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STREET SHEET IS READER SUPPORTED, ADVERTISING FREE, AND AIMS TO LIFT UP THE VOICES OF THOSE LIVING IN POVERTY IN SAN FRANCISCO.
This excerpt from "The Eviction Machine" was originally published by our allies in Street Sheet. It tells the story of the life of the man known as 300, a lifelong Berkeley resident who died in 2019 after being evicted from his home.

I met 300 sleeping on a bench outside the CoHo at University Avenue one late night in the summer of 2013. He had a burly mustache and he wore a dark poncho with a black skull on his bald head. A square black cross hung from a black shawl around his neck. He had a copybook about the American origins of Nazi eugenics, and we talked for a while about the history of fascism. I asked him where he was doing masonry and he said he was working on the Department building on Martin Luther King. He was doing masonry for 300 a few days later and I got an education in street politics. When summer ended, I got an education in street politics. When summer ended, I realized that I was not truly being evicted until this land is returned to its original stewards.

In the fall of 2014, after I moved back to Berkeley, he lived in Berkeley most of his life. He lost his job during the 2007 recession, and he sheltered at familiar spots around Berkeley for years. He used an Obama phone to get wi-fi at the café, and he slept sitting upright on the benches outside. A few years ago, those same benches were flipped backward and filled with flower pots so unhoused people couldn't shelter there.

I studied in the café every night until 2 A.M. After closing, I'd sit outside and talk with 300. He had a photographic memory and he told stories like the film was projected in front of his home. He taught me about the history of Berkeley and growing up in the time of the Black Panthers. He saw abandoned storefronts and high-rise towers and reminiscence about the shops and venues that used to stand there. He worried about who was ransoming through his shopping cart when he was asleep. His voice got low when a police officer walked up and asked for him by his government name.

As silhouettes drifted past in the dark, he pointed out predators and prey, who was abusing, who was being abused in the shadows of lines and alleys away at night. That summer, I got an education in street politics. When summer ended, I moved away for school and I lost touch with 300.

In the fall of 2014, after I moved back home, a jury acquitted a police officer who had killed a young man named Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. I saw a crowd marching up University Avenue and I joined them, followed by police shooting tear gas grenades and rubber bullets at our backs. 300 was sitting on the bench outside the café again, watching the scene and the cloud of smoke. I stopped to say hello, and he gave me the number to his prepaid flip phone.

I caught up with 300 a few days later at the “cop shop,” the Berkeley Police Department building on Martin Luther King. He was doing janitorial work for a sheet metal company on Gilman Street and recycling aluminum cans to make ends meet. Every other week, he went next door to the City Hall to attend City Council meetings. His portable radio played KPFA while he sat on the steps of the cop shop every night.

The cop shop was 300's last resort. He had camped with tree-sitters at the Memorial Stadium oak grove until the university destroyed their tents and cut down the trees. He had slept below the arches of his church on Bancroft Way until the clergy chased him off, dripped in jewelry and driving foreign cars. He had lived in a tool shed behind a house where he worked as a gardener, but the owner snapped the knob off the door, angry that 300 brought other unhoused people to live there. He wasn't eligible for a subsidized apartment unless he signed a form declaring a “mental illness” or “disability” —— he refused, because he understood that those labels could be used to incarcerate him. He was caught in a crisis because I could not get a place to live because I could not find work.

The police station was the last, safe place he could find to sleep. He maintained the grounds around the Public Safety Building, planting flowers, trimming hedges, and sweeping debris. In exchange, BPD quietly allowed him to set up camp on the front terrace.

The police station is quiet at night, and 300 spoke freely when I met him there. He told stories about his childhood growing up in a violent neighborhood in Southwest Berkeley segregated by Jim Crow. The park where he had been raised was called “authentic” and "did not investigate further. He put police racism in simple terms: "They classify all African-American people as either criminals or servants." He meant that "Removal from their housing during the 2007 recession, he shuttled at familiar spots around Berkeley for years. He used an Obama phone to get wi-fi at the café, and he slept sitting upright on the benches outside.

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San Francisco voters have a lot to consider before the March 5 election. Voting No on Proposition E should be an easy choice for anyone who is concerned with addressing our city’s challenges, rather than benefiting from them. If passed, Prop. E would similarly weaken police accountability to protect the rights and safety of San Francisco residents and visitors.

If Prop. E passes, it would allow city police to deploy invasive surveillance technologies without accountability and oversight. One million dollars might buy a few years of experiment, but it’s an important enough question that tech billionaires and police associations are side-by-side at the ballot boxes. San Francisco Police Officers’ Association—alongside tech billionaires—are donating more than $1 billion to keep our city under surveillance.

