

# Building post-capitalist futures

**TRANSNATIONAL INSTITUTE FELLOWS' MEETING**

*Amsterdam 7-10 June 2018*

## *“The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born”*

Over several sunny days in June 2018, a diverse group of 60 activists and researchers from 30 countries convened for a multi-day meeting to discuss the collective building of post-capitalist futures. The meeting provided the opportunity for a rich exchange of perspectives and experiences, as well as deep discussion and debate. The goal of the meeting was not to achieve consensus both an impossible and unnecessary endeavour but rather to stimulate mutual learning, challenge one another and advance analyses.

One session of the meeting – Transformative Cities – was held not as a closed discussion but as a public event attended by 300 people at which prominent activists and academics engaged with municipal leaders and politicians on the role cities can play in building post-capitalist futures.

In line with the meeting, this report does not intend to advance one line of analysis, but rather summarise some of the key ideas and issues discussed and debated (not necessarily in the order they were articulated). To summarise necessarily means to leave things out. It would be impossible to fully capture the incredible richness of the discussion that took place, but hopefully this report provides a valuable sketch.

## **The Age of Monsters Our Capitalist Authoritarian Present**

### ***Capitalism in chronic crisis***

Any discussion of the post-capitalist future must begin with an analysis of the current economic, social and ecological context and the ‘monsters’ we now face. Most of the world is experiencing the brutal realities of extreme forms of capitalism. Inequality has surged to new heights, with an estimated \$32 trillion stowed away in tax havens by wealthy corporations. Multinationals are taking over government and societal functions, aided by a trade and investment regime whose goal is to secure corporate power over judicial and legislative arenas and to increase profit thwarting the best plans of governments with the threat of expensive lawsuits. The goal is to privatise everything. Trump both disrupts but also reinforces this model putting in place the most extreme deregulation agenda while also advancing a nationalist agenda that seeks to replace the ideology of ‘free trade’ with ‘bullying trade.’ In this and other things, he may not be unique, but simply part of a new norm.

This year (2018) marks the tenth anniversary of the financial crisis, but we must recognise that the ‘financial crisis’ is not time-bound: capitalism is in a constant state of crisis. Of the most interconnected companies in the world, nearly all are financial. They are at once large and extremely vulnerable: when one collapses (as Lehman Brothers did), they could all collapse. Given that another financial crash is inevitable sooner or later, it’s critical that we are ready to explain it and show that crisis is a permanent part of the logic of capitalism.

The dominant economic model continues to externalise environmental impacts. Climate change is now irreversible. We are in a new stage of capitalism and a new geological time, the Anthropocene characterised by repeated environmental crises. Capitalism is now undermining the earth’s natural systems, creating a scenario of chronic crisis. Yet the drive for profit is leading to ever more

expropriation and environmental degradation, with the financialisation of nature representing the peak in the processes of enclosure. The ecological dimensions of capitalism may raise the question as to whether we have reached the limits of capital expansion.

The issue of population and mass migration has also risen in the political agenda within Western countries. In the 1970s, population was discussed largely in terms of hunger and changes in agricultural production. Now population is framed by populist right politicians in terms of the threat of mass migration from Africa and the Middle East to Europe, or from Central America to North America. Instead of blaming the capitalist system, and in the context of prevalent austerity policies, many politicians in Europe are blaming refugees for people's precarious living conditions. Authoritarianism is on the rise in places like Italy, Hungary and Turkey with proto-fascist forces surging everywhere.

### ***The 'fourth industrial revolution'***

Klaus Schwab of the World Economic Forums argues we are in the midst of the 'fourth industrial revolution' with rapid technological developments transforming the economy and society. Whether it is third or fourth revolution, rapid technological change has certainly created a new theatre of struggle: technology's potential and its dangers depend on how it is used and who has access. Five giant companies have emerged (Apple, Google, Microsoft, Amazon and Facebook) that are now the most powerful corporations in terms of market capitalisation. Their US \$3 trillion is equal to all the co-operatives in the world.

Tech companies have inserted themselves between the state and people by controlling technological infrastructure, the roads of the twenty-first century. For example, Facebook sought, albeit unsuccessfully, to provide free internet in India under the condition that the company become the internet platform for the country. Tech giants can be seen as a cartel that has seized the means of production, in which people and their communications are the product. The falsely labelled 'sharing economy' consists of companies like Airbnb and Uber which have created a new form of subordination and seized control not just of people's labour, but also their capital people's homes and cars.

