In and against the (local) state: radical municipalism in the Greater London Council, 1981-1986

Timothy Owen Joubert

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School of Geography

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*

This thesis is dedicated to Paul Moore (1952-2022), vice-chair of the GLC’s Transport Committee from 1981 to 1986, and one of the great unsung heroes in the history of radical transport politics. *Tantus labor non sit cassus*.

Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between radical politics and the local state in the context of left urban government, through a case study of the 'new urban left' administration of the Greater London Council (GLC) from 1981 to 1986. Drawing on a critical historical study consisting of archival and oral history material, the GLC experience provides a lens through which to examine the potential, limits, and contradictions of radical urban movements developing political alternatives through the local state. Looking at how left activists pursued an alternative municipal politics, how they negotiated constraints, and how they experienced the contradictions of being 'in-and-against-the-state', the thesis develops an argument for looking beyond a binary conception of state and society. To capture different elements of working in-and-against the spaces of power, the thesis develops three linked conceptual frames each focused on different scales of analysis: 'urban state activism', highlighting the contestation of urban political economy; 'reflexive autonomy', emphasising the relational quality between constraint and agency and bringing into view both the limits and possibilities of pursuing radical politics within the local state; and 'activist state work', exploring the practical labour in the boundary-bridging world of radicals within the state, spanning the distinct yet overlapping roles and values of activism and officialdom. Productive possibilities for anti-capitalist social change can be found in the contradictions, gaps and fissures that emerge from political contestation within local government. The GLC study informs an argument for rethinking existing habitual binaries in radical left state-critical thought, chiefly in separating state from society and splitting left strategies into abstention or reformism. The thesis argues for antagonistic engagement with local states, and for attention to the everyday micro-politics of pursuing activism through the practical labour of statehood, which contributes to 'new municipalist' thinking on renewing left strategies for urban transformation.

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List of acronyms

AGM	Annual General Meeting
ANC	African National Congress
ANL	Anti-Nazi League
BI	Bishopsgate Institute
BR	British Rail
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CDP	Community Development Project
CLP	Constituency Labour Party
CLPD	Campaign for Labour Party Democracy
CND	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
CSE	Conference of Socialist Economists
GLA	Greater London Assembly
GLC	Greater London Council
GLEB	Greater London Enterprise Board
GMB	General Municipal and Builders Union (formerly, now simply 'GMB')
GRE	Grant-Related Expenditure Assessment
ILEA	Inner London Education Authority
LAHC	Labour Against the Housing Cuts
LCC	London County Council
LCEB	London Co-operative Enterprise Board
LEWRG	London-Edinburgh Weekend Return Group
LIS	London Industrial Strategy
LLP / GLLP	London Labour Party / Greater London Labour Party
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
LT / LRT	London Transport Executive / London Regional Transport
MDR	May Day Rooms
NF	National Front
NUL	New Urban Left
RAT	Racism Awareness Training
RMT	National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers
RSG	Rate Support Grant
SDP	Social Democratic Party
TUC	Trade Union Council

Part I: The research framework

Chapter 1
Introduction

> "'What does this place stand for?' is a question that can and should be asked of any place. Its import and urgency will vary between places (global cities may have more possibility in the sense of room for manoeuvre, and more responsibility in the sense of the magnitude of their effects), but it is a question that makes each and every place a potential arena for political contest about its answer. The constraints are undeniable (from the global movements of capital to the corsets imposed by national policy), but there are possibilities for responses that question and even rework and undermine those constraints. ... [N]ot only is it politically possible, it is also a political responsibility, to find some way of addressing that question. It is a challenge not only for the local state, but for the grassroots of the city too, indeed for all those who in one way or another take a part of their identity from the fact that they are here" (Doreen Massey, *World City*, 2007: 10).

1.1. The new radical municipalism

In June 2017, I attended the Fearless Cities summit in Barcelona, hosted by the city's minority government led by *Barcelona en Comú*, in celebration of international municipalism. The summit, since described as the "'coming out party' of the global new municipalist movement" (Russell, 2019: 990), brought over 700 participants from scores of municipalist initiatives into conversation for the first time. At its opening event, a public rally in *Plaça dels Ángels*, the radical mayors of Barcelona and Madrid, Ada Colau and Manuela Carmena, both elected in 2015 on the wave of the 15M movement, spoke about inter-urban solidarity amongst unfolding struggles for the right to the city and urban democracy. The moniker 'Fearless Cities' (*Ciudades sin Miedo*) was coined to evoke an urban coalition against the rise of right-wing authoritarianism and anti-immigrant politics, but the discussions more broadly captured an emerging set of directions for progressive urban politics shared by movements across a diversity of geographic and political contexts. Over the next three days of talks and events, radical scholars and activists shared panels with city officials, inspiring participants to articulate a shared sense of this 'new' municipalism's broad orientation and conduct an informal form of "collaborative theory building" (Russell, 2019: 991). It heralded the 'thrilling promise' of 'rebel cities' striking out on projects of democratic renewal and remodelling local state institutions into support mechanisms for urban self-government and as bridges into post-capitalist urban commons (Tiedemann, 2018: 70).

This heightened interest in municipal radicalism has brought renewed theoretical attention to the experiences of left-wing activists in taking and wielding state powers. The paradigmatic case has been the 'citizen platform' *Barcelona en Comú*, which emerged from the city's housing justice movement to take power as a minority government in 2015, attracting international interest among geographers and other scholars interested in urban justice movements, as a case study in the opportunities and challenges of translating grassroots organising into radical governance in the context of urban crisis (Bianchi, 2018; Blanco, et al., 2019; Eizaguirre, et al., 2017; Rubio-Pueyo, 2017). In broad terms, *Barcelona en Comú*'s progressive leftist policies represent a socialising approach to the urban economy, combining moves to defensively combat issues like air pollution and gentrification, for example by more tightly regulating rentier platforms like AirBnB (Charnock and Ribera-Fumaz, 2017; Thompson, 2020), with more positive plans such as the re-municipalisation of housing and utilities, and reclamation of streets for public and green space (Blanco, et al., 2019; Burgen, 2020; Custodio Martínez, 2020).

