

## **A Different Kind of State: Imagining Popular Power and Democratic Administration for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

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**ABSTRACT:** Since the 2008 economic crisis, the political legitimacy of representative democracy has eroded. The roots of this legitimation crisis are found in growing inequality and the unwillingness of representative democratic capitalist states to address the structural causes giving rise to this polarization. In many respects, in the third decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the class nature of the state has rarely been so apparent since before the Keynesian era. Various historical and contemporary cases provide examples of a 'different kind of state' where the state's agenda setting function and policy outputs were informed by working class and other perspectives and interests. The result is greater social and economic inclusion generally and a democratization of the administrative state.

**KEYWORDS:** State; Neoliberalism; Working Class; Inclusion; Representative Democracy

### **Introduction**

This paper returns to the question of a different kind of state raised by Gregory Albo, David Langille, and Leo Panitch in their edited volume published in 1993 (see *A Different Kind of State?: Popular Power and Democratic Administration*). Here we interrogate how the work of public administration can be reconfigured to facilitate greater non-elite, mass participation in the design of public policy and in the implementation of public programs. In this effort, case studies where local governments, led by parties or movement parties of the Left, have employed the political capacities of the local state to address inequality illustrate the possibilities for re-imagining a different kind of state.

The various cases provide lessons in the art of the possible. These practical insights include the role of decentralization/devolution as a means to re-distribute power to input on and even decide upon policy and program at the neighbourhood or workplace level; selective de-commodification of key needs-based goods and services including housing, public transportation, health care, recreational space; and providing resources to enable communities to plan and initiate employment generating projects and enterprises. In all of these, a critical component is the inclusive planning processes which actively seek the participation of citizens and civil society organizations.

The following pages are composed of four component parts. First, the reader will be introduced to a theoretical overview of the key conceptual links connecting state theory, at least as how it is presented by Poulantzas, to public administration. Second, we turn to a discussion of democratic innovations, specifically the means, instruments, the how to tools for operationalizing democratic spaces within the state's policy and decisional processes. Third, three cases of 'actually existing' democratic administration are canvassed. These cases are drawn from the experiences of Bologna (1945 to 1991), the Greater London Council (1982 to 1986), and Barcelona (2015 to current). Each case comes from obviously different historical moments and political contexts. Finally, we conclude with critical observations respecting the experiences of these cases in terms of the political openings that can be created within the state but also the limitations.

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## **The Problem of the State: State Theory, Public Administration and Democracy**

Deepening democratic processes to facilitate the participation of non-elite actors is significant if only the policy and program outcomes produced by those processes serve to mitigate economic inequality through de-commodification of key goods and services as well as greater access to cultural and recreational opportunities. The stuff of daily lived experience. Indeed, the *Communist Manifesto* states “the first step in the revolution by the working class, is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy” (Marx & Engels, 1973, 74).

Themes engaging with the idea of expanding democratic practices within public administration and the policy process reach back to the Minnowbrook Conference of 1968 which gave rise to what came to be labelled the New Public Administration (NPA). NPA was concerned with, among other issues, reconciling public administration and democracy and social equity (Frederickson, 1997, 832). NPA sought a fundamental shift within the discipline of public administration toward an explicit recognition of the unequal distribution of power in society and consequently how this reality was reflected in the work of the state. Harold Lasswell, a founding member of the field of policy studies, wrote “the concept of power is perhaps the most fundamental ... the political process is the shaping, distribution, and exercise of power” (Lasswell & Kaplan, 1950, 75). Following in this vein Murphy and Fafard (2012) explain hegemonic policy ideas and actors, regardless of the evidence researchers provide, always give expression to powerful societal interests (Murphy & Fafard, 2012, 729). In the process, non-elite social categories including but not limited to workers, women, racialized minorities, and the poor are excluded from or marginalized as they lack voice within the policy process. In this sense, the line of continuity from NPA to Democratic Administration is one centred on making the state more democratic and representative of non-elite groups and perspectives.

Democratic innovations depart from traditional methods as they are designed to expand citizen participation in the political decision-making process beyond familiar institutionalised forms of participation such as public consultations and advisory boards (Smith, 2009, 1). Thus, the characteristics of democratic innovation include: measures to broaden participation; transfer of decision power to participants; participants’ influence on procedures; and measures to assure deliberation is of high quality (Röcke, 2014, 39). The power to decide, is central to genuine co-governance. In a more radical democratic sense, it is the tacit knowledge of citizens as the users of public goods and services which must be incorporated into the process. A fundamental re-design of processes is required entailing “new institutional channels that directly link the public service with diverse individuals and non-elite groups outside government who have additional information sources, differing perspectives and direct hands-on experience” (Cohen 2005, 6). The process must ultimately entail that non-elite actors have significant control over the process (Geissel 2013; Patten 2001, 224). Therefore who owns the means of deciding is strategically of utmost importance.

