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Making power emerge: municipalism and the right to the city

Municipalist strategies enable a radical re-articulation of our hopes for political change

There will be a tendency to remember the end of 2019 as a period of missed opportunities and strategic mishaps - and perhaps as failure. Yet it was in many ways a time of profound hope: the preceding years had seen a blossoming of radical political economic thought (and practice, to a limited degree) that was seriously orientated towards the future.[1] At least amongst those under forty, this blossoming correlated with the near complete collapse of a capitalist realism that had foreclosed the progressive imagination for decades.[2] Beyond socially necessary redistributive policies and marginal tax increases on obscene wealth, there was a reasonable prospect that a Labour government would have provided opportunity for a proliferation of experiments in economic democracy - novel approaches to the collective ownership and governance of everything from land to data, and with credible pathways for how to achieve this.

The profound hope so many of us have felt over the past few years - the tacit knowledge that things can be different, and that we are generating equitable and sustainable alternatives that we know will work - is not something that we can afford to be squandered. We must find a new articulation for this hope, sifting the most important elements of the past few years, and recombining them as part of new approaches to political organising. This article focuses on one such approach - new municipalism - drawing on what I've learned over the last few years from those both doing and theorising 'municipalism' in a diversity of international settings. From the need to decentre the institutions of the state in our thinking and organising, through to the development and implementation of models of economic democracy and the commons[3&4], it explores some of the ways in which municipalist strategies could play a fundamental role in the building of a new progressive left politics in the UK.

As there will undoubtedly be renewed calls to focus on what local government can do to contribute to the rebuilding of a socialist project, it is essential to make clear from the beginning a distinction between progressive or nominally 'socialist' approaches to local government administration, and what constitutes municipalist political approaches. Whilst the administrative work done by local authorities is of significant concern, it is neither an equivalent to - nor the essential focus of – a new municipalist politics. This distinction is crucial to exploring the full horizon of what any transformative social movement, especially one that takes the question of political scale seriously, could look like.

However, while such guiding principles are important in attempting to build some form of working definition of contemporary municipalism, they leave us with a lot of work in developing actionable political strategy. The strange thing about political theory is that the further it becomes abstracted from its context, and the more universal it claims to be, the less useful it seems to become. Indeed, this is perhaps one of the principle tenets that resonates across contemporary municipalist movements: a politics without place has no politics at all.

This contribution will therefore offer five connected propositions for how we could develop a municipalist coordination in the city in which I live - Manchester.[5] (I use the

term coordination intentionally as both a verb and a noun; both as a mode of operation and a way of identifying a conscious political initiative.) To that end, these propositions are neither instead of, nor a replacement for, all that currently exists in terms of social and political infrastructure in the city. Nor would they necessarily be appropriate or replicable in towns and cities that could afford to be less or more ambitious, although it is hoped they may offer a degree of inspiration to those looking to develop a municipalist project in their own village, town or city.

To argue for a municipalist politics is neither to turn inwards and give up; nor is it merely a dispensable step in the long march towards national electoral success. It is not a case of 'making do' with the subnational political sphere during a time of electoral weakness, but rather of shifting focus as to where and how we see transformative movements being built. To argue for a municipalist politics is to argue for place-based strategies that transform our relationship to our territories and how they are currently governed. It is less about seizing institutions, and more about coordinating and manipulating those that currently exist whilst building new ones. It is less about sharing or dispersing power, and more about making power emerge. And it is not instead of a national and international perspective, but rather the development of new ways to act on these perspectives.

What municipalism?

In a 2016 article detailing the impact of austerity measures on local government, Tom Crewe noted that

> the establishment of a neoliberal consensus in Britain has been, in its essence and by necessity, an anti-municipal project. Austerity is Thatcherism's logical end-point, effecting simultaneously the destruction of local government as a potentially rivalrous state-within-a-state, and the marketisation of nearly every aspect of public policy.

Whilst New Labour staved off the absolute demise of local government, Crewe argues that their policy, was 'to leave almost all the new restrictions in place, to encourage more outsourcing and to place ever tighter controls on funding'.[6] Subsequent years have been no kinder to municipal administrations, with the Local Government Association predicting in July 2019 that more than ninety of its members will run out of money to meet their statutory obligations within the next five years.

