

Urban neoliberalism, strategies for urban struggles, and 'the right to the city'

**Interviews with Neil Smith and Jamie Gough,
by Özlem Çelik**

Dedicated to the memory of Neil Smith, 1954–2012

Introduction to the special section: Urban neoliberalism, strategies for urban struggles, and 'the right to the city'

Capital & Class
2014, Vol. 38(2) 414–451

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DOI: 10.1177/0309816814533291

c&c.sagepub.com



Özlem Çelik

Middle East Technical University, Turkey

Jamie Gough

University of Sheffield, UK

Abstract

The strategy and demand for the 'right to the city' was first advanced by Henri Lefebvre in the late-1960s. The concept has been used as a slogan by urban movements in various countries since the 2000s, and has also been discussed in left academic literature. This special section of *Capital & Class* contains interviews on contemporary urban politics and the right to the city by two Marxist urbanists, Neil Smith and Jamie Gough. These are preceded by a brief history by Jamie Gough of the idea and use of the slogan. Neil Smith died in September 2012. Jamie Gough begins this special section with an appreciation of Neil's enormous contribution to Marxist geography.

Keywords

Right to the city, urban neoliberalism, urban struggles

Introduction

The strategy and demand for 'the right to the city' (hereafter RTC) was first advanced by the great Marxist social scientist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre in the late-1960s. For Lefebvre, the RTC meant the design, production and control of all aspects of the city by

Corresponding author:

Özlem Çelik, Middle East Technical University, Turkey.

Email: ozlemcelik.mail@gmail.com

the collective working class. Although little used in the thirty years that followed Lefebvre's proposal, since the 2000s the slogan has been taken up by urban movements in many countries. These movements have often used RTC to refer to the right to the use of urban public spaces and the right to live in (central or inner) cities. It has also referred, more widely, to the right of residents to participate in decisions on spending by local governments, and to economic arrangements for the supply of affordable housing. The RTC was even incorporated into Brazil's new constitution in 2001.

During this period, a considerable left academic literature on the RTC has also appeared (for example Mitchell 2003; Sugranyes and Mathivet 2010; Brenner, Marcuse and Mayer 2011). In 2008, David Harvey, the Marxist geographer and urbanist, published an influential essay on the RTC, in which he argued for the usefulness of the slogan in Lefebvre's meaning, while giving it a particular interpretation. In 2011 Özlem Çelik interviewed the Marxist geographers and urbanists Neil Smith and Jamie Gough on the RTC, Harvey's article, and contemporary urban politics more generally; these are to be published in Turkish in Çelik, Çarıkçı and Türkmen (forthcoming). This section of *Capital & Class* contains the two interviews, previously unpublished in English. The interview with Jamie Gough has been updated for this edition.

In September 2012, Neil Smith unexpectedly died at the age of 58. We begin, therefore, with a brief appreciation of Neil's major contribution to the development of Marxist and revolutionary geography.

The section continues with a short history of the idea of 'the right to the city', particularly useful for readers who are not urbanists. This explains the power and appeal of the slogan, but also the variety of meanings in which it has been used. This is followed by the two interviews. These consider contemporary urban problems, the connections between them and the ways in which urban movements can make connections between these problems; the record of recent urban struggles; the usefulness of the slogan 'the right to the city'; Harvey's argument that struggle should focus on the production and use of surplus value in the city; the dialectics between the particular and the universal; and finally the relations between urban, national and international politics.

Neil Smith's work

Jamie Gough

University of Sheffield, UK

Neil Smith was a Ph.D. student of David Harvey, and over forty years, his work developed the Marxist spatial political economy of which Harvey was a pioneer. Smith's first book, *Uneven Development* (1984), remains a key contribution to this field. In it, he explored the relationship between 'nature' and humans at a time in which there had been very little theorisation by Marxists of this relationship, and when the green movement and ecological concerns were weak (though growing). Smith argued that 'nature' (by

which he meant the world's ecosystem) presents itself as 'first nature', external to human society, but as 'second nature' is *constructed by* production. Under capitalism, second nature is increasingly commoditised and created in specifically capitalist forms. The book also set out a theorisation of the spatial unevenness of economic development within capitalism. Fixed capital investment roots production and workers in territory, and differentiates territorial economies; but this is contradicted by the mobility of capital, which tends to equalise territories. A high rate of profit in a territory attracts capital investment; but this tends to raise input prices, particularly of labour power and land, reducing the rate of profit, and leading to disinvestment. Since this eventually causes falling input prices, the direction of capital flow may reverse. These ups and downs of accumulation in each territory are internally related to capital flows across space, which create a 'see-saw' of growing and contracting territories. Smith mapped out some characteristic forms of these dynamics within the global, national and urban scales.

In the 1990s, Smith made an important contribution to a debate amongst left geographers concerning the significance of spatial scale (for example 1992, 1993, 1996). He emphasised the use of particular scales of territory by social actors as means of exercising or enhancing their power. He also began to fill out a lacuna in his earlier theorisation of uneven development, namely the role of social interactions between actors within territories. He focused on cooperation between firms within the territory to enhance their productivity and profitability, and the tension of this cooperation with firms' mutual competition; the territory of this cooperation may be of varied scales from local to national to continental. Missing from this theorisation was consideration of capital-labour relations in production within territories, an aspect of capitalism that played a small part in Smith's writing (as also in Harvey's). However, capital-labour relations *in the social-reproduction sphere* were the focus of another major contribution, on gentrification.

Alongside his work on the abstract theory of space, from the 1970s Smith was fascinated by the more historically- and geographically-concrete issue of 'gentrification'. Up until the 1980s, this term referred to the movement of middle-class people into working-class residential areas, and the displacement of the latter, mostly in inner areas of older cities. Academic writing had sought explanation of gentrification in an increase in professional jobs, and hence workers, in large cities, and in a cultural preference of some of the latter, especially younger and child-free, to live in the inner city rather than the boring suburbs. Gentrification was thus explained by *demand* from professional workers. Smith argued that this explanation neglected the *production* of middle-class housing by developer capital or by the petty capital of individuals. The land market was crucial here: investment in higher-income housing in working-class neighbourhoods was a response to a 'rent gap' – the difference in ground rent or land price between existing and prospective use (1979; see also Smith and Williams 1986). This corresponded to his theory of uneven development, already noted, which focused on capital flows in relation to locally specific prices. Smith's focus on the *production* of the built environment was a useful addition to the theorisation of gentrification. Smith initially over-played his thesis by *counterposing* the rent gap to socioeconomic and cultural explanations: this is explicit in the title of his first article, where gentrification is 'a back to the city movement by capital, not people'. His critics pointed out, and Smith later accepted (e.g. in 1996), that higher potential land price can come only from higher-priced housing, which results from the

greater buying power of professional compared with working-class residents. To understand a monopoly or fictitious price for a commodity (here, housing) requires consideration of both supply/production *and* socially produced demand.

From the 1990s, Smith widened the meaning of 'gentrification' to an increasing domination of *all* aspects of the inner *and* central city by professional work and workers. This included the growth of finance and business-service jobs in the centre, the construction of new offices for them, central retail and leisure taken upmarket, spectacular public buildings to advertise the new city, provision of housing for professionals not only through the conversion of working-class housing but also through new-build flats on central sites previously in industrial or transport use; and the serving of the centre by expansion of rapid transit and airports. Not only were working-class residents being pushed out of inner residential areas, but central public and semi-public spaces were being policed to cleanse them of the homeless, poor youth, and other undesirables (Low and Smith 2006). Smith's initial focus was on homeless people in New York City and their use of scale, sparking his interest in theorising scale-power (1993). Smith gave a specifically political reading of generalised gentrification as 'revanchist', a 'revenge' or directly political attack by capital for previous working-class influence on the city under Keynesianism, by analogy with Haussman's revenge on the 1848 Paris working class (1996). Smith also saw this class-transformation of the centre and inner city as constituting a major part of world capital accumulation as a whole: gentrification is a 'global urban accumulation strategy' (2002). This is particularly evident in the enormous flows of investment into commercial property, housing, rapid transit and airports (something that has been a major focus of David Harvey's work).

From the 1990s, Smith turned his attention to uneven development at the global scale. Godlewska and Smith (1994) surveyed the 500-year history of Western imperialism. *The Endgame of Globalization* (2005) considers US imperialism from the early 20th century to the invasion of Iraq. In keeping with Smith's earliest formulations on spatial uneven development, its economic focus is on capital and trade flows. The book provides a bitter denunciation of the policing of these flows by the US state. Smith never lost his anger and contempt for ruling-class violence against the oppressed.

A brief history of 'the right to the city'

Jamie Gough

University of Sheffield, UK

In the late-1960s and early 1970s, Henri Lefebvre's writing was devoted to 'the city' (more precisely, urban and rural localities), particularly in *The Right to the City* (1968/1996) and *The Urban Revolution* (1970/2003), and to theorising 'space' (the geography of human society) more generally, particularly in *The Production of Space* (1974/1991). (For an account of Lefebvre's writing on cities, see Kofman and Lebas

1996a.) *The Right to the City* appeared just before the general strike and student revolt in France that heralded the long wave of crisis in the imperialist countries. Lefebvre's first motivation in writing about the city was to awaken the left, and in particular the French Communist Party, to aspects of life it had previously neglected. Lefebvre believed that the urban realm had become the crucial site for capital accumulation. Moreover, beyond the realms of production and the waged economy, Lefebvre regarded social life and culture – popular sensibilities and ways of life, as well as cultural products – as deeply political, class questions. This interest arose from Lefebvre's Marxism, which incorporated an admixture of German idealist philosophy (Hegel, Nietzsche). Accordingly, he wanted to develop a critique and socialist politics of the social and cultural aspects of capitalism, which form such a large and visible part of cities and city lives: residential life, housing, street life, commercial buildings and cultural monuments, the meaning of places, modes of transportation, varied urban cultures and sensibilities, and so on. But this was not merely sociology or cultural studies: he wanted to integrate an understanding of these aspects of life with political economy; and he wanted to emphasise how space (area, distance, scale) is not merely a passive container of social processes, but is an essential, active moment of them. In short, he was interested in the entire set of inter-related social relations within localities, and in linking them.