In the late 1970s, Tony Benn, then a minister in the Labour government, routinely encountered the phenomenon of the senior public service engaged in the curation and framing of political problems and the policy options to address those. From his vantage point, Benn observed the limitations of the capitalist state, even when managed by social democrats, for its “inability to solve some of our problems but also for their failure to reflect others adequately ... Political debates concentrating on economic and other management issues between government and opposition sometimes appear to blank out everything else, while a number of other issues are not sufficiently discussed because they have not been fitted into the current pattern of political debate”

(Benn, 1981, 108). Or, in the parlance of policy process studies, these issues failed to be placed on the policy agenda for review. The end result is a disconnect between how democracy is experienced and valued and the practices of actually existing democracy where “representative democracy no longer appears capable of dealing with new challenges” (Sintomer, Röcke, & Herzberg, 2016, 1). The crisis of representation at the heart of the democracy deficit is compounded by the evolution of an administrative apparatus which has been designed to be insulated from external, non-elite influence and control. Albo notes the origins of this political-administrative formation can be located with the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century emergence of representative institutions within the capitalist state: “The popular-democratic struggles of the early socialist movement sought to wrest control of the state structure from aristocratic elites and compel the administration to be accountable to directly elected parliaments... The imposition of parliamentary control over the state ... also entailed the systemization of the organizational structure and bureaucratic rules that distanced the administrative machine from the direct popular control envisioned by democratic reformers” (1993, 20).

In order to manage the political pressures being expressed through the representative institutions of democracy, particularly those of the working class, there was need for a heuristic serving to theoretically and practically wall the state from non-elite demands whether voiced in the streets or in the parliaments. With the appearance of *The Study of Public Administration*, Woodrow Wilson, later to become President, posited there was little or no difference between public and private administration. Wilson posited: “administration is a field of business. It is removed from the hurry and strife of politics. It is a part of political life only as methods of a counting-house are a part of the life of society, only as machinery is part of the manufactured product” (Wilson, 1887, 210). This introduced an enduring, though contested, concept into public administration – the politics-administration dichotomy (P-AD). Public administration should be no more than the “detailed and systematic execution of public law” (Wilson, 1887, 212) while the political leadership and their agents set the policy agenda and then leave its implementation of to the public service. For Wilson “administration lies outside the proper sphere of politics. Administrative questions are not political questions” (Wilson, 1887, 210). The P-AD was criticized as an ideologically conservative approach which “accepted and supported the existing political order” particularly through its adherence to efficiency and expertise (Fry, 1989, 224). Dwight Waldo, a scholar of public administration, rejected the very concept as unrealistic (Waldo, 1977, 9). Rather than serving to advance democracy the concept instead advanced centralization of power in centre of government – the executive (Waldo, 1948, 133).

The politics-administration dichotomy has in theory and practice informed a particular official ideology of professional public administration. While great lengths are taken to characterize the practice and theory of public administration as imbued with the values of neutrality and professional technical competence, this is an ideological patina for an arrangement of institutions whose purposes are fundamentally political and conservative. The public administrative apparatus was a neutral but technically competent instrument that could be directed by whomever was elected. Miliband’s analysis of the capitalist state, however, depicted the upper echelons of the state apparatus, as where “inevitably the administrative process is also part of the political process; administration is always political ... at least at the levels where policy-making is relevant” (Miliband, 1973, 47). This is likely more accurate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century than when he set about his interrogation of the capitalist state just as the post-war Golden Age of capitalism began to wane.

The state is not a ‘thing’ but rather a system of power incorporating the complex of governing institutions that rule over sovereign territorial units, the interactions between these institutions and the social forces present in these territories. In this sense the state is not to be understood as an empty vessel in which different social forces can simply inject their own programme by entering the state institutions. The reification of the state has been problematic in state theory, and in political practice, as it “proceeds ‘as if’ the state were indeed a universal a priori predicate to our social existence rather than a product of our social existence” (Bratsis, 2002, 249). Poulantzas defined the state as “a relationship of forces, or more precisely the material condensation of such a relationship among classes and class fractions”, a definition which avoids “the impasse of that eternal counterposition of the State as a Thing-instrument and the State as a Subject” (Poulantzas, 1978, 129).

This material condensation within the apparatus of the state and the array of institutions which compose it, are themselves the “historical product of a multiplicity of class practices and struggles” which then allows us to pose the question “of what material causes and processes underpin the existence of the state” (Bratsis, 2002, 258). In other words, the state isn’t akin to say a computer where by changing the software the modalities of the machine can be re-programmed to provide different functions and capabilities. Rather the outcome of prior struggles are embedded within the varied institutions of the state. The class bias of these outcomes are expressed in manifold ways in the ‘structural selectivity’ that takes place within the institutions in framing public policies, laws, and state programs (Ibid., 259). In this way, the state institutions are themselves a site of class, and other, political struggles which come to give expression to the ebbing and flowing of victories, defeats and stalemates in civil society.

