
Book Section:
Joubert, T and Hodkinson, SN orcid.org/0000-0001-7676-5331 (2018) Beyond the Rent Strike, Towards the Commons: Why the Housing Question Requires Activism that Generates its Own Alternatives. In: Gray, N, (ed.) Rent and its Discontents; A Century of Housing Struggle. Transforming Capitalism . Rowman and Littlefield International , p. 185. ISBN 9781786605740

Beyond the Rent Strike, Towards the Commons: Why the Housing Question Requires Activism that Generates its Own Alternatives

Tim Joubert and Stuart Hodkinson

The 1915 Glasgow Rent Strike arguably represents the most successful housing struggle the UK has ever seen. By collectively withholding payments to the landlord and resisting evictions, tenants multiplied their power to win their immediate urban struggle for rent controls which would remain in place until January 1989, whilst forcing the state to effectively nationalize housing policy that laid the foundation for mass public housing during the twentieth century. Throughout this period, the rent strike was arguably the tactic of the housing movement within a relatively clear terrain of struggle between the mass working class and exploitative monopoly landlordism. After a notable hiatus, rent strikes are very much back in vogue among debt-racked students, generating new enthusiasm for their wider redeployment in other housing struggles. In this chapter we critically reflect on where the rent strike tactic stands today in the armoury of UK housing struggles, making two provocations.

First, that the rent strike should no longer be viewed as the go-to tactic for addressing the contemporary housing question in the UK. While rent strikes can still work, the conditions that made the Glasgow Rent Strike successful bear little resemblance to today's housing realities. Our second provocation, however, is that the rent strike's core principle of breaking the circulation of money to the landlord remains relevant but must be reinvented as part of the construction of a cross-tenure movement that develops tactics of resistance based on generating its own alternatives. Our reinvented rent strike idea builds on recent theoretical discussions of the concept of 'commons' (De Angelis 2017) to argue that different housing struggles need to be politically articulated into what Dyer-Witheford (2006) has called the 'circulation of the common': the production and extension of collective sharing processes beyond market exchange. We conclude by arguing that a reinvented rent strike is essential for ensuring all have the 'right to the city'.

The Potency of the Glasgow Rent Strike

As the Introduction to this book shows, the Glasgow Rent Strike transformed a simple idea into mass direct action. Led by socialist and labour militants, tenants organized to collectively withhold

the increased rent demanded by landlords with full support from trade unions and left wing parties. These actions were supplemented by a campaign of defence actions to resist eviction and large street demonstrations bringing grievances to national attention and explicitly articulating demands for a new state housing policy (Castells 1983; Melling 1983). The rent strike resulted in a clear victory after a few months with the 1915 Increase of Rent and Mortgage Interest (War Restrictions) Act that froze rents and mortgages at their 1914 levels until the early 1920s (Damer 2000; MacLean 1983), and 'led to the rapid retreat of the private landlord and the emergence of council housing' (Power 1993, 179).

The Rent Strike took place against the background of an appalling housing crisis. Glasgow and the wider Clydeside area was a core node of capitalist urbanization, and rapid industrial and population growth had long outpaced housing construction. The already high cost of housing was exacerbated by both the collapse of private housing construction due to rising building costs (Melling 1983, 7), and the accelerated demand for industrial labour at the beginning of the war, leading to both massive overcrowding and spiralling rents over previous decades. These conditions were further compounded by harsh laws, such as the 'Law of Urban Hypothec', that enabled landlords to not only evict tenants withholding rent but also to confiscate their property; landlords and their collectors also conducted illegal evictions and extracted rents through harassment and intimidation (Castells 1983; Englander 1983). In Scotland, after 1911, tenancies moved from being set annually and paid quarterly in arrears to a monthly basis, allowing landlords to evict tenants in only seven days of arrears at 48 hours' notice. These summary eviction powers were exploited by landlords as a means of forcing up rents (Hughes and Lowe 1995, 13).

Added to this housing crisis were increasingly exploitative workplace conditions. The government's wartime disciplinary measures, which temporarily stifled growing unrest in shipbuilding and munitions factories, shifted the terrain of class struggle to the arena of social reproduction. This enabled workers to express legitimate grievances over exploitation by landlords, making the issue a visible threat to the wartime industrial effort. A key factor here was the proximity and relative homogeneity of class and place: the shared experience of a crisis in social reproduction fostered a common identity across class factions and militant mobilization took place in closely-knit communities in geographical proximity to one another 'where work, home, leisure, industrial relations, local government and home-town consciousness were inextricably mixed together' (Hobsbawm 1987, 40; Griffin 2015).