The decision to support or oppose Prop. E comes down to how you answer one straightforward question: “For how long should police be allowed to violate our privacy and safety without accountability and oversight?”

As simple as it may seem, it’s an important enough question that tech billionaires and police associations are side-by-side at the ballot boxes. San Francisco Police Officers’ Association—alongside tech billionaires—are donating more than $1 billion—without the support of the San Francisco Police Officers’ Association—to convince us the answer is at least one year.

When tech billionaires and police associations are side-by-side at the donation plate, it’s wise to investigate the stakes. One million dollars might not be enough to eliminate all the challenges San Francisco’s under-resourced residents face. Still, that money could be used for much more effective purposes than convincing money could be used for much more resourced residents face. Still, that money could be used for much more effective purposes than convincing.

In 2019, responding to vocal support from a wide range of community members and organizations, San Francisco’s Board of Supervisors voted to hold a pilot on surveillance transparency and accountability. A consensus legislation established a democratic process requiring the San Francisco Police Department (SFPD) to submit a use policy to the Board for approval before acquiring or using new surveillance technology. Once approved, these policies establish parameters on how the technology can be used and how the rights of anyone impacted will be protected. They also outline the steps that must be taken to ensure any information collected is held securely or deleted.

Prop. E would recklessly abandon this process. The SFPD would be given free rein to secretly use tested and highly invasive surveillance technologies on San Francisco residents for at least one year—without oversight or safety policies. And after a year, if the SFPD submits a use policy for a surveillance technology and the Board of Supervisors fails to act on it, nothing would stop the police from surveillance residents this way indefinitely. While the possibilities are nearly limitless, this could include equipping closed circuit TV cameras with AI-powered biometric tracking, installing long-range listening devices on city blocks, and, according to the City Attorney, even operating face-scanning drones. Civil rights groups, privacy advocates, and community organizations—including the ACLU of Northern California, Arab Resource and Organizing Center, Chinese for Affirmative Action, Coalition on Homelessness, Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), League of Women Voters National Harm Reduction Coalition, Older Women’s League, San Francisco Rising Action Fund, and San Francisco Bay Area chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)—have been rallying against the ballot measure. They believe that Prop. E would undermine the privacy and civil rights of our city’s residents, especially those from marginalized communities already disproportionately targeted by police surveillance and discrimination. They also argue that Prop. E is unnecessary and ineffective, as the current law already assures a democratic process that involves public input and legislative oversight.

During a November 13, 2023 meeting of the Board’s Rules Committee, a member of the mayor’s staff arguing in support of the measure shared that Prop. E “authorizes the department to have a one-year pilot period to experiment” and “to work through new technology to see how they work.” This would alarm us all. We deserve more than to be the canaries in the surveillance coal mine. Police should not and we can’t sit silently while opportunists turn our streets into a surveillance state testing lab. Vote No on Prop. E. And tell your family, your friends and anyone who will listen to turn in their San Francisco primary election ballots with a NO vote on Prop. E.

Nathan Sheard is managing director of advocacy at the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a digital civil liberties nonprofit based in San Francisco.
10 ACTIONS FOR PANDEMIC SOLIDARITY

A BLUEPRINT FOR THE LONG FUTURE

While capitalist institutions produce mass illness and death, we must not abandon each other. Together, we have the power to shape our communities. To do so, we must prioritize the health and safety of all our people by committing to these 10 actions:

1. **MASK UP:** Wear high-quality, well-fitted respirator masks (KN95 or better) when sharing air beyond your household to care for your neighbors and yourself.

2. **CLEAN THE AIR:** Clean the air you breathe by utilizing air purifiers, opening windows, upgrading filtration, and monitoring air quality.

3. **TEST OFTEN:** Test frequently and according to best practices before events, after gatherings, and in your daily life with PCR-quality tests where possible. Isolate from others in your home and community if positive or sick.

4. **MAKE A LAYERED PLAN:** Make a COVID-19 safety plan that includes multiple layers of protection, a support crew, and protocols for sickness or a positive test.

5. **SHARE TOOLS:** Share resources such as high-quality masks, updated information from reputable sources, and tests with your loved ones and neighbors.

6. **REQUIRE SAFETY:** Require universal masking, testing, and clean air protocols when gathering with friends, family, colleagues, and neighbors to keep everyone safe and not leave anyone out.

