Symbiosis Research Collective
Community, Democracy, and Mutual Aid
Toward Dual Power and Beyond
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taken him to Morocco, Algeria, Western Sahara, Mauritania, and India.

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Introduction

Five years ago, the Arab Spring reclaimed public spaces across the Middle East and North Africa, demonstrating to a new generation the possibilities for creative resistance and political imagination under even the most repressive circumstances. They sparked a Movement of the Squares that swept the world, from the anti-austerity movement in Europe to Occupy Wall Street in the United States. Adopting the slogan, "Another World Is Possible," Occupy offered one of the fiercest rebukes in a generation to the dominant narrative that ours is the best and only possible system. It demanded new forms of radical democracy outside the state and an end to unfettered capitalism—indeed, many Occupy offshoots attempted to create such a world in miniature.

Yet the utopian spirit that swept the globe in 2011 hasn't yielded comprehensive alternatives to the present political and economic system. Occupy and the movements it inspired have failed to answer the question of what that other world— the "Next System"—should look like and how we can possibly get there.

Our aim in this essay is to channel our struggles against oppression and domination into a strategic approach toward building real utopias—to transform the poetry of Occupy into the prose of real social change. Both concrete and comprehensive, our proposal is to organize practical community institutions of participatory democracy and mutual aid that can take root, grow, and gradually supplant the institutions that now rule ordinary people's lives.

By meeting communal needs and channeling our communities' collective action through organs of radical democracy, we aim to develop institutions that can both build popular power against unresponsive oligarchy and be the very replacements for capitalism that the Left is so frequently criticized for failing to envision. This next system we imagine is a libertarian ecoso-

cialism grounded in the direct participation of citizens rather than the unaccountable authority of elites; in the social ownership of the economy rather than exploitation; in the equality of human beings rather than the social hierarchies of race, gender, nationality, and class; in the defense of our common home and its nonhuman inhabitants rather than unfettered environmental destruction; and in the restoration of community rather than isolation. Above all else, our aim is to lay out a framework for crafting such a society from the ground up—to, as the Wobblies declared, build the new world in the shell of the old.

Karl Marx famously criticized utopians as trying to "write recipes for the cookshops of the future." By this, he meant that utopians imagine they can design a new society from scratch and bring it into being by sheer force of will. When they inevitably fail, they are doomed to disappointment and disillusionment. By contrast, Marx's method of analysis grapples with the complex and dynamic process by which societies change. He believed that only by carefully examining the social relations, incentive structures, and class dynamics of a society can we understand its path going forward. In Marx's view, every social system is a complex process rather than a static essence, and each system contains the seeds of its successor, which need only be encouraged to grow for change to come about.

In our view, the answer to political change lies between the utopians and Marx. There is some truth to Marx's claim that describing a desired future is a waste of time; devising complex utopias does little to guide us politically or strategically if it is divorced from the process through which such ideas could feasibly come about. Yet neither can we sit by critiquing the current economic and political landscape while we wait for "inevitable" revolution. The next-system vision spelled out here can and must be enacted in our communities today as an essential, intermediate step toward realizing a revolutionary vision for the planet.

the "Next System?" Well, maybe—but that doesn't mean politics is over. The central ethos of the vision articulated here—community control, local experimentation, and radical democracy—means that we cannot predict precisely what the future will look like; nor do we want to. Even the authors of this essay don't agree on all the particulars—should some semblance of money, the market, and private ownership remain for nonessential goods? Or should all economic activity be fully communal? To what extent can or should the Internet reduce the need for face-to-face deliberation in democratic decision making? But these details are for people in communities now and in the future to discuss and try out; attempting such political sorcery ourselves would be self-defeating. The only certainty is that change should be guided by egalitarian principles—beliefs that might be called libertarian or anarchist, socialist or communist, ecological or posthumanist—but adherence to these principles still allows for pragmatism and diversity.

There are no perfect worlds, only better ones. Even our vision of the next system, if we can achieve it, will not be homogenous or static. Less than an end goal, the path and the system described here is a framework, a way to ensure that the systems to come can represent and respond to the needs and desires of the people who inhabit them. Actually building that world, then, is up to all of us. In this we have followed the Zapatistas, whose defiant revolt at the precise moment when history was said to have ended sparked a revolutionary wave—a global movement for ecological consciousness, radical democracy, and libertarian socialism—that we are riding still. They emerged from the Mexican jungle to demand a world beyond neoliberalism, a world of true democracy and justice, a world where all worlds fit. Their advice to the international volunteers who wanted to help was simple, and resonates even louder today: Build Zapatismo in your own communities. Twenty-three years later, it's not too late to start.

will be needed to develop nonindustrial countries while transitioning into an ecologically sustainable economy—Green New Deals in the rich countries and Green Marshall Plans for the developing ones.

Clearly, these goals are best accomplished by international or even global decision-making bodies. From our point of view, these decision-making structures ought to consist of a global representative body with fairly limited power held accountable to regional bodies that in turn answer to more powerful local bodies run via participatory democracy. Only democratic confederalism at the local and regional level can hold the institutions that emerge to tackle global issues accountable to the people of the world, not distant elites.

These political organizations would be sustained by cooperative economic ventures managed democratically by their workers and the public. The community itself would determine production and allocation of (at least) the essentials— food, shelter, and healthcare managed as core public goods. All co-ops would be accountable to community councils to ensure that they meet social and environmental needs.

If we can meet these goals, a better future is ours for the taking.

Work hours would shrink drastically, and leisure time would skyrocket. Less resource-intensive forms of recreation, such as the arts and hiking, would keep our bodies, minds, and the biosphere healthier. Nearly everyone would subsist on plant-based foods grown in urban hydroponic systems or permaculture farms nestled symbiotically in local ecosystems. Energy would come primarily from wind and solar, incorporated into the built environment rather than displacing wildlife. Waste would be reused, composted, or broken down into new materials, eliminating the need for landfills and mining.

When we have established bottom-up democratic governance, eliminated private profit, and begun to restore Earth's devastated ecosystems, does that mean we've reached

The next system is more likely to succeed and endure if we steadily transform existing institutions, modes of production, and ways of relating to one another rather than try to conjure up a whole new system out of thin air. The heart of our argument is that building networks of radically democratic, cooperative institutions can sustain our communities and our collective struggle in the near term, organize our base to win fights with the state and private sector, begin eroding public support for the current dysfunctional system, and, in time, become the dominant institutions of tomorrow's world. Our proposal integrates process and objective, with democracy and community as both the means and the ends of social transformation. Filling in the gaps between "scientific" socialist analysis and utopian imagination, we have attempted something the Left has always struggled to create: a realistic transition model to a post-capitalist world.

Our Democratic Crisis

Today's political situation hangs in a limbo of crisis, in which nothing fundamentally changes despite a seemingly endless series of catastrophes. Capitalism's structural imperatives for endless growth and privatized gain for externalized costs have pushed our global climate rapidly toward the brink of total destabilization. Habitat destruction, overexploitation of resources, and pollution have eroded the ecological base of (human and non-human) communities the world over, driving the worst mass extinction event since an asteroid wiped out the dinosaurs. A tiny transnational ruling class leverages its position in the global economy to extract extraordinary amounts of untaxed wealth and keep billions in poverty. Divided global working classes compete for survival in a race to the bottom. Even the middle classes in rich countries have

been hollowed out and robbed of political power as postwar social democracy has morphed into neoliberalism.

"Democratic" institutions, supposedly designed to secure the common good through the power of an enfranchised public, seem powerless to stop any of this. The power of ordinary people over their own lives has eroded from the 1970s onward as capitalist elites have recaptured the state and returned us to an era of privatization, deregulation, and austerity while nationalist and neofascist movements scapegoat the vulnerable in response. Meanwhile, imperial adventurism continues to displace millions through ever new wars and conflicts. The likelihood of further economic crisis and the looming ecological cliff all promise to intensify the global trend toward suffering, violence, and tyranny beyond anything seen yet.

