

Your Party

Grasping The Enormity of the Moment

Roger Hallam



Hard Rain Books

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Contents

1. Introduction	1
Testimony of Ruptures	
2. Rupture One	8
3. Rupture Two	11
4. Rupture Three	13
5. Who Decides? Negative Dialectics	21
Totality	
Identity	
Concept	
Back to our present moment	
Power	
Culture	
6. What is to be Done? Non-linear Dynamics.	59
Stages of exponential growth	
Training and Organisation	
Going International	
Winning Elections	
Follow on developments	
7. Conclusion	86

Chapter One

Introduction

This moment. This moment right now, it is 8.48am on Thursday 7th August 2025. I am sitting in a single cell in HMP Wayland in Norfolk typing these words. What are you doing, right now, in this very moment? Please just attend to this moment and sense it. There is a French theologian you may not have heard of called Maurice Blondel who wrote a classic work, *Action* in 1893. It makes the supremely mundane and yet undeniable ground breaking point that in each moment we act — and the nature of that act is fundamentally unknowable. We do not know where it will lead. We do not know what will happen. The world is open and to grasp this — the depth and mystery of it — is to feel humility. We have responsibility — we choose to act, or not to act, which is an action in itself, in each and every moment. We cannot avoid decisions and to deny this is, as the phrase goes, is ‘bad faith’. We deny what we are.

What I want to argue in this text is, as you can see from the title, that we have to grasp this moment — because of its enormity. Not just this precise moment of you reading this text, but in the wider sense of the next few weeks. This historical moment of a new left movement/party being created in the UK. I want to explain why this is the case and

what it means — what decisions we have to make. The consequences of those decisions will be enormous.

In the last few moments I have skimmed through George Orwell's essay, "The Lion and the Unicorn". Written in 1941, it was written in another moment of enormous importance. And that is one reason why, as it says on the back cover, it is "one of the most famous essays in the English language". Orwell says we need socialism or we face barbarism — not as some flowery rhetorical move, but because this was absolutely the situation. Hitler was about to attempt to invade the country. The reality was all too real. And Orwell's essay hangs over what I write in this essay, because, as we are all well aware, the all too real faces us too. A final reality — and so a final enormity.

For the past ten years I have read several articles and papers each week on what is quaintly called 'climate change' — what should be called with Orwellian bluntness "a project of the ruling class to take us to permanent ruin". Last Christmas I innocently decided to go through all the paperwork I had read in 2024 and add up all the numbers, the increases in temperatures from all the sources — human and nature — the triggered feedbacks, the collapsing carbon sinks, the locked in add-ons. Putting the analysis into decadal iterations the arithmetic came out with us passing 5°C around 2060. I put the paper on my social media and it caused a stir. No one disputed the maths. After all there is nothing more basic than adding up. Some people put the numbers into an AI programme, as is now the routine, and it came out with 1.5 billion people left in 2100. It seems that the adding up that the people in the British Insurance Industry have been doing, do the same thing. They recently released a report on climate impacts, and hiding in Appendix A, like some Nazi concentration camp admin report, is a table stating that at 3°C, 4 billion people will die. "At least" 4 billion just to be precise. But only 2 billion at 2°C — which, if James

Hanson, arguably the top climate scientist in the world, is correct, we will start hitting around ten years from now. Not long. You get the picture. We have had thirty long years to understand all this. And so now here we are. This is what I mean by *enormity*.

Of course I could go on about "everything else". The almost weekly communication from the rulers of America and Russia that we could be heading for nuclear war over Ukraine. The news articles casually suggesting that the chances of AI destroying the human race are 10-20%. Fingers crossed. There is a pattern here. This world is fucking mad. Whatever this modernity thing is — it is not working. And that's before all the stuff on inequality, and injustice, and the general alienation of everyday life under the capitalist regime.

What I want to argue then is what happens with this new political project is not of local interest. The world is in our hands. Because every moment from now on, the world is in our hands. Eternity or whatever it is that is, is watching us — every move we make. So what I am going to write about is what moves we have to make. I want to write about 25,000 words — a long essay. I have a week to write it, edit it, and publish in some semi-respectable fashion, as I am meeting with Zarah Sultana and various connected people in ten days time. And I want it ready for then. That is a decision I have made. As such, what I write in the 'first edition' may be a bit rushed. There may be a bit of unnecessary repetition, a few scrappy edges, the odd typo. It is what it is. If people think what is written here is helpful then maybe it will get tidied up and a second edition will be produced. But what I mean to say is that what is written here is of this moment for this moment. Because time is of the essence. As I say, the decisions which are made over the next few weeks will be of enormous importance. They could well determine whether the world ends or not. This is end of the world stuff — because, well — it is.

I have been organising people just about every week for decades now. It's what I do. Dare I say it, I can do it in my sleep. Ten years ago I came to London to do research at King's College on the dynamics of political mobilisation — 'how to cause trouble', as I like to call it. I knew no one, I had no money, and I slept in my car and under my desk for several years. But since that time I have done the design work for some of the biggest social movements and campaigns in this country and around the Western World. The New Statesman decided I was the 34th most influential progressive person in the UK, but maybe more to the point, I was put in prison for five years for exercising that influence — telling people to do civil disobedience on a zoom call. Be careful what you wish for is all I can say! An appeal judge called the sentences "manifestly excessive", and I am getting out next week. Just in time for this historical moment, which is handy. It is on the basis of this knowledge and experience, such that it is, that I write this essay.

I could write a rather dry linear "this is what I think" points A, B and C text but that is not really my style. I want to do a more *lateral thinking* thing and choose two particular points of views and work back from there. One point is the rather obscure thought of Theodor Adorno, the twentieth century social theorist, and the other is the notion of *non-linear dynamics*, a way of thinking which is more associated with US entrepreneurial theory than socialist strategy. But that is the whole point. To break things up, to challenge us to see ourselves and this situation from outside the box . To trigger new creativity and new understanding — and thus the courage we need at this moment. We need to grasp what is going on, with depth and breadth, because we need all the help we can get.

As such what I write is radically incomplete. This is an essay, not a comprehensive study. It does not tell us what policies to pursue, it does not deal with the directions of deep cultural transformation we need,

it is not going to speculate on moves of capital after taking power. There are plenty of better informed and more talented people than me to advise on all that. No, what I am focusing on is 'how to win'. How to mobilise to become the greatest social movement in UK history, the biggest political party, how to create a pathway to take control of the British state — to win the next election. And most significantly, to create a model of mass mobilisation success that can be replicated around the Western World and beyond. Basically what put us in a position to actually 'save the world'. Nothing more nothing less.

The first section deals with social rupture, and starts with my own experience, as examples of probably the biggest discovery (or rather rediscovery) of social science of the past half century, which is that agency counts. We are not functions of immovable structures. The 'impossible' does happen — actually on a regular basis. If you do a certain A, B and C you can massively increase your chances of political success. We have it in our power. This then sets the scene. Then we go on to our friend Adorno. We are not going to be concerned with him as such, this is not an academic assessment — but rather with the critical points he makes, as a figure through which a two hundred year tradition of ethical socialism speaks. He argues that unless we know why we are doing what we are doing, that unless we are clear what real liberation looks like, we will fail — even if we are 'successful'. And so on these foundations of serious self-critique, we proceed to the science of take off and take over — *non-linear dynamics* — how, in our ultra connected world, we can win the race to literally bring together millions of people to deliberate, to organise, and to take control of our global destiny. The future is here now.

So I apologise in advance for the limitations, the gaps, and any mess ups in what I write. I am very grateful that you are going to take two or three hours to read what I have to say. I am going to try my best to

be as clear and truthful as I can. We are "the most humble", as the poet puts it in the quote on the cover, as we have a lot to be humble about. It is in that spirit that I hope to write, and in that spirit that I hope we will all proceed in the coming critical weeks and months 'to win' even if people don't believe us.

Testimony of Ruptures



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Chapter Two

Rupture One

Early one morning at the beginning of April 2019 I woke up and started to cry. I should say I am not the crying type. I went to a working class Northern comprehensive in the early 1980's. I remember playing rugby, and twisting my elbow. It hurt like hell. My teacher congratulated me on not crying — "good lad". Any British man above a certain age knows all too well that golden rule of being a "good lad". But there comes a time when even the most abusive psychological conditioning breaks down and that April morning was one of the moments. I had just spent probably the busiest six months of my life working every hour of the day organising the mobilisation for what became to be one of the few great moments of popular power in the UK since the Second World War — the Extinction Rebellion occupation of Central London. It had not been easy. During the 2024 Christmas break I had presented a long plan to the core thirty odd Extinction Rebellion people on "what to do". I proposed we go to the capital en masse and basically stay there until the government acts on our three climate demands. Very few people were impressed. Remember before something new happens, it has never happened before — meaning people make that fatal logical error of assuming that therefore

it can never happen. But the key argument was "we either aim to win big or we won't win at all". Sometimes only the maximal option makes sense. A recent UN report had just shocked the world by stating we had 12 years to half global emissions or something very bad would happen. It was written UN speak but it meant we would have mass death — forever. Enough people in that room had read enough of the 'science' to know the weight of the world was upon us. I did not back down. I was insistent. I had read the literature. I knew the theory. It was not impossible and so it was possible. I had already made the right call that we would be able to occupy a bunch of London bridges for a few hours the previous October and we did. The proposal was passed.

That was not the end of it. Deciding on a bold idea is one thing, getting it implemented is quite another. This could not be, "come down to London for a day or two", or even three. It had to be "come down to London and stay there until the government acts". And it could not be a nice symbolic occupation of one roundabout so we could *perform* our displeasure. It had to be an occupation of the whole damn place. Myself and another campaigner I had worked with before Extinction Rebellion were clear, we had to occupy five sites. The others in our working group — all from old direct action groups thought this was 'not possible' — the police would definitely stop it. We got our way but they were not happy. They had the 'experience'. We were the upstarts — all that stuff. But I had been in about a dozen meetings with the police. I could tell from the tone of their voices that they would not stop us. Obviously they did not say we could do it, but I sensed that they would not prevent the occupation. More to the point, if we did not do what "definitely would not happen", we would get to create unheard of disruption in the city, get on the front pages of the papers, and so get in the ballpark of getting a government concession. You have to do the impossible to get the impossible to

happen. But of course we did not know how it would turn out. Would we really be able to occupy five sites? Would enough people turn up? Would we ever get into the ‘ballpark’? The point was, there was no plan B. If this did not happen then the momentum would be broken. The chance would not come again. It was stressful. I felt an enormous burden — the enormity of the moment was upon me. I woke up. It was too much. I broke down.

The tension continued until around midday. The people arrived — about 10,000 of them. All five sites were taken. The impossible happened. It was several days before the stress left my body. Jeremy Corbyn (of course!) said some nice things in the House of Commons. We got meetings with government ministers. We held out for 10 days and forced Parliament to declare a Climate Emergency — the first country in the world to do so. And as a result the whole thing exploded. 200,000 people joined up in a matter of weeks. We created 400 local groups and in six months Extinction Rebellion was set up in 70 countries. We were named the number one global influencer on the climate in 2019. None of that would have happened if we had not taken five sites for ten days.

Chapter Three

Rupture Two

Two years before Extinction Rebellion was set up I had already experienced what it takes to make the impossible happen. As part of my research, I worked on the design for a rent strike. It had to be participatory, involve mass canvassing, and a bunch of other ‘micro designs’, as I call them. It started off, as things do, really well. Lots of people turned up for the rent strike meetings. People got excited in the break out groups. They signed up to knock on doors. We had a target to get to — a critical mass. And then it tailed off. There had not been a rent strike in London since the 1970s. It was another ‘impossible’ situation. People just didn’t really believe it was going to happen. Just before things stopped for Christmas, there was an emergency meeting. The call was to “take a break” and review things in January. Myself and a trade union guy I worked with knew that was death. We both gave passionate speeches. But it was not like the movies. In January we were more or less back to where we started with a half a dozen enthusiasts. But we decided “fuck it” — we’re still going to do it. We decided to focus on one single housing block. We needed 150 people, half the tenants in the block to commit to going on strike to get to a critical mass, meaning enough people to make it political enough for

the landlord not to be able to evict people. We had a deadline set by the union that was supporting us. By the end we were running down corridors to get enough tenants to email that they would make the 'conditional commitment' — meaning they would agree to strike if 150 other tenants made the same commitment. We reached the target with just hours to spare. The next week on a set date the rent strike was officially called. The 150 tenants stopped paying their rent. They all turned up for strike meetings. And the word spread. Within three months around 10,000 other tenants had stopped paying their rents too. Why should they pay when other people weren't? There were no eviction notices. Critical mass had led to take off. In April the landlord agreed to a rent reduction. We won.

Chapter Four

Rupture Three

I'm a campaign designer. I read the case studies, the theory. I run around with a clipboard. I do the maths. I don't like being in the limelight — it does not come naturally to me, but sometimes, someone has to stand up for what is right — and if no one else does, fuck it — I will. That's basically my approach. After Extinction Rebellion I felt I had done 'my bit', I had been arrested more times than I could remember, I had been to prison four times. I was doing strategy. I co-founded Insulate Britain and then Just Stop Oil and things took off like Extinction Rebellion. In 2023 Just Stop Oil organised a big action — the most important action so far. I was not involved but they wanted me to rally the troops. I agreed to appear on a zoom call and do my bit. I didn't think much of it. I had done that sort of thing many times before — spoken at 200 plus public meetings and online meet ups. It was in many ways just another day. Except it wasn't. A Sun journalist was there. She took a recording to the police and the deal was when they came to arrest me, the Sun would get the pictures of me being taken off. As it happened I was not in but handed myself in expecting it to be a 'routine' raid situation — meaning they come to your flat, take your laptop and phone, keep you overnight, and release

you the next day. I did not get out for the next four months. A year later I was in court with four others who ran the zoom call on a charge of "conspiracy to cause a public nuisance". I was pretty sure I would be found innocent because I was not "party to any agreement". I was not involved in the organising. I did not get any documentation. I just turned up to do a 20 minute speech. So I could have split off from the other four but then I decided we had to stand together. We would all focus on the big picture. The government wants to "burn baby burn" — which objectively means ecological and thus social collapse, and so, in any sane world, we have a "right of necessity" to "prevent harm" by causing nonviolent disruption. Except by this point, the British state had decided that 'climate change' was nothing to do with the 'evidence' and so juries were no longer able to consider this evidence for themselves. While the prosecution was given several days to provide every minutiae of evidence of harm and possible harm, we were told we had "20 minutes" to state our case. This then was a moment.

