Special section: Urban neoliberalism, urban struggles, and 'the right to the city'

Interview by Ozlem Celik with Jamie Gough: Urban neoliberalism, urban struggles, and 'the right to the city'

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What do you see as the main urban problems in the developed countries in recent times?

In the 'developed' countries (DCs) over thirty years of neoliberalism, a large number of problems have emerged have emerged at the 'local' or sub-national scale. I prefer the term 'local' to 'urban', partly because rural areas of the DCs, unlike those of the Third World, have fundamentally the same social relations as cities and towns. Moreover, 'locality' can be of varying scale, from neighbourhoods to towns, cities, city-regions and regions.

Problems of localities have varied considerably between different developed countries as a function of their historic forms of capitalism, their particular social relations of production and reproduction, and the conduct of the class struggle over these decades. But in all DCs one sees common processes: the working out of neoliberal class, gender and 'racial' relations, and the developing contradictions of these manifested at the local scale. In the first place this has meant the reinforcement of the economic and political subordination of the working class (that is, the great majority of the population) to capital at the local scale: the increased discipline of workplace managements over their workforces, the enlistment of the whole labour force of the locality to the task of making the territory compete better in the open global economy, the restriction of welfare spending in the name of inter-local competition, and the handing over to business of public services, public land and the control of land use. The tensions for women of time, energy and place between caring work and increasingly necessary wage work have intensified. Intensified competition between workers for jobs, housing and welfare services has led to racist competition and movements. All these have benefitted capital and hit the working class; but the atomisation and depoliticisation of labour, which is not merely an effect of neoliberalism but its principal aim, has been largely successful, so far, in preventing strong opposition emerging at the local scale.

Nevertheless, neoliberalism has run into enormous contradictions expressed at the local scale. All the fundamental contradictions of capitalism are involved. Central is the contradiction between the freedom of owners to dispose of their property and the actually social nature of production, reproduction and our relation to nature. The fragmentation of production decisions between many capitals contradicts the intense productive interdependencies of different branches of investment, including fixed investment embedded in place. People's increasing dependence on commodities for reproduction not only damages their well-being but undermines the production of labour power of qualities and location useful for capital (Eisenschitz and Gough, 1996; Gough, 2002). Capital's unregulated accumulation destroys ecosystems at every spatial scale, severing the real unity of human and nature. These contradictions are manifested in increasingly obvious ways at the urban scale: in closure of workplaces and whole local industries; in the erosion or crushing of skill, health,

responsibility and initiative of workers, which are the necessary basis of productive work; in increasingly uneven spatial development, resulting in congestion and inflation in some localities and impoverishment, population decline and scrapping of infrastructures in others; in acute shortages of affordable housing, especially in locations where workers can get jobs; in ever-longer journeys based increasingly on the car; in ever-increasing air pollution with both local and global impacts; in intensifying neurosis, depression, addiction and inter-personal violence arising from disempowerment and alienation. All these crisis tendencies are interweaved with the accentuated boom and bust cycles which have characterised the neoliberal period. These arise from another profound contradiction of capitalism, the overaccumulation of capital resulting from uncoordinated investments, and the contradiction between restricted real wages imposed by capital and the consumer demand needed to realise its investments. Since the late 1980s until the credit crunch, waves of overaccumulation in both productive and fictitious capital were exacerbated by massive credit creation, which global capital attempted to use to restart a long wave of expansion. Thus we have seen the boom-bust cycles in glamour sectors of production in particular nations and localities (the late 1990s dotcom boom being exemplary); booms and slumps in building of commercial premises, infrastructures and, in some localities, housing; huge fluctuations in the valuation of these assets, with their devalorisation not only ruining the owners and their creditors but leading to severe contraction of credit from the finance system, with the global, national and local impacts that we know.

These multiple urban contradictions have damaged capital as well as labour. Social democracy, where it still exists, accordingly proposes to capital that it should attend to socialisation in its own interests. But capital in the DCs is very reluctant to go down this path, for fear of undermining what neoliberalism has achieved for it. This is particularly the case in the countries with the strongest liberal traditions, the US and Britain, and in those countries where property speculation powered the previous boom, including Ireland, Spain and Greece. Thus the current coalition government in Britain, far from attending to the longstanding crises of manufacturing, training, housing and transport, has set off by axing the already-inadequate state investment in them and their already-weak regulation and coordination, and the local state is following obediently along. Capital is too attached to the gains it has made in subordination of the working class to envisage any serious moves towards coordination of production and reproduction.

This analysis is somewhat different to Harvey's in his 'Right to the City' essay and indeed in his work of four decades. Harvey focuses on the flow of money capital into the built environment. Important though these are, urban crises are also centrally about the flow of money capital into and out of 'normal' (non-built environment) production and reproduction services both private and public. The valorisation of investment in the built environment is in the end wholly dependent on these other forms of commodity production and state services. And this production and reproduction in the city *is* labour, the exploitation of labour power, and unpaid domestic work, in modes specific to particular localities (Gough, 2013 forthcoming). But Harvey's work gives little attention to capital-labour relations and domestic work. His analysis of urban crisis tendencies is thus partial; and can be read as a kind of spatial fetishism to the extent that the built environment is the visible, concrete articulation of space in the city (with the pun intended!).

The task of addressing the socialisation of production, reproduction and nature will therefore fall to the working class. It may be possible to make temporary alliances with sections of capital over specific issues in particular localities to address socialisation; but these are unlikely to develop into *long term, general* class alliances or regimes. The local scale is crucial for radical politics. As we have seen, both the attacks on the working class and the contradictions of neoliberalism are clearly expressed – and clearly *visible* – at the local scale. From closure of workplaces and unemployment to unaffordable and low quality housing and public transport, to air pollution and degradation of public spaces, the problems are manifest. The crazy polarisations of neoliberalism are increasingly difficult for capital to hide: inflationary, unbalanced growth in some localities, abandonment in others; the spectacular development of business and leisure centres down the road from derelict poor neighbourhoods; increasing chasms in income and lives between rich and poor within the same locality; unmet needs beside unused labour and physical resources. These manifestations of neoliberalism's failure at the local scale all point to the need for the coordination of production and reproduction to meet the needs of the population, against the claims of private property, that is, for their *democratic socialisation* within the locality and beyond. This potential is the 'objective' basis for the development of radical urban politics now.