This corporate model requires unprecedented knowledge of people's behaviour and communications and therefore has helped constructed a new system of surveillance capitalism. It has also turned the neoliberal idea that information-based price signals make for an efficient economy on its head. The accumulation of huge amounts of micro-data about people is changing the nature of how the capitalist system works. Airlines charge people a different price based on information accumulated about them. Non-human agents are now buyers and sellers in markets, and algorithms are replacing humans.

Technology is increasingly touted as a means to ending poverty. Missing from this narrative are the structural causes of poverty and inequality and any critique of the market. For the Gates Foundation and U.S. tech firms in Africa, lack of access to the markets is the problem and technology development is the solution. They ignore the potential loss of jobs to new waves of automation the replacement of workers by robots and machines in sectors like logistics and banking. Or the ways that automation can exclude people, for example with the drive for a 'cashless' society providing major benefits to financial firms but making daily living ever more difficult for people

on the economic margins. They also obscure some of the environmental costs of technology. For example, the expansion of blockchain technologies such as bitcoins that rely heavily on servers powered by coal.

Similarly, some corporations continue to push for large-scale technological manipulation of the Earth's systems as a solution to climate change. There is a risk of an attempt at the UNFCCC in 2020 to end the geo-engineering<sup>1</sup> moratorium established in 2010 by the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity.

### ***Inequality and war as the fundamental long-term reality in people's lives***

It is important to note that while certain trends have accelerated, the reality of dispossession and violence has long been a reality for much of the world. There is a danger of a western leftist nostalgia for a post-war European past that ignores that the social democracies of the West were made possible by imperial looting. The sale of neoliberal individualism as a solution was also only made possible by ongoing economic exploitation of labour in former colonies, post-Soviet countries and now in the West too. The story of Kenya in the last 40 years, for example, is not one of increased unemployment, but of a population that has *never* been employed millions of people who are excluded from the economy. Today's neoliberalism has its roots in the liberalism of the Enlightenment, in which participation in the 'sacred' space was limited to white male slave-owners. In today's context, that sacred space is reserved for the global elite - largely male and largely white. Any post-capitalist order dedicated to restorative justice will need to address and provide the reparations and restitution of this exploitative past and present.

Inequality is the fundamental reality for people's lives across the globe. The Occupy movement succeeded in popularising the notion of the 99% and 1%. Even in the U.S., the wealthiest country in the world, 41 million people are living in poverty and another 140 million are just one pay check away from catastrophe. There is a significant population mostly people of colour who are permanently unemployed. For the 99% in America, as elsewhere, it is not possible to speak of a financial crisis that is 'over'.

As capitalist crises expand, War is emerging as the norm. In the United States, more than half of the discretionary budget goes to an increasingly automated military that makes use of robots and drones. As a consequence, fewer Americans are dying in combat, but there is no decrease in the number of people being killed by the U.S. military. Gaza serves as the new model for pacification and control. It is being used as a site to experiment with new military technology. The population has been deemed surplus: what happens to them doesn't matter. Direct political resistance is met with violence. Anti-war mobilisation has tended to be separate from struggles for economic and environmental justice, but this is a false dichotomy. Social and ecological injustice is created by wars and fuels wars, with dispossession and exclusion facilitated by arms and security firms in the West and paramilitaries in the South.

### ***Failures of the Left***

As we think about post-capitalist alternatives, we have the imperative to analyse and learn from our own actions of social movements and political parties we have supported and allied with. Over the past century, there have been multiple examples of the left assuming political power Russia, China, South Africa, Latin America and failing to deliver or replicating systems of oppression.

In Latin America, the 'pink tide' governments made important steps to reducing poverty but largely failed to structurally transform their economies and left office with social movements weaker rather than stronger. In Europe, the radical left is growing, but is divided and without clear answers on European integration or immigration. In Germany, for example, a huge internal debate is taking place inside Die Linke (the Left Party) over whether the party should focus more on the 'German' working class and less on the rights of refugees and LGBTs. Similar divisions were seen in the UK in the opposing positions on Brexit by the left. Meanwhile in Greece, the anti-austerity stance of the party Syriza was defeated by the Troika despite the overwhelming 'No' vote by its population in the referendum in 2015.