Underlying this systemic crisis is a deficit of democracy. The European Union and global financial institutions (which exert considerable control over the policy decisions of indebted developing nations dependent on investment and trade from the Global North) are managed by an unelected technocracy beholden to transnational capitalist interests. A rigorous quantitative study of American politics recently demonstrated that the policy preferences of the lowest earning 90 percent of Americans have no independent effect on government policy decisions; instead, lawmakers respond exclusively to the interests of corporations and the wealthiest 10 percent. As the authors conclude, "America's claims to being a democratic society are seriously threatened."[1] Even in allegedly democratic nations, the institutions that channel national decision-making are structurally incapable of staving off ecological and economic collapse, and securing a decent life

[1] Martin Gilens and Benjamin I. Page, "Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens," *Perspectives on Politics*12, no. 3 (2014): 577.

urations of the egalitarian and ecological society we wish to usher into being.

No matter what, we can expect the private sector to be hostile, hastening the need for unity and confederation. The cooperative economy must be networked among cities to grow large and resilient enough to be a viable and stable replacement for capitalism. Regional political bodies are also better positioned than local ones to successfully rein in capitalist power, simply by virtue of their scale. Larger-scale institutions are also more visible, and thus better suited to serve as a model to communities across the globe.

One by one, entire governments and capitalist industries will dissolve as their democratic communal alternatives spread. And what will this leave us with?

It is important not to presume the precise contours of the future society since no static blueprint can predict changing circumstances, and the very point of the new system is that the people will design it democratically. That said, a democratic successor to statism and capitalism must address certain big-picture problems: labor arbitrage and the flight of capital, the industrial development of nonindustrialized nations, and the global ecological crisis. We can surmise from these global socioeconomic problems at least the outlines of what the next system will *have* to be to survive.

The solutions are interlinked and require new global institutions to administer them. These institutions would need to bring multinational corporations under control through an international agreement like a new Bretton Woods—likely with strict capital controls and redistributive taxes on the international finance market. This global network would also need to codify universal labor rights (through a global minimum wage, universal union rights, and globally agreed on mechanisms to transfer control of production to workers and communities) and administer them through an international labor organization. Finally, a great deal of collaborative economic planning

More difficult is the hostile case, as under an authoritarian or right-wing government. Such a state may use violence to quash any local uprising, as the example of the First Intifada illustrates. Or they may close off a community's legal right to determine its own future.

Numerous American state governments in the pocket of the fossil fuel industry have forbidden townships and cities from banning fracking, for instance. A Trump administration will likely attempt mass deportations, necessitating oppositional unity by sanctuary cities.

An isolated revolution is a fragile one, so amid hostility confederation and regional alliances are even more important. It is harder to quell a geographically dispersed revolution, and, should the state try, sympathetic cities—especially if networked with communities outside the country—can launch their own political campaigns against a hostile government or aid their besieged allies. Progressive social movements of every sort would be strengthened by channeling their efforts through permanent community institutions instead of becoming flashes in the pan, as so many protest movements are. The existence of a widespread and powerful alternative is the only hope for sparking enough Arendtian noncompliance to weaken the state.

We can all take comfort from the fact that embryonic forms of this radical democratic strategy have popped up in many countries, and a global conversation among the libertarian left can bring such transnational alliance into being. The Greek base of mutual aid organizations that launched Syriza to power, the Zapatistas of Chiapas, the Kurdish revolutionaries of Rojava, and the Sahrawi refugee communities of western Algeria all exemplify an international shift in leftist politics rooted in "community before party," with a growing understanding that the state is not the only political tool we have to work with. Organizing across borders, we can together build these prefig-

for everyone. What we face is a colossal collective action problem.

Our Theory of Social Change

The German-American political philosopher Hannah Arendt argued that intolerable situations such as ours could be cast aside by the public's revolutionary withdrawal of support from governing institutions. As a prominent theorist of totalitarianism, political violence, and direct democracy, Arendt developed important concepts that help disentangle the problems humanity currently faces and indicate a way forward.[2]

Power is conventionally understood in politics as the ability to make others do things, often through violence or coercion to enforce obedience and domination. In *On Violence*, however, Arendt demonstrates that power works quite differently in actual human societies. She defines "power" as people's ability to act in concert—the capacity for collective action, and thus a property of groups, not individuals. Leaders possess their power only because their constituents have empowered them to direct the group's collective action.

Arendt argues that all power, in every political system from dictatorships to participatory democracies, emerges from public support. No dictator can carry out his or her will without obedience from subjects; nor can any project requiring collective action be achieved without the support, begrudging or enthusiastic, of the group. When people begin to withdraw their support and refuse to obey, a government may turn to violence, but its control lasts only as long as the army or police choose to obey. "Where commands are no longer obeyed," Arendt writes, "the means of violence are of no use… Everything depends on

[2] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1951).

the power behind the violence."[3] The understanding that power emerges from collective action, rather than from force, is a key component of our transitional vision.

As a revolutionary political strategy, however (rather than a mere description of certain past political events), Arendt's theory of power requires several modifications. First, without preexisting mass organization, the public has no way to collectively withdraw its support.

Individuals acting alone have no impact on the state's power. This is why Arendtian revolutions (Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1989, and Tunisia in 2011) occur only in exceedingly rare moments of crisis.

Second, most people will never even consider retracting support for governing institutions if they don't see viable alternatives. As Antonio Gramsci explained a century ago, the ruling class's cultural hegemony can be undermined only by what he called a "war of position"— developing a material and cultural base within the working class to craft an oppositional narrative and to organize oppositional institutions.[4] The organization of unions, worker-owned firms, and housing cooperatives is what makes socialism a real, lived possibility around which greater movement-building can occur.

Third, withdrawal has serious costs. Even absent violent repression (a feature of even today's most liberal democracies), we are made dependent on capitalist and state institutions for access to basic survival needs and avenues for collective action. Transcending capitalism and the state thus requires having alternative institutions in place to meet those needs and organize people to act powerfully in concert with one another. Retract-

[3] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt Books, 1970), 48–49.

[4] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey N. Smith (New York: International Publishers Company, 1971).

recall and be accountable to the neighborhoods' wishes, while higher-level bodies focus mainly on coordination and leave politicking as much as possible to local communities.

In some ways, regional collaboration works the same as within the city—the confederations engage in shared struggles, create autonomous institutions to coordinate and democratize their economies, and undermine the state by making its authority ever more obsolete in daily life. These regional democratic bodies would also connect the economies and civil societies of their respective communities. A network of Midwestern cities would pool and redistribute resources when necessary, exchange goods and services, and plan political action in concert. Such joint political action will be critical as the tensions of dual power come to a head. The strategy for dealing with these tensions will vary greatly by country, depending on whether the state is sympathetic or hostile to the transition or, more likely, somewhere in between.

In the sympathetic case, as under a leftist or social democratic government, cities where democratic confederalism has taken root would push for meaningful progressive reforms.

Confederations would pool resources to create political alliances and win policies ranging from a universal basic income to stringent environmental protections to tax incentives for cooperative businesses. Such policies would give cities additional time and space to continue building up their alternative, post-capitalist institutions. Of course, coexistence with even a sympathetic state will be impossible in the long run—even relatively democratic states are unlikely to willingly cede much political power to local organizations and can't be expected to wither away on their own. But this movement should be willing to work with them and pressure them for beneficial reforms, even as it ultimately aims to replace all their functions—and, when the time comes, following Arendt, to suffocate their authority by withdrawing public support.

structure to encourage development of the socialist institutions in civil society that made such reform possible in the first place.

Cooperatives, common funds, community land trusts, collective housing, social services, urban agriculture networks, and other such innovations would spread. What comes next?

Local action is not enough by itself to actually transform capitalist society. Capital and state violence are organized regionally and globally, and so must their replacements be. Once we have established dual power, we can turn to the larger-scale reforms necessary to transition out of capitalism. The question is how to go from local and municipal institutions to a global network of economic cooperatives, mutual aid organizations, and democratic decision-making bodies that can challenge and ultimately overturn the existing power structure.

The key to this lies in what Kurdish revolutionary Abdullah Öcalan calls "democratic confederalism," a version of Bookchin's libertarian municipalism. This political system has local deliberative democracy at its core but is networked to allow regional and, eventually, global collaboration.[34] For example, Detroit's appointed delegates might attend a regional congress—perhaps initially a network of Midwestern cities, though ultimately an assembly including every rural, suburban, and urban community in a given area. As the number of represented communities grows, so would the number of confederated levels—from the neighborhood to the city, the county, the state or province, the region, the nation, the continent, and at last the planet.