A corollary is that, because the problems of neoliberalism are so strongly expressed at the urban scale, this is an essential scale for working class resistance. As Harvey (2008, p. 40) reminds us, "Lefebvre was right to insist that the revolution has to be urban, in the broadest sense of that term, or nothing at all".

How can we relate the different problems in cities to each other, to understand their inter-relations?

The analysis I have just sketched out suggests that the various problems are deeply related, in that they are manifestations of capitalist-class relations and inter-woven gender and racial oppressions. This provides the basis for collaboration between women, between black people, and across the working class as a whole to address these problems. There is another potential unity which is particularly evident at the local scale: that between production and reproduction, 'economy' and social life, 'work' and home. Industrial capitalism separates these, organising each through distinct, contrasted social relations: waged work is the realm of necessity, of direct subjection of the worker to capital; in social life the worker in principle has a realm of freedom, to decide where they live, with whom, and their work and leisure activity, within the constraints of the (household) wage. Bourgeois politics, including at the local scale, mirrors this separation, with largely separate 'economic' and 'social' policies. Yet in reality the two spheres are intimately linked: wages determine the worker's burden of domestic work, their housing, mobility and leisure; the waged labour process shapes the worker's skills, aptitudes and culture; capital's use of men and women in waged work deeply impacts gender divisions and differences within social life; firms' production strategies affect the price and design of housing and other consumer goods and services; and the reproduction of labour powe, within the home, neighbourhood and public services in turn profoundly affects production. And these links mean that social life is not the realm of freedom and 'choice' celebrated by the bourgeois ideology, advertising and the media: it is profoundly shaped not only by the value of the wage but also by the design and supply of consumer goods and services by business and the state. These connections between production and reproduction are *visible* at the

scale of neighbourhoods, towns and cities (Gough and Eisenschitz, 2010). This gives the basis for a truly radical politics which spans economy and social life, waged and unwaged work, production and consumption, and whose holistic dynamic is to fight for people's *well-being*.

How can these relations, these real unities, lead to movements, organisations and struggles at the urban scale?

Bourgeois politics deals with urban problems one by one, in isolation from each other, through fragmented interventions which typically treat the symptoms rather than the deep causes. It divides policy between 'economic' and 'social' problems, it divides education problems from the division of waged labour, housing consumption from its production, social-economic problems from those of buildings, land and environment, and so on. Constant failures of policy are the result – as acknowledged in the endless complaint of 'lack of joined up government'. But mainstream politics continues to proceed in this fragmented way, because to adopt truly holistic policy would imply the *socialisation* through collective organisation and discussion of the whole of society and economy in a territory. It would reveal the root of the 'separate' problems of caring work, unemployment, housing, environment and so on in class, gender and racial oppression. It would thus *politicise* urban processes by showing the fallacies of individual responsibility and market freedom (Gough, 2002).

The task of a radical urban politics, then, is to show the real potential unities of the city. Popular organisation and action nearly always *starts* around a particular activity – a workplace or local industry, a particular tenure of housing, social care of a particular group, and so on. The direct experience of problems takes this initially fragmented form, and leads to initially fragmented responses. But organisation across the economy/social divide can greatly strengthen struggles. For example, campaigns for free local public transport and for big investment in it can win support from public transport workers as well as from the public and from environmental campaigners. Campaigns for house building and insulation can bring together building workers, the unemployed and people living in inadequate housing. This cuts across the traditional left 'division of political labour' between workplace and community politics, in which the two seldom come together. It is also at odds with recent reformulations of social democratic and Eurocommunist ideas, which seek to enhance citizenship, 'social capital' and networks in civil society without any substantial links to trade unions or issues within production (on the false premises that people's working identity is no longer important to them, and/or that workers have suffered complete and final political defeat). To the contrary, the potential power that workers have to halt the production of surplus value is crucial in providing strength to campaigns around social provision and the confidence to struggle. Historical instances where workers' and residents' organisation have come together show the potentially explosive dynamic. Thus building workers in Sydney in the 1970s, who were waging sharp battles against the employers and state around wages and job security, became immensely popular when they refused to work on building projects which despoiled wilderness, demolished historic buildings, or evicted residents from their homes ('the green bans'). In northern Italian cities in the late 1960s, measures of workers' control in the large factories inspired very radical actions in the social realm, including mass squatting of empty housing and public transport workers letting passengers ride free.

Such radical approaches also bring to the fore the fundamental social relations, and show the unity of interest of the oppressed. Thus feminist urban activists have sought to link struggles against

linked aspects of women's disadvantage – in housing and its location, transport, health services, waged work, and in public spaces. This highlights the pervasive nature of patriarchal relations across all 'sectors' and aspects of the city. Similarly, linking residents' demands to those of workers demonstrates the class nature of both.

How do you assess the recent practices of the left at an urban scale?