In the million stories of gross injustice there is always that moment — the fork in the road — do you, or don't you. Do you submit, or do you stand firm. I proposed we stand firm. If I was to take an oath to God that I would tell the whole truth then I had no choice. I had to tell the jury the whole truth. I would have to tell the jury about the harm (greater harm than ever imagined in human history) and, well, it would take more than 20 minutes. The 'moment' then in this case was that moment when I politely communicated to the judge that I was obligated by my oath to tell the whole truth to the jury and so that was what I was going to do. When he told me to stop I continued speaking. He was effectively shouting at me as I calmly spoke to the jury. Time stood still. In a visceral way, I felt like the court was a solid space, as if the air was a material thing, and then it cracked open, it ruptured. Something that just could not happen, did happen.

The judge walked out, the police came in and dragged me out of court passing by all the journalists. I said something like "welcome to democracy". I think I was dragged out of court for telling the truth three times that day. The other four did the same. We all ended up in prison for the rest of the case. After the verdict we were given sentences of four and five years, the longest ever given for nonviolent civil disobedience. Of course it backfired. 1200 public figures wrote a public letter, nearly £100,000 was donated by outraged supporters. For the appeal, 1000 people came along in solidarity and sat in the road outside the court — something which can now lead to years in prison. The groundwork was laid for the growing revulsion against police state legislation.

So what am I saying? Well, let me be clear I am not describing these experiences to draw attention to myself. There are millions of people each year who make incredibly brave decisions to stand up for what is right and terrible things happen to them. The reason I am sharing this testimony is because I want to communicate with you that ruptures do happen. The impossible does happen. In fact, it is arguably that history is no more than the 'impossible' rupturing 'normality'. It happens again and again and it needs to happen again now in this moment. We can decide to make it happen. We have that freedom and so we have that responsibility.

There is some history here. The social science of political change — of social movements, uprisings, revolutions, my academic specialism, has gone through a paradigm shift in the last forty years and it's important to know why. Conventional research up to the 1980s was clear: political change was a function of political opportunities, it was a matter of structures — the deep changes in how societies operated. A classic example of the approach was Theda Skocpol's study *States and Social Revolutions* which persuasively argued that revolutions came

about because of the crisis of the state — a function of external competition and internal contradictions. The interests of the elites and the state diverged — meaning basically the rich refused to pay their taxes, creating a fiscal crisis and popular revolt. We can see this happening obviously at the present time. The point was that revolutionaries did not start revolutions — they simply responded to structural opening. Her book was published in 1979. That year revolution happened in Iran. There were no structural openings. The government was united and wealthy, it had one of the biggest armies and security forces in the world, the economy was growing, and it was supported by the US. And then the regime collapsed. Charles Kurzman's study of this 'un-thinkable revolution' showed that revolutions happen because they're happening, people mobilise because other people were mobilising, people go onto the streets in their millions because they believe the revolution is 'viable'. People in other words have the agency — they can make it happen. Skocpol accepted she had been wrong.

And that was just beginning — the emotional or cultural turn in explaining social change grew and grew. Take *ACT UP*, the massively successful campaign in the US during the 1980s to get good health care and drugs for gay people suffering from AIDS. There was no structural opening, no 'Gay Spring'. In fact, Reagan had won the election, homophobia was on the march. No one gave a shit about these thousands of people dying in hospital corridors. So the whole campaign should have been a flop, right? No — because it was driven by that key element of agency — rage. Larry Kramer and other leaders just let rip. "Get on into the streets, or your gonna fucking die". And they did. Once the campaign changed to give voice to the anger and grief, things changed in a matter of months. New drugs were developed. People started getting dignified care. Thousands of lives were saved. It's about what people do. And then at the end of the 1980s

something massive happened. The Berlin Wall came down and the Soviet Union collapsed. What was ‘impossible’ changed to ‘inevitable’ in three short years. No one predicted it. And so no one could no longer rule anything out — and that is the situation in this moment. We all sense it.

And then, to bring us up to date, this whole change of perspective was given another enormous boost with the publication of *Why Civil Resistance Works* by Harvard researchers Erica Chenweth and Maria Stephan. Before this publication, research tended to just assume one revolt was much like another, whether they were nonviolent or not was insignificant. Reviewing 300 civil resistance and regime change campaigns over the past century their research showed that success was twice as likely if actors chose nonviolent methods. And nineteen of the twenty cases of successful violence revolts led to social breakdown and civil war within five years. Choosing nonviolence is the most significant factor in creating long term democratic outcomes. The reason is straightforward — nonviolent action mobilises more people, women as well as men, the young, the old, the minorities, the marginalised. And high participation is overwhelmingly the key determinant of structural political change. It’s all about mobilisation. And mobilisation depends on what people do. We can choose to mass mobilise or not.

Of course, structure still counts — there are obviously times when the elites are weak and divided and openings for change are produced. But what is more important is strategy — organisation and culture. While the social science has moved with the times, it seems like the commentary on the left has remained stuck in the rigid structuralism of the past century. Analysis remains almost universally focused on the macro level: political economy, the structures of repression, the power of the elites — what I call *left defeatism*. The closed circular logic goes

like this: the bad guys are so bad for reasons A, B and C — and so the poor and oppressed are pushed down so much that they cannot do anything, and so well... they don't do anything. You could not ask for a more powerful propaganda for the neo-liberal project! And of course this analysis is all very convenient for the largely middle class 'educated' analysts who churn out this stuff — it lets them off the hook. With these people, whatever happens, it will not work, as we used to joke in *Extinction Rebellion*. It's the privilege of 'pure critique'. And of course it's rubbish. While in western universities this narrative has gone largely unchallenged, down on the streets, all around the world, it has been kicking off like never before. Millions take to the streets — they are making it happen because they have decided to make it happen. And so it does. The logic is reversed.

And as we know the 'out of nowhere' thing has been happening with ever greater frequency as ruling regimes have become ever more fragile — as public support drops to ever lower levels. We have had Syriza going from 4% of the vote to 40% in a matter of months during the Greek debt crisis, the sudden emergence of Podemos, winning 20% in its first national elections in Spain, Bernie Sanders recruiting half a million volunteers in six months during his campaign for Democratic candidate for the US presidency. And of course our very own Mr Corbyn winning the Labour leadership race and building the biggest membership of a left party in the Western world. And so we come to August 2025, the next chapter in this story, when 600,000 people sign-up to a new left movement/party in a week. This is off the scale. So this time it has to push through, because it can, and because it has to.

The key step is this: strategic capacity. Let me show you an example of what I mean. The 1960s Californian farm workers movement started with an 'uneducated' Mexican American organiser, Cesar Chavez

and his family and friends surveying 25,000 farm workers. This led to the setting up of mutual aid projects and then a series of labour strikes which won era bursting labour rights for 100,000s of people working on Californian farming estates. They had to compete with the massively well resourced reactionary Teamsters union. Their organisers were getting \$20,000 a month, while as leader of the farm workers movement, Chavez was on \$5,000. The conventional union guys were experts — they knew what to do and so they did not need help or advice. And that is why they lost. The farm workers made it up as they went along — they were humble, they tried new things because they did not know what worked. They built a mass social movement, based upon families and communities, creating nationwide political networks to run boycotts and media publicity. As Marshall Ganz, one of the key organisers, puts this openness down to the willingness of the core team to have a diverse make up — an alliance of the church people, young social movement people, and trade union organiser people. This is how they developed a winning strategic capacity.

This then is the opportunity of the present movement — to develop this winning strategic capacity we need the centre of this movement/party to reflect the emerging national networks — Left/union people, Palestine/Muslim people, climate/democracy people. To put it bluntly, if you are not sitting around the table with some people you privately think are a bit weird, then you don't have strategic capacity — you are not going to maximise your collective intelligence. You are going to miss some of the big picture, and that is a mistake we cannot afford to make.

This then is why this essay is not staying in the box. It's why we are going to do a bit of lateral thinking — a few weird things to widen our view. We have to acquire the moral courage to do the right thing, and

only then will we acquire the analytic courage to do what works. This then is what we will look at in the next two sections.

Chapter Five

Who Decides? Negative Dialectics

Let's go to another time and place — Theodor Adorno. At first glance this starting point does not look very promising! Adorno was a social theorist of the Frankfurt School — little known outside Germany and left circles. His works are famously difficult to read and, if you know your history of left politics in Germany, you may know he didn't do himself any favours by calling in the police when students took over his university in 1969. That said the students were disorganised and romantically utopian. There was little social connection between the student movement and the general population, and it had a nasty tendency towards violence. So maybe Adorno had a point. He was not keen, as he put it, to become a Pied Piper for the movement, and was critical of notions of *charismatic authority*, to use the sociologist Max Weber's term. What is clear is that Adorno was no liberal. He was thoroughly embedded in the Marxist and left

traditions. He had fled the Nazis in the early 1930s, and written several books savingly critical of capitalist modernity. And for all the difficulties of his ideas, he was called a genius by Herbert Marcuse, arguably the most important thinker of the radical sixties.

But whatever we may think of the man and his life, we are here to focus on his ideas — what was he saying and what can we learn from them for our present moment. Adorno is a funnel through which we can engage with a whole complex of ideas that have been at the core of the left and socialist traditions the past two hundred years. This is the approach of *critical theory*: that capitalist society is fundamentally flawed and it needs to be vigorously investigated to understand what is happening and how to change it. Adorno was a pessimist — which is understandable living at the time of the horrors of Stalin, Auschwitz and Hiroshima. I have always been an organiser who likes to focus on practice, but Adorno challenges me, and all of us, by saying that we are going to get nowhere by having "thought bowing irrationally to the primacy of action". All practice assumes certain theories — a bunch of assumptions of how the world works. Get that wrong and we will not avoid the catastrophes he and his generation experienced. There is then no "illicit shortcut to practical action". We have to do the work. And "politics is no less mediated in intensified struggle" — there is no pretending we can escape into mobilisation and protest. If we do not know what we are doing we simply create a "catastrophic vicious circle" leading to over polarisation, violence, and varieties of fascism.

For Adorno and his colleague Horkheimer there can be no naïve simple faith that Enlightenment humanism will bring about progress. In fact liberalism was deeply complicit in bringing about the Nazi disaster, and the barbarism that we now face. The idea of 'economic growth' and the culture that goes with it is fundamentally the problem. There is a continuum between liberal democracy and fascism —

what he called the "blocked state". And there can be no refuge in some notion of an absolute idea. Hegel was an 'appeasing philosopher' for his view that there is an objective endpoint in history. There is not. We cannot avoid the extreme complexity and danger of modernity which flips between the "theodicy of bourgeois life" and the "despair of utopia" — meaning, giving in the religious dogmas of neoliberalism or pursuing dreams of final revolutions, both of which can only lead to more horrors. We are invited to walk a tightrope. If we are to avoid "the prey of power" we have to move beyond false alternatives, we have to create something other than dominating power. And so we need a new methodology.

Adorno calls this new method *Negative Dialectics* — the name of his last major work published in 1966*. Of course, dialectics has always been a central idea of Marxism. History is a process of conflict and crisis. There is a thesis, and then the challenge — the antithesis, and the outcome of this confrontation is the synthesis. In Marx's notion of dialectical materialism, the thesis is capitalism, the antithesis is the working class challenge, leading to revolution and socialist utopia — the synthesis. Adorno is highly critical of the vulgar reduction of this process to some inevitable progress to "positivity" where history stops and everything is sorted out. On the other hand he does not throw the baby out with the bathwater. He is opposed to discarding the very idea of dialectics by replacing it with some vague idea of stages and paradigms — where the reality of the fundamental contradictions of capitalism is lost. Such ideas, as arguably seen in the work of Hardt and Negri, during the neo-liberal period after 1989, leads to a post-modernist retreat into the local and the micro politics promoted at US universities. Dialectics are needed because the macro contradictions do not go away. But it has to be a *negative* dialectics — and a dialectical critique that does not end in any positive synthesis — some false dawn

of neo-liberalism or a static socialist utopia. He has no time for some vacuous notion of 'desire' or 'life' — a vitalism that enters the material world from the outside. Such ideas, rooted in 'existence', lose their critical political edge. This is why he says Heidegger slid into support for fascism, and Sartre came to support Soviet communism. To give Adorno credit, unlike his contemporaries such as Bloch who supported Stalin's show trials and Benjamin's plans to move to Moscow, he maintained a consistent opposition to all totalitarians of both the right and the left. The reason for this is rooted in his negative dialectics orientation. We never arrive at utopia and so we can never justify the horrors of the twentieth century.

What starts to appear here then is a particular approach to the central questions of left strategy and organisation. Negativity, in the meaning Adorno gives to it, can have no time for the supposed objectivism of vanguards, the dictatorship of the party, the fetish of state power. But as we shall see this is no easy critique of leftist extremity, it is a devastating critique of the dehumanisation of power itself.

Adorno's critique evolves around three interrelated key analyses: totality, identity, and concept — we will look at each in turn before seeing how they challenge us to review how we develop our strategy and organisation at this present moment with the new movement/party.

Totality

There can be no new synthesis, what Adorno calls a new *totality*. A totality is an abstract material and symbolic form of domination. Its domination lies in its very claim to totality — a total system — the claims of "this is it and there is nothing else". It is a rigid grid

placed upon the actuality of the world. As such it has no space for particularity — the fragment or trace of the other.

But any claim to totality is impossible because there is always an excess — that which escapes, that which cannot be pushed down. And it is always this excess that creates antagonism — this ‘refusal’ — a crisis in the totality. The totality Adorno is referring to concretely here is the bourgeois form of science and philosophy that constructs a reductive, manipulatable, and extractable world — ready for exploitation, a world to be used — instrumentalised. And his key point for the left is this: “the bourgeois form of thought has not yet been radically overcome in Marxist and revolutionary form”. The left mystifies class struggle as a mirror image of the bourgeois mystification of capital. Both views are totalities.