While superficially this may resemble US federalism, the difference is that in democratic confederalism the key locus of power is at the grassroots. Delegates must be subject to instant

[34] Janet Biehl, "Bookchin, Öcalan, and the Dialectics of Democracy" (speech at Challenging Capitalist Modernity conference, Hamburg, Germany, February 3–5, 2012), new-compass.net.

ing support without engaging in such oppositional institutions is hardly distinguishable from apathy.

Fourth, we cannot neglect the preformation of the post-revolutionary society— the need to actively create institutions to replace the ones we have now. Arendt has somewhat romantic notions of the forms of organic democratic politics that emerge in the vacuum following a mass public retraction of support for governing institutions. To a certain extent, history is on her side. The Syrian Kurds' democratic confederalism in Rojava; the workers' councils of revolutionary Russia, Germany, and Hungary; the Paris Commune; Argentina's factory takeovers; and Catalonia's anarchist revolution all exemplify community-rooted participatory politics emerging out of revolutionary crisis. More complex institutional arrangements to manage and coordinate society as a whole, however, are beyond the reach of spontaneous face-to-face democracy. Far from expressing public will, such institutions are usually seized or assembled by whichever party or faction is best positioned to capitalize on the conditions of vacuum and uncertainty (as Arendt herself notes and criticizes).[5] A revolutionary transfer of authority to popular organs of radical democracy requires the *preexistence* of such participatory institutions, not a naive faith that they will be conjured into being out of a general strike, mass retraction of public support, or insurrectionary upheaval.

Arendt's analysis of the sources of state power, we contend, generally applies to capitalist institutions too (though they are, of course, shored up by the state). These can be supplanted only by creating sustainable, egalitarian alternatives to sap their public dependency and approval. An effective political strategy for the present must combine the best of Arendt's

[5] Some examples: the political opportunism of the Bolsheviks in the Russian Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini's faction in the Iranian Revolution, and the Muslim Brothers in the Egyptian Revolution.

intuitions about the workings of power in society and possibilities for popular revolution, with an organizing vision of community institution building. With such dim prospects for sufficient progress through existing institutional channels, new democratic and cooperative institutions must be built from the ground up.

In early stages, crafting the political infrastructure of radical democracy and libertarian socialism will be mainly local, through outgrowths and codifications of existing social processes that can be expanded into mainstream practice and incorporated into a broader strategy. The community institutions proposed here are modular. They can stand alone as individual projects, fine-tuned to solve specific problems created by the current system's failures, but they are designed to be organized as a network. By working together and mutually reinforcing one another, these institutions can qualitatively change the power relations of a city or neighborhood, and lay the groundwork for new macro-structures of self-governance and civil society. Through engineering and managing new institutions of their own, communities can cultivate a creative and communal spirit that will empower them to take control of their lives, connect to one another across cultural and geographic distances, and develop the egalitarian foundations of a new society. Only such a process serves as the basis of a truly democratic ecosocialism.

Most of the community institutions discussed here are not new inventions, but have been developed through generations of popular struggle all over the world. The challenge taken up here is to synthesize them into a unified anti-capitalist strategy at every level of society.

Particular institutional arrangements will likely depend on local needs and conditions, but possibilities include worker-owned cooperatives, neighborhood councils, community land trusts, local food distribution systems, mutual aid networks, community-owned energy, popular education models, time

a downward spiral of energy monopoly insolvency: as more people switch to cooperative renewable power, the price of electricity that DTE sells will rise and the average capital costs to community ownership will fall. Eventually, DTE would be forced into a fiscal crisis by its obligation to maintain such high returns for shareholders. At that point, the city government would be well positioned to municipalize the grid and buy up any productive infrastructure that would be in the public good (such as DTE's solar arrays).

Leveraging democratic power for control over municipal policy making would mean an entirely new direction for Detroit's redevelopment. Non-reformist reforms like a location value tax, expansive public transit, and restorative justice practices would all be within reach. So would many other crucial policies that this essay lacks the space to discuss. This approach to radical organizing could build a universal healthcare system rooted in community clinics. It could vastly reduce the police force's scope of activities and bring all public security services under direct civilian control through police-monitoring neighborhood patrols and community-based teams of trained mental health professionals and conflict de-escalators. It could help us reimagine the public school by integrating mixedage popular education models and community-based learning into the public sphere to be available to all. We could devise city-wide bike shares, recycling and composting syndicates, community centers, and time banks.

Conclusion: A Next System Beyond the City

Suppose we can reconfigure a series of large municipalities like Detroit along libertarian municipalist lines—making city officials report directly to a confederation of decentralized neighborhood councils and using the new city governance

The levels of civic engagement sustained by neighborhood councils and other projects would also allow this revolutionary community organization to seize municipal power directly through elections. The City Charter could then be rewritten, restructuring city governance toward radical participatory democracy. It is at this stage that the institution-building strategy described here would begin to create a cascade effect of municipal transformation.

Upscaling Radical Democracy

Municipal authority provides a powerful new lever to advance all other movement work. Public backing for cooperative credit streams and community common funds would vastly expand the post-capitalist economy. Once cooperative housing is extensive enough to demonstrate proof of concept and weaken developers' power, the new political base and City Council support could be leveraged toward further municipalization of land and housing. So long as the central role of participatory democracy in the governance of the cooperative housing system is legally enshrined, municipalizing it would vastly expand the community's available resources and legal powers (such as eminent domain). The City of Detroit could guarantee shelter as a human right.

Municipal authority would also allow citizens to municipalize the entire energy grid to be managed in the public interest as part of the urban commons. The voting public could then force a complete drawdown on fossil fuel use. With enough preexisting social and physical infrastructure around community ownership of energy, this shift toward energy democracy is entirely feasible. In Michigan, state regulators set the price of electricity to guarantee DTE an exorbitant return on investment within a certain range. If demand for electricity decreases beyond projections, they recalculate and raise the price to maintain a similar level of return. This pricing structure could drive

banks, childcare centers, community health clinics, and more. Specific institutions will be discussed as illustrative examples of political possibilities, but the understanding is that radical democracy means ordinary people possess the power to innovate, modify, discard, or replace them as they wish, as part of a global conversation of open-source experimentation. Underpinning this strategic vision is a spirit of pragmatism. If what a community builds works, it can be exported elsewhere with local adjustments—much as the goals and protest methods of the Movements of the Squares were rapidly adopted and adapted by social movements around the world.

Our organizing vision has roots from across the history of revolutionary movements for freedom and justice. We draw our inspiration and intellectual development from, among others, autonomist Marxism, Zapatismo, the alt-globalization movement, the New Anarchists, the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, the Alinskyist community organizing tradition, asset-based community development, anarcho-syndicalism, council communism, social ecology, and the movement for a social solidarity economy. Using the following proposal as a starting point, our goal is to synthesize these wide-ranging currents of thought into a movement organization engaged in community institution building and organizing work spanning housing, energy, food, healthcare, technology, labor, education, ecological restoration, and other issues. Here, we will further explore the precursors to this sort of organizing, how we can build on those political traditions through community institution building, and how such institutions can be integrated into a revolutionary framework for social, political, economic, and ecological transformation.

Lessons From The Past

In 1917, between the overthrow of the tsar in March and the October Revolution, Russian society saw a division of political authority into two oppositional forces governing society in parallel. The soviets, a network of radically democratic, autonomous workers' councils, operated alongside an official parliamentary Provisional Government that they were attempting to displace. The Petrograd Soviet in particular, which represented the city's workers and soldiers, competed with the Russian state for popular legitimacy. It incorporated delegates from other soviets around the country and refashioned itself as the All-Russian Congress of Soviets. At the time, many Russian socialists referred to this political situation as *dvoyevlastiye*, or "dual power." Leon Trotsky wrote about dual power in his *History of the Russian Revolution*, and Vladimir Lenin argued that this bifurcation of authority was fundamentally volatile and could give way to a revolutionary overthrow of the republican Provisional Government.

