching of the Judges, staging late night raids on hoverboards to blow up cameras (taking care to hurt only equipment, and not people).

Like the previous skysurfing protagonist, Chopper, they are presented as somewhat doomed romantics; free spirits destined to rot in a system that would never allow them their freedom. Unlike Chopper, who gains victory by being a self-centred individual who rejects the rules (yet does not actively seek to overthrow them), the SABs are activists, doing it because they believe it helps their fellow citizens.

'***Now you are like fish in a bowl. You can't breathe without it being noted down. Cross-referenced. Analysed for possible persecution. And it's not right. You know it's just not right.***' This narration is aimed not at any particular character but at the reader: ***you*** know it is not right. You don't need to research – people are not animals in a zoo. At least, they shouldn't be. So threatening are the SABs to the Judges that they shoot to kill.

'SABs' is as angry as a Wagner script gets. The final page, with Judges Dredd and Bork discussing citizens' resistance to the

constant surveillance, makes its point clearly: '***Gangs destroying cams inside the blocks. SABs doing it out in the streets – you gotta wonder why we bother sometimes.***' Despite the sentence itself calling for a question mark it does not end in one. Dredd knows exactly why they bother.

'***Yeah,***' replies Dredd, '***when are the creeps going to wise up and realise we do it for their own good.***'

As is made clear by Ezquerra's original image of Mega-City One, the future is one where we are all being watched, often without realising it, and where data tracking, mass surveillance, and facial recognition mean that 'no one can opt out'.[772] The paranoid state wishes to see us as clearly as it can and at all times, and so co-opts everyone and everything into its mission.

In his ***Critical Theory of Police Power***, Neocleous explains how the embedding of 'security' in every aspect of life creates the figure of ***Homo securitas***, 'a suspicious person in both senses of the term: you should be suspicious about everyone and be ready to say something, but should also bear in mind that other people are also watching you and ready to report you as suspicious'.[773] We are, he says, 'constantly reminded that in this social order we are meant to treat each other as the source of insecurity rather than solidarity or friendship'.

Mega-City One, therefore, is ***civitas securitatis***, a 'security state' that is endlessly suspicious of its citizens. Its eyes are embedded in spaces, walls, and even minds, and so ubiquitous and far-reaching that they become normal, accepted, obvious. Even when the citizens riot with the revelation of Sector Seven's existence, it is only because the system has been caught in a moment of excess. This normal, background experience of being watched has an unsettling echo for our own time – despite revelations about the abuses of the surveillance state, the growth in development and use of such technology has not slowed.

When police can search privately held mass databases of photos and data, share information about victims of crime with immigration enforcement, and not only monitor protests in real time but maintain

secret databases of protestors who have never committed crimes, we can see how the need for ever greater 'security' breeds 'a suspicion which is universal, neurotic and based on a pronounced feeling of insecurity'.[774]

Unrestrained surveillance technology places us all in a perpetual police line-up – forever under suspicion, required to prove our innocence in an inversion of the rule of law and the social contract. The vast majority, undisturbed by the watching eye until it is too late, acquiesce.

'What we do know,' wrote Neocleous, 'not least because our police masters tell us time and again, is that the enemy will in the end turn out to be us.'

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[713] 'The Cal Legacy', ***2000 AD*** Progs 1178-1179 (2000) Script: John Wagner, Art: Colin Wilson, Colour: Janet Gale, Letters: Tom Frame

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Art by Duncan Fegredo

14

THE RUNNER

Race, racing, and the policing of the 'Other'

'***Way he sees it, people don't run without a reason – generally criminal.***'
– Judge Dredd, 'The Runner' (2001)

WEARING A SPANDEX one-piece and aerodynamic helmet, he prepares to run.

Sprinting through the crowded and chaotic streets on a mission to beat his personal best time, he dodges gangs, shoot-outs and robot guard dogs, the story's clipped third person narration mimicking his breath as he runs: '***Shoot-out on the strip and he hardly breaks pace. Hazards of the city. He's used to them. Head down and keep moving,***' a glance at his stopwatch, '***14.56. This just might be the night.***'

AND THAT'S WHEN he catches the eye of Dredd.

LIKE SO MANY Wagner single-episode stories before it, 'The Runner' is heavy with a dark irony.[775] Immediately suspicious of the running man, Dredd quickly calls other Judges in pursuit. Even as the unnamed runner dodges all manner of criminals, including a gang of cannibals openly hunting in the street, he is the one the Judges focus on.

Engaged in an innocent activity, injunctions to stop and warning shots barely register: '***They must mean him but he's doing nothing wrong! Plenty of time to explain afterwards! Less than 100 – keep going!***'

The killing shot goes through his heart just as he passes the finishing post, and he dies glancing at his stopwatch – and his new

personal best. A friend who recognises him rushes over, asking why the Judges executed him.

'***Creep was running,***' says Dredd, his arms sternly crossed. '***Refused an order to halt.***'

'***B-but he's not a criminal,***' cries the friend. '***He loved running…*** ***He was always running, that's all. Is it a crime to run now?***'

'***It's reasonable grounds for suspicion,***' comes the reply.

FOR ALL OF its six short pages, 'The Runner' is a complex story. On the face of it, it is classic Wagner – an atmospheric 'slice of life' tale about the web of deadly and ironic futility facing citizens every day of their lives, with a punchline that could easily have come from any of the previous twenty-four years. 'It's one of my favourites,' said Wagner.[776] 'I think it's just a simple exposition of the Judges' ethos – you're dangerous if you run.'

But the story is about more than the reflexive disproportionate violence of the Judges because, in his script directions to artist Duncan Fegredo, Wagner purposefully mentioned the runner's ethnicity – he is a young, Black man.[777] It is an unusual detail to include for a writer who admits he normally leaves the ethnicity of characters to an artist's discretion, but even more unusual because no mention is made of it in the story. So why stipulate it so clearly?

Published in May 2001, just a month after violent protests in Wagner's native Ohio over the police killing of Timothy Thomas, a Black nineteen-year-old who was chased and shot dead in Cincinnati over traffic violations, 'The Runner' also came two years after the publication of the Macpherson Report on the death of Stephen Lawrence – a Black teenager stabbed to death in an unprovoked racist attack in 1993, who was at the same London school as Wagner's own daughters.[778]

The runner's race is a detail that cannot be divorced from what it implies yet does not say. That choice, to instruct the artist but not the reader, strikes at the heart of how the politics and history of 'Judge Dredd' intersect with the real world in a way few are willing to admit.

So, we come to the subject that has hung over this narrative from the beginning: race.

In February 2020, Ahmaud Arbery was jogging in his hometown of Brunswick, Georgia, something the twenty-five-year-old Black former high school American football player did virtually every day.[779] As he was running through a mostly white neighbourhood, he was chased and shot by three white men, one a former police officer, who believed he was a burglar. It took more than two months for the men to be arrested, but all three were later jailed for life.[780]

Their racist assumption, that Arbery was criminal because he was Black and he was running, is emblematic of the racial profiling sarcastically referred to as 'Driving While Black'.[781] Along with its ambulatory cousin, 'Walking While Black',[782] it is the shared experience of Black people engaged in innocent everyday activity being under suspicion and regularly stopped by police. It is incidents such as this that 'The Runner' draws on – a daily fact of life for Black people.

Decades of 'law and order' rhetoric has made Blackness synonymous with criminality.[783] Black people are seen as inherently criminal by law enforcement, children as young as ten are mistaken as older and are more likely to face tougher punishments at school because they are viewed as 'less innocent',[784] and ordinary behaviour is treated as suspicious and threatening – even jogging.[785]

'I got stopped jogging once, and I think that was hilarious,' said Black British dub poet Benjamin Zephaniah, who was stopped while running in Lincolnshire.[786] 'It was raining and the cop said: "Where are you coming from?" and I said: "Well, home." He said: "Where are you going to?" and I went: "Well, home, I'm jogging around in circles." He went: "Can I search you? Have you got any keys?" and I actually said to him: "Have you just joined the force? Do you need to, kind of, prove something, you know?" I just laughed and laughed at him.'

While Zephaniah – who lives in a country where the police are not routinely armed – is able to laugh off the encounter, in America such assumptions come with a growing death toll. Coming just three months before the killing of George Floyd, Arbery's case joined the tally of police encounters which lead to death – whether from minor offences or simply imagined threats.

It was both the very public nature of Floyd's death and its manner that sparked the global 'Black Lives Matter' protests in 2020, which called for racial justice and an end to harsh policing of Black and ethnic minority communities. Protests in Britain were met with surprise and not a little resentment – this was not America, critics insisted, no one was being shot as they jogged. There was simply no comparison.

Yet Britain has its George Floyds too.

Black people are more than twice as likely to die in or following police custody.[787] Twenty-year-old Rashan Charles died after a member of the Met's Territorial Support Group chased him into a shop in East London in 2017 and used 'unorthodox' restraint to pin him to the floor.[788] The same month, Darren Cumberbatch died after he was tasered, struck with batons, and punched fifteen times by Warwickshire Police, a level of restraint a coroner called 'excessive'.[789] And Met Commander Bas Javid admitted that the force still had an issue with 'racial discrimination, bias and prejudice' after apologising to the family of Kevin Clarke, who died in custody in 2018.[790]

While Black people in the UK are seven times more likely to be stopped and searched compared with white people, they are also five times more likely to be subjected to the use of force, according to Home Office figures from 2021.[791] Young Black people are nine times more likely to be locked up in England and Wales than their white peers.[792] During the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns this worsened, with one in four of all Black men in England and Wales aged between fifteen and twenty-four stopped, searched, and found to be doing nothing wrong. Police forces have been unable to explain the enduring disparity and the situation is likely to deteriorate further as rules on 'suspicionless' stop and search are relaxed and powers expanded.

Meanwhile, shocking messages exchanged by officers at Charing Cross police station revealed a culture of racism, as well as sexism and homophobia;[793] a serving officer told the BBC police found Black people 'more threatening and aggressive'[794]; the Met was forced to ditch a 'racist and misogynistic' course for trainee detectives that

‘stereotyped immigrants as drug dealers, rapists and child abusers’ after lecturers refused to teach it[795]; and an investigation found racism was likely to have been an ‘influencing factor’ in the traumatising and degrading strip searching of a fourteen-year-old Black girl by police officers at her school.[796] It was later revealed that of the five children Met officers strip-search every week without first arresting them, more than half are Black and only one in five white.[797]

In the face of all of this, the resistance to the message of the Black Lives Matter protests proved one thing, anti-racism scholar Adam Elliott-Cooper wrote in ***Black Resistance to British Policing***: ‘that Britain is a nation uncomfortable with discussions of ‘race’ and British racism’.

IT IS MORE than two decades since the Macpherson Report finally did what Leslie Scarman, who investigated the causes of the 1981 Brixton uprising, did not. Published in 1999, the three-hundred-and-fifty page report into the police failings that allowed the killers of Stephen Lawrence to evade justice revealed an investigation marred by incompetence and prejudice.

Most importantly, for the first time it described the Metropolitan Police as ‘institutionally racist’. The report was a bombshell, a vindication of those who, for decades, had tried to highlight the way Black communities in Britain are policed.

However, it rankled the police, who have steadfastly refused to truly accept Macpherson’s conclusion.

Britain has long viewed itself as tolerant and open, that ‘world at one with itself’ where the liberal rule of law is applied fairly and equally.[798] As avatars of this system, the police are particularly sensitive to criticism that challenges their self-image as its guardians, an image integral to the idea of ‘policing by consent’, in which the police’s use of their moral authority is based on the permission and cooperation of the community.

Macpherson’s conclusion left many police feeling that they were being individually branded as racists and that it threatened to undermine their relationship with communities of colour. Even just the use of the word ‘racism’, regardless of Macpherson’s careful caveat,

contradicts the national myth of the British Bobby as a fair, honest and impartial enforcer of the law.

Judge Dredd is – we are repeatedly told – an equal opportunities oppressor.

Part of the character's humour is that he is brutal to all regardless of their ethnicity or gender. Never portrayed as racist or shown beating anyone or giving them a steeper sentence because of the colour of their skin, he represents the fantasy of the 'colour blind' cop who, shorn of inconvenient and messy humanity, cares only for enforcing the law. '***He's tough but fair!***' a grinning perp (who happens to be white) declares as Dredd shoves a Lawgiver in his face in Brian Bolland's cover for ***Time Out*** in 1982.[799]

The strip is always at pains to position his heavy-handedness as an impartial response to crime; Dredd is not a bigoted 'fascist', but an objective maintainer of the harsh law guided by – in the immortal words of ***Dragnet***'s Joe Friday – 'just the facts'. Indeed, racism does not seem to figure in the strip.

This may simply be reflective of the fact that, over the past forty-five years, 'Judge Dredd' has been produced almost exclusively by creators who are white. Not a single writer of colour has ever worked on 'Dredd' for ***2000 AD***.[800] Of the more than three hundred artists to have worked on 'Dredd' for ***2000 AD*** and the ***Megazine***, Doug Braithwaite, Ajibayo Akinsiku (under the pseudonym 'Siku'), David Bircham, Duke Mighten, Tan Eng Huat, and – most recently – concept designer Joel Carpenter are the only creators of colour.

The lack of creators of colour has a knock-on effect in the strip itself. The ethnic make-up of Judges, criminals and citizens was – and by and large still is – almost entirely white. While the strip may be set in America, ***2000 AD*** is a comic produced in Britain, a country that remains overwhelmingly white.

A white man now discussing how 'Judge Dredd' deals with race and racism is fraught with difficulty, but to ignore it – and the problems it creates – would be to ignore the implications of this silence.