Importantly, this economic democratisation is coupled with a democratising approach to the state and decision-making institutions. Municipalism's most significant strategic reference point is the way it has sought to not only capture and utilise the power of the local state, but also bring the agency of social movements into state corridors, transforming their practices and functions, and distributing power outwards (Russell, 2020; Thompson, 2020). As a pamphlet I helped distribute at the Fearless Cities summit argued, this has not simply been an embrace of electoral politics by grassroots radical movements, but rather "an openness to the idea of occupying both the squares and the institutions – of exploring how best to generate power and exercise leverage to achieve social change" (Plan C, 2017: 6). The practitioners of radical municipalism adopt a strategic approach that attempts to reimagine and remake the state on the municipal scale, without discarding an oppositional approach to the state as such. It involves crafting new kinds of state practices, both 'external' in terms of *what* the state does (functions and services aimed at shifting the balance of forces away from corporate capital and towards workers, tenants, deprived communities and oppressed minorities) and 'internal' in terms of *how* it operates (prefigurative practices of democratic decision-making, collective participation, and ways of working with and against organisational bureaucracy) (Russell, 2020). These approaches present a challenge to settled state-critical theories about the strategic wisdom of whether to try to engage with state power. Whereas an explicit anti-capitalism is not necessarily shared across the movement, radical municipalism's preoccupation with a democratic urban economy, democratisation of political institutions, and urban commons suggest an anti-capitalist quality in essence (Thompson, 2020; Tiedemann, 2018). Consequently, for radical left activists and scholars, they invite the tactical question of how challenges to capitalism can be progressed through the architecture of urban governance.

Although some of the initial progressive euphoria surrounding municipalism has waned – in some cases from meeting a counter-wave of alt-right municipalism – it remains at an early stage and vested with many urban activists' hopes and energy. This post-euphoric period offers an

opportunity to reflect more widely on its meaning. As 'new municipalists' reflect on the failure to advance further, it becomes necessary to also consider the experience of historical urban left formations. If there is an equivalent 'old' municipalism, what can we learn from it that is of relevance to today's municipal prospects? How might they help make sense of the relationship between left strategy, cities, and the (local) state? Given the striking absence of UK left municipalism in this emerging international movement, what can Britain's own history of municipal radicalism contribute to the emerging literature on 'new' municipalism, and to prospects for the contemporary British left? Indeed, what has not yet been learned from the prior history? It is these questions that this thesis sets out to explore.

1.2. Theoretical starting points

The primary motivation of the research lies in connecting theoretical and empirical knowledge with practice in ways that can inform action for social change. This thesis is motivated by a political agenda situated within an open Marxist philosophical tradition, and aims to answer normative political questions and contribute knowledge with the purpose of intervening in real-world present-day struggles. Accordingly, the approach to knowledge about the world that underpins the research is, at root, a Marxian interest in *critique*. Derived from Marx's *ideologiekritik*, the notion of critique challenges conventional forms of theoretical abstraction that presuppose a separation between subject and object, forming concepts in environments detached from the practical social world they aim to interpret (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002; Horkheimer, 1974). Marxist critical theory rejects this separation of theory from practice in standpoints that assume themselves to be 'outside' a social context, and instead recognises that knowledge emerges from specific historical conditions. The key point of theoretical abstraction, for Marx, was not to 'fix' a social totality, but rather to critique the prevailing conditions of society, and expose their naturalised ideological foundations, as the starting point for attempts to transcend them. Critical theory is therefore an explicitly politicised and practical-material form of thought that involves "unmasking the historically specific myths, reifications and antinomies that pervade bourgeois forms of knowledge" (Brenner, 2009: 199). Critical theorising thus demands an interrogation of the purpose of knowledge, and an engagement with normative and practical political questions.

At its most abstract, Marxism is concerned with the disjuncture between what is and what can be. It builds on forms of 'dialectical' reason, attentive to the contradictions and fractures within the social world that allow for transformations to occur (and for antagonistic forms of knowledge to emerge and contest that social formation and its prevailing understandings) (Marcuse, 1964; Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002). Revealing the contradictions hidden within society in its current form aids a search for "the historical alternatives which haunt the established society as subversive tendencies and forces" (Marcuse, 1964: xi-xii). The task of critical theory is thus to excavate emancipatory possibilities buried in the present order, both

declaring the possibility of alternative futures and seeking out the points of rupture that point towards this potential. This thesis therefore proceeds from an interest in theorising that is *generative*, understanding the world in order to propel action for social change. As such it takes a critique of capitalism and its associated political instruments for granted. It adopts the normative positions of critical or 'radical' theory: against all forms of oppression, exploitation, alienation and limits to collective freedom and prosperity, rooted in a critique of capitalism.