It is in this dire context that the socialist Mayor of Salford, Paul Dennett, recently set out a nine-point plan to 'save local government'.[7] And although the national election result now means that much of this will not come to pass, the Labour Party manifesto did outline some much needed steps that would begin the reversal of the decades-long trend of decline. These policies were in tune with Dennett's plan, and reflected both Jeremy Corbyn's celebrated commitment to the 'rebirth of municipal socialism' and John McDonnell's assertion that 'democracy and decentralisation are the watchwords of our socialism'.[89] Yet the return of the 'municipal' as an important political scale has been recognised not just by the Labour Party leadership but also across wider parts of the British left. In the twelve months prior to the election, Labour groups in towns and cities such as Manchester and Lewes held a number of over-subscribed meetings focused on the potential re-emergence of a municipal left politics. Edinburgh saw the

birth of the resident-led 'Citizen' network, which takes the future of the city as its primary object of struggle.[10] Inspired in part by an international context that has seen municipalist movements across Latin America, North America and Europe, a wealth of publications have explicitly looked for the emergence of a 'new municipalist' tendency in places such Preston, Islington, Hackney and Camden.[11] There have also been a number of conferences on municipalism in the UK.[12]

With the electoral defeat of the Corbyn-led Labour project, and the UK committed to a far-right disaster-nationalism for the next four and half years, we can anticipate that some on the left - both in and outside of the Labour Party - will begin to refocus on the 'local', town, and city level. Just as some framed the municipal socialist initiatives of the 1980s as an effort 'to illustrate and build awareness of the alternatives' and to 'mobilise popular support and to build alliances as the basis for rebuilding an electoral majority', there will be those who now approach the local as a key scale for organising until Labour is strong enough to command an electoral victory at the national level.[13]

Putting aside the drastically reduced resources of local government in comparison to the early 1980s, there is merit to the argument that the rebuilding of a national electoral majority will be grounded (in part) on the progressive work conducted by local authorities. The community wealth-building approach that has been championed by the Centre for Local Economic Strategies - which takes Preston as its foremost example - has attracted national attention, with the Labour Party establishing a Community Wealth Building Unit to assess the prospects for its wider uptake. Thus far restricted largely (although not exclusively) to progressive approaches to procurement, community wealth-building has (in theory) realistic ambitions to address the role local administrations can play in promoting economic democracy. Whilst local government remains in a dire financial situation due to the ideological austerity agenda, the community wealth-building work demonstrates there is scope for local authorities to pursue progressive agendas, which may well contribute in turn to the rebuilding of an electoral majority.

Yet the administrative work done by local authorities is neither an equivalent to - nor the core focus of - a municipalist political project. As Ana Mendez, an activist in Madrid 129 and former cultural-policy advisor puts it, a municipalist approach is 'not a way to implement the state conception of the world in a smaller scale. It's a way to actually modify this level of the local government into something that is different'.[14] Whilst a community wealth-building agenda has a place in contributing to a municipalist project, and local government administration is an important site of political contestation, the purpose is not to run local authorities like little socialist-states-within-a-state. In any case, such a proposition would be untenable for a number of reasons. Rather, a municipalist project is about contesting not only the functions of local government (and beyond), but the forms through which we make collective decisions about ourselves and our territories.

There is a therefore a crucial distinction to be made between the territory we produce (and through which we live), and the institutions and processes that govern its production - which are by no means constrained to our local authorities. The enduring goal of a municipalist project is to undertake a fundamental reorganisation of our territories, exploring what forms of social power, institutions and processes - both existing and not yet born - would allow us to collectively govern our territories in our

common interest. Whilst the operation of local government administration remains an important concern, the question becomes: (how) can the institutions and processes of the local state (and beyond) contribute to a broader transformation of how we govern our territories?