'I don't feel confident in dealing with it,' Wagner admits.[801] 'I can see the big problem with racism, but I think I'll leave it to more

intelligent people to deal with properly.'

It is true that, despite its multitudes, the citizens of Mega-City One find themselves equally on the receiving end of the city's slow and quick violence. This has led some to claim that the strip is a vision of a 'post-racial' society, one that – although brutish and dystopian – has 'solved' the scourge of racism. But the world of 'Judge Dredd' is only 'post-racial' in that, as Elliott-Cooper makes clear, it does not want to talk about race.

When it ***does***, it turns its victims into robots, aliens, and mutants.

'***Now the slave will become the master!***' cries carpenter droid 'Call-Me-Kenneth' as he breaks free from his programming and begins killing humans in 'Robot Wars', the strip's first multi-part storyline in 1977.[802]

In a previous episode, Dredd had watched a robot seller brag to an audience: '***see how obedient our new models are, ma friends!***' as he sent a robot – plaintively begging for mercy – into a fire to melt. But when his warnings of an imminent robotic revolt caused by such cruelty are ignored, Dredd briefly quits… only to redon his badge to fight Call-Me-Kenneth, who has become as oppressive as any human, praising Adolf Hitler (thus giving Dredd moral licence to destroy the rebellion) and, in a reprise of the robot seller's cruelty, ordering one of his followers to self-destruct. Aided by loyal robots, including his obsequious robo-servant Walter the Wobot, Dredd defeats the tinpot tyrant. Legions of robots gratefully return to their servitude. The 'good slaves' who helped Dredd are rewarded – though only one of them, Walter, earns his freedom.[803]

The allegory of 'Robot Wars' is not subtle, though it is confused. In drawing a clear comparison between Mega-City One's robot workforce and the victims of the Atlantic slave trade, it positions Dredd not as a hero fighting against injustice, but as a 'neutral' enforcer of the law, a position reinforced in 'The Neon Knights', written by Pat Mills, in which he tackles a Ku Klux Klan-style mob attacking robots in 'revenge' for their rebellion.[804] Revealing their leader to be a cyborg – to the disgust of his fellow vigilantes – Dredd

insists the law '***protects robot and human alike***'. Their prejudice does not concern him, so long as they obey the law.

He was soon disciplining an 'immigrant' population of talking apes, who lived in the abject poverty of 'the Jungle' ghetto and talked in the patois of Italian mobsters. '***There is one law. Maybe you second-generation free apes don't remember it, but your mama did…'*** Dredd says as he sends them not to the cubes but the zoo.[805]

Six months later, Dredd turned 'white saviour' in Pat Mills' 'The Cursed Earth', when he saved an alien called Tweak from a gang of pitiless slave drivers, including a 'slave patrol' with one member sporting the pointed hood of the Ku Klux Klan.[806] '***When someone calls on the law for help… be he mutie… alien… cyborg… or human…'*** Dredd declared. '***The law cannot turn a blind eye! And I am the law!***'. Intentional or not, the juxtaposition of Dredd and the slavers is particularly striking considering that modern day US law enforcement can trace its origins in part back to the 'slave patrols' created in the Carolinas in the early 1700s to quash slave uprisings and return runaway slaves to their owners.[807]

Meanwhile, out in the irradiated Cursed Earth, mutants are not the spandex-clad superheroes of Marvel's ***X-Men***, but luckless inhabitants of a poisoned land. With hands extending from heads, bleached eyes, and contorted faces, they are a horrifying underclass living both beyond the limits of the city, the bounds of 'normal' society, and the tolerance of the law. ***'Mutants hate ordinary people because they themselves are warped. That's why they were banned from the city,***' thought Dredd as he chased a mutant gang leader in 'Mr Buzzz',[808] though by the time of 'The Cursed Earth', he mused that mutants '***deserve pity… not vengeance***'. However, as soon as they entered the city, they broke the law and were all too deserving of Dredd's vengeance.

Physical mutation was a common metaphor for Wagner and Grant. ***Strontium Dog*** – the long-running space Western series Wagner and Ezquerra created for ***2000 AD***'s short-lived sister title, ***Starlord*** – portrays members of a similar mutant underclass forced by the prejudice of 'norms' to become bounty hunters.[809] It is a powerful strip, with an allusion made all the more obvious by Nelson Bunker

Kreelman, a bigoted politician modelled on British Union of Fascists leader Oswald Mosley, and his fascist 'Kreelers'.

So, ***2000 AD*** does talk about prejudice, but it can only do so by abstracting it through such science-fiction tropes. This makes sense for a sci-fi action comic originally aimed at an audience of what was predominantly white children – for all of its politics, 'Dredd' was never intended to be a kitchen sink drama – but in doing so the strip seeks to make a point without actually engaging with the realities of it.

Mutants, for all of their pathos, are still presented as grotesque. Their visible difference justifies their exclusion from the 'norm' population and the strip sorts them into inhuman monsters who must be destroyed or pitiful idiots who are only there to be saved. And referencing the enslavement of African peoples in America and the racial bigotry of the Nazis enables what Elliott-Cooper calls 'imperial amnesia', which sees racism as an aberration, something that is not only safely foreign and safely in the past, but also abolished and 'defeated'.

This reassured the comic's young readership that racists are slave owners and hate-filled fascists at the same time it featured appalling portrayals of racialized characters that are impossible to ignore. Stories such as 'The Warlord',[810] 'Fists of Stan Lee',[811] 'Juve's Eyes',[812] 'Our Man in Hondo',[813] and 'The Taxidermist',[814] feature alarming and outdated racist stereotypes of ethnic minorities, many of them becoming running jokes.

Dredd's landlady, Maria, has a comedy mock Italian accent – '***How you like-a my cookin' a-laser?***' – while the dialogue of characters from Latin America is phonetically rendered in a Speedy Gonzalez patois from ***Looney Tunes*** cartoons. Abominable stereotypes in stories such as 'In The Bath', 'Banana City', and 'Sugar Beat' portray Latin Americans as inveterately corrupt, lazy, and criminal.[815] Other nationalities are treated with similarly regressive, colonialist clichés – the Judges of Japan are samurai warriors, Chinese Judges wear wide 'sedge' hats, Egypt's Judges are techno-Pharaohs.[816]

Such racial assumptions were commonplace in British comics, so much so that even the self-appointed Comics Council, founded in 1953 during the moral panic over US crime and horror comics,

questioned homegrown comics' 'monotonous tendency to make the non-British, particularly the dark-skinned races, either the enemy or the inferior character in the story'.[817] Wider British culture too had 'an unseemly obsession with people of colour'. Shows like Spike Milligan's ***Curry and Chips*** (which was pulled off the air by TV regulators after just six episodes in 1969), ***Love Thy Neighbour*** (1972-76) and ***Till Death Do Us Part*** (1965-75) all claimed to be lampooning racist attitudes even as they regurgitated them.[818] At the same time as TV audiences laughed along, the National Front was marching through Lewisham, where police allegedly raided homes as part of operation 'PNH' – 'Police N****r Hunt'.[819]

It demonstrates the limitations of the satire in 'Dredd', as the strip undercuts its own message by not recognising such contradictions. It wishes to speak of the evils of prejudice yet sees it, ironically, as a black-and-white issue, refracting it through a binary 'law and order' frame – and while racism is seen as bad, it is only policed when it threatens order.

'***Don't blame yourself, Merle. You did what you had to.***'

When 'The Runner' is brought down by a single shot to the heart, it is not Dredd who fires it. He reassures his colleague that the execution, however unfortunate, was legal. It is a sleight of hand that allows Dredd to keep his hands clean, even as he reinforces a system whose hands are not.

'Pat always wanted Dredd to be the hero,' said Wagner.[820] 'I saw him partly as a hero, but more so a villain. That was the original conception of Dredd – that he shouldn't be a nice guy, that he shouldn't be a hero. Some things he does will be heroic, but overall – no.'

Here again the strip finds itself undermined by its own contradictions. 'Judge Dredd' is a parody of unfair policing that cannot show its lead character engaging in the kind of policing it is parodying. Whatever he does, Dredd ***is*** the hero of the strip – he makes hard choices, from the destruction of East-Meg One to the jailing of children, but is always scrupulously shown to not be cruel or unfair.

It demonstrates the limitations not just of Dredd as a character, but of serialised comic book characters as a whole. Characters, especially heroes, need to have ***some*** redeeming features in order to make them compelling protagonists. This was the process that took place between 'Bank Raid' and 'Judge Whitey' – Dredd could not be someone who arbitrarily gunned people down, he had to be shown to be ***right***.

And so, he became the perfect ideal of what a Judge should be, an idea that – inadvertently or not – gives credence to the thought that Judges are, deep down, a good thing. If only all law enforcement was like Dredd – scrupulous, dedicated, unstinting, selfless. It is an image of forthright integrity, an integrity that can be bent but never broken or the mask will slip and expose the ugliness behind it.

When the mask does fall away, as it did in 'Revolution', the whole system is brought into question.

The same is true for the police. The image of 'policing by consent' portrays the police as, as Robert Reiner put it, 'romantic symbols of order and morality, "knights errant" ever ready to protect against threats' and doing so with the permission of the community they serve.

Yet Macpherson's conclusion was that the problem of racism was not one of racist individuals, but the institution as a whole. It was, he said, a 'collective failure'. It is not a problem that can, like a 'rotten apple', be swiftly expunged; it calls into question the entire structure and even the very function of the police. When the mask of 'consent' slips, as it does with each new crisis of confidence, it challenges both our national myth and the self-image of the police.

Yet twenty years after Macpherson and forty years after Scarman, the problem not only remains but grows still sharper after years of both reform and austerity. In the light of this, the disproportionate policing of communities of colour begins to look, in the parlance of computer programming, less like a bug and more like a feature.

THE CONCEPTION OF race is a vital part of 'law and order' politics.

The rhetoric spouted by politicians from Enoch Powell to Priti Patel is saturated with allegories for a threatening Blackness; when the

papers talked of ‘muggers’ in 1972, their audience knew what they meant, when David Cameron declared ‘all-out war’ on ‘gangs’ following the riots of 2011, it was well understood that the battlefields would not be in the leafy – and mostly white – suburbs.

The moral panic of the 1970s elevated crime to national priority just as rhetoric about foreign cultures ‘swamping’ Britain reaffirmed the association of crime and deviance with ethnicity and ‘race’.[821] The stereotyping of young Black men as ‘dangerous, violent and volatile’ legitimises the over-policing of Black communities, who are portrayed as unable to cope with that highest achievement of civilization – the rule of law.[822] This creates an ever greater need for new instrumentarian power to deal with the ‘enemy within’, the dangerous and alien ‘Other’.

The concept of the Other was developed by, among others, Palestinian-American academic Edward Said who, in his ground-breaking 1978 book ***Orientalism***, explained that it is a binary opposition imposed on anything that the West is not – something exotic but ‘not fully human’, something to be pitied or something to be dominated. The process of ‘Othering’, this product and tool of colonialism, sits at the heart of the police project.[823]

With its roots in colonial domination, at the time the Metropolitan Police were created in 1829, the Other was the ‘dangerous classes’, the vagabonds, predatory criminals, vagrants, and prostitutes that emerged out of the poor underclass in nineteenth-century cities, as well as stranded Lascar merchant seamen and migrant Irish, that required disciplining by Peel’s new police. As discussed in chapter nine, the form of British policing exercised across the Empire both accentuated this Othering and supplied the technology and techniques for its enforcement.

Now, in the early twenty-first century, it encompasses a range of ethnicities of Black, Asian, and poor white ‘Chav’ populations, and most modern legislation – especially the granting to the police of summary powers – is directed towards the policing of this racialized Other.[824]

In America, after the civil rights movement of the 1960s, the logic of racial segregation was replaced by the logic of ‘law and order’,

allowing the governing and marginalisation of racial groups to appear non-racial.[825] Policies such as 'broken windows' are regularly held up as a 'race-neutral' response to criminality, their disproportionate deployment against poor communities of colour justified as 'mere statistical inevitability'.[826]

Such arguments continue to this day. 'We don't target young Black males with stop and search,' one Metropolitan Police commander put it. 'We put stop and search into areas with the most violence and the most crime'.[827] Deputy Commissioner Sir Stephen House said he was trying to 'decriminalise the word disproportionate', while the government claimed that any discrimination Black people might suffer because of an expansion of stop and search powers would be 'objectively justified'.[828] [829]

Four decades before, this will have sounded all too familiar. In the wake of the Brixton uprising and stung by the Scarman Report's criticisms, the Met began publishing the ethnicity of perpetrators of violent street crimes to 'prove' that they were justified to target 'inherently criminal' Black communities. 'In the Jamaicans you have people who are constitutionally disorderly,' Metropolitan Police chief Kenneth Newman said in 1982, 'it's simply in their make-up'.[830]

Such framing was dismissed by the government's own Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, set up in the wake of George Floyd's murder, which said it was 'evident' that a vicious circle had developed where police targeting of Black and ethnic communities fuels arrests, prosecutions, and convictions, reinforcing the idea that they are disproportionately involved in crime more generally.[831]

Having been primed to fear the threatening Other, the wider 'unpoliced' population is generally comfortable for the police to fulfil the role of disciplining them, happy to remain ignorant of the methods, and dismissive of concern for populations they accept are 'inherently criminal'. 'As much as it's the police as well, our whole society has a stereotype of young Black men and Black people in general,' one young Black man, who had been labelled a member of a gang and repeatedly stopped and searched, told researchers in 2018. 'Do you know what I mean? I'm a Black youth in a tracksuit.

