

# STOP THE WAR ON THE POOR



OR: DUMP ALL PIGS!





# STOP THE WAR ON THE POOR!

Cancel all laws used against homeless people, sex workers, and drug users, and abolish all cops, bylaw officers, and security guards!

Our poor people's movement fights for a global, social redistribution of wealth so that no one exists who is hungry, houseless, or otherwise without the things we need and desire. There is no mainstream political party in Canada or the US that is proposing wealth redistribution at the scale we would need in order to end the miserable poverty that plagues our communities. We must, therefore, resist, fight back, and take what is ours.

Our communities "expropriate the expropriators" every day through survival acts like doing work slowdowns and calling in sick, shoplifting, break and enter robbery, selling drugs, doing sex work. And for our perseverance, stealing bread to feed the hungry, the police come after us and lock us up. Our criminalized activity is not collective political activity, but it contains the seeds of the resistance we need in order to fight against the dominating power of colonialism and capitalism.

Join us and fight to abolish the laws, police, courts, and prisons that criminalize our survival, surveil and repress our movements, and keep our people poor!

THIS ZINE WAS MADE BY:

RED BRAID ALLIANCE  
(FORMERLY ALLIANCE AGAINST DISPLACEMENT)  
[WWW.STOPDISPLACEMENT.CA](http://WWW.STOPDISPLACEMENT.CA)  
[ORGANIZE@STOPDISPLACEMENT.CA](mailto:ORGANIZE@STOPDISPLACEMENT.CA)

Red Braid Alliance is an anti-colonial & anti-capitalist organization devoted to building indigenous & working class power.

The June 8th Network was started by poor & homeless tent city activists in Victoria in June 2019. We want to build poor people's power by connecting our struggles for freedom across BC.

Right now we have two campaigns: **ABOLISH SUPPORTIVE HOUSING** aims to expose the jail-like institutions that poor people are shovelled into, so that we can clear the way for the housing we deserve.