## The Next System

### *Power and principles in a post-capitalist future*

Around the world, people are creating models of a post-capitalist future and engaging in prefigurative experiments to hegemonic shifts. What principles, values and drivers need to be at the core of the 'next system'? How do these diverse next system proposals redistribute and transform (or not) power among different types of actors: capital, the state, a 'partner' state, labour, citizens, communities, the market, the commons?

As part of its New Systems project, the U.S.-based Democracy Collaborative has developed a framework to look at this question based on an analysis of a wide variety of 'new systems' possibilities and proposals, mainly focused on the global North. (They draw on their own on-the-ground experimentation in Cleveland, where three locally-owned cooperatives, the Evergreen Cooperatives of Cleveland, have been incubated and supported by procurement from large, local 'anchor' institutions (hospitals and universities).

The framework identifies three theories of change that underpin the variety of new systems proposals. At the one end are social democracy and radical localism, which can be described as countervailing strategies of containment and regulation of the current system. In these proposals, power lies with capital and the corporatist state. Similarly, in proposals like Sweden Plus and Steady State Ecological Economics, power continues to lie with capital and the state, but substantial shifts are envisioned. This can be described as combining strategies of containment and regulation with some systemic elements.

At the other end of the spectrum is evolutionary reconstruction: new institutions can be built, scaled up and can ultimately displace the current system. This theory of change drives a variety of the new models emerging today, including worker-owned, localised economic democracy; commoning; and public and socialised economic democracy. For example, the UK city of Preston is now working to relocalise procurement based on the Cleveland model, which has been embraced as a positive model by the national Labour Party, inspiring it to set up a Community Wealth Building Unit to learn from and expand similar initiatives across the UK.

Cooperation Jackson in the US city Jackson, Mississippi focuses in particular on organising under- and unemployed members of Black and Latino communities and helping build worker-organised and worker-owned cooperatives. The group presents its vision of a new society in concrete, practical ways and works to share these with other municipalities.

However, it is important to note that not all solidarity economies are progressive in nature. There is already a strong tradition among the right in Hungary and other parts of Eastern Europe of organising solidarity economies of a distinctly fascist flavour. Hungary's right-wing populist government is currently starting pension cooperatives to help 'good Hungarians'. Solidarity economies certainly mutualise resources and values, but the question is for whom and at what scale.

### ***Self-organisation and counterpower***

A systemic crisis needs systemic alternatives. The goal of a new system must be broader than just replacing the capitalist system; it must also replace the anthropocentric system, the extractivist system, the racist system, and the patriarchal system. So what is a systemic alternative? The shift from dirty to clean energy, for example, is not in and of itself systemic. There must also be a shift in who controls and produces the energy. One measure of a systemic alternative is whether it empowers social movements and facilitates communities' self-organisation. Another is whether it replaces extractive, exploitative means of production with regenerative ones that promote wellbeing globally.

The recent experiences and failures of the 'pink tide' in Latin America provide important lessons. Bolivia's Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) government is one of the few to have survived the electoral backlash (and without the violence and chaos now afflicting Venezuela and Nicaragua), but even so, it is notable that indigenous communities and social movements were much stronger in Bolivia before Evo Morales and MAS were elected to power.

In Bolivia, as in other pink tide countries, the left reduced poverty but did not move to systemic alternatives. Economic power largely remains with the same elites as before. People from the movements thought they had taken control of the state, but instead were captured by it. Their goal became re-election, and with that came an increasing reliance on clientelism.

This trajectory can be seen in relation to energy. To its credit, the Bolivian government semi-nationalised the energy industry increasing the taxes paid by transnational corporations and giving the state-owned energy company a much larger role. But the goal became creation of the largest state-owned energy company. Small communities were prohibited from producing solar energy to sell to the grid, and thereby denied their own source of income. Giving real power to the community would have meant accepting less profit. The Bolivian case shows that state power has its own logic. In other words, if we assume engagement with the state is necessary, it must be radically transformed. When social movements put people in government, it is crucial to maintain and build autonomous counterpower outside the state.

The recent experience in Catalonia raises different but also important questions. There, the government went beyond the law to do what nationalist movements were asking of it. Although the movement was extremely powerful, capable of organising general strikes and powerful actions, it did not have the police or the army. It could not match the naked force of the Spanish state. Many of Catalonia's elected officials including its vice president and several ministers are now in prison. These two different cases Catalonia and Bolivia remind us, à la Foucault, about power and the differences between force and coercion: the first eliminates the agent, while the second eliminates agency.