Municipalism as the Right to the City

One of the foremost theorists to 'spatially' conceptualise this problem of collective self-government was Henri Lefebvre, a French philosopher whose work has gained increasing prominence since English translation began in the early 1990s. Speaking closely to the sense of disenfranchisement and marginalisation that so many experience living in urban environments, his concept of the 'Right to the City' has come to animate a wide range of social movements, inspired a wealth of political thought, and become the branding of major international NGOs. Its popularity has even led to it being referred to explicitly as part of the 'shared vision' of the UN's 2016 New Urban Agenda.[15]

Yet, as Margit Mayer has noted, the evocative terminology has encouraged considerable conceptual slippage. The Right to the City evidently 'resonates with activists, as it makes sense as a claim and a banner under which to mobilize … an oppositional demand, which challenges the claims of the rich and powerful'. Yet at the same time, it has 'gained significant traction with international NGOs and advocacy organizations [which] enumerate specific rights', and, although these are usually progressive, they tend to foreclose any broader vision of transformation in favour of 'claims for inclusion in the current system as it exists'.[16]

Rather than an abstracted set of rights to be guaranteed for a homogeneous and passive citizenry, Lefebvre's vision of the Right to the City cannot be separated from his account of autogestion. As Mark Purcell has summarised, this concept of autogestion speaks to the:

> struggle from below by people who have decided to take on the responsibility of governing themselves, who gain confidence through their successes, and who are able to demonstrate, bit by bit, that the state is no longer necessary … In autogestion, we do not smash the state and then begin managing our own affairs. Rather we manage our own affairs, we work hard at it, and we get to the point where it is evident that we can truly govern ourselves. Only then does the withering of the state truly kick in. Autogestion thus offers the possibility of a withering from below. It is a clear alternative to a failed model of a vanguard party seizing the state in order to impose conditions that will cause the state to wither away.[17]

Far from an abstracted set of liberal rights to be enshrined within the existing institutions of the state, the enactment of the Right to the City is thus an active process of replacing the state, which is understood not just as an institution but as 'a form of social relations, a class practice [and] a process which projects certain forms of organisation upon our everyday activity';[18] the local state is seen as including within itself diverse forms of collective social organisation that enable citizens not only to

occupy already-produced urban space, but also to themselves produce urban spaces, so that the city meets the needs of its inhabitants.[19]

This vision of collective self-governance-beyond-the-state chimes with a wealth of subversive urban practices - from squatting movements and guerrilla gardening to 'DIY urbanism' and housing cooperatives. These are often understood as being guided by a 'Lefebvre-inspired logic': the right to use and shape the city is based on activists' inhabitance of the city.[20] Whilst some of these examples offer somewhat ephemeral and symbolic moments of dissent against the dominant logics that reproduce our territories, others prove to be longer-lasting efforts at collective appropriation and self-management - not least initiatives such as community land trusts that begin to enact different relationships of collective ownership and governance. Yet the fundamental challenge that many of these practices face is how to take the step beyond being small prefigurative lifeboats of 'otherness', and instead contribute to a broader movement of transformation in how we govern both ourselves and our territories.

One starting point for addressing this challenge is to return to a more nuanced reading of Lefebvre's own conception of autogestion. Lefebvre was vehemently anti-statist, asserting that 'there is no "good State" … The State crushes that which resists it; it makes difference disappear'. Indeed, contrary to revolutionary strategies premised on seizing the state, Lefebvre suggests that:

> autogestion calls the State into question as a constraining force erected above society as a whole, capturing and demanding the rationality that is inherent to social relations … Autogestion cannot escape this brutal obligation: to constitute itself as a power which is not that of the state.[21]

Whilst some have suggested that Lefebvre's proclamations on the state demonstrate a strong anarchistic tendency, Lefebvre is nonetheless known to have declared 'I'm a Marxist of course … so that one day we can all become anarchists!'.[22]

Nonetheless, Lefebvre's irrefutable anti-statism has led to a somewhat polarised interpretation of autogestion - and the Right to the City more generally - that focuses on initiatives that exist 'outside' of the state, and, at least nominally, function in opposition to the logic of capital. The examples on the roll-call given above - from squatting movements to community greening - tend to be positioned as 'alternatives' that exist in-spite-of and despite the state. Yet Lefebvre himself warns against a 'narrow, doomed conception' of autogestion that 'tends to dissolve society into distinct units, communes, businesses, services' - little utopian lifeboats of autonomy - suggesting that 'an autogestion that only organized itself into partial unities, without achieving globality [le global], would be destined to failure'.[23]