Lefebvre's critique of the contemporary capitalist city was for the most part rather abstract. The city privileges exchange value over use value. It embodies alienated work and alienated patterns of consumption and spectacle (Lefebvre was associated at one stage with the Situationists). It thus fails to meet and in fact violates human needs and desires, and also violates the natural world. The capitalist land market creates fictitious capital in land, renders territory as 'abstract space', and imposes value-processes onto every urban activity. A more historically concrete critique is of social space within the city. The promise of the antique and Renaissance city was of a place of meeting, social encounter and interaction, conversation and debate, social conflict and politics – a kind of 'concentration and centralisation' of social relations. But in the modern city, most people's residences are decentralised to lifeless dormitory suburbs, with the city centre appropriated by the ruling class as residential and social space, and for its control centres. Moreover, the ordinary residential areas become increasingly differentiated and separated by income, ethnicity and culture. Thus the strong degree of *socialisation* inherent in the city is increasingly contradicted by its social-spatial *fragmentation*.

A revolutionary politics of the city is therefore required in order to overthrow these oppressive processes, and to remake the city in order to realise human needs. The subject of this politics is the working class, understood in its Marxist sense of those dependent over the course of their lives on wages. Through this politics, the working class comes to collectively control the labour of production and social reproduction. This implies the collective *design* of production processes and products, of buildings and infrastructures, and above all of the organisations (the concrete social relations) that run these on a day-to-day basis. The working class becomes the creative class. Lefebvre sometimes depicted cities, both capitalist and in the future, as *oeuvres*, literally 'works', which can be understood as both labour ('road works', 'steel works') or as in 'a work of art'. In the socialist city, it is the majority that creates the city through labour *and* design, 'mental' and 'manual' work. It is this control of the city in all its aspects, whether practical, moral or

aesthetic, material or symbolic, which Lefebvre called 'the right to the city'. Note, then, that this is something completely different from a bourgeois-democratic right; and it goes far beyond the right merely to be *in* the city.

As to how such a RTC can be developed, Lefebvre gives some hints. Radical ideas can develop out of 'heterotopias'; that is, places within capitalism in which social praxis can begin to challenge, or at least partly escape, from capitalist social relations. But this does not imply that development of the RTC proceeds through the propounding and setting up of utopias – of which there has been a myriad over the history of capitalism (see Harvey 2000: Pt. 3): Lefebvre derides utopian approaches. He proposes that *scientific knowledge and concepts* of the city, the expertise of urbanists and planners, are a vital moment in the development of a revolutionary politics of the city if this knowledge is put at the service of social movements, in dialogue with them, rather than providing them with technocratic blue-prints. The development of the socialist city has to be feasible.

The slogan of the RTC largely disappeared from left academic urbanism and activism in the thirty years following Lefebvre's major writings on the city. But since the 2000s it has been revived, though used for the most part in more restricted senses than Lefebvre's: the right for *the poor to remain living* in central and inner areas of the cities, and the right of all groups *to use public spaces* of the city. These issues have arisen from important developments common to many cities across the world in the last two decades or so. First, the eviction of the poor from central and inner areas of cities and their expulsion to the periphery, or out of the city altogether, has become pervasive in both the Minority and Majority Worlds. The poor have been evicted from inner-city areas partly through the market mechanisms of ground rent and land price. This started in some Minority World cities from the 1960s, with middle-class people buying up housing in formerly working-class neighbourhoods (classic 'gentrification'). But on a larger scale, lower- and middle-income people have been increasingly unable to remain in the major cities due to housing costs, and unable to migrate to these cities. Thus in the last twenty years or so, many people have had to move out of London because they cannot afford housing there – a process which the current government is now accelerating by cutting state benefits to the poor. But in the last twenty years, the eviction of poorer people from (inner) cities has increasingly taken place through state-organised 'urban regeneration'. The growth of finance, business services and the media in central cities, and the attendant increases in the number of professional workers in cities, have led to property developers' redeveloping areas of housing of the poor for high-income housing and up-market consumer services, as well as offices. This led Neil Smith to argue that 'state-led gentrification' of inner cities had become a major, global strategy *for capital accumulation* (Smith, 2002), echoing Lefebvre's view of urban investment as central to capital accumulation as a whole.

Capital investment in city-centre housing and consumption in turn led to the 'cleansing' of 'undesirable people' from public spaces: homeless people, working-class youth, especially black youth, 'potential muggers' and so on were increasingly excluded. This has taken place both through direct policing and through the privatisation of shopping areas (new malls, private management of existing streets). Moreover, political protests on local, national and global issues which have taken place in the city's public spaces (squares,

streets) have in many cases been repressed by the police or the army. The protestors, and the left more generally, have performed had to demand and defend the right to be in those public spaces. Much of the left academic literature on the RTC has focused on the right to the use of public space: for example, Don Mitchell's *The Right to the City* (2003) focuses on the use of public spaces in the US for political protests. Other important urban texts focus on this subject, but without using the term RTC (for example Low and Smith 2006; Graham 2010).

The slogan 'the right to the city', then, has been used mainly to point to the right of people to live in the city, and to use the city's public spaces freely. The most systematic use of the term in these ways has been in the USA, where the Right to the City Alliance of community campaigns was set up at the US Social Forum in 2007, bringing together campaigns on housing of the poor and the right to use public space, as well as on other social-reproduction issues (Harvey 2012: xii; Smith, this issue).

A somewhat different use of the RTC originated in urban politics in Brazil. It came out of the struggles for housing, infrastructure and public services which developed strongly in the 1990s, a key basis for the growth of the Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, or PT) during that time. Where the Workers' Party took control of municipal governments, these popular demands were given formal expression and also managed, by the process of 'participatory budgeting' pioneered in the city of Porto Alegre, with a population of one million, by a left current in the Workers' Party. In participatory budgeting, neighbourhood and city-wide community organisations debate the allocation of *given* municipal funding to different services and infrastructures, and to different spaces within the city (Abers 1998; Baierle 2002). This led to the RTC being incorporated into the Brazil's new national Constitution in 2001, developed by the Workers' Party.

David Harvey's (2008) essay, 'The right to the city', argues for Lefebvre's very broad meaning of the slogan: that of a collective struggle for control over urban economic resources going well beyond individual citizen rights. However, most of the essay is devoted to a discussion of the role of investment in the built environment (buildings, physical infrastructures) in the history of industrial capitalism. Following his work over four decades, Harvey argues that this circuit of capital is vital for capital as a whole as a way of absorbing over-accumulated or 'surplus' capital, resulting in waves of massive investment in the built environment. These always in the end lead to over-investment, falls in prices and the devalorisation of new constructions, which feed through to bankruptcies of property capitals and the writing-off of their debts to financial capital. This process was at the heart of the financial crash of 2007-8. Harvey's focus on this particular aspect of urbanism leads him to propose that 'establishing democratic management over [the] urban deployment [of the surplus] constitutes the right to the city' (2008: 37). The linking of property- to money-capital is reflected in his suggestion that the RTC 'has to be a global struggle, predominantly with finance capital' (2008: 39). Thus although Harvey sometimes implies a strategy of RTC as broad as Lefebvre's, his main emphasis is on control of investment in the built environment.

The two interviews below discuss some of these ambiguities and possible uses of the term RTC. This discussion is framed by wider consideration of contemporary urban problems and urban struggles.

Urban neoliberalism, strategies for urban struggles, and 'the right to the city', I: An interview with Neil Smith

Özlem Çelik

Middle East Technical University, Turkey

ÖÇ: What do you see as being the main urban problems in developed countries (DCs) in recent times? How can we relate these different problems in urban politics to one another in order to understand their inter-relations?

NS: The central issues of urbanisation in the developed world today all revolve around the specifics of the neoliberal urban regime that developed following the crisis of the 1970s and the effects of the crisis in which neoliberal capitalism finds itself since 2007. In the broadest terms, just as neoliberalism brought a doctrinal reassertion of the fundamentals of capitalist political economy – private property, competition, free trade, and the rule of the market over social not just economic calculation – cities after the 1970s became even truer expressions of the capitalist economy than they hitherto had been. On the one hand, different social and political functions and activities and different populations were increasingly sorted in the urban landscape, and yet this sorting also involved its opposite, namely a destruction or disillusion of previous urban orders, capitalist and otherwise. That is a very broad claim of course, and it obviously applies differently in some places than others, but I think it is a sustainable generalisation. In his book *Urban Revolution*, Henri Lefebvre (1970/2003) claimed that urbanisation was increasingly superseding industrialisation, and while this is too crude a characterisation, Lefebvre was obviously seeing something that has been instantiated during the neoliberal moment of capitalism. Let me mention several specific shifts: The first is rural-urban and urban-urban migration at the global scale. This is often missed when we take the urban as a scale apart from other scales, and it immediately begs the question of the interconnection across the old divide of developed versus developing world cities (I no longer find that a very useful distinction). Certainly, such transnational migration long preceded the neoliberal era, but the partial deregulation of capital mobility ushered in under the auspices of neoliberalism inevitably brought a migration of the variable portion of capital, in Marx's terms, embodied labour power. The resulting problems range from heightened competition over wages, increases in urban poverty,

intensified racism, and the weakening of labour unions which in many places have been slow to respond to the realities of crisis, or else have been entirely defensive. The ready importation of labour has led to a second range of problems, allowing ruling classes in higher-wage economies to dismantle large parts of their social welfare systems, Keynesian or otherwise. This has further accentuated class inequality and poverty. In strictly urban terms, these first two shifts have led to a third, namely a new round of large-scale ghettoisation, making whole new urban landscapes, whether we think of the *banlieues* of Paris, the high-rise poverty of immigrant populations in Toronto, the increasingly fractured and fragmented geography of ethnic, racial and class exclusion, and the increasingly suburban location of the poorer working class, native born or otherwise, in cities throughout the global North.