The work of the state, “done through the state apparatus” serves as a “filter determining the modality of state economic and ideological interventions” (Therborn, 1978, 151). In other words, it is in these organizational structures that state functionaries decide on what to act upon, or do nothing, and how to do so. The term *state form* captures this concept of the state as constellation of social relations (Jessop, 1990). This means, the state takes on a specific institutional form corresponding to the balance of class forces. This results in the production of a distinctive, class-biased structure exercising degrees of relative autonomy which enables the state to structurally and politically adapt to shifting balances in class power. In this respect, *state form* has “a structure (or strategic) selectivity which reflects and modifies the balance of class forces” (Jessop, 1990, 256). More specifically, the balance of class forces is reflected in “structurally inscribed possibilities that each state form offers for the successful pursuit of specific class interests” (Jessop, 1990, 256). Thus the particular form that a state takes on can be seen as an expression of class power and the balance of power.

A second Poulantzian concept, *state administration*, distinguishes between the traditional understanding of public administration where the machinery of the state is seen to be fragmented, politically neutral and technocratic but subject to the dominance of an elected and representative legislature with the observation that the state is instead subject to an expanding concentration of state power in the hands of the executive arm. This executive is composed of the core state bureaucracies and other instruments of administration. Correspondingly, the power of the legislative arm shrinks. This represents a shift in legitimacy from parliament to the executive in the form of a move towards the “instrumental rationality of efficiency” (Poulantzas, 1973, 219).

Poulantzas argues that there is a loosening of the “ties of representation” that is moving power away from parliamentary representatives and establishing the executive as the centre of political decision-making. At the same time, “government has become autonomous from parliament, and the administration has become distanced from the process of national representation” (Poulantzas, 1973, 222). Thus, not only does the executive become the site for the elaboration of state policy, but it is also becomes the principal actor in this process. This shift to state administration has produced a number of important changes. Foremost, the principle of public, deliberative debate increasingly became replaced by an institutional principle of secrecy. Related, this shift removes popular needs and demands from the policy process in favour of narrow sectional interests. Finally, it concentrates and centralizes power into fewer and more compartmentalized structures.

### **Imagining a Different Kind of State: The Contours of a Radical Proposition**

In *Fearless Cities*, a declaration of the global new municipalist movement drafted by Barcelona’s left-wing municipal party, Barcelona En Comú, it states: “Those who engage only in a politics of protest or organizing on the margins of society must recognize that there will always be power- it does not simply dissolve. The question is, in whose hands will power reside – in those of the state with its centralized authority, or in those of the people” (Barcelona En Comú, 2019, 13). And once the question of where power resides or should reside, how is that to be exercised and made manifest?

Democratic innovation has been defined, at least by one scholar, as alterations that “have been specifically designed to increase and deepen citizen participation in the political decision-making process ... and represent a departure from the traditional institutional architecture that we normally attribute to advanced industrial democracies. They take us beyond familiar institutionalised forms of citizen participation” (Smith, 2009, 1). Precisely what the actual components of democratic innovation are varies, however, some criteria have been identified as: measures to broaden participation; transfer of decision power to participants; participants’ influence on procedures; and measures to assure deliberation is of high quality (Röcke, 2014, 39). Who participates is key to democratization in that the usual cast of those who represent, lobby and advocate for capital are engaged by less integrated citizen-worker actors.

This is the measure of genuine inclusiveness (Fung, 2006). This transfer of decision-power to ordinary citizens “breaks with the core principles of representative democracy” (Röcke, 2014, 40) where the legislature is sovereign in such matters of decision. And the question over what is decided over, in other words what does the state allow to be decided upon, is not a trivial question with respect to how a democratic administration would function, the point should be that power is not “shared” but rather becomes transferred or owned by those same ordinary citizens whether they be those affected by public policy and program decisions, those whose work is to produce and deliver public goods and services.

Constructing a democratic administration is fundamentally about expanding the means by which the state can be controlled and made responsive to the interests of non-elites rather than being experienced as a means of control over those same people. It is not only about the real gap separating the centres of control from front-line public sector delivery workers that is problematic but also that the state is experienced by many as both remote and unresponsive. Overcoming this actually existing state requires a fundamental re-design of public policy and administrative processes which would entail “the creation of new institutional channels that directly link the public service with diverse individuals and non-elite groups outside government who have

additional information sources, differing perspectives and direct hands-on experience” (Cohen, 2005, 6). As the experience of the Paris Commune suggests, the existing practices and mechanisms of public administration, specifically hierarchically ordered administrative units, under the exclusive political control of the state executive, is not going to resurrect a sense of legitimacy in liberal representative democracy. Broad-based empowerment must be a core dimension in any project of democratic innovation.