## ***Democratisation of money***

Democratisation of money must be a key element in the next system. 'Economic man' - the classic economic conceptualisation of people as rational, self-interested agents - is disembodied from biological time and ecological time. The body and the environment are both externalised in its formal accounting, although they bear the costs of unsustainable economic activity. It is also a debt-based system that invariably ends in crisis.

The reality of money production is that banks are not *lending* money, they are *creating* new money, which means there will always be a shortage between how much they put in and how much they want out. States, too have created money - as we have witnessed through the vast influx of capital provided by quantitative easing programmes in which trillions of dollars have been injected into the financial sector, chiefly supporting banks rather than investing in public services, essential infrastructure and a just energy transition. Overall, public money has been hijacked by commercial banking and speculative investors.

The question of the state's role in post-capitalist monetary systems is key. There are many models and much discussion and debate about the best target the state or the commercial banking system for transforming monetary systems. One possibility is the democratisation of public budgets in which democratised, public control would replace the state system. Budgets would be built based on public need and would include a longer cycle of budgeting and public consultation. Democratisation would go further than 'participatory monitoring/budgeting': communities would both set the amount of the budget and decide how it is allocated. A monetary policy committee would decide how much the private sector can absorb and help determine tax (retrieval) rates.

## ***Public ownership and transition***

The demand for democratic control is also at the heart of a growing wave of local initiatives globally looking to de-privatise and regain public control of energy, water and other public services. TNI's research in *Reclaiming Public Services* showed that there have been at least 835 (re)municipalisations of public services around the world since 2000.

This does not mean a return to the former models of bureaucratic state (national or local) control. Rather in many cases communities are seeking to develop new models that engage and involve workers and citizens. The shape of this varies though based on the political and economic context. In Croatia, demands for democratisation of public services have been a strategic way of preventing privatisation and asserting better democratic control over public companies. Activists are therefore calling for better monitoring of spending, more regular meetings with citizens and an independent supervisory committee. In Greece, the context of austerity though has meant local authorities have become eviscerated in their capacity to renovate public services. Citizens have therefore focused on developing community-based systems of solidarity to provide education and healthcare for all that often bypass state structures.

Energy has been a particularly important focus for developing post-capitalist alternatives, given the central role energy plays in the capitalist economy and the urgent need to transform our energy systems to prevent worsening climate change. Energy democracy provides a framework to democratise part of the economy and shift power with a big "P" – transforming society by

means of shifting power in the power sector. Activists from Mauritius, South-Africa, Bolivia and the US shared how they have used demands for energy democracy and sovereignty to challenge private energy oligopolies and pollution affecting low-income communities, to demand a rapid just transition away from fossil fuels to clean energy and to explain the necessity for a democratisation of the economy.

Campaigners in a coalition called Power Shift in Mauritius managed to stop a coal plant by means of a hunger strike and by uniting middle class citizens, social movements and unions. They have advanced in its place energy proposals that would be based on solar generation in the countryside, helping to build connections between urban activists and rural sugar-growers. This is leading to new resistances in other arenas, for example against private grabbing of public beaches.

In South Africa, engaging unions has been key. Renewable energy was reframed as a threat to coal and steel workers, but movements have been active supporting union calls for a socially-owned renewable system. This notion of a just transition is critical to not only fight climate change, but also ensuring that workers and the most affected people are at the heart of the next energy system, in order for it to be just and democratic.

### ***An aggregation of next systems?***

To what extent will the next system be an aggregation of next systems? In the U.S., the context of decentralised government and an advanced stage of capitalism means that there are places ripe for new strategies and alternatives and others that are not. Local, small-scale initiatives can provide a means to get past the immense power of adversaries. In some contexts, the state can play a positive role alongside of local 'next systems', if they understand their role as facilitating and supporting such endeavours. While in other contexts the state - and national legal frameworks - are one of the key obstacles to transformative local practices.

Can we re-imagine the role of the state in a way that facilitates community self-organisation? In a non-hierarchic peer to peer (P2P) state, for example, the act of commoning could become the defining principle of the state. The nation (civil society) is a collection of commoners. P2P can create the conditions to optimise the specific what (resource), who (community) and how (rules) of commoning. Linux and Wikipedia are good examples: they provide the infrastructure, but they do not control the community. The potential is an economy that can be generative towards people and nature, by for example, enabling local manufacturing based on global design, which makes production not only more ecologically viable, but also better suited to community needs.