They have a perception of what I am. Yesterday I was riding from here, I was riding from boxing and this old woman – and I rode past her and she went… I couldn't believe it, I thought I was, like, scum – she'd grabbed her handbag. I haven't seen that for years. She went, "oh!" and grabbed her bag. I just stopped and I said, "I'm not a robber." That is mad. Do you know how mad it is that the whole society has a perception?'

Occasionally, however, the toll of these methods is exposed to the light and a crisis of legitimacy ensues. 'State power is revealed to unpoliced populations only in times of crisis,' wrote criminologist Lambros Fatsis and sociologist Melayna Lamb. 'For such populations, it is only periods of crisis that lay bare what is otherwise normal(ised) on the lives of those who are excluded, marginalised, criminalised, policed and confined.'

The murder of George Floyd was one such crisis. His death did not just chime with the experiences of African Americans, but with those of other ethnic minority populations around the world, including the UK.

Ten years before, then-Home Secretary Theresa May had called British policing 'the envy of the world', and police chiefs continue to insist that they require the 'trust' of communities, even as police practices – such as stop and search – undermine that trust.[832]

So, in the teeth of a crisis, when the realities of policing are exposed, politicians and police chiefs quickly call for 'reform'. This, however, is rarely the promised panacea – indeed, it can threaten to break the system itself.

'*Grud preserve us! It's one of them! Send for the Mutant Catchers!*'

When Constanza Murfy gives birth, her child is not 'normal'. The city's Mutant Catchers offer her a choice – send the child to an expensive care home in the Cursed Earth, exile, or euthanasia. Constanza and her husband Oddy opt to run, pursued by Dredd.[833]

Not since 'The Wall' had the realities of the Mutant Segregation Act been made so clear.[834] Children torn from mothers, the sick banished, until the body politic is cleansed of the aberrant – all

justified by their physical 'difference', their 'impurity'. Previously it had merely been doubt about how the failings of the system created injustice, but now Dredd saw how it actively engaged in injustice.

'***All these years we've been force-deporting mutants,***' he says to Chief Judge Hershey, '***splitting families, hunting them down like animals. I've never questioned it – just swallowed the whole protection of the gene pool line… if we were wrong about this, how many other ways have we been going wrong?***'

It is no coincidence that in the 2006 epic storyline 'Origins', which will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter, Dredd had discovered a whole community of descendants of his clone father, Fargo. The knowledge that some of his 'relatives' are mutants brought a sudden moral awakening, something reinforced when he finds exiled mutants at a Justice Department Cursed Earth work farm are being harvested for their organs.

When the mutants were simply the Other, he could shoot them without losing sleep, but when he has personal experience of injustice, he could no longer ignore it. For perhaps the first time since the welfare case of 'An Error of Judgement', one of the pebbles that led to the avalanche of 'Necropolis', Dredd was forced to look up from his 'tight boots' and acknowledge the easy inhumanity of a system given free rein to treat certain people as less than human.

His solution to this injustice was reform – the end of the mutant segregation laws.

It was an immediate disaster. The citizens, long conditioned to see the monstrous Other as a threat, erupted in violence. Prejudice found free rein as mutant immigrants were hounded, harassed, and murdered.

Just or not, the policy was wildly unpopular. In return for backing Dredd's reforms, his long-term ally Judge Hershey was ousted as Chief Judge by the populist Dan Francisco, a Judge with his own reality TV series, who reversed the reforms and effectively exiled Dredd to the Cursed Earth as penance.

Even as the city executed a man for killing mutants – '***They were only muties, for Jovis's sake!***' he shouted as he was condemned to the time-stretcher, a machine from the strip's earliest days which

fatally compresses a life sentence into minutes – it sought to condemn his victims to either forced sterilisation or lives of toil in Cursed Earth work farms (now being administered by Dredd) to supply the city with food.

For all his power, for all his legendary status, the man who killed Death, the man who saved the world, the future's toughest lawman, Dredd can only apply that power in a very specific direction. He can do as he pleases – when it comes to hurting people – but cannot actually make people's lives better; there are moments, but in the greater scheme of things it never counts. He cannot make the people accept the mutants or treat the robots with a degree of decency, because the city is built on the expulsion of one category and the exploitation of another.

'***How much misery,***' Dredd asks the city's ruling Council of Five, '***do we have a right to inflict?***' [835]

In 1999, Sir William Macpherson's report laid out his blueprint for reform.

Alongside reporting and managerial changes, in an attempt to end the 'collective failure' of 'institutional racism', officers and staff from all UK police forces were given mandatory diversity training. Yet this produced little improvement; a drop in stops and searches, as police confidence about their use declined, soon disappeared.[836]

Following the riots that took place across England in 2011, in response to claims that stop and search powers continued to be deployed in a way that was both disproportionate and discriminatory, a new 'Best Use' scheme was introduced to create 'better outcomes' for stops.[837]

A decade later, police chiefs launched yet another plan to give all officers in England and Wales mandatory anti-racism and 'Black history' training as part of a new 'Race Action Plan', after the Black Lives Matter protests raised awareness of continued problems with stop and search.[838]

The abuse of stop and search powers is now so serious that police watchdog, the Independent Office for Police Conduct, said Black people need 'protecting' from stereotyping and racial biases.[839]

The same outcome followed the killing of George Floyd – training on de-escalation, implicit bias, procedural justice,[840] and even 'bystander training' to teach officers to intervene to stop their colleagues killing people.[841] Yet Minneapolis, where Floyd died, had already instituted a wave of reform and training following the shooting of Michael Brown in 2014 to try to improve trust with the local Black community.[842] None of it prevented Floyd's murder.

'Diversity and multicultural training is not a new idea, nor is it terribly effective,' wrote Alex Vitale in ***The End of Policing***. 'Most officers have already been through some form of diversity training and tend to describe it as politically motivated, feel-good programming divorced from the realities of street policing.' He said biases remain 'even after targeted and intensive training' not necessarily because officers 'remain committed to their racial biases, though this can be true, but because institutional pressures remain intact'.

Yet the government and police do not just remain committed to stop and search; as detailed in chapter six, they are vastly expanding its use and the Home Office insists it is a 'vital police tool', even as it is shown not to work.[843] In fact, so central have these practices become to modern policing, that removing them would call into question the entire institution.

'THE IDEA ORIGINALLY was to make him more or less any race, a mixture,' said Ezquerra of his original design for Dredd.[844] 'I read a science-fiction novel many years ago, I think it was Asimov, where he said that with the races there would be so much mixing that we'd all be more or less a single colour.'

Inherited from the Spaghetti Western, Ezquerra always brought a degree of ambiguity to each of his characters. When he had walked away from 'Dredd' it had been to draw ***El Mestizo*** for ***Battle***, a series written by Alan Hebden specifically for him about a formerly enslaved man turned bandit during the American Civil War. While unsubtle by today's standards, ***El Mestizo*** was unique in acknowledging racism, even if it placed it in a semi-mythical past. It was Ezquerra who gave Dredd distinctively full lips to, he said, 'put a mystery as to his racial

background.'[845] Mick McMahon followed Ezquerra's lead, consciously portraying Dredd as Black.

Yet while Ezquerra saw Dredd in the ambiguous landscape of Clint Eastwood's Westerns, Wagner had placed him firmly in the urban jungle of Eastwood's Callaghan. He saw Dredd as not simply a heavy-handed lawman, but a decidedly white one – a 'hard-hearted white fascist'.[846] So too did the artists that followed Ezquerra and McMahon, who all portrayed Dredd as white. 'Mike told me he's spent four months drawing Dredd as a Black man,' said Ron Smith.[847] 'Whereas Brian [Bolland] and myself had been drawing him as a white man.' It was an assumption shared by ***2000 AD***'s in-house colourist; the final page of 'Judge Whitey' fell on the back cover of Prog 2, one of a handful of colour pages in each issue and, as Dredd stares stoically into the distance, his skin is rendered in whites and pinks. 'I suppose it's because it's easier for white artists to draw white people than to draw Black people,' Ezquerra joked in 2009.

It is interesting to consider what might have happened had Ezquerra's vision held over Wagner's, if Dredd had continued to be portrayed as a character of colour, and the implications for the way diversity is now held up as the solution to institutional racism. Communities will feel better represented, reformers insist, and therefore happier being policed if they recognise themselves in those policing them; yet even if this were true, despite efforts to increase the number of officers of colour, the Met has admitted it would take a century for it to represent the diversity of the population it covers.[848]

Meanwhile, promotion for Black, Asian and minority ethnic officers continues to take longer, while they are fifty per cent more likely to voluntarily resign than their white counterparts, and more than twice as likely to be dismissed or have their contract terminated.[849] Officers reporting discrimination can often find themselves targeted for speaking out.[850]

'The problems that exist between police and communities of colour are too multifaceted to be solved by merely altering officers' racial makeup,' wrote criminologists Jacinta M. Gau and Rod K. Brunson, 'and Black officers are no less susceptible to the negative impact of a

dysfunctional organisational culture than their white counterparts are'.[851]

Having a Black officer amongst the four who arrested him did not save George Floyd.[852]

THERE ***HAVE*** BEEN prominent supporting characters of colour in 'Judge Dredd'. The strip's first explicitly Black character, Judge Giant, was introduced in 1977's 'The Academy of Law'.[853] Initially the jive-talking son of a former sports star (John 'Giant' Clay from the 'Harlem Heroes' strip), Giant soon became a regular feature and his murder in the lead-up to 'The Apocalypse War' was a shock for many readers. There have been others too, not least America Beeny, the Latina daughter of America Jara and singer Bennett Beeny, whose father has her sent to the Academy of Law before he dies.

However, they are not proof that the Judges are somehow 'progressive' in their 'lack' of racism. The opposite is in fact true – it stresses their totalitarian credentials. Everything is subsumed into the mission, for them there is no race, creed, or gender. Even if Bolland and Smith had followed Ezquerra's lead and portrayed Dredd as a character of colour, it would not have altered his character. Changing the colour of the face under the helmet would not make the system any fairer or just, it would merely change the mask it wears.

'Having more Black and brown police officers may sound like an appealing reform,' wrote Alex Vitale,[854] 'but as long as larger systems of policing are left in place, there is no evidence that would give cause to expect a significant reduction in brutality or overpolicing.'

DESPITE ITS LENGTH, 'The Runner' is not a simple story. It consciously pulls back from making explicit what the colour of the runner's skin says about 'Judge Dredd' and about policing, and – as Elliott-Cooper makes clear – it is a conversation that the strip does not wish to have.

Similarly, policing in Britain continues to grapple with the question of race while simultaneously refusing to accept the answers. These are institutions designed to work in a certain way; to believe that racism can be reformed out of the police is to forget why the police

were created in the first place – to control those the society has deemed to be Other.

A system that proclaims its commitment to fairness has injustice baked into its very being and, even after forty years of reform, cannot change without undermining its entire purpose. The same is true with 'Dredd', a satire on policing that cannot truly question the institution of policing.

The Black Lives Matter protests saw slogans such as 'Defund the police' appear across the world, placing discussions about the actual ***abolition*** of policing into the mainstream, often for the first time. The resistance to the idea, which has its roots in the Black radical thought of the 1960s and '70s, that there may be alternatives to policing is echoed by the often unspoken question at the heart of 'Judge Dredd'.

'Security is not possible as long as the physical, mental, and spiritual health of our communities is ignored,' wrote the radical Black activist and scholar Angela Y. Davis.[855] 'Safety and security require education, housing, jobs, art, music, and recreation. Abolitionist approaches ask us to enlarge our field of vision so that rather than focusing myopically on the problematic institution and asking what needs to be changed about that institution, we raise radical questions about the organisation of the larger society.'

IN REFUSING TO 'see' race, except in the abstract, and its denial of alternatives to the rule of the Judges, 'Dredd' does – inadvertently or otherwise – say something quite profound about policing and race. It is the truth, the inescapable yet unutterable truth, that rather than being a vision of some bold, equal, post-racial future, 'Judge Dredd' is a world where everyone is policed the way we have always policed Black people.