At the time, however, "dual power" was essentially descriptive. The American anarchist theorist Murray Bookchin was the first to flesh out the concept into a strategic framework for transformative politics. In his political blueprint, called "libertarian municipalism," confederations of directly democratic assemblies would be forced into conflict with the nation-state, making continued coexistence impossible.[6] We advocate a somewhat more flexible approach than Bookchin's—engaging with liberal democratic governments wherever possible to restructure them in a participatory and ecosocialist direction. Even so, his theoretical work on dual power is central to our strategy. The sections below explore how to build dual power in the here and now by modifying and transcending

[6] Murray Bookchin, "Thoughts on Libertarian Municipalism," *Left Green Perspectives*,no. 41 (January 2000).

of exporting anarcho-syndicalist labor organizing methods to struggles outside the workplace.[32] He notes that, just as unions in that tradition work to become the very structures that can replace the boss-worker relationship when capitalist modes of production are overthrown, so too can the tenant community union fight to take over management of the property. Burley does not, however, carry over this aim of worker and tenant organizing—to form the institutions of the liberated society—into the self-governance of a community in political terms. This is a serious oversight. Developing such councils is about restructuring democratic governance rooted in community participation, not just autonomous management of a few buildings.

A confederation of neighborhood councils would oversee the management of community cooperatives and mutual aid networks. The next step would be to integrate these councils into city governance itself. In Detroit, recent amendments to the City Charter allow residents of a city council district to form a Community Advisory Council (CAC); their city councilperson must then regularly confer and host public meetings with these councils. Establishing or taking over these CACs might be a place to start on the road to radical democratic governance. In other cities, the specific mechanisms will differ. Some cities have run pilot programs of participatory budgeting, following the lead of Porto Alegre in Brazil.[33] Pressuring the city to adopt such modes of governance would be a major step toward empowering the neighborhood councils and instituting a democratic confederal system.

[32] Shane Burley, "Ready to Fight: Developing a 21st Century Community Syndicalism." *Institute for Anarchist Studies* (January 23, 2015), anarchist-studies.org.

[33] Marion Gret and Yves Sintomer, *The Porto Alegre Experiment: Learning Lessons for Better Democracy*, trans. Stephen Wright (London: Zed Books, 2005).

improve neighborhood economic conditions while staving off climate catastrophe.

Neighborhood Councils

At the center of all of this mutual aid and participatory social service work is the creation of organs of radical democracy. Like the Palestinians in the First Intifada, the Kurds in revolutionary Rojava, and the Catalonians in the Spanish Civil War, American communities should both actively organize local assemblies in which free citizens come together to make decisions and empower those institutions politically. Detroit has several good starting points.

Detroit has a long history of block clubs on which neighborhood councils could be built. During the worst of the recession, block clubs and more informal networks of neighbors proved vital in preventing the total collapse of many neighborhoods. Indeed, the neighborhoods that weathered the downturn best were the ones with organized block clubs already in place. They mowed vacant lots and lawns, chased off would-be looters, and communicated with the city when basic services were delayed or absent. Block clubs are typically apolitical, however, and almost always focused hyperlocally, with little aspiration or ability to influence broader city politics. Still, as incubators of participatory democracy, they can coordinate with other cooperative institutions and take on more ambitious community projects, gathering strength as they do so.

Another starting point is tenant organizing. "Community syndicalism" or "community unionism" is a strategy for organizing renters to bargain collectively with landlords. A tenant union is, in essence, a neighborhood council organized around an apartment building or residential complex. Tenant organizing overlaps with both cooperative housing work and the proliferation of democratic councils. Take Back the Land organizer Shane Burley discusses community syndicalism in the context

current approaches to community and labor organizing to create radically democratic community institutions. As North Americans, our focus will be primarily on the United States, but our proposal should be understood as a transnational project, inspired and guided by visionary organizers the world over.

Building On and Beyond Current Approaches to Organizing

Participatory democracy is at the core of our vision for organizing and institution building. When a community can decide for itself what its needs are and how to address them instead of receiving "solutions" from on high, the benefits are many. While the fields of organizing, social service provision, and international development are full of well-intentioned organizations and individuals who fail to understand this, a more positive illustrative example comes from Young Shin, the founder of the Asian Immigrant Women Advocates (AIWA).

In the early 1980s, Shin set out to organize Chinese and Korean immigrant women workers in the Oakland garment, hotel, and high tech factory industries to fight rampant wage theft. When she spoke with these women, however, time and again they told her that their top priority was to learn English, not to organize. Shin was confused—as she tells it, most of the women worked, shopped, and did laundry without a word of English, and rarely had time to venture outside their immigrant enclaves. Why was learning English so important then? Were the women just looking to assimilate and individually ascend the social ladder?[7]

Shin trusted the workers, however, and the English classes she organized turned out to be pivotal. For starters, they al-

[7] Young Shin, interview with one of the authors, 2016.

lowed the women to stand up to their oppressors in the workplace.

One group of women told Shin that they wanted to be able to tell their boss to stop yelling at them and to treat them with respect. They recognized what Shin had not—that learning English was "a form of self-defense and self-affirmation."[8] The classes also helped the women learn their labor rights, situate themselves in all working women's historical struggle for justice, and push back against oppressive cultural norms regarding gender and the family. Eventually, as they gained new skills and confidence, the women did take on wage theft and many other battles for labor justice. For Shin and for anyone who seeks to organize, it was an all-important lesson: the community knows what it needs better than anyone else does.

Building directly democratic, cooperative institutions creates buy-in at an early stage and ensures that a community can make decisions in its own best interest. Direct democracy is also a form of popular education. Through it, people can develop political consciousness and practice living the ethic of horizontal collaborative democracy. Murray Bookchin writes:

> [T]hose forms of association where people meet face-to-face, identify their common problems, and solve them through mutual aid and volunteer community service…serve, to greater or lesser degrees, as schools for democratic citizenship. Through participation in such efforts we can become more socially responsible and more skilled at democratically discussing and deciding important social questions.[9]

[8] Nilda Flores-Gonzalez et al., ed., *Immigrant Women Workers in the Neoliberal Age* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 214.

[9] Murray Bookchin and Dave Foreman, *Defending the Earth: A Debate* (Montreal: Black RoseBooks, 1991).

Community energy has already begun to take root in Detroit. In 2011, DTE repossessed all of Highland Park's[30] more than one thousand street lights due to unpaid electricity bills. In response, Highland Park residents formed a group called Soulardarity to install community-owned solar street lights. Members pay annual dues to keep up and expand the program. Soulardarity is a very young organization, but its model has the potential to expand into solar arrays, wind generation, and efficient battery systems to power member homes, especially if integrated into a wider multi-issue strategic framework. Solar arrays could be managed by community land trusts, community-owned wireless routers could be combined with street lights for affordable public Internet access, and housing cooperatives could collaborate on weatherization and energy-saving measures.

As with community gardening, organizing for energy democracy presents an opportunity for popular environmental education. Without taking steps to meaningfully improve people's lives, Soulardarity would have no credible platform from which to raise ecological consciousness. But by grounding its education work in a concrete program in which community members are invested, Soulardarity can communicate effectively about climate change and environmental justice.

The ownership structure of the energy economy is an essential part of halting greenhouse gas emissions. As Naomi Klein argues in *This Changes Everything*, democratic management (rather than for-profit management) of the grid is often necessary to transition away from fossil fuel dependency.[31] By placing control over energy systems in community hands, and by upscaling those systems into the public sphere, we would

[30] Highland Park is a small, three-square-mile city entirely surrounded by Detroit.

[31] Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014).

Energy Democracy

Energy production, distribution, and consumption is another critical site of environmental and class struggle in the urban landscape. As in most US metropolitan areas, Detroit's energy grid is controlled by a state-backed private monopoly. The energy company (DTE) secured a 10 to 15 percent return on all infrastructural investments through price setting by state regulators. This is an especially exploitative and (as shown below) vulnerable model of energy capitalism. Effective, visionary organizers can help their communities bypass the corporate monopoly's price gouging and pollution through a community-owned grid of renewable, distributed generation supplying affordable electricity to all.

Since the Industrial Revolution, energy production has been complex and capital intensive, requiring technology and expertise that lent itself to elite-controlled centralization. In *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming*, Andreas Malm argues that the switch from hydropower to coal power for industrial manufacturing was actually driven by a capitalist need to intensify control over the workforce.[29] Textile mills using cheap hydropower could be built only where water flowed reliably. Even though steam power was more expensive, it could power a mill anywhere that coal could be delivered. The resulting capital mobility allowed capitalists to set up in urban centers, which—unlike rural riverside sites—had an abundant reserve army of labor to serve as scabs and a strong state to punish striking workers. Centralized control over energy sources was—and continues to be—a form of social power. Social ownership over new forms of distributed energy production, like wind and solar, potentially threatens that power.