## **Emancipatory Futures**

What must be done to embed emancipation at the core of the Next System? The experiences of the feminist movement and feminist organising, thinking and theory, offer important guidance here. The left has often asked the feminist movement to postpone its emancipatory agenda to wait until socialism or communism is in place. But new structures often simply replicate systems of domination. The MAS movement in Bolivia, for example, was very patriarchal before it came to power. It should come as no surprise that it replicated this in the government. Movements are also adversely influenced by the systems in which they function, even when they seek to change

them. This can be seen, for example, in the external – often donor – pressure to professionalise organisations, which can create a separation between employed staff and the people and communities they work with. In order to transform society, social movements themselves must be transformed.

A promising example is emerging in the U.S. right now. The Poor People's Campaign is resurrecting the intersectional movement built by Martin Luther King a half century ago, linking systemic racism, poverty, militarism and climate change. The campaign, which targets state governments, started with local community meetings involving a wide range of impoverished communities from indigenous people to war veterans. Significantly, the movement did not emerge from left, but from the faith-based movement. Led by two preachers, it uses the language of morality, rather than electoral politics.

The goal need not and perhaps cannot be to 'unify' movements around a single issue. The feminist movement speaks in terms of cross-movement organising, an approach that acknowledges that tensions can exist within and across movements. Transformative cross-movement organising focuses on the creation of emancipatory spaces and then joining other spaces in solidarity and humanity. An example is the 'feminisms' social movement in Spain, which features a diversity of women with different approaches, shared leadership and the exploration of new ideas. On March 8<sup>th</sup> 2018 feminists succeeded in organising a massive general strike focused not only on highlighting gender inequalities, but also the need to curb consumerism. 'We strike to change everything' as the slogan went.

### ***Breaking the boundaries of imagination***

A key step is to recognise and break through systems that limit the imagination. The feminist movement has shown that there are other ways of imagining human relationships. A new vocabulary can be used and different types of knowledge black feminist thought or migrant women's experiences, for example can be valorised, prioritised and transmitted in creative ways, such as art and storytelling. In the Association for Women's Rights in Development's (AWID) methodology used to imagine feminist futures, imagination *is* the reality. A fantastical feminist village is created to articulate emotional, social and systemic alternatives. A similar transformative, emancipatory process plays out in real eco-villages, where the act of commoning forces people to reconfigure and critique relationships with themselves, nature, and 'economic man'. It is often difficult, sometimes psychologically traumatic work, even for those with radical politics and particularly for those who have been socialised in capitalist systems.

Liberating our imagination enables us to challenge the limiting notion that capitalism and the nation-state are the only logical, possible systems. This is relevant to the question of the state's role in emancipation. People's experiences and ideas about the state diverge widely. Class, locality, race, gender, history all shape these perspectives. For some, the state is always present and must therefore be engaged, albeit carefully and with recognition that it is contradictory territory. Yet for others, this does not resonate. The Soviet state, for example, doesn't even exist anymore. In Georgia, there is no functioning state to speak of. Survival is entirely dependent on the family, but people would prefer a progressive state to have a role. Taking the nation-state for granted or assuming that it is natural is to limit the imagination.

And what of the state's role in emancipation? In his history of Black Reconstruction in America, African-American intellectual W.E.B. Du Bois saw the state as a means, albeit limited, to open up space. He recognised that the state could not provide freedom, but that not being in chains was better than being in chains. Aside from post-1804 independent Haiti, in which former enslaved people took power, advanced a universalist vision, and inspired movements across the Southern hemisphere, there are precious few examples of the state being emancipatory.

Insights from the women's movement are useful in thinking about the state, power and emancipation. There is an important distinction to be made between power as domination (*power over*) and power to transform (*power to*). The former can be used to describe the state, with its power over resources and capital, which may provide distinctive levers of power. The latter expresses people's own transformative capacity, the fact that the system depends on their contributions. In London, for example, social movements organised against proposed property development along the Thames in the mid-1980s. When the Labour Party gained control of the municipality, it used its power to stop the development and support movements to build an alternative. But the party didn't create transformation; the social movements did. The distinction between *power over* and *power to* may provide a way to understand the ability of the state or political parties to facilitate (or not) transformation.