Democratic administration, in its more radical conceptualization, proposes more than an ‘opening up’ of the state apparatus to other social actors and forces. A key lesson from the experience of the Paris Commune was that “the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery and wiled it for its own purposes” (Marx and Engels, 1973, 8). As noted above, the state is not a machine, which can simply change drivers to change its functions and the social categories whose interests it chooses to intervene on behalf of. Rather than an ‘opening up’ of the state we should interrogate how to transform the state through the “reabsorption of the state power by society as its own living force” (Lebowitz, 2003, 196) and its conversion “from an organ superimposed upon society into one completely subordinate to it” (Marx as cited by Lebowitz, 2012, 359). Instead of a “state which stands over and above us”, its power and functions are decentralized to the community and workplace facilitating an “unleashing of tacit knowledge and popular energy to link the capacities of people to communal needs and purpose” (Ibid.).

Such a new democratic state does is not simply wished into existence. Human action and agency, or as Marx termed it ‘revolutionary practice’, through the workplace and communal councils (op cit.) is a necessary first step in the development of human capacities. Operationally, it is in this sense democratic administration seeks to “promote the dynamic developmental aspect of democracy, full public disclosure and encouragement of debate on all the options before a ministry, right up to the moment of final decision, is required ... debate should be invited, public meetings organized, referenda held to the end of making the process an open one right up to the moment of decision. ... the task of democratic leaders and administrators ... is to encourage and facilitate the organization of communities of identity and interest” (Panitch, 1993, 10-11). This depicts a state which relies upon not only important deliberative and participatory processes as the means to deepen democracy beyond its liberal representative limitations but also to allocate the power to make authoritative decisions to non-state, non-elite social actors.

Central to this transformation are mechanisms enabling popular (meaning non-elite) participation in the work of the state including multi-scale practices of social dialogue and concertation as well as democratic control and management by public sector workers and citizens who use the public services produced and delivered by those workers. Concretely, a program for democratization of public administration entails empowering and enabling citizens with the means and ways to “monitor and direct government activities”; similarly providing the ways and means for front-line service delivery workers to shape how services are delivered; broaden the form and type of official knowledge to include “experiential and practical forms of knowledge and expertise” utilized in policy construction and implementation; and radically broaden “transparency and accountability of decision-making within administrative structures” (Cohen, 2005, 10).

But is broadening input from non-elites sufficient? The real question is to what degree is power over outcomes (read policy) distributed/shared with non-elite actors engaged in such processes? This is the power to decide and not be confined to deliberation. Grounding how the state thinks, or how it comes to frame and understand collective problems, in the lived experience of non-elite actors makes it more probable that policy and program outcomes would address issues

relevant to those subaltern groups. It is this correspondence of process with outcome which defines both social inclusion as well as democracy.

Empowerment, the capacity to participate and decide, is the central feature here. Fashionable thinking on deliberative democracy and policy making tends to obscure this point. Some key characteristics associated with deliberative democratic exercises with the public include: the provision of information needs to be comprehensive, balanced and accessible; an open agenda where government will set out the broad parameters of the discussion, but the agenda must be open to revision or expansion by the deliberators; deliberative exercises must allow time for discussion, allowing citizens time to work out their own position (Coleman & Götze, 2002, 6). The question of power-sharing, to augment the voice of non-government actors with decisional authority, is the critical piece in building democratic administration. While deliberative democracy is necessary for legitimating the process and the eventual outcome, this deliberative aspect must ultimately entail that non-elite actors “have control over the policy-making process” (Patten, 2001, 224).

### **A Different Kind of State is Possible: Case Studies in Democratic Administration**

Here we briefly survey three significant cases of historical local/city governments which employed the political capacities at their disposal to advance significant reforms. The three cases draw on the experiences of Red Bologna (1945 to 1991), the Greater London Council (1982-1986) and Barcelona (2015-current). These cases are presented not as explorations of the local state and the politics therein but rather as examples of how governmental power can be imaginatively employed, even where there are significant constraints politically, legally and fiscally.

*‘Red’ Bologna: Devolution to the Neighbourhoods.* Between 1945 and 1991 the Italian Communist party (PCI) governed the city of Bologna. In the postwar period, the city administration embarked upon an ambitious social and political reconstruction project. Extensive housing and social projects were rolled out through the late 1940s. Consequently, ‘Red’ Bologna’s achievements became the model for local Communist government throughout Italy (Jaggi, Muller, and Schmid, 1977, 7). Despite their success, the Italian Communists understood, for reasons articulated by Albo above, the limits of their local project in the absence of national power from which the PCI was excluded. They stated “Bologna is not a red island – an oasis of socialism with a human face in a capitalist desert ... Nor is the city separated from the economic, political, and social life of Italy... The Communists of Bologna have not solved the crisis of capitalism in one area; nor have they developed a conception of socialism in one city. Rather they have offered a perspective on what is possible....” (Ibid.).