Indeed, Lefebvre's conception of autogestion recognises that 'the global incorporates the level of strategic decision, of politics, of political parties', and that 'for autogestion to be consolidated and expanded, it has to occupy the strong points of a social structure that constantly bridle against it'.[24] As such, rather than a crude anti-statism that forecloses any consideration of what is to be done about the problem of the state, we can read Lefebvre's concept of autogestion as posing the seemingly paradoxical challenge of understanding how the state can be manipulated against itself as part of a general movement to govern ourselves without the state. In this sense, autogestion can

be seen as the method behind the concept of being in-against-and-beyond the state; it involves the recognition that contestation over the form of the state is foundational to any concerns over its function - and this takes on a specific spatial form when articulated as part of the Right to the City.

From Cooperation Jackson in Mississippi to Ciudad Futura in Rosario, municipalist initiatives share this relatively paradoxical approach to the state within their organising strategies. Each initiative emerges out of remarkably different forms of social organisation, in substantially different contexts, and has approached the institutions of the local state quite differently. Yet an ethos they appear to hold in common is that municipalism is neither a project of seizing the local state so as to deliver change from above, nor one that ignores state institutions so as to focus solely on building lifeboats of autonomy, creative acts of dissent, or workplace struggle. Rather, they appear to be built on the hypothesis that we are capable of developing much better forms for governing ourselves and our territories - which is where the proliferation of work on new forms of economic democracy and the commons most clearly fits - that will function to deliver more equitable, sustainable and just ways of providing for our collective interests.

Municipalist approaches are therefore interested in the operation of the local state - and indeed all scales of existing government - to the extent that they can support such a movement.[25] Yet they are also critically concerned with the emergence of non-state sources of power - renters' unions, cooperative energy initiatives, community land trusts, arts and social centres, community supported agriculture schemes, and so on - these are the lifeblood of any such movement. It is not because of a belief that the existing scale of local government is somehow deemed privileged in terms of its ability to act that municipalist initiatives unfold strategically at the level of the 'municipality'; rather, municipalist perspectives understand the territory of the municipality - with the intense proximity of the social and material relations that constitute those territories - as being a privileged starting point for the creation and deepening of opportunities for our collective self-governance. This is why the place of politics matters, and why (in part) we talk of the right to the city.

Five propositions for a municipalist coordination in Manchester

Whilst much can be learned from what has attempted elsewhere - both tactically, and in terms of broad principles - there is no rule-book that details what a municipalist strategy may look like in your own territory. As this article has sought to demonstrate, this is not due to an intellectual fuzziness in which anything goes, but because conditions cannot be generalised. There is little sense in looking to reproduce a land strategy that was effective in a medium-sized de-industrialised American town characterised by collapsing land-prices and vacant lots, if your territory is a densely urbanised city with a nominally progressive local authority, characterised by spiralling rents and predatory platform capitalism. No universal organising approach can be successfully forced onto such diversity.

To this end - and to avoid falling foul of my own commitment to ensuring that politics has its place - I am offering five connected propositions for how we could develop a municipalist coordination in my own city of Manchester. A post-industrial Northern

city considered to have pursued 'a short and rather tepid experiment in municipal socialism' during the early 1980s,[26] in the last thirty years Manchester has been redefined as the archetypal 'entrepreneurial city', characterised by a 'development-led vision', with overtones of 'the "trickle-down" of wealth philosophy which justifies unbridled entrepreneurialism'.[27] City leaders have been accused of acceding to government pressure to absorb expenditure cuts in return for the promise of additional powers and future funds, but these have turned out to be less than anticipated and have come with strings attached. Rather than being a sign of increased democratic control, devolution has taken the form of 'a centrally prescribed localism based on a weak governance model [in which] local statutory responsibility increases, but diminishing central government funding leaves local authorities more dependent on their ability to raise local revenues'.[28]