A fourth and related problem is in many ways the other side of the coin. Neoliberalism has significantly deregulated the land and property markets, and in addition to massive new construction at the exurban margins, urban centres are being rebuilt under the rubric of gentrification, thus intensifying the geography of class division. As societies become more polarised, the urban landscape does so too. The gentrification of the city has become a global urban strategy (Smith 2002) in a way that some of our theories perhaps predicted at the end of the 1970s. Accompanying this dramatic new feature of neoliberal urbanism is an unprecedented displacement and removal of poorer populations as market rules – the ability to pay – have increasingly and more intensely determined the social geography of who gets to live where and under what conditions, and who gets forcefully removed.

In all this, it would be a mistake to assume that neoliberalism has taken the state out of the urban equation: quite the opposite. The state at all scales – urban, national, global – has been central in planning the new geography of the city. The London Plan of 2011 epitomises the new robust role of the state. Among its central emphases are the removal of most workers from the city centre together with an investment in transportation infrastructure that would facilitate the daily movement of workers in and out from far suburbs; the total gentrification of the city centre; and the capitalisation of an ‘environmental city’ as a whole new state-subsidised investment opportunity for capital.

Since 2007 however, with the advent of global economic crisis, the status of the urban has changed considerably. It is important to note that this crisis was triggered at the nexus of city building and global finance capital, namely with the sub-prime mortgage crisis in the USA, the belly of the beast, as it were. The European banking and financial crisis stem from this precipitating event. As just one sign of this crucial connection between city building and global finance (and, not coincidentally, the pattern of class and race exploitation and oppression that is built into capitalist social relations), the BBC produced a map of sub-prime house foreclosures in Cleveland. This was overlaid with a map of African-American homeownership, and overlaid again with a map of Deutsche Bank holdings. All three maps were virtually homologous, demonstrating the same geographical

pattern. This would seem to give considerable weight to some version of Lefebvre's claim concerning the increased centrality of urbanisation as a vehicle of capital accumulation (Smith 2009).

Neoliberalism, we can say, is dead yet dominant. That the problems of neoliberal cities will continue to be the problems in 'cities after neoliberalism' (Smith 2009) is far from assured. There will be some continuity, but also some discontinuity. On the one hand, the crisis has quickened and intensified levels of urban inequality along class lines, and has raised this problem above all others. On the other hand, it is not yet possible to see what the socio-geographical results of the crisis will be vis-à-vis cities, largely because the crisis is still unfolding. A class strategy for sure, the relatively ascertainable *economic* logic of neoliberalism at its highpoint is now subject to far greater and less predictable political direction, and the *political* contours of any solution or indeed of alternatives are not yet in any way visible. Whereas in China, the response to crisis was almost a classical Keynesian stimulus plan aimed at building urban infrastructure, the response in Europe and the USA has been to bail out the financial sector very much at the expense of the people – the 99 per cent.

ÖÇ: **How do you assess the recent practices of the left at the urban scale? How can the relations between urban problems, these real unities, lead to movements, organisations and struggles?**

NS: I think that by 2011 it is now clear that these shifts and their resulting problems have indeed provoked struggles against neoliberal urbanism specifically, but also struggles against neoliberalism that have claimed the city as their own. These are different if obviously related kinds of struggles. Since 2007, and building on earlier more sporadic struggles, whether against the G8/G20 (Genoa), in support of immigrant rights (Paris), or concerning related issues, European cities have erupted with anti-austerity revolts. These have affected virtually every major city and capital city in the region, from Reykjavík to Rome, Lisbon to London, and of course Athens. At the same time in the USA, if at a lesser scale, numerous local but interconnected organisations, broadly gathered under the rubric of the 'right to the city', have fought to put people back in their homes once the banks foreclosed on them, repossessing their homes. 'Take Back the Land' has been the leader in these struggles. Most recently, the Occupy Wall Street struggle erupted on Wall Street in the autumn of 2011 and quickly inspired 'Occupy' revolts in hundreds of cities around the world. So yes, there is new political motion today.

Whether these struggles amount to a movement, or connected movements, is a slightly different question. My best sense is that at least by late-October 2011, the European austerity demonstrations have remained somewhat national and represent pulses of opposition, upsurges en route to becoming a movement, or a group of parallel movements, but that are certainly building in that direction. Occupy Wall Street, which credits in addition to domestic events both the Paris Spring and the European anti-austerity movement for some of its inspiration, has involved far fewer people than the European demonstrations. But Occupy

demonstrations have spread globally, and for all their spontaneity they may well have a greater potential of becoming a movement. At the same time there is a sustained revolt by students in Chile against neoliberal austerity attacks, on education and more generally. And there are many other uprisings. In purely US terms, however, it is already clear that the Occupy Wall Street revolt is the most galvanising political opposition that has emerged there since 1968. What unites these struggles across North America and Europe and beyond is the common experience captured in the stark class politics of the Occupy Wall Street chant: 'Banks got bailed out! We got sold out!'

What all of these revolts suggest is that the future, including the urban future, is dramatically open today compared with perhaps five years ago. This alone is a reason for cautious optimism, but it is important to be realistic. The question you raise of organisation will be of paramount importance. Whereas the post-2007 economic crisis has brought down several governments, from Iceland to Latvia to Ireland, and the political challenge mounted by anti-austerity movements can certainly claim considerable responsibility for the more recent toppling of the Czech government, still the aggressive and vociferous confrontation with austerity and class-slanted stimulus plans has had less success. In Spain and Greece, where arguably the movements have been most powerful – certainly most visible – these revolts have not so far succeeded in halting class-punitive austerity legislation. These movements pose a powerful and growing challenge to capitalism, and they have faced uneven but intense repression and state violence, but neoliberal urbanism, however weakened and dead in the water, remains dominant. Still these movements are more promising as vehicles of social and political change than anything else that has happened in recent years, even decades. What kinds of organisations will be built and – more importantly – sustained, and how will their political aims reframe, remake, retake the city?

ÖÇ: According to Harvey, 'The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanisation. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights ... One step towards unifying [disparate] struggles is to adopt the right to the city as both working slogan and political ideal, precisely because it focuses on the question of who commands the necessary connection between urbanisation and surplus production and use. The democratisation of that right, and the construction of a broad social movement to enforce its will is imperative if the dispossessed are to take back the control which they have for so long been denied, and if they are to institute new modes of urbanization' (2008: 23, 40). According to Gough (this volume), 'the right to the city' is very limited as an approach for the left, since 'rights' are categorical political entitlements. The main task for the left at the local scale, by contrast, is to contest economic, social and cultural processes,

with a perspective of eventual popular democratic control of them. This involves debate around investment in, and distribution of, the material conditions of life; in most cases these cannot and should not be reduced to categorical rights. Do you think that ‘the right to the city’ is a useful slogan?

NS: The ‘Right to the City’ (RTC) comes, of course, from Henri Lefebvre, writing on the eve of the 1968 Paris Spring. It was a diffuse statement, under-specified and radically opaque in Lefebvre’s characteristic way, but it was as politically optimistic as it was enigmatic. As Lefebvre himself put it, the RTC is a ‘cry and a demand’. Together, these features of Lefebvre’s coinage gave the RTC its beauty and political potential, but also its Achilles heel. It worked as a slogan, then as now, in the same way that we might (and do) chant: ‘Whose city? Our city!’; but it also left future possibilities tantalisingly open. The RTC was immediately a source of discussion, debate and not a little puzzlement among academics, and it was picked up by activist groups in the last decade, leading to a certain globalisation of this powerful slogan as an organising focus. In the USA, where numerous anti-gentrification, housing and myriad other urban and community organisations adopted the slogan, a Right to the City Alliance was founded in 2007 and helped galvanise pre-existing struggles into a broad if loosely connected focus for many urban activists. At the same time, it offered considerable reconnection between academics and activists. But it is important to emphasise that this slogan helped galvanise not just national but global interconnections between local urban activist organisations. It is always important to fight for rights, even as, in the process, we fundamentally redefine those rights. In place of the right to private property, for example, we should propose the right to food and housing; in place of the right to buy and sell (exploit) human labour, we should propose the right to a more social organisation of the production and reproduction of daily life. In place of the right to exploit nature, we need to explore the collective right to a democratic, metabolic, production of socio-nature. And so forth. The problem with rights is that these are so embedded in the fundamentals of liberal (and therefore neoliberal) capitalism, and a political focus on rights, while tactically useful, is strategically limited. First, it is too narrow, and incorporates no imperative to look beyond rights to the social relations that make any particular set of rights appear as common moral sense. Second, ‘rights talk’ is precarious, highly vulnerable to political co-option and the re-absorption of political protest into the goal of a reworked capitalism under the framework of existing liberal rights. Third, and more specifically, a political movement based too narrowly on rights risks the confusion of ethics with politics, and this is a particular danger in the present era when a broad post-structural sensibility explicitly confuses ethics and politics. More broadly, in an era in which political struggle and the critical analysis of capitalist ideology has, in the global North, been at a low ebb until very recently, rights talk is especially precarious.