This is most brutally displayed in Lukacian Marxism. Lukács is explicit, he wants to create a new totality to overcome and replace the totality of capital. This creates a theoretical scheme based upon the proletariat and the party. The new total knowledge is class consciousness and the mediating function is assigned to the party — the vanguard. What is created then is a new hierarchy to mirror that of capital — a new homogenous subject — the class, the party, the state — this new synthesis. This is the domination of the political over the social. The political is reified — it is outside the world and imposed upon the world as a pre-constructed total system. It is a mystique in the sense that it comes out of nothing — it is objective and so cannot be questioned. Once this new totality is in place then history comes to an end, echoing a left version of Hegel’s notion of the absolute spirit. The revolutionary party is assigned the role of bringing about this absolute. A rationale is produced for a violence without limit. Adorno suggests an alternative to this new barbarism: that we start not with totality — not with the party, but with the

negation of totality — with the negation of the party: as an alternative epistemological starting point meaning a different way of knowing. In other words, we simply cannot conceptualise radical social change in terms of ‘a party’, otherwise we just get more of the same. We have to question the power and domination of the very notion of totality. The fundamental principle of negative dialectics is contradiction, which is dead set against the centrality of totality in positive dialectics. We have to begin with seeing totality itself in negative terms — always as a crisis. The negation of negativity can never lead to synthesis — any critical project to remove the crisis of capitalism cannot lead to any promised land. This is because the crisis of totality is created by particularity and within this other world “totality is inconceivable”. Particularity is the quintessential critical category — as it cannot be reduced to a system. It is this excess in any system. When a totality is critiqued by the particular it does not lead to another totality. There is no new totality which is symmetrical in its logical structure to the last totality as is the case in Lukács’s scheme. To deny the particular then is to pervert and fetishize the very idea of revolutionary change. It does not create the new society but abolishes it.

What lies behind both sides of this symmetry is the bourgeois fear of chaos and so the rationalisation for social control. We can trace this back to the Hobbesian myth that without totality there is only the war of all against all. This is what lies behind Hegel’s philosophy of the state, in both its liberal and left forms. It is this ideology of power that justifies the relations of domination and curtails emancipation. For Adorno, “it keeps fettering the human consciousness instead of comprehending it”. Consciousness then resides in the particular, it cannot be pushed into a totalising box. It always jumps back out.

Walter Benjamin, who worked closely with Adorno, shared this deep awareness of ‘something else’ that blasts into totality with the

new. Out of nowhere comes a lifeworld with the promise of overwhelming the abstraction and homogeneity. A moment occurs such as Corbyn's announcement of a new party. For Benjamin this is not about some objective idea of progress towards a set end point. It is what he calls a *monad* — a temporality of rebellion as opposed to the temporality of abstraction. A heterogeneous and multiple subject ruptures history "like a thunderbolt". It is then an anti-synthesis. There is not a singularity of struggle but a community of struggles. It drives through the dead weight of totality — of capital, of the state. In other words, it is a revolt against abstraction in itself.

And isn't this the deeper reading of Marx, Adorno argues. A reading that provides for a new coherence — that what exploitation and domination are is depersonalisation — the crushing of the person. This is what functional rationality and material abstraction do. Capitalism is a social metabolism which transforms the constitutive heterogeneity of the human into alienation of 'labour'. The rich depth of what is labour — of what the human act should be, the creativity and flow of this act, is cut up and reduced to slivers. Do one job, then the next one. And then repeat. Follow the manual laid down by the totality. The joy of spontaneity is gone. Everything is turned dull.

This then explains the schizophrenia of traditional left practice that claims to remove this alienation — the claim that the party is *yours*, but then it merely imposes yet more bourgeois rationality upon the world — yet, another autonomous objectivity, another negated 'us'. But still antagonism is always opening up the world. This is the challenge Adorno presents us with — practice without a theoretical response to this challenge will get us nowhere. We have to prevent the "mutilation of the emancipating movement". Adorno does not mince his words!

Identity

If we drill down into the general idea of totality we find the dead weight of *identity* — the way we find ourselves, the way we are required to see the world. We see, for instance, how the rich reality of our labour is reduced to a single flat abstract identity, brought about by the process of capitalist production and consumption — the process of exchange. We see it in the way we are a clog in the machine, in our alienated state as just a set thing. *This* and not *that*. And only *this*. In a party then the identity requires a member to do only A, B and C but nothing else. In an alienated social space "this kind of deluded identity is the essence of the ideology". Identity creates the way of seeing that maintains the system — that keeps the totality in place. But again Adorno insists that that is not all there is. There is something else — an overflowing. The *non-identity* breaks open the identity and opens the way to something new. To our new movement/party. We suddenly have the opportunity to question those illusions around us. To change how we see.

Contradiction in all human systems then is "non-identity under the aspect of identity". Liberation is the driving force of the misfit, the irreducibility of particularity. It will not submit to top down party discipline — it is explosive and volcanic. This force that comes to the fore in a new subjectivity- "I am not that, I am something else". The world is turned on its head. For the Italian autonomists, for example, the move was to not to put capitalism first but rather the working class. We have to start with the struggle of the working class — to put this non-identity at the centre of our analysis. Who is this new 'we'? What do we want as this new 'we'? To attack identity then "goes to the core of life itself". Negation is creativity. The subject breaks through the constituted subjectivity — what they have been told they are. We

see this clear and dramatically in these moments of rupture — in the aspirations of those 600,000 people you have sign-ups. They want something else — not the old identity.

And yet we find that a challenge here. As Adorno points out *the working class* is a concept that explodes itself — "fallacy is constitutive subjectivity" — meaning that all constructed identities are basically false. We can choose to put *the working class* first but in the very act of doing so we reify and reduce a complex reality. The reality of the diversity of the poor and exploited overflows that identity. There is always more. This then in more recent times has been called the "paradox of political identity" — that we create a new collectivity — an oppositional force but it becomes its own worst enemy. The very process of identity creates a barrier to growth because it excludes those who are not part of that new identity. The label that liberates becomes oppressive and alienating. We are back then with this never ending process of negative dialectics. There is no certainty, no resting place, no endpoint. We don't get to where we can say "this is who we are" and now the question is closed. There is always a new contradiction and so a new movement. Always "the beginning of the movement is non-identity". The possibility of reconciliation is opened up by this emancipatory move of non-identity. Repression is overcome, and difference and multiplicity emerge. And so "negative dialectics ...is in the service of non-identity". As John Holloway put it there is the "scream of rebellion". But that is never the end of the matter.

Concept

It may be best to let Adorno speak on this final project of analysis:

"Above all the leftist critics failed to notice that the 'ideas' themselves in their abstract form are not merely images of the truth that will later

materialise, but that they are ailing themselves, afflicted with the same injustice under which they are conceived, and bound up with the world against which they are set."

So if *totality* refers to our social systems, and *identity* refers to how we ourselves, the notion *concept* refers to the very 'ideas', the words, we use. We have to accept that the map is never the territory. The map, even if we mean well, can never liberate the territory. It only creates the 'same injustice' — all those warm words only make us feel hollow. They don't feel real because they are not real. Because as Adorno puts it, "objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a reminder". They do not "exhaust the thing".

But as we know the concept loves its own logic. If we deny the concept we are told we are 'violating logic'. We are being silly, uneducated, irrational. Concepts then police themselves. But that does not mean they win. Again there is always antagonism, for the simple reason there is this 'reminder'. Negative dialectics drives the reminder into view — to crack open the conceptual totality. This is not a mere cognitive move. Negativity releases the scream, the "world's agony raised to a concept". It gate crashes the old concept of 'the party'.

The creation of the *concept* then, for negative dialectics, is, in the same breath, the negation of it. For example, as discussed the concept of the 'working class' is necessary and useful but at the same time we need to question the notion of "working" and 'class' — what do they assume, who does it leave out. We need to be in confrontation with the state to demand self determination while considering what is not contained in self-determination. For Adorno then "definition becomes reactionary". We have to "attack the nouns and liberate the verbs". In a sense then we need a movement to create a revolution without a name. As soon as we create positivity we slide into accommodation with 'progressive' governments. Distinctions then matter.

Too often paralysis is created through the fetishism of a core concept so it becomes impossible to think of the world radically — to liberate ourselves so we can act effectively.

This awareness of the power of the concept to control and exclude is central to the critique of capital. We face an "edifice of classifications" which aims to reify elite power. The message is "this is real". There is nothing else. The world is conceptualised as a world of commodities, of economic categories. This leads Adorno, in his characteristic pessimism, to state, "whatever one does is false". We are trapped. The role of critical theory then is to penetrate this reality, to stripe the blindfold from the concepts of capitalism. As Marx says "Man makes history". Nothing is "just so". Relations are social relations. They are made. They serve the purpose of a power. 'Social laws' reveal the tautologies of a vicious circularity — the whole nonsense that, "it is because it is".

In response then we have to promote the negativity of immediacy — that which the concept wants to erase. We have to think outside of 'the thing'. "£10 an hour" is not the sum total of that hour. There is an interior life to the thin hood of society. The stuff that is in the concept does not belong to it. The subject can engage in rational behaviour in the context of objective irrationality — in other words the elites may be taking us to mass death but we don't have to accept this as normal. The old mythical idea of fate becomes no less mythical by being translated in the secular 'logic of things'. The colonisation of our life world does not mean we have to accept the worldview of the colonisers. Hence Adorno's insistence on negativity. Capital, he is clear, is a "bewitching force". It sucks you in. Difference is coerced to be indifferent to itself. The concept becomes "the mask of death".

But the essence of things never goes away. It antagonises — breaking through the surface of the concept. As Marx put it, "already the simple forms of exchange-value and of money latently contain the

opposition between labour and capital". The concept comes under growing strain — it operates against itself. There is a whole world of human practice that contradicts the world of capital and its regimes of control. As Marcuse put it, "the constitution of the world occurs behind its back". In fact, capital would be nothing without human creativity and spontaneity — making things work despite the bureaucracy, the command and control. It is then a "fatal mischief" that degrades people into submitting to the abstractions that rule over them: the notion that wage slavery is "freedom", the idea that self-actualisation is the making of oneself into an object, something for sale, so the person in social relations is made invisible. The process of subjectification becomes an objectification. *Discipline* as Foucault called it, becomes internalised. Everything is converted into what Marx calls the "perverted form" of value.

Our movement/party then has to do things differently. Adorno's three analyses show we have quite a task on our hands. We are not dealing with simply 'economic' relations. It is about how we are constructed across the social space. We have to defend ourselves "against a merely objective existence in politics, in religion, in philosophy". We are called to claim ourselves for the human sensuous beings that we are. It is clear then that the process of power alienates this being. "Man is never at the centre of politics but a means of politics". It is crucial that we remember that it is real people with real lives that rebel. Abstractions don't go on strike. All this then points something very foreign to conventional left practice – to Lukács's claims of the party as a new whole. "The whole is false", it has to go, Adorno insists. It is incompatible with an active humanity – what Bloch called the "inner transcendence of matter". We cannot be compromised by yet another positivity – yet another 'new' party. More pseudo activity. The bottom line is this – "wrong life cannot be lived rightly". Worshiping idols just

does not work. We cannot again and again keep pretending to ourselves – making out that our alienating practices are liberating when self-evidently they are not. We have to decide to choose something new. "There has to be as much free will as there are people with the will to be free." The question then is how to create that "will".

Back to our present moment

I want to make it clear I am not suggesting Adorno is the final word, not least because I would obviously not have grasped what he is saying. I am not concerned with whether Adorno is ultimately 'right' or 'wrong' – this is not an academic exercise. We are in a social emergency, not a seminar room. What I am interested in is this: what can we productively learn from his theoretical perspectives, the rich streams of left traditions he draws upon, which continue to evolve today. What he is saying may not be new to you, or maybe you have "heard it all before" but, in which case, I respectfully suggest maybe it is good to hear it again. And of course you may be thinking "well Roger you have just thrown a whole load of concepts at me from a guy who is not into concepts". To which I would respond – good point – and that is the whole point. Adorno, as I understand him, is not promoting 'a position' but rather a method and way of practicing theory – that does not come to a final point. You could also be thinking this is just more romantic airy musing disconnected with the hard world of real political struggle. But be rest assured I am not going to take us down some post-modernist rabbit hole of pure critique – where we persuade ourselves that everything is so compromised, domination so embedded, that we should conveniently stay rooted in our armchair – for those of us who have that rare privilege. Nothing drives me more mad than self-righteous inertia. This is not going to lead to another

rant against centralisation – as if ‘decentralisation’ is somehow ‘the answer’. We must all agree the purism of ‘horizontalism’ has run its course.

No, we need to follow what Adorno says. Look at the world, critique it, go beyond the standard scripts and moves, without fear or favour, and then act, and then do it again. In the teams I work with, we call this “good enough to go”. We are enthusiastic about repeated iteration. The learning never stops. The humility stays in place. This then is the method. So let us do it and see what we can come up with.

What seems to me to be clear is there is an agonising underlying tension. We may deny it, we may pretend it is resolved, but in truth it never goes away. It is this tension between what we criticise and how we act ourselves. We know the bad guys are beyond bad but can we really honestly say we are much better? Look in the mirror and ask yourself – honestly. Sure we don’t do really bad things (let’s hope not) but aren’t we just avoiding the real question. We have just read about Adorno. He lived through Stalin, Auschwitz, and Hiroshima. He was not interested in avoiding hard questions. Maybe we could avoid those hard questions in 1995, in 2005, maybe in 2015. But now in 2025 – No! We have the far right as the biggest party in France, Germany and the UK. We have Trump in the White House. We are over 1.5°C. I need not go on. This essay is about what we do. “People know it sucks”, as a Spanish researcher friend of mine used to say – what they want to know is *what to do*.

Adorno makes abundantly clear this is not just about *capital* – as a thing out there. It is about a system of domination which saturates modernity. A process of extreme alienation that pollutes the very nature of conventional organisation itself. It is tempting to pretend he is just picking off the easy targets of where the far left slides into left fascism – the embarrassing crudity of Lukács’s ‘Party’, as a sort of

Second Coming. It just wreaks of the gulags. As hundreds of works have elucidated in morbid detail the slippage of power as a means to an end, to power as an end in itself. We know about the engineering of the masses within the factory system, the revolutionary vanguard as the new clergy, the turning of the dictatorship of the proletariat into the dictatorship of the party. All that. It is obscene but what about us?

What is hard is to accept that the left and its parties in 'democracies' are also instrumentalist, manipulative, and repressive but in more subtle ways. Maybe these parties can fool most of the people most of the time but not year after year, decade after decade to the point trust in politics is lower than anyone can remember. To the point where it is happening again – the far right cocks up the contradiction and antagonisms of liberal capitalism that Adorno speaks about. We are not able to challenge the right because we don't have the courage to do the hard negativity. To critique what clearly is not working. Because **IT IS NOT WORKING!**

The form of the 'political party' in the Western world is a state of living death. It only still exists because whatever comes next is being stopped from being born. And if whatever it is that has to be born does not come into being soon then, as we know, another model is happily ready to take the reins – a delightful choice of different fascistic irrationalisms. The agony of the situation is that you cannot see what you cannot see. The political class is a cult of inbred exclusion. Its denial is pathological. Its inertia, pitiful. And yet, as the Labour party, in a spasm of hubristic excess spits out a never ending stream of factory rejects, a new 'something' becomes possible – a new anti-identity 'party', if we still dare to use that name. This moment is a crack in the system of denial. There is an outline, a zeitgeist even, certainly a surge of mass expectancy.