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[775] ***2000 AD*** Prog 1240 (2001) Script: John Wagner, Art: Duncan Fegredo, Colour: Chris Blythe, Letters: Tom Frame

[776] Interview with John Wagner, 11 March 2022

[777] Discussion with Duncan Fegredo, 20 May 2021

[778] Wagner interview, ***ibid.***

[779] Rich McKay, 'Factbox: Who was Ahmaud Arbery?' – reuters.com (24 November 2021) https://reut.rs/3aNWSph

[780] Dakin Andone, Eliott C. McLaughlin, Alta Spells & Devon M. Sayers, 'Ahmaud Arbery's killers sentenced to life in prison for 25-year-old Black man's murder' – edition.cnn.com (8 January 2022) https://cnn.it/3RQM7U6

[781] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., 'Thirteen Ways Of Looking At A Black Man' – newyorker.com (16 October 1995) https://bit.ly/3zc11g9

[782] Garnette Cadogan, 'Walking While Black' – lithub.com (8 July 2016)

[783] Will McMahon and Rebecca Roberts, 'Truth and lies about 'race' and 'crime'' – crimeandjustice.org.uk (8 March 2011) https://bit.ly/3OfOjkK

[784] Adina Campbell, 'Black children over-policed in schools, report says' – bbc.co.uk (29 April 2022) https://bbc.in/3PfHrVR

[785] Philip Atiba Goff, Matthew Christian Jackson, Brooke Allison Lewis Di Leone, Carmen Marie Culotta & Natalie Ann DiTomasso,'The Essence of Innocence: Consequences of Dehumanizing Black Children' in Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, Vol. 106, No. 4 (2014)

[786] Emma Youle '"That's What They Do To Us": Benjamin Zephaniah On His Experiences Of Police Racism' – huffingtonpost.co.uk (30 April 2021) https://bit.ly/3PgvWNV

[787] Noah Robinson, 'Black people twice as likely to die in or following police custody' – thejusticegap.com (20 January 2021) https://bit.ly/3o7kEQp

[788] Clare Sambrook, 'New evidence, fresh questions about death of young Black Londoner Rashan Charles' – opendemocracy.net (26 November 2020)

[789] ***BBC News***, 'Darren Cumberbatch death: Probation staff to get extra training' – bbc.co.uk (26 October 2019) https://bbc.in/3RU5HyO

[790] Mark Daly & Kieran Etoria-King, 'Kevin Clarke: Met Police apologises over restraint death' – bbc.co.uk (18 January 2021) https://bbc.in/3RIpUaD

[791] Adina Campbell, 'Police in England and Wales to get anti-racism training' – bbc.co.uk (24 May 2022) https://bbc.in/3PC3aHv

[792] Owen Bowcott & Vikram Dodd, 'Exposed: "racial bias" in England and Wales criminal justice system' – theguardian.com (8 September 2017)

[793] Margaret Davis, 'Racist, sexist and homophobic messages exchanged by Met Police officers exposed' – independent.co.uk (1 February 2022) https://bit.ly/3TkDJwU

[794] Sam Francis, Tarah Welsh & Zack Adesina, 'Met Police "four times more likely" to use force on Black people' – bbc.co.uk (30 July 2020) https://bbc.in/3uVK3jH

[795] Michael Gillard & Fiona Hamilton, '"Racist" Met police course for detectives ditched after protests by attendees' – thetimes.co.uk (15 July 2022) https://bit.ly/3aPxvUl

[796] Joe Talora & Anthony France, 'Children as young as 10 subjected to full strip searches by Met Police' – standard.co.uk (22 April 2022) https://bit.ly/3aRy3ZS

[797] Rachael Venables, 'Met strip-search five children every week without first arresting them, LBC reveals' – lbc.co.uk (25 July 2022) https://bit.ly/3PPyHWu

[798] Robert Reiner, ***The Politics of the Police*** (2000)

[799] ***Time Out***, 20-26 August 1982

[800] In contrast, writers of colour Charlie J. Eskew, Joseph Elliott-Coleman, and Stitch – who writes under the pen name Zina Hutton – have all written for Rebellion's ***Judges*** series of prose novellas, which are set before the Judges' coup.

[801] Interview, 11 March 2022

[802] ***2000 AD*** Progs 10-17 (1977) Script: John Wagner, Art: Carlos Ezquerra, Ron Turner, Mick McMahon & Ian Gibson, Letters: unknown

[803] While two droids are rewarded with 'pleasure circuits', Walter is freed… but immediately rejects his manumission, remaining in the service of Dredd for years as a comedy sidekick alongside stereotypically 'Italian' cleaning lady, Maria.

[804] ***2000 AD*** Prog 29 (1977) Script: Pat Mills, Art: Ian Gibson, Letters: Tony Jacob

[805] 'The Ape Gang', ***2000 AD*** Prog 39 (1977) Script: John Wagner, Art: Mick McMahon, Letters: Tony Jacob

[806] ***2000 AD*** Progs 61-85 (1978) Script: Pat Mills, John Wagner & Chris Lowder, Art: Mick McMahon & Brian Bolland, Letters: Tom Frame, John Aldrich & Pete Knight

[807] National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 'The Origins of Modern Day Policing' – naacp.org (3 December 2021) https://bit.ly/3wJO9wq

[808] ***2000 AD*** Prog 22 (1977) Script: John Wagner, Art: Ian Gibson, Letters: Peter Knight

[809] Wagner and Grant began writing ***Strontium Dog*** together after the strip moved into ***2000 AD*** following the merger with ***Starlord*** in 1980. Johnny Alpha

and his partner Wulf Sternhammer would become some of ***2000 AD***'s most popular characters.

[810] ***2000 AD*** Progs 451-455 (1986) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Cam Kennedy, Letters: Tom Frame

[811] ***2000 AD*** Prog 484 (1986) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Barry Kitson, Letters: Tom Frame

[812] 2000 AD Progs 414-415 (1985) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Art: Ron Smith, Letters: Tom Frame

[813] 2000 AD Progs 608-611 (1989) Script: John Wagner, Art: Colin MacNeil, Letters: Tom Frame

[814] 'The Taxidermist', ***2000 AD*** Progs 507-510 (1987) Script: John Wagner & Alan Grant, Pencils: Cam Kennedy, Inks: Mark Farmer, Letters: Tom Frame

[815] 'Banana City', ***2000 AD*** Progs 623-625 (1989) Script: John Wagner, Art: Will Simpson, Letters: Tom Frame
'Sugar Beat' ***2000 AD*** Progs 873-878 (1994) Script: Alan McKenzie/John Tomlinson, Art: Ron Smith, Letters: Tom Frame

[816] Similarly, Scottish characters are portrayed as parochial simpletons and Irish characters as drunks. However, as these are usually written by writers who share their nationality, they are less racist stereotypes and more national in-jokes.

[817] Miss P. M. Pickard (ed.), ***British Comics: An Appraisal*** (1955)

[818] Angus Harrison, 'A Brief History of Britain's Racist Sitcoms' – vice.com (21 July 2017) https://bit.ly/3aWPY12

[819] Daniel Rachel, ***Walls Come Tumbling Down: The Music and Politics of Rock Against Racism, 2 Tone and Red Wedge*** (2016)

[820] David Bishop, ***Thrill-power Overload*** (2007)

[821] Elliott-Cooper (2021)

[822] Paul Gilroy, 'The myth of black criminality' in ***Socialist Register*** (1982), quoted in Patrick Williams and Becky Clarke, 'The Black Criminal Other as an Object of Social Control' in ***Social Sciences*** Vol.7, Issue 234 (2018)

[823] Michal Krumer-Nevo & Sidi Mirit, 'Writing Against Othering' in ***Qualitative Inquiry***, Vol.18, issue 4 (2012)

[824] Mike Brogden & Graham Ellison, ***Policing in an Age of Austerity: A Postcolonial Perspective*** (2013)

[825] Nicole Gonzalez Van Cleve & Lauren Mayes, 'Criminal Justice Through "Colorblind" Lenses: A Call to Examine the Mutual Constitution of Race and Criminal Justice' in ***Law & Social Inquiry***, Vol.40, Issue 2 (2015)

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15

ORIGINS

Neoliberalism and the eternal crisis of policing

‘***It was never meant to... be forever.***’
– Judge Eustace Fargo, ‘Origins’ (2006)

THE STORY DETAILED in this book began in crisis, and so did Dredd’s.

The details of how his world had come to be had not been told before. It was never worked out in advance, only developed piecemeal. Originally portrayed as a small elite cadre of paramilitary police elected by the people to fight crime, in ‘The Cursed Earth’ Mills revealed that the Judges had actually come to power by removing the last President of the United States, Robert ‘Bad Bob’ Booth, after his belligerence plunged the world into nuclear war.

Sentencing Booth to a century of suspended animation in the vaults of Fort Knox, the Judges dismissed liberal democracy and assumed the mantle of law enforcement, judiciary, legislature and government. Wagner and Grant paid relatively little heed to ‘continuity’, the narrative lore beloved by comic book fans; the past was less a fixed bible than a patchwork quilt, threadbare in places, made of cast iron in others, as details were added, others ignored.

‘Origins’ was meant to set everything straight. ‘There were many unresolved questions about the origins of the Judge system and some apparent contradictions that required sorting out,’ said Wagner.[856] ‘It’s a task I’d always shied away from because of the difficulty of making sense of it all while still telling a story that was worth reading – but I knew that sometime it had to be done, if for no other reason than my own satisfaction.’

As its title suggests it is an origin story, but unlike Peter Parker’s spider or Bruce Wayne’s bat, it is not a story of individual transformation but one of societal change – nothing less than the end of democracy and the beginning of the Judges’ rule.

Published between September 2006 and May 2007 to mark the thirtieth anniversary of 'Judge Dredd', and fittingly drawn by Carlos Ezquerra, 'Origins' weaves together Dredd's personal history with that of the collapse of democracy, an epistolary journey interspersed with a journey into the Cursed Earth to recover the long-preserved body of Eustace Fargo, the first Chief Judge and the man with whom Dredd shares his DNA.

Just as Wagner, as co-creator and the strip's primary voice, was the only writer who could give the story authorial authority, so Dredd – a clone of the man who created the system – is the only one who can tell it.

'***The law has failed us!***' Eustace Fargo tells Congress as he unveils plans to introduce a new force wielding powers of summary justice. '***It is time to take the judges out of the courts and put them on the streets!***'

This is the story as it had already been told – the police beleaguered, the courts corrupted, the streets unsafe, and gang warfare and civil unrest consuming the rapidly urbanising seaboard, Fargo's Judges step in to save the terrified populace. Brutal, incorruptible, monk-like enforcers with the powers of summary execution, this true 'third force' is neither police nor army, but both.

As the Mega-City grows, so Fargo builds a penal state within it; harsh immigration controls are enacted and vast new prisons – the iso-cubes – are built to house thousands, millions of new convicts. '***Fargo's new judicial system was harsh,***' recalls Dredd. '***Mistakes were made. But the citizens [were] prepared to overlook a few teething troubles. They were tired of the country looking like a warzone.***' Soon, Justice Department grows powerful enough to rival Congress.

Throughout liberal democracy is shown to have failed – not just in not stemming lawlessness but in electing the belligerent Booth, who launches a nuclear attack on the '***anti-American alliance***'. Not even the US's vast missile shields can prevent some retaliatory strikes from breaking through and the world is laid to waste, the remaining population huddled in their crowded city states. A state of emergency

is declared and, even as cadets, Dredd and Rico are assigned to clear the streets, shoot looters, prevent what authorities always fear – the war of all against all.

Echoing the controversies over the 2000 and 2004 US Presidential elections – the former settled only by a Supreme Court decision and the latter marred by allegations of voter suppression – and eerily presaging the conspiracy theories around voting machines in the 2020 election, a whistle-blower reveals that Booth's election was rigged. Having failed to do anything even as nukes rained from the sky, it is now that the Judges act. Booth has become, to them, just another criminal.

It is to the oldest US law of all – the Constitution – that the Judges turn. Citing the Hobbesian right under its social contract to remove a government that cannot guarantee the people's safety, they attempt to arrest Booth. In one of the most striking pages in the strip's history, dozens of uniformed Judges charge forward under the order to '***Take the White House!***', its familiar shape surrounded by flames and rubble. It is not an assault on Booth, but on democracy itself – cladding the president in chains but sensitive to their unprecedented step, they sentence him to a century of suspended animation.

Yet the crisis is not over, the world is in ruins. The Judges assume control and never leave. '***Congress and the Senate were suspended,***' says Dredd, '***they'd done nothing to curb Booth's excesses – they'd shown themselves to be toothless and irrelevant.***' They become Leviathan.

'LAW & ORDER!!!'

These three words have echoed throughout this book. They were also the war cry of then-President Donald Trump's campaign for re-election in 2020, referenced more than ninety times in a year, seven times in the first presidential debate, and even while he was hospitalised with Covid-19.[857]

While protests asked for an end to police brutality, his entreaties explicitly wove race and criminality together in a call not for the restoration of social consensus, or even justice, but a retributive response from the state.

This is the playbook laid down by Richard Nixon and Edward Heath in the 1960s and by Thatcher and Reagan in the 1970s. Their rhetoric was full of images of violent Black muggers, trade unionists, wild youths, and decaying cities. The old world was overwhelmed by crises, they insisted, and a corrective was required – not just a reordering of the economic order, but the security order to enforce it.

This would have been very familiar to Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci, who wrote in 1930 how the crisis 'consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear'.[858] In response to such morbidity, politicians talked of the 'rule of law', police chiefs warned of a collapse of civilisation, and culture became saturated with monsters willing to fight monsters, of ***Dirty Harry*** and ***The Sweeney***, brutal but righteous men willing to do what the system would not, doing what 'had to be done'. Gramsci understood this well. As the old order crumbles, rulers lose their capacity to lead through consent, and the masses yearn for a way forward; as Gramsci rotted in an Italian prison cell, the scared and radicalised bourgeoisie turned towards the comforting lies and brute strength of Nazism.

By summoning images of crime, violence, savagery and the Other, 'law and order' politics creates the 'crisis'. It is the language of fear, its very utterance summoning its antonym, comforting words instead evoking frightening images of chaos. It calls not for normalcy but for a new front in a forever war.

It has become an altar at which all politicians must now genuflect, lest they be branded 'soft on crime'. In surrendering to the carceral logic of 'law and order', Tony Blair's 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime' sparked a 'law and order' arms race in British politics that saw successive and ostensibly liberal Home Secretaries arguing for policies such as indefinite detention and saturating communities with CCTV. Even now, the watchword of Britain's current Labour opposition is 'security',[859] while its shadow Home Secretary blithely suggests granting police the power to summarily execute terror suspects and urges them to 'beat down the door of the criminals' in the dead of night to 'antagonise' them.[860]

It is the 'tough on crime' lexicon of the Judges: when asked to justify judicial rule ahead of the democracy referendum Dredd did not speak of politics or the benefits of the judicial system, he immediately conjures up a scenario that places the reader in the role of a victim: '***When some creep's holding a knife to your throat – who do you want to see riding up? Me? Or your "elected representative"?***' This threat, wrapped up in the language of safety, echoes the emergence of victims of crime as a 'dominant model of the citizen [that is] representative of the common person whose needs and capacities define the mission of representative government… these victims' truths are powerful, often overwhelming the emotional significance of other issues' and, criminologist Jonathan Simon says, undermining the 'solidarity and responsibility necessary for democratic institutions'.