A final element in the rent strike's potency was the political economy of rental housing itself. With the typical owner of working class housing from the lower middle class, 90 percent of Glasgow housing was purchased by bond mortgage, making thousands of landlords dependent on regular cash-flow from their housing investments to service their own debts (Melling 1983, 8–9). Thus, rent strikes could seriously hurt the landlord at a time when industrial capital and the state were desperate to ensure that workers' unrest over housing conditions—at a time of emerging communist movements—did not reverberate back into the factory and sink the war machine (Castells 1983). The rent strike was thus born out of a particular kind of class consciousness in which workers recognized their class power and the unique leverage it had within this confluence of historical factors (Damer 2000). In the next section, we argue that such conditions no longer hold in today's political economy because neoliberalism has displaced dweller power.

The Rent Strike Neutered: the Displacement of Dweller Power under Neoliberalism

Although rent strikes were waged with mixed success against local councils throughout the twentieth century, they gradually faded away from tenant activism during the neoliberal decades as the private rental sector shrank to less than 10 percent of the housing stock and home ownership reached new levels, flanked by a diminishing social housing sector. Over the past few years, however, the return of a housing crisis marked by a growing private rental market has prompted the return of rent strikes, particularly among students. The extraordinary Cut the Rent campaign at University College London has led the way, protesting huge recent rent increases that make student life unaffordable for many (Cant 2016) and winning concessions of over £2million in three years (UCL Cut the Rent n.d.). This has reopened for many housing activists the possibility of promoting the rent strike as the way to fight the housing crisis and the wider crisis of social reproduction under neoliberal austerity (Beach 2015). However, an analysis of the historical transformation of the housing system since 1915, and especially since 1979, reveals a number of ways in which the rent strike tactic has been confronted with more difficult obstacles and limitations.

First, the organic class and geographical fusion of workplace and homeplace struggles against exploitation that underpinned the rent strike on Clydeside has been undermined not only by restrictive legislation and the decline of trade unions but also by the increasingly splintered spatial composition between workplace and homeplace in post-industrial Britain, making the collectivizing glue of production and reproduction struggles against capital far less sticky.

Glasgow in effect represented a generalized class condition of landlord exploitation: around 90 percent of the UK population at this time were private tenants and subject to overcrowding, unpayable rents, intimidation and eviction (Englander 1983). Today, a far more fragmented tenure picture exists: around 62 percent of households live in owner occupied housing of which more than half own outright without a mortgage, 20 percent are private renters and under 18 percent are social tenants (DCLG Live Table 101). While this tenure diversity is geographically uneven both across the UK and within local authority boundaries, the effect has been to fundamentally recompose the city into a patchwork quilt of tenure and condition that cuts through streets, estates, tower blocks, and neighbourhoods. This tenure fragmentation not only mitigates any clear class consciousness and solidarity generated by common experience, but also makes the rent strike far less possible as a generalizable tactic as the majority of households now own their own home and thus have no monopoly landlord to collectively organize against.

Second, the landlord-tenant relation itself has also fundamentally changed along this diversifying spectrum of experience. Glasgow's tenants paid rent directly from their wages, other earnings, or borrowing; there was no housing benefit to cover all or part of the cost. Today, just under half of all renters receive housing benefit towards all or part of their rent, which for a significant proportion—around a third—goes straight from one part of the state to another in the form of their municipal landlord, so they never have any rent to withhold. Should the rest of those 4.8 million renters on housing benefit decide to go on rent strike, their landlord will be able to apply to have the benefit paid directly to them, neutering that rent strike. Then there is the fear of taking action caused by the potential dire consequences of withholding rent. This did not deter the Glasgow rent strikers given the barbarism of their conditions, but today's renters do have something to lose as precarious citizens disciplined by economic insecurity amid the ongoing shift from the 'welfare state' that the Glasgow rent strike helped win to the neoliberal 'workfare state' (Peck 2001). State policies such as the bedroom tax, the benefit cap, and the so-called 'right to rent' that require landlords to check migrants' immigration status have merely accentuated this housing precarity. Landlords' heap further conditionality onto those forced to rent, requiring credit checks, references or guarantors, and hold the power to discriminate against welfare recipients. Such an environment poses a serious threat not only to their ability to cling on to an existing home that might, if they are lucky, be near their job, their kids' schools, their family or friends, but also to their right to access benefits or ability to rent in the future.