7. **CHANGE THE NARRATIVE:** Use intentional language to promote COVID-19 safety and combat misinformation, minimizing, and denial in your relationships and communities.

8. **PROTECT PUBLIC SPACE:** Demand rigorous and robust COVID-19 safety requirements – including universal masking and clean air protocols – from your workplaces, organizations, healthcare providers, neighborhood shops, and event venues. Boycott those that do not implement them.

PANDEMIC SOLIDARITY.ORG

@PS4.FUTURE
In what has to be one of the dumbest, most desperate yet convincing pre-election stunts ever seen in years, Mayor London Breed put an initiative on the March ballot that will dramatically increase homelessness while wasting valuable public resources.

This brain fart has been labeled Prop F or “F is for ‘fail’” by Mayor Nilsen. Breed is in a panic over the overdose crisis, with more people dying from accidental overdoses than ever, she has come up with a plan to cut those suspected of drug use off of welfare.

Yes, you heard right. No, the plan is not to decrease treatment options. No, the plan is not to change evidence-based research. No, the plan is to make a slimmer version of the department’s own very smart over-dose prevention plan. No, No, No.

Clearly those who have died mean very little. Because as Mayor Breed said at a forum on this initiative, “this is not about the data, this is not about the numbers.” God forbid policy be about science when we are talking about a public health emergency. Instead, it is all about politics and bad politics at that. Readers know the routine: Talk to your billionaire donors, and counterproductive. Mandated treatment often leads to increased isolation, while stripping people of trust it takes for someone to disclose their substance use without fear. It threatens access for people seeking addiction treatment today who may not come knocking again tomorrow if they have seen addiction and over-dose worse when people lose support systems and that is what Proposition F threatens to do.

Under Proposition F, San Francisco’s already overtaxed Human Service Agency workers will be made to do more with less. They will need to pre-screen clients suspected of drug use and, while they already make referrals to treatment, they will have to monitor compliance and terminate benefits. Prop F will thus likely result in reduced treatment for as those diverted to welfare recipients.

We have a clinician shortage that is packing waiting lists for treatment. So let’s get this straight: We are going to take a valuable clinician time to conduct an assessment with a client, who if they have a substance use issue and are honest about that issue will possibly lose their benefits, because they will be forced to navigate even more bureaucratic red tape. Are these really the conditions under which we want clinical assessments to take place? If there is a clinic with a bit of integrity would want to do these assessments?

“Prop F is a cynical waste of resources that will materially harm very vulnerable people and increase homelessness in San Francisco,” said Jerry Thomas, the executive director of HIV and harm-reduction policy at San Francisco AIDS Foundation. “This measure does not address the very vulnerable people and increase access to needed substance use disorder treatment. That is why we are opposing Prop F and we are proud to stand together with the San Francisco Democratic Party, SPUR, SF Black Wall Street, SEIU 1021, the League of Pissed Off Voters and many others.”

Oh, and another thing: We all know Prop HSA will play “I won’t pay, they won’t play” and will want to make sure there is plenty of treatment available under the political spotlight off site? We don’t deserve that. It is such a hard work of expanding treat- ment with. We can’t take the easy way out and set aside treat- ment spots for this population—only for it to sit empty. We can’t take this change over again with political priori- ties. The system goes all screwball to clean Muni buses. This change would discourage folks from seeking treatment because adding another requirement has an issue means they risk losing housing, shelter and money for food.

This initiative plays on classicist im- ages of welfare recipients, the in- fluential San Francisco Chronicle ran a story in 1994 again, when Republican Pete Wilson threatened to give you a 6 pack of beer,” when he proposed cutting welfare by 25 percent.

The reality is, studies show folks use their welfare for things like housing and food. Necessities. And the money is soooooo little. If you are housed you get a bit over $700 per month. If you are unsheltered, you get a little over $100 a month. About 20% of the 7,000 welfare recipients are homeless, and of those, about 400 are in shelter, dependent on assistance. If you lose assistance, you lose a lot of rights. They rent from roommates or family members, if they don’t they lose their keys, if they lose their keys they can’t find a housing plan, because there is just another budget-saving trick. Another requirement. Another setup. Another stolen. Another Human Service Agency is COUNTING on that, and that is how they hope to pay for the clinicians. So what kind of hell are they building? Can we solve homelessness, is there a way for a politician who is running for office to dump a bunch of money and avoid candidate campaign spending limits by just photobombing the face out there. Mayor Breed’s face is all over the literature. While it might sell well on the right, she has no excuse for this madness.