## Radical movements of resistance and transformation

### *Agency, resistance and collective structures*

Around the world, new forms of agency are emerging. Numerous intersectional political struggles are merging resistance with transformative processes. In Greece, for example, a grassroots, anti-racist solidarity movement emerged to both resist the Troika regime and to create new, collective, autonomous, solidarity structures to respond to people's immediate needs. The movement goes well beyond a response to austerity in that it recognises crisis as a permanent new condition. People in the movement are reflecting on new institutions and new forms of politics. Self-organisation is a critical component of this as it connects the personal and the political. The movement is creating its own material structures of power and spaces where power is redefined. It is defending local spaces and promoting new practices of health, education and economy.

Some of these new structures, which pre-date the refugee crisis, were formed by the anti-racist movement to put migrant communities and Greek people on the same level to fight isolation, self-blame and embarrassment. The movement aims to create new and different social fabrics in communities, and involves diverse groups of people, including those without work, precarious workers, women, pensioners and migrants. It has revitalised living memories of Greek family networks, communal structures and solidarity structures that once existed. It is engaging and empowering people to create their collective solutions. The movement insists on a democratic approach, which means that the people in the community, not the activists, decide what issues they want to address.

## Restoring political agency

Restoring agency is similarly critical to the movements in Croatia. After severe impoverishment and de-industrialisation in the 1990s, followed by the recent process of EU integration, people lost their sense of agency. EU elites treated Croatia as backward, in need of help and with neoliberal economics as its only salvation. But the left is now being re-born: a new generation of leftists have come of age who cannot be associated with the discredited former regime and are no longer constrained by the anti-communist discourse of Post-Socialist Europe. Diverse social movements ecological, cultural, student occupation, right to the city, refugee solidarity are engaged in joint efforts. A lot of work has been done to build the transactional capacity of civil society; the next step is building mobilisation capacity. In the Croatian context, people are very distrustful of politics. Despite scepticism about engaging in electoral politics, the movements recently organised a municipal platform to run the Zagreb local election, which succeeded in putting four people on Zagreb's city council. The aim is not to become an electoral actor, but to use electoral politics alongside other strategies and to develop political involvement.

### *Occupying territory while demanding rights*

In Brazil, the urban Homeless Workers' Movement (MTST) involves 72,000 families in 32 occupations around the country. MTST emerged out of the agrarian landless movement (MST) and, like MST, considers itself a territorial movement. MTST is demanding that land serve its social function in accordance with the Brazilian Constitution, drawing attention to the fact that many human rights like decent living conditions, access to health care, and education are dependent on having a place to live. The movement is resisting real estate speculation in a context in which 1% of the population owns 30% of the land. In addition to occupation tactics, MTST engages in demonstrations and strikes, and targets the government. In the run-up to the World Cup in 2013, for example, MTST united with other movements and had some important successes, including a decrease in the price of public transportation.

But as with social movements in other 'pink tide' countries, the political context including the 2017 parliamentary coup against Rousseff and the imprisonment of the former leftist Workers' Party president Lula da Silva has been difficult and complex. (MTST in early 2018 protested Lula's imprisonment by occupying his apartment, the purported reason for his imprisonment as it was falsely claimed he had won the apartment through a corrupt kickback).

The lesson from Brazil is that voting is not enough. As with the Bolivian experience, counterpower must be maintained. Since the coup, rights have been dismantled, impunity is rampant and a new anti-terror law deems social movements terrorists. MTST responded by thinking about new forms of participatory governance and uniting leftist movements in a platform called *Vamos!* (let's go). The focus is on ideological education and political empowerment. *Vamos!* insists that everyone should participate in democracy, starting with meetings to set goals for the next president and the government on various issues, including gender, health, education, diversity. More than 500,000 people contributed to the online platform.

### ***Power or counterpower, force or process?***

The differences between these movements in Greece, Croatia and Brazil begs the question: what do we mean by counterpower? Of course, one possibility is to see it as a way to accumulate force to resist adversaries or remove them from power. But it is also important to consider the kind of power constructed in the process. Counterpower can be seen as a process in which pre-formative structures and ways of relating to each other are created. The struggle is not to take power but to build it. It may be preferable to speak about power rather than counterpower: building power goes beyond countering something, but about defining the political society we want a new hegemonic model.