Third, the Glasgow Rent Strike as a generalized tactic cohered with a generalized housing crisis of the vast majority of industrial urban dwellers at the hands of the monopoly power of private landlordism. While such structural dynamics are clearly in play in the speculation-driven property machine of London and its Southern commuter belts where student housing militancy has grown, today's housing crisis is also marked by a swathe of apparently different problems experienced by specific groups. For instance, a new kind of urban struggle is unfolding on London's housing estates as both homeowners and social tenants' battle to stop their homes from being bulldozed under so-called regeneration and other development projects (Watt and Minton 2016). Elsewhere, the crisis of unaffordable housing is experienced more in the context of barriers to social and spatial mobility created by the dysfunctional mortgage finance market faced by current or prospective homeowners (Forrest and Hirayama 2015). The worst conditions are affecting migrants and the poorest of the poor, struggling to meet mortgage or rental payments to stay in their homes. Mass coordinated rent or mortgage strikes make little sense given this general picture of fragmented housing crises, especially when such experiences have been individualized and pushed firmly into the private sphere between the individual household and its landlord or lender.

Reinventing the Rent Strike for the 21st century: Breaking the Circuit, Building the Commons

Nevertheless, if the rent strike method and target are increasingly outmoded, the rent strike idea remains core to housing struggles today. By temporarily shutting off the circulation of interest-bearing capital in the urban environment, the rent strike stopped the flow of money to landlords, while also enabling people to remain in their homes as a right claimed against the encroachment of capitalist enclosure. It was a perfect example of 'self-reduction' of the social costs of living, which would later become common in Italian Workerism in the 1970s (Cherki and Wievorka 2007). The 21st century housing crisis need a new kind of rent strike: a form of collective action that not only blocks the flow of money to rentier capitalism—public and private landlords, landowners, banks and other financial interests—but switches the collective labour that generates rents into alternative forms of housing provision based on need not profit. That is, rather than break the circuit of capital in the hope that the state will intervene to solve our housing needs, we need

to create our own collective housing solutions that can withstand the neoliberal state's inevitable backlash.

Drawing on Hodkinson (2012a), the reinvented rent strike starts from political ideas inspired by the 'commons', which are often expressed through the example of how land was held and utilized in common prior to its violent enclosure and transformed into individual private property (Linebaugh 2008). Here we see the twin notions of natural resource commons gifted by the planet such as soil, water, and vegetation, and common property regimes in which people collectively use and manage these natural commons (Ostrom 1990). These principles can be extended to the wider public or social commons of goods and services, typically provided free at the point of use by the state, to primarily meet need instead of profit (Dyer-Witheford 2006); and to the relational commons that emphasizes how producing and managing commons relies on cooperation and mutual aid in everyday life (Gibson-Graham 2006, 82). The enclosure of these commons has been a continuous feature of capitalism over many centuries, separating people from the means of production whilst closing off our ability to socially reproduce outside capitalist market relations by turning common resources into privatized commodities (De Angelis 2007).

Applying this analysis to the fractured housing movement today, it is the common struggle against new rounds of capitalist enclosure and 'accumulation by dispossession' (Harvey 2003) that potentially unites those currently struggling against what appear to be very different problems in the realm of housing. But recognizing the wider enemy is not enough to win change; creating alternatives based on that common interest must also be part of this shared struggle. In what follows, we spell out four strategic coordinates that might guide and push those struggles into common articulation with each other.

Ending the False Binary between Ideal-Type versus Actually Existing Housing Commons

What kind of housing do we want and need in ideal terms? By answering 'housing in common', we are emphasizing two simultaneous qualities: first, the use-values of housing as spaces of shelter, autonomy, and social reproduction that satisfy material and emotional needs, and not its exchange-value as asset, income stream, investment or commodity; and second, the collective means of producing and reproducing those use-values that are non-hierarchical, directly democratic, egalitarian and affordable in our everyday lives. In the ideal-type housing commons, therefore, we would not want the hierarchical, bureaucratic, and impersonal neoliberal state

managing a national housing stock on behalf of the public. Following Hardt (2010), the common is instead more properly conceptualized as 'the abolition of not only private property but property as such' (2010, 352, our emphasis). To guarantee secure access to that commons, housing must be provided as a guaranteed right irrespective of wealth or income. Housing as commons offers other use-values such as providing protections from market forces and external control, thus curtailing capitalist power in the workplace.

The ideal-type housing commons is arguably reflected in Colin Ward's anarchist manifesto for dweller control and self-help housing, Tenants Take Over (Ward 1974). Instead of defending state housing, which he called 'municipal serfdom—based on paternalism, bureaucratic social control, segregation and substandard housing, Ward argued for housing that simultaneously enabled three freedoms denied by the state: to move at will, to stay put, and to control one's own home (Ward 1985, 41). All three could be found in the model of 'mutual home ownership', which allowed for a form of collective ownership that simultaneously recognized individual autonomy and control. Tenants would become members of a housing society that purchased existing dwellings (or land to build new homes), and would be directly involved in the collective management of their own homes. Rent levels would be set to service any debts incurred and build up an equity share in the property so that when a tenant left, they would receive capital returns, which Ward (1974, 131) argued was necessary to make mutuality as attractive as individual home ownership.