About half of people in CAAP for some reason don’t have housing. Reality flash: Poor folks in SF live in housing where they don’t have a lot of rights. They rent from roommates or family members, they can’t do what they want, they can’t go to the bathroom, they can’t eat, they can’t sleep, their substance use without fear. It threatens access for people seeking addiction treatment today who may not come knocking again tomorrow if they have seen addiction and over-dose worse when people lose support systems and that is what Proposition F threatens to do.

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For a list of organizations and indi- viduals who have endorsed “NO on Prop F” go to https://www.reducessfhomelessness.org
Surviving in the tech-fueled wealth bubble of San Francisco on a paycheck to paycheck battle. As rising costs of living continue to push out all but the elite, being poor here means struggling for the basic dignity and security that many take for granted.

With median rent for a one-bedroom apartment approaching $5,500, finding an affordable place to live on a limited budget is next to impossible. Low-income neighborhoods like the Tenderloin are filled with rundown single-room occupancy hotels and overcrowded apartments that often lack necessities, such as laundry, secure mail or pest control. Many families cramp into small spaces, sacrificing privacy and safety just to keep a roof over their heads. The waiting list for subsidized housing is years long, so there’s little hope for relief.

Food security is another daily worry. With high prices at local markets and few affordable supermarkets, many are forced into choosing between nutrition and cost. The lines at food banks and soup kitchens stretch down the block. Community gardens help supplement diets when funding allows, but fresh produce remains hard to come by.

Displacement constantly looms as an existential threat as well. Landlords cash in on the real estate boom by finding excuses to evict lower-income tenants in rent-controlled apartments. Within weeks, their homes are renovated and relaunched at sky-high prices they could never afford. Navigating the maze of housing courts is a nearly insurmountable task for English proficiency and access to legal aid. Few walk away with their homes intact or get relocation assistance.

These realities cause constant anxiety and hopelessness. Working multiple low-wage jobs leaves little time or energy for self-care, community building or creative enrichment. Families become isolated in overcrowded housing projects and neglected neighborhoods where basic needs go unaddressed due to lack of culturally competent care. Families become isolated in overcrowded housing projects and neglected neighborhoods where basic needs go unaddressed due to lack of culturally competent care.

San Francisco’s underfunded public transit system fails to adequately serve poor residents. With routes cut and fares hiked annually, those living in marginalized neighborhoods can’t reliably get to jobs across town. Waiting through delays and transfers for cross-city commutes forces many to give up on opportunities. Lack of affordable transit locks the poor out of economic mobility.

The result is young people being left behind without skills or options. Youth homelessness and recidivism rates are heartbreaking. Lacking support at home or school, kids quickly end up on the streets or stuck in the prison pipeline without alternative paths being presented. A few find relief in community programs, but budgets keep getting slashed as inequality grows unchecked.

The story is rarely hear in San Francisco—the voices muffled beneath the flashy facades of tech companies and their condos. But the human toll of exclusion and indifference is very real. No child should have to do homework under a freeway overpass by flashlight. No parent should have to work three jobs without benefits just to feed their family.

The poverty is by design, upheld by those whose power and wealth accumulation depends on stark inequality. But when we look past the glimmering illusion and into the eyes of those being crushed under the wheel of “progress,” we must ask: can we still call this prosperity, and does the health of a society not depend on the welfare of all, instead of just the privileged few?

By refusing to see and value the humanity in front of us, we risk our own. The choice remains: continue down this path of greed and exploitation, or renew our commitment to solidarity and justice. Our cities cannot become bankrupting abscesses, not just for the most marginalized among us, the moral foundation of our community will crumble, and the glittering lie of San Francisco fades to reveal a city in spiritual poverty and decay.

The economy is designed to be alone. The choice remains to be alone. The choice remains...
A FUTILE ATTEMPT TO MAKE MONEY FOILED BY SOCIAL SERVICES

The social services systems in California punish success and punish efforts at raising one's standard of living and personal security—at least, that's how it seems in my case. Even if your earnings are literally tiny, Social Security, the IRS, county food assistance and Medicaid all insist they need to know, and insist they all get their share.

As hard as I work at my two to three little-paid writing gigs, Uncle Sam and his gang still need to know every little detail.

State and federal governments use what amounts to intimidation tactics in an effort to keep people hiding and cowering in the shadows. It's more of a dominance thing, rather than taking away every scrap that poor people can get: The designers of the system want poor disabled people to feel that the place with no hope of things being better.

Apparentlly, we are a considered a population of rejects. It's not clear what social purpose is served by keeping us down. Yet, in a past conversation with a person of privilege, when I mentioned college ought to be accessible to poor people, they said something to the effect of "Then everything would all be equal," and objected to the idea.