The city's growth model is typified by a landscape punctuated by steel-and-glass phalluses promising 'authentic urban living experiences' to an international 'market' of young creatives. These towers typify an elite property-led redevelopment of the city: the Greater Manchester Combined Authority has offered over £420 million in low-interest public financing to private developers, while the City local authority has routinely waived the Section 106 agreements that would force developers to provide (nominally) affordable flats and much needed funds to the city.[29] At the same time, the local authority's own statistics recognise that Manchester has one of the highest rates of child poverty in the UK, with more than a third of under-16s living in poverty.[30] Research released by the Financial Times found that whilst Manchester is one of the most economically productive areas in the country, it also has the ignominious accolade of having one of the lowest disposable household incomes.[31]

Manchester's civic leaders are proud of the city's role in historic protest movements' - typified by recent city-sponsored celebrations of the centenaries of the Suffragettes and the Peterloo Massacre, and the recent installation of a statue of Engels in an area of cultural consumption – but recent attempts to contest the direction of the contemporary city have been successfully resisted. As Graham Haughton and others have argued:

> those who question the fundamental assumptions [of Manchester as an entrepreneurial city] tend to be dismissed as 'trouble-makers', serial dissidents, or malcontents with an underlying political agenda to undermine the ruling authorities. By contrast, those happy to play the role of partner or stakeholder can be incorporated into this techno-managerial process and their concerns attended to, since they are viewed to have 'properly aired' their issues in the approved manner, albeit without altering the instituted organization of the modalities of governing.[31]

As should be clear from the earlier argument about the Right to the City, any municipalist project in Manchester will need to do more than replace one governing elite with another; it must be geared towards fundamental changes in the way we approach the governance of the city. With this in mind, the five propositions below are aimed towards the conscious coordination of many different actors, to produce something that is bigger than the sum of its parts. They are not listed in terms of their relevant importance, and should be taken as a constellation of activity rather than a series of linear steps. They are also intended to be generative rather than final, to

encourage thinking around how a municipalist agenda could emerge. In the main I will not even attempt to provide an overview of the many factors and actors that would be relevant to such a coordination - that is something for us to work on in Manchester.

To coordinate with those elected representatives committed to transforming the city
Whilst a number of municipalist initiatives - from Zagreb to Barcelona - have formed and run their own candidatures in city elections, there seems little sense in doing so in our current context. Manchester is a city in which ninety-two of the ninety-six councillors are Labour (with three Liberal Democrats, and one independent), and which voted overwhelmingly for Labour candidates in the general election. At a moment when we need to be focused on articulating new strategies and forms of social power, we should see this as a position of relative strength from which to build. Nonetheless, the cabinet-style structure of the council - in which a leader and nine executive members are chosen out of the total pool of councillors - means that certain councillors have considerably more powers than others, whilst there exists significant diversity in the political and strategic outlook of the elected members.

A municipalist coordination needs to call for the participation of those elected representatives that will help to transform our city - irrespective of which party they belong to. We need councillors who are clear that they both support and contribute to such a coordination – and, conversely, we need to understand which councillors wish to maintain the governing status quo that has dominated the past thirty years. It is not which party people belong to that is our main concern, but whether they are committed to act.

In the medium-term, we should also consider exploring using the provisions of the 2011 Localism Act to dissolve the cabinet-style structure of the council. The 'It's Our City' campaign in Sheffield has successfully triggered a city-wide referendum to occur in May 2020, arguing for a turn towards a committee-based system, which they argue will fit into a broader project of democratising decision-making.[32] It will be valuable to pay close attention as to whether this develops into a bureaucratic sleight of hand, or into something of real value in changing the role citizens can play in the governance of their city.

To coordinate the capacity of citizens to stand together
We need to build on our existing methods and develop new tools that enable citizens to support one another to defend our immediate interests. From rogue landlords to exploitative contracts, we need to work together in developing our capacity to defend and extend our collective rights. In the first instance this means an active role in supporting the grassroots unionisation of the residents of Manchester, not only in conventional sectors, but across the gig economy. Tenants' unions such as ACORN need high-profile publicising and funding, with existing institutions assisting the grassroots unions to expand across the city, and councillors providing transparency and clear advice on developments within the local authority, as well as actively supporting expansion within housing associations and across the private rental sector.