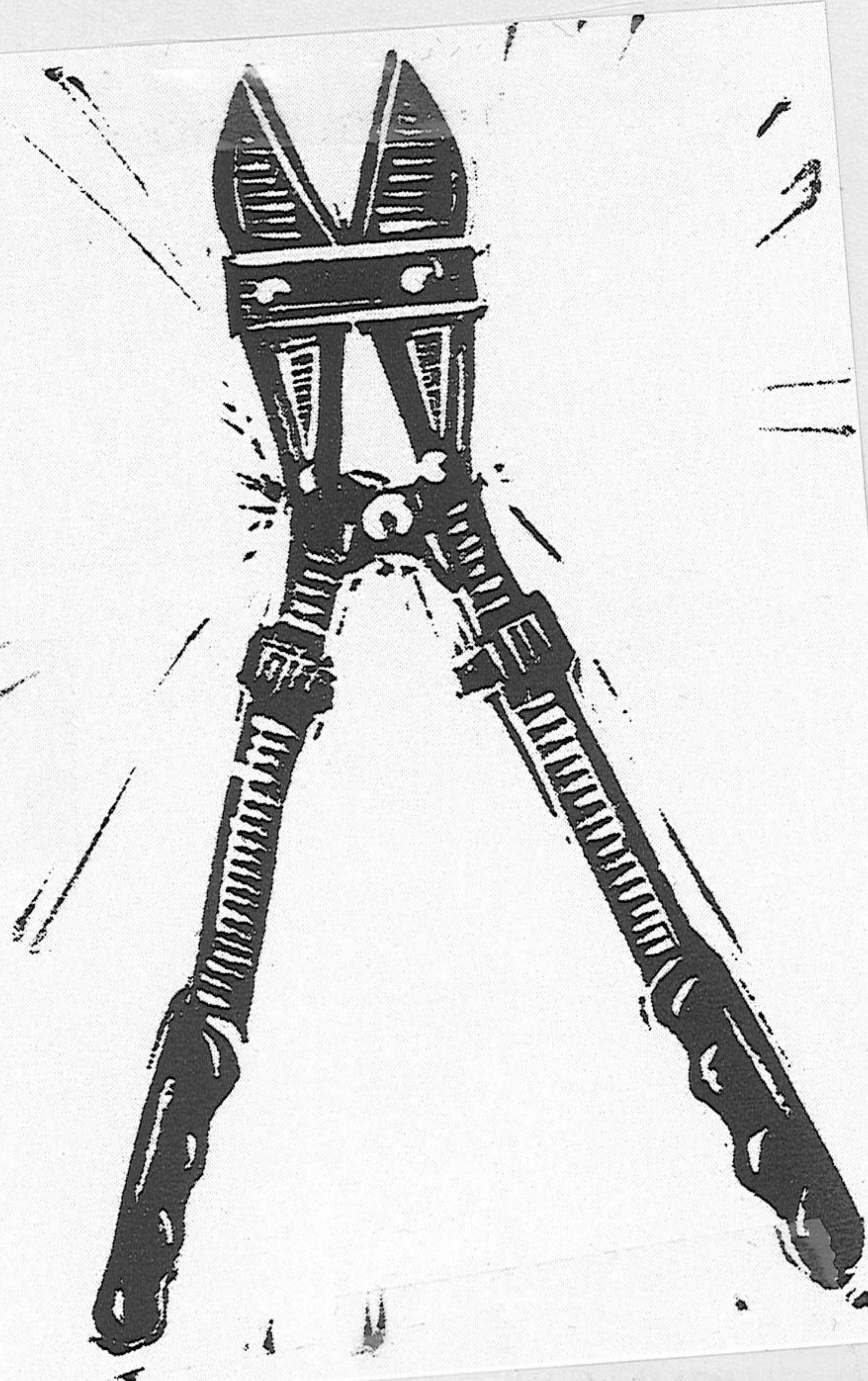
**STOP THE WAR ON THE POOR** aims to expose the anti-poor laws enforced by cops, bylaw officers, and security guards that criminalize our survival and repress our activism.

In fall 2019, we're reaching out to communities across BC to launch these campaigns. If you're interested in getting involved in either (or both!) campaigns, email Red Braid Alliance at [organize@stopdisplacement.ca](mailto:organize@stopdisplacement.ca)



# HOMES NOT JAILS

"Bolt Cutters" by Shaun Silfer, Justseeds Artists' Cooperative



# WINDOWS NOT BARS

## VAGRANCY ACTS:

Canada's colonial, racist, sexist, homophobic, trans antagonistic, history of criminalizing the poor

For most of Canada's existence, Vagrancy Acts made it a crime to be poor. "Idle" meant **UNEMPLOYED**, "disorderly" meant **SEX WORKER**, "rogue" meant **DRUNK**, "vagabond" meant **HOMELESS**, and if the police thought you were any of these kinds of poor, they could sweep you up and put you in jail.

Vagrancy laws criminalized people who were most oppressed by the dominant society.

Laws criminalizing drunkenness were used mostly to put Indigneous men who police found off reserve into jail.

Laws criminalizing sodomy were used to put gay men and gender non conforming people and trans women into jail.

Laws criminalizing prostitution were used mostly to put single women, and especially Black and Indigenous women that police found in cities, into jail.

## Had Job Back In '94, So He's No Vagrant

Thomas Hawkes, no fixed address, denied indignantly charges of police officers in Police court today that he is a "loose, idle person" and had never been known to work.

"I was employed at Rock Bay on more than one occasion," said Hawkes, whose voice came from thick bushy whiskers reaching almost to his waist.

"When was that?" asked W. M. McKay, city prosecutor.

"Back in 1894," said Hawkes. Magistrate George McQueen found him guilty of vagrancy, and, stating that it would be for his own good, sentenced him to two months in Oakalla.



Canadian courts wiped out its official "vagrancy laws" in the 1970s and '80s, but governments and cops quickly adapted and created new laws that make sure it is still a crime to be poor.