In that sense, I think Gough is correct. In fact, one can already see this process operating in some RTC groups that have emerged, at least in the USA. The best available analysis of this process, I think, comes from my student, Baris Kuymulu (2011/2013), who connects the vagueness of Lefebvre’s initial formulation with

the experience of RTC groups in recent years. Unwilling to relinquish entirely the power of the RTC as an organising focus, nor indeed Lefebvre's intent, Kuymulu suggests both a critique and a constructive politico-intellectual path toward a sturdier and more robust claim for the RTC.

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

NS: I don't find anything to disagree with here, but as with the proposal that we prepare for a 'post-capitalist transition' I think that if we are to make such sentiments practical – the gist of your question – we need to go much further. Inspiration has to come from closer to the movement (Sheppard 2011). The 'democratic management' of surplus might cover a multitude of sins, and a political movement capable of challenging the capitalist organisation of cities will need to be more specific, less all-encompassing. Keynes, for example, was certainly interested in more democratic management of the capitalist surplus, but the rationale for him was in no way to overthrow capitalism but rather to rescue it by reforming and restructuring it. The left today has to be more ambitious than simply calling for a new Keynesianism. We need to be clear that revolt aimed at the radical overthrow of capitalist urbanism is not at all the same thing as democratic reform, capitalist repair. That said, there is no question but that struggles for specific well-considered reforms map out the road toward more comprehensive revolt; the constant demand for reforms is not the problem, rather the problem comes when the reforms become ends in themselves (for example, the goal of a revamped Keynesianism), and especially when reformist struggles obscure and eventually erase the revolutionary goals, dim them from sight.

Viewed this way, the RTC movements work as waypoints along a more arduous yet exciting road. At the same time, it always has to be remembered that groups gathered under the 'RTC' rubric are highly diverse and embody quite different political potentials. Actually, today I am less concerned with what democratic management might look like – we can all come up with hundreds of specific ideas about how to organise housing, childcare, education, public space, medical care, and so forth. Our problem today is not so much imagining what we might want the future to look like. Rather, the central dilemma is first, imagining that such a radical future is possible, within grasp, a necessity; and second, building the social and political power that will allow us to put our myriad imaginings into practice – enable them to be realised in practice.

Let me take the issue of housing. The majority of housing in most parts of the world is consumed today under three main regimes of use: private property (owner occupied or rented), public (social) housing, and informal housing. This

is a system of housing provision intrinsic to capitalism; it serves to enhance the accumulation of capital, buy social peace, and at the same time discard a so-called surplus population to the margins of social non-provision. There has to be a better way. Private housing has become a means of capital accumulation, not just for families wealthy enough to be able to afford it but more importantly for a variety of capitalist sectors from construction to consumer gadget production, and especially for global finance. The central issue here is presumably to decouple housing conditions and acquisition from the right to housing. Public housing has become a repository for those not well enough placed in the capitalist market to allow homeownership, but whose labour is vital to capital accumulation. The central issue here again is to disconnect the provision of a vital human right and need from the class-specific interest in reproducing labour power; the reproduction of labour power is not ontologically synonymous with the reproduction of human life. And informal housing, ranging from homelessness to those who have created their own housing conditions more or less outside the market, is of such inferior quality that with few exceptions it can hardly be called housing. So what to do?

The first step, it seems to me, is to take housing out of the private market. In different places this would have to be done differently, but the point would be to transfer control over housing to a system of neighbourhood collectives responsible for the allocation, reallocation, maintenance and general administration of housing. As regards public housing there are places, for example Scandinavia, where public housing works reasonably well, and might offer not just a reasonable alternative to the private market but in the short term also a foundation for more collective housing arrangements. Elsewhere, in the USA for example, public housing accounts for only 2 per cent of the housing stock – 7 per cent in a city like New York – and is broadly dysfunctional. Here too, with initial state funding, administration could be passed to a system of coordinated tenant councils and neighbourhood collectives. A similar trajectory out of informal housing is not only possible but also variously if partially implemented already in *favelas* and informal settlements around the world.

Such a transformation in the social provision, administration and consumption of housing is easy to imagine, but would hardly be simple to implement. It would have to be coordinated with all manner of other service provision, and would immediately bring to the fore questions of household definition, and prospects for and the desirability of collective cooking, laundry, childcare, etc. It would immediately pose the question of different forms of collective and communal living. The key would be that responsibility for administering housing would lie in the first instance with local democratic organisation. No one looks after homes better than those who live in them.

Here, then, we see a practical example of the argument that the road to revolt and reinvention emphatically runs through the demand for reform and the simultaneous *Aufhebung* (superseding) of these same reforms. The point is not that such reforms will solve all the problems, but to the extent that they succeed they can galvanise the political inspiration that shows revolutionary change to be possible;

to the point that they are opposed and frustrated, they expose more clearly the opposing social interests and thereby also potentially create fertile ground for organisation.

ÖÇ: Harvey argues that particular struggles, involving various and differentiated demands and expectations, should overcome their particularities and develop a universal alternative embodied in a social system. He argues that this involves seeing the universal and the particular not as simple opposites but as dialectically related. What do you think about the universal/particular tension in the development of an alternative urban movement? Harvey further claims that ‘as many have recently pointed out, the remaking and reimagining of “community” will work in progressive directions only if it is connected en route to a more generalized radical insurgent politics’ (2000: 240). How can this connection between local and larger-scale politics be developed?

NS: Indeed. Again, I think this is non-controversial. The trick obviously lies in how to put meat on such abstract conceptual dialectics. There is no formula for that. Not only is there no royal road to science, as Marx famously put it, but there is even less a royal road to making socialism in practice. If a system of housing provision and administration is established along the lines suggested above, for example, how is such a central plank of community reinvention to be articulated with a new regimen of work? How quickly will the abolition of private ownership in housing lead to the broader demand to abolish it in all land? Or the abolition of private ownership of the means of production, more broadly? How are the social divisions between community and work or work and play, all built more or less directly on the division of labour, to be overcome in the process of reinventing daily life? On the one hand I do believe that past attempts at socialist organising in cities have a lot to teach us, from the new Soviet urbanism of the years immediately after 1917 to the organisation of urban Catalonia during the Spanish Civil War, and from Mao’s anti-urbanism to Red Bologna or the workers’ factory collectives in Argentina after 2001. The anti-utopianism of the left in the wake of a failed 1968 has rendered the earlier experiences all but lost. At the same time, we should not shrink from learning the negative lessons of a dystopian Stalinist urbanism later in the 20th century. By corollary, it would be a drastic mistake, as a certain defensive sector of the left does, to go back to these experiences and to say that because the Soviets or Lenin did this or that, our model is set. One cannot revisit this history without grasping how totally experimental these experiences were, usually driven by dire necessity in very specific contexts; and how creative and inventive they were, making many wrong turns; and often learning from these, but just as often not.

Engels’ *On the Housing Question* is an extraordinary document, well ahead of anything being written in the nascent social sciences at the time, and it still has a lot to teach; but we also now have 140 years of subsequent experience with the most dramatic urbanisation the world has seen. In particular, as Lefebvre began to glimpse in *Urban Revolution*, the process of city building now lies at the heart of global capital accumulation. This means that a specifically urban politics has to be

seen as equally central to any organised challenge to capitalism. It also means that we have to see the real interconnections between urbanisation in the 'developed' world and the new urbanism of Asia, Africa and Latin America. We have a lot to learn from the latter; it is not an exaggeration to say that the world's real global cities may be concentrated there and that they represent the cutting edge of a new urbanism.

The housing question, to follow up on our example, is no longer a marginal concern, as it was for so long among socialists, nor is it fully circumscribed by issues of living conditions for workers and poor people. And what applies to the housing question applies also to other urban issues. These issues remain absolutely central, but they are now connected as never before with more traditional struggles over social production – the construction industry, for example, and the predicament of migrant workers – as well as global finance capital. The old dilemma of the impossibility of separating the urban from the non-urban – of identifying what makes the urban a discrete field or experience – is even more intense today. The left has yet to catch up with this integration of previously 'urban' issues into the fundamentals of anti-capitalist struggle, but it is changing, although not fast enough. In the USA, for example – to take the case I know best – one obvious place to start would be with unions and their investment of massive pension funds. It is working people whose homes are being foreclosed by banks in the post-2007 crisis, and yet billions of dollars in workers' pensions underwrite the profits of these same banks, and so there is a glaring opportunity for labour to connect struggles in the workplace with struggles over housing and other aspects of social reproduction – the needs, wants and desires of daily life. Unions have not begun to use their financial power, locked up in pension funds, strategically. Yet this would be an obvious way, beyond rhetoric, for the unions to support not only their members but the broader Occupy Wall Street and related movements, such as Take Back the Land.

The opportunities to connect the universal and the particular and also the global and the local will be radically different in different places. Again, there is no set script. In that context, I'm reminded of something Lenin once said – something rarely remembered but worth repeating:

Marxism, therefore, positively does not reject any form of struggle. Under no circumstances does Marxism confine itself to the forms of struggle possible and in existence at the given moment only, recognizing as it does that new forms of struggle, unknown to the participants of the given period, inevitably arise as the given social situation changes. In this respect, Marxism learns, if we may so express it, from mass practice, and makes no claim whatever to teach the masses forms of struggle invented by 'systematisers' ... We know ... when examining the forms of social revolution – that the coming crisis will introduce new forms of struggle that we are now unable to foresee.' (1965 ed: 213-14)

What is clear, however, is that the limits to the neoliberal version of capitalism are now apparent. If the neoliberal variant of capitalism is dead but dominant – dead because it has run out of new ideas, has lost momentum, and dominant

because as yet there is no global challenger capable of displacing it – still it is evident that unlike even five years ago, the future is again radically open. The opportunities for political organisation and for reconnecting urban with broader issues are greater now than they have been in at least a generation. We are indeed the 99 per cent, and we now have the chance to make the issues of the 99 per cent, not those of the 1 per cent, the dominant issues. What would a new urbanism for the 99 per cent look like, and how are we going to build the power to make it happen? The urgency of this question has never been greater, but nor has the opportunity been more palpable.