Here, I will focus on Western Europe, as local politics in the other DCS are very different. Since the 1980s, popular organisation around local problems has been greatly weakened by neoliberalism, which has discredited any kind of collective organisation and collective solutions, and promoted individual private strategies. At the onset of the present 'wave of stagnation' in the late 1960s and early 1970s, urban struggles in Western Europe were a strong part of the overall class struggle. This was in part due to the contradictions of urbanisation which had built up precisely because of the *rapid* rate of capital accumulation in the 1950s and 1960s. Partly it was due to the process mentioned before, that struggles in production can inspire those in the social sphere. And partly it was due to the emergence of movements of specially-oppressed sections of the working class, especially black people, women, and lesbians and gay men, who made demands which spanned the economy/social divide. But following the defeats of the unions in the 1970s and 1980s, all attempts at popular organisation, around whatever issue, were undermined by an acceptance that 'there is no alternative', by lack of confidence, and often by fear of direct state repression. The organisation of minority ethnic people within the DCs, who had been at the forefront of struggles at the end of the boom, was weakened by police repression, state repression of 'illegal' immigrants, and by increasing majority-popular racism, cheered on the capitalist media; the politics of minority ethnic groups thus tended to move to the right. Radical organisation around housing, transport and public services was greatly weakened. Individualised strategies towards these resources then appeared as the only possibility: the owner-occupied house, as much a financial speculation as a use value; the privately-governed gated community; car use for every journey; a residential location within the catchment area of 'good' state schools; extra private health insurance, and so on. These solutions were, again, heavily promoted by the media, through advertising and, particularly, TV lifestyle programmes (the 'perfect' home, second home, garden, car…). The fact that these 'solutions' were out of the reach of many people did not detract from their compelling promise and allure: comfort, security and pleasure through private property.

Despite this rightwing pressures, in most of Western Europe there has been resistance to cuts in public services, particularly in school education, health, social care and social work, to their privatisation, and to qualitative changes which make their content more conservative. This resistance has usually involved the relevant trade unions, but has also often involved residents as users of these services, and has sometimes been initiated by residents. Sometimes resistance to neoliberal reforms has been nationally organised, sometimes it has involved national coordination and spreading of local campaigns, and sometimes the resistance has been limited to a few localities. In Britain, for example, unions have resisted the further intensification of work by teachers, with some success; there have been local campaigns by unions, parents and students against quasi-privatisation of schools, again with some success; unions have tried to resist, mostly unsuccessfully, repeated restructurings (six in the last ten years) of the National Health Service, which have created fragmentation, partial privatisation and internal markets; specific local campaigns have sought to

prevent closure of particular health facilities; there have been neighbourhood campaigns against the transfer of state-owned housing to quasi-private Housing Trusts, with substantial success. In France, there have been repeated campaigns by unions and students to protect school and university education, with strong local organisation and national coordinations. These defensive campaigns have been vitally important not only because of the type of service they seek to protect but also because they generate confidence and a sense that there is an alternative to neoliberalism. Their successes illustrate the point I made earlier, of the potential power of collaboration between workers and residents. Nonetheless, at best they have succeeded in preserving the status quo; and overall, the state has been able to neoliberalise many services, so that resistance has slowed down neoliberal change but not stopped it. Moreover, militants can easily become demoralised after years of defensive fighting. And intensification of waged and unwaged work reduces energy and time for collective organisation – a key but neglected part of the 'governmentality' of neoliberalism.

Two other types of local resistance have been widespread across Western Europe. The most dramatic expressions of resistance at a local scale were of working class youth battling police, as on several occasions in Britain, and black youth fighting off white racists or the police (Britain and Spain, but most notably in the outer-suburban ghettos of the French cities). These revolts may have deterred future attacks, and they sometimes helped to spur national governments into programmes of 'regeneration' of poor neighbourhoods. But the latter produced no jobs; and the youth did not put forward any economic or social demands which could have provided a focus for developing organisation. A second widespread type of resistance has been 'right to stay' campaigns against the eviction of working class and bohemian middle class residents from inner city neighbourhoods as part of central-city business development. These have had mixed success; but they are purely defensive, and have not developed into wider campaigns for housing provision. Sadly, perhaps the strongest and most ubiquitous popular campaigns around the living space have been white racist initiatives against 'Moslems' and Roma, some, as in Italy and France, orchestrated by elected local politicians.

There have, of course, been other cases of local resistance, but they have for the most part been limited to a single locality at a time, and usually short lived. In Britain, for example, there have been local campaigns against increases in bus fares; campaigns against new roads, airport expansions and power stations; and campaigns in poor neighbourhoods, led by women, against the dealing of illegal drugs and against young-male mayhem. These have scored some victories, and have been important in raising confidence. But they have not connected with the trade unions, and have seldom generated dynamics towards organising around other issues.

A rather different kind of reaction to neoliberalism at the local level has been to attempt to meet needs through self-provision, organised through not-for-profit or 'social' enterprises, voluntary organisations, workers' cooperatives, work-exchange schemes (LETS), local currencies, and credit unions. These often pose themselves as 'positive initiatives', in contrast to 'negative' and 'futile' resistance to neoliberal reforms. The idea is that 'people can do something for themselves, and thus be empowered, rather than complaining about loss of jobs and services'. The promise of these 'Third Sector' initiatives is that they can provide protected jobs and work experience (albeit at very low pay or none), and that they can provide useful services to local people. In Britain and the US, this social economy has been concentrated in the poorest neighbourhoods. In recent years there

has also been a rapid growth, and not just in poor neighbourhoods, of 'green clubs' or 'Transition Towns', which again 'positively' promote action by individuals, rather than campaigning for larger scale ecological programmes. The promise of the Third Sector for socialists is that it spans production, reproduction and nature, involves people, develops skills and skilled ways of working, and has social goals. But the mode in which it has developed, at least in Britain and the US, has been for the most part conservative, internalising neoliberal culture. It has involved self-exploitation; it has lacked any substantial ties to organised workers in the mainstream economy; most social enterprises operate in insecure markets and/or are heavily dependent on short term contracts from the state; they have been a 'acceptable' way of privatising state-run public services; and their 'do it yourself' nature functions to reduce demands on capital and the state. A socialist approach to the local social economy would set out to reverse these features (Gough and Eisenschitz, 2010).