As the proverbial hammer that sees everything as a nail, Dredd cannot consider society in any other terms besides crime and punishment. Lacking even the emotional grammar to consider things such as 'the causes of crime', crime prevention seems to him a waste of time – perps are perps; and eventually, all citizens are perps. It is this lack of emotional grammar that causes him to almost break down when he perceives 'The Big Lie' at the heart of the system he upholds.

The solution, offered by his mentor Morphy, was simply 'tighter boots'. Like a monk committing self-flagellation to drive away impure thoughts, Dredd's constant refusal to leave the streets, to adapt to a kind of administrative position more in tune with his seniority can be read as adrenaline addiction, but also as subconscious understanding that if he sits down and starts to think things through he will reach some unfortunate conclusions about his society and his place in it.

IN HIS 2001 BOOK, ***The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society***, criminologist David Garland argues that the political order in both Britain and the United States has been fundamentally reshaped by the fear of crime. This 'crime complex' 'stresses personal responsibility, rather than collective risk spreading,

and minimal protections against economic harm, with a harshly enforced, highly moralistic criminal law promising almost total protection against crime, while emphasising how dangerous the world still is despite these much-needed measures'.[861]

Such a 'complex' frames challenges, such as the control of border crossings by immigrants, in terms of a 'crisis' that justifies harsher, more punitive controls. By evoking the crisis, such repressive measures short-circuit democratic accountability and resolve ambiguity with the cold hard reasoning of 'legality'. As we saw in the last chapter, groups or individuals in society are identified as the Other as a precursor for their differential treatment, whether through increased surveillance or harsher policing.

'Security and protection are two of the most fundamental mechanisms that underpin the police power,' wrote Mark Neocleous.[862] 'But in security there is always insecurity and in protection there is always fear. One of the functions of the power of the monstrous is that it is crucial to the political construction of fear and insecurity. With the continual iteration of issues concerning order and disorder, security and identity, borders and boundaries, containment and excess, the discourses of monstrosity and police share a fundamental conceptual ground: a problem to be contained and a process of containment.'

Crime therefore becomes central to the exercise of ***any*** authority in a process Simon dubbed 'governing through crime'; a law of necessity, driven by narratives of fear, has come to determine not just crime policy and practice, but the broader tone and direction of government – a process known as ***securitisation***.[863]

Every issue is now one of 'security' – and it is a process that is not slowing down.[864] 'Things are moving fast,' warned philosopher Pierre Dardot and sociologist Christian Laval in their 2019 book ***Never-Ending Nightmare***. 'We are witnessing a significant acceleration in the economic and securitarian processes that are profoundly transforming our societies.'

Indeed, the years since 1980 have seen an ever-expanding – and accelerating – list of 'law and order' legislation. While there were only eleven such Acts in the 1980s and twelve the following decade, the

‘war on terror’ saw this leap to thirty-one in the 2000s and thirty-three in the 2010s. The two years since 2020 have seen more than a dozen such bills, with even more on the way.[865] In a crude realisation of Hayek’s belief that the state should be stripped away and left with only a single function, crime and its control has become the means of governance and a way of viewing the world.

‘Law and order’ had been proffered as the solution to the ‘crisis’ of the 1970s, a ‘short, sharp shock’ that would return things to how they had been. Yet that ‘return’ never came. Instead, ‘law and order’ has only grown.

As ‘Origins’ draws to a close, the mission to recover Fargo is successful. His frail body, damaged by cryogenic freezing, is failing. He speaks first to Chief Judge Hershey and then calls for Dredd and Rico, unaware that the latter is long dead.

‘***I’d tried to… to deny it,***’ he tells Dredd. ‘***But I… didn’t believe myself anymore… What we did – wrong. Too far. Went too far.***’

‘***Booth had to go,***’ replies Dredd. ‘***You did what had to be done.***’

‘***It was never meant to… be forever, Joe,***’ says Fargo as he weakly grips Dredd’s wrist. ‘***We created a monster – we, us, we’re the monster! We got greedy – wanted everything – so we killed the dream! We killed America! I’m asking you… begging you – my flesh, my blood… It’s not too late! Fix it, Joe! You – you and Rico – you can do it…’***

And with that, he dies.

It is a spine-tingling moment. In a single page, Wagner cast into doubt the entire history he had just set in stone. Here it was from the lips not of a democracy activist or bleeding-heart liberal, but from the iron father of justice himself – it was all a lie.

Wagner had touched on the ‘big lie’ before, it had been the idea around which Dredd’s doubts had coalesced before he took the Long Walk. This ‘big lie’ was different though, it wasn’t just doubt at the efficacy of the Judges’ rule, but at its very legality.

Rather than the founder of an eternal solution to humanity’s problems, Fargo had meant to embody the republican simplicity of Cincinnatus, the Roman dictator who handed power back after

thwarting an invasion, or of George Washington, who had returned to his slave plantation after seven years as an American dictator.[866] 'He gave up everything to serve the republic' had been the motto of the Society of the Cincinnati, a group of American revolutionary officers who, in 1783, elected Washington as their president.

The Judges, like the Roman dictators, had taken supreme power. Unlike Cincinnatus and Washington, they had not handed it back and returned to their ploughs. Like the imperial dictators that finally did away with the Roman republic altogether, they ensured that the emergency that had granted them their powers simply… endured. They entered into, as Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben theorised, the 'permanent state of exception'.[867]

Based on the theories of German legal theorist Carl Schmitt, who aided the Nazi regime in its complete takeover of Germany in the 1930s, the 'state of exception' is the power to suspend the legal system and declare a state of exception if the country faced an existential threat to its integrity.

Such emergency powers were not new – the powers of the US president have always technically been 'emergency' war powers – and Agamben suggested it was in World War One that many states found the taste for such 'crisis' legislation to effectively suspend the law. It was an appetite that only grew.

In Britain, such powers – introduced with the 1914 Defence of the Realm Act – did not recede with the Armistice, but found a new front at the factory gates as a 'state of emergency' was called to tackle striking workers;[868] when the German parliament building, the Reichstag, burned to the ground in February 1933, the Nazi regime – claiming Communists were planning a violent uprising – rushed through 'temporary measures' that suspended the Weimar constitution and paved the way for Nazi domination; and General Augusto Pinochet, the butcher of Chile, regularly extended the 'State of Threat to Internal Peace' emergency powers.[869] 'This will always remain one of the best jokes of democracy,' Joseph Goebbels once declared, 'that it gave its deadly enemies the means by which it was destroyed.'[870]

The 'legal dictatorship' is a warning from history about the dangers of legislating in a crisis. 'Such legislation 'is not a carte blanche for permanent restrictions,' Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, UN Special Rapporteur on counterterrorism and human rights, had warned the UN's Human Rights Council in 2018.[871] 'Nor is it a basis to abuse rights simply to consolidate power, to snuff out legitimate dissent, and to quell political opponents… Critically, any restriction must function as a means to return the legal system to normal, rights protective functioning.'

THE 'LEGAL' COUP of the Judges in 'Origins' was painfully timely – Britain had just introduced its fourth anti-terror law in under six years.[872] Following the 2005 London Underground bombings, the threat of Islamic terrorism was portrayed as being so serious that it was used to justify a wide range of new anti-terror measures, including the 2005 Prevention of Terrorism Act in the UK, which significantly increased the state's surveillance powers. This was another stage in the 'war on terror', which fuelled an appetite for relentless increases in security and new legislation granting sweeping powers that remain in place.

Like the Patriot Act in the US, many of these laws were passed with little true scrutiny, even as they slashed away at long-held rights in the name of 'security'. Under the state of emergency, prisoners captured in the 'war on terror' are treated as being without legal status; at the Guantánamo Bay detention centre, set up in 2002 at the US naval base in southeast Cuba, they are held in legal limbo – neither criminals nor enemy combatants – which allows them to be subjected to psychological and physical coercion that is 'tantamount to torture'.[873]

Even prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, many countries existed in a perpetual state of emergency. Between 1985 and 2014, at least one hundred and thirty-seven countries – roughly two thirds of all sovereign nations – declared a state of emergency at least once.[874]

For Agamben, such 'crises' open up the possibility for a radical new form of state power that is fundamentally anti-democratic, authoritarian, and which operates through a ***permanent*** state of

emergency. This licences the law to transgress its own limits, so that the law ***becomes*** its own exception, creating law that endlessly expands into every aspect of life, the distinction between staying within the law and breaking it disappears as its power becomes all-encompassing. We have discussed at length the powers of the Judges, the ludicrous sentences for minor offences, the constant surveillance, the impossibility of not committing a crime, the almost total scope of the 'Security of the City Act'. This is the infinite law of the Judges – a permanent state of exception.

Yet it is not unique to the post-9/11 world, or even the twentieth century; it is merely the West being subjected to some of the authoritarian, anti-democratic laws that colonies had endured for centuries – for the governance of the colony has always been a permanent state of emergency. As mentioned in chapter nine, the British regime in India regularly resorted to 'emergency' measures in order to maintain order and control, from the declaration of martial law to the suspension of the law to crush uprisings, police entire groups deemed 'criminal', and even suppress peaceful political protest – all within the law. 'The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the "state of emergency" in which we live is not the exception but the rule,' wrote the German Jewish philosopher Walter Benjamin in 1942.[875]

After the Judges deposed Booth, the seat of American power shifted from the White House to the 'Grand Hall of Justice'. Having a mansion built by enslaved people replaced with a glorified police station could not be a starker metaphor for the replacement of a grand colonial power with the all-encompassing exceptional governance of crime-fighting.[876]

'Origins' shows us not the beginning of Dredd himself but of the system that made him (quite literally). Like many other such systems it might hold a seed of truth at its core – Booth ***was*** corrupt and dangerous – but on top of that a mountain of lies is built. Fargo, that paragon of Justice upon which all Judges should be modelled, Dredd's own clone father, failed to uphold his own lofty standards, choosing to try to commit suicide (a fact that was subsequently hushed up).

If the man who designed the system couldn't commit to it, what chance do others have? ***'It wasn't meant to last forever'*** exposes the fragility of the lie; a house of cards built on corpses and prisons. Constantly collapsing, only to be rebuilt again.

'The more the dominant logic prevails,' wrote Dardot and Laval, 'the more it destroys anything that might check it, the more it is reinforced in accordance with a truly infernal logic.'[877]

FOURTEEN YEARS AFTER the publication of 'Origins', a new state of exception emerged with the coronavirus pandemic. One hundred and twenty-four countries declared a state of emergency in response to Covid-19.[878]

Underprepared for a pandemic and having refused to learn from simulation exercises and even actual incidents,[879] even as health systems buckled under the weight and begged for medical supplies, even as corruption and incompetence robbed the state purse of billions,[880] the British government rushed through emergency laws granting the police unprecedented powers to arrest and issue fines.

This used 'law and order in order to contain an imploding political crisis,' wrote Lambros Fatsis and Melayna Lamb in ***Policing the Pandemic***, 'by disguising a pathogen as a problem to be solved by law enforcement – as if it were a crime.' Unclear and unevenly applied, these powers landed heaviest on already over-policed communities; the disproportionate use of stop and search powers ballooned while dog walkers in national parks were harassed by police drones.[881] A year later, it was revealed that a third of almost two thousand prosecutions under coronavirus laws were wrongful.[882]

While such powers can be seen as reasonable in the face of a crisis, there is a deep reluctance of states to give up the power of the state of exception, even when faced with evidence of their iniquities. Despite a warning from the House of Lords that emergency powers should remain temporary,[883] after effectively declaring the pandemic 'over', the British government has sought to make permanent many of the draconian powers granted under coronavirus legislation, with the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill and new Public Order

Bill curtailing the right to protest and removing constraints on police power.

Meanwhile, in the US a new 'crisis' of crime – falsely blamed on Black Lives Matter and the 'defund the police' movement – has been met with more police, billions of dollars in new funding,[884] and an array of new powers, even as court systems buckled from underfunding and prisons became overcrowded places of lonely death.

'THOSE WHO WOULD give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety,' is Benjamin Franklin's oft-quoted (though misquoted) maxim for the conflict between democracy and security. Yet the people who had voted for the devil they knew, soon learned that Justice Department is actually very bad at keeping them safe.[885]

In fact, the story of 'Judge Dredd' could easily be dubbed the decline and fall of Mega-City One. With each passing year, the crises that envelop it have grown ever greater in number and size. The city has been cut in half by Soviet nukes, attacked repeatedly by the Dark Judges, overrun by zombies in 'Judgement Day',[886] attacked by rogue Judges from Titan in 'Inferno',[887] nearly toppled by criminal oligarch Nero Narcos in 'The Doomsday Scenario',[888] nearly replaced in 'Trifecta',[889] and almost destroyed by extra-terrestrial ice monsters in 'Enceladus'.[890] There are always new and greater monsters for Dredd to defeat, new disasters to overcome.

It is, of course, the nature of serialised storytelling – each new story must, the readers insist, be bigger and better than the last. However, the 'Day of Chaos' mega-epic drew down a crisis onto the city that called into question everything that had gone before.[891]

Beginning in late 2010 and the longest ever 'Dredd' epic, Wagner's 'Day of Chaos' was a multi-faceted drawing together of threads from the previous three decades that ran for almost two years in ***2000 AD***. As mentioned in chapter thirteen, three decades after the destruction of their city, the embittered survivors of East-Meg One launch a complex terror attack on Mega-City One.