More broadly, we need to find new methods and approaches to articulate our struggles in common. Rather than compartmentalising into 'feminist organising', 'housing organising', 'energy politics', we need to find ways that allow us to aggregate these concerns- so that the sum becomes greater than its parts. As Haughton and others have

argued, there is a need to distinguish between 'social movements that are particular', and focused on specific policies or objectives, and 'political movements that aspire towards a transformation of the instituted order'.[33] Whilst the former are often more grounded in people's lives and thus form the vital energy of any movement, it is the latter that offer the means to challenge how things are done. We need to coordinate such that we do not subsume the former to the latter, but rather find ways to articulate social movements as part of a common political movement.

To coordinate bringing utilities and services into democratic public ownership
We should strive to establish an Observatory for Democratic Ownership, charting the opportunities and addressing the challenges in implementing forms of democratic public ownership of key utilities and services. We know that public ownership has popular support, and we know that hundreds of towns and cities have either re-municipalised or developed new forms of democratic public ownership over the past decade. We need not only to consider what the prospects are for bringing contracts back into public hands, but we need to foster those organisations - such as Greater Manchester Community Renewables - that are already implementing productive models of economic democracy. As the Alternative Models of Ownership report suggests, this isn't about establishing top-down state bureaucracies, but developing new ways - such as public-common partnerships - for us to collectively own and govern those resources we rely upon.[34]

To coordinate a transformation in how economic decisions are made in our city
Manchester needs to put a radical community wealth-building approach at the heart of its economic agenda.[35] This means a super-charged approach to developing a plural ownership of our economy, bringing into common use our land, property and assets (from buses to buildings); a radical revision of our procurement processes towards a transformative economy (especially in light of any changes to procurement law as we leave the EU); a critical realignment of financial power and creation of public banks (and supporting of credit unions); and a dramatic shift in our conditions of employment (beyond voluntary charters to enforceable standards). It means looking at how we make decisions that work in solidarity with other places outside of the city, not against them. It means actively opposing both the discourse and logic of Manchester as an 'entrepreneurial' and 'competitive' city predicated on attracting inward investment, instead focusing on how institutions (not just the local state, but everything from credit unions to schools) can support the development of democratically owned and controlled enterprise.

Much of this work needs to escape the offices of policy-makers and instead take place in popular spaces, focusing on tangible and specific cases that have real import to people's lives. For example, redevelopment sites such Manchester Central Retail Park have the potential to become central in the contestation of our city's future. Situated in close proximity to Manchester's principle rail station, the site is being treated by the Council as an investment opportunity for the development of green-washed high-tech offices, in plans described by the local Trees Not Cars campaign as a 'ghetto for the wealthy'.[36] Sites such as this offer key moments for the political articulation of otherwise 'specific' issues; successful contestation over this site must necessarily involve more than the specific future of this 10.5 acre site; it should concern the very nature of who gets to make decisions about our city, and how they are made.

To coordinate a programme of transformative city experiments
We need to establish a programme of transformative city experiments that push at the limits of political possibility. This means thinking beyond the restrictions on how local authorities can currently act, and instead focusing on how we could begin to implement (using both carrot and stick) the necessary shift towards collective self-governance of our territories. There are already a number of resources that help us stretch our imagination, not least the Transnational Institute's aptly named Transformative Cities Award and associated Atlas of Utopias.[37] There is infinite scope to imagine what these transformative experiments might look like: the establishment of municipal-cooperative farms that provide organic food to our schools;[38] a city-wide adoption of participatory decision-making platforms;[39] a dramatic reforestation or retrofit programme populated through a coordinated voluntary employee volunteer scheme; a public-common energy partnership that puts energy and heat production in collective ownership;[40] or even mobilising towards trialling a four-day week across the city.[41]

Municipalism beyond the municipality

Given the dire situation we find ourselves in, it may seem a bit indulgent to suggest that the question of scale is one of the biggest and most perennial challenges facing the left. In part, this is because the question of scale is one that is frequently approached through a fixation on the political and social institutions that already exist, and the question of which of these is considered most appropriate in delivering progressive social change. At a time when our actions must be driven by the urgent necessity to produce equitable and socially just responses to the climate crisis, it might be seen as a bit of luxury to 'take our time' focusing on organising in individual towns and cities: we need to act now, we need to act fast, and we need to act everywhere.