The global financial crisis that started in 2007 and the subsequent recession has substantially changed the terrain on which radical urban politics takes place. The financial crisis was sparked by developments in the urban realm (though the deeper causes are much wider than this): defaults on mortgage payments by poor households in the US, reinforced by the emergence in 2007 of overcapacity and sharp devalorisations in commercial property in many countries. As the recession developed, unsaleable houses and empty offices spread, along with evictions of people no longer able to pay. This housing crisis was found in all DCs where owner-occupied housing is important; it has been at the centre of the unfolding national crises in Ireland, Spain and Greece, and important in the US and Britain. The mass homelessness that has resulted in the US has not, however, led to organised resistance: the evicted have been encouraged to see their plight as the result of their 'misjudging the market'. Resistance to evictions in Spain has been much more successful.

The recession has caused mass layoffs and reduction of hours in private industry, particularly in the US and Britain. But there has so far been minimal response by workforces and unions; employers have been able to blame withdrawal of credit by the finance system, and then, as recession to hold, lack of demand. The blame then lies with highly abstract and reified economic process; how can one 'fight credit money'? A few courageous workforces have tried to hold out, but the localisation of these actions has isolated them. Interestingly, one of the few such local actions in Britain was a workers' occupation against closure of a factory making wind turbines; the workers gained much support because their product is a socially and ecologically important one, exemplifying the point I made before about linking of production and 'consumption' politics.

Since 2009 a new phase of urban class struggle has emerged in those countries where the annual fiscal deficit has risen sharply, caused both by states' rescue of the finance system and by the recession. The bourgeoisies are not willing to reduce these deficits at the expense of capital, not even financial capital; they have therefore cut welfare services and state transfer incomes and benefits, cut public sector wages, and increased taxation of the working class. In countries such as Greece, Portugal, Spain, Ireland and Britain these attacks on welfare and incomes are savage and massive, unprecedented in history. They are devastating working class life and the ecology in every locality. There have been mass mobilisations against these attacks based on the trade unions in Greece, Spain and Portugal; the response of the working class in Ireland and Britain has, however, so far been weak. In my view the key to successful resistance will be alliances of the public sector and other trade unions with the users of public services and recipients of state transfer payments (social

benefits, pensions). The local scale will be a crucial one for forming these links and building campaigns with broad popular support, using the visibility of cuts and planned cuts at the local scale.

A different kind of resistance has been the Occupy demonstrations and camps, and in the Britain the UnCut protests directed mainly against retailers to highlight their tax evasion. These have focused on national and international financial processes, and have been 'urban' only in the sense that cities have the necessary concentrations of population for substantial collective protests and are the control centres for finance. (Interestingly, in Ireland consistent against the finance system have been confined to three or four 'conservative' farming villages.) In Britain, these movements have had some impact on public discourse, particularly in compelling politicians to pay lip service to tackling tax evasion. But the Occupy camps have not been sustained, partly because of a rather naive disappointment that governments have not substantially reformed finance capital and taxation, but particularly because Occupy has largely not linked up with struggles in production and public services nor with the trade unions.

According Harvey, "The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights…… One step towards unifying [disparate] struggles is to adopt the right to the city as both working slogan and political ideal, precisely because it focuses on the question of who commands the necessary connection between urbanization and surplus production and use. The democratization of that right, and the construction of a broad social movement to enforce its will is imperative if the dispossessed are to take back the control which they have for so long been denied, and if they are to institute new modes of urbanization." (2008, p. 23, p.40) How can one understand 'the right to the city' in a social rights framework? Is it useful as a slogan?

Here, Harvey presents in substance Lefebvre's idea of the socialist transformation of the city, with which I completely agree. But I disagree with Harvey that the RTC is a good slogan to encapsulate this project. This is because of the very limited meaning of 'rights' in a capitalist society. The notion of 'rights' of the citizen emerged in early modern society. The core right, as Locke made clear, was the right to dispose of one's property as one pleases. This is necessary to constitute bourgeois property, and the bourgeois economic actor, who can buy and sell through market exchanges, free of state interference. It is inherently a *negative* right: it does not prescribe economic behaviour but rather prohibits constraints on it. A second meaning of 'rights' is strictly political rights: right to the vote, to freedom of speech, to free association, and so on. These are binary: either you have these rights or you do not (though of course there are all manner of economic and social mediations of the exercise of political rights). In Britain from the 17th century, these political rights were taken up not only by the bourgeoisie but also by the working class. These definitions of 'rights' suggest both advantages for the left in using the notion, but also – and I think more strongly – the disadvantages.

The rhetorical strength of the 'rights to the city' is that it appeals to the popularity in the working class of *political* rights, of formal democratic rights. Now, 'the right to the city' as used by Lefebvre and Harvey is not *in substance* a political right: it is not principally about the right to vote in local

elections, nor even to participate in neighbourhood fora and such like; it rather suggests participation in substantial economic, social and cultural decisions at the local scale. In gesturing towards political rights, the slogan suggests a freedom from dictatorship, from tyranny. And this 'dictatorship' could be of markets, or of capital. However, to give this suggestion any substance would require one to analyse concretely the economic, social and cultural processes which exclude, but - it is hinted - could include; and these social processes are of a *different order* to political rights. In terms of social substance, then, the slogan of 'right to the city' does not take one very far. Incidentally, my guess is that Lefebvre coined the term in order to engage with a key audience for his ideas, the French Communist Party. The politics of the CPs of the time envisaged a long struggle for greater democracy as part of an advanced, productive, nationally-organised capitalism; the construction of socialism was indefinitely postponed. Thus 'rights' were fore-grounded, rather than workers' control over social resources.