But a moment for what? I have worked with James Schneider on these questions. He was part of Jeremy Corbyn's team when he was Labour party leader. James, I have no doubt, is aware of Adorno's critique. He has some key moves and spoke about them in a recent interview for *Sidecar*.

James identities the core project as the translation of the *sociological* majority into a *political* majority. The question then is how to 'construct the people'. In other words we need *popular power* – new organisations that can win "concessions from capital and the state", a movement that can "legislate from below while at the same time creating the conditions for their party to legislate from above". There is then the question of dealing with the alienation that Adorno (and Marx) speak about – in contemporary language, how to empower, mobilise, and organise. As James puts it – how to "recognise the essential dignity of every person", how to create "new forms of life beyond exploitation, empire and top-down control". We need to "win power in every sense: social cultural political industrial." He is spot on in identifying the role of Corbyn – that people turn on to who he is rather than due to specific policies. This then is our secret – Corbyn provides a pathway to power that "bypasses the structures that are supposed to neutralise it". This is what has the elites panicking. And what has millions of ordinary people daring to hope that .. maybe...

Maybe what? Well, we need the details. James proposes that left wing people need to set up new organisations – "food co-ops, bill payers unions.. " and so on. So how does that happen? The "choices need to be made democratically by a national democratic party". But does this answer the question? Sure the days of top down state led technocratic routines are gone – there are no new ideas, and no money. There instead needs to be "outlets for real popular participation". So again what precisely does this mean? The whole 'political-media-state

class' thing takes us nowhere. Playing by the rules of the games is a living death – the Green Party is not going to break through – it has been trying for 40 years for God's sake. It's playing a loser's game.

The question then is how does the alternative actually work. He gives us some details, but still critical details go unanswered. Strategic goals "can... be delivered largely by frontline organisers or politicians", "A committee would be set up which would have real legitimacy in its decision making", and every member of the party would have a "full right to participate" with development of "structures and cultures that will allow for more meaningful decisions to be made". It all sounds great but then most things *sound* great. Don't get me wrong it's a great article and James is one of the few people who have thought long and hard about these questions. His 'negativity' has been robust! But at the end of the day is there a significant difference here between what he outlines and the rhetoric of Lukacian state communism. Well, yes, in one sense there is. James is clear this is a membership organisation with democratic constitutional power – this is not a dictatorship of a self-selected central committee. No one is having their leg broken or worse for voting "against the people's will". But in another sense, no. There is something about the whole structure and culture of 'the party' which does not work – to put it bluntly which is fucked. It's difficult to put your finger on it. If it was easy and simple it would have been sorted long ago. To understand it we need a negativity which goes to the depth that Adorno goes to – that goes into the very nature of totality, identity and conceptualisation. Maybe it is good to give a concrete example over why even with the supposed best of intentions. things get, well, fucked.

There are hundreds of examples to choose from but I recently completed reading a book about the popular sector mobilisation during and after the Pinochet regime in Chile from the late 1970s to early

1990s (this is what I get up to sitting in a cell all day!). The story is familiar enough. When bad times hit, people come together, whether it's the war, the depression, the shantytown. In this case it was the latter. The new dictatorship in 1974 banned all political parties. The void was filled by thousands of bottom up participatory mutual aid set ups – what were called 'the popular sectors'. Notice already – this is what happens when the political parties are removed from the scene. New social forms and cultures are given space to flourish based upon participation, pluralism, and autonomy – these anti-concepts – the concrete essence behind the surface: that people sat round and chat, they made decisions together by consensus, they look out for each other, they educate themselves, and learn to have dignity.

Critically then, what motivated them were procedural matters not political policy objectives. It was about *how* it was done. And this is why they grew – because they were being 'most humble'. To the point that there was the potential for a new massive social movement of the poor as the country entered the process of re-establishing a democracy. The political parties were coming back into their own. The rhetoric was humble as well – they accepted they had put party interest before the country and this had contributed to the coming of the dictatorship. It was to be different this time, they would work together. They would work with the popular sectors, it would be a different democracy – all those warm words. So what happened? They held a big congress to establish this new national social movement of the popular sectors. And to get to what happened you have to look behind those warm words, inside those concepts – to the central question of power: "Who decides who decides?". The parties decided who decides. And they decided that various assemblies would decide on who would decide – who the delegates would be. Sounds good except obviously the race was on for each party to get the maximum number of its

party members as delegates. So they dominated the assemblies, they set up ghost organisations to hold assemblies, they held assemblies in areas where the political parties were strongest. Areas with weak party presence were excluded. People did not even know about the process. While the vast majority of the people in shantytown ‘pobladores’ – the grassroots organisations, were not members of parties, at ‘their’ national congress, surprise, surprise, 90% of the delegates were party members. Given we are dealing here with the core point of this essay, it’s worth quoting from two non party participants:

"(The delegates) approached the Congress like parties... it was ideological. Party X had to be at the head, saying the others were misleading... The parties did not worry whether the leaders there represented the bases with (their own) concerns. (For me) they could be party militants but they had to represent a base – what the people behind in their loan payments, the unemployed, the people without houses thought. (The CUP) refused to recognise leaders elected by the base because they were not members of a particular party. This was not respect for the interests of the people." (Woman active in organising soup kitchens).

"I was invited to the congress of pobladores and I found it to be a fight among political parties. I thought I would see many pobladores from different areas and that it would be democratic. What I found was a joke" (Woman co-founder of a handicrafts organisation).

Notice both these quotes came from women, who both actually did stuff in their communities – they were the *anti-identity* standing against the *identity* of the political party – the regime – the totality of the remorseless logic of power. What the pobladores represented was something not just outside that power, but outside modernity itself. As one put it, "we realised that there are more important matters than just political and economic demands. There is the right to be a person". James writes we have to "recognise the essential dignity of

every person". But what is the reality behind this most revolutionary proposal? What does it mean to have 'dignity', to be a 'person'? Well, it certainly means we have to give more attention to the details. As the researcher, Phillip Oxhorn writes in this study of the popular sectors, there was "a marked lack of attention to the mechanisms that could actually incorporate the popular sectors into the political process". But this is still avoiding the main point. What actually should those mechanisms be? And even more radically what actually is meant by the *political process* – what actually is the meaning here of this concept: the *political*. As Adorno says "the concept is reactionary". The very construction of the concept of the 'political' already ensures that participation cannot happen. The matter is decided even before the 'attention' is given because the framing already excludes the possibility of what is desired. The concept is not neutral – the concept is power – it polices itself. What we need then to attend to is the anti-concept – the *person*, the *dignity*.

I suggest we make a concrete proposal – we look at what actually has to happen, we attend to the actual evidence. We bring in the numbers and ratios and cut the bullshit. First then I will look at power and then culture.

Power

A concrete proposal: there can be no more elections. Elections create power. And as long as there is this power there will be no room for the *person* and their *dignity*. Power is *totality*. It saturates the human space and demands that there is nothing but power. Totality cannot be compromised with, it has to be broken – it requires revolution. Look at it this way, everyone reading this essay knows nothing will fundamentally change while capitalism is in charge. The most famous

demand in modern history is Marx's call "to control the means of production". In other words, it is not a matter of negotiating with the owners of the factory, you have to take over the factory. Or, in the modern context, we can negotiate with the representatives of international capitalist finance but until this global system is replaced it will set severe limits on what any national government can do. It is the same with power – the process of the political enacts the will of capital. Power and capital then are essentially the same force. The way they exploit and alienate is identical. The logical structure is the same. And so if you take over power you do not change the system – you just change.

the administrators

Just as you can have hard capitalism – the brutal violence of the classical factory owner with his paid thugs, so you can have hard power – the brutality of the riot police and night time raids. And you can have soft capitalism – the movement in the bond markets, the need for private investment, and so you can have soft power, the "electioneering" that gets our party members, our people, voted into the congress. So what is the revolutionary move equivalent to taking over 'means of production' in the realm of power? It is to take over 'the means of power'. You remove the human input into the question of "who decides who decides?" and give it to chance – people who decide are chosen randomly, by what is called *sortition*. In one single revolutionary step, you remove the hundred and one ways that elections are manipulated by those with money, connections, knowledge, and commitment. You take everyone in the space but put their names in a hat and pick people out. So the soap kitchen women and handicraft women have as much chance of being selected for the congress as the party hack, the middle

class activist with connections, the guys with the money. You get it – you don't take over the sweet shop to get a few sweets. You take over the sweet factory – the means of production – the place that produces the sweets, so everyone can have them – forever. This is then a reform versus revolution thing. You either get a bit of the 'rights of the person', a bit of 'dignity', if you are lucky, if the 'party' lets you: the patronage model, or everyone gets a chance to decide just by being a person, just because they are given the dignity of being able to be chosen. Nothing more, nothing less.

There is history here I want to touch on briefly. Any totality is always a lie. It always insists it is the way it is, because it's always been that way – "this what politics means" and so of course this is how the lie ensures nothing changes. Because if we find out that the *totality* came into being then, hey, well, it is going to go out of being at some point. What goes around, comes around. Back in the Eighteenth century everyone knew what democracy was and it was NOT elections and voting. Democracy from ancient Athens to the French revolution meant *sortition* – people selected by lot. Elections and voting was the aristocratic method, it led to oligarchy – obviously. For all the reasons we know. The rich put the candidates up, they control the media, they set the agenda. Once in power those candidates owe their allegiance to the machine, the money, the rich. The Athenians banned elections and chose people by lot who would sit in the assemblies and committees because otherwise they knew they would be back under the boot of the rich and powerful. Some things don't change. When the 'Founding Fathers' instituted elections and voting after the American revolution it was not some noble step to create democracy, it was precisely designed to stop democracy. None of them were democrats. Democracy was for them ruled by the mob, elections were instituted

to stop democracy – to stop ‘the mob’. The plan was for the educated and worthy to rule – meaning of course the rich and powerful.

It was only over the decades leading up to the 1830s that the word ‘democracy’ got perverted into meaning electoral systems. So we have all been conned. The reason we are all so pissed off with our democracies is because they are, in fact, not democracies! They are what we all know them to be – oligarchies – the rule by the few, because we see it with our own eyes, every week, year, and decade. The representation of *the working class* in parliaments in the UK and France, in the US congress is less than 5%. It's a racket! As the old saying goes – whoever you vote for the government gets in. You always get the interests of power and capital because we have the wrong damn system. And as Adorno insists, “wrong life cannot be lived rightly”. You cannot reform a crap system.

So let me be blunt, the name “Your Party” is a contradiction in terms. I can guarantee millions of people are thinking “yeah right”. Not because whoever thought up the name is being deliberately deceitful but because we are dealing with decades, lifetimes, in fact of people being told lies by politicians – the toxicity of selling oligarchy as democracy. Lies rots the soul, and national lies rot the soul of the nation.

So there is a lot of work to do. Fundamentally we have to decide is this “party” to mean what this word always has meant up to now – a totality – a funnel of self-selecting dominatory power – or are we are going to create an anti-identity to that concept – are *we* – all of us – actually going to be in charge. Is the working class going to have over 50% presentation in the decision-making bodies or less than 5%. If you really want Mrs Jones, on a housing estate in Bolton with three grandkids to look after, to participate you are going to have to, as they say in school, *try harder*.

Trying harder means we have to understand the actual core mechanisms of exclusion. What happens can be pretty rough and ready – like the crudity of creating ‘ghost’ organisations, as in the Chile example, or it can be subtle and gradual but no less deterministic – because while you keep elections things always slide into oligarchy. It is called the “Iron Law of Oligarchy”. The phrase was created by Robert Michels, an Italian sociologist who studied the degeneration of ‘democratic’ processes in European social democratic parties before the First World War. But, of course, he was referring to a system of manipulation which goes back centuries. While every degeneration has its own uniqueness, it is always a combination of a family of processes. As mentioned, over time only those with money, time and connections get themselves set up as candidates and then get elected. Once in power they in turn use their power to influence who gets chosen and elected. In other words, the process is iterative – a slow, or not so slow, vicious circle which ends up with a passive alienated membership and a central oligarchy – a rule by the few who fight it out for the top job. What is for sure then is that Mrs Jones from Bolton will be back looking after her grandkids. Whatever the rhetoric, even with good intentions, the system is deterministic. Elections are competition and so their essential nature is to select those that can win competitions.

Which brings us onto the other thing. No disrespect to the amazing people like Jeremy and Zarah, they are exceptions that prove the rule that self-selection privileges the ego. And as the old wisdom traditions say, those that fancy themselves to lead do not make good leaders. It is the *most humble* that need to lead – meaning those who are chosen by chance because, as such, they have the humility of knowing they are in a position to decide for no other reason than chance. So it isn’t an ego thing, you don’t ‘deserve’ to have been because you are such a

great person and/or privileged. And as studies of hundreds of citizens' assemblies show, – people chosen by chance are indeed humble – they listen, they work together, they focus on the common good of the common people. And it stays like that because they rotate. No one stays 'in position'. Identity is not consolidated. They step down and others are selected. The structure then supports *the person* – it provides for *dignity* because everyone is there to serve. It is deeply political in the ironic sense that it is not political – meaning power has to be removed from the space.

There is nothing utopian here, in the absolutist sense of perfection. Bad apple people are going to end up being selected, decisions will still be difficult to make, and it is still possible that the agenda-making power could be co-opted by oligarchic interests. All these problems have been worked upon over the past few decades through a process of trial and error by deliberative democracy designers. People need to be trained. and work in small groups, so individuals are embedded within a respectful team culture. Groups selected by sortition can oversee the power of centres of selecting what is on the agenda, and ensure that a plurality of inputs are considered by decision making assemblies. The assembly needs to have the power to create new agenda items, and call its own advisers and witnesses. The key point however is this. A sortition based decision making body directly reflects the wider social space. For the first time in history the richest, most connected, most self-entitled 1% of the membership or population only have 1% of the make up of the assembly.

And what could be more socialist than a decision making body that ensures that the working class, woman, minorities are fully represented? If people like Mrs Jones make up 50% of the members then people like Mrs Jones make up 50% of the conference, the assemblies, the working committees. It is beautiful. How can anyone who claims to

speak for the empowerment and participation of working people not support such a revolution – where such people are properly represented not as the exception, but as the rule – in fact every time. If this new party is *your* party it has to become *our* party and to do this it has to be properly democratic, meaning it makes decisions in groups selected randomly from all the people.

This then is totally doable. In fact, it is totally practical – it sorts out the “taking up all your evenings problem” – the old nightmare of everyone having to *be there* to decide everything – direct democracy as death by endless meetings. Each person can rest assured that people like them will be there, no one will be getting themselves selected by getting their own people to crowd out yet another meeting on a rainy Thursday night. Distortion, corruption, and entryism are designed out. We can relax.