My research interest at the outset of this PhD project was to try to understand the relationship between cities and grassroots social movements, hoping to assess the radical potential of the urban for transformative social change. My theoretical interest was therefore geared toward understanding and evaluating attempts at social change, not out of objective scientific interest but as an 'interested' party to discover how social change towards a post-capitalist future can occur. In this endeavour I have been guided by a set of more 'open' theoretical Marxist perspectives, both in radical left theory in general and in Marxist urban geography in particular. Without seeking to unify bodies of theory that can be discordant, this thesis draws implicitly on a range of perspectives that are critical of authoritarian state socialism and overly structuralist 'scientific' Marxism, while retaining a radical normative position against capitalism. These include the early New Left thinkers whose emphasis on the creative agency of the working class and 'socialist humanism' was strongly influential on the British left (discussed further in chapter 4; see e.g. Thompson, 1957, 1980; Williams, 1965); later expressions of 'Open' and 'autonomist' Marxism rooted similarly in an emphasis on agency, class struggle, and self-organisation (as covered in chapter 2 – Bonefeld, et al., 1992; Bonefeld, 2003; Cleaver, 1979); as well as 'post-Marxist' accounts influenced by poststructuralism that contest totalising narratives about capital (and the state) and instead highlight the myriad forms of social cooperation that exist in and despite capitalism (Gibson-Graham, 1996, 2006). As Dyer-Witheford (1999: 62) describes it, this 'red thread' of more open Marxism "shows how the insurgencies of the oppressed unseal fixed sociological categories and teleological certainties". Instead of seeing history as the unfolding of certain mechanical laws internal to capitalism, this tradition puts an emphasis on capital's external barrier, the working class. History is, in Marx's words, the history of class struggle – of "exploitation and its refusal in the constantly recurring eruptions of fight and flight by which rebellious subjects seek a way beyond work, wage, and profit" (Dyer-Witheford, 1999: 63). Yet this less objectivist and teleological perspective also opens up a theoretical project, as advanced in this thesis, to rethink and contest the boundaries between fixed conceptual categories and the theoretical certainties behind their relations, such as between social movement and state. Holding space for the political agency of the working class, we can highlight expressions of working-class political activity 'in and against' capital and the state that have hitherto been obscured by more mechanistic or structural accounts. These theoretical frames underpin a conviction that cities and urban struggles, and the relations between left movements and local state institutions, should be important vectors of anti-capitalist strategic thinking, and they have guided the way the case study of the 1980s GLC has been approached here (introduced below).

Building on these kinds of critical perspectives, a number of efforts have been made within the academy to develop more relevant and purposeful scholarly work, oriented toward social justice and progressive social change. Reflecting anxieties that academic research might be irrelevant to social struggles, or might be exploitatively building careers "on the backs of researching the oppressed" (Autonomous Geographies Collective, 2010: 247) without reciprocating, scholar-activists aim to unite their political ideals with their academic labour in ways that work toward social change (Fuller and Kitchin, 2004). Proponents of this approach have sought to pursue more collaborative research oriented toward social change, moving beyond the solipsistic confines of the academy and repurposing their roles from career-oriented knowledge-builder to community-engaged participant in contentious politics (Autonomous Geographies Collective, 2010; Chatterton, et al., 2007). Chatterton, et al. (2007: 216), for example, suggest that as researchers we should "consciously strive to bring ourselves into contact with social movement groups struggling for radical social change, and to participate with them in participatory actions and 'research'".

This research has been conducted with such a scholar-activist approach in mind. Although the chosen case study and method are historical, the perspective that informs the research is inspired by ideas of 'participatory action research' (see Kindon, et al., 2007) and 'militant ethnography', with a commitment to carrying out research in a "politically engaged and collaborative" way "from within rather than outside grassroots movements" (Juris, 2007: 164). As such my own political and activist commitments have informed my research, and *vice versa*. Militant ethnography emphasises the concept of 'critical solidarity' (Juris, 2007; Russell, 2012), with the researcher not only participating in organisational activity but also staking out their own political position rather than follow the temptation to act as a disinterested observer. Thus the boundary between political participation and academic theory-production is blurred; instead, the point is to "do politics *critically*, participating in the messy and contingent processes of struggles and (co)producing knowledge that critically reflects upon the aims, processes, knowledge(s) and approaches of … political movements" (Russell, 2012: 25, original emphasis).

Active engagement in left-wing organisations has thus shaped the direction of this thesis. The problematic of municipalism combined my own (already politically charged) interest in radical urbanism with my engagement in political organising. As an illustration of this convergence of academic and activist interests, like-minded members of Plan C, an autonomist communist organisation, organised a 'Radical Municipalism' cluster between 2017 and 2019, which hosted municipalist activists at speaking events and co-authored a pamphlet setting out our recognition of the "unique revolutionary potential" of the city "as a space of contestation", with a set of questions and orientations for radical municipalism (Plan C, 2017: 6) that have formed the conceptual backbone of this thesis.

Finally, in terms of writing the research findings, I have followed Castells (1983: 339) in rejecting the "excessive theoretical formalism" common to more structuralist-influenced

theoretical positions. For Castells, while systems to code social scientific observations into formal models like functionalism, structuralism, and symbolic interactionism arose as "a healthy reaction against short sighted empiricism that forbade human thought to go beyond those situations that were measurable by rudimentary statistical tools" (1983: 339), their actual application is often largely irrelevant, adding little to understanding of the experiences they codify. If anything, their use has conditioned the utility of research findings as much as strict adherence to quantifiable data has. Consequently, the conceptual interpretations in this thesis have been formed in a 'reflexive' manner without reliance on a formalised philosophical system (notwithstanding the basic foundation in Marxist dialectics). It is therefore not a rigid social-scientific exegesis of the case study, but rather a politically engaged 'immanent critique', using the empirical study to explore, support or challenge theoretical concepts (see Lowes, 1998 on this method in relation to 1980s left-wing struggles).