However, the neoliberal assault since 1979 that has seen the re-privatization of housing through the progressive selling off of the historic stock of public housing has had a particularly devastating effect on housing conditions in all sectors (Hodkinson 2012b). Millions of households can no longer access a quasi-secure housing space that once constrained the exploitative power of capital through its mix of low rents and legal protections. Instead, they are forced into the private housing market where, through fear of mortgage defaults or evictions, they are more susceptible to capitalist exploitation. Pushing for the ideal-type housing commons at the expense of existing public housing thus risks losing sight of what Harvey (2012) correctly highlights as the strategic need to defend existing or new commons against (re)enclosure. Local autonomous commons do not inherently escape capitalist social relations just because we collectively own and manage them. Nor is local self-management always necessarily anti-capitalist: neoliberalism, after all, loves localism and local control, and unless it specifically disrupts capitalist social relations, the

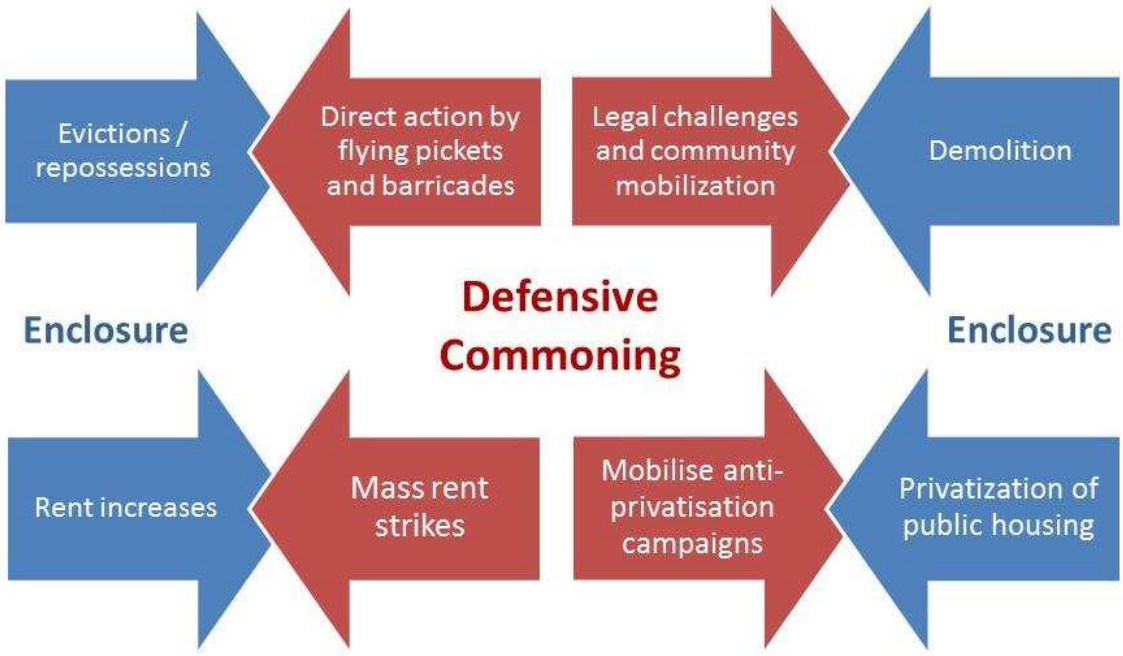
commons as self-organized social reproduction could work in capital's favour by relieving capital or the state of responsibility for the 'social wage'. This is what De Angelis (2013) has called capital's 'commons fix'.

What Harvey helps us to see, beyond the blinkered idealism of ideal-type commons, is that all housing, irrespective of tenure and ownership, constitutes an actually existing housing commons when we recognize its collective use-value as social infrastructure that benefits us all when everyone can access it. The existing stock of homes in the United Kingdom currently stands at just over 28 million dwellings (DCLG Live Table 101), of which more than three-quarters is privately owned by either owner-occupiers or private landlords. This is a national resource of residential buildings that will be with us for hundreds of years into the future, thus representing important sites of resistance to enclosure. For example, individual home ownership, and the mortgage-bondage it usually requires, might form an essential pillar supporting capitalism, but when a household is repossessed for failing to meet mortgage payments or is compulsory purchased by the state to make way for a new development, a new round of enclosures are taking place that can only be resisted by defending the home owner. Similarly, state housing may well be bureaucratic, paternalistic, and subject to neoliberalization, but for those unable to access a home they can control, it remains a vital resource pool that should always be defended from attack given that the alternatives in such a context will always be worse.