Urban neoliberalism, strategies for urban struggles, and 'the right to the city', II: An interview with Jamie Gough

Özlem Çelik

Middle East Technical University, Turkey

ÖÇ: What do you see as the main urban problems in the developed countries (DCs) in recent times?

JG: Over forty years of neoliberalism, a large number of problems have emerged at the 'local' or sub-national scale. I prefer the term 'local' to 'urban', partly because rural areas of the DCs, unlike those of the Third World, have fundamentally the same social relations as cities and towns. Also, 'locality' can be of varying scale, from neighbourhoods to towns, cities, city-regions and regions. Problems of localities have varied considerably between different developed countries depending on their historic forms of capitalism, their particular social relations of production and reproduction, and the conduct of the class struggle over these decades. But in all DCs one sees common processes: the working out of neoliberal class, gender and 'racial' relations, and the developing contradictions of these manifested at the local scale. In the first place, this has meant the reinforcement of the economic and political subordination of the working class (that is, the great majority of the population) to capital at the local scale: the increased discipline of workplace managements over their workforces, the enlistment of the whole labour force of the locality to the task of making the territory compete better in the open global economy, the restriction of welfare spending in the name of inter-local

competition, and the handing over to business of public services, public land and the control of land use. The tensions for women of time, energy and place between caring work and increasingly necessary wage work have intensified. Intensified competition between workers for jobs, housing and welfare services has led to racist competition and movements. All these have benefitted capital and hit the working class; but the atomisation and depoliticisation of labour, which is not merely an *effect* of neoliberalism but its principal *aim*, has been largely successful, so far, in preventing strong opposition emerging at the local scale.

Nevertheless, neoliberalism has run into enormous contradictions expressed at the local scale. All the fundamental contradictions of capitalism are involved. Central is the contradiction between the freedom of owners to dispose of their property and the actually social nature of production, reproduction and our relation to nature. The fragmentation of production decisions between many capitals contradicts the intense productive interdependencies of different branches of investment, including fixed investment embedded in place. People's increasing dependence on commodities for reproduction not only damages their wellbeing but undermines the production of labour power of qualities and location useful for capital (Eisenschitz and Gough 1996; Gough 2002). Capital's unregulated accumulation destroys ecosystems at every spatial scale, severing the real unity of human activity and nature. These contradictions are manifested in increasingly obvious ways at the urban scale: in the closure of workplaces and whole local industries; in the erosion or crushing of the skill, health, responsibility and initiative of workers, which are the necessary basis of productive work; in increasingly uneven spatial development, resulting in congestion and inflation in some localities, and impoverishment, population decline and scrapping of infrastructures in others; in acute shortages of affordable housing, especially in locations in which workers can get jobs; in ever-longer journeys based increasingly on the car; in worsening air pollution with both local and global impacts; and in intensifying neurosis, depression, addiction and inter-personal violence arising from disempowerment and alienation.

All these crisis tendencies are interwoven with the accentuated boom-and-bust cycles that have characterised the neoliberal period. These arise from another profound contradiction of capitalism: the over-accumulation of capital resulting from uncoordinated investments, and the contradiction between restricted real wages imposed by capital and the consumer demand needed to realise its investments. From the late-1980s until the credit crunch, waves of over-accumulation in both productive and fictitious capital were exacerbated by massive credit creation, which global capital attempted to use to restart a long wave of expansion. Thus we have seen the boom-bust cycles in glamour sectors of production in particular nations and localities (the late-1990s dotcom boom being exemplary), and booms and slumps in the building of commercial premises, infrastructures and, in some localities, housing. There have been huge fluctuations, too, in the *valuation* of these assets (fictitious capital), with their devalorisation not only ruining the owners and their creditors but also leading to severe contraction of credit from the finance system, with the global, national and local impacts that we know.

These multiple urban contradictions have damaged capital as well as labour. Social democracy, where it still exists, accordingly proposes to capital that it should attend to socialisation in its own interests. But capital in the DCs is very reluctant to go down this path, for fear of undermining what neoliberalism has achieved for it. This is particularly the case in the countries with the strongest liberal traditions, the US and Britain, and in those countries in which property speculation powered the previous boom, including Ireland, Spain and Greece. Thus the ConDem government in Britain, far from attending to the longstanding crises of manufacturing, training, housing and transport, has set off by axing the already-inadequate state investment in them and their already-weak regulation and coordination, and local governments (including those under Labour Party control) are following obediently along. Capital is too attached to the strong subordination of labour it has achieved to envisage any serious moves towards socialisation of production and reproduction and the protection of nature: this would involve re-politicising economy, social life and ecology. The project of re-socialisation therefore falls to the working class. It may be possible to make temporary alliances with sections of capital over specific issues in particular localities to address socialisation; but these are unlikely to develop into *long term, general* class alliances or regimes.

This analysis is somewhat different to Harvey's in his 'Right to the City' essay and indeed in his work of four decades. Harvey focuses on the flow of money capital into the built environment. Important though these are, urban crises are also centrally about the flow of money capital into and out of 'normal' (non-built environment) production and reproduction services both private and public. The valorisation of investment in the built environment is in the end wholly dependent on these other forms of commodity production and state services. And this production and reproduction in the city *is* labour, the exploitation of labour power, and unpaid domestic work, in modes specific to particular localities (Gough 2014). But Harvey's work gives little attention to capital-labour relations and domestic work. His analysis of urban crisis tendencies is thus partial; and can be read as a kind of spatial fetishism to the extent that the built environment is merely the most visible, concrete (!) articulation of space in the city.

The local scale is crucial for radical politics. As we have seen, both the attacks on the working class and the contradictions of neoliberalism are clearly expressed – and clearly *visible* – at the local scale. From the closure of workplaces and unemployment to unaffordable and low-quality housing and public transport, to air pollution and the degradation of public spaces, the problems are manifest. The crazy polarisations of neoliberalism are increasingly difficult for capital to hide: inflationary, unbalanced growth in some localities, abandonment in others; the spectacular development of centres of business and leisure down the road from derelict poor neighbourhoods; increasing chasms in income and quality of life between rich and poor within the same locality; unmet needs beside unused labour and physical resources. These manifestations of neoliberalism's failure at the local scale all point to the need for the coordination of production and reproduction to

meet the needs of the population, against the claims of private property; that is, for their *democratic socialisation* within the locality and beyond. This potential is the 'objective' basis for the development of radical urban politics now.

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

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

JG: The analysis I have just sketched out suggests that the various problems are deeply related, in that they are manifestations of capitalist–class relations and inter-woven gender and racial oppressions. This provides the basis for collaboration between women, between black people, and across the working class as a whole to address these problems. There is another potential unity which is particularly evident at the local scale: that between production and reproduction, 'economy' and social life, 'work' and home. Industrial capitalism separates these, organising each through distinct, contrasted social relations: waged work is the realm of necessity, of direct subjection of the worker to capital; whereas in social life workers in principle have a realm of freedom, to decide where they live, with whom, and their work and leisure activity, within the constraints of the (household) wage. Bourgeois politics, including at the local scale, mirrors this separation, with largely separate 'economic' and 'social' policies. Yet in reality the two spheres are intimately linked: wages determine workers' burden of domestic work, their housing, mobility and leisure; the waged labour process shapes workers' skills, aptitudes and culture; capital's use of men and women in waged work deeply impacts gender divisions and differences within social life; firms' production strategies affect the price and design of housing and other consumer goods and services; and the reproduction of labour power, within the home, neighbourhood and public services in turn profoundly affects production. And these links mean that social life is not the realm of freedom and 'choice' celebrated by the bourgeois ideology, advertising and the media: it is profoundly shaped not only by the value of the wage but also by the design and supply of consumer goods and services by business and the state. These connections between production and reproduction are *visible* at the scale of neighbourhoods, towns and cities (Gough and Eisenschitz 2010). This gives the basis for a truly radical politics which spans economy and social life, waged and unwaged work, production and consumption, and whose holistic dynamic is to fight for people's *well-being*.

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

JG: Bourgeois politics deals with urban problems one by one, in isolation from each other, through fragmented interventions that typically treat the symptoms rather than the deep causes. It divides policy between 'economic' and 'social' problems; it divides education problems from the division of waged labour, housing consumption from its production, social-economic problems from those of buildings,

land and environment, and so on. Constant failures of policy are the result, as acknowledged in frequent complaints over the 'lack of joined-up government'. But mainstream politics continues to proceed in this fragmented way because to adopt truly holistic policy would imply the *socialisation* through collective organisation and discussion of the whole of society and economy in a territory. It would reveal the root of the 'separate' problems of caring work, unemployment, housing, environment and so on in class, gender and racial oppression. It would thus *politicise* urban processes by showing the fallacies of individual responsibility and market freedom (Gough 2002). The task of a radical urban politics, then, is to show the real potential unities of the city. Popular organisation and action nearly always *starts* around a particular activity – a workplace or local industry, a particular tenure of housing, social care of a particular group, and so on. The direct experience of problems takes this initially fragmented form, and leads to initially fragmented responses. But organisation across the economy/social divide can greatly strengthen struggles. For example, campaigns for free local public transport and for major investment in it can win support from public transport workers as well as from the public and from environmental campaigners. Campaigns for house building and insulation can bring together building workers, the unemployed, and people living in inadequate housing. This cuts across the traditional left 'division of political labour' between workplace and community politics, in which the two seldom come together. It is also at odds with recent reformulations of social-democratic and Eurocommunist ideas, which seek to enhance citizenship, 'social capital' and networks in civil society without any substantial links to trade unions or issues within production (on the false premises that people's working identities are no longer important to them, and/or that workers have suffered complete and final political defeat). On the contrary, the potential power that workers have to halt the production of surplus value is crucial in providing strength to campaigns around social provision and the confidence to struggle. Historical instances in which workers' and residents' organisation have come together show the potentially explosive dynamic. Thus building workers in Sydney in the 1970s, who were waging sharp battles against employers and the state around wages and job security, became immensely popular when they refused to work on building projects which despoiled wilderness, demolished historic buildings, or evicted residents from their homes ('the green bans'). In northern Italian cities in the late-1960s, measures of workers' control in the large factories inspired very radical actions in the social realm, including mass squatting of empty housing and public transport workers allowing passengers to travel free.