The only reason why anyone would object would be because they have the old Hobbesian panic that they will no longer be entitled to run the show themselves or with people like them. That old patriarchal top down prejudice that ordinary people, ‘the mob’, cannot learn to reason. Such attitudes have no place in a genuine party of the people anymore than attitudes that put down people on the basis of their race and gender. Such views are totally unacceptable. Time has moved on and it now has to move on further. And, as it happens, moral principles aside, all the research on the topic is glowingly enthusiastic. It turns out that ordinary people can and do make perfectly ‘rational’ decisions. After all, in this country, we have had juries selected by lot for over a thousand years and law and order has not collapsed, yet. Why should anyone think that, on the basis of a plurality of good information and a diversity of witnesses, any group of ordinary people cannot come to good decisions about collective life? In truth, it is a no-brainer. The technology exists to make it precise and efficient. We can

institute it tomorrow. Everyone will love it. Not least, Mrs Jones and everyone like her.

Sortition then drives a stake into the heart of the core problem: this iron law of oligarchy at the centre of political parties. It is also designed out by having the parties controlled by local and regional associations – where the party is the national ‘political instrument’ for decentralised power bases. In Bolivia, for example, the socialist party there was set up by pre-existing regional associations, an already existing mass social movement, to give them representation in the national parliament. These associations choose candidates and decide policies. These two elements of hard power are constitutionally decentralised, or rather there is no constitution as such. These associations are only partially territorial. They can be based upon occupation or particular cultures – for instance, farmers, or indigenous people. No one has a monopoly on a certain geography. Often this makes it messy. But that is the point. No one can impose a clean ‘rational’ singular membership and leadership structure on it that thereby ensures the slide to oligarchy and alienation. And of course these arrangements are far from perfection – this is real life. But the proof is in the pudding – for several decades in Bolivia this arrangement has resisted the ‘iron law’, and no doubt for that reason, participation has remained very high compared with “properly organised” parties which, as we will discuss, is why the socialist party there has won election after election.

So what can this show us about how to organise regions and localities in the UK? First of all we have to understand that when we create this movement/party, the movement has to come first. But, as I promised, this essay is not yet another easy rant against the people in charge – against centralisation and the supposed joys of decentralisation, as the debate is framed. The ‘grassroots’, as anyone with practical experience of organising knows, can have its own special varieties of

toxic *totalities* – the petty power politics of ‘rotten boroughs’ as they used to be called. As the Bolivian example shows, a key part of the answer to this is deterritorialisation – no one gets a monopoly of power over any geographical area. This, of course, goes against two centuries of conventional political practice but it also goes against the domination of the ‘law of oligarchy’ at the local level over those two hundred years. As at the national level, as soon as you create a centre of power and processes of self selection, no elections will stop the gradual, or not so gradual, degeneration into the rule by the few. I have talked to many people around the world who have set up social movements. We like to compare notes. We all agree, as soon as you set up groups or chapters based upon towns or boroughs, then that is the point when things go downhill. They get taken over by the weird, the mad, and the bad, as we will discuss below, new initiatives are seen as challenges to local power and blocked, and participation collapses. People revert to paying their monthly sub, staying at home, and hoping for the best. It is exactly the model neo-liberalism wants and designs for, through its addiction to territorialisation. But it was not always like this and can be different again.

In fact the design solution is simple. Sure anyone can set up a group but no one can claim the land – there can be no colonial land grab – we all know where that leads! Notice that in the Chile shantytowns and in the Bolivian regions, collectives are centred around social activities or occupations – soup kitchens, housing co-ops, farmers groups, small trader associations and such like. In our UK context then anyone can set up a group within the movement to do assemblies, campaigning, mutual aid, it’s “let a hundred flowers bloom” but no one gets to wear the local crown – no one becomes the king (or the general secretary) of Bolton – not even an enthusiastic grandmother. Again if this sounds messy then that’s the point. There is what the neo-liberal instrumen-

talists term 'redundancy' – an arrangement that is 'sub-optimal', but that is how it needs to be to promote real popular power, meaning high participation. Participation will only be maintained if people can vote with their feet. If you don't like this co-op you can join another. If that assembly is getting shouty you can go to another that is organised properly. The big lesson over the past hundred years is that real socialism cannot be created through imposition, but through culture.

Culture

Participation then is not just a physical thing — people showing up, it's about *culture* — a culture that goes beyond the old politics — beyond "the economic and political" to this "right of the person" at the heart of what dignity means. Unsurprisingly the way this works gets excluded by the totality of power — from its groups, its conferences, its books and manuals, even from its conversation. This *essence*, as Adorno calls it, is hidden but at the same time you cannot keep it down because what we are dealing with here is humanity itself. The concept of the *political*, as the instrumentalism of power, makes the lifeworld invisible. And what is made unseen can create no challenge. This then is the 'regime' we have inherited. It goes all the way down to the very way we see and speak. Let me give you an example, the *concept* says "This is a meeting about the state of the water industry. We are here to resist the obscene corporate control of our utilities". Sounds all good stuff — the language of political struggle for the past two hundred years. But what is actually going on? I mean *really* going on. Someone comes into the room. They sit down.. They think "uh, I'm not feeling very welcomed", then "well, at least I got out of the house", and maybe "hmm, they're done up this hall quite nicely". Two people sit down a few seats away and one of them is thinking, "I hope it's not going to be

as boring as the last meeting my friend got me to come to". Later on during the meeting the single person is going "I don't really like that speaker's hair cut" and then, "hmm she looks nice over there". Back to the two friends, one of them is drifting off, "I wonder what to watch on Netflix later", and then "only 15 minutes to go, maybe we can leave early".

Notice two things: none of this is about the water industry and all of it is about what people actually think about in real life. I mean let's be honest. The social completely inhabits the political, all the time! This is what Adorno and Benjamin are going on about when they talk about the 'particularities' of the *monads* — the fragments and traces of our luscious humanness. We are always chatting and if it is not happening between us, it is happening in our heads. But don't get me wrong, we're not throwing the baby out with the bath water here. We are absolutely mad about the bloody water industry shitshow — absolutely — but at the same time, most of the time we are thinking about someone's tie colour and their hair chat — we think about *culture* because we are *cultural beings*.

So what does this mean? It means that people have to engage in the act of speech — meaning they have to be allowed to chat. People are empowered by *proximity* — sitting together in small groups and sociability — meaning they chat. This is not surprising given this is what we have been doing for hundreds of thousands of years. This is what I "found" in an award-winning research project I did at King's College. I did the design for the first meeting of the rent strike I told you about. 32 people showed up. There were only two short five minute inputs, about the 'political' stuff. The rest of the time was spent in small groups, having go-rounds, each person speaking in turn and being listened to so everyone gets to speak (and so feels empowered). By the end of the meeting people were positively evangelical.

They all signed up for the strike and left with a list of things they were going to do. 80% of them, in follow up questionnaires and interviews, felt empowered by the experience. Two weeks later I did the first meeting for an education campaign — the same sort of people with a similar number of people in the room — but with the 'usual format': four speakers, all very worthy from a 'political' point of view, and the question and answer session when (as expected) four men asked 'political questions'. People were looking at their phones, drifting off, no doubt thinking about ties and haircuts. In the questionnaire and interviews afterwards only 20% felt empowered by the experience. And the proof was in the pudding. 28 of the rent strike people came back to the second meeting — only 8 for the education campaign. There is nothing unusual here — it's just that what is going on is not seen. The identity of the *political* suppresses the anti-identity of the *cultural*. The boredom, the alienation, and the resulting drop of participation is a reflection of the antagonism between very different modes of organisation. What we have is the core contradiction of a politics that demands liberation but creates repression. And so people exit.

These dynamics play out so universally that it is embarrassing that Western "radical" politics still chooses to engage in such impositions of puritanical masochism. As James said in his interview, believe it or not, "political meetings" in other countries involve singing and dancing. They really do! What is the world coming to? They do it not just to enjoy yourselves, but because it works. It builds mass participation, as shown over and over again, by researchers such as myself. For example, Phillip Oxhorn in his Chile study writes that the top reasons people take part in mutual aid activities is because of "solidarity and community", then "increased consciousness between members" and only after that comes "material resources". Just about all the groups including in

their "activities" include going to the beach and celebrating feast days. That is how to build a mass movement! It was cycling clubs and walks on the moors that built the British socialist movement in the UK as some readers may know. I recently read another study, about the *MST*, the movement of landless workers in Brazil — one of the biggest social movements in the world. When they went to a new area what did they do in their first meeting — read out bits from *Das Kapital*? No. They sing and chant. I hope you are smiling reading this.

Here in the UK, as part of my research, I worked on meeting design for a small trade union in London, the Independent Worker's Union of Great Britain (IWGB). We got people speaking and listening in small groups. The president of the union called the empowering results "absolutely fantastic". When we did the rent strike, you may have noticed, we did a survey first which enabled the tenants to speak and for us to listen. This created the human connection which led to the collective commitment to strike when asked to sign-up during a second conversation. Similarly when we do door knocking people are generally twice as likely to say they will come to an assembly if they are listened to for a few minutes while they respond to survey questions, compared with if we just talk to them about why assemblies are a good idea. Commitment is built through listening not speaking. The teams I worked with in Extinction Rebellion and Just Stop Oil each organised a thousand public meetings up and down the country. Not a single meeting had a Q&A. People broke into small groups and went round in turn speaking and being heard. Extinction Rebellion set up 400 groups in a matter of months, and Just Stop Oil organised thousands of people to be arrested — but none of that would have happened without this new *culture* — a way of organising that enhanced the person and gave them dignity.

Cultural design also has to take account of the universal problem of "difficult" people. This is the single biggest problem of building participation in ongoing groups and it has to be dealt head-on. Most groups and projects decline and die when the weird, mad, or bad take them over. Let me be clear, there is nothing intrinsically wrong about being weird, mad, or even bad — after all I could easily put myself into at least two of those categories (and given you are reading this essay maybe you could too!). There are many extremely creative and committed people out there but this does not mean they should be leading groups. Most people are 'normal', in the sense they are not interested in strange habits, wacky ideological theories, and they definitely don't like to be pushed around and abused. As soon as this behaviour becomes embedded in a movement space people head for the exit and the moment of mass mobilisation is lost. To grow groups you cannot have this 'tyranny of structurelessness'. You have to lay down rules on what is okay and not okay, and, even more crucially, delegate explicit responsibility to set people to ask people to leave when these rules are broken. Otherwise the bystander effect locks in whereby noone challenges people because noone else is doing it, and so nothing happens, and so people just quietly stop showing up.

This then brings us onto training. As I have said, I am in complete agreement with the traditional centralists who say you cannot leave the grassroots to their own devices — things go bad and chaos is the result. To that extent I am with Hobbes. But the traditional solution of command and control does not work any better than letting people just *get on and do it*. The solution is training, training, and more training. Every social movement that gets to scale only does so due through systematic training programmes. The landless workers movement in Brazil I mentioned involved millions of people over decades. It was officially about occupying land but it actually was

one massive training and education project. The action and solidarity came out of this investment in people — in the person and the dignity of that person. So first, this is not how to do stuff but how to be with each other — how to work in a team, leadership training, dealing with conflict and, yes, how to ask people to leave. And then there are all the technical skills — door knocking, running assemblies, and campaigns — and political education on how the world works and how to change it. This cannot be done in fifteen minute chats fitted in before events — nor can it be long boring seminars with endless powerpoints that no one reads. Trainings need to be put into ongoing programmes with stages for people to pass through — beginners stuff, intermediate level, and advanced. And trainings have to involve at least 50% active participation: go rounds, role plays, feedbacks etc. So it is not a matter of running assemblies and setting up organisations, it is all about *training* people to do these things. In other words it is about the quality of assemblies and organisations. A movement that is going to go to scale has to be structured by compulsory training and certification. Of course people can go and do what they want, how they want, but if you want to be under the ‘brand’ then you have to do the training. This is how it needs to work.

If not then, it will just create a three month wonder. Like the recent UK mobilisation of *Enough is Enough*. Hundreds of thousands of people sign-up. Then what happens? The troops are marched up to the top of the hill and back down again, and then it's time to go home. The warm words just turn out to be just that, warm words. Another example was a project called the *Radical Assemblies* which was set up in London about ten years ago. It was initiated by some great people, including some of my friends. Thousands of people came to the first meetings. To give them credit they were fairly well organised, but there was no systematisation. It was not clear what was the plan,

concretely speaking. There was no explicit training programme. And, no disrespect to either Hackney or Marxists, but after half a year those thousands of keen people had declined to literally six Marxists meeting in a pub in Hackney. Many of us know what that feels like. And this is what will happen to "Your Party" without training, training, and more training. A last example is the rent strike. After its great success I had to go onto do other research projects. Myself and my trade unionist friend got the whole detailed routine written down in a 'how to' booklet. We had great hopes of the whole thing taking off but the project group got taken over by far left people who were only interested in talking about what Adorno calls *ideas*. Nothing happened. In fact, hilariously, they threw my friend out of the group. To my knowledge, despite various initiatives, there has been no rent strike in London since the one I helped organise. As James rightly said in his interview, we need *Generation Rent* to organise. But setting up "tenants unions", as he suggests, tells us nothing in itself. Effective collective action will only happen through proper organisation which means a lot of training.

Finally, *culture* means art, not as something stuck on the end, as a little add-on — the band and disco on the Saturday night. It has to be front and centre. The whole language of the old dead 'political' has to be laid to rest. For example, why use the term *conference*? Why not a *festival*? Why not have the comedian Mark Thomas telling some jokes between sessions. Why not have Gary Lineker organising the kids to play football in the breaks. Decorate the wall with murals, and banners. Have a ceremonial beginning. A sing-song at the end. And let the young people design it. These things have to be at the centre of a movement/party that has escaped from the identity of power — the negativity of that power realises itself in the anti-identity of popular culture. And of course, as Adorno would say, soon enough

this anti-identity will itself *become* an identity — a power itself. And so the dialectical process has to continue. New negation will lead to new cultural forms. There can be no permanent oppression of positivity, no "we have always done it like this" but neither should we have the nihilistic status of pure critique — the idea that whatever happens it is no good. Both deny dialectics — the process of creation and recreation. This then is what design, training, and art bring — a richness of living culture. It is what mass movements are made of.