1.3. The thesis: a summary

This thesis explores the relationship between radical politics and the local state in the context of left urban government. It does this by revisiting one of the most important experiments in contemporary British politics: the 'new urban left' (NUL) in control of the Greater London Council (GLC) from 1981 to 1986. Although much of NUL's activity in the GLC was specific to the scalar and spatial contours of British politics in the 1980s, it nevertheless provides a valuable lens through which to examine the possibilities, pitfalls, limits and strategic implications of radical urban movements developing political alternatives at the municipal scale, either within or in alliance with local states. In particular, I am interested in the experience of a radical left-wing municipal project that brings into view not only the limits of local state power for radical transformation, but also the possibilities that exist in the contradictions, gaps and fissures of the institutional materiality of the state. By looking specifically at how activists pursued an alternative local state politics and how they experienced the contradictions of such a project, this thesis develops linked concepts of 'urban state activism', 'reflexive autonomy', and 'activist state work' to capture different elements of the difficult negotiations (and delights) of working in-and-against the spaces of power.

This thesis draws on archival research and interviews with left-wing councillors and officials who were involved in the GLC 1981-1986. Municipal politics in early 1980s Britain were highly politicised and viciously contested, and the GLC was at the heart of a radical politics that came to be widely derided by the press and the Conservative government as the 'loony left' (Curran, et al., 2019; Lansley, et al., 1989). Under the leadership of Ken Livingstone and a left faction within the Labour Party, it implemented a range of progressive and redistributive policies, many for the first time in British politics, in areas like public transport, planning, support for women and ethnic minorities, and economic intervention to protect jobs and support co-operatives. While the GLC was part of a broader wave of municipal radicalism or 'local

socialism' (Boddy and Fudge, 1984; Gyford, 1985) in Britain that offered the last major challenge and alternative to the neoliberal politics of central government, the GLC left stands out as both unique and theoretically significant. As this thesis will argue, it pushed beyond progressive policy and clashes with central government to open up new functions, meanings, and relationships within the local state in coalition with outside social movements. While the left's leadership within the Labour Group of councillors was fragile – held together with support from the 'soft' left and centre, and sometimes prone to political and tactical division – it was guided by a firmly socialist manifesto, and opened space for a more radical minority of councillors, along with a newly hired cadre of local government officers, to transform some of the functions of local government, albeit to a limited degree and with many constraints.

Moving beyond existing accounts and analyses of 'municipal socialism' in the GLC to explore some of its more subterranean radical currents, this thesis uncovers a set of practices 'in and against' the local state, in which a coalition of left forces created pockets of institutional space to pursue its oppositional anti-capitalist (and feminist, anti-racist) politics, in concert with the 'outside' social movements they considered themselves an extension of. This coalition rejected the formal limits of local state action by enfolding new issues and concerns into its sphere of interest, and by seeking to establish a new relationship between local state and social movements. It pushed against the institutional structures of the local state itself by attempting to transform the GLC's internal relations, practices and cultures. Attention to that subterranean current in the GLC helps to clarify this thesis's central theoretical emphasis on traversing boundaries, revealed especially in the practical labour of imprinting left politics on the local state's form and practices – the everyday experience of being in-and-against.

The next section of this introductory chapter briefly introduces some of the wider conceptual positioning for the thesis, posing questions framed by existing left perspectives on the state and strategies for social change. I follow this with an introduction to the GLC case study and set out the research questions that guided the research, after which I briefly outline the conceptual contributions of the thesis. The final part of the chapter describes the organisation of the thesis and the aims and content of each chapter.

1.4. Thinking in-and-against the (local) state

Anti-capitalists have long argued over the question of whether radical change can be brought about through the state, generating a polarised terrain of anti-state, pro-state or state-ambivalent camps. Typically, the relationship between left-wing politics and the state in the global North has been narrated in dichotomised terms, as two clearly separated poles: the state and civil society. For much of the 20th century, a binary existed between reform and revolution, yet, historically, reformists and revolutionaries largely shared a basic agreement in focusing on the state "as the vantage point from which society can be changed" (Holloway, 2002: 11). But since

wholesale revolutionary seizure and replacement of the capitalist state is now seen as a remote prospect, the main opposition to 'statist' reformism in recent decades has come from an anti-statist abstentionism, based on viewing the state as an inherently antagonistic apparatus maintaining class domination against any attempt at social reform (Dinerstein, 2015; Hardt and Negri, 1994; Holloway, 2002, 2010). For much of the radical left, the experience of state socialism has discredited the idea that alternatives to capitalism can be achieved through the state. Thus in Britain, while waves of anti-capitalist contention have swung between more or less anarchist or socialist influenced perspectives and movements in recent decades (Ibrahim, 2019), they have typically steered clear of involvement in 'electoral' politics, viewing working with or within the state as reformist, futile and self-limiting; whether socialists nominally hold state power or not, the result is the same. As John Holloway, perhaps the most prominent proponent of this view – having moved away from an earlier 'in-and-against' strategy *vis a vis* state power (Holloway, 1980) – puts it pithily, "The state is a way of doing things: the wrong way of doing things" (2010: 58).

Holding to this view, an abundance of critical Marxist and anarchist literature has explored the harmful nature of the state and its practices. Gramscian and neo-Marxist perspectives have complicated our understanding of the state as a set of interdependent and sometimes discordant relations rather than a singular entity, highlighting the diversity and unevenness of state strategies in concert with capital and ruling classes (see e.g. Clarke, 1991; Jessop, 1990). These perspectives reveal differences and disjunctures in the state, potentially showing how there may be openings for radical collective action. But broadly, while critical understandings of the state have become ever more sophisticated as they track changes in its contemporary complexion, few new *strategic* approaches have been developed that do not start from the assumption that radical change *solely* requires creating and expanding institutions autonomously of the state. Throughout this thesis I broadly refer to this grouping of perspectives as 'state-critical radical theory', with the proviso that I situate my approach within this tradition: as suggested above, this thesis is concerned chiefly with an immanent critique of anti-capitalist action frames within their own terms of reference.