The PCI-led city council was both progressive and pragmatic in its approach to a range of public policy and program outputs. And informing and shaping the policy process was not a small cadre of state elites or ‘insiders’ but rather a system to enable non-elite participation. This practice of facilitating inclusive participation was understood as the basis for transformation of the state’s institutional apparatuses and was the means to shift power (Ibid., p25-26). However, these were not open popular assemblies but devolved mechanisms whose membership was determined by the City Council itself. The centre-piece to this was the Neighbourhood Councils, of which there were, by 1966, a total of 18 composed of twenty neighbourhood residents appointed, as noted, by the City Council. In 1967 the Council began a process to empower the Neighbourhood Councils to take on a more direct role in a decentralized administration. By 1974 the Neighbourhood Councils acquired the political authority to formulate guidelines relating to the city budget, urban planning, economic development, traffic, issuance of building permits, and traffic.

In addition, the Neighbourhood Council's were encouraged to take up a greater role in improving the management and accountability of public education, health and recreational institutions. To this end, every neighbourhood was mandated to strike Work Committees to undertake policy development and planning relating to education, local planning, traffic, recreation, tourism, social security and culture. And as a means to embed a direct link to the Mayor's office, each Neighbourhood Council would elect an 'assistant' to the mayor (Ibid., 39).

In terms of policies and programs, this devolved structure of representation, facilitated a far-reaching reform programme touching every aspect of daily life. To limit property speculation the City Council adopted a standard where every person would be 'entitled' to 64 sq. metres of public land; nurseries were established; urban infrastructure was modernized with sewer upgrades and street lighting; public transit was given priority over private means; social services such as daycare were to be financed by employers in part; provided support for the establishment and viability of cooperative enterprises; privileged independent retailers over chain stores; and much more (Ibid., p50-96). Policy and program shifts in housing, education and health were among the most significant.

Many PCI governed municipalities in Italy, and Bologna was no exception, decided to engage in deficit financing in order to pay for their reform program (Ginsborg, 1990). Bologna embarked upon social housing development and in this respect, the constraints on property speculation were a strategic intervention. The government's key objectives in city planning was to promote the role of public housing, improve housing conditions of low-income and working people, rebalance trends in the metropolitan area by strategically selecting the location of industrial plants and protecting agricultural spaces and protecting the heritage of the city centre. A housing policy was prepared in the early 1950s and was used to acquire city land for housing and other public projects such as hospitals, schools, social and cultural centres. While housing funds were controlled by the central government, constraining the city's attempts to fully solve all of its housing problems, by the 1960s Bologna was the only city in Italy with a large number of new public housing projects close to the city core (Watson & Bentley, 2007).

In the 1960s pre-school nurseries were set up in order to counter the selection and discrimination processes inherent in the educational system which privileged children from more affluent classes. It was argued that class inequalities in education could only be reduced if all children had access to the same type and quality of education. In addition, these nurseries enabled working class mothers to remain in the labour force. In 1964, Bologna's citizens formed the first Parent-Teacher Association in the city. School committees and parents associations provided the mechanism for popular participation. By 1975, 77 percent of all children between three and six attended the pre-school programs. By 1974, 80 percent of teachers had regular interactions with neighbourhood representatives and 60 percent of teachers participated in meetings with parents. Parents and teachers work together to figure out what will be useful for the children. Both participate as educators of children. (Muller, 1977, p 111-132)

In the realm of public health, the local authorities established free clinics in order to address the shortcomings of the prevailing Italian healthcare system. Children, pregnant women, young mothers and the elderly were the main users of these clinics. In these clinics, medical professionals took a preventative approach and in part they searched for their causes in social settings and the family environment. People were encouraged to see them as being controlled and operated by them. In this way too, incompetent and unsympathetic doctors would be held to account by patients

or forced to resign since citizens in their capacity as patients would also participate in the management of these clinics (Schmit, 1977, p159-174).

The experience of 'Red' Bologna demonstrates a breadth of political imagination which has disappeared to a large degree. Legal and fiscal limits were real but the PCI took what they had to the limits. But it was understood that Bologna was no more than a city embedded within a much broader network of power relations. The secretary-general of the CGIL trade union confederation at the time stated: "We must take care not to confuse our successes with the victory of the working class. What we ... can achieve is an alleviation of exploitative conditions. But we cannot abolish the exploitation until the socio-political system changes" (Jaggi, 1977, 86). And it should be reiterated that the PCI did not implement a broad-based practise of popular participation. A more narrow representative model prevailed where the voices of workers could be heard but mediated through other institutions such as the Neighbourhood Councils, the City Council itself, and of course the Mayor's office. The party, specifically the PCI, in its commanding position in the representative structures, was key to determining the composition of various participatory and devolved venues for deliberation.