When we embark on paid work, we put our benefits at risk the moment we are. Our data goes into various databases, and Uncle Sam will know. If we work for cash, we will be equal," and objected to the idea.

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My housing is linked strongly to the social services system. Everything is documented. Everything is recorded. There are many surveillance cameras here. Big Brother is here.

This makes for a difficult home environment. It isn't about any resident being a bad person. It is about living in a cubicle; not feeling close to anyone; living in crowded, congested conditions; the inability to find a parking space; the high costs associated with living here—and the stress of all of this put together.

I continue to need health care.

My health is not great because of several medical conditions that I've been ignoring. I can't keep it up, I am better off if I can document my health problems, which helps the "system" work to my benefit.

Still, the health care systems, Medicare and Medicaid, are like rocket science to me, and I have not taken the time to read the material and understand how they work. I can only do so much. It seems to me it will be a grand exercise in deduction to comprehend all of the rules of Medicare and Medicaid.

My disability is invisible but it's real and well documented. I believe I am disabled because I can do things that require intellect, like writing books. But I still have to deal with a condition that requires medication and talk therapy.

Much of my time is absorbed with trying to get my symptoms under control, making me very inefficient at accomplishing needed tasks. If I can't control them well enough, I'm prone to making poor decisions. And I have seen myself do this and have seen the awful results of this in my life.

I'm fighting for my life, and it feels like I'm losing. I might have made a name for myself by publishing a lot, but I have not devised a method for turning this into cash. So, I continue to be dependent on the government, and this is no way to live. I'm in constant fear that the government will cut me off. This could be irrational, or the fear could be realistic. Since I don't know what the government thinks unless they tell me, I have no method of validating or disproving my worries.

But I do know that some government workers exercise their power in a bullying manner, and that there are others who genuinely want to help. It is a mix, and on a good day, you could get something that can help you survive.

I am disabled and 59 years old, and even though I may have hoped to rise above the poverty line, it might not happen. Trying to work, with the social services systems as they are, seems like an exercise in masochism.

The government has its rules. In the news we see examples of how the rules apply differently to people of different socioeconomic backgrounds. If you are mega-rich, you might get a six-figure fine for your violations, which you can pay by selling a little bit of your stock. If you are poor, you might be picking up trash at the side of the freeway, or you might be thrown off benefits without any method of support.

I'm still at it; I haven't given up. I hope to someday improve my circumstances. As I close in on 60, I don't see millions of dollars coming my way thus far. The hope could be futile, or if I get a lucky break, I might have a comfortable old age.

Jack Bragen writes fiction and commentary and lives in Martinez, California.

BECOME A VENDOR
MAKE MONEY AND HELP END HOMELESSNESS!

STREET SHEET is currently recruiting vendors to sell the newspaper around San Francisco.

Vendors pick up the papers for free at our office in the Tenderloin and sell them for $2 apiece at locations across the City. You get to keep all the money you make from sales! Sign up to earn extra income while also helping elevate the voices of the homeless writers who make this paper so unique, and promoting the vision of a San Francisco where every human being has a home.

TO SIGN UP, VISIT OUR OFFICE AT 280 TURK ST FROM 10AM-4PM ON MONDAY-THURSDAY AND 10AM-NOON ON FRIDAY
We are in an unprecedented moment where the world is rising up in solidarity with Palestinians calling for a ceasefire. It’s imperative that as we intensify our calls for a ceasefire, we extend our solidarity to stand with & stand up for Black people who are dying under the boot of white nationalism unaddressed.

White nationalism requires the deprivation, deportation, sterilization, incarceration, exploitation, and extermination of people of color in general and, in particular, of Black communities. We must seize this opportunity to broaden the movement and build the relationships necessary to successfully remove the boot of white nationalism off the necks of people of color worldwide.

We call on the world to end Black death and save Black lives from West & East Oakland to West & East Africa, South Berkeley to South Sudan, Hunter’s Point to Haiti, Chicago to the Congo.

Join @community_ready_corp & the 4 Peace Coalition for our Stop Black Death: Save Black Lives March & Rally on Monday, February 19 at 1pm at Oscar Grant Plaza, 14th & Broadway, Oakland.

The 4 Peace Coalition is convened by Community Ready Corps and includes KANO Special Services, From the Cage to the Stage, Anti Police-Terror Project (APTP), MH First, Haiti Action Committee, Pathways to Peace, and Guiding A New Generation (GANG).