Combining Defensive and Offensive Commoning

What is at stake, therefore, is both the preservation of an existing stock of commons ('defensive *commoning')* and the production of new housing commons ('*offensive commoning')*. Defensive commoning resists enclosure of the actually existing housing commons, recognizing it as forms of protection against the market, however 'corrupted' (Hardt and Negri 2009). It involves defending everyone's 'right to housing' and 'right to stay put' (Hartman 1984) by resisting the privatization of public housing, the further marketization of social rented housing, the demolition of homes and estates regardless of tenure, and the repossession and eviction of both home owners who have defaulted on their mortgage payments and tenants of social or private landlords (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Defending the existing housing commons from enclosure



Offensive commoning means actively creating new spaces of shelter and home that embody the ideal-type commons. For instance, existing home owners can create new housing commons by turning their existing individual properties into a mutual homeownership society that is run on a more collective basis. Alternatively, existing public ownership can be democratized through Nevitt's (1971) 'communal tenant ownership' vision in which public tenants are made joint-legal owners of public housing in a social contract variation of Ward's mutual home ownership model. This would give tenants' legal rights to security of tenure, to modify and improve their homes, to be represented in local housing management, and to enjoy the lowest possible rents based on collective sharing of costs and risks via the state.

A cross-tenure housing movement, however, must go further than supporting isolated acts of resistance and creation, or isolated strikes against enclosure. We must fuse defensive and offensive commoning together wherever possible as part of the same struggle. In the very moment of struggle to defend the existing housing commons, we must seek to transform it along the principles of living-in-common wherever possible but without weakening the protective shield that strategic housing commons provide. Similarly, in the very moment of creating cooperative forms of housing, we should ensure that these new spaces of commons actively support existing housing

commons and undermine enclosure. In our approach, commoning takes place at the apex of such acts of resistance and creation. This approach can be illustrated by three examples of creative resistance:

1) The London Squatters Campaign. Born in 1968 as an act of resistance to the problems of homelessness and slum landlords, the London Squatters Campaign mainly targeted luxury flats, hotels, and empty public buildings in order to house the homeless and pressure the government to change its priorities. Beginning with short-lived, tokenistic occupations that put the scandal of empty property and homelessness onto the political agenda, the squatters soon learned the art of squatting and how to handle the law, police, media and public bodies. Once occupied, the squatters would seek to negotiate for the right to stay with a tenancy agreement, or to be rehoused elsewhere within the local authority. Within months new groups were forming and families from across London were contacting the group keen to squat. One outcome was the establishment of a legal precedent that landlords could not evict squatters themselves (often through intimidation and violence) but had to seek a court order, making evictions less straightforward and generating important bargaining power. In many London Boroughs, councils handed over thousands of empty homes, some destined for demolition, to squatters on short-term licences. Squatting also politicized the problem of homelessness to the extent that the Labour government was forced to amend homeless legislation (see Bailey 1973).
2) Transforming real estate into housing coops in Montreal. In 1968, in response to plans to evict them for a $250million redevelopment project, residents of Milton Park in Montreal organized, holding protest marches and street festivals to campaign against the demolition of the neighbourhood, and culminating in 1972 when 56 protesters were arrested during a protest sit-in as bulldozers moved in. However, partly as a consequence of this militant activity, the development project floundered and in 1977 the developer sought to sell the unbuilt two-thirds of its stake in the neighbourhood. Under pressure from a resurgent neighbourhood movement, the city passed a zoning bylaw limiting building heights in the district, effectively ending the original project, and in 1979 the Canadian government bought the 600 homes that had not been demolished so that they could be renovated and handed over to cooperative housing associations. The Milton Park story has inspired

housing cooperatives across Quebec, with about 1,300 cooperatives administering 60,000 residents in 30,000 units, while the community members have continued to improve the neighbourhood through both direct action and cooperative production, securing new green spaces, pedestrianized roads, and community centres (see Kowaluk and Piché-Burton 2012).

3) Resisting mortgage repossession, creating social rent in Spain. Since the 2008 financial crisis, a wing of the Spanish housing movement, the PAH (Platform for People Affected by Mortgages), has been successfully resisting the wave of mortgage repossessions through collective actions, including large protest demonstrations and direct action. There are now well over 200 PAHs and local housing assemblies, operating according to values of mutual aid and collectivism, and creating leverage over banks with coordinated militant resistance against evictions, occupations of bank offices, and squatting in buildings at risk of eviction, which pressures lenders into negotiating on debt and repossession. Importantly, the PAH is also seeking the creation of new housing commons through the transformation of empty houses owned by banks (some of which are owned by the Spanish taxpayer since the post-crisis bailout) into social or cooperative housing. Some occupied buildings are currently functioning as living spaces for families, according to cooperative principles, while under threat of re-enclosure and eviction. The PAH's success and popularity has seen one of its most prominent figures, Ada Colau, elected as mayor of Barcelona in May 2015 with the platform Barcelona en Comú winning minority control of the municipal government (see García-Lamarca 2017).

