



Open Research Group

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NOTES

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Report of meeting held at School of Economic Science, 11 Mandeville Place, London W1U 3AJ
See: **Notes of Open Research Group meeting on 24th Jan 2018: [OpenResearchGroup-180124](#)**
Present: Janos (chair), Mary (notes), John Mc, Kyle (presenting), Ashburn, Paul, Ellena
Apologies: Dagem, Ahmet, Bob, Henry, Liliias, Philip, Sandra, Steve, Trevor, William,

Mary – Programme on Radio 4 about the Magic Money Tree, Globalnet21 meeting on Poverty & Housing.

Kyle: presentation on **Our Right to London:**

The idea for this project is taken from The Right to the City, originally from experience in Paris, but can apply to any city. Kyle came here 15 years ago from South Africa, as a child of 5, his father was an economic refugee, they were happy with the fall of Apartheid, but they stopped funding building projects – his father was an architect. Kyle has let London re-make him, but feels it should be complemented by being able to remake London. The project is about a direct form of democracy. Problems of Debt, Homelessness, Inequality, Pollution - London is the most polluted city in Europe. Inequality leads to an increase in violence – mostly done by young men who feel disrespected. All it takes is a few insults or a wrong look, and they lash out. Disempowerment is a root cause, even though London is the hub of the economy, many people are in precarious empowerment, which leads to weakness, lack of personal autonomy and lack of freedom.

Part of “Remaking London” is the Right to Revolution. This idea goes back thousands of years. At the time of the English Revolution in the 1640s, the Levellers were the main group pushing towards the execution of Charles I and creating a republic, which was short-lived. They used to meet at the pub - they loosened up by drinking. They sent delegates to each parish, then a larger meeting, the Executive of London. They were the main radicalizers - the revolution happened more quickly because of them. Now London is much bigger, more divided, differences more extreme. We need a non-violent revolution, agitation by violence just doesn't work. Proposal to form a London Commune, it would be a genuine democracy, we are presently a republic, we elect people who make policy for us. We need to get it back to how they used to do it in ancient Greece.

Ward Assemblies are the foundation. There are 600 Wards, each of these would have an assembly. Policy-making becomes the realm of these bodies, they decide local issues, by majority rule, and express opinions about regional or national matters. We also have to guarantee freedom of speech, so that even lunatic ideas can be expressed, we need to have space for them to talk. To make it work we need coordination, Borough and Regional confederation. These are the ideas of Murray Bookchin. Eg Kensington and Chelsea has 18 Wards, each of which returns a councillor to the borough council, they would have no powers to make policy, they would be about admin. In the French Revolution they had 48 Sections. The more moderate revolutionaries tried to limit them, but nonetheless the system worked. Also New England Town meetings. We need to encourage people to adopt an identity as Citizens, an objectively grounded ethic, “being” is independent of “action”. The London Communalism Meetup is on 2nd Monday of every month at May Day Rooms, 88 Fleet Street. We discuss Bookchin's ideas, and how to apply them to London. how to run Candidates in Local Elections, and take over local government. The emphasis on non-violence.

John McCone: Principles of Non-Violent Revolution: Oppression occurs when the benefits of oppression are greater than the costs. To achieve non-violence, we have to make the benefits of non-violence greater than

the costs. This happens when the intellectuals switch sides. They would originally be on the side of the oppressors, but they are not dealing adequately with any of the problems, they are basically a capitalist government. Secondly when there is an economic upgrade. The ruling classes suffer from self-doubt. There is class antagonism. This comes from a book by Crane Brinton. The crushingly oppressed do not rise up, it's the middle-classes lead the way – the motive is jealousy. Eg the Marriage of Figaro, the feeling of anger against the ruling class. It's when the people of high quality hit the ceiling that revolution breaks out.

Paul talked about the Iranian Revolution, the people's revolution, was stolen by the Mullahs, the Muslim Priests. The people revolted en masse. The day after the Shah de-camped, the Shah and his cronies flew in. The revolution was based on principles, but not organized. Also in Egypt, Mubarak was deposed by the people, and then the Muslim Brotherhood took over, and the people preferred the military. Also Gorbachev.

John continued with the three stages of revolution: at first there is a lot of freedom, then as the revolution progresses it tightens up, and the equilibrium is re-established. It's when the talented people try to pass it on to their children. The aim of London Communalism is to stabilize. Give people capacity – make the resources universally available. As in Trotsky, the Minimum Programme includes monthly meetings of the commune, the Transitional Programme includes recallable candidates, and with the Maximum Programme you would have municipal ownership of property. There would be a need to have checks and balances, including a police force to make sure certain things don't happen. Only go into violence when the aggravators go into violence, but we need to avoid this in the city, as it's too dangerous. Need to bring in Civilic Defence.

Ashburn asks where the money would come from about this. Henry George said common ownership would be the best way, but is not going to happen so people agree the taxation of Land, which was more realistic.

John suggests Countryside Living Allowance. - *see booklet*. The cost of living in the countryside is less, the liability is lower, and there is the Benefit Amplification Factor. Employers have to struggle to bring in employees, this goes alongside means-tested benefits, but if numbers go up and wages go down, fewer people quality, so it trades off. Finally we need to phase in Land Value Tax in the countryside. There should be a group of townships. People in the city will benefit because there will be a shortage of labour once some of the workforce have moved out. At first UBI is targeted, then it can be gradually phased in smoothly.

Mary suggested using the existing structures of Labour Party Ward Meetings - they have invited speakers, the Councillors attend, and members discuss issues – but it would be good to get the same kind of energy into it as there is in Momentum meetings. The Councillors already represent the people and are accountable to them, but Kyle says in Communalism, it's more like mandating them – it becomes more democratic - policy-making would be separate from administration to carry it out. Currently, Central Government is limiting the power of local authorities by not funding them to build houses etc. Community Currency adopted at Local Authority level would solve this. Many different things should be integrated in the Communalists proposal, including UBI and Land Tax. Reference was made to the power of lobbying, the way the system works at the moment.

Ellena talked about the origin of Wards during the Black Death, because of the need for quarantine – see <https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/museum-london/permanent-galleries/war-plague-fire>. There were Wardens to ensure that people obeyed the rules, which formed the basis of our modern Police Force. They were brought together in the Metropolitan Wards, but the City Police only protect the City, which is a separate entity – neither in the UK, nor the EU. Maybe this should be abolished in the Maximum Programme!

Paul: talked about spread of diseases in the Americas, the system collapsed, depopulation was probably due to smallpox accidentally imported by earlier visitors from Europe, the visible culture of Native Americans was a different culture, they were survivors of a larger structure that had existed before. There were wars and extermination but many of them survived by moving to Mexico. Similarly in New Zealand, but the Maori tribes were also at war with each other.

MF/mf/180201– *see other information and links on:* <http://globaltable.org.uk/wp/archives/6924>