At the same time, the full, complex story of these cases also begs the question: which power are we dealing with and at what level? In Greece, the ECB and the finance ministers of the eurozone simply refused to negotiate with Yanis Varoufakis, the democratically elected finance minister. In Croatia, the EU, with Germany in the driver's seat, provides the social and economic blueprint to be followed. In Brazil, a democratically elected parliament supported by real estate speculators waged a coup against a democratically elected president. International financial power may be eclipsing that of the nation-state. And nation-state power may eclipse local power. For example, in Europe and the U.S., urban movements have welcomed refugees creating 'sanctuary cities' and the like but immigration rights are not a local-level competence.

The challenge is that compartmentalised counterpower can be easily crushed. Even if they are not crushed, anti-systemic initiatives can end up inadvertently reinforcing rather than undermining capitalism. In Jackson, Mississippi, for example, its efforts to create community land trusts may have contributed towards trends of increasing land prices that force people to relocate.

For some, the answer lies in being aware and active at all levels local, national and international. For others, the emphasis is on preparing the ground, so institutions are in place when top-down power structures ultimately implode.

### ***Preparing the ground: the transformative city***

A key question is how can we scale up grassroots struggles to confront global forces like corporate and financial power? Cities will certainly be a core arena of struggle, as cities are not just local arenas but global too given they emerged as a result of globalisation, privatisation, and, most importantly, the rise of global finance. They both encapsulate global processes such as the 'grabbing' of cities by corporate and financial firms and the concomitant rise in expulsion, poverty and inequality. Yet throughout history, they have also been unique spaces where people without power can build cultures, economies and make their own histories. Cities have always endured and outlived more formal, closed systems. Today's urban activism is therefore critical: people need to be organised and ready when the current 'grab' comes to an end.

Cities have a special role to play in 'preparing the ground' for transformation. Cities like New York and Oakland, California and Cadiz, Spain are forging ahead in tackling climate change. Local governments in some countries have been able to push back against neo-liberal plundering in their territories and develop alternative economies such as communal gardens. Municipal and 'fearless city' movements are growing worldwide and are using networked and horizontal

structures to scale up their power, assert solidarity and exchange lessons. For urban activists, local transformation, when done right, has the potential to provide solutions to systemic, global problems. Local, grassroots activists can prefiguratively fight for their issues, meaning they can already *do* what they want the world to look like. This is the approach of *Code Rood*, a grassroots collective in the Netherlands that is using civil disobedience and other strategies to fight for climate justice while experimenting with resilient forms of sustainable living. The key is that local efforts are connected around the world; that practices of social innovation can be shared and replicated.

As discussed above, the question of institutional political power and its risks is relevant to these municipal movements. As with state power, so too with city power: for example, the new city government in Amsterdam led for the first time by the Green Left party intends to join other 'fearless' cities movement, fight for a just energy transition, tackle polarisation and re-define the relationship between government and citizens. But its ability to deliver on its good intentions depends on its ability to overcome entrenched power, its courage to oppose false market-led solutions, and its openness to constant dialogue with social movements and civil society organisations. Strong activism is vital for giving politicians both the leverage and motivation (i.e. sustained political pressure) to realise transformative change.

What can't be left out of the discussions around cities, however - nor states for that matter - are the politics of natural resource exploitation on which they depend. Even progressive cities are often thriving from processes of extraction and dispossession in rural areas - whether it is food systems dependent on land dispossession, poorly paid migrant labour, soil erosion and toxic pesticides or dams providing energy and water to cities yet built on appropriated indigenous lands. Similarly states can develop progressive policies on the back of exploitation. This has clearly been the case in Latin America. Venezuela, for example is currently opening up 10% of the country to transnational mining in the name of funding social services.

## Constructing a post-capitalist hegemony

### *Public policy to facilitate transformation*

Tame it, smash it, escape it or erode it? Diverse thinkers from Marx to today's John Holloway, Hilary Wainwright and Erik Olin Wright theorise a range of necessary, possible or impossible routes to ending capitalism. How can we build a post-capitalist hegemony in support of radical transformation and at what level? Concrete experiences inform a diversity of perspectives on the question. Reciprocally, the severity of the situation for many people their immediate struggle to survive reminds us that ideas must translate into concrete action.