Circulation of the Housing Commons

Here we see how different acts of resistance to enclosure in different parts of the housing struggle generate new forms of commons that themselves support the creation of further commoning projects. These are clear examples of what Dyer-Witheford (2006) calls 'circulation of commons', a process by which people organize themselves into collectives that generate a common that is then able to produce more associations and commons. If we want to expand the housing commons at a faster rate than it is being enclosed, we must make these singular, one-off acts of commoning become, like the circulation of capital itself, 'aggressive and expansive: proliferating, self-strengthening and diversifying' until they become socially hegemonic (Dyer-Witheford 2010,

110). De Angelis (2017) conceptualizes this circulation and expansion of the commons in terms of 'boundary commoning', whereby different commons systems are put into productive relations with each other, building new kinds of expanded commons based on communication and sustained cooperation. Forms of 'structural coupling' between different commons could make one system's complexity available to another and so allow 'the boundaries of one system to be included in the operational domain of the other' (Luhmann 1995, 217). Such forms of linkage and cooperation might thus '[give] shape to commons at larger scales, pervading social spaces and intensifying the presence of commons within them' (De Angelis 2017, 287).

We can imagine these processes of expanded reproduction by bringing separate acts of generative resistance outlined above into circulation with each other. In each of these examples, new knowledge, finance, housing, and activism are being created that can feed into other projects. For example, squatting collectives can not only be useful in occupying empty homes but the activists and their acquired knowledge can be invested in other struggles when the occupation of homes is needed to resist demolitions or evictions. Similarly, anti-privatization campaigns can provide support and advice to homeowners trying to mobilize their own campaign against demolition. The homes that are saved, brought into forms of common ownership or newly constructed within these projects can also be vital additions to the actually existing commons that could at any point become an important source of shelter for communities resisting enclosure.

The concept of commoning thus enables us to imagine a cross-tenure platform for the creation of a 'common housing movement' that brings together public tenants, home owners, private renters, squatters and the homeless around a common political agenda. Alongside campaigns against evictions or mortgage repossessions, for regulation of rents and conditions, and for security, the common housing movement would also support all forms of cooperative and mutual home ownership schemes as long as they do not involve the undemocratic privatization of public housing or a net loss of affordable housing in a locality. The long-term aim of such a strategy would be to create a critical mass of diverse strategic and tactical interventions, from blocking privatization and gentrification, stopping the closure of community facilities, occupying land, or standing in local elections, in order to force periodic concessions from state and capital, re-energize housing campaigns, create and defend housing commons, and bring them into articulation with strategic commoning in other spheres of production (e.g. cooperative food growers), exchange (e.g. people's shops) and reproduction (e.g. community schools).

Coordination of the Housing Commons

Finally, the most important question raised by our argument is how does all this happen? Who will make this expanded circulation of commoning happen and how does it get coordinated? Most autonomist Marxist thinkers conceive of commoning as the formation and self-management of autonomous spaces and new value practices that exist beyond the reaches not only of capital, but also the state apparatus (see De Angelis 2017). Hardt and Negri (2009), for instance, argue that new commons continually emerge through new associations of human activity—knowledge, communication, and creativity—in ways that a state neither could nor should have control of because that complexity exceeds its capacity to act as a controlling force.

While we share this politics of autonomy and rejection of state-centrism, we also share Harvey's (2012) concerns about the democratic limits of scale brought up by horizontalism and localism: 'scaling-up' requires some form of nested hierarchical structure that can link together local commons into a city-wide or regional commons infrastructure, in an egalitarian, democratic and socially just way. There are a number of reasons such a structure might be necessary: local communities can produce externality effects that cannot be controlled by them and might have detrimental effects on others (see Purcell 2006); the accrued social benefit of distinct local commoning projects will likely be uneven, and a more just outcome would require those benefits to be distributed more evenly; the commons at the metropolitan or regional level requires certain technologically-intensive resources—such as housing, transport, waste and energy infrastructures—to be integrated and centralized in ways that coordinated local actions are unlikely to achieve; and finally only some form of external pressure towards openness can counter the tendency for boundaried autonomous communities to become exclusionary. Harvey's main point here, however, is that assuming this can be accomplished without some sort of hierarchical organizational structure is wishful thinking: '...when it comes to bundling together issues of this kind, left-analysis becomes vague, gesturing hopefully towards some magical concordance of local actions' or noting but ignoring the problem (2012, 80).