The difference between the new poor laws and the old ones is that the Vagrancy Acts actually made it a crime to be poor. The new poor laws make it a crime to do poor people things. The new poor laws are a mixture of Criminal Code laws and Provincial laws and Municipal bylaws.



**VERNON HAS AN  
ANTI-POOR CITY  
BYLAW BANNING  
SHOPPING CARTS  
IN PUBLIC SPACES!**

**ABOLISH ALL COPS: RCMP, CITY POLICE,  
BYLAW, + PRIVATE SECURITY GUARDS!**

The June 8th Network is fighting to abolish all police, bylaw officers, private security guards, and laws, courts, and prisons that keep our communities poor. All poor prisoners are prisoners of the war of the rich against the poor!

### **WE DEMAND:**

1. Abolish all anti-poor bylaws! All city bylaws that stop us from panhandling, sitting on the sidewalk, sleeping anywhere outside, or setting up tents in parks are laws that criminalize people for being low-income.
2. End the war on drugs! Drug laws are used to attack the illicit economies that poor people who cannot or will not keep regular jobs depend on to survive, and to surveil, harass, and criminalize young people in Indigenous, Black, and South Asian communities.
3. Sex worker rights are worker's rights! Canada's anti-sex work laws make it impossible for people working in the sex trade industry to organize for higher wages and safe working conditions, and make women sex workers more vulnerable to violence, including from cops. End all laws that result in the criminalization of sex work, including for migrant workers.



On the Strip, outreach was overtly run by the cops. But when is outreach not the police? When the City of Vancouver filed for a court injunction to break up a tent city on Hastings Street in 2015, they used evidence given by outreach workers to argue that the camp was dangerous. When BC Housing wanted to close down a shelter in Maple Ridge in 2016, and residents threatened to occupy the building and refuse to leave, it was the shelter workers who had won residents' trust who refused to leave the building, lied to the residents that they were supporting their action, and ultimately convinced them to leave the building without arrests.