Such radical approaches also bring to the fore the fundamental social relations, and show the unity of interest of the oppressed. Thus feminist urban activists have sought to link struggles against linked aspects of women's disadvantage – in housing and its location, transport, health services, waged work, and in public spaces. This highlights the pervasive nature of patriarchal relations across all 'sectors' and aspects of the city. Similarly, linking residents' demands to those of workers demonstrates the class nature of both.

ÖÇ: How do you assess the recent practices of the left on an urban scale?

JG: Here, I will focus on Western Europe, since local politics in the other DCs are very different. Since the 1980s, popular organisation around local problems has been greatly weakened by neoliberalism, which has discredited any kind of collective organisation and collective solutions, and promoted individual private strategies. At the onset of the present 'wave of stagnation' in the late-1960s and early 1970s, urban struggles in Western Europe were a strong part of the overall class struggle. This was in part due to the contradictions of urbanisation which had built up precisely because of the *rapid* rate of capital accumulation in the 1950s and 1960s. Partly it was due to the process mentioned before – that struggles in production can inspire those in the social sphere. And partly it was due to the emergence of movements of especially oppressed sections of the working class, especially black people, women, and lesbians and gay men, who made demands that spanned the economy/social divide. But following the defeats of the unions in the 1970s and 1980s, all attempts at popular organisation, around whatever issue, were undermined by an acceptance that 'there is no alternative', by lack of confidence, and often by fear of direct state repression. The organisation of minority ethnic people within the DCs, who had been at the forefront of struggles at the end of the boom, was weakened by police repression, state repression of 'illegal' immigrants, and by increasing majority-popular racism, cheered on the capitalist media; the politics of minority ethnic groups thus tended to move to the right. Radical organisation around housing, transport and public services was greatly weakened. Individualised strategies towards these resources then appeared as the only possibility: the owner-occupied house, as much an instance of financial speculation as a use value; the privately-governed gated community; car use for every journey; a residential location within the catchment area of 'good' state schools; extra private health insurance, and so on. These solutions were, again, heavily promoted by the media, through advertising and, particularly, TV lifestyle programmes (the 'perfect' home, second home, garden, car ...). The fact that these solutions were out of the reach of most people did not detract from their compelling promise and allure: comfort, security and pleasure through private property. Despite these rightwing pressures, in most of Western Europe there has been resistance to cuts in public services, particularly in school education, health, social care and social work, to their privatisation, and to qualitative changes which make their content more conservative. This resistance has usually involved the relevant trade unions, but has also often involved residents as users of these services, and has sometimes been initiated by residents. Sometimes resistance to neoliberal reforms has been nationally organised, sometimes it has involved national coordination and spreading of local campaigns, and sometimes the resistance has been limited to a few localities. In the UK, for example, unions have resisted the further intensification of teachers' work with some success; there have been local campaigns by unions, parents and students against quasi-privatisation of schools, again with some success; unions have tried to resist, mostly unsuccessfully, repeated restructurings (six in the last ten years) of the National Health Service, which have created fragmentation,

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

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

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

A rather different kind of reaction to neoliberalism at the local level has been to attempt to meet needs through self-provision, organised through not-for-profit or ‘social’ enterprises, voluntary organisations, workers’ cooperatives, work-exchange

schemes (LETS), local currencies, and credit unions. These often pose themselves as 'positive initiatives', in contrast to 'negative' and 'futile' resistance to neoliberal reforms. The idea is that people can do something for themselves and thus be empowered, rather than complaining about loss of jobs and services. The promise of these 'Third Sector' initiatives is that they can provide protected jobs and work experience (albeit at very low pay or none), and that they can provide useful services to local people. In Britain and the USA, this social economy has been concentrated in the poorest neighbourhoods. In recent years there has also been a rapid growth, and not just in poor neighbourhoods, of 'green clubs' or 'transition towns', which again 'positively' promote action by individuals, rather than campaigning for larger-scale ecological programmes. The promise of the Third Sector for socialists is that it spans production, reproduction and nature, gets people involved, develops skills and skilled ways of working, and has social goals. But the mode in which it has developed, at least in Britain and the USA, has been for the most part conservative, internalising neoliberal culture. It has involved self-exploitation; it has lacked any substantial ties to organised workers in the mainstream economy; most social enterprises operate in insecure markets and/or are heavily dependent on short term contracts from the state; they have been a 'acceptable' way of privatising state-run public services; and their 'do it yourself' nature functions to reduce demands on capital and the state. A socialist approach to the local social economy would set out to reverse these features (Eisenschitz and Gough 2011).

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

The recession has caused mass layoffs and reduction of hours in private industry, particularly in the USA and Britain. But there has so far been minimal response by workforces and unions: employers have been able to blame the withdrawal of credit by the finance system, and then, as recession took hold, lack of demand. The blame then lies with highly abstract and reified economic process: how can one fight a lack of credit money or demand? A few courageous workforces have tried to hold out, but the localisation of these actions has isolated them. Significantly, one of the few such local actions in Britain was a workers'

occupation against closure of a factory making wind turbines: the workers gained broad support because their product is a socially and ecologically important one, and again links production and consumption politics.

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

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

ÖÇ: According Harvey, 'The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights ... One step towards unifying [disparate] struggles is to adopt the right to the city as both working slogan and political ideal, precisely because it focuses on the question of who commands the necessary connection between urbanization and surplus production and use. The democratization of that right, and the construction of a broad social movement to enforce its will is imperative if the dispossessed are to take back the

control which they have for so long been denied, and if they are to institute new modes of urbanization' (2008: 23, 40). Do you agree that 'the right to the city' a useful slogan?

JG: Here, Harvey presents in substance Lefebvre's idea of the socialist transformation of the city, with which I completely agree. But I disagree with Harvey that the RTC is a good slogan to encapsulate this project. This is because of the very limited meaning of 'rights' in a capitalist society. The notion of rights of the citizen emerged in early modern society. The core right, as Locke made clear, was the right to dispose of one's property as one pleases. This is necessary to constitute bourgeois property, and the bourgeois economic actor, who can buy and sell through market exchanges, free of state interference. It is inherently a *negative* right: it does not prescribe economic behaviour but rather prohibits constraints on it. A second meaning of 'rights' is strictly political rights: right to the vote, to freedom of speech and to free association, in short, the rights of a citizen. These are binary: either you have these rights or you do not (though of course there are all manner of economic and social mediations of the exercise of political rights). In Britain from the 17th century, these political rights were taken up not only by the bourgeoisie but also by the working class. These definitions of rights suggest both advantages for the left in using the notion, and also the limitations. The rhetorical strength of the 'right to the city' is that it appeals to the popularity in the working class of *political* rights, of formal democratic rights. The subject of this right is posed as *the citizen* not merely of a nation-state but of a city, the word thus reverting to its linguistic root. But the RTC as used by Lefebvre and Harvey is not *in substance* a political right: it is not principally about the right to vote in local elections, nor even to participate in neighbourhood forums and suchlike; it rather suggests participation in substantial *economic, social and cultural decisions* at the local scale. In gesturing towards political rights, the slogan suggests a freedom from dictatorship, from tyranny. And this 'dictatorship' could be of markets, or of capital. However, to give this suggestion any substance would require one to analyse concretely the economic, social and cultural processes that exclude; and these social processes are of a *different order* to political rights. In terms of social substance, then, the slogan of the RTC is rather mystifying. Incidentally, my guess is that Lefebvre coined the term in order to engage with a key audience for his ideas, the French Communist Party. The politics of the CPs of the time envisaged a long struggle for greater democracy as part of an advanced, productive, nationally-organised capitalism; the construction of socialism was indefinitely postponed. Thus democratic rights were fore-grounded, rather than workers' control over social resources.

Another way of putting the problem is that one can easily construct a rightwing version of the RTC. In fact, neoliberal culture does just that, though without using the expression. Everyone has the right to own their own home; buildings should be built where people want them, not where planners want them; car drivers should be free to go on all roads without restriction or payment; the state should not enforce urban speed limits (which is de facto the case in contemporary British cities); public spaces should be cleared of 'riff-raff' so that 'decent people'

can enjoy them and trade is not interfered with, and so on. This is the constant refrain of the rightwing press, magazines and TV lifestyle programmes. In the Majority World, similarly, de Soto proposes that the key next move for people in city slums and shanty-towns is to make them owners of their housing and its land. The left's imagining of 'the right to the city' is of course nothing like this. But this merely shows that the notion of a 'right' to certain resources and spaces is too abstract to get one far: the key question is that of the nature of the *social relations* through which those resources and spaces are constructed, distributed and used.