In response, we see real potential in the current networked vertical and horizontal practices of the Spanish housing movement, which builds on neighbourhood housing assemblies to coordinate and circulate struggles and ideas (García-Lamarca 2017). The PAH model, for instance, begins from the direct involvement in housing assemblies of those affected by the housing crisis, who share experiences and strategies, plan acts of resistance and creation, and link with other local

nodes in a wider housing movement that scales up to coordinated regional and state level meetings (PAH 2016; Youngman 2015). While the PAH has tended to focus on repossessed and evicted homeowners, mobilizing on the ensuing moral affect of homeowners as a betrayed generation, our approach demands that neighbourhood housing assemblies are always cross-tenure. Potentially, there could be dozens of assemblies of different tenure compositions and geographies, each self-managing their own autonomous local housing activism which circulates through a wider assembly that self-organizes at the scale of the city, neighbourhood, or territory in question, and in turn coordinates with other assemblies as part of a national (or transnational) movement.

Finally, following Lefebvrian-inspired ideas of planetary urbanization (Lefebvre 1970; Merrifield 2014) in which the metropolis has become the key site of struggle against capitalist enclosure of the common (Hardt and Negri 2009), we also need to ensure that the housing commons becomes one node articulated into a broader ecology of urban commoning and the right to the city (see Harvey 2012). This movement would be comprised of different assemblies working with each other to create commons within the various urban systems underpinning our everyday social reproduction: energy, transport, education, public space, waste, food and so on. Such a model has the potential to reproduce another key dimension of the Glasgow Rent Strike: a wider urban and national struggle against injustice under capitalism.

Conclusion

Glasgow showed how successful rent strikes require not only organization, courage and solidarity, but the urban proletariat recognizing and deploying its own class power. It was an urban struggle, not just a housing issue, in which the city's grassroots were lined up against their industrial and financial overlords as a cohesive social force. The Rent Strike was therefore a strategic strike at the heart of empire, class rule, and profit, in which a perfect storm of circumstances meant landlords could be sacrificed to keep the social peace, conditions that currently do not exist. However, the key function of the rent strike—stemming the circulation of capital through the built environment—must be reinvented for today's conditions if we are to gain leverage against the power of state and capital in a new terrain of struggle marked by neoliberalism, splintered class and tenure geographies, and the precarity of everyday social reproduction. Without allying demands to the real power to create blockages in the flow of money, neither landlord, lender nor state will listen or act. This power must proceed from a project of building our own alternative

housing options in the form of a commoning movement that brings together new and existing housing resources with new associations built on alternative value practices. Such a commons would work towards providing for our housing needs in the here and now by simultaneously defending the existing housing commons and actively supporting new alternatives in ways that would create blockages in the circulation of capital while simultaneously reducing our reliance on the private market and the state. But these alternatives also need to hold out against re-enclosure by capital, meaning they need to expand and become hegemonic through complex circulatory articulations between and amongst each other and other systems. Coordinating this circulation can find a starting point in the housing assembly, as a means of democratic organization that can scale up the capacity of the movement to act without compromising principles of grassroots democracy and self-governance. The circulation of the commons here takes place not through the invisible hand of the market, but through the very visible body of the housing commoners, the groups of activists and individuals who are resisting and creating. Each action to commonize housing cannot by itself mean the end of capitalism and thus the end of the housing question, but they can help to circulate and expand the commons to improve life in the present and provide the basis for post-capitalism in the future.

References

Bailey, Ron. 1973. The Squatters. London: Penguin.

Beach, Ben. 2015. "Is It Time for London to Go on a Rent Strike?" Vice, June 16, 2015. https://www.vice.com/en_ca/article/vdxdb9/rent-strike-ben-beach-839

Cant, Callum. 2016. "Students In The UK Prepare For A New Wave Of Rent Strikes." Roar Magazine, October 17, 2016. https://roarmag.org/essays/uk-student-rent-strike/

Castells, Manuel. 1983. The City and the Grassroots. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Cherki, Eddy, and Michel Wievorka. 2007. "Autoreduction Movements in Turin." In Autonomia: Post-Political Writings edited by Sylvere Lotringer and Christian Marazzi, 72–79. Los Angeles: Semiotexte.

Damer, Sean. 2000. "'The Clyde Rent War!' The Clydebank Rent Strike of the 1920s." In Class Struggle and Social Welfare edited by Michael Lavalette and Gerry Mooney, 71–95. London: Routledge.

DCLG. n.d. "Table 101: By Tenure, United Kingdom (Historical Series)." https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/609286/LT_101.xls

De Angelis, Massimo. 2007. The Beginning of History: Value Struggles and Global Capital. London: Pluto Press.