'Anti-power' politics (Holloway, 2002) has now existed long enough to exhibit persistent limitations (Gray, 2019). Foremost is the paradoxical spectacle of countless left-wing movements habitually addressing state governments as both the target and the subject of their grievances, implicitly viewing states alone as bearing the capacity to address problems, including those it has itself caused (Cooper and Herman, 2019). In this imaginary, political activism manifests as the exercise of pressure on government bodies and other kinds of powerful actors to enact changes; entry into state power, on the other hand, is typically assumed to nullify one's preceding activism. Thus even if anti-power proponents place faith in the working class as the agent of social change, this habitual conceptual dualism tacitly assumes that "activist bodies alone cannot *realise* the changes they seek and so must pressure others" (Cooper and Herman, 2019: 41, original emphasis). As Gray argues,

> "much of the radical left relies, often unconsciously, on an anarcho-reformism which can only make radical demands from outside the state. Consequently, we allow the atrophy of the collective capacities necessary to *transform the state* and stifle the development of new such capacities" (2019: 6, original emphasis).

This bifurcated imaginary frequently maps onto other dichotomous left positions that posit incommensurable contradictions between hierarchy and horizontality, or mediated and prefigurative politics (Nunes, 2021; Srnicek and Williams, 2015). What these seemingly opposed perspectives tend to share is a conceptual dichotomy of state and civil society. The uncritical statism of social democracy (or labourism in the British context) focuses on formal representative structures that separate and exclude civil society and ordinary people from the political sphere. Yet anti-state perspectives that, by contrast, seek entirely autonomous forms of social organisation against state and capitalism similarly invoke an orthodox binary narrative from the opposite direction: since the state is monolithic and all-powerful, any engagement with it is irreparably compromised and implicated in its harms. While opposed in other ways, these perspectives share an unspoken conceptualisation of politics in which the state and society, power and resistance, are neatly and clearly separated.

This imagined separation is rarely sustained in practice, both because the state plays a major part in the conditions of our everyday lives (Painter, 2006), and because the participants in governing projects are political actors, and the state is thus composed intrinsically of social relations – even if those relations are largely determined by and inherited from capitalism (Cooper, 1994, 2020; Newman, 2014a). The state, like space, is at once the cradle and outcome of struggles between competing social projects. It is a terrain of contestation, and although routinely disregarded by anti-state thinkers more invested in street-level expressions of activism, the presence (or otherwise) of left-wing and anti-capitalist politics within and through the state warrants some attention and analysis. For Newman (2014a: 139), looking at the contested internal relations within the state means viewing it not as "a singular and all-encompassing logic" of power, but rather a set of structures and "projects whose articulations and alignments with diverse … social, cultural and political forces cannot be assured".

It therefore seems unclear how a radical engagement with the state that eschews incorporation or becoming moulded to the state's ways of behaving and thinking can be articulated and understood without moving beyond the limitations of a narrow conceptual dualism of inside/outside. An emerging body of work on 'reimagining' the state (Cooper, et al., 2020) contributes to this approach, and helps move state theory beyond the limits of a state/society dichotomy. Putting emphasis on the politics of 'reimagination', that aims to think the state beyond the scope of dominant accounts, it points toward potentially transformative new ways of engaging with states and statehood (Cooper, 2020; Newman, 2020). Cooper (2020), for example, emphasises a prefigurative approach to state theory, asking what a more positive, progressive and transformative state would look like; or what it means for non-state actors to take up the terms of statehood. Reorienting thinking about the state in this way "reveals,

revalues and makes sense of hopeful practices that have been ignored or neglected because they fail to fit prevailing paradigms" (Cooper, et al., 2020: 4), including projects that have worked within and against the grain of the state's own structural logic.

Similarly a move beyond the separation of state and society would necessitate acknowledging the limitations of both party/electoral politics and 'anti-power' abstentionism. If a reformist, electoral politics has proven itself incapable of resisting complete absorption by state and capital, abstention has ceded too much of the political terrain to ruling classes (Cumbers, 2015; Gray, 2019). Hence Gray's equally pithy argument that "the neoliberal hollowing of the state is complemented by a neo-anarchist *Hollowaying* of the state" (2019: 6, original emphasis). As the limitations of changing the world without taking power have become clear, the question becomes how to reconcile these shortcomings with a sufficiently critical approach to the capitalist state.

An important subset of that concern is the significance of *local* states and urban governments, and their susceptibility to projects of anti-capitalist transformation. In this thesis I use the terms local state, local government, local authority, urban government, municipality, local council, etc. mostly interchangeably. While they may have different meanings in different contexts, I am typically referring either directly to the GLC, or through these terms, making general reference to local states as subsidiary, metropolitan-level branches of the nation state.