*Greater London Council: Enabling Civil Society-based Organizations and Deliberation.* The Greater London Council (GLC) was the site of an important period of experimentation in local democratic innovation under the leadership of Mayor Ken Livingstone between 1982 and 1986. During this brief period, Livingstone led a left-leaning local Labour majority on the GLC where both elected representatives of the Labour party and public service staff undertook to employ the local state and its apparatus in a radical experiment in civic power building and drawing upon not evidence per se but the front-line knowledge of public sector workers and service users. Indeed the 1981 Labour party manifesto for the GLC elections, placed social dialogue between the GLC, workers, unions, and citizens generally at the centre of its political practise. The manifesto stated: "Our vision of the future is a city in which the elected representatives take the lead in economic planning – with maximum community involvement" (Mackintosh and Wainwright, 1987, 2). This deliberative democracy was central role in shaping decisions and further expressed that the state and its various units were not to be neutral actors. Instead together with the unions, public authorities "were to act as allies" (Ibid., 137).

Many of the Labour councillors elected in 1982 came from the ranks of social movements, particularly those devoted to public control of land use urban planning. The Labour government at the time believed in the ability of Londoners themselves to find the solutions to meet the city's needs. Rather than deliver services through the local state, the GLC saw its role as one of enabling popular organizations and unions by means of providing resources, financial and professional, to support various citizen initiatives to achieve their goals and be more effective (Wainwright, 2018). This was the distinguishing characteristic of the GLC. In return for that resourcing, the GLC demanded considerable investment of time, knowledge and experience from "many community organisations, trade unionists, women's groups, and others" in the participatory planning processes. The resulting collaborative planning work undertaken by the council and constituents was the mechanism in economic and industrial policy design (Mackintosh and Wainwright, 1987, p1-2). This collaboration was not without a certain degree of tension between the participating state units and citizens as the democratizing of the policy process entailed the state and its policy officers, relinquishing some partial control (Ibid., 3).

The GLC's Industry and Employment Committee utilized its spending powers in five different ways: it invested in jobs in the private or cooperative sectors in partnership with trade unions; it used contract compliance to raise working conditions in private businesses in which it

purchased goods/services from; it spent more on improving and expanding its own public employment; it expanded services by addressing shortcomings in welfare services; and it funded the development of organizations and campaigns of labour and other movements who were looking to create socially productive jobs. The GLC served as a grant source, providing funding for citizen initiatives that converged with and helped achieve the policies of the GLC in a collaborative manner. The Popular Planning Unit and Project Development Unit, for example, offered grants to non-GLC groups, such as trade unions, based on a criterion in line with the values and goals of the party's election manifesto (Wainwright, 2018) and thus enabled these to conduct their own research and develop policy alternatives.

The GLC did not separate administration from politics, it politicized administration by transforming policy development and implementation into a more integrated and democratically controlled process. For example, by providing public funds to unions and community groups. This commitment was rooted in a commitment to participatory governance that was central to defining needs and creating strategies to address those needs in the workplace and wider community. It envisioned a limited role for the local state; while state mechanisms were needed to regain control over capital, state power by itself was inadequate. The GLC political strategy understood the need for countervailing powers outside the local state, where civil society activists could be relied upon to encourage participation and strengthen community autonomy. By 1986, more than 700 grants worth 19 million pounds were provided to almost 300 organizations, including union support units, unemployed centres, women and ethnic minority work initiatives, domestic initiatives such as workplace child care and community laundries serving housing residents and labour or community campaigns (Egan, 2005).

The GLC supported community childcare initiatives, led by women, in order to expand high quality and accessible childcare. The GLC, in line with its mandate of broad-based public involvement in planning, collaborated with an extensive network of women's groups, that had established childcare and nurseries in the 1970s, most of which were underfunded and run voluntarily. The Popular Planning Unit, along with the GLC Women's Committee, consulted with various networks in order to first map existing and potential childcare initiatives. Afterward a strategy was devised for funding, grants were provided over a period of time in order to improve quality and accessibility, provide training, management and equality of job opportunities (Wainwright, 2018). Then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher came to see the GLC as a problematic state within a state and would move to dismantle the GLC in 1986. The GLC under Livingstone's Labour party, played the role of enabler of non-government actors and communities to find their own solutions to their problems. In this sense it was informed by participatory policy analysis lead by non-GLC persons but supported by GLC staff.

*Barcelona: Popular Participation in Repairing the Damage.* The historical cases surveyed tell a story of working class political mobilization through political parties to draw upon local state power and fiscal resources around a program for social inclusion, the contemporary case of Barcelona, while similar in certain respects, is situated in a very different political and economic context. The fundamental objective is to mitigate the worst effects of neoliberalization at the local scale through the use of public ownership or re-nationalization of certain services, and controlling speculation. Citizens themselves through civil society alliances work in and through the local state administration to achieve their political objectives. A new political party - Barcelona En Comú (Barcelona In Common)- was the electoral vehicle for this project. Its 2014 election manifesto stated its goal was to initiate a "democratic rebellion in Barcelona" to "seize control of local

government and to dis- and re-assemble the city's institutions from within on a more transparent and participatory basis" (Charnock and Ribera-Fumaz, 2017, 189-90).