Nevertheless, I acknowledge and celebrate that the RTC has been used to great effect as a means of mobilisation in recent years for urban movements in both Majority and Minority Worlds. An important strand of these movements has been concerned with the *right to be in the city* (the housing of the poor) or *the right to be in public spaces of it* (for political protesters, the homeless, youth, and so on). In these struggles, the notion of a 'right' seems entirely apt. The right to stay where you are living, and where your community has lived, is a categorical question: it has a yes or no answer. And public space is by its definition open to all, a quasi-legal right, and again a categorical question. I think it is for that reason that the RTC has strong resonance in such campaigns.

Another use of RTC as a mobilising slogan is in the movement for 'participatory budgeting', that is, an active role of popular forums in determining the *spending* priorities of local governments. This was initiated by a left current of the Workers' Party in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre, and it has since spread to other cities in Brazil under the rubric of RTC. Here too, the notion of rights is apt. The financial resources of municipal government are, after all, public property, and in a (parliamentary) democracy they are supposed to be spent in accordance with the wishes of all local people. Participatory budgeting is therefore fully in line with the notion of parliamentary democracy, even if it goes beyond its electoral-representative form. Thus participatory budgeting can present itself as a political right, and take on the latter's legitimacy. But note that the same is *not* true of determining taxation rates and of whom or what is taxed: these are questions of private property rights and 'economics', not democratic rights. For this reason, it is very hard to extend participatory budgeting to popular control over taxation, and thus over the size of the total budget to be distributed; I know of no examples of this happening. This limits participatory budgeting merely to distribution of a given total. This illustrates the limits to democratic rights in a capitalist society, and hence a limitation of the slogan of RTC.

If the RTC, the rights of the citizen, are limited in their purchase on property and economic resources, could a left urbanism proceed through demanding 'rights' to *concrete resources* – the right to a job, to mobility, to healthcare and education, to housing? After all, there have been many left campaigns under capitalism under the slogan 'the right to work' or similar. But such demands immediately raise further questions. What *quality* of job, of healthcare, of housing? To focus on housing, how should provision meet the needs of different sections of the population – number and type of rooms, their layout, open space, location within the city? What prices or rents should be charged in relation to incomes? And how

should the housing be constructed – by what type of enterprises, and with what labour processes and industrial relations? These questions indicate that a radical local politics has to consider concrete financial resources, organisation of production, forms of ownership, and needs. Bare demands such as ‘the right to housing’ may have a rhetorical use in pointing out that there are people who have less than *the most minimal* ‘normal’, culturally acceptable housing; while ‘the right to a job’ highlights that there are people without even the worst job. But if such campaigns succeeded in winning housing or jobs, but only of the worst quality, then they will have failed to create movements which can unify the working class by demanding that everyone’s *needs* be met.

This ambiguity in demands for rights to concrete resources can be seen in the exemplary London Citizens campaign. This citywide alliance of local residents’ and community groups, some with input from churches, has campaigned for the right to a ‘living wage’ well above the national minimum wage legislated by the Blair government. This addresses the massive section of London workers employed in low-paid work in consumer services, manual services to firms, in public services, and in sweated manufacturing, a majority women and a large proportion from minority ethnic groups. The abysmal wages paid in these sectors are inadequate to lead a decent life anywhere in Britain, and even less so in London, with its sky-high housing prices. London Citizens has had some success in forcing public bodies and large firms to pay its target wage. Notice that a necessary element here is the setting of a particular living wage. This is not done by considering ‘rights’, but by assessing workers’ concrete needs, the ability of employers to pay the demanded wage, and the likelihood of being able to get them to do so; in other words, a typical trade union calculation. This is an *open-ended* battle over resources, rather than a right that can be definitely achieved.

The limitations of demands for rights and citizenship suggest a need to move towards building collective control of the working class over economic resources and the making of the city. And indeed, some urban movements under the banner of the RTC have moved in this direction, going beyond demands for political or legal rights. For example, struggles around the right to stay and around homelessness in the USA have spilt over into proposals (and some practices) for the *economic and social organisation* of ‘affordable housing’ (affordable, that is, by blue-collar workers). Similarly, London Citizens has moved in this direction. Such shifts point to a strategy of *the democratic socialisation of the city*. This involves collective organisations that develop knowledge of production on the one hand, and needs on the other. It requires the participation of many different sections of the working class, both as producers and residents/consumers. There will need to be negotiations, balances and trade offs. I therefore agree wholeheartedly with Harvey when he argues that radical local politics seeks collective resources rather than individual ones, and that it requires ‘the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization’. Where I disagree with Harvey is in seeing all this as a ‘human right’. Rather, it is the development of working-class *power* through wresting resources and power from capital and thus developing qualitatively new social relations and command over resources

– in short, collective economic, social and cultural power. This implies, as Harvey says, ‘the construction of a broad social movement to enforce its will’. But rather than ‘the right to the city’, this might better proceed under the slogan of ‘popular planning of the city’ or, more aggressively, ‘popular control of the city’.

This implies a rather different political dynamics from the winning of rights. A right to do or have something implies a ‘something’ which is already known in essence, and which can be definitively won. In contrast, a process of collective popular planning is open ended: an investigation of potentials, of needs and capacities, whose outcome cannot be known in advance.

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

JG: Harvey here seems to focus radical urbanism onto a specific part of local socialisation: the investment of money capital in the built environment. This needs to be seen in the context of the whole article, most of which is devoted to a brilliant discussion of how investment in the built environment has been used as an economic *and political* way out of systemic crises – albeit partial and, because of the contradictions of property development, temporary. But in discussing strategy for radical local politics as such, I think one needs to widen out the discussion: firstly, from investment in the built environment to investment in production as a whole; and secondly, from investment to management of labour processes. Pat Devine (1988) has argued, for me very convincingly, that the essence of planning of value in a fully socialist society should be the planning of major new investments, rather than planning of final prices. This investment is not only in the built environment on which Harvey focuses, but also in machinery, in the quasi-fixed capital of training and research, and in circulating capital (materials, labour power, stocks of output goods). Planning of investment starts with debate on the overall investment rate (investment/consumption ratio), and then sectoral allocations: which sectors of production (which of course includes services) are to expand, and which contract? How can the sectoral composition of production be changed to better meet needs? One does not need to have already achieved a socialist society in order to adopt this approach. In a collective working-class plan for the development of a locality, a central part would be demands concerning the sectors of production which should be boosted and those which should be run down (subject to maintaining employment); demands to expand the building of housing, schools and medical facilities, for instance, or to radically expand bus services, or to decrease the production of armaments through a switch to production of ... buses and transport control systems. Such comprehensive planning of investment flows would be unlikely to start from an overview; rather, they could develop from campaigns for, for example, free

bus services, which investigated the investment needed for such services, or campaigns around housing which investigated needs and estimated the investment needed to meet them. There are precedents for this kind of local *investment* planning. Tentative steps were taken towards it, for example, by the Greater London Council under a left Labour Party administration in 1982-6 – experiments ended by the Conservative government's abolition of the troublesome council (GLC 1985; Mackintosh and Wainwright 1987).

Such investment planning raises, of course, the question of the source of funds. In a socialist society, both physical means of production and investment funds would be collectively controlled and thus collectively owned ('state owned' only in this sense). But what transitional demands and aims for funding could one have in the present? Funding by the national or local state is the obvious, traditional, and valid answer. But the present conjuncture suggests others. In Britain and the USA, the national state now owns large parts of the finance system. We should demand that their funds be put under popular control, and that this be extended to the part of the finance system remaining in private hands, which owes its continuing existence to the state bail-out. The many productive resources which have been rendered idle by the recession should be another target: local collectives based on the trade unions could take over factories, plants and office services and run them – as was widely done by local initiatives during the Argentinian crisis in the 1990s and early 2000s.

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

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

JG: I think there are many senses and levels at which radical local movements have to confront contradictions between the universal and the particular. A fundamental one, to which I have alluded several times already, is the notion of 'need'. The moral force and legitimacy of the socialist project resides – and I think *must* reside – in a notion of needs of humans as a species, 'human needs'. If the latter do not exist, then how can one critique existing society and argue for a better one? If there are no basic human needs, then each society can *use and mould* people to its own logic, however barbaric, with people experiencing no unavoidable pain or unhappiness. So the socialist movement should argue that there *are* fundamental human needs which are not met, indeed are violated, by capitalist society, and which could be met much better by socialism. These needs are not only of survival (food, drink, shelter, air) but also of supportive, caring and loving relations with others, and through these, self-realisation, the realisation of the *social* self. In recent years, many authors have written persuasively on these needs. But these needs are developed in particular historical and geographical circumstances, and differently developed in particular social groups and individuals. In this way, 'nature' becomes 'second nature': powerfully felt needs which grow *out of* fundamental needs but which may be quite particular to the social group or the individual. Some of these developed needs cannot or should not be satisfied by a socialist society. No inclusive society can accommodate incompatible needs, for example the need felt by many men to dominate women *and* the need of women to end that domination. And a socialist society should not accommodate needs for things and experiences that are destructive of others or the environment, however strongly felt such needs may be, particularly when they have been developed by oppressive social relations. But these judgements cannot be made mechanically, or by fiat. People will argue for social arrangements that meet their *existing* desires. The only way to decide which desires should be met, and the feasibility of meeting them, is through the most open debate. And such debate can change for the better what people desire. For instance, at the local scale, a radical movement would need to confront the huge attachment that many people have to their cars: cars really do realise, in a particular form, many of people's most basic needs, conscious and unconscious. A debate of these car users with supporters of public transport, exploring the practical alternatives, can unearth where these needs come from and in what ways the car is essential to their fulfilment. Such a dialogue, and changing positions, can occur *because* there are fundamental needs that are a common, shared aim and reference point. This kind of conversation is generally not a simple unearthing and clarification of difference, but rather an exploration of the *contradictions* within the needs of each group or each individual; people find sympathy with what initially appears as an antagonistic need because they have the same need at some fundamental level. Through such active and open democracy, universal social arrangements can be agreed and implemented 'universal' in the sense of best (not perfectly!) meeting the needs *of all* in the given situation.