Prevailing state-critical left-wing accounts of the state, especially from anti-capitalist positions, have tended to focus predominantly on national states. Critical perspectives on local states, meanwhile, have often downplayed their transformative capacity within the constrained political terrains of national governments and global capital flows. Especially in Britain, academic writing on local government in recent decades has largely focused on the withdrawal of resources and powers from councils and their shift into subordinate administrative roles, moving away from managerial local welfare states (Cockburn, 1977) in the early urban entrepreneurialism of the 1980s (Harvey, 1989) to become frontlines of neoliberal 'austerity localism' in today's 'late-entrepreneurial' environment (Peck, 2017). Left-wing positions on the potential of the local state to bring about social change thus often resting on pessimistic assessments of its relative political autonomy to challenge the power of capital and central government. Municipal government is frequently disregarded by radicals due to a perceived lack of power or relevance, despite a number of important historical experiments in progressive and socialist government at a sub-national scale, from 'Red' Vienna in the 1930s to 'Red' Bologna in the 1970s to present-day Barcelona. In contrast, a range of perspectives within radical politics point to the significance of *urban* political struggles, including the unique importance of the urban or municipal scale for questions of political contestation, social transformation, self-governance, and transitions to post-capitalism (e.g. Chatterton, 2010; Harvey, 2012; Merrifield, 2014; Miller and Nicholls, 2013; Nicholls, 2008). Yet despite the obvious fact that local governments, with varying degrees of direct control, organise and administer urban systems and experiences, a connective rather than exclusive conceptual

relation between state institutions and urban social movements has rarely been established in critical and radical urban scholarship.

Against this trend, some researchers have posed the question of local governments' ability to exercise political agency, exploring approaches developed to mitigate the impact of austerity, and other forms of 'progressive' policy such as in-sourcing contracts or environmentally-conscious development (Cumbers, 2012; Lowndes and Gardner, 2016; Thompson, et al., 2019). While comparatively marginal in the scheme of pervasive neoliberal urbanism, exploring these initiatives helps rekindle the possibility of local government action against the grain of reactionary politics and sustain debate on what progressive localism might do beyond "resiliently resisting or mediating austerity" (Cooper and Herman, 2019: 41). Recognising the existence of municipal counter-politics is a reminder that working against the neoliberal status quo can (and does) occur within local government, opening it up conceptually as a site of contestation (Newman, 2014b).

Looking internationally, on the other hand, the last few years have seen a surge of interest in new forms of 'radical municipalism', as flashpoints of urban contestation in a number of cities have developed into local electoral platforms to channel the grassroots power of social movements into the local state – returning scholarly and activist attention to the radical possibilities of local government, as noted above (see Cumbers and Paul, 2020; Russell, 2019; Thompson, 2020; among many others). Citizen platforms have emerged across Europe, the United States, and Latin America – especially in cities that have been at the epicentre of the urban outcomes of the global financial crisis (Thompson, 2020). Municipal platforms in Spain, for example, have described themselves as 'confluences' linking the 'tides' of urban protest of the anti-austerity Indignados movement. During those protests, citizens turned to new forms of self-organisation to channel an 'overflow' of social and political energies that could not be contained by existing forms of formal political representation (Blanco, et al., 2019; Rubio-Pueyo, 2017), but movements subsequently adopted a novel trajectory, making an 'institutional turn' following dissatisfaction with the efficacy of making claims *from* the state from outside (Thompson, 2020). But while institutional and electoral tactics surface in the swell of these confluences, they have not simply represented a return to traditional party politics. Instead 'new' municipalism has sought to create new forms of strategic counter-hegemonic engagement, developing a "specific, radical-democratic and transformative response to urban-capitalist crises" (Thompson, 2020: 3) that distinguishes it from other progressive urbanisms.

In particular, 'new' municipalism points to novel ways that urban movements are thinking about the state and institutions of local government. While radical left and social movement literatures often read the formalisation and institutionalisation of movement energies as their moment of failure, the growing literature on radical municipalism aims to move beyond the assumed conceptual boundaries demarcating the vitality of autonomous social protest and the toothless exhaustion of institutional politics. However, what specifically characterises municipalist politics is a continuing commitment to wider political mobilisation – to occupying both the

'squares' and the 'institutions' (Russell, 2020; Thompson, 2020). Municipalism analytically and strategically decentres the state and refocuses on the emergence of grassroots municipal power, with attempts to effect change through the local state sitting alongside the cultivation of self-governing commons institutions (Russell, 2019, 2020), helping prompt an emerging concept of 'public-common partnership' (Russell and Milburn, 2018). It is thus not simply about bringing a progressive agenda to municipal governance, but part of a symbiotic strategy in which citizen-led movements strategically transform city halls, which then use their power to aid (but not necessarily lead) wider transformations of urban society. For Debbie Bookchin, "Municipalism demands that we return power to ordinary citizens, that we reinvent what it means to do politics and what it means to be a citizen", but the practical matter of achieving this nevertheless means "doing what the conservatives around the world have done so successfully in the past few decades: running candidates at the municipal level" (2019: 14, 15).

Municipalism therefore combines a radical philosophical outlook with practical strategic thinking. In this thesis, through the examination of the GLC case, I aim to illuminate this question of how new conceptions of what local states can be and do might be given practical content. What implications do such experiences, working through the contradictions of being both 'in' and 'against', have for our concepts of the relationship between the local state and left urban movements?