But I think I know what you might be thinking? Or maybe you are thinking that other people will think this. That people will say: *Well, Roger this is all good stuff — all these assemblies, and cultures, and movements but at the end of the day there is injustice, there is capitalism, there is a struggle against the state. We have to win elections, we have to take power. We have to focus on the prize. We need a political party to do that. And that is what we are setting up here.* To which I say yes, and no. Yes absolutely this is not a hobby, a project, an experiment. I 100% agree, those days have gone where we can just mess around. We face a total emergency. We face fascism. If we do not get serious and come together and get on with it, we are going to be done for. Which no doubt is why you are reading this essay.

So yes we absolutely have to win, but we will absolutely not win by trying to win like the opposition wins. What is that supposed to mean? It means we have to be *strategic* — we have to smarten up. What is the first principle of any smart strategy? It is don't fight the enemy on his terrain. We have to choose our own terrain. To simplify somewhat, there are three terrains to the pathway to power. One is policies, we will do this and that. The second is the media, we look like we can do the business. And the third is, wait for it ... doorknocking. The first two are *their terrain* — sure you need some decent and inspiring policies. But whatever your policies they are going to get battered to death, and

besides most of the voters are not interested in ‘policies’, they are not computers.

Second, the media more than ever is a death zone. Whatever you say you’re fucked, you are interrupted, misinterpreted, lied about, brought down. Again, sure you have to make an appearance and show some calm authenticity. But it will never be the winning ground either. These are the spaces of the opposition’s power and their big money. So we come to the truly humbling terrain of ‘doorknocking’. And sure I am exaggerating (but not much) — what really makes people vote for popular left parties is face to face contact, not telling people but listening to them, because this creates the movement which provides the doorknocking which gets you to the win. Doorknocking is about having people, *a lot of them*, a mass movement of them.

This then is the great lightbulb moment of this essay — the ah ha!! Yes of course we don’t want to fight them on the flat open planes of the *political* but lead into the forested mountains of the *cultural*. We do something they just don’t understand because they cannot see it — meaning hundreds of thousands of people listening and speaking with each other at festivals, in assemblies, during house meet-ups, on the doorstep — people speaking with their neighbours, in their mosques and churches, at the sports clubs, the trade union meetings, even the chess club. This is the people power strategy. And it is as old as the hills. Assemblies are not some new fangled election ‘technique’ some weird person like me has dreamed up. They have been the single most important form of human deliberation and decision-making for tens of thousands of years. It’s just that we have been looking at our screens so much lately, we’re forgotten what living a human life entails.

Which brings us onto the core point on all this: that a winning strategy does not need us to do bad things to do good things — the old model of left political schizophrenia. We now have to do good

things to do good things. We can create a vibrant mass movement (a good thing) to win the next general election (another good thing). The social knowledge is there ready and waiting. This then is what smart left populism is all about. It is not about trying to compete in all those power games, it is being out and about, going on tour, speaking with the people, night, after night, after night. It is doorknocking or fascism, as I like to put it.

So now, with a bit of help from Adorno and his friends, we have got our ethical ducks in a row. We now have a method. We need to use that method to build a plan. We are now in a position to ask "What is to be done?". It is all very well having a shopping list of good stuff we want, but we need a way to get to the shops. This requires another whole new theoretical understanding to instruct our practice. And so we will turn to this next.

Chapter Six

What is to be Done? Non-linear Dynamics.

Let me make a big claim. I think the Corbyn and Sultana announcement on creating a new movement/party is the biggest moment of our lifetimes. I need to be more clear. I think it can lead to a global political revolution. It is certainly bigger than the Extinction Rebellion mobilisation, it's bigger than the poll tax campaign, bigger than the 1980s peace movement and the miners strike, bigger even than 1968. I may be wrong of course, but I don't think I am. And I suspect I am not the only person who has thought this in the dark hours of a recent sleepless night. Maybe you are reading this because you are thinking the same. But I am not writing this essay to share a vague intuition, some fanciful dream of a better tomorrow. I believe it to be the case because of an understanding of a certain something. Sure we need everything we have gone through so far — the ability to create, train, and structure a mass movement. We have that, and we

have, in truth, had this know-how for a few years now. But something has been missing.

So what is it? It is an understanding of *non-linear dynamics*. It's a mouth full for sure. But this is the second part of our lateral thinking exercise — to choose an outside point and work back from there to where we are, so as to open us to the new — to something else. To escape from our totality of how the world is and how to do things. Non-linear dynamics is not a phrase that slips off the tongue for socialists or activists. It is most associated with the US entrepreneurial literature — with its notions of "minimum viable project", "first and second movers" and "jumping the chasm", and such like. But, in fact, it has no necessary connection with capitalism or right wing ideas, any more than does the idea of strategy — a way of systematically thinking about what you want. *Non-linear dynamics* is a way of understanding rapid change and how to make that change come about. It can be applied to natural ecological systems, to ideas, business products, and yes, to revolutions. It is really about being able to see how things really work. And, as we have discussed, the notion of strategic capacity, and the whole literature of successful action, points to the importance of diverse teams — where people bring in different ideas and paradigms. This then is how to create the new — the new that will win.

A central idea here is to take an aspect of another system which has a specific function in that system and bring it into another system where it performs a very different function. This process is called *ex-emption*. It is used to explain evolutionary processes, for example, how animals grew feathers for warmth which then lead to the 'discovery' they could be used to aid flight. A human cultural example is the fusion of San Francisco hippy culture with the new IT industry in the 1970s. Originally Los Angeles was the main centre for IT companies, way ahead of San Francisco, but it was locked into a traditional top

down corporate culture. The free flowing creativity of San Francisco's alternative culture was exampted into the venture capital world of the rapidly developing IT business sector and as a result the area surged ahead of LA in attracting talent and investment.

This then is what we need to do with the Left space and non-linear dynamics — bring them together for this new movement/party project. There is also some history here. Over the present century, there has been an ongoing tension between what could be called *community organising* and *mass mobilisation*. Various other terms have been used but the general tension is that while it is important to create a deep organisational capacity, it is also important to take advantage of "moments of the whirlwind", as Paul Engler describes them in his classic book on radical political change, *This is an Uprising*.

The challenge then is that the present moment is a massive whirlwind potentiality — where these non-linear dynamics come into play but also where a rapid growth process has to be structured and organised. We have seen this problem play out with the rapid mobilisations of Occupy and various 'revolutions' such as the Tahrir Square events in Egypt. Very little concrete political change happens because of a lack of organisation — people go to the street and then go home. On the other hand, community and workplace organising, and related approaches, get bogged down in focusing on small victories which fail to scale into structural challenges against the system itself. However it is possible to do both — cultural and political change can happen very rapidly but we need to know what we are doing — meaning we need to be fully aware of this challenge and proactively design our response to it.

So how is it done? There are, I believe, two things that have to go together. You need to have a grounded strategy you know will work. We already have this. Over the past few years the teams I work with

have designed and enacted mass mobilisations using a bunch of designs that bring together proximity and sociability to create empowerment and commitment. We know how to scale rapid organisational growth. Both Extinction Rebellion and Just Stop Oil went from start up to become the biggest campaigns in the UK in around six months, increasing their full-time staff from a handful of co-founders to over 100 people in both cases. We then took the model and systematically replicated it in many western countries. In several states — Germany, Italy, France, and Sweden — we successfully created the largest climate campaigns in those countries, getting near universal name recognition for the new ‘brands’. We see similar processes with the rapid take-off of various Left mobilisations such as Syriza, Podemos, Bernie Sanders, and of course with Momentum and Corbyn in the UK. So it can be done, and it can be done on an even bigger scale. But for this to happen there needs to be something else — something that makes the whole process surge forwards. We know that mobilisation through assemblies works. We have the evidence — the numbers and the ratios, as I will show below. But the whole thing needs a massive start up boost to take it to a mass scale. The Sultana and Corbyn announcements have created that boost.

Let’s look at the specifics of this moment then, from the point of view of *non-linear dynamics*. What this approach is basically saying is that systems can create positive feedback processes. In simple terms what this means is that A creates growth in B and the growth in B in turn creates growth in A and so on. And with each iteration of interaction the amount of growth increases — growth goes exponential, meaning there is a growth in the rate of growth itself. So, for instance, a non-linear exponential sequence is 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, 64, 128... the rule being that the number is doubled at each stage of the sequence: the *rate of growth increases*. This can be compared with a linear, straight

line sequence such as 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14... Here clearly there is growth but the *rate of growth is constant* — the rule being that 2 is added to the number at each stage of the sequence. This might all look pretty easy to understand but non-linearity is actually extremely difficult to anticipate and plan for. As the famous scientist Albert A. Bartlett said "the biggest problem for the human race is that it cannot understand the exponential function". We see the disastrous consequences of this in the extreme difficulty of getting our heads around the exponentially increasing collapse of the climate. We are told we are heading into a 'new normal' when, in fact, the new normal is that it is *not* normal. In other words, we see climate as a static 'event' — like *a* problem or *an* issue to 'solve', rather than an ongoing process that will never end. The same cognitive error applies to our new movement/party. Our brains assume what we are dealing with here is an 'event' — the creation of a 'something' rather than a process. As Adorno says the *concept* is the noun. The *anti-concept* is the verb. And then it is even more difficult to think of a process that takes off with ever increasing speed. So this is the central strategic challenge here — it is two fold. We have to understand that this process with the new movement/party has gone 'mad', and we then plan for this 'madness' so it is structured and organised. It can be done, but we need to focus with absolute dedication on what actually is happening, and what can happen if we play our cards right.

Let's look at an example of what I am saying here. There is a restaurant in a small town. The owner and staff work hard and it ends up being the best place to go and eat out at. It wins a competition and is named "best restaurant" in town and, as such, lots more people go there. It is not that it is massively better than the other restaurants, but the mere fact that it is marginally better enables it to be named the 'best' place. This is called 'the winner takes all' dynamic. Whoever is 'best', suddenly gets a disproportionate amount of attention, money,

resources etc. Liverpool might not be massively better than Arsenal but they have won the league and so they get the fame and fortune that goes with it. But crucially, it does not stop there. If the team running the restaurant are smart, they will be prepared for the non-linear surge in customers, and thus additional money and media attention. They will be ready to use those additional resources and opportunities to build a restaurant chain which therefore will be eligible to enter a national competition for best chain in the country. And so it will then be able to win this prize, which then in turn propels the business into becoming the top international brand. The point is not that this process will definitely happen, but that the probability that it will is maximised to the extent that a team prepares in advance for non-linear growth and so optimises the allocation of any exponential increase in resources so that they drive even more exponential growth. That then is the challenge.

So let's return to the specific case of the Sultana and Corbyn announcements. We need to do some maths here. *momentum* = *volume* $\times$ *speed*. In this case, at the time of me writing this text, around 700,000 (*volume*) people have signed up for the new movement/party in just over a week (*speed*). I cannot be the only person who has been taken by surprise. A few weeks before the announcement I worked on a plan for the new movement/party that assumed an announcement would create around 100,000 sign-ups and then, if we did a certain A, B, and C, then we could get it to 250,000 people within six months. So non-linearity has predictably caught us off guard, but we cannot allow ourselves to be caught off guard again. What is crucially important is to recognise that this is not just the 700,000, but it is 700,000 that has happened in just a few days. It is the combination, i.e. the *momentum*, that can now drive its own momentum — meaning the greater the momentum, the greater the momentum. It became the

"best restaurant" meaning it takes off because everyone is talking about it taking off. It is in the news because lots of people are talking about it, and so because it gets in the news even more people talk about it, and so more people sign-up, and so it gets more news — and so on. It is the 'effect' that circles around and recreates and boosts the 'cause'. It is a positive feedback loop. The winner takes it all.

All good, but we want to focus on this certain A, B, and C which will maximise the non-linear growth potential by allocating our new resources so as to enable maximum growth potentiality. To stop it getting clogged because we remain within the cognitive error of *linear* mode. In other words, we don't want to make the assumption that it will now go linear — that the metric will potter up to 800,000 and then stop – meaning our linear thinking becomes self-fulfilling because we don't act to make it continue its non-linearity. To put it bluntly, what we need to do is to be smart and courageous enough to realise that 3 million people could sign-up but only if they see that 3 million others are signing up! In other words this is all about keeping that momentum moving. The key reason that the restaurant, in our example, wins the best restaurant of the country award is not just that it invests to make it a chain, but that they did it quickly while people were still talking about it and it is in the news. It is about speed then, not just volume. In other words, getting to 3 million sign-ups, in so much as it is potentially possible (and we don't know that it is not), will have to lead to actions on that A, B, and C within weeks, not months, to maximise the possibility of breaking into the "biggest political news story of the year" so people are going, "Oh my God, did you know that Corbyn thing has passed 1 million sign-ups" and then, "Oh my God, did not know that Corbyn thing has reached 2 million sign-ups the last month — you know what, I think I am going to sign-up too", and then "Oh my God, I don't believe it, its passed 3 million people, it's the

biggest story of the year, I'm going to tell my friends to sign-up". What we have to understand then is that it does not slow down, *it speeds up*, for no other reason that we get it to speed up!

Stages of exponential growth

So I am going to outline what needs to be done in some detail to make this happen. The point of showing these details is to concretise exactly what should happen. So you can see it is credible — it's totally doable if we have the strategic smartness and courage. At the same time, obviously, it will not work out exactly like this — real time tweaks will be made as we get more data and feedback, some things will turn out differently. But that is not the point. The point is to create a concrete plan for off the scale growth — so that, insomuch as it can be fulfilled, it is fulfilled. So we need to make an educated guess on where the present level of momentum could get us. This is a broadly mathematical process: it is about following the arc of the curve on the graph. As mentioned, I originally assumed that if the sign-ups hit 100,000 in the first month then we could push that curve upwards and end up with 250,000 after six months. The curve is steep. It definitely has momentum but it settles down broadly between 200-300,000. With 600,000 in a week we are in a very different ballgame — that is a massively steep curve. The whole thing is just getting started. We can crash though the 1 and 2 million mark and we should plan for 3 million signs give or take a million within 6-12 months. This then is where we need the courage to follow maths. The maths is pretty easy and objective. What we have to resist that little *linear* voice in our heads going "no, that is not possible" — that we have to follow a straight line on the graph. No, what we have to do is to stay ahead of the curve, as the famous phrase goes.