Spain was particularly hard hit by the 2008 financial and the resultant austerity policies. Against this background, there emerged political movements aiming to enact radical change in policy in order to strengthen democracy and address inequality. Barcelona en Comu (BeC) pursued a program which sought to expand the scope and quality of public goods and services, implement new forms of community engagement, expand public participation in the co-construction and co-production of public policies, and build a non-market social economy. These elements mark a shift away from the intensification of neoliberal processes of the previous years (Blanco, Salazar, & Bianchi, 2020). BeC's political platform reflected a concern for employment, food security, energy/water, housing and public transport. Among the first initiatives of the BeC in government was to publish an 'Emergency Plan' which outlined the steps to be taken to give priority to "those most adversely affected by the crisis" (Charnock and Ribera-Fumaz, 2017, 194).

The Emergency Plan stated: "Barcelona has enough resources to tackle inequalities and to become a model of a city where people live well in common ... To harness these resources, we need a credible and courageous council that is able to stand up to powerful groups that put their own interests above those of the majority, and to a council that taps into the collective intelligence of the people and neighbourhoods of Barcelona" (BeC, 2016, 3). The plan further stated the government's commitment to redistributive social policies and to advance social rights foremost of these was the right to housing, but also included food security for children, healthcare, affordable public transit, and a guaranteed basic income of 600 euros/month equal to 60 per cent of the average wage in the city (Charnock and Ribera-Fumaz, 2017, 195).

The main objectives of BeC was to attempt to recover the old city centre from the massive expansion of tourism which had contributed to property speculation and the loss of long-term rental homes. The municipality established a moratorium on new licenses for companies linked to tourism in the old centre and a moratorium on new tourist accommodations to remain until 2017. BeC mobilized already existing venues like neighbourhood councils and created new units such as Decidim Barcelona to promote broad participation in the Municipal Plan for which the government and civil society organizations developed policy proposals to debate through meetings and on-line platforms. BeC also organized periodic open meetings between residents and the mayor as a forum for participatory dialogue.

The electoral base of BeC was to be found in lower income districts. In May 2015, it won 25 per cent of the vote and 11 out of 41 seats on the city council. This was a limiting factor in terms of program implementation but nevertheless various policy objectives were achieved. Barcelona's commitment towards broadly inclusive democratic policymaking reflects its history of supporting decentralization and citizen participation at the local government level, following the death of Franco in 1975 through social and anti-Francoist movements (McLaverty, 2017, 77).

The Municipal Charter is the current legal document and contract that obligates the municipal government to citizen participation in several key areas: citizens must be engaged in order to inform the Municipal Charter; establishing City Advisory Councils (CAC) must be established comprised of key interest groups including citizens (in the form on neighbourhood associations) to meet and discuss Municipal Action Plans which guide municipal policy from one election to the next (McLaverty, 2017, 85). There has been a further evolution in the practice of citizen participation in that local government was understood to be working for its citizens and over time, it has shifted to working with its citizen from a co-creation perspective. The shift to the

latter reflects the ongoing austerity pressures and the need to partition responsibility (McLaverty, 2017, 86).

To aid in enabling participation, Barcelona established, as noted above, the Decidium platform. This technology provides the following function: strategic planning, participatory budgeting, initiatives and citizen consultations, participative processes, assemblies, voting, surveying, sortition (random selection of candidates / citizens with “reproducible, procedures that guarantees non-biased and uniform distributions”) and networked communication. “It supports participatory budgeting, strategic planning, services redesign, urban planning...Decidim was born when a young protest movement in Spain swept into power...The new leadership created a platform for open strategic planning for the city” (Stark, 2017). This was particularly the case in Madrid and Barcelona where new local parties entered government with a commitment to participatory democracy. The technology provided the means to “speed up and make possible a more complex participation” (Stark, 2017).

For Barcelona, this “open-source platform allows the public to participate directly in government as they would a form of social media, and they have had early success. The city council hosted several organizing events to decide on a strategic plan, and nearly 40,000 people and 1,500 organizations contributed 10,000 suggestions” (Stark, 2017). Barcelona does not rely solely on the technology to engage citizens in decision-making and policymaking. They have created a structured approach that enables the democratization of policymaking such that citizens can participate in the decision-making process and agenda setting. The participatory processes are a series of meetings delimited in a specific time, to promote debate and to contrast arguments between the citizens or between citizens and municipal officials. A participatory process can be used to diagnose a specific issue, search for innovative ideas, and suggest which forms of intervention may be the most appropriate.

The processes are structured in four phases: 1) An Information phase: dissemination to the whole of the citizens on what is the subject in which they want to ask for participation; 2) Debate phase: dialogue and contrasting arguments, in which the contributions of the participants are collected. During this phase, the most appropriate and diverse methodologies are used to reach all the affected groups; 3) Return phase: In this stage of the process, the result is transferred to the participants and the rest of the citizens; 4) Follow-up phase: facilitates the monitoring of the development of the results of the process. The outcome of the participatory process does not affect the decision-making and execution capacities of the City Council's governing bodies. However, at the outset of any process, it must be clear how the results will be applied to the final decision (Stark, 2017). BeC represents the emergence of a new party form distinct from the old left social democratic and communist parties. In this regard, BeC in program and practice sought to “develop popular capacities for genuinely democratic participation as well as complex democratic representation and administration” (Panitch, 2016, 360).