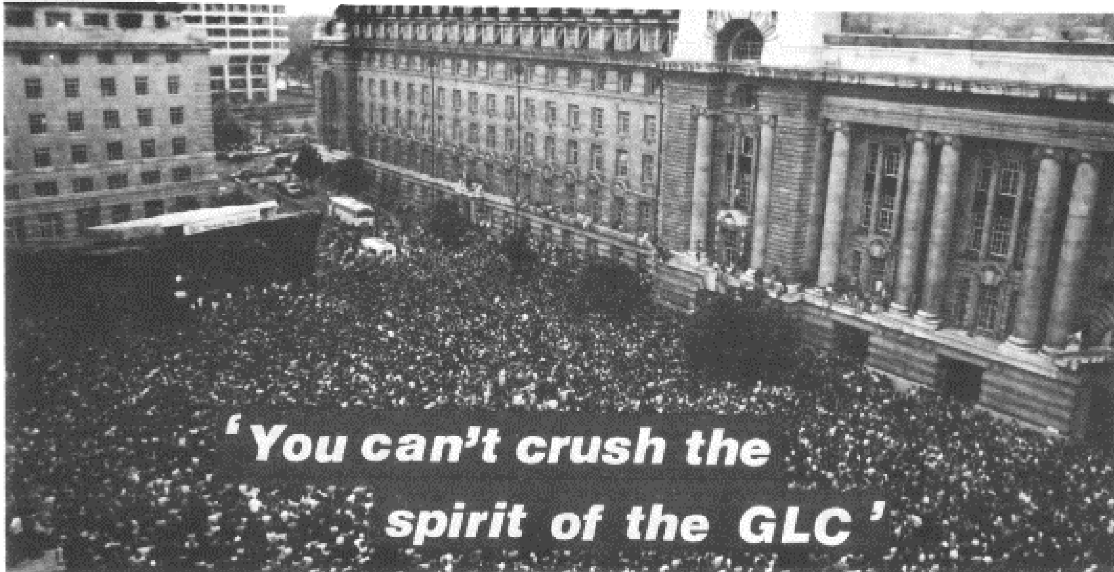

Figure 1 County Hall during a GLC festival.
(Source: London Labour Briefing, July 1984a)

1.5. The Greater London Council, 1981-1986

From the perspective of the UK left, far from the centre of gravity of new municipal interest, there is nevertheless considerable interest in the potential for municipal radicalism. British left-wing activists have been encouraged by the development of the 'Preston Model' and ideas of

'community wealth building' led by progressive think-thanks like the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES)[1] (Brown and Jones, 2021; Brown and Shaikh, 2019). London has seen left hopes dashed and raised: some recent left-led Labour councils like Islington and Haringey have disappointed activists with a lack of ambition and radicalism (see Hatherley, 2020; Satow, 2019), but there is now an independent left coalition running Tower Hamlets (Rahman, 2022; Uddin, 2022). The lack of a project on the scale of *Barcelona en Comú* should prompt a re-examination of Britain's own history of municipal socialism. The GLC and other left councils of the 1980s have frequently been mentioned – albeit mostly only in passing – at recent UK conferences on municipalism that have brought academics and activists together. As Cooper (2020) points out, new theoretical-political paradigms enable new conceptual lines and links to be drawn from an examination of historical projects. Thus, whereas the history of left councils, or 'local socialism', in the UK has tended to be penned from the perspective of local governments' occasional forays into socialism (Boddy and Fudge, 1984; Lansley, et al., 1989), the perspective of the 'new' municipalism challenges earlier conceptualisations and invites a new reading focused on left social movements' engagement with local states.

This thesis therefore aims to read the historical case of the GLC between 1981-1986 from a theoretical interest in what the local state can do for anti-capitalist activism, and what activists can do *to* the local state, rather than the existing narratives of councils (as coherent units) acting progressively. Such a perspective points to hitherto under-recognised sources of political prefiguration at work in British municipal history that anticipated the possibility of a municipal radicalism and can provide lessons for its practice today.

The significance of the GLC left during its early 1980s tenure is evidenced not only by the extraordinary amount of hostile media attention it received, but by the extent to which the hopes of the wider British left had been invested in it. The farewell given to the GLC in *Marxism Today* gives a flavour of this importance:

> "…the GLC stands as the greatest achievement of the labour movement since 1979. It shows what can be done. Creativity and imagination have been in desperately short supply in the labour movement, the GLC had bags" (Campbell and Jacques, 1986: 10).

Two particular features of the left GLC's politics contributed to that perception. First was the implementation of policies aimed at shifting the balance of power in London's economy. In transport, for example, a flagship 'Fares Fair' policy of cheaper and improved public transport sought to improve quality of life, redistribute wealth, and foster greater access to mobility for disadvantaged groups. The GLC's Transport Committee pursued novel policies aimed at diminishing the presence and priority of motor vehicles and improving streets for pedestrians and cyclists – including a dial-a-ride service and taxi-card for disabled passengers, a safe

1 Founded by Mike Ward, one of the former GLC councillors interviewed for this thesis.

women's transport scheme, a pavement parking ban, a ban on heavy goods vehicles on most roads, and the cancellation of destructive road-building schemes. A new Industry and Employment Committee, meanwhile, pursued an interventionist economic policy, setting up a Greater London Enterprise Board (GLEB) to coordinate investments aimed at preventing job losses – conceptualised as 'restructuring for labour' and tied to progressive conditions such as equal opportunities, union rights, and worker involvement in industrial planning – and funding a range of alternative progressive economic ventures, including technology centres, training schemes, worker cooperatives and cooperative development agencies. Together, these can be conceptualised as a strategy of intervention, redistribution, and qualitative improvement within the urban political economy – aimed at shifting the balance of power toward workers, public transport users, and local communities as constituents of a broader urban public, and as points of convergence for a popular left 'counter-hegemonic' movement. The success of this strategy, however, was patchy – for example, criticisms were raised that GLC industrial planning could not hope to significantly impact economic trends in London, the 'capital of capital' (Murray, 1985). Nevertheless, the GLC's policy programme indicates potentially fruitful points of alignment between urban social movements' interests and local governments' capabilities.

Second was the GLC's deployment of local state resources in a campaigning capacity, including reshaping the Council's public relations towards support for left-wing political causes, and the use of policy tools to exert political leverage beyond its existing powers. It thus twinned efforts to directly benefit working class Londoners with attempts at public awareness-raising around wider social and political issues. Part of the aim here was on transforming the symbolism surrounding the local state, and adopting an extroverted, campaigning tenor to engage more actively, *as a state institution*, in provinces considered beyond its remit (Cooper, 2020; Wainwright, 1987). In doing so, the NUL challenged a narrow territorial and political parochialism, taking active interest in and showing solidarity with a range of local, national, and international struggles. As Cooper (2020) has pointed out, it refused to see certain politicised aspects of life as belonging to realms disconnected from the concern of public policy, either too 'private' (such as women's issues, racism, and sexuality), or too remote (such as apartheid South Africa or nuclear weapons).