[29] Andres Malm, *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Origins of Global Warming* (New York: Verso Books, 2016).

Bridging divides of race, class, and gender can also be facilitated through a deliberative, democratic process, so long as that process is structured toward eliminating those inequalities.

Across all sites of organizing—workplaces, neighborhoods, and more—a genuinely transformative politics can be ushered in only through a framework of radical democracy. This means building up a network of neighborhood councils from the community level that can create and manage these institutions themselves. With that as our starting point, let's next consider the main currents of progressive organizing in the United States and ways that an ethic of participatory democracy for decision making and a strategy of cooperative institution building can take those traditions to the next level.

Labor and the Cooperative Movement

Since the rise of industrial capitalism, worker struggles have cultivated a progressive politics voicing demands from survival to liberation. At minimum, labor movements demanded higher wages and a decent living standard for the average worker. At their most ambitious, they demanded the abolition of the wage system, the common ownership and democratic administration of key productive infrastructure, and a society where the people themselves determined the goals and exertion of their own labor. It is this latter, more radical labor movement that must be revived and expanded. Bargaining for a better share of economic surplus without transforming the ownership structure of the economy itself is not a strategy that can succeed in the long term.

Despite the temporary successes of mid-century social democracy—"successes" that inadequately addressed matters of ecology, race, gender, and internationalism—the present neoliberal consensus has driven unionization to an all-time low. Unions have been curtailed by mass unemployment, the casualization of work, anti-labor laws in developed countries,

and violent political repression in industrializing ones. The traditional industrial proletariat is no longer well defined or large enough to be the single revolutionary agent, and perhaps never was.

Now, though, there is an opportunity to situate the industrial proletariat as a prominent wing within a broader democratic struggle, not just against wage labor but against racial and sexual oppression, hierarchy, ecological destruction, the state, and perhaps even work itself. A better socioeconomic system can only be won by a cross-class international coalition among peasants, proletarians, social movements beyond labor, and progressive elements of the middle classes. The labor movement should be conceptualized as a central pillar of that struggle but not equated with the struggle itself.

Workers have already begun to organize outside the boundaries of traditional industrial unionism. Innovative methods include creating cross-class alliances and unionization drives at such labor hubs as hospitals, airports, and universities; defying union bureaucracies to advocate for union democracy; and creating nonprofit organizations, worker centers, and other autonomous working-class institutions.

One of the most promising worker institutions for achieving workplace democracy is the worker's cooperative. Since worker ownership of the means of production is socialism's central demand, transforming individual workplaces into sites of democratic worker self-management is a crucial step for creating direct democracy and socializing the economy at large. By giving workers direct control over firms, cooperatives provide democratic control over sectors of the economy and an escape from wage labor, free of state intervention. But cooperatives also suffer from important problems—some borne of their failure as firms, others from their success.

Studies have shown co-ops to be even more competitive than oligarchic capitalist firms of the same scale once they get started—but "once they get started" is the key phrase. The

working-class women and challenge patriarchal norms, and just as restorative justice practices both reduce the power of police and prisons and challenge the dehumanizing and often racist beliefs underlying those institutions, so too would sustainable community gardens both feed people and challenge the rapacious logic of conventional agriculture. By adopting the principles of permaculture and agroecology in urban gardens and housing—that is, by integrating human society and food production within our ecosystems, rather than wiping them out—people become more conscious of their role in the food web and less alienated from the nonhuman world. Community gardens should welcome everyone to contribute, regardless of ideology.

However, organizers should also work to pass on green and post-humanist ethics—deep respect for the interconnected living world of which we are a part— through the shared practice of cultivating the food that sustains us all. Without nurturing and transmitting these values, any socialist project is unlikely to succeed in the long run, as declining biodiversity threatens every society.

The ecological effort must ultimately go beyond food, impacting all aspects of society from clothing to scientific research to transit to recreation to resource extraction to waste management. Nonhuman interests must eventually be represented in structures of participatory democracy too, through human proxies to give them a voice and enshrined norms that make certain activities off-limits, analogous to current initiatives to provide legal rights to ecosystems and to individual nonhumans. But to get here, studies suggest, we need to help people develop an emotional attachment to nature.[28] A great place to start is in the garden.

[28] Jill Suttie, "How to Raise an Environmentalist," *Yes! Magazine* (September 24, 2016.

many parts of the city have already given rise to community gardens, but for the most part they aren't coordinated with one another or the people who need food the most. As with housing, the community land trust could partner with this dual power organization's social work arm to connect individuals and families to a mutual aid network supplying fresh produce from community gardens.

Even if radically expanded from their current small-scale, patchwork level, these gardens couldn't meet all of Detroit's food needs. But they would begin to replace an unsustainable and unhealthy industrial food system and to develop an informed food movement that can push for radical change in food production everywhere.

The capitalist food system, to put it mildly, desperately needs an overhaul. It is among the leading drivers of habitat destruction, climate change, and dangerous levels of soil and water pollution. By draining aquifers, poisoning environments with pesticides and herbicides, replacing complex ecosystems with industrial monocultures, and destabilizing the global nitrogen cycle through over-reliance on petrochemical fertilizers, it erodes the ecological base that all agriculture (and life itself) depends on. Furthermore, the food this system produces is poorly distributed by the market. Eight hundred million people worldwide are undernourished, including 15 percent of American households and one in five American children. The worst offender is animal agriculture, with its inefficient land use and harm to water, air, soil, climate, wildlife habitat, and human health. Our farms and fisheries horrendously exploit human workers, inflict unconscionable abuse on the animals themselves, and wreak havoc on local ecosystems.

By making produce affordable and accessible, community gardens are an important step toward a plant-based food system.

This role for community gardens is not only material but ideological. Just as parent-run childcare co-ops both empower

major weakness of co-ops, and the reason for their scarcity, is the enormous difficulty of financing them. Unlike wealthy entrepreneurs, typical workers at median wage have very little capital to proffer, making whatever small initial investment they can raise essentially an all-or-nothing risk for them.

Absent venture capital, worker-owned firms must turn to banks. In today's for-profit credit system, banks are inherently skeptical of firms with an experimental structure that allows production to be structured around goals besides maximized profits, such as the livelihood of workers or the common good. Thus, most lenders demand either a significant amount of capital as collateral or a role for their agents in the start-up's decision-making processes, up to and including a potential ownership stake (which compromises the very workplace democracy that is a co-op's fundamental goal).[10] Given these constraints, a huge number of cooperatives fail before ever being given the chance to succeed. Even those that do jump the hurdles are often limited to relatively small-scale activities (supermarkets, restaurants, bike shares, etc.).

On the flip side, co-ops that do succeed face other problems. Mondragon—a network of cooperatives in Spain with over 74,000 worker-owners and 12 billion euros in assets—supports a wide range of industries and programs, and has implemented some degree of internal democracy. Yet it also demonstrates many of the limitations of even successful cooperatives.

One of Mondragon's first problems (as early as the 1960s) was that its worker-owners became concerned primarily with their own prosperity and neglected participation in the broader anti-Franco struggle.[11] More recently and perhaps more distressingly, the cooperative's internal democracy has

[10] Ben Craig and John Pencavel, "Participation and Productivity: A Comparison of Worker Cooperatives and Conventional Firms in the Plywood Industry," *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity* (1995), 126–127.

[11] Sharryn Kasmir, *The Myth of Mondragon: Cooperatives, Politics, and Working Class Life in a Basque Town* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996), 86–87.

slowly eroded amid reforms meant to keep it competitive with capitalist firms. Between 1985 and 1991, the component worker-owned co-ops of the Mondragon network ceded most of their decision-making power to the Mondragon Cooperative Corporation, a centralized holding company whose elected upper management was largely unaccountable to the worker-shareholders except in largely symbolic annual general assemblies. At about the same time, Mondragon began hiring legions of wage workers (nonowners) in its foreign subsidiaries. By 2014 only 40 percent of Mondragon's employees were worker-owners who had voting power in the cooperative.[12]

The lesson here is that an institution beyond the worker-owned firm is needed to provide an incentive against self-exploitation as co-ops come under pressure to adapt to survive within capitalism. Macroeconomic structures that would help a cooperative economy thrive—such as a large-scale nonprofit credit system and limits on corporations' use of sweatshop labor—are largely beyond what cooperatives themselves can create.