De Angelis, Massimo. 2013. "Does Capital Need a Commons Fix?" Ephemera: Theory and Organization in Society 13(3):603–615.

De Angelis, Massimo. 2017. Omnia Sunt Communia: On the Commons and the Transformation to Postcapitalism. London: Zed Books.

Dyer-Witheford, Nick. 2006. "The circulation of the Common." Paper presented to the Conference on Immaterial Labour, Multitudes, and New Social Subjects: Class Composition in Cognitive Capitalism, 29–30 April 2006, King's College, University of Cambridge. http://www.fims.uwo.ca/people/faculty/dyerwitheford/Commons2006.pdf.

Dyer-Witheford, Nick. 2010. "Commonism." In What Would It Mean to Win?, edited by Turbulence Collective. Oakland, CA: PM Press.

Englander, David. 1983. Landlord and Tenant in Urban Britain, 1838–1918. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Forrest, Ray. and Yosuke Hirayama. 2015. "The Financialization of the Social Project: Embedded Liberalism, Neoliberalism and Home Ownership." Urban Studies 52(22):233–244.

García-Lamarca, Melissa. 2017. “Reconfiguring the Public through Housing Rights Struggles in Spain.” In City Unsilenced: Urban Resistance and Public Space in the Age of Shrinking Democracy, edited by Jeffery Hou. New York: Routledge.

Gibson-Graham, J K. 2006. A Post-Capitalist Politics. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Griffin, Paul. 2015. The Spatial Politics of Red Clydeside: Historical Labour Geographies and Radical Connections. PhD diss., University of Glasgow.

Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri 2009. Commonwealth. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Hardt, Michael. 2010. “The Common in Communism.” Rethinking Marxism, 22(3):346–356.

Harvey, David. 2003. The New Imperialism. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Harvey, David. 2012. Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution. London: Verso.

Hobsbawm, Eric. 1987. “Labour in the Great City.”.New Left Review, I/166: 39–51.

Hodkinson, Stuart. 2012a. “The Return of the Housing Question”. Ephemera: Theory and Politics in Organization 12(4):423–444.

Hodkinson, Stuart. 2012b. “The New Urban Enclosures.” City: Analysis of Urban Trends, Culture, Theory, Policy, Action 16(4): 500–518.

Hughes, David, and Stuart Lowe. 1995. Social Housing Law and Policy. London, Dublin & Edinburgh: Butterworths.

Kowaluk, Lucia, and Carolle Piché-Burton, eds. 2012. Communauté Milton-Parc: How We Did It and How It Works Now. Montreal: Communauté Milton-Parc. http://www.miltonparc.org/English.pdf

Linebaugh, Peter. 2008. The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All. California: University of California Press.

Lefebvre, Henri. 1970 [2003]. The Urban Revolution. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

Luhmann, Niklas. 1995. Social Systems. Redwood City: Stanford University Press.

McLean, Iain. 1983. The Legend of Red Clydeside. Edinburgh: John Donald.

Melling, Joseph. 1983. R*ent Strikes: Peoples' Struggle for Housing in West Scotland 1890*–1916. Edinburgh: Polygon Books.

Merrifield, A (2014), The New Urban Question. London: Pluto Press

Nevitt, Della. 1971. Fair Deal for Householders. London: Fabian Society.

Ostrom, Elinor. 1990. Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action. New York: Cambridge University Press.

PAH (Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca) (2016) *The PAH's Green Book: A Basic Guide to* the PAH. [Online]. [Accessed 18 July 2017]. http://afectadosporlahipoteca.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/GreenBook-PAH-21juny.pdf

Peck, Jamie. 2001. Workfare States. London: Guilford Press.

Power, Ann 1993. Hovels to Highrise: State Housing in Europe Since 1850. London: Routledge.

Purcell, Mark. 2006. “Urban Democracy and the Local Trap.” Urban Studies 43(11): 1921–1941.

UCL, Cut The Rent. n.d. Facebook Group. Accessed July 15, 2017. https://www.facebook.com/uclcuttherent/

Ward, Colin. 1974. Tenants Take Over. London: The Architectural Press Ltd.

Ward, Colin. 1985. When We Build Again: Let's Have Housing that Works! London: Pluto Press.

Watt, Paul. and Anna Minton,. 2016. London's Housing Crisis and its Activisms: Introduction. City: Analysis of Urban Trends, Culture, Theory, Policy, Action 20(2): 204–221.

Youngman, T. (2015) Housing Gains in Spain. Red Pepper. [Online]. [Accessed 8 July 2017]. http://www.redpepper.org.uk/houyoungsing-gains-in-spain/