Another way of putting the problem is that one can easily construct a rightwing version of 'the right to the city'. In fact, neoliberal culture does just that, though without using the expression. Everyone has the right to own their own home; buildings should be built where people want them, not where planners want them; car drivers should be free to go on all roads without restriction or payment; the state should not enforce speed limits (de facto the case in contemporary British cities); public spaces should be cleared of 'riff raff' so that 'decent people' can enjoy them and trade is not interfered with; and so on: this is the constant refrain of the rightwing press, magazines and TV lifestyle programmes. In the Majority World, similarly, de Soto proposes that the key next move for people in city slums and shanty-towns is to make them owners of their housing and its land. The left's imagining of 'the right to the city' is of course nothing like this. But this merely shows that the notion of a 'right' to certain resources and spaces is too abstract to get one far: the key question is what are the *social relations* through which those resources and spaces are constructed, distributed and used?

Now, in recent years urban movements in both Majority and Minority Worlds have used the call for the RTC to great effect, as a means of moblisation. An important part of these movements have been concerned with the *right to be in the city* (the housing of the poor) or *the right to be in public spaces of it* (for political protesters, the homeless, youth, and so on). In these struggles, the notion of a 'right' seems entirely apt. The right to stay where you are living, and where your community has lived, is a categorical question – it has a yes or no answer. And public space is by its definition open to all, a quasi-legal right, and again a categorical question. I think it is for that reason that the RTC has strong resonance in such cases. Another successful use of RTC is in participatory budgeting. Here too it is apt. The financial resources of municipal government are, after all, public property, and in a (parliamentary) democracy they are supposed to be spent in accordance with the wishes of all local people. An active role of popular forums in determining spending priorities is therefore fully in line with the notion of parliamentary democracy, even if it goes beyond its basic form in elections. Thus participatory budgeting can present itself as, and take on the legitimacy of, a political right. In contrast, note that the same is *not* true of determining taxation rates or who or what is taxed: these are questions of private property rights and 'economics'; it is very hard to extend participatory budgeting to control over taxation.

Could a left urbanism proceed through demanding 'rights' to concrete resources - the right to a job, to access to necessary destinations, to health care and education, to housing? After all, there have been many left campaigns under capitalism under the slogan 'the right to work' or similar. But these demands immediately raise further questions. What *quality* of job, of health care, of housing? To focus on housing, how should provision meet the needs of different sections of the population – number and type of rooms, their layout, open space, location within the citya\? What prices or rents should be charged in relation to incomes? And how should the housing be constructed – by what type of enterprises with what labour processes and industrial relations? These questions indicate that a radical local politics has to consider concrete financial resources, organisation of production, forms of ownership, and needs. Bare demands such as 'the right to housing' have may have a rhetorical use in pointing out that there are people who have less than *the most minimal* 'normal', culturally acceptable housing; 'the right to a job' highlights that there are people without even the worst job. But if such campaigns succeeded in winning housing or jobs, but only of the worst quality, then they have failed to create movements which can unify the working class by demanding that everyone's *needs* be met.

I should add that, where people are literally being evicted from the city, or moved to a distant part of it, then 'the right to the city' has a direct relevance. In the Majority World, for example, people living in squatter settlements and slums of large cities are often evicted and, at best, offered accommodation on the periphery of the city where it would be impossible for them to maintain their current employment. In Britain in the last twenty years or so, many people have had to move out of London because they cannot afford housing there – a process which the new government is about to accelerate by cutting state benefits to the poor. For these particular processes, the slogan is very apt. But, important as this issue is, it is far from being the whole of radical urban politics.

My objection to the slogan 'the right to the city' is not simply a distinction between bourgeois property and political rights on the one hand and rights within socialism on the other. It is, more importantly, a question of political dynamics. A 'right' to do something implies a 'something' which is already known in essence; the right provides access to this given. In contrast, the process of collective popular planning is open ended: it is an investigation of potentials, of needs and capacities, and the outcome of this planning cannot – should not – be known in advance.

We are back, then, to the notion of the democratic socialisation of the city. This involves collective organisations which develop knowledge of production on the one hand and needs on the other. It requires the participation of many different sections of the working class, both as producers and residents/consumers. There will need to be negotiations, balances and trade offs. I therefore agree wholeheartedly with Harvey when he argues that radical local politics seeks collective resources rather than individual ones, and that it requires "the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization". Where I disagree with Harvey is in seeing all this as a "human right". Rather, it is the development of working class *power* through wresting resources and power from capital and thus developing qualitatively new social relations and command over resources – in short, collective economic, social and cultural power. This implies, as Harvey says, "the construction of a broad social movement to enforce its will". But this would better proceed under the slogan of 'popular planning of the city' or, more aggressively, 'popular control of the city', rather than 'the right to the city'.

An alternative urban movement

According to Harvey, if "the urban and peri-urban social movements in opposition... somehow did come together, what should they demand? The answer … is simple enough in principle: greater democratic control over the production and utilization of the surplus. Since the urban process is a major channel of surplus use, establishing democratic management over its urban deployment constitutes the right to the city." (Harvey, 2008, p. 37). Leaving aside the mention of "the right to the city", how should this democratic management of the surplus be developed?

Harvey here seems to focus radical urbanism onto a specific part of local socialisation, the investment of money capital in the built environment. This needs to be seen in the context of the whole article, most of which is devoted to a brilliant discussion of how investment in the built environment has been used as an economic *and political* way out of systemic crises - albeit partial and, because of the contradictions of property development, temporary. In discussing strategy for radical local politics as such I think one needs to widen out the discussion: firstly, from investment in the built environment to investment in production as a whole; and secondly, from investment to management of production processes.