Their plan is to use the city against itself: its complexity, its atomisation, its abrogation of the social, the very things that make the citizens easy for the Judges to control become their downfall. In a fitting call-back to the Block Mania virus used by the Sovs to weaken the city ahead of their invasion in 'The Apocalypse War', the Sov plan centres on the Chaos Bug – a weaponised virus that kills almost all it infects and, in the days before their death, makes them murderously violent. In the confusion, terrorists strike at the instruments of judicial control – the Statue of Judgement and the Academy of Law. So focused are the Judges on maintaining their rule that they have neither the tools nor even the imagination to protect against such a multi-form, decentralised attack.

Realising that their city is lost, they soon begin executing the infected and abandoning whole areas of the city. Mass graves are dug outside the walls, sports stadiums filled with the sick are sealed off. Such is the scale of the death and destruction that not even Dredd, the saviour of his city, has an answer. In a powerful image by Henry Flint, a shadow-wreathed Dredd stands, surrounded by ruins, his head lowered in abject defeat. '***Tomorrow will be worse,***' the narration warns. '***And the day after that… and the day after that… too grim to contemplate.***'

When 'Judge Dredd' began in 1977, Mega-City One had over eight hundred million citizens. By the time of 'Day of Chaos', it was reduced to fifty million. It had not even been decimated; it was one-twentieth of its former size – barely the modern population of north-eastern American megalopolis that originally inspired the city.[892] All this has taken place not just under the watchful gaze of Judges but as a consequence of Dredd's actions.

'***The Mega-City One we knew is gone,***' Dredd tells Hershey in a chilling foreshadowing of so many newspaper op-eds during the Covid-19 pandemic.[893] '***We have to accept that and move on.***'

However, moving on from such destruction was easier said than done. While Wagner intended 'Day of Chaos' as an opportunity for reinvention and rejuvenation, its sheer totality caught other writers off guard. 'We were sent a memo that told us exactly how bad it was going to get,' writer Al Ewing told ***SFX***,[894] 'but I personally still got

caught on the hop slightly when I rewrote the stories I had waiting to run. I didn't realise it'd be that bad, is all I can say. I'll be saying the same thing when the super hurricanes come and civilisation collapses – "I got the memo, but I didn't think it'd be that bad"'.

For Ewing and fellow writers Rob Williams and Simon Spurrier, the destruction of the Public Surveillance Unit and the power vacuum it created provided the opportunity for their 'Trifecta' crossover event; but for others, it should have irrevocably changed the emotional tone of the strip.[895] In Gordon Rennie and Emma Beeby's 'Suicide Watch', a Psi Division Judge exposes the psychological damage to survivors as suicide cults grow ever more popular. Regardless of the destruction and the resulting trauma, the people – broken, bowed, and terrified – are unable to do what the Judges had done, and overthrow a government unable to guarantee their safety.

Indeed, even as catastrophe after catastrophe descends on the city, in the logic of the Judges it only demonstrates and reinforces the need for their regime. It exposes how the 'law and order' age that began in the 1970s can become a self-sustaining 'method of government'.[896]

The term 'crisis' has lost its original meaning of a 'moment of disequilibrium and disorder', wrote Dardot and Laval, and instead has come to signify 'a permanent state, a regular condition rather than the disruption of an equilibrium': 'Every natural disaster, every economic crisis, every military conflict and every terrorist attack is systematically exploited by neoliberal governments to radicalize and accelerate the transformation of economies, social systems and state apparatuses.'

This, they stress, is not a conspiracy but an opportunistic 'crisis spiral' that feeds off the crises it creates, the chaos reinforcing the very system that caused it. 'Neoliberalism actively works to undo democracy,' they added. 'It does so by imposing, little by little, piece by piece, a comprehensive normative framework that enrols individuals and institutions in an implacable logic, defeating any capacity to resist and fight. And this logic does not diminish over time, but grows stronger.'

One of the ways in which John Wagner ensured Dredd's longevity was to avoid the apocalypticism inherent in Mills' version of the character, that constantly escalating action that made 'The Cursed Earth' so entertaining yet left the character with few places left to go.

Mills' work has always been apocalyptic, the natural polemical force of his writing on characters such as the superhero-killing police officer ***Marshal Law*** and alien freedom fighter 'Nemesis the Warlock' needs and demands a cathartic resolution. Wagner, though, understood that Dredd must always remain. Just like his system, to die is to lose.

Many readers find this intolerable. In a strip that exists in linear time, the inevitability of death clamours for conclusion, for an end to Dredd. Ultimately, this is the satire of 'Judge Dredd'. Systems of repression are all too aware of their mayfly existence, yet power wants to exist indefinitely. When faced with such a concept, we know that it is unbearable. At his heart, Dredd ***is*** intolerable and yet he must last forever. 'Judge Dredd' warns us that the 'law and order' crisis born in the 1970s, which now defines our society and continues to demand ever greater mechanisms of retribution and control, can never end.

It is not churlish to compare Fargo to Margaret Thatcher. Both of them overthrew established orders to help create systems of discipline and punishment that continued, and grew, without them. Thatcherism outlived Thatcher, and Fargo's regime endured without him, just as 'law and order' has now become so embedded into the country's political system that it is now impossible to remove it. Truly, as Thatcher made clear, there is no alternative.

'Wars' against drugs, against crime, and against terror have lasted half a century and by 'necessity' have demanded that the law be suspended, altered, eroded. There is always some new insecurity which requires a punitive response, that requires that we give up some trifling freedom.

Yet it is a system that leaves us vulnerable to systemic shock. And there are more shocks to come. The devastating effects of man-made climate change are starting to be felt: harvests fail, habitats degrade, extreme weather intensifies. In the face of an existential threat to

humanity's survival, which already falls most heavily on the poor and marginalised, the carceral logic of the security state promises only to maintain a system that does not wish to change.

'Security is to keep oneself on the right side of disaster,' wrote French philosopher Frédéric Gros in ***The Security Principle***. 'Security is: again, for a while longer, still the same. Security renews, perseveres, insists. It holds, maintains, retains. Yet, as Walter Benjamin wrote, "that things are 'status quo' ***is*** the catastrophe".'

Even as Fargo's body goes cold, the Judges cannot bring themselves to listen to his words. At a small ceremony to inter Fargo in the tomb he had never occupied, Dredd asks Hershey what her predecessor had said to her. '***Nothing important,***' she replies. '***Glad to see the city in safe hands, keep the faith.***'

'***You?***' she asks.

'***Pretty much the same,***' Dredd says, blankly. '***Pretty much the same.***'

As renowned criminologist Otwin Marenin put it, the quality of policing is the quality of ruling.[897] In the face of the exponential growth of inequality, the cries of the dispossessed, our looming existential dissolution, it is a mode of ruling that will demand ever greater 'securitarian' measures – greater powers, fewer freedoms, more scrutiny, less accountability. The war on drugs, the war on crime, the war on terror – these are all crises that have seen the law suspended, altered, eroded. All in the name of necessity.

Like the Judges, if we do not change we will find ourselves overwhelmed, standing in the rubble of our certainties, and knowing that tomorrow will only be worse. The rule of the Judges is not a solution to humanity's problems, but a Gramscian 'morbid symptom'. To paraphrase Labour politician Aneurin Bevan's famous quote about fascism, Mega-City One is not in itself a new order of society. It is the future refusing to be born.[898]

'***Nothing lasts forever,***' Hershey tells Dredd at Fargo's funeral. That may be true, but the Judges can never accept that – though even Wagner admits a question mark lingers over whether Fargo would have uttered his final words had he not been dying.[899]

Those words – '***It wasn't meant to last forever***' – effectively turn 'Dredd' into a horror story. All of the death, the destruction, the pain, the loss, all of it was meant to be temporary. Yet, like Judge Death, Dredd can never die.

THE CRISIS IS eternal.

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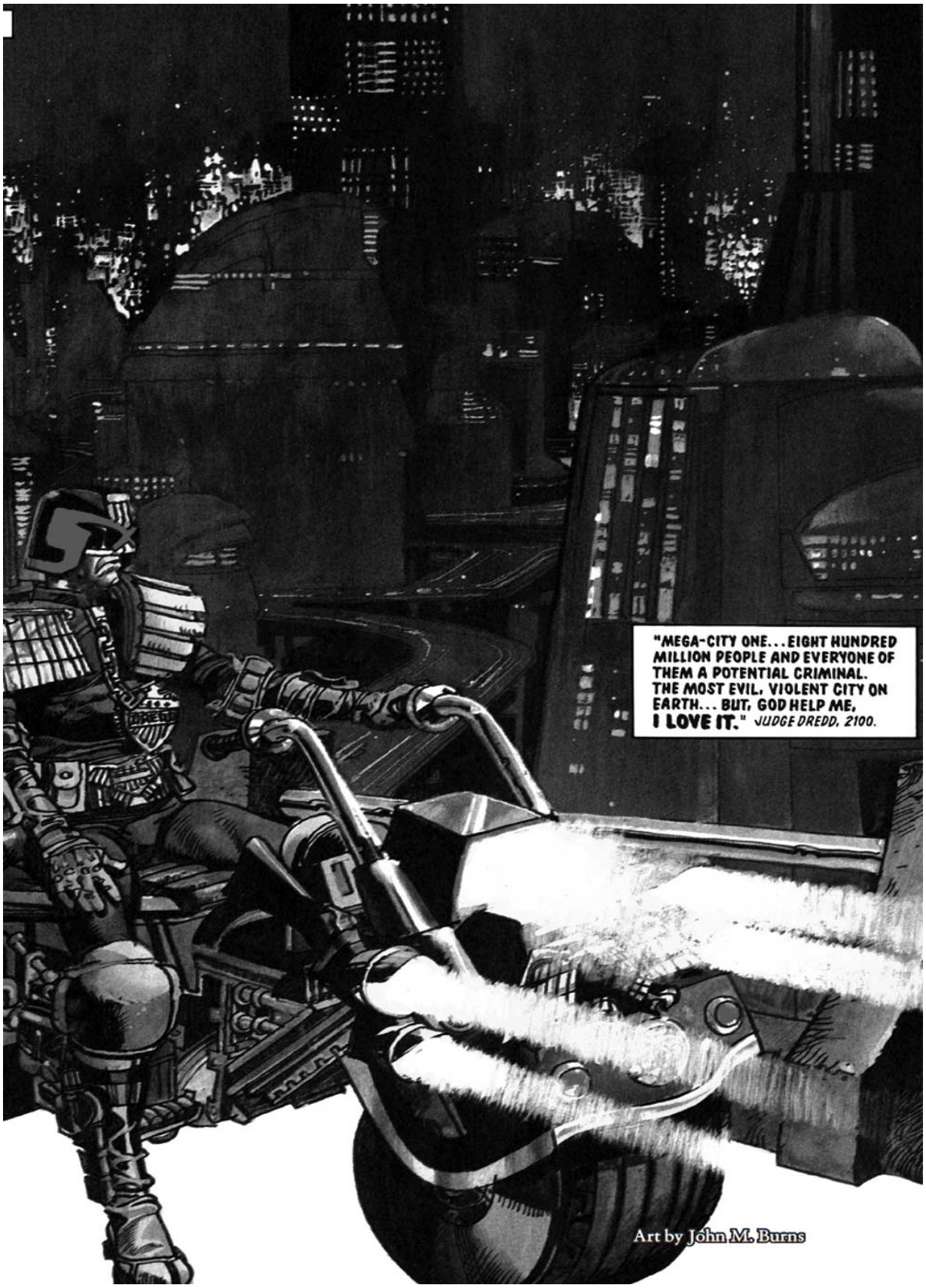

Art by John M. Burns

CONCLUSION

'You'd think in the 21st Century we could wipe out crime – but guess there'll always be punks like you!'
– Judge Dredd, 'The Statue of Judgement' (1977)

THIS STORY BEGAN with a world where violence and chaos seemed to reign, where a wild, chain-wielding teen was another spectre conjured up by newsprint in a decade of nightmares. Society could not bear the weight of the manifold crises it faced, but there were simple solutions to hard problems. The 'old ways' had supposedly failed, there was to be no sympathy for post-war social welfarism as it was replaced and transformed by the white-hot fire of the free market – a revolution to be shepherded by the uniformed ranks of the police.

At the very moment that the violence and Manichean worldview of colonial policing marched into the imperial metropole, as 'snatch squads' dragged away protesters on the streets of Lewisham and phalanxes of police waded into strikers outside the gates of Grunwick, legions of children were reading the adventures of John Wagner and Carlos Ezquerra's hard-line super-cop who would brook no argument and give no mercy.

These two stories have run in parallel, one an inverted reflection of the other, one promising 'iron times' and the other warning of their consequences.

Indeed, as we have seen, over the forty-five years since his debut Judge Dredd has come to act less as a warning of what ***might*** happen and more a record of what ***is*** happening.

THAT FIRST PAGE of 'Judge Whitey' laid everything out – a state where a democracy in crisis has been discarded as the police, in a self-sustaining and eternal war on crime, wield the power of life over death, their high-minded dogma about 'order' and 'justice' allowing neither check nor challenge. Together, Wagner, Mills, Harris, Gosnell, Ezquerra and McMahon laid down the foundations of a satire that would both cut to the heart of the historical moment and track the

slow, steady march toward authoritarianism that had already begun. Even after almost half a century of change, this remains the bedrock upon which 'Dredd' is built.

Similarly, the changes in policing since the 1970s are not some new corruption or a break with the past – as in 'Dredd', the constant surveillance and 'stop and search', the brutal enforcement of 'zero tolerance' and the militarisation of policing, were always a reality for those considered 'police property'. Robert Peel and his successors helped craft a national myth of the benign 'Bobby' who policed 'by consent', but the contradiction of this for those who could not or would not consent remained unacknowledged and unaddressed.