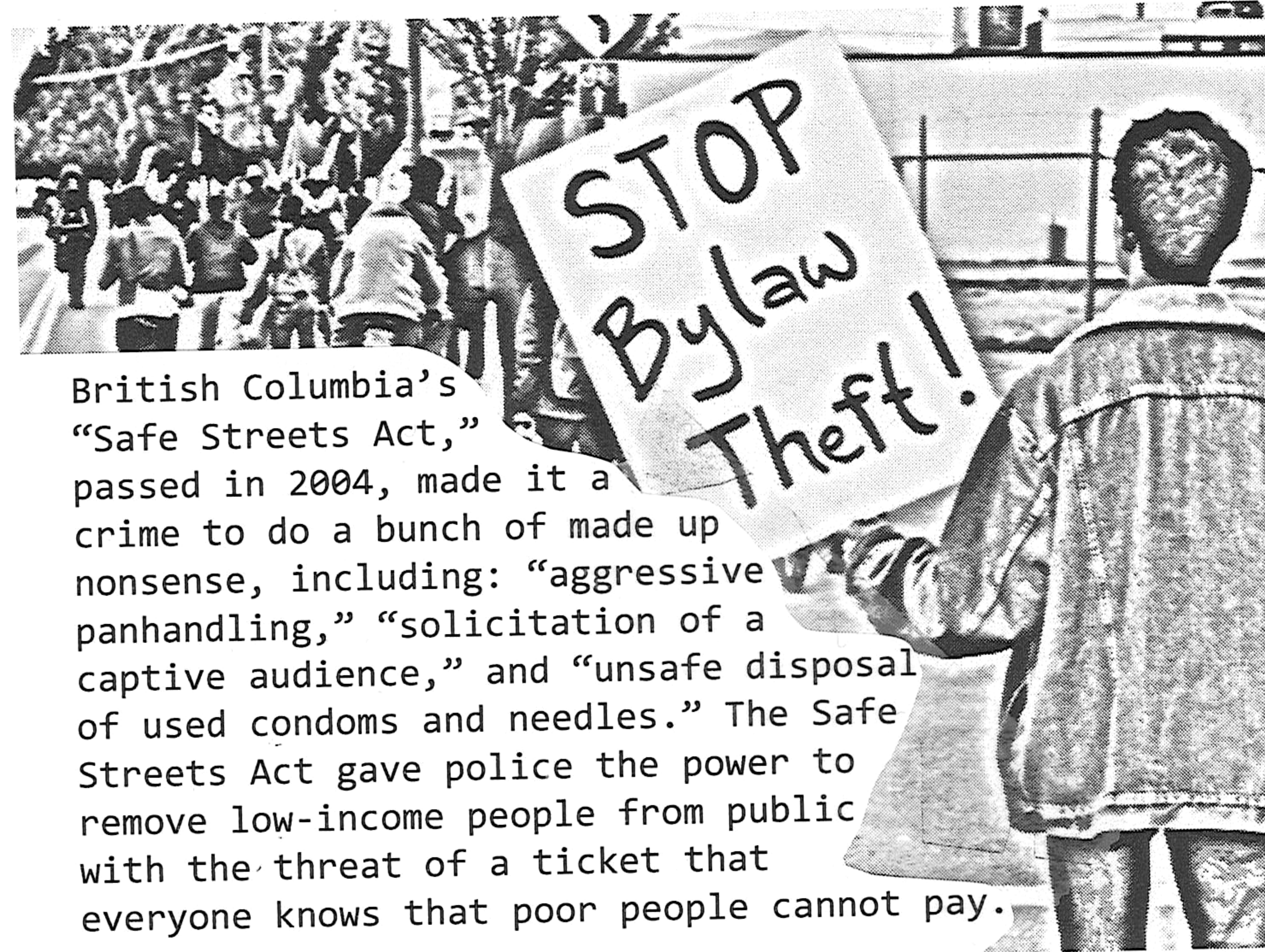


A study by an academic named Jade Boyd proved what everyone living in supportive housing already knows: front desk staff give cops free access to buildings and to residents rooms, and happily turn over video footage and guest registry records, all without the warrants cops would need if not for the help of shelter and outreach workers.

The experience of the Surrey Strip demonstrates that abolishing the police state means also abolishing outreach, shelter, and social workers: everyone whose government-paid job puts them in a position to administer and regulate our communities' access to food, income, health services, and housing.

## ANTI-HOMELESS BYLAWS

Ever since Canada's courts threw out the Vagrancy Acts, Provincial and Municipal governments have been trying to get back the power to directly attack and arrest poor people, and people racialized as poor. They know they won't be able to get the Vagrancy Acts back on the books because they are too openly discriminatory, so instead they create local versions, and Provincial ordinances and Municipal bylaws.



British Columbia's "Safe Streets Act," passed in 2004, made it a crime to do a bunch of made up nonsense, including: "aggressive panhandling," "solicitation of a captive audience," and "unsafe disposal of used condoms and needles." The Safe Streets Act gave police the power to remove low-income people from public with the threat of a ticket that everyone knows that poor people cannot pay.

Municipal bylaws are even worse. Bylaws are not part of the criminal code, and they regulate behaviours at a local level, in the ways that cities regulate business hours and yard cleanups. This, plus the problem that every single town and city has different bylaws, makes them tougher to challenge at a Supreme Court level.



But even though bylaws are only ticketable offences, they still give bylaw officers – and security guards, who can call bylaw officers and cops – the power to harass, intimidate, and displace poor people out of public spaces.

A bylaw ticket is a doorway to a hallway that leads to a prison cell. If a bylaw officer threatens you with a ticket and you tell them to go fuck themselves – because they don't have guns after all – they call the RCMP, who can arrest you for "obstruction," a Criminal Code offense. And if you take the ticket and don't pay it, you can get arrested for non-payment of tickets, and the cops or the courts will eventually redzone you and then arrest you on breach of your redzone. It is a nightmare maze of laws and policies and discriminatory enforcement where all hallways end in the same place: jail.