In Uruguay, for example, the leftist government has sought to democratise institutions and to develop initiatives focused on the country's large population of poor people. Industrial tripartite councils were created that gave workers a seat at the table with multinationals and bureaucrats. Workers were involved in defining the plans for key sectors and actively involved in how the government negotiated foreign direct investment. Alongside this, a national development fund was created to support development of worker-owned cooperatives, while the *Plan Juntos* (the Together Plan) aimed to address extreme poverty and vulnerability. Families in irregular settlements (on unsecure land) were supported to build their own houses, with support from

technical staff who were required to live in proximity to the communities. But the houses were not the goal: the purpose of people's participation was to support a process of transformation, and not to legitimate the policy. The goal was to move from a focus on symptoms to causes and to shift from individual experiences to structural and collective responses.

### ***Or the need for autonomy?***

Experiences in Bolivia, where communities have developed hundreds of autonomous community-managed water systems, provide a different perspective. Bolivian communities have long self-organised to address their needs and problems, including not only water but also security and garbage. They did not wait for the state to provide such services. Contrast this to the appealing narrative by President Evo Morales, which held that everything was bad before he came to power and that his 'government of the people' would solve the country's problems. The consequence has been the demobilisation and fragmentation of what was a very strong movement. Behind the narrative lurked a new form of domination. From this vantage point, it seems that the focus should be on solutions that come from the people, with emancipation being not a goal, but a way of life. In Bolivia, people are not thinking in terms of 'post-capitalism' but in terms of autonomy and self-determination. They are not asking the state to solve problems, rather for it to respect the organising that is already happening.

### ***Seizing the means of narrative production***

As the Bolivia example shows, narrative power is critical. Corporations and elites are currently exerting enormous control over the news. Algorithms and social media are spreading misinformation, narrowing people's perspectives and polarising society. Behind the myth of 'free' news is the exercise of power. But a media that serves the public can play a crucial role in bringing about post-capitalist transformation. Similarly, other cultural actors opinion-makers, the creative sector, designers and makers can be valuable and strategic allies as fellow commoners. They can help forge and strengthen cultural norms, ethics and values that support post-capitalist efforts.

A media that serves the public would be transparent about sources of funding and information. It would be participatory and engage in dialogue with citizens. And it would tell inspiring stories, connect to ideas, and motivate people into action. It would facilitate a process of transformation by challenging people's biases and assumptions, bringing them different perspectives, and showing that another world is not only possible but already here.

## NOTES

1. Geoengineering refers to a set of proposed techniques that would intervene in and alter earth systems on a large scale recently, these proposals have been gaining traction as a “technofix” solution to climate change. <http://www.etcgroup.org/content/un-convention-still-says-no-manipulating-climate>

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*The analysis in this report is written by Paige Shipman and Nick Buxton, but is the collective work of Achin Vanaik, Agnes Gagyi, Ana Mendez de Andes, Ashok Subron, Brid Brennan, Ben Hayes, Brett Scott, Brian Ashley, Christophe Aguiton, Christos Giovanopoulos, Daniel Chavez, Danjela Dolenc, Dany Marie, David Fig, David Sogge, Edgardo Lander, Erick Gonzalo Palomares, Fiona Dove, Firoze Manji, Gisela Dutting, Hakima Abbas, Hilary Wainwright, Inna Michaeli, Irene Escorihuela, Joachim Jachnow, Joel Rocamora, Kali Akuno, Laura Flanders, Lavinia Steinfert, Lyda Forero, Mabel Thwaites Rey, Marcela Olivera, Mary Mellor, Mary Fitzgerald, Myriam van der Stichele, Nuria del Viso, Pablo Solón, Phyllis Bennis, Renata Boulos, Sacajawea Hall, Saskia Sassen, Satoko Kishimoto, Sebastián Torres, Selcuk Balamir, Sol Trumbo Vila, Stacco Troncoso, Susan George, Tamás Gerocs, Thomas Hanna, Tom Henfrey, Vedran Horvat, Yuliya Yurchenko, Sopiko Japaridze. It does not mean that everyone agrees with everything written here, but it is an agreed summary of the discussions.*

In June 2018, a diverse group of 60 activists and researchers from 30 countries convened for a multi-day meeting to discuss the collective building of post-capitalist futures. The meeting provided the opportunity for a rich exchange of perspectives and experiences, as well as deep discussion and debate. This report tries to capture some of the key ideas and exchanges and provide that input for all those involved in struggles for systemic and transformative social change.

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