Where this argument concerns conflict between distinct social groups, one can note the poverty of much 'postmodern' politics. The broadly postmodern

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

In order to challenge this postmodern politics, one needs to challenge the analytical starting point. Social differences may be divided into two sorts: ‘oppressive differences’, which are congruent with social relations of power and oppression; and ‘non-oppressive differences’, which reflect socially and spatially developed differences. Social relations of power such as those of class, gender, racisms, sexuality and disability *constitute* the differences between the actors in the relation: the masculine and feminine identities, for example, are constituted by gender relations, and thus internalise unequal power. A radical urban politics cannot be indifferent to difference of this type, allowing it to be settled by power; but on the contrary, it has to acknowledge the power inequality, and enable (for example) women to assert and achieve their needs *against* patriarchal social relations. Negotiations over non-oppressive differences, in contrast, do not involve a struggle between *fundamentally* opposed interests. But they are by no means trivial or easy. They involve re-negotiation of the enormous unevenness within the working class constructed by capitalism, whether in wage work, social life or cultural sensibility. But the processes of planning for the restructuring of the locality precisely enable the material differences and social relations constituting this unevenness to be opened up to debate. And they enable materially feasible, rather than purely ideal, ways forward to be jointly agreed, going beyond ‘culture wars’ and otiose debates about taste.

A further type of particularity, concerning which Harvey has made an important contribution (for example Harvey 1996: 21-3, 40), is the particularity of workers’ situation in local units of production with respect to the spatially wider industry. In capitalism, workers within each workplace, firm and local industry – the ‘local unit of production’ – are put into competition with workers elsewhere by the competition between capitals and the potential flows of investment between the local units; this is especially the case where the competition in question is with units outside the locality (manufacturing rather than retail), and especially under the intensified competition of neoliberalism. This ‘horizontal’ competition between workers is created by, and reinforces, the ‘vertical’ power of capital over labour (Gough 2004: Ch. 13). Capital may conduct this competition through mechanisms that are

disciplinary (wage cuts, intensification), or through cooperation with the local workforce (high skill, high productivity, strong innovation). But both strategies construct spatial division and conflict within the working class (Gough 2010). What happens if workers in the local unit of production, rejecting both subordination to capital and cooperation with it, instead launch an offensive against their employer or employers? When this offensive remains purely local, Harvey calls such action 'local particularism'. Because the benefits from the action are not shared with workers across the industry in other localities, he sees it as once again divisive, as reproducing the 'normal' competition between workers. But Harvey here is seeking a universalist politics which does not take sufficient account of the material conditions of particularism, and which does not *work through* the dialectic of the particular and the universal. Material conditions of life mean that workers are in better communication with each other within local units of production than they are at higher spatial scales; and they may have locally particular advantages in their militancy, such as higher-than-average profitability in their unit of production, or strong local traditions of militancy. Thus militancy often has to *start* at the local level, often involving local particularities (Gough and Eisenschitz 2010). Harvey is right, though, to emphasise that, especially in sectors in which capitalist competition is trans-local, militant worker action needs to be developed at higher spatial scales; this is needed not only so that 'strong' workers lend a hand to weaker ones, but also so that local gains can be sustained against capitalist disinvestment by spreading them through the industry. In this way, local particularity will be transcended and larger solidarity built (see further Gough 2010).

Throughout this conversation, I have emphasised the importance of the most open and full debate among 'ordinary people'. This has been the central argument of the academic proponents of open and transparent political communication (Habermas), 'deliberative democracy' and 'development of civil society' (Laclau, Mouffe), and, in the specifically urban context, 'communicative planning' (Patsy Healy, Nigel Thrift). My argument is, however, quite different from theirs. The enthusiasts for deliberative democracy focus on 'political processes' in the traditional, narrow sense, such as the construction of social and interest groups and networks, neighbourhood forums, and planning consultations. They largely abstract from materially-based social relations: the different political-economic resources possessed by different groups; their empowerment or disempowerment by economic and social relations; and the control of the material resources (money investment, revenue, buildings and land) which are to be planned. Thus in my view, the most basic task of deliberative democracy is to begin to overcome the disempowerment of the majority created by capitalism; this means that deliberations need to be combined with the gaining of power over material resources, since most people are not interested in discussions that have no material effects. Moreover, such deliberations involve power imbalances: they seek to wrest power from capital and, to some extent, from the state, and they need to combat power imbalances within the working class. In my view, then, the enthusiasts of deliberative democracy need to take far more account of materiality, resources and socio-economic power.

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

JG: I agree with Harvey’s point, if one takes ‘community’ to be a synonym for ‘local society’. But I would first like to emphasise that organisation at the local level is not only useful but *essential* for the left. This may seem obvious, at least to radicals interested in urban politics; but the dominant traditions on the left, with the exception of some anarchist, green and feminist currents, have regarded the national and international scales as more-or-less the only significant ones for politics. This neglects a number of reasons for radical organisation within localities, including workplaces and neighbourhoods. First, there is the issue of *feasibility*. The ruling class has the resources to organise itself easily at the national and global scales. But working-class people have limited money, energy and time to do so; conversely, we can talk to and organise with our co-workers and neighbours with relatively little of these resources, and that is why such interactions occur daily. Moreover, face-to-face discussions are particularly vital for the politics of the working class. Members of the bourgeoisie are always politicised because they are always ruling, whereas capitalism – and neoliberalism particularly – depoliticises working-class people: even when they are most suffering from capitalism, they do not necessarily think of collective organisation as a solution. A will to fight collectively has to be actively constructed through discussion and, recursively, practical organisation. Telecommunications can play a role in both discussion and organisation; but such mediated relationships cannot have the empowering quality of face-to-face meetings, and these must mostly be at the local scale for resource reasons. Further, at the local level it is easier to build trust in others; and due to local particularity, there is more likely to be commonality of social experiences. A second importance of local organisation is the ability to *address local socioeconomic processes*. I spoke earlier about the reality of such processes, which are ‘local’ in the senses of both local specificity and local socioeconomic relations, dependencies and ties. It is not simply that local employers, service providers and the local state, and locally contained markets, have impacts within the locality; it is also that radical politics seeks to intervene into the vital *local connections* between the different aspects of the locality. As I have argued, radical local interventions must involve the most open discussion and debate if they are to overcome particularisms within the locality and develop genuinely universal and inclusive politics; an adequate strategy for local politics cannot be wholly mandated from outside the locality by, for example, national unions or a national housing campaign. Fortunately, as I just noted, it is relatively easy, in a practical sense, for working-class people to undertake such organisation around local issues.

A third point is more theoretical. The main traditions of the left tend to underestimate local politics partly because they for the most part hold a crude theoretical understanding of the geography of capitalist society: that capitalism and capital are ‘national’ and indeed ‘global’, so that left organisation needs also to be at this

level. This view of capitalism is true in the sense that *flows of capital* (commodity, money, productive) are strongly national and inter-national, and this is true to a lesser extent of labour power (formally: a geography of flows). It is also true in the sense that the capital–labour relation, and the power of money, commodity and productive capital, exist *throughout* the globe (a geography of area). But this latter point has an implication that is seldom realised: if the relation of the working class to capital is ubiquitous, then it is enacted and reproduced at *every* spatial scale: territories of every size, from the globe to the nation to the locality and neighbourhood to the workplace and home, are *internally* constructed by capital–labour relations (Gough 1991, 1992). The same is true, *mutatis mutandis*, of gender and inter-ethnic relations. Working-class struggle therefore can and should be organised within *every* spatial scale – including the local or ‘urban’.

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

A corollary of this point is that the strategy of building a socialised economy at a purely workplace or locality level is doomed to failure. In recent years, there has been much enthusiasm from social-democratic and neoliberal politicians, and from many academics of the left and right, for a strategy of building the ‘social economy’, also known as community business or the Third Sector. This sector is not-for-profit, neither conventionally capitalist nor state-run. For left academic commentators such as J.K. Gibson-Graham, and many leftwing ‘social entrepreneurs’, the sector represents the most *feasible* path towards a non-capitalist economy. For all its supporters, the small scale and necessarily low capitalisation of social enterprises are seen as not being a significant barrier to their growth. But in reality, mainstream capital, in commodity, productive and money forms, severely restricts the expansion of the social economy, including through restrictive state regulation. As Aram Eisenschitz and I have argued, the social economy can be a significant site for socialist struggle, but only if the strategy of autonomy and of ‘a socialised economy within one locality’ is rejected, just as the Stalinist strategy of ‘socialism in one country’ failed. The social economy cannot gradually erode the capitalist economy. Socialists working within it need to cooperate strongly with militant workers and residents within the mainstream economy and society (see further Eisenschitz and Gough 2011).

It is not only in the field of production proper that purely local organisation has its limits. Local states, even in federal countries, are typically limited in their

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

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

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Author biographies

Özlem Çelik has a Ph.D. from the Department of Town and Regional Planning at the University of Sheffield, and is currently a research fellow in the Political Science Department at the Middle East Technical University in Ankara. She also coordinates the Urban and Regional Political Economy working group within the International Initiative for Promoting Political Economy, at SOAS. She is carrying out research in a Marxist framework on state theory, rescaling of the state, housing, urban regeneration and financialisation.

Jamie Gough worked on industry and employment in the the Greater London Council before its abolition. He has carried out academic and policy-related research in a Marxist framework in the fields of industrial and labour geography, urban and regional political economy, and poverty. He has written abstract-theoretical work on production, the space economy and the spatiality of the state. He currently lectures in town and regional planning at Sheffield University, England.