As society has fragmented and the assumptions of capitalist liberalism have become contested, deep fissures have grown as the police are able to surveil, arrest, harass, and even kill those society deem acceptable casualties in the 'war on crime'.

In the same way that Dredd's satire of 'law and order' is hardwired into his being, the details and cases we have examined are not some slow degradation or an adulterating of an Elysian past where policing was virtuous and just, but an original sin.

CRITICS WHO DISMISS Dredd as a crude satire best left to the Thatcherite past miss the ambiguous duality that makes him both a compelling character and an enduring metaphor. Possessing what writer Neil Gaiman called the quality of being both 'the thing' and 'the critique of the thing',[900] Dredd exposes the contradiction of policing, what scholar Stuart Schrader described as liberalism's 'cohabitation of the liberal and illiberal' – an institution that speaks of protection and security, yet – for too many people – provides neither and instead increasingly relies on coercion and confrontation, while insisting that 'whatever measures may be necessary are necessary'.[901]

This contradiction is embedded in Wagner's Dredd, a hero and a villain, the 'good' servant of a 'bad' system, the brave, bad man. It is a moral enigma that issues a challenge to the reader – how far is too far? How complicit are you willing to be? At what point will you say 'no'? It is the same question that our societies face over policing, one posed with ever greater urgency in the wake of the Black Lives Matter

movement, the increasingly short cycles between scandal and proposed reform that never seems to deliver, and the suppression of dissent. What are you willing to allow in order to feel 'safe'? Whose safety are you willing to sacrifice? How many police, how many laws, how many restrictions will finally fulfil the 'promise' of policing that it can 'win' the war on crime?

'***Mega City will be crime-free. Trust in the Judges!***' read the 'Covenant of the Judges', displayed in the 'Justice Day' parade in Prog 26.[902] Behind it, another float carried a huge vision of a twenty-second century Leviathan – a statue of a Judge, one arm cradling the Book of Law, the other holding aloft a sword in the Hobbesian compact.

Forty-five years on, it is clear that Dredd is a failed Leviathan. Despite its vast armadas and unimaginable powers, Justice Department has not kept its citizens safe. The punitive police state and mass incarceration has solved nothing – the city is still full of crime, still vulnerable to systemic shocks that kill millions, still unable to deliver anything other than the meanest, barest life. All the Judges do is preserve their world in aspic, a failed world, one held forever on the point of collapse. The strip gloriously exposes the emptiness of 'law and order' rhetoric – how it fails in the very mission it claims to be the only solution to. While the scene at Leviathan's feet in Hobbes' frontispiece is a bucolic one, such a merciless and unchecked sovereign could never bring peace because its methods are power and violence, not the promotion of liberty and happiness, but the reign of fear.

From the very start, 'Dredd' exposed this deeper truth about the nature of police power: they were not created to provide justice but to reproduce order, which is different to safety. It is the unspoken truth that there is no correlation between the number of police and the rise and fall of crime rates: 'The police do not prevent crime,' policing scholar David Bayley stressed.[903] 'This is one of the best-kept secrets of modern life. Experts know it, the police know it, but the public does not know it. Yet the police pretend that they are society's best defence against crime and continually argue that if they are

given more resources, especially personnel, they will be able to protect communities against crime. This is a myth.'

And yet, as new moral panics unfold, politicians can only ever promise more police, more equipment, more powers. In the US, barely two years since the Black Lives Matter protests President Biden announced his 'Safer America Plan' for a hundred thousand more police officers, while British political parties argue over how ***they*** will boost the number of officers as a 'solution' to interlocking crises created by their own policies. Yet there are never plans to address poverty, homelessness, racial injustice, drug overdoses – the state merely turns to the police to paper over their failures with more violence, greater incarceration.

'Crime, crime, crime,' Boris Johnson insisted as he sought to deflect attention from revelations that he and his staff had broken the strict Covid-19 restrictions they instructed the rest of the country to follow.[904] The moral panic of crime has become a reflexive response, a recourse to fear, to violence, a rejection of complexity, of community. It is all they have, the punitive impulse, the lever of crime – governing us since the 1970s even as governments and politicians reserve the right to break it themselves, even as they diminish justice and its wellspring, democracy.

At the same time, they have sought to remove checks and balances on their power. As they branded judges 'enemies of the people' and condemned 'lefty lawyers' for thwarting their punitive policies, the Conservatives have overseen a systematic defunding of the criminal legal system, leaving accused and victim alike waiting years for justice and remedy – all the while espousing 'tough on crime' policies.

This imbalance of power was explicitly tackled in 1981's 'Lawmaster on the Loose'. After the artificial intelligence on board a Judge's Lawmaster is damaged, it goes on a rampage, running over and gunning down citizens over trivial misdemeanours such as dropping litter, walking on a pavement, or, for one unlucky Judge, 'bleeding on the public highway'.[905] Unconstrained, the bike's incredible firepower makes it almost impossible to stop. After it blasts its way into a monorail carriage and slaughters the occupants, Dredd

fires at its fuel tank, obliterating the bike, the carriage, and a whole section of the track.

As Dredd stands over a huge pile of twisted and bloodied bodies, a sole surviving citizen dangles over the shattered edge of the monorail, holding onto Dredd's ankles for dear life. '***Y-you did it!***' he says. '***You're a brave man, Judge Dredd! What would we do without the Judges to protect us?***' His question, framed by wholesale death and destruction, is a blackly sarcastic barb. 'Judge Dredd' is a riotous, cynical laugh, delivered from the crowd before a gallows, about the emptiness of a system that talks of justice when it is designed only to reproduce order by any means necessary.

That satire has grown only sharper. Indeed, 'Dredd' predicted how the very idea of 'security' would become synonymous with the notion of the state – for in the twenty-first century, just like the Justice Department of Chief Judge Fargo, policing has become government and government has become policing. Much like the strip, the process of 'securitisation' has become self-sustaining. Security is 'forever expansive,' wrote Schrader, it is 'forever unfinished, forever self-justifying. Security is, according to its own imperatives, simply forever. Until it is not'.

Our world of ever greater emphasis on policing was not brought into being by rising crime rates or some new social pathology or corruption, but instead has been formed by the reactionary 'law and order' politics that have come to dominate Britain and America over the last fifty years. This was a reaction not to crime or criminality per se but to change, both social and economic.[906] The prism of crime and of policing has become the lens through which the world is seen, a cold, hard vision of the world as a place of control and domination, which insists it is the only way to combat the demons it has evoked.

On the very last page of 'America' in 1991, artist Colin MacNeil painted an extreme close up of Dredd's face, the visor of his helmet reflecting nothing but a sharp flash of blue light. In staccato captions, Dredd tells the reader that democracy and freedom are mere dreams, whereas his way is the truth. '***This is the real world,***' he says. It is an implacable statement, delivered with cast iron certainty, a

monochrome vision of the world consumed by the 'police fetishism' we know only too well.

YET, THE LAST few years have demonstrated a growing popular resistance to policing that has not been seen for decades. Questions are now asked as to whether the cycles of reform and endless training can actually change the fundamental truth that for increasing numbers of people, policing provides only order, not safety. Far from being the cold, hard truth, 'law and order' is the corrupting lullaby of power, a politics of fear spewing reassuring words. As we face a set of existential challenges, many of them ignored and exacerbated by the capitalist order that now seeks protection from the people it exploits, those same songs play out ever louder from TV screens, newspaper headlines, and internet op-eds.

'To see Britain through the hard years ahead we need a leader able to harness the protective power of Leviathan,' wrote former war reporter Aris Roussinos, as he lamented the lack of political will to tackle such crises.[907] Yet to yearn for the Leviathan is to invite the same catastrophes that got us to this point. We may cross our fingers and hope that, this time, power will be good, will serve our best interests, will keep us safe, give us justice and be the brave, bad man that we think we need.

'I truly believe that one good Judge is worth a thousand protest marches,' Bennett Beeny wrote in a final note to his daughter America, named after the idealist friend he betrayed and who he has enrolled to become a Judge.[908] Even after everything Justice Department had done to him and those he loved, he still believed that it was redeemable.

But power only ever serves itself.

If Dredd truly understood justice, he would know that it is not to be found in retribution. If we are to have justice in this world, we know that it will not come through the power of Leviathan, nor through cops and guns – it can only be achieved through the end of such things. Rather than embracing still further a view of the world based on control and war – which only fills the prison and the graveyard – true

justice comes with cooperation, equality, and solidarity. As long as Dredd and his system persist, the future will struggle to be born.

With this stoic, ambiguous, and ridiculous super-cop who asks such searching questions of power and justice, John Wagner has proven himself to be one of our greatest living writers, the last forty-five years a towering monument to his skill and that of his close collaborators, especially Alan Grant.

In the black comedy, the violence, the stark morality, in the system's 'Big Lie' and its aversion to change, Wagner's wild, over-the-top, harsh and implacable police officer has been comics', and arguably the world's, most nuanced, authentic, complex, and challenging satire of policing.

For 'Judge Dredd' is – and always has been – a warning, not a manual.

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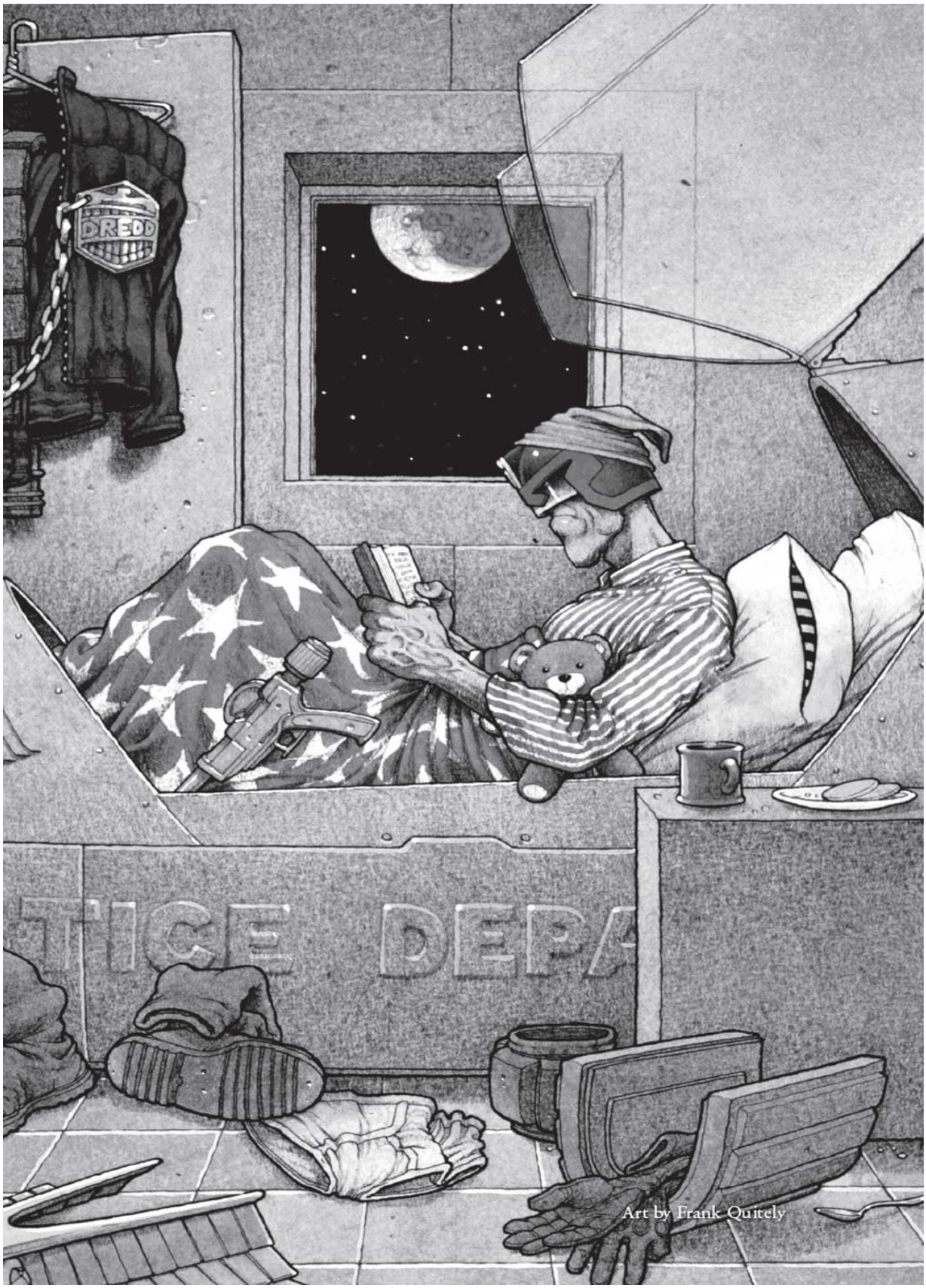

Art by Frank Quitely

FURTHER READING

As there are citations throughout this book, a bibliography seems unnecessary. Instead, listed below are some titles for further reading, should you wish to explore the themes and ideas of this book for yourself. Some of them will have appeared only fleetingly in the text, if at all, yet will have been major influences on the thinking behind it.

On 'Judge Dredd'

Although tackling forty-five years of continuous storytelling can seem daunting, there are multiple ways to begin reading 'Dredd' and often diving straight in is the best way. The ***Judge Dredd: The Complete Case Files*** series from Rebellion Publishing reprints all of the 'Judge Dredd' stories in their original order (you can begin at volume one, though volumes four and five are also good starting points). The new ***Essential Judge Dredd*** series packages up key stories, the 'America' collection collects early stories in the 'democracy' storyline.