And insofar as cooperatives are part of a capitalist society, they also face pressures to exploit the consumer or commodify things that should not be commodified (such as healthcare or artistic creation). Even a democratically run power company, for example, could exploit its monopoly over electricity to price gouge consumers should its workers decide to make a higher profit—unless energy, along with other necessities, were taken off the market altogether and its provision coordinated some other way. It is not enough, then, to make a single workplace democratic (though it's a start). Cooperatives can achieve their potential only as parts of a more comprehensive struggle to remake the entire capitalist economy.

[12] Anders Christiansen, "Evaluating Workplace Democracy in Mondragon" (undergraduate thesis, University of Vermont, 2014).

that residents have private living spaces connected to common spaces for recreation, cooking, and eating. Close-knit neighborhood blocks would be integrated with a food co-op, so that one building would house an expansive kitchen and dining room where everyone on the entire block gathers for meals, taking turns with weekly cooking and cleaning shifts. Other large houses and residential complexes might become the sites of even more closely connected intentional communities. Common management of the home, shared rituals of belonging and deepening relationships, and collective child-rearing are all features of current intentional communities that such a housing system would nurture and expand. Some houses or apartments would also adopt the model of the Camp Hill and L'Arche communities, with people of varying physical and mental ability living in community alongside able-bodied and neurotypical people, or of mixed-age housing as an alternative to the segregation and pervasive abuse of the elderly in assisted living facilities.

Developing affordable cooperative housing options outside of the destabilizing real estate market is a meaningful stride toward preempting the expulsion of poor communities of color in Detroit. A CLT used in this way would foster community while laying groundwork for the liberated society.

Food and Environmental Justice

CLTs are also of use in building power to bring food justice to neglected communities. In many sites around the country, these institutions have been used to steward community gardens. Developing a cooperative, sustainable local food system is of utmost importance for both urban communities and the biosphere. Urban community gardens can simultaneously reclaim public space, expand civic participation and community social ties, and provide for people with little access to healthy food. In Detroit, where huge swaths of the city are food deserts,

housing system.[27] We would also assemble a tool library, cutting costs for both home renovation teams and the library's community members.

A CLT could create a varied landscape of housing aimed at fostering intentional community while meeting a diverse population's need for shelter. In essence, the housing system would maximize resident choice and create opportunities for experimentation in a variety of forms of cooperative living. Understandably, many individuals and families have no desire to live in communes, and an emphasis on expanding the cooperative sphere of daily life should not be a barrier to entry. However, many other people feel constrained by the alienation and limitations of current housing options. Revitalizing community and pushing back against our social atomization is an important aspect of all projects in this organizing model—rethinking living arrangements most of all.

Housing arrangements in this system would vary on two axes: duration of anticipated residence and degree of communality. On the first axis, housing options would range from *emergency temporary shelter* for those currently on the streets; to *transitional housing* for victims of abuse and domestic violence seeking refuge and those coming from temporary shelters as a starting point for receiving other social services (the housing-first model); to *short-term housing* for up to a year for university students or long-term visitors; to *semi-permanent housing* from one to five years with extension available if needed; and, finally, to *permanent housing* for those planning to stay in a house or apartment indefinitely.

On the second axis, options would range from individual apartments and single-family homes to a variety of communal living situations. Some apartments would be redesigned so

[27] Most uninhabited homes in Detroit are in need of serious repair to become habitable again. A cooperative labor pool would vastly reduce the costs of each renovation.

The Common Fund

How do we fund cooperatives, incentivize cooperation over competition, and tie these member institutions to an explicitly socialist politics? We propose a Common Fund, which would absorb the profits from a network of community-run cooperatives and pool money that communities could reinvest for economic development. It would be under the democratic control of the networked cooperatives' member-owners and would initially finance additional cooperatives to further grow that network. As it grows, the fund could invest in such profitless purposes as building new infrastructure, establishing other independent socialist institutions, and financing political movements to take over and reform local government along radically democratic lines.

Credit streams through non-extractive finance from organizations such as Working World are a particularly good starting point for worker ownership. The Working World fund's initial capital was raised from donations, investment capital, and the profits of the successful workers' cooperatives that control it. The organization uses this mixed capital stream to offer zero-interest loans and educational support to newly founded worker co-ops or existing firms transferring ownership to workers. Uniquely, the fund accepts no loan repayment until the co-op begins to turn a profit, and even then it gets paid back strictly as a percentage of profits. (In months without profit, the firm pays nothing). The Working World has funded over 200 worker-controlled companies around the world, and it has been so successful that it is now spearheading the development of a network of local funds for cooperatives.[13] The fund currently needs local organizers to set up local credit institutions and incubate new co-ops, and answering that call

[13] The Working World, www.theworkingworld.org;, Oscar Abello, "Closing the Funding Gap for Worker Cooperatives," *NextCity*, July 8, 2016, nextcity.org.

would be a powerful addition to the labor organizing and grassroots cooperative development proposed here. Such a network of funds—if democratically controlled and funded from the bottom-up—can form the basis of a new cooperative economy and a new communally engaged labor movement.

There is no doubt that an organized workers struggle is important. But the union movement of the past developed institutions primarily to leverage their collective action within capitalism. Now these proletarian institutions must *replace* capitalism.

Rules for Radicals Are Made To Be Broken

Community organizing in the United States has historically been dominated by a model known as "institution-based community organizing" (or "broad-based community organizing"). This model evolved midcentury out of Saul Alinsky's work in Chicago neighborhoods and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference's civil rights organizing across the South. The legacy of the civil rights movement is obviously central in the progressive political imagination, and Alinsky's *Rules for Radicals* is still used as a foundational handbook for organizing. The central idea of this model is that such community institutions as labor unions and religious congregations are already internally organized and already have community buy-in, making them the perfect vehicle for more powerful organizing in the community's interest. The civil rights movement, for example, was organized through the existing strength of the black church. Major organizing networks based on this legacy continue to use the methodology of institution-based, largely faith-based organizing across the United States, and public-interest advocacy organizations draw upon the Alinskyist tradition in their campaigns on many issues.

Organized efforts to keep foreclosed families in their homes are already underway.

Formed in 2014, the Tricycle Collective buys occupied homes at the county auction, often for considerably less than the back taxes owed, and signs ownership back to the occupants.[26] Although this form of temporary tax relief for such families is essential, it leaves them vulnerable to future tax delinquency and does nothing to change the structural forces of the real estate market that drive eviction, residential segregation, and gentrification. The only solution that guarantees housing for low-income citizens is socialization: removing housing from the market altogether.

In the short term, the institution best suited to creating an anti-gentrification bulwark of socialized housing run by the community is the community land trust (CLT). A CLT is a non-profit legal entity entrusted with property management in the community's interest—ensuring affordable housing, preserving environmental assets, and driving cooperative neighborhood development. The leadership structure of a Detroit CLT, designed along radically democratic lines, would have recallable board members accountable to housing cooperative members and would subject policy changes to democratic approval.

Through this CLT, organizers would raise funds to purchase both abandoned and (with the homeowner's or renter's consent) inhabited properties, restore them, and secure them for income-adjusted affordable housing outside of the market. Like Habitat for Humanity's model, those who receive housing through the CLT would commit a certain number of labor hours (by themselves or someone else on their behalf) to future projects of home restoration to expand the cooperative

[26] Those being foreclosed upon are prohibited by law to bid on their own homes.

Housing Equity

In this era of rapid urbanization worldwide, housing and real estate are central battlegrounds for class struggle. The power of developers and landlords over tenants and the public at large lets them extract wealth and resources, enforce artificial scarcity, expel poor residents from their communities through gentrification and "urban renewal," deprive human beings of their basic right to shelter, and suppress approaches to urban development that could uplift the common good. Yet it is the urban commons that gives prime real estate much of its value— through the infrastructure, culture, and humanity clustered around it. This social value that we all create is captured by a tiny rentier class at the expense of the rest of us.

Detroit is well situated for pioneering methods of fighting back against this social order. Most of the city has severely depressed property values but sits on the cusp of a major wave of gentrification (likely over the next 20 years). Low property values do not mean an absence of real estate capitalist interests and exploitation; since 2005, more than a third of all homes in Detroit have been foreclosed on due to mortgage default or tax delinquency. Concentrated development in downtown and midtown Detroit has simultaneously seeded a process of non-inclusive "comeback," carving out a white and middle class pocket in an overwhelmingly black and low-income city.