### **Conclusion: Respecting Democratic Administration in Practice**

The three cases canvassed here are useful in that they present, and emerge out of, vastly different historical and political contexts. In this sense they are a rather ecumenical collection. Each demonstrates the potential of the political imagination to take up what resources and capacities are available, no matter the constraints, and apply them to empowering working class, and other non-elite constituencies. And each case is an example of redesigning the state apparatus, the policy process, in such a way as to directly include these voices from the relative margins. ‘Red’ Bologna demonstrates the central and critical role of a party, in this case, the Italian

Communist Party, dedicated to a rebalancing of class forces within the state apparatus, entering the state. And there were no illusions.

As the PCI acknowledged, Bologna was not a ‘red island’ capable of resolving all of the crises of capitalism. But they took what they had in order to improve the quality of working class lives. The Greater London Council was similar to that of Bologna, though much more short-lived, in that the key actor was a political party, in this case a social democratic one, which had as its main strategy the transfer of financial and professional resources to trade unions and community-based organizations, to undertake the design and implementation of their specific projects. This allowing the tacit, experiential knowledge of non-elite persons and organizations to be applied to addressing local problems. And new structures were designed within the local state to facilitate this transfer and to co-ordinate that devolved work. In Barcelona, as with Bologna and London, a political party designed to contest elections to enter the state is the central actor. But *Barcelona en Comu* is not a party like the others.

Not a product of the ‘old’ 20<sup>th</sup> century Left, but rather it emerged out of the anti-austerity struggles besetting Spain through the 2008 economic crisis. In government, BeC, similar to the others, created open processes to facilitate non-elite citizen participation in policy agenda setting – what is to be acted upon. All share a politics to decentralize power, to some degree, by devolving the power to establish policy and program priorities for non-elite citizens. Where they differ is in the scale of this decentralization of power. In Bologna, the PCI created the venues for citizen engagement and took the outcomes of such under ‘advisement’. Barcelona’s experience is similar but with a much more explicit programmatic, or political commitment, to situating participatory democracy at the centre of its political practice in government. The left of Labour in the GLC went the furthest in providing direct financial and technical expertise support to non-elite actors to go ‘do it yourself’. In our cases, the parties of the Left recognize this imbalance and privilege access and inclusion of working class, poor and other non-elite social categories. However, this does not constitute a re-composition of the state in such a way as to fundamentally shift the balance of class forces. There is a preferential option expressed for non-elites to gain access and input through new structures and practices but these are no islands of socialism.

In all cases a social movement whether consisting of working class organizations such as trade unions, a broad popular front against austerity, or the outcome of anti-fascist armed struggle, is connected to a party engaged in the electoral sphere. In certain cases, such as Bologna, the party which organized against fascism *is* the movement. In Barcelona, the anti-austerity movement, the indignados, precedes and then informs the founding of the electoral organization. And in London, the trade unions, in those days still a vibrant political force in their own right, were the key constituent component of the Labour party. And the Thatcherites hated the trade unions and local government alike (Hannah, 2021, 30). There is an important dialectical relationship between movements and parties. Social movements, if they wish to see their goals achieved, must to greater or lesser degree work with or through a political party. And in this respect, social movements can contribute to the electoral success of parties by shaping its policy orientations and how work within the state is practiced (Goldstone, 2003, 2).

In one sense the cases confirm that entering the state is essential. The examples of Occupy Wall Street and Nuit debout are examples where “the assemblies soon hit their limits and dissolved ... there were no prospects of putting ideas into practice ... They were detached from the processes of everyday life, as well as administrative processes” (Demirović, 2017, 300). in other words, “you can protest until hell freezes over, but without taking and transforming political power you will never change the world” (Panitch, 2016, 361). Transformative, emancipatory politics will

inform the policy and program processes and outcomes but there are no guarantees, as history demonstrates, that such projects can be sustained indefinitely. Radical incursions into the state have been and will be defeated by more powerful adversaries. And, over time, the social democratization of these experiments, while not inevitable, is a real possibility with entering the state. How to maintain a class-focus, as opposed to the drift toward ‘big tent’ multi-class electoral coalitions, is an old strategic question for Left parties. In part the strategy and political practice must entail a class-focused politics which is linked to a class-rooted politics. The deliberate and on-going work of maintaining a connection between “working class formation and political organization” is central to avoiding the professionalization and concern with efficient state management which marks social democratization. There is no play book here, but it does require a “fundamental rethink of the relationship between class, party and state transformation” (Panitch and Gindin, 2016, 37).

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