The key texts about the history of 'Judge Dredd' and ***2000 AD*** are David Bishop's ***Thrill-power Overload*** (updated by Karl Stock in 2017 for the comic's fortieth anniversary) and ***Judge Dredd: The Mega-History*** by Colin Jarman and Peter Acton. While it only runs up to 1995, the latter is ***the*** forensic history of the early years of 'Judge Dredd' and provided much of the historical detail about the strip in this book.

The perfect short primer, however, is Tom Shapira's masterful ***The Lawman***, which takes the five pages of 'Judge Whitey' and uses them to expound on the wider themes of the strip as well as show how much of its foundations were laid down at the very beginning.

On policing

The two key books I have relied on are Robert Reiner's ***The Politics of the Police*** and Alex Vitale's ***The End of Policing***. The former is

more of a textbook than a narrative, but its sections on the early history, the politicisation of and media representations of policing were invaluable. With the surge of interest in police defunding and abolitionism that came with the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, Vitale's book became the go-to for people seeking to understand the roots, contradictions, and brutalities of modern policing; although its focus is on the US, his wider work examines the consequences of and answers to our modern fetishism for policing.

For general histories on British policing, historian Clive Emsley's ***The Great British Bobby*** and ***The English Police*** are broad and very readable, though very much geared towards the police's point of view, while his excellent ***Violence in England since 1750*** puts paid to the idea of England as some kind of peaceful idyll of consensus and even-handedness.

Chapter 1: Action, Crisis & Crime

The big hardcover of Martin Barker's ***Action: The Story of a Violent Comic*** is currently out of print, which is a shame because his detailing of the birth, zenith, death, and neutered rebirth of ***Action*** is essential reading for understanding how its ground-breaking stories became caught up in the 'moral panic' of the 1970s around crime and disorder. Martin's ***A Haunt of Fears*** is also the key examination of Britain's bizarre nativist reaction against American comics in the 1950s.

Published just a year after ***Action*** was finally folded into ***Battle***, to describe ***Policing the Crisis*** by Stuart Hall and his colleagues at the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies as a landmark book doesn't really do it justice. It has had an enduring influence on historians looking at the roots of Thatcherism, as well as sociologists examining the effects of emerging forms of mass culture on society, and it is the spiritual inspiration behind ***I Am The Law***. It is a weighty and involved read (I recommend getting the thirty-fifth anniversary edition with its useful postscript), but worth it to understand the 'moral panic' that emerged around mugging early in the decade and how it evolved into what Hall called the 'law and order society'.

I did not find a non-academic book on Margaret Thatcher that I felt properly grappled with the consequences of her 'law and order' rhetoric, though the work of criminologist Phil Scraton was invaluable in tracing its move toward the 'popular authoritarianism' that Hall described.

Chapter 2: Judge Whitey

The best books on ***Dirty Harry*** and the vigilante cop genre are ***Dirty Harry's America*** by Joe Street and ***Thrillers*** by Martin Rubin; the latter is a broader examination of the genre and traces its lineage from the hardboiled detective to the 'police thriller' that still holds film and TV in its grip, while the former is a very detailed sociological critique of ***Dirty Harry*** and its sequels, as well as America's political 'backlash' against the civil rights era.

Very helpful for both this and the previous chapter were Andy Beckett's excellent history of the 1970s, ***When the Lights Went Out*** – the only mainstream history of the period I could find that bothers to even mention 'Judge Dredd' – and Jon Savage's seminal story of punk, ***England's Dreaming***.

Chapter 3: The Return of Rico

A good precis of police corruption in the 1970s is Neil Root's ***Crossing the Line of Duty: How Corruption, Greed and Sleaze Brought Down the Flying Squad*** while Kristian Williams' ***Our Enemies in Blue: Police and Power in America*** eviscerates the myth of the 'bad apple'.

Chapter 4: The Day The Law Died

This chapter was inspired by Greg Grandin's brilliant Pulitzer Prize-winning ***The End of the Myth***, which examines the violence of the American frontier and how the border wall (not just Trump's) is now the symbol of America.

Border and Rule is Harsha Walia's brilliant dissection of the global migration crisis, nationalism, capitalism and how borders exist as

political, social, cultural and economic barriers – well worth seeking out.

Chapter 5: Block War

Most of the books about automation and unemployment either seem to be by excitable 'tech bro' types salivating at the prospect of not having to provide American workers with healthcare, or are out-of-date before they even make it to bookshelves. However, Guy Standing's work on the 'precariat' is this chapter's key inspiration and – although not mentioned in the text – Mike Davis' ***Planet of Slums*** is an important read on the evolving nature of cities and work. I would also recommend David Graeber's ***The Utopia of Rules***, which leaps from critiquing bureaucracy and right-wing economics to talking about Sherlock Holmes and Batman. In fact, any work by Graeber, who sadly died in 2021, is worth your time – a thinker as close to the heart of 'Judge Dredd' as any other.

Chapter 6: A Knock on the Door

It is hard not to be affected by the palpable anger of the excellent short essays in ***Abolishing the Police***, which is edited by Koshka Duff – to whom the Met was forced to apologise for officers' abusive language while she was strip-searched after offering a legal advice card to a Black teenager during his stop and search.

Similarly, Adam Elliott-Cooper's ***Black Resistance to British Policing*** is an essential book on how 'sus' may have given way to 'stop and search', but the outcome is the same. It also examines how suspicion of Black communities drives the criminalisation of young people.

Although it is about the riots in Brixton later in the 1980s, Lee Lawrence's award-winning ***The Louder I Will Sing: A Story of Racism, Riots and Redemption*** is about his mother, Cherry Groce, who was shot by police during a raid on her home in 1985, and is a powerful memoir about growing up in modern Britain as a young Black man.

Chapter 7: Unamerican Graffiti

There are a number of histories of American graffiti and hip-hop culture, and I cannot claim to be an expert, but Jeff Chang's ***Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*** is an excellent read.

Two books very useful in tracing the rise and spread of 'broken windows' and 'zero tolerance', as well as placing them in their contemporary context were Jordan T. Camp & Christina Heatherton's ***Policing the Planet: Why the Policing Crisis Led to Black Lives Matter*** and Michael S. Sherry's ***The Punitive Turn in American Life***.

Chapter 8: The League of Fatties

For the broader idea of 'governing through crime' and the carceral society, Nils Christie's ***Crime Control as Industry***, and Loic Wacquant's ***Punishing The Poor*** and ***Urban Outcasts*** are seminal texts on the subject. For more on the ongoing prisons crisis, please follow and support the work of the Howard League for Penal Reform (named not after Wagner's pseudonym but rather the eighteenth-century prison reformer).

On the anaesthetising effect of hyper-capitalist mass culture, ***Amusing Ourselves to Death*** by Neil Postman, published in 1985, chimed neatly with what Wagner and Grant had been doing for several years by that point.

Chapter 9: Rumble in the Jungle

The militarisation of policing and the key role colonialism has played in that process could have filled the entire book, and there are plenty of great titles to recommend, though most focus on the appalling situation in the US. The most obvious is Radley Balko's ***The Rise of the Warrior Cop***, though its most recent edition is now almost a decade old. Greg Grandin's ***Empire's Workshop***, Stuart Schrader's ***Badges without Borders***, and Spencer Ackerman's ***Reign of Terror*** cover the situation since as well as the wider history. For a British

perspective, the radical philosophy of Mark Neocleous is another major influence on this book, particularly ***War Power, Police Power*** and ***A Critical Theory of Police Power***.

Chapter 10: Letter from a Democrat

The works of Hannah Arendt – ***The Origins of Totalitarianism*** and ***On Violence*** – are obvious recommendations, as is any collection of George Orwell's articles and letters. While Robert O. Paxton's ***The Anatomy of Fascism*** provides a very readable historical footing for the collapse of democracy and rise of totalitarianism in Europe, Timothy Snyder's ***On Tyranny*** gives a powerful warning of the steps being taken today that are leading us toward fascism, while Anne Applebaum's ***Twilight of Democracy*** helped form the backbone of this chapter. For Ece Temelkuran, this is not a potential future but a living present – in ***How to Lose a Country: The Seven Steps from Democracy to Dictatorship*** she describes how Turkey fell to Erdoğan's populist authoritarianism.

In addition, what Pinochet did to the people of Chile, with the support of the British and American governments, is all too easily forgotten but Peter Read and Marivic Wyndham's ***Narrow But Endlessly Deep*** goes some way to describing the lasting pain caused by his brutal authoritarian dictatorship.

Chapter 11: Revolution

Matt Foot and Morag Livingstone's excellent ***Charged: How the Police Try to Suppress Protest*** came out just after this chapter was completed, so I was not able to reference it in the text. Alasdair Roberts' ***The End of Protest*** covers similar ground and is a short guide to how neoliberal states have developed to police and suppress dissent.

The best book on the 'spycops' scandal is by those most affected by it – the victims of undercover police officers. ***Deep Deception: The Story of the Spycop Network, by the Women who Uncovered the Shocking Truth*** is well worth your time.

Chapter 12: Necropolis

The desire to explore 'deathworthiness' in relation to ‘Judge Dredd’ came from reading Nickie D Phillips and Staci Strobl's excellent 2013 analysis of the legal and moral dimensions of superheroes, ***Comic Book Crime: Truth, Justice, and the American Way***.

Achille Mbembe’s work can be quite dense to just plunge into, but ***On The Postcolony*** and ***Necropolitics*** also inspired this chapter. I have tried to avoid relying too heavily on Michel Foucault’s work, however ***Discipline and Punish*** is his key text and a good starting point to understand those who come after him. Georgio Agamben’s ***Homo Sacer*** is very readable, though his most recent work is best avoided. I also recommend the online article ‘Death Drive Nation’ by journalist Patrick Blanchfield.

Chapter 13: The Cal Files

Mass surveillance is a subject that is growing at such pace that it can be difficult to keep up and, while it is so widely known that it seems obvious to recommend, Shoshana Zuboff’s ***The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*** was key to developing this chapter. Referenced in the previous chapter on Judge Cal, Anna Funder’s ***Stasiland*** is still a masterpiece after almost two decades, a personal and evocative but unsentimental analysis of the Stasi’s reign of surveillance terror.

Chapter 14: The Runner

There have been so many great books over the last few years that seek to show how race and racism is embedded in British culture and, specifically, British policing. Adam Elliott-Cooper’s aforementioned ***Black Resistance to British Policing*** was key for this chapter but other important titles for its formulation were Akala’s ***Natives: Race and Class in the Ruins of Empire***, ***Why I’m No Longer Talking To White People About Race*** by Reni Eddo-Lodge and Mariame Kaba’s ***We Do This ’Til We Free Us.*** And the lessons of Angela Y. Davis’ landmark 1981 book, ***Women, Race and Class***,

are an indispensable read alongside James Baldwin's ***The Fire Next Time***.

Specifically in relation to comics, Qiana Whitted's Eisner Award-winning ***EC Comics: Race, Shock & Social Protest*** is a brilliant book about the publisher whose works were the subject of America's great 'moral panic' over comic books in the 1960s.

Chapter 15: Origins

Naomi Klein's ***The Shock Doctrine*** is the standard text explaining how capitalism uses crisis to advance its means of control and remains even more relevant today than when it was written.

I regret barely touching on the work of Walter Benjamin in this book, not least because ***The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*** has such major relevance to the creation and production of comics. However, his ***Theses on the Philosophy of History*** is essential reading in this age of eternal crisis.

But we come full circle back to the prophetic works of Stuart Hall. The collection of his political writing, ***The Great Moving Right Show and Other Essays***, is a useful reminder that – as per the theme of this book – where we are now was readily foreseen forty-five years ago.

Art by Mick McMahon

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It is a near certainty that there are errors contained within the text. If there are then they are all, without a shadow of doubt, no one else's but mine.

While a great many people have helped me in various ways, there are a few I would like to thank personally.

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The idea for this book grew out of a series of features and interviews I wrote for the ***Judge Dredd: The Mega Collection*** partworks series from 2015-18. I would like to thank Isabelle Couderc, Helen Nally, Sarah Gale, Tom Bath, and Rahela Begum at Hachette Partworks for that opportunity.

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I can still remember my parents buying me my first regular comic book, a copy of Marvel UK's ***Transformers***, in 1985. Three years later, during a cold Easter holiday in North Wales, they gave me the money to buy a copy of ***The Best of 2000 AD Monthly***. Since then,

there have no doubt been times when they have regretted sparking this lifelong obsession – and I have rarely made things easy. Yet they have never wavered in their love, support and guidance, even in the very darkest of times. To them, and to the rest of my family, I owe absolutely everything.

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Splundig Vur Thrigg.

Michael Molcher
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'The futures that I, Tharg the Cautionary, depict in each week's prog are only several of the infinite possibilities that lie before us all. It's your world… don't foul it up!'

– Tharg the Mighty, *2000* ***AD*** Prog 578 (1988)

Photo by Pat Loika

MICHAEL MOLCHER IS a comics journalist, award-winning podcaster, and publicist. Previously a local newspaper reporter and then a government shill, he has been ***2000 AD***'s publicity droid for more than a decade and is now its brand manager.

He has written extensively about comics for ***SFX***, ***Comic Heroes***, ***politics.co.uk***, ***2000 AD***, ***Judge Dredd Megazine***, and ***2000 AD: The Ultimate Collection.*** His interviews with many of the creators who have worked for ***2000 AD*** over its forty-five year history are collected in the ***2000 AD: The Creator Interviews*** eBook series. From 2015 he wrote an extensive series of critical pieces about 'Judge Dredd' for Hachette Partworks' ***Judge Dredd: The Mega Collection*** series, out of which came the idea for this book.

He lives in dystopian Oxford with his wife and their cat.