Pat Devine (1988) has argued, to me very convincingly, that the essence of planning of value in a fully-socialist society should be the planning of major new investments, rather than planning of final prices. This investment is not only in the built environment which Harvey focuses on but also in machinery, in the quasi-fixed capital of training and research, and in circulating capital (materials, labour power, stocks of output goods). Planning of investment starts with debate on the overall investment rate (investment/consumption ratio), and then sectoral allocations: which sectors of production (which of course includes services) are to expand and which contract? How can the sectoral composition of production be changed to better meet needs? One does not need to have already achieved a socialist society to adopt this approach. In a collective working class plan for the development of a locality, a central part would be demands concerning the sectors of production which should be boosted and those which should be run down (subject to maintaining employment); demands to expand the building of housing, schools and medical facilities, for instance, or to radically expand bus services, or to decrease the production of armaments through a switch to production of … buses and transport control systems. Such comprehensive planning of investment flows would be unlikely to start from an overview; rather it could develop from campaigns for, for example, free bus services, which investigated the investment needed for such services, or campaigns around housing which investigated needs and estimated the investment needed to meet them. There are precedents for this kind of local *investment* planning. Tentative steps were taken towards it, for example, by the Greater London Council under a left Labour Party administration in 1982-6 – experiments ended by the Conservative government's abolition of the troublesome council (GLC, 1985; Mackintosh and Wainwright, 1987).

Such investment planning raises, of course, the question of the source of funds. In a socialist society, both physical means of production and investment funds would be collectively controlled and thus collectively owned ('state owned' only in this sense). But what transitional demands and aims for funding could one have in the present? Funding by the national or local state is the obvious,

traditional, and valid answer. But the present conjuncture suggests others. In Britain and the US, the national state now owns large parts of the finance system. We should demand that their funds be put under working class control, and that this be extended to the part of the finance system remaining in private hands (which owes its continuing existence to the state bail-out). The many productive resources which have been rendered idle by the recession should be another target: local collectives based on the trade unions could take over factories, plants and office services and run them – as was widely done by local initiatives during the Argentinian crisis in the early 2000s.

The second strand of workers' planning is more fine grained but no less important: planning production and the design of goods and services. The collective workforce of workplaces and whole local industries can consider how the divisions of labour, labour processes (including but not limited to production technologies and buildings) and wage systems could be restructured to make better jobs. The collective workforce can also discuss with local users the design of goods and services its produces – for example the design of houses, or bus routes and timetables, or the forms of care in homes for the infirm. 'Even' in a socialist society, these kinds of decision should be taken at industry or workplace level (though they would then be subject to various forms of wider commensuration, for example of work hours and intensity and wages) (Devine, 1988). All the more legitimate to start this kind of workers' and residents' planning now. This planning of production and products can be hugely empowering to workers, and can meet essential needs of local residents in innovative ways. This does of course imply struggles within workplaces and (local) industries against the employers, who are never willing to hand over such control; but these struggles have a greater chance of making gains if users and workers collaborate.

Harvey argues that particular struggles, involving various and differentiated demands and expectations, should overcome their particularities and develop a universal alternative embodied in a social system. He argues that this involves seeing the universal and the particular not as simple opposites but as dialectically related. What do you think about the universal/particular tension in the development of an alternative urban movement?

I think there are many senses and levels at which radical local movements have to confront contradictions between the universal and the particular. A fundamental one, which I have alluded to already several times, is the notion of 'need'. The moral force and legitimacy of the socialist project resides – and I think *must* reside – in a notion of needs of humans as a species, 'human needs'. If the latter do not exist, then how can one critique existing society and argue for a better one? If there are no basic human needs, then each society can *use and mould* people to its own logic, however infernal, with people experiencing no unavoidable pain or unhappiness. So the socialist movement needs to argue that there *are* fundamental human needs which are not met, indeed are violated, by capitalist society, and which could be met much better by socialism. These needs are not only of survival (food, drink, shelter, air) but also of supportive, caring and loving relations with others, and, through these, self-realisation (the realisation of the *social* self). In recent years many authors have written persuasively on these needs. But these needs are developed in particular historical and geographical circumstances, and differently developed in particular social groups and individuals. In this way 'nature' become 'second nature': powerfully felt needs which grow *out of* fundamental needs but which may be quite *specific* to the social group or the individual. Some of these developed needs cannot or should not be satisfied by a socialist society. No inclusive society can

accommodate incompatible needs, for example the need felt by many men to dominate women *and* the need of women to end that domination. And a socialist society should not accommodate needs for things and experiences which are destructive of others or the environment, however strongly felt such needs may be, particularly when they have been developed by oppressive social relations. But these judgements cannot be made mechanically, or by fiat. People will argue for social arrangements that meet their *existing* desires. The only way to decide which desires should be met, and the feasibility of meeting them, is through the most open debate. And such debate can change what people desire for the better. For instance, at the local scale a radical movement would need to confront the huge attachment that many people have to their car: cars really do realise, in a particular form, many of people's most basic needs, conscious and unconscious. A debate of these car users with supporters of public transport, exploring the practical alternatives, can unearth where these needs come from and in what ways the car is essential to their fulfilment. Such a dialogue, and changing positions, can occur *because* there are fundamental needs which are a common, shared aim and reference point.

This kind of conversation is generally not a simple unearthing and clarification of difference, but rather an exploration of the *contradictions* within the needs of each group or each individual; people find sympathy with what initially appears as an antagonistic need because they have the same need at some fundamental level. Through such active and open democracy, universal social arrangements can be agreed and implemented, 'universal' in the sense of best (not perfectly!) meeting the needs *of all* in the given situation.