Yet a municipalist hypothesis does not refute the necessity of contesting existing institutional scales; consider for example the work being done by Corporate Europe Observatory to contest efforts to revise the EU's Bolkestein Directive, and trade deals such as CETA, which would radically restrict the capacity for local authorities to act;[42] or the efforts to run a municipalist candidacy at the 2019 European elections.[43] Rather, the municipalist wager is that our relative proximity in our towns and cities - to one another, to flows of capital, to instances of both crisis and opportunity - makes it a privileged starting point for building a new landscape of power. And it is precisely this new landscape of power, the new processes, institutions and methods through which we begin to govern our territories in common, that will provide the vital force of any broader counter-hegemonic project.

There are no short cuts to making these new forms of power emerge; this landscape can't be delivered from above, but must be experienced and produced together. This doesn't mean abandoning institutions in favour of some utopian volunteerism, but nor does it mean seeking to implement the 'state conception of the world' at the scale of our towns and cities. Rather, it means developing political projects that take seriously the complete disenfranchisement and justifiable lack of faith people have in a fundamentally undemocratic state-system - whatever the colour of the rosette - and using all and any means necessary to develop forms of collective agency over our lives. To focus on the importance of scale is to focus on the problem of where and how we begin to facilitate this building of collective agency, not on behalf of us, but by us.

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Notes
1. The World Transformed functioned to support much of this innovative thought - along with the building of relationships - whilst also providing a unique 'boundary space' between social movements and the Labour Party. A number of new creative think-tanks had formed (such as Common Wealth, Autonomy, and the Strategy and Communications Group), joining some pioneering work by the Centre for Local Economic Strategies and the US-based Democracy Collaborative. A series of relatively unprecedented campaign groups internal to the Labour Party captured wide imagination, such as Labour for a Green New Deal. And a number of conferences and fora cemented both relationships and an emerging intellectual agenda,.
2. For more on capitalism realism, see Mark Fisher's seminal work Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?, Zero Book 2009. For a critical analysis on the relationship between age cohort and political outlook, see K. Milburn, Generation Left, Polity Press 2019.
3. B. Russell, 'Beyond the local trap: New Municipalism and the rise of the Fearless Cities' Antipode 51 3, 2019.
4. See for example our recent report for Commonwealth: https://common-wealth.co.uk/Public-common-partnerships.html.
5. I use the term coordination intentionally as both a verb and a noun; both as a mode of operation and a way of identifying a conscious political initiative.

6. T. Crewe, 'The Strange Death of Municipal England', London Review of Books 38 242016: https://www.lrb.co.uk/v38/n24/tom-crewe/the-strange-death-of-municipal-england.
7. P. Dennett, 'Saving Local Government', Tribune, 15 November 2019: https://tribunemag.co.uk/2019/11/saving-local-government.
8. https://labour.org.uk/press/jeremy-corbyn-speech-labour-councillors-nottingham/
9. Guinan, J. (2016) Democracy and decentralisation are their watchwords: for Corbyn and McDonnell, it's municipal socialism reinvented. Open Democracy. 25.06.2016. https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opendemocracyuk/democracy-and-decentralisation-are-their-watchwords-for-corbyn-and-mcdonn/
10. https://reimaginingthecity.scot/.
11. For example: Demos, *The 'Preston Model' and the New Municipalism*, 2019 https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/June-Final-Web.pdf; and CLES, New Municipalism in London, 2019: https://cles.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/New-Municipalism-in-London_April-2019.pdf.
12. For example The Centre for Urban Research on Austerity (CURA), based at De Montfort University has hosted two conferences on this theme and the 2019 The World Transformed festival hosted a stream of sessions under a 'municipal socialism' banner.
13. M. Boddy and C. Fudge (eds), Local Socialism?, Macmillan 1984, p19.
14. https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/fearless-cities-municipalism-experiments-in-autogestion/.
15. http://habitat3.org/wp-content/uploads/NUA-English.pdf.
16. M. Mayer, 'The "Right to the City" in the context of shifting mottos of urban social movements', City 13 2-3, 2009, pp367-9.
17. M. Purcell, The Down-Deep Delight of Democracy, Wiley-Blackwell 2013, pp41.

18. London-Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, In and Against the State, 1979.

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