Rising property values drive the expulsion of poor residents in two ways. As demand rises in an area, landlords increase rents, and tenants who cannot afford those increased costs are evicted. At the same time, as appraised home values increase, so do tax burdens. If homeowners cannot afford their new property taxes, they will face tax foreclosure, have their home sold at auction, and be evicted. Many tenants who have paid rent are also evicted because their landlords failed to pay property taxes.

Institution-based organizing relies on two premises that we question, however. One is that community institutions already exist, ripe for organizing. The other is that representative democracy can still be made to work for the people if only they are engaged enough and apply enough pressure.

In recent decades, community institutions in America have crumbled under the advance of the neoliberal state, the dismantling of organized labor, the privatization of public space and public schools, the closing of recreation and community centers, and the waning importance of organized religion to many people, especially younger generations. Simply put, working through today's community institutions does not get us very far if there is a dearth of them and if the surviving ones are less important than they once were to many citizens.

Using existing institutions to demand concessions from power also fails to achieve the full potential of Alinsky's own "iron rule of organizing"—never do for others what they can do for themselves. In institution-based organizing, the iron rule means that professional organizers should emphasize training and leadership development in the community, rather than running campaigns on behalf of the community. The former method builds power and grows the organization or movement; the latter stifles it. Although the philosophy behind the iron rule is sound, institution-based organizing does not take it far enough. Training people to apply pressure to the levers of power in a (barely) representative democracy still means ultimately relying on others—mostly unresponsive "elected" officials and undemocratic institutions—to make changes on behalf of a community, rather than initiating those changes oneself.

Institution-based organizing networks and the sprawling ecosystem of public interest advocacy groups also subscribe to another core Alinskyist principle: that the issues they take up must be concrete, immediate, and winnable. In our experience, these strictures have limited the scope of what

such organizations consider possible and the extent to which they can change the basic structures of society. As community organizers Francis Calpotura and Kim Fellner (1996) ask:

> Do fights for incremental changes necessarily contain, or even lead to, a critique of prevailing social and economic structures, or do they only redivide the same pie in other ways? Increasingly since the 1960s, we are also asking: Do organizations that engage in these fights—purportedly to alter relations of power between the powerful and the dispossessed—build more just and equitable internal structures or do they merely replicate the patterns and culture of the larger society?[14]

The model proposed here does focus on the concrete practices of meeting community interests and does involve taking immediate winnable steps—but the focus is always on a larger vision of systemic transformation.

Although it must draw upon this legacy of community organizing, the transition to our next system must prioritize building up new communal institutions of democratic self-governance and self-sufficiency rather than working through the traditional organizing model that eschews service provision. Creating and organizing these institutions are means for building the community's power, preparing it to wage more traditional organizing campaigns when needed to force the government or private sector to act in the community's interest. At the same time, these democratic cooperatives can be ends in themselves, filling in the gaps of the shrinking welfare state through networks of mutual aid and direct action

[14] Francis Calpotura and Kim Fellner, "The Square Peg Finds Their Groove: Reshaping the Organizing Circle," *H-Urban Seminar on the History of Community Organizing and Community-Based Development*, COMM-ORG Papers Collection, vol. 3 (1996).

means to national liberation; for us, they will be both means and ends.

Toward An American Dual Power

The First Palestinian Intifada proves the potential strength of putting the pieces of dual power organizing together. What would this organizing model look like transposed to an American context? As our example, we will use Detroit, Michigan—the city we know best and the one where we first intend to begin putting the ideas outlined here into practice. It is also one of the harder-hit cities in the current neoliberal crisis. Detroit's conditions of undemocratic governance, depressed property values, depopulation of the urban core, high point source pollution, tremendously powerful developers, high poverty rate, and racial segregation are more extreme than in most other cities, though not exceptionally so. Postindustrial cities across the Rust Belt and elsewhere present similar challenges and opportunities, and what works in Detroit will likely have cross applications.

What follows is an inexact blueprint of how organizers starting from present conditions can build dual power and libertarian ecosocialism in Detroit and, through parallel organizing work around the country and the world, scale up from there. To keep our overview concise and comprehensible, we confine this discussion of the envisioned evolution of democratic cooperative institutions to housing, food justice, energy, and neighborhood democracy—rather than attempting to outline a similar trajectory for every possible issue. These and many other institutions will be coordinated in a network and approached through the framework of strategic escalation. In other words, we start small with what we can do now, but simultaneously calculate each project and action to build power for the future and carry the struggle to multiple fronts of economic and political life.

ordinary Palestinians a voice in the direction of the struggle and the formation of their new society.[25] Building dual power from the ground up is what enabled the mobilization of the entire Palestinian public against its collective disenfranchisement and dispossession. For those of us inspired by the rise of horizontalism in today's social movements, the First Intifada has much to teach us about the organizational conditions necessary for this ideal to be truly realized in a practical and powerful way.

Eventually, the scale of repression became too much for even this highly resilient model to bear. The imprisonment of the most experienced organizers and the paranoia about the wide network of paid or coerced informants in Palestinian society eventually fractured and then crumbled the Intifada's organizational capacity, and the movement collapsed. How the Palestinian liberation movement could have done better to overthrow the occupation regime is another discussion; the movement nonetheless illustrates how this form of grassroots democratic institution building can channel collective action on an incredible scale and empower participatory democracy and mutual aid as the guiding forces of a society. The end goal of the First Intifada was not to build libertarian socialism or radical democracy, but to replace the occupation with a democratic Palestinian state. Even so, a similarly structured movement with different goals could trace an analogous path, with greater success in a freer society like the US. For the Palestinians, libertarian socialism and radical democracy were

[25] One First Intifada veteran interviewed in Beit Sahour in 2014 said that he was jokingly accused of being in the UNLU because the suggestions his popular committee had given him to present to Beit Sahour's town-wide committee appeared in a UNLU leaflet two weeks later. This model was extremely effective at disseminating strategies for popular resistance. The idea of a tax strike, deployed so effectively by the people of Beit Sahour, was actually first proposed by the popular committee of a small village near Nablus and ended up in a communiqué printed and distributed by popular committees throughout occupied Palestine. See Herson-Hord, "Sumud to Intifada."

where and when the state and private sector fail to respond to citizen needs or demands.

The best American precursor to this aspect of the model is the Black Panther Party. Even so, the full radical potential of its organizing model was left unrealized. Founded in 1966, the Black Panthers articulated a vision of black power and revolutionary socialism in opposition to American militarism, the impoverishment of black communities, and police violence. Their "Serve the People Programs" included free breakfasts for hungry schoolchildren, a cooperative shoe factory, community health clinics and education centers, and cooperative housing for low-income people.[15] They often illustrated the programs' function with the metaphor of being stranded on a life raft—the community must take practical steps to stay alive in the present, but never forget that the real goal is to make it to shore, to revolution. The Panthers understood these programs as "survival pending revolution"—a means of sustaining their communities until they could achieve liberation.

Survival programs proved to the community that the Black Panthers were serious about improving black people's lives. This approach let the Panthers build power where revolutionary rhetoric alone would have failed, and membership swelled. Even so, such programs could have been structured toward building power even more than they did. If they address more than mere survival, by building the structures of a society autonomous from and in opposition to the state and capital, survival programs can become liberation programs as well. By meeting basic community needs, such institutions rupture capitalism's control over people's lives, allowing oppressed people to carve out space within capitalism, defend it, and thus transform the world around them. This relationship between

[15] David Hilliard, ed., *The Black Panther Party: Service to the People Programs* (Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008).

"survival work" and "liberation work" is a core theme of the political vision developed here.

The Black Panther Party's successes and failures have much to teach us about winning real victories in the present. We intend to draw upon the Black Panther tradition while taking their model to the next level.

Revolutionary Institution-Building in Practice

How can these moving parts in our strategic framework work together as a powerful revolutionary force? Below we use the First Palestinian Intifada to demonstrate that integrating institutions of mutual aid and participatory democracy can mobilize all of society into an effective resistance movement. Then we lay out a blueprint for scaling up this sort of organizing to a revolutionary transition in an American city.