Where this argument concerns conflict between distinct social groups, one can note the poverty of much 'postmodern' politics. The broadly postmodern approach starts - and ends – with the observation of social and cultural *difference.* The differences between social groups, categorised by ethnicity, gender, class, age, nation, locality, neighbourhood and so on, are described but not explained; their particularities are thus not seen as dialectical variants within commonalities, least of all a universal human nature, but rather as *sui generis* difference. This is true *a fortiori* of cultural differences, which are seen as cultural choices or invented discourses with no structural relations to each other or to material life. The logical outcome of this approach is that there is no basis for productive conversations, debate and contestation between social/cultural groups. One has a politics within which each group pursues its own interests; since there is no possibility of arriving at a synthesis, the result is to be determined by force – an amoral anarchist conclusion which one finds in thinkers from Foucault to Zizek. The political conclusion of this 'radical' approach is therefore (not coincidentally) the same as neoliberalism – the rule of the strongest.

To challenge this postmodern politics one needs to challenge the analytical starting point. Social differences may be divided into two sorts: 'oppressive differences' which are congruent with social relations of power and oppression, and 'non-oppressive differences' which reflect socially and spatially developed differences. Social relations of power such as those of class, gender, racisms, sexuality and disability *constitute* the differences between the actors in the relation: the masculine and feminine identities, for example, are constituted by gender relations, and thus internalise unequal power. A radical urban politics cannot be indifferent to difference of this type, letting it be settled by power; on the contrary, it has to acknowledge the power inequality and enable (for example) women to assert and achieve their needs *against* patriarchal social relations. Negotiations

over non-oppressive differences, in contrast, do not involve a struggle between *fundamentally* opposed interests. But they are by no means trivial or easy. They involve re-negotiation of the enormous unevenness within the working class constructed by capitalism, whether in wage work, social life or cultural sensibility. But the processes of planning for the restructuring of the locality precisely able the material differences and social relations constituting this unevenness to be opened up to debate. And they enable materially feasible, rather than purely ideal, ways forward to be jointly agreed, going beyond pointless debates about taste.

A further type of particularity, concerning which Harvey has made an important contribution (for example Harvey, 1996: 21-3, 40), is the particularity of workers' situation in local units of production with respect to the spatially-wider industry. In capitalism, workers within each workplace, firm and local industry – the 'local unit of production' – are put into competition with workers elsewhere by the competition between capitals and the potential flows of investment between the local units; this is especially the case where competition is with units outside the locality (manufacturing rather than retail), and under the intensified competition of neoliberalism. This 'horizontal' competition between workers is created by, and reinforces, the 'vertical' power of capital over labour (Gough, 2004: Chapter 13). Capital may conduct this competition through mechanisms which are disciplinary (wage cuts, intensification) or which cooperate with the local workforce (high skill, high productivity, strong innovation). But both strategies construct spatial division and conflict within the working class (Gough, 2010). What happens if workers in the local unit of production, rejecting both subordination to capital and cooperation with it, instead launch an offensive against their employer or employers? When this offensive remains purely local, Harvey calls such action 'local particularism'. Because the benefits from the action are not shared with workers across the industry, he sees it as once again divisive, as reproducing the 'normal' competition between workers. But Harvey here is seeking a universalist politics which does not take sufficient account of the material conditions of particularism, and which does not *work through* the dialectic of the particular and the universal. Material conditions of life mean that workers are in better communication with each other within local units of production than they are at higher spatial scales; and they may have locally-particular advantages in their militancy such as higher-than-average profitability of their unit of production or strong local traditions of militancy. Thus militancy often has to *start* at the local level, often involving local particularities. Harvey is right, though, to emphasise that, especially in sectors where capitalist competition is trans-local, militant worker action needs to be developed at higher spatial scales; this is needed not only so that 'strong' workers lend a hand to weaker ones, but also so that local gains can be sustained against capitalist disinvestment by spreading them through the industry. In this way, local particularity will be transcended and larger solidarity built (see further Gough, 2010).

Throughout this conversation I have emphasised the importance of the most open and full debate among 'ordinary people'. This has been the central argument of the academic proponents of 'deliberative democracy' and 'development of civil society' (such as Laclau and Mouffe), and, in the specifically urban context, 'communicative planning' (such as Patsy Healy and Nigel Thrift). My argument is, however, quite different from theirs. The enthusiasts for deliberative democracy focus on 'political processes' in the traditional, narrow sense, such as the construction of social and interest groups and networks, neighbourhood fora, and planning consultations. They largely abstract from materially-based social relations: the different political-economic resources possessed

by different groups; their empowerment or disempowerment by economic and social relations; and the control of the material resources (money investment, revenue, buildings and land) which are to be planned. Thus in my view the most basic task of deliberative democracy is to begin to overcome the disempowerment of the majority which capitalism creates; this means that deliberations need to be combined with gaining power over material resources, since most people are not interested in discussions which have no material effects. Moreover, such deliberations involve power imbalances: they seek to wrest power from capital and, to some extent, from the state, and they need to combat power imbalances within the working class. In my view, then, the enthusiasts of deliberative democracy need to take far more account of materiality, resources and socio-economic power.

Harvey claims that "as many have recently pointed out, the remaking and reimagining of 'community' will work in progressive directions only if it is connected *en route* to a more generalized radical insurgent politics" (Harvey, 2000, p.240). How can this connection between local and larger-scale politics be developed?

I agree with Harvey's point, if one takes 'community' to be a synonym for 'local society'. But I would first like to emphasise that organisation at the local level is not only useful but *essential* for the left. This may seem obvious, at least to radicals interested in urban politics; but the dominant traditions on the left, with the exception of some anarchist, green and feminist currents, have regarded the national and international scales as more-or-less the only significant ones for politics. This neglects a number of reasons for radical organisation within localities, including workplaces and neighbourhoods. First, there is the issue of *feasibility*. The ruling class has the resources to organise itself easily at the national and global scales. But working class people have limited money, energy and time to do so; conversely, we can talk to and organise with our fellow workers and our neighbours with relatively little of these resources; that is why such interactions are occur daily. Moreover, face-to-face discussions are particularly vital for the politics of the working class. Members of the bourgeoisie are always politicised because they are always ruling, whereas capitalism - and neoliberalism particularly - depoliticises the working class; workers, even when they are most suffering from capitalism, do not necessarily think of collective organisation as a solution. A will to fight collectively has to be actively constructed through discussion and, recursively, practical organisation. Telecommunications – the post, the telephone, the internet – can play a role in both discussion and organisation; but such mediated relationships cannot have the empowering quality of face-to-face meetings, and these must mostly be at the local scale for resource reasons. Further, at the local level it is easier to build trust in others; and there is more likely to be commonality of social experiences (due to local particularity).