What staying ahead of the curve means is that we focus most of our attention, but critically not all our attention, on the next step. The optimal design is that we design the next few weeks in great micro detail asap — the questions for break out rooms, the copy for emails, and such like. But then we also attend to the next two to three months with a *macro* level of detail — meaning we know about the big milestones — what the big events should be and put in dates for them, assuming we are hitting 1 to 2 million sign-ups. And last, but not at all least, we ‘seed’ design the layout of the maximal growth scenario — the 3 to 4 million sign-ups. What would this look like? What sort of organisational arrangements will we need? The function of doing this is as much psychological as technical — it frames our collective imagination so we role play such an outcome and so we believe in it and so plan for it. And then we need to think about depth. Again most of our attention needs to focus on the *core* — what we are doing with the existing 700,000 sign-ups — how can we bring them into pathways of greater commitment. Then we attend to the *semi-core*, those groups we already network with to bring them into a closer connection. And lastly, but again not at all least, we have to ‘seed’ connections with the wider social space — the spaces we will need to engage with when we have 3 to 4 million signs: the social institutions and media networks who are at the moment stand-offish but will not be at that level of growth when we are the “biggest political story of the year”.

There is another core consideration here and that is communication technology. In the old days news in Britain would take days to reach all around Italy or Russia. Now it is instantaneous. In other words, non-linearity potentialities are massively amplified across time and space — and so the potentiality for the deepening connections is also amplified. In particular, I am talking about zoom. We all remember having rubbish online calls during the pandemic — frozen

screens and not being able to hear properly. But now there is a whole new situation. Literally tens of thousands of people can meet together online with a reliable quality of connection. They can be put into thousands of small break out rooms to chat, and, I have recently been told, there can be real time translation.

This "changes everything" as they say. Remember, the two key factors in mobilisation are *proximity* and *sociability* — meaning people chat, and they chat in small groups. That is now possible, on a massive scale. Again in the old days Jeremy and team would have to trudge around the country doing face to face meetings in a sequential and linear fashion — all with big overheads of time and resources — and so momentum would inevitably be lost. Now in a few hours you can send out messages on email and social media with a zoom link and in a matter of days you have tens of thousands of people on mass zoom call. This really does change everything.

Okay, so with all this in mind, let's work on a plan. I will go through each stage and explain why I think each stage creates the maximum momentum for the next stage. The point is each state is not an 'event' but part of a process that aims to get us to the next stage. It is always about the *mobilisation*. I will focus on the central architecture of the system growth and then loop back and look at how this core thrust can and must be elaborated upon to create greater connectivity across the system. We will need to create a parallel growth in support systems to build the organisational and cultural depth to make the whole show sustainable.

So, first, we cannot fit all 700,000 people on a zoom call. So we should organise regional zooms as soon as possible. Within a matter of two to three weeks while the whole thing is still in the minds of the public/the media (it's one system). As I say, this is super easy to do. We split the country up into around 7 or 8 regions: the South East,

North West, London, Scotland etc. Everyone on the database receives the zoom link for their region. The links are promoted on social media, signed-up people are encouraged to share them with friends, the press are informed. So each region should have around 100,000 sign-ups, give or take. Let's assume that around one in ten people come onto the call. So that is around 10,000 people. Zarah and Jeremy obviously have to come to each online event — so in a matter of just two to three weeks they get to speak directly to the 70,000 or so of their most enthusiastic supporters. And notice that a zoom call is massively accessible and so inclusive. You just have to click on the link on your phone or laptop — it takes a second or two. You don't have to get on a bus or in a car and travel anywhere. You don't have to find a babysitter. You don't have to spend any money which you may not have.

The zoom call then follows the research — the speeches by the two leaders are short and to the point. Then all the thousands of attendees are given a crash briefing on listening to each other in a go round in the online break out rooms: "We are all here to respect each other and so don't interrupt, okay, everyone is okay with that — great". The break outs enable people to introduce themselves and engage in that all important act of speech. Then people come back and they hear about the big plans for about five minutes. Then they go back into break outs to discuss what they think and how they can help. Lastly, people come back to the main call and fill in an online form: enter their details, give a donation, and agree to bring 2 to 3 friends or family members to the next zoom call for their own city or county. Critically, people can get the zoom link there and then, and sign-up to go along. The design of a process of increasing commitment has to be seamless, meaning at each stage the next stage is already fully organised. That is the golden rule. And it was all done and dusted in around 1 hour 15 minutes.

The next step is to hold around 20 zooms calls for the particular localities within each region. So, for instance, the North West call gives links for the subsequent zooms calls for Liverpool, Manchester, the Lake District etc. All these calls again are promoted to the whole 700,000 database so, if people missed the regional call, then can go straight to their city or county call. And the links continue to be promoted on social media and to the wider left and mainstream media. This thing is then it continues to build because it continues to build, as has been explained.

It is important that these 140 city/county calls stay online for two important reasons. First it is going to take some time to train up enough people to create quality-controlled offline mass meetings and assemblies which empower people rather than put people off. And secondly, experience has shown that ‘ordinary’ people — particularly in working class and/or poorer areas, will not travel into the centre of towns and cities for meetings, and so, if we are going to be truly inclusive for both ethical and mobilisation reasons, we need to keep things online for this next stage. Again the assembly-like format is broadly the same. Short speeches and testimonies, break out for discussion, explanation of *the plan*, and more breakouts — this time for people in particular parts of the city or country to go to the same breakout room and organise the next step for their locality. So everyone in Moss Side on the Manchester call goes into breakout room X.

This then is where we literally hit the ground running. As we have seen, the key way to create initial connection and thus commitment is to do a short survey. You do not knock on the door to tell people how great Jeremy is. You knock on the door to say that Jeremy and Zarah and the whole movement/party thing want to know what you want for your family, your community — and the country. In other words canvassers *listen*. So how do we transition from tens of thousands

of people having the usual transactional neo-liberal relationship with the new movement/party: sign-up, pay your tenner, wait and see how 'they' do? We move people to *our* terrain — to a situation where people are going out and listening to people on the doorsteps and then inviting them to hundreds and then thousands of local communities assemblies — where again they get listened to and get to speak. They will be briefed by local coordinators (see below) in the breakout rooms and be encouraged to join doorknocking sessions and come to the local assembly events. People then are invited to go straight into a practical activity — doing surveying, signing people up to local whatsapp groups and bringing them along to the assemblies. At these events they will be put into empowering small groups, where they can discuss what issues and policies should be priorities for the new movement/party.

At this point we can do some numbers. Obviously these are rough and ready but estimates are a lot better than having nothing. We have suggested that 10,000 people will click the link and come and see Zarah and Jeremy on their regional zoom. Then each regional zoom will lead to around 20 city/county zooms — that is 140 (7 regions x20) calls with each with around 250 attendees — that is around 50% of the people from regional calls. Out of these 250 people we could expect 100 people to do an average of 10 hours of doorknocking over the next ten weeks — some will drop out and some will do more than one hour a week. So that is 140 localities with 100 people doing 10 hours of doorknocking each — making a total 140,000 hours of listening to people. We know from our own canvassing work that 6 to 8 people an hour give their number to be put on a local whatsapp group, and agree to come to an assembly, *if* you do a survey with them first. As mentioned this is around double the positive response you get if you just talk to them and then ask them to do stuff. The survey then is

a gamechanger in terms of securing sign-ups . And this is without mentioning the magic words of "Jeremy and Zarah", and the prospect of concretely feeding into the policy formation of the "biggest movement/party in the UK". In addition, people will naturally spread the situation through word of mouth and on their social media, getting their friends to sign-up to the whatsapp and come along to the assemblies. Lastly, the key design here is that these assemblies will be in local communities, only up to 15 minutes walk away from the people who are being doorknocked. It passes the proximity test — ordinary people will show up because it is their own neighbourhood. So we can estimate each of those 140,000 hours lead directly or indirectly to 7 sign-ups on whatsapp groups — that is 980,000 new people. If we assume the 800,000 online sign-ups will slide up to 1 million by Christmas 2025 then, with the doorknocking sign-ups, we get to a total of 2 million.

But it does not stop there. In fact it never stops — it's a momentum thing! At the national election last year, we found that assemblies to support radical independent candidates led to 50% of participants signing up to door knocking. So if each of the 140 localities does an average of 10 assemblies in the poorer and more radical areas, and 10 volunteers from each assembly stick at doing the doorknocking for an average of 10 weeks doing 1 hour a week, then we have another 140,000 hours of doorknocking, each hour getting the sign-ups of seven people, leading to another million sign-ups. We get to our jackpot of 3 million sign-ups! Again, this will also be driven by the momentum effects of getting that number of sign-ups. Doorknockers go, "so we have 2 million sign-ups already, do you want to sign-up as well?", "Oh my God, hey Joe you know this Corbyn thing has got 2 million sign-ups... yeah 2 millions, shall we sign-up too... yeah sure

sign us up." It's a momentum thing. If it happens fast because it's happening fast, that's why it has to happen fast.

There is then one final step to this process before we take a breath and go "okay so how do we organise all these people". All of this cannot be fake, just another political move. It has to be absolutely straight up *real*. First, because that is what our political values demand, and also because that's what brings people in for the long term. We win by being good. So those millions of people need to input into the party programme and strategy because the party belongs to them. This happens in two ways. First the assemblies decide on five policies/issues they think are important. The outcomes of these thousands of assemblies are aggregated and feed into the first movement/party conference/festival. The process is real and transparent. Second, all the people who input into the assemblies and have signed up, each have as much right as a 'person', as anyone else, to go to the conference. So it has to be like they get a lottery ticket and a thousand of those two or more million people get chosen — again in a transparent and open way, to come to the foundational event with all the artistic razzmatazz we can muster. No one gets to because they are more or less 'important' than anyone else, because in this party we are all equal. We actually are — it's not just more warm words.

And this great historic act of the people's deliberation is livestreamed to thousands of local assemblies in community centres, pubs, front rooms. It's like the World Cup, you can watch the full game: the speakers, the deliberation sessions, or just the highlights. And yes, Gary Lineker is back organising the football games in the breaks! So the local meet-ups, however large or small scale, have their own break out groups and feed in their views in real time. "Did you see the speakers on the wealth tax", "Yeah sounds like a good idea", "What shall we say 30% or 40%", "Well 40%, fairs fair right". They press

the 40% button. All this data then gets aggregated and feeds into the thousand person national assembly event. And this assembly, selected by sortition, looking like a cross section of the ordinary people of the country because that is what it is, makes the final decisions. It's the same with the constitution, and with the choosing of a national leadership team. It is all decided over a number of days, with real-time feed in by the millions of people getting updates on their phones. There are lots of details and options here I do not have time to go into, but I hope you get the idea — you sense that great thing about us humans — we really are capable of doing something entirely new. We are for making history. And this has never happened before — real time tech enabled one million person democracy events. It will be global news (because it *is* global news). It is entirely possible. And so we have to make it happen.

Training and Organisation

It's time to take that deep breath. We need to train and organise, for all the reasons we have discussed. This is not Occupy, Tahrir square, a flash in the pan. This thing has to be made to last. The principle is, as I like to call it, "one step at a time sweet Jesus" (sorry if that is a bit culturally specific!). First we need to go back and start with where we are at, here and now, as I am writing this. Having talked to a bunch of people I think it is realistic to think within the climate/assembly/radical democracy spaces we have around 300-500 people who would be ready to help create a training infrastructure. Again I am going to be specific here so you can see the details, while, at the same time, we know it will not exactly turn out like this. I suggest we start by having weekly national zooms for the trainer people. We create an initial good enough to go training course — four two hour zoom sessions on door-

knocking, running an assembly, running a campaign, and creating a culture of respect and service. Every mass movement take-off event of the past few decades focuses on one thing — not training people but *training trainers*. It's a *non-linear* thing. No way are these few hundred people going to be able to train tens of thousands of people in a matter of two to three months. That is linear thinking. Each week we have the capacity to run national zooms for each of the four sessions with 50 people on each call — but we are not training people in how to do doorknocking, assemblies etc — we are training people to train people to do these things. Within four weeks we can have 300 trainers up to train people, drawn from the 300-500 people and other networking contacts. Some will be paid to work part-time or full-time — others will have other commitments and may volunteer one or two nights a week or do a weekend training once a month. We will then be in a position to do national and regional trainings online, as well as the 300 people being assigned to do offline weekly or fortnightly trainings in the 140 city/country areas (approximately 2 people for each area).

The next step then is to create a firm organisational structure. This requires that we recruit two part- or full-time organisers for each of the 140 areas who will have specific responsibility for organising the doorknocking and assemblies for their city/country. These people will be selected from the national database and given a short intensive training and then ongoing mentoring. They will meet each week with other organisers in their region to get support and compare notes. They will head hunt people in their localities to form coordinating teams and organise regular training events with the trainers. This way we quickly create an authority structure in each area: two people responsible for building the mobilisation in their areas. This then is the core of the whole mobilisation project. It's what the donations should be used for — to pay people to do a proper job: to bring on

those tens of thousands of people to do doorknocking, assemblies, and organise in their communities. This is the organisation that builds the resilience for the longer term. This system then can consolidate around set training programmes and certification processes. For a certified movement/party assembly to happen the people running it will have to go on the four session training course. The events then will be quality controlled. Badly run assemblies, as seen with *Radical Assemblies* and other previous projects, are not empowering at all. There needs to be a clear central control over the localities. But critically the control is over *process* not content. No assembly is told what to think. But they are told how to organise so that people can think in an empowering way. This way we overcome the top down versus bottom up dichotomy. And it can be done. Extinction Rebellion trained thousands of people in the basic Movement DNA and campaigning skills in a matter of months. Movements in the States have done the same through this golden rule of 'train the trainers'. And world's biggest mass mobilisations in places like India and Brazil have been sustained over decades by this solid backbone of a systematically embedded 'constructive programme': a wide range of training and educational courses.

The same then applies to quality control at the national level. People can be chosen by sortition to be trained to oversee the process of running large national assemblies — the conferences/festivals. The two key areas are the organisation of the selection processes for these events, and then the agenda setting and choosing of speakers and witnesses to input into sessions. The general principle is to have a division of power and responsibilities and a transparent oversight by sortition based selected people from the sign-ups/membership. These people rotate, so fresh pairs of eyes come into the central systems, and then can communicate to the movement/party via open sessions and

written reports. No doubt there will need to be a number of iterations for such arrangements to settle down. But this is the general direction of travel.