Organizing for the First Intifada

The First Intifada broke out in late 1987 as a mass uprising against the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories. It was one of the most powerful popular mobilizations in recent history, largely responsible for the Oslo Accords and the formation of the Palestinian Authority as a framework for achieving Palestinian independence. The flaws of this framework notwithstanding, this popular struggle upended the previous consensus around the de facto annexation of the occupied territories and the impossibility of a Palestinian state, changing the course of the conflict forever.

Most discussion of the First Intifada focuses on the role of mass protest in making Palestinian society ungovernable for Israeli occupying forces. Less discussed is the role of community organizations of mutual aid and confederated participa-

municipal committees, which coordinated resistance activities among neighborhoods, camps, and nearby villages. These committees in turn elected representatives to a district committee, and district committees sent representatives to *al-Qiyada al-Muwhhada*, the secret Unified National Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU).[23] The UNLU first began distributing pamphlets in January 1988 detailing strike dates, boycotts of Israeli goods, marches, and other guidance for individual popular committees—such as calls to develop the "home economy,"[24] to withhold taxes from the occupying regime, and to resign from posts in the occupation government.

This structure acted as a democratic confederalist shadow state, parallel and in opposition to the repressive and undemocratic military government, with enthusiastic nationalist legitimacy and organizational effectiveness to make up for its lack of monopoly on violence. It carried out a three-part strategy of resistance to the occupation: undermining the hegemony exercised by the occupation and its institutions; out-administering the occupation with parallel institutions to meet human needs; and creating a new nationalist hegemony to supplant the occupation.

This organizational structure also proved essential for coordinating local actions into territory-wide coherence. It gave

[23] In older sources, the UNLU is commonly mischaracterized as a command structure with political parties at the center. More recent interviews with veteran organizers in the popular committees provide little to no evidence for this framing. Rather, the UNLU was dependent on and democratically embedded in the popular committee network. See Mazin B. Qumsiyeh, *Popular Resistance in Palestine: A History of Hope and Empowerment* (London: Pluto Press, 2011); Mason Herson-Hord, "Sumud to Intifada: Community Struggle in Palestine and the Western Sahara" (undergraduate thesis, Princeton University, 2015).

[24] Community gardens, cottage industry cooperatives, food and medicine distribution networks, and other forms of economic self-sufficiency provided subsistence for neighborhoods so they could both provide for all members of the community and participate fully in strikes and boycotts.

provided the sustaining material support for economic resistance against the Israeli occupation, in forms such as boycotts and strikes. Finally, these women built up the community's organizational capacity to wage a broad-based social struggle drawing on all segments of Palestinian society.

These various local community institutions overlapped with one another cooperatively. Women's committees and voluntary work committees joined forces for many of their charitable projects, feminist organizers ran labor unions for garment workers, and political parties helped link different labor groups together.

The labor, student, and women's movements eventually coalesced in the Intifada's most important political institution—*al-lijan al-sha'abiyya*, the popular committee[22]—and gave birth to radically democratic council management of the community.

When an Israeli military truck killed four Palestinians in the Jabalia refugee camp on December 8, 1987, a mass protest movement rapidly ignited across the territories. Huge demonstrations sprang up in every camp and city, demanding justice for the victims and an end to the occupation. By January 1988, popular committees had formed out of the social infrastructure of local unions, women's committees, student associations, political party organizing, and friendly neighbors across the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Committees carried out tasks for every social function imaginable: collecting garbage, determining local strike dates, collecting donations through an "alternative taxation system," distributing food and medical aid, repairing damaged buildings, organizing barricade building, developing local economic self-sufficiency, and more.

Like the women's committees, the popular committees coordinated with one another through a confederated structure. Local committees nominated delegates to represent them at area/

[22] Also called "neighborhood councils" (or, in rural areas, "village councils").

tory democracy in making such mass protest possible. The brief overview below shows how these institutions laid the groundwork for and sustained a revolutionary upheaval against one of the most totalitarian political orders of that time.

Organizing within the prison system was a political incubator of the Palestinian resistance movement and offers a microcosmic example of the development of dual power in the much larger prison of the occupation. With hunger strikes, political prisoners eventually won concessions for their own self-administration within the prisons. They assembled structures of political organization and representation, forced prison authorities to recognize those representatives, and developed a division of labor around hygiene, education, and other daily tasks. Palestinian prisoners described this arrangement as *tanthim dakhili* ("internal organization"), similar to the concept of dual power. Even in the least free of circumstances, these prisoners carved out space for self-governance and created the preconditions for revolutionary struggle.

Prisoners taught and studied everything from Palestinian history to Marxist political economy, often for eight to 14 hours per day.[16] As these freshly educated and trained political activists were released back into society, the resistance movement was galvanized. Illiterate teenage boys arrested for throwing stones reentered the fray months later as committed, competent organizers who had studied movement building, strategic civil resistance, and dialectical materialism.

Meanwhile, the organizing context outside of prison transformed dramatically. Saleh Abu-Laban, a Palestinian political prisoner from 1970 until 1985, stated, "When I entered prison there wasn't a 'national movement'; there were only under-

[16] Maya Rosenfeld, *Confronting the Occupation: Work, Education, and Political Activism of Palestinian Families in a Refugee Camp* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 252; Avram Bornstein, "Ethnography and the Politics of Prisoners in Palestine-Israel," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*30, no. 5 (2001), 546 – 574.

ground cells that performed clandestinely. When I got out I found a world full of organizations, committees, and community institutions."[17]

Central to this new world of community organizing was the Palestinian labor movement. Unions were formed out of workers' places of residence rather than workplaces because migrant labor was prevalent and Palestinian unionism within Israel had been criminalized. Unions then formed strong alliances with local organizations in the national movement. With rapid growth in the early 1980s, labor unions found it necessary to decentralize and democratize their structure to become more resilient as Israeli repression intensified against union leaders and organizers.[18] These local unions were networked together through the Palestinian Communist Party and the Workers' Unity Bloc, creating a web of labor organizers and community groups that linked their class struggle to the larger project of national liberation.

Young people also played a vital role. They organized student associations at high schools and universities. There, they assembled demonstrations, set up volunteer committees serving refugee camps and poorer villages, and funneled youth into the national movement. Youth cultivated solidarity practices that were crucial during the uprising, including the formation of a largely student-run national mutual aid network to coordinate service delivery among dozens of local committees.

The Palestinian women's movement was perhaps the most important of all in laying the groundwork for the First Intifada.[19] These feminist organizers started by addressing their members' real material needs, but deliberately oriented these

[17] Rosenfeld, *Confronting the Occupation*, 218.

[18] Joost R. Hiltermann, ed., *Behind the Intifada: Labor and Women's Movements in the Occupied Territories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 7, 34, 57, 64.

[19] Joost R. Hiltermann, "The Women's Movement During the Uprising," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 20, no. 3 (spring 1991), 48–57.

projects toward the higher goals of women's liberation and Palestinian national liberation. The women's committees they formed brought together housewives and working women in cities and towns throughout the occupied territories. They set up classes and cottage industry cooperatives (managed along roughly anarcho-syndicalist lines, with one vote for each worker-member) for women looking to generate supplementary income.[20] Organizers went door-to-door in the poorer villages and refugee camps to reach women who were illiterate, economically dependent on men, and largely confined to private domesticity. Free cooperative childcare allowed these poorer women to join the co-ops, take literacy and vocational classes, and participate in women's committee politics.[21]

The women's committees were a confederal system, with webs of individual committees democratically operating local projects. Each women's committee nominated a member to represent its members at a district/area committee, which in turn nominated representatives for the national body. These national women's committees built strong ties with labor unions, expanded mutual aid supply lines, and developed community leaders.

Such activities served multiple purposes. They made the conditions of military occupation more livable, sustaining Palestinian families in the face of relentless colonization. They provided individual women with greater economic independence, allowing them to slowly stretch the boundaries of patriarchal control and participate more actively in public life and the national movement. They laid the early foundations of the "home economy," which fostered Palestinian self-sufficiency and later

[20] Hiltermann, *Behind the Intifada*, 52; Philippa Strum, *The Women are Marching: The Second Sex and the Palestinian Revolution* (New York: Lawrence Hill Books, 1992), 74–78.

[21] Philippa Strum, *The Women are Marching: The Second Sex and the Palestinian Revolution* (New York: Lawrence Hill Books, 1992), 53.