A second importance of local organisation is the ability to *address local socio-economic processes*. I spoke earlier about the reality of such processes, which are 'local' in the senses of both local socio-economic relations, dependencies and ties *and* local specificity. It is not simply that local employers, service providers and the local state, and locally-contained markets, have impacts within the locality; it is also that radical politics seeks to intervene into the vital *local connections* between the different aspects of the locality. As I have argued, radical local interventions must involve the most open discussion and debate if they are to overcome particularisms within the locality and develop genuinely universal and inclusive politics; an adequate strategy for local politics cannot be wholly mandated from outside the locality by, for example, national unions or a national housing campaign.

Fortunately, as I have just noted, it is relatively easy, in a practical sense, for working class people to undertake such discussion of and organisation around local issues.

A third point is more theoretical. The main traditions of the left tend to underestimate local politics partly because they for the most part hold a crude theoretical understanding of the geography of capitalist society: that capitalism and capital are 'national' and indeed 'global', so that left organisation needs also to be at this level. This view of capitalism is true in the sense that *flows of* capital (commodity, money, productive) and to some extent labour, and thus economic interdependencies, are strongly national and inter-national (formally: a geography of flows). It is also true in the sense that the capital-labour relation, and the power of money, commodity and productive capital, exist *throughout* the globe (a geography of area). But this latter point has an implication which is seldom realised: if the relation of the working class to capital is ubiquitous, then it is enacted and reproduced at *every* spatial scale; territories of every size, from the globe to the nation to the locality and neighbourhood to the workplace and home, are internally constructed by inter-class relations (Gough, 1991 and 1992). The same is true, *mutatis mutandis*, of gender and inter-ethnic relations. Working class struggle therefore can and should be organised within every spatial scale – including the local or 'urban'.

This said, in many fields of struggle there are sharp limits to what can be achieved through *purely* local organisation and action. I have already talked about the limits of purely local militant organisation of workers. Militancy limited to *the workplace* is inadequate in all types of capitalist sector, since the workplace is in competition with others - and indeed, this is becoming increasingly true with the neoliberal fragmentation of state services. Militancy within *a locality* is inadequate in those sectors where capitalist competition is organised across localities and nations. Spatially-wider workers' organisation can not only prevent spatial divide-and-rule by capital; it can begin to put into question the flows of investment and disinvestment across the sector, and thus start to develop workers' planning of investment (Devine, 1988; Gough and Eisenschitz, 1997; Gough, 2004: Chapter 13).

A corollary of this point is that the strategy of building a socialised economy at a purely workplace or locality level is doomed to failure. In recent years there has been much enthusiasm from social-democratic and outright neoliberal politicians, and from many academics of the left and right, for a strategy of building the 'social economy', also known as community business or the Third Sector. This sector is not-for-profit, neither conventionally capitalist nor state-run. For left academic commentators such as J.K.Gibson-Graham, and many leftwing 'social entrepreneurs', the sector represents the most *feasible* path towards a non-capitalist economy. For all its supporters, the small scale and necessarily-low capitalisation of social enterprises are seen as not being a significant barrier to their growth. But in reality mainstream capital, in commodity, productive and money forms, and the expression of these through the state, severely restrict the expansion of the social economy. As Aram Eisenschitz and I have argued, the social economy can be a significant site for socialist struggle, but only if the strategy of autonomy and of 'a socialised economy within one locality' is rejected, just as the Stalinist strategy of 'socialism in one country' failed. The social economy cannot gradually erode the capitalist economy. Socialists working within it need to cooperate strongly with militant workers and residents within the mainstream economy and society (see further Eisenschitz and Gough, forthcoming).

It is not only the field of production proper where purely local organisation has its limits. Local states, even in federal countries, are typically limited in their regulatory powers, their freedom to spend, and in their revenue- and debt-raising capabilities; this implies that local radical struggle will often need to 'jump scale' to at least the level of the national state. This is obviously the case in most of the main public services. But it is also true of housing. The main structures of housing provision are national (though sometimes with a federal-state element): the institutions for funding of building by private house builders and the funding of their buyers; legal regulation of house selling and renting; land use planning laws; and the powers for local governments to fund and build publicly-owned housing. Local campaigns for better housing cannot avoid confronting the national state and the national and international capitals involved in the sector.

The logic of upscaling of radical struggle from the local level is not simply economic and institutional: it is also a question of political consciousness. It is hard to build militant politics at a local level if people know that there is currently little militant, visible and (at least partly) successful struggle in other parts of the nation or continent, and indeed *across* the nation or continent. This is perhaps what Harvey is mainly thinking about in the quotation you gave. People need a minimum amount of optimism in setting out to contest the capitalist city, a sense that the working class can be a social actor, and a sense that they are not alone. In this sense too, "a more generalized radical insurgent politics" is important to local radical advance.

In this respect, finally, there are some positive developments in contemporary Western Europe. In a number of countries there have been militant national actions, the most recent of which was the strikes and demonstrations against pension reform in France. And these are beginning to become internationally coordinated, as in the recent day of action (in October 2010) organised by the European trade union confederation against neoliberal fiscal austerity, which involved action in twelve countries. This is a promising context in which to develop radical campaigns and initiatives at the local level.

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