Going International

This thing then is going to be big. And if it is big, it will not stay in Britain — whether you want it to or not. When I helped set up XR we made a crucial strategic mistake of thinking this was going to just be a UK thing but that is not how non-linear dynamics works. It does not respect national boundaries. We are in an open world. Someone can jump on a zoom call from Tasmania and join our grandmother in Bolton in a matter of seconds. The Extinction Rebellion occupation of London and its success in forcing Parliament to declare a Climate Emergency became a leading global news story. Extinction Rebellion set up in 70 countries in the following months. And it was a chaotic mess — because we had not strategically prepared for it. This cannot be allowed to happen again. You cannot just give the brand to the first people who come along from country X that say they want it. That is not democracy, it is allowing the most privileged and savvy movers in a space to take control. No, what has to happen is that if you want the brand you have to go on the course. The expansion is fractal. The same thing that happens in the UK happens in Italy, Canada, and Argentina. It goes like this. First, we are pro-active about it because it is going to happen anyway. So Zarah and Jeremy accept that international greatness is being thrust upon them and do a series of ‘international zooms’ for different global regions, as the demand develops. They obviously share hosting these events with speakers from that region. Then the breakout groups are for each individual country. A central coordinating team is created with UK people who headhunt

and train and support people from that country. They then have a national zoom just for that country. This leads to regional zooms, and then to city/county zooms, as we have already described. A dedicated national team trains trainers and organisers for the city/county areas using the basic four session programme. These organiser teams oversee the running of 5-15 assemblies in these local areas which then feed into the foundational national conference/festival at which a constitution, policies and leaders are chosen. Of course there will need to be flexibilities for particular conditions, but also the red line design principles which ensure a high quality participatory process, such as well run assemblies and sortition based national assemblies. Some people will want to do it their own way which is fine, but again if you want to use the brand (whatever it is called) then there is a deal. There is then always a balance. It is difficult, but then these things are always difficult. But it is better than allowing a neo-liberal free for all, or imposing some form of Leninist totality.

Winning Elections

Somewhere in all this we also win the elections. Which is how it should be. The winning of elections is the by-product of a mass participation movement/party. As discussed, we are not going to be fighting on the opposition's terrains — on the 'policies', on the 'media', with everything dependent of our leaders. All these sites are part of the ecology and need to be attended to, but they are not the main show. The main show is on the doorstep and in the breakout groups — the *proximity* and *sociability* of being listened to and being able to speak. This is our terrain — and the opposition cannot touch it because it is dispersed, being 'many to many' there is no head to cut off. And it is *face to face* which has been shown to trump the superficial and

transactional connectivities created by social media and the big money behind it. Our election strategy has to be this: armies of doorknockers feeding into thousands of assemblies which recruit even more armies of doorknockers in a non-linear fractal expansion during every election campaign. There are plenty of recent examples that point to this massive potentiality. I recently read about Zohran Mamdani, the guy who won the democratic nomination for Mayoral candidate for New York. In *The Economist* (I like to keep up with what the opposition is thinking), in the final paragraph of the piece on the New York election, it mentioned that "a factor" was that the campaign has 10,000 canvassers. The opposition has not quite caught on yet that these are the "barbarians" at the gate of capital. But they will.

However again, for this strategy to work it has to be real, meaning it has to be the assemblies that choose the candidates and the programmes. Sure, the national programme will be set by the national sortition assemblies, but the regional and local programmes need to be set at the regional and local level. As discussed with the Bolivian model, the critical design is that the hard power of candidate selection and the local programme has to be situated in the locality. Otherwise we just slide back into oligarchy — and its corruption and the consequential collapse of participation. We lose the armies of doorknockers and thus we lose the election. This then is the central argument of this essay for any hardened realists reading it: no participation, no left power. Period. But local control is over content not process. Assemblies have to be run by trained movement people, they have to be certified to ensure quality — localities just as much as centres can become 'rotten' — mini oligarchies. And then as various different candidates are selected for one single constituency then a single candidate can be chosen via a single or a series of open hustings. So local people can vote for the person they want. Quality control has to be put in place ensuring,

for instance, that only people from the area in question chose their candidate. And, of course, if other progressive Independents, Greens, or Left candidates want to join the husting process, the more the merrier. The revolutionary principle is '*the people decide*' — there are no back room deals and pacts agreed centrally, in closed rooms with then the members/peasants told who to vote for. Those days are over.

There is, of course, a lurking fragment of a left totalising perspective here which is panicking that the 'wrong candidate' will be chosen, and what if the 'wrong' policies are prioritised. Let me make a structural point here. In a pre-revolution historical moment, meaning a time when the level of social and political repression has led to a massive popular alienation from the political class and the state regime, when the levels of real democratic control over the rich and powerful have so self evidently collapsed, then the last thing we need to worry about is that ordinary people will not move to the left when allowed to collectively imagine what they 'really want'. This is overwhelming evidence that the outcome of citizen's assemblies over the past two decades moves to the left, whether on abortion, climate, or equality. Sure they will be anomalies and outliers — this is a real life complex system, but the general direction of travel will be more leftwards than even hardened activists' expectation. Let me give you an amusing example. Going back to the London rent strike case, at the initial meeting we presented some facts and figures about how much profit the landlord made out of renting their flats. In this case the majority of the properties were owned outright and they were massive cash cows. The rents had doubled over previous few years while the overhead costs remained broadly flat. The 'hardened activists', myself included, who organised the meeting, expected the assembly would go for something 'realistic' like a demand for a 5% or 10% cut in the rent. But having heard how much they were being exploited, they all decided on a 40%

cut demand. Who were we to go against the democratic process! This then happens again and again. The reason why many people are not radical is because they do not believe it is possible to be radical — they think it will not ‘work’ and so it becomes self-fulfilling, helped along, of course, by the corporate media, but in non-linear historical moments when everyone is deciding things together because that is what is happening — people will decide on what is just because suddenly justice is *possible*. This then is how it works.

Follow on developments

There is not room in this essay to go into detail on the many possibilities this central architectural design opens up. But controlling the means of *social* production as we might call it – the creation of mass participation – has a similar potential that Marx and the left tradition saw in the structural demand to take control of the “means of economic production” — the factories, the banks, the state. So I will cover a few directions of travel, each of which could easily have their own essay to investigate their own participatory designs. I will look at some options at a local national and then international level.

At the local or regional level the main move is to create permanent city or county assemblies which parallel existing ‘old regime’ councils. A possible design is that all the neighbourhoods have a series of local assemblies once every six months and they then feed into a six monthly all-area assembly with people selected by sortition from the area’s sign-up database. Movement/party councillors voted onto the council will make public pledges to follow the policies and priorities set by these six monthly assemblies. So they are then directly accountable to the evolving priorities of their areas. These ‘all area assemblies’ will be given a plurality of information and witness inputs, in the same way a

citizens' assemblies are generally organised. There could be some carry over of people from one assembly sitting to the next to ensure a balance between benefiting from experience and continuity, and ensuring a rotation of people. The training and experience involved in taking part in these assemblies, will empower participants to feed back into the culture of their local communities, bringing people together, and spreading the skills which enable various forms of collective action.

The next step then is to move to a participatory budgeting arrangement. Following the successful model from Porto Alegre in Brazil, this does not need to be a formal constitutional arrangement. An areas' participatory budgeting assembly can gain influence over the conventional council through its transparent structure and popular legitimacy — being the voice of local people rather than that of the old political parties and their business interests. A model could be to have yearly local assemblies to consider priorities for the council's annual budget. The local assemblies then send representatives to the all area assembly that aggregates all the local priorities into a single budget, aided by movement/party elected council members, and technical assistance from council employees. The budget then is presented to the council which will be under democratic pressure to accept it.

A space then also opens for mutual aid projects that can be supported by local people and financed from these participatory budgets. There can be a number of standard designs each with a national training course so that people can learn best practice before setting up their own organisations — for instance: how to create food co-op; a mental health project; a self build eco-housing company. National networks of these mutual aid projects can create support and mentoring groups. They can be promoted on the neighbour whatsapp groups, recruiting volunteers and asking for donations. Local and ethical businesses can pay to promote offers on the local whatsapp groups and local com-

munity websites. This then brings in money to support the start of the new projects. Conditional commitment can be used to leverage a critical mass of initial participants — "we need 200 families to join a food co-op for Bolton in order to get 20% off basic food stuff. Sign-up here if you would join, if 200 other families also agree to join". What we see here is how a critical mass of local assembly participation can trigger a cascade of local collectivities, particularly as people can see such

developments happen in other areas.

Lastly assemblies can develop sectionally as well as geographically. They can be run by charities, local businesses, religious groups, trade unions, sport clubs and such like and be able to feed into the all area assemblies and participatory budgeting processes. Sectional groups and their community campaigns can be promoted on the whatsapp groups. In this way the movement/party gets buy-in from other community actors who can benefit from the general rise in local participatory mobilisation. The pie grows bigger and all boats rise, to mix my metaphors.

On the national level the biggest challenge is the actualisation of popular power in the face of corporate opposition, both nationally and internationally. This is a massive area of strategic consideration but again there is a simple and decisive mechanism to support national level confrontations: *people power*. The 'party' does not have to be on its own, sad and lonely. This does not just mean tens of thousands of people in the streets protesting though, no doubt, this is an essential source of popular pressure. The new move here is National Citizen's Assemblies created by the movement/party in combination with other popular actors — unions, churches, campaigns — which then consider particular issues. Through the standard combination of national sortition selection, open deliberation, and lack of external pressure

from private interests we can credibly establish the national popular will to gain democratic legitimacy for radical change. These national assemblies can start off being outside the 'old regime' system and then progressively gain more effective, and then constitutional, power — an end point in the UK being making an assembly permanent by replacing the House of Lords. The fundamental strategic move here is for a future movement/party government to follow the lead of these assemblies and so derive their political power from their legitimacy. So, instead of being undermined as reckless and extreme by the corporate media, they can simply and correctly respond "well we are following the will of the British people, as shown by the recent citizens' assembly deliberations". And while we are mentioning the corporate media, a priority should be to have citizens' assemblies on their distortion of our democratic life, leading potentially to overseeing bodies which contain people selected by sortition, rather than the representatives of various private interests. So again we see how this rupture of popular mass participation creates a cascade of structural democratisation and accountability across the national and in the local space.

Which brings us onto what has to be the meta-strategic prize: international assemblies with the global popular power to tame the power of global capital. And in doing so, to tackle the overwhelming obscenity of our time — the continued emission of carbon which violates the most basic rights of the world's poor and future generations. The process again should be fractal. The exponential increasing number of left movements/parties in many countries jointly set up the first international assemblies. Initially they will just consist of people selected by sortition from these national movement/party databases. But then they can develop into assemblies selected by sortition from all the populations of the countries with a high level of movement/party presence. Finally, Global Assemblies can be selected from effectively

the whole of the world's population. A parallel process then develops in terms of popular power. Initially these assemblies will only have symbolic power but they will start to come up with demands which can be used by national and international campaigns and movements to pressure their governments. They give political legitimacy to these movements as it is evident that their demands are supported by the majority of people in many countries. The final step is when these assemblies are able to parallel and surpass the United Nations as the legitimate and authentic voice of the people of the world in the twenty-first century, and gain effective and even constitutional power to enforce the will of a global democracy upon state and private actors. This, as we all know, is the final goal of any truly sustainable humanity.

There is an underlying meta-principle on all the development: we have to design the design process. This is the structural and non-linear move. We focus on the design of how designs are created and implemented. We do this through creating central guidelines, which are communicated in a soft power way via training and certification processes. "You can do what you want but if you want to be in the set up with the coolest best practice, then you need to do the course". Then there is a transparent accounting and feedback process so the best social practices are identified and then spread around the system via the training and certification processes. There is a complete feedback system. We get the best of collective action practice without the deadweight of central command and control. This then is the future of human design.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

"The time has come when one can predict the future in terms of an either- or".

George Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn* 1941.

Everything I have written in this essay stands or falls on our response to one indisputable fact — the rupture that is 600,000 people signing up in seven days for the new Corbyn/Sultana movement/party in July 2025. As I write this on the 11th August around 10 people or so, at the centre of this initiative, have an enormous opportunity and so an enormous responsibility. This essay is written for them. In a few days I meet with some of them, and what I have written here will be given to them. And what will be will. The situation then is this. Imagine a row of dominos — 500 of them in a row and on the last one is written, "human survival and flourishing". It seems so impossible to be able to get to it. It is so far away. And yet those 10 people have been given, through this rupture, a first starting domino. If they choose to push it over then a process will start that knocks

down all those 500 dominoes to get to that final one. So, as Orwell put it — "we are in a situation of either-or ". We get to that last domino. We get to survival and flourishing, or we do not. Humanity gets to live or it does not. We get to the humane socialism those ten people want so dearly, or we face barbarism — a fascism that will bring us our final ruin.

We all know this is not rhetoric. It has been told to us in a 1000 books, a 1000 reports. It is on the news every week — it is everywhere. Whether it's the nuclear thing, the climate thing, the AI thing, the whole damn system out of control thing. We have never been in this situation before in human history — facing a universal final end in an exponentially increasing number of ways. But there are certain fragments of the past we can learn from. When George Orwell wrote the above quote bombs were falling on London. It was 1941. Britain stood alone against Hitler. No one knew how it would turn out. To understand what Orwell was saying we have to understand a Nazi invasion was an absolutely real possibility. He says to the British people, "we either make our words take psychical shape or we perish". He says the time is over for the "emotional shallowness of people or who live in a world of ideas and have little contact with physical reality". He has no time for the "inner clique of politicians who have brought us to our present pass". He calls Chamberlain, the appeaser of Hitler, "a stupid old man doing his best according to his very dim lights". Doesn't that remind us of someone.

This then is what we are up against again now. A politician class that is completely incapable of grasping the enormity of this moment. The question then is whether this inner core around Jeremy and Zarah will also prove to be incapable or whether they will push over that domino. They have made the first brave step. They have made the announcement — set a foundation. Now they have to build a team. They

have to bring people in who are *not them* — so they can build that all important strategic capacity. Diversity is the most vital component of collective intelligence and we need all the intelligence we can get.

What I have laid out here is a first draft of what needs to happen — there are plenty of gaps to be filled in, iterations to be worked upon, tactical moves to be developed. But one thing I am absolutely 100% sure of. We will not get off this road to hell without the full participation of ordinary British people — that grandmother on the housing estate in Bolton and millions like her. Unless we can have the courage to trust these people, we are lost before we start. That domino gets pushed over the moment we let go of our power and decide to listen and allow people to speak. Everything starts with that. All the planning, organising, training, it all starts with that absolutely fundamental democratic principle: we come together or we fall apart. This then is the truly democratic socialism for our century. It is what makes the impossible, possible, and then inevitable. It is the substance and it is the hope.

I feel very emotional writing this. I have been organising people for forty-five years. Participatory design is my life's work. I have done well over my 10,000 hours thinking about it. I think about it every day. What I have written is the best I can do. I have two more days before I get out of prison after a year of sitting here in this cell. I have to edit the text, and get it emailed.

In the face of the enormity that confronts us I feel an overwhelming humility. I can only hope you, reading this, feel it too. There is so much weight on our shoulders. But then, as was written on a wall in Chile, "We, the most humble, will win".