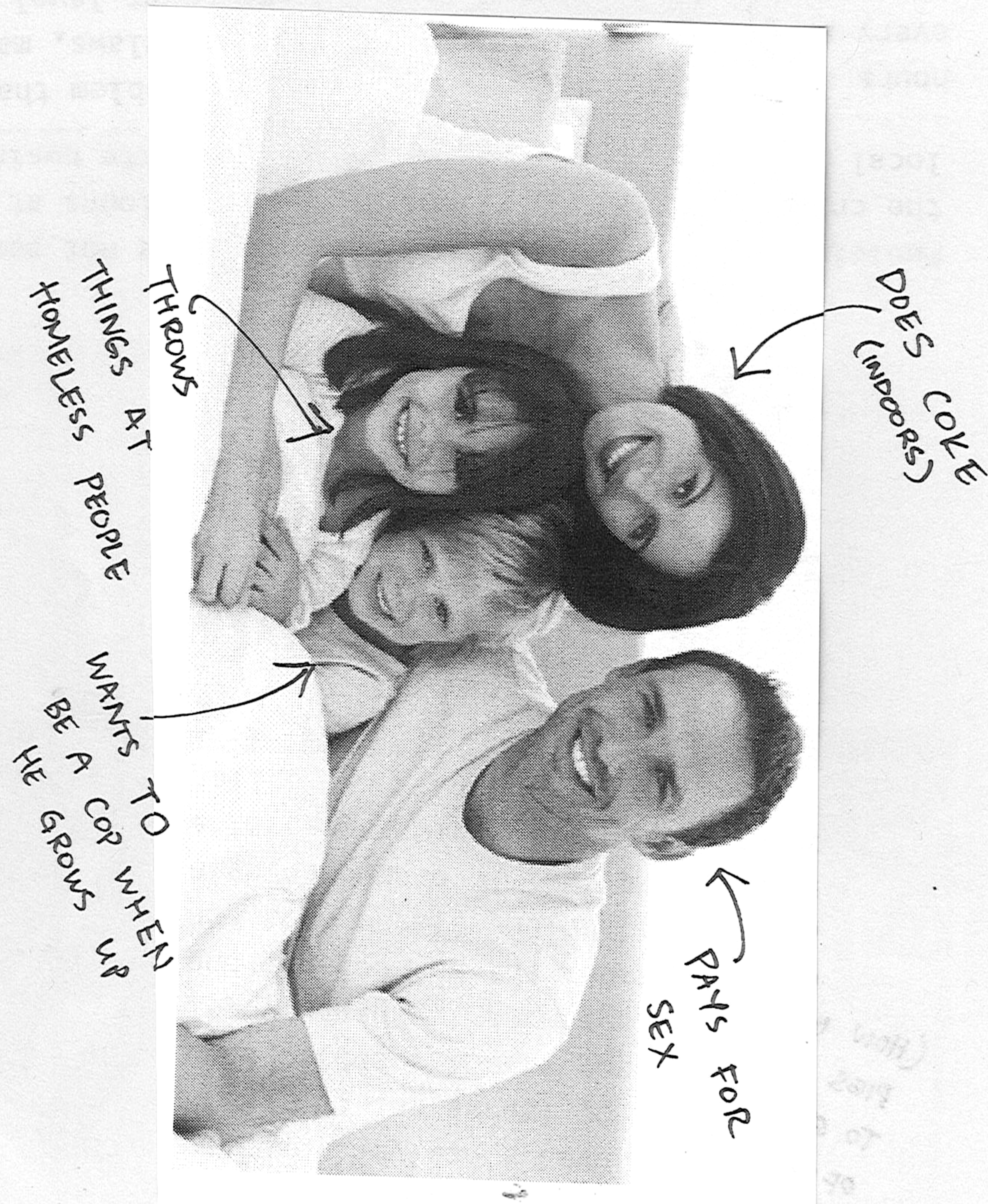


The 135A Street "Surrey Strip," on unceded Kwantlen, Katzie, Qayqayt, and Kwikwetlem territories, was home to hundreds of homeless people from 2015-2018. Some residents referred to the Strip as a tent city, while others called it an "outdoor prison" because of the intense harassment and surveillance they faced from the so-called "Surrey Outreach Team" – a team of 12 police and four bylaw officers, established in December 2016 to patrol the Strip 24/7. In June 2018, the City of Surrey erected 160 Atco trailer rooms and cleared the Surrey Strip of tents. Some residents were moved into the modular housing, others into shelters, and the rest were scattered across Surrey.

Bylaw officers from the "Outreach Team" were a consistent presence on the Surrey Strip, harassing residents and stealing their belongings. Residents organized a march against bylaw theft in October 2016. There was interest among residents to continue organizing to push the City of Surrey to reimburse homeless people for their stolen belongings, but the arrest of a lead organizer in early 2017 broke the momentum. Residents found ad hoc ways to mitigate bylaw theft, like "babysitting" each other's tents and keeping their sites clean.



The laws that are enforced the most, and most likely to lock you up in prisons, are laws that target people who are poor. And, like the Vagrancy laws, they are used disproportionately against Indigenous and Black communities. The anti-poor, racist, and colonial character of Canada's criminal code laws are the reason that Indigenous, Black, South Asian, poor people are the ones who fill the prisons.



## DAILY DISPLACEMENT: PUSHING THE POOR OUT OF PUBLIC SPACE IN THE TRI CITIES

In their statement explaining why they were launching the "We Exist" tent city, in the summer of 2019, homeless people living in the Tri Cities (Port Moody, Port Coquitlam, and Coquitlam) explained that they were fighting against the Tri Cities model of managing homelessness. They declared:

*The Tri Cities "solution" to homelessness is to have bylaw and RCMP officers bully us constantly. Bylaw officers regularly steal all of our belongings, forcing us to constantly start over and pushing us deeper into the bush to camp. RCMP officers threaten us any time we pause in public and tell us to move to other cities, like Maple Ridge or Edmonton. We refuse to spend our lives being pushed from place to place.*

The Tri Cities model invests public dollars in bylaw officers and private security guards whose jobs are, almost entirely, to seek out, pursue, harass, and chase, homeless people out of public spaces. But it's not just about public space: cops harass the poor no matter where we go.





## THE MOST POLICED LAWS ARE ANTI-POOR

Ross, who was one of the founders of the short-lived We Exist tent city, says that he has been hunted out in the bush in Coquitlam by a police helicopter, which he says must have had a heat sensor. "I was really hidden back there so bylaw couldn't find me," he said. But hours after the helicopter flyover, bylaw came in and chased him out.

The Tri Cities model is also used in other towns. In Vancouver, park rangers complain that their job has become little more than chasing homeless people out of parks. In Maple Ridge, as the city moved to close Anita Place tent city, city council doubled the budget for private security patrols in the downtown core. With the homelessness and housing crisis continuing to grow, governments are relying on new poor laws and petty cops to chase the "problem" of the poor out of public and break up poor peoples' community power.

Criminal Code laws make it a crime to possess and sell certain drugs, and to be caught paying someone money to perform sex acts. We think of these as "poor laws" because people with private homes, careers, nuclear families, and money also buy, sell, and take drugs. They also pay for sex acts - both directly, from sex workers, and indirectly, with gifts and longer-term contracts like marriage, with people who do not consider themselves sex workers.

Police only use drug and sex laws to shake down, harass, surveil, arrest, and imprison poor, Asian, and young people. Drug laws are poor laws.

Laws that make it a crime to shoplift to feed your hungry self, and to break into a building to shelter your unsheltered self are also poor laws.