In short, NUL conceived the GLC as – and to some extent transformed it into – an open, campaigning, and redistributive institution, aimed at combining the power of the local state with the transformative capacity of urban social movements (Wainwright, 1987). However, each of these initiatives were fraught with conflicts and contradictions, whether between the GLC and central government (Egan, 2001; Duncan and Goodwin, 1988), within the left, or between the left 'inside' and the 'outside' movements it tried to support (Ouseley, 1990; Cooper, 1994).

These constraints and contradictions, however, often resulting from divergent (perceived) interests and asymmetrical power relations, furnish the enduring theoretical relevance of the GLC left for anti-capitalist strategy. But its place in the collective memory of the British left has been ambiguous. Hatherley (2020: 107-109) comments that the 1981-1986 GLC is treated by

today's younger socialists "as a sort of social democratic Paris Commune … as a period in which their forebears constructed a new and viable socialism". Yet others have lamented that, certainly in the more mainstream telling of labour history, the GLC has been largely forgotten. Indeed, in the decades since the GLC's abolition, there has been surprisingly little in-depth literature on the left's experience of it, either popular or scholarly. This absence of literature is especially stark in geography, despite governing one of the world's largest and wealthiest cities for five years at a time of immense social and economic crisis and upheaval (Massey, 2007; Sassen, 1991; Thornley, 1992). But while financial deregulation of the City of London and the creative destruction of its new skyscraper enclave in Docklands were key moments in the global imposition of a neoliberal urbanism stretching across economic and social domains (Massey, 2007); and while from Westminster the Conservative Party constructed a national identity assembled through the narrowly ethnocentric terms of suburban Britain and the expulsion of diverse inner cities from its cultural imaginary (Hall, 1988); both faced an alternative vision of society from across the Thames river, where London's seat of municipal government offered a 'South Bank socialism' of democratised public space, robust public services, and a voice for the oppositional claims of trade unionists, feminists, anti-racists, gay liberation, and the peace movement (Hatherley, 2020; Lansley, et al., 1989; Mackintosh and Wainwright, 1987; Williams, 2020).

A handful of studies have nevertheless subjected the 1980s GLC to analysis. Contemporaneous accounts of the GLC are contained to a relative few works, but they are of great depth and quality. Recent interest in the NUL is reflected in a growing body of scholarly work, both general (Hatherley, 2020) and on specific policy areas (e.g. Atashroo, 2019; McFadzean, 2021; Williams, 2020). Given the range of existing literature, this thesis does not seek to present a comprehensive narrative of the GLC and its policies, although it does draw extensively on some existing works, especially on the historical background of the NUL and its relationship to the Labour Party and labour movement. Instead, this thesis focuses more on the relatively under-researched strands of political practice in the GLC, offering a 'post-hoc' interpretation and analysis of some of the GLC's more radical undercurrents of particular relevance for left municipalism. The aim, in doing so, is to bring these under-recognised elements of political activity to the attention of urban geographers and historians interested in the history of left-wing politics, and to use them to ground a theoretical approach to radical politics and local government that emphasises (and evidences the possibility of) acting 'in and against the state', even if it poses a range of difficulties and challenges.

1.6. Research questions

My research for this thesis has focused on three elements of the relationship between radical left politics and the urban state, emerging from the core problematic discussed above and drawn out at more length in chapter 2. I look at how the left leadership of the GLC developed a new urban

imaginary, how they used state capacities and navigated structural constraints to unlock new possibilities for and meanings about statehood, and how the context of being inside the local state changed the practices and possibilities of radical activism. This endeavour was guided by four research questions:

> **i. How did the politics of the NUL translate into a policy platform for the GLC, and what kind of new urban imaginary for London did this represent?** I outline the ideological and practical contexts behind the GLC left's politics and their impact on its policy programme, look at the left's wider objectives in terms of the transformation of urban life, and analyse the contested political nature of the left GLC's policies.
>
> **ii. How were the capacities and constraints of the local state experienced and navigated by the NUL, and what do they reveal about the composition of state power and possibilities for different kinds of statehood?** I examine the legal, financial, and political context of the GLC, particularly in relation to constraints imposed by central government, and investigate how the left encountered those constraints and, in the co-evolving space between structural limits and political agency, how new forms of leverage and new political openings unfolded and were closed down.
>
> **iii. What contradictions arise from the experience of being 'in and against the state', and how do they manifest in a context of left government?** I explore how radical values, practices, and aims translated into a context of urban government, and analyse left activists' encounters with state bureaucracy and their entanglements with institutional values and forms of action. From oral history accounts, I look especially at how these contradictions are experienced at the level of ordinary practices and labour within the local state, and consider what might constitute a radical activism out of state work.
>
> **iv. How does engagement with state power by social movements challenge radical theoretical approaches to the state, and what does that mean for the strategic thinking that shapes anti-capitalist practice?** I link the grounded insights from the GLC experience to a set of broader political and strategic concerns in radical social movements surrounding theories of the state, and their implications for a wider political philosophy.

In answering these questions, the thesis contributes knowledge from a relatively under-explored episode of urban left history towards a growing field of literature on radical municipalism, with implications that extend to literature on urban social movements, left and labour historiography, local government, and state theory. A secondary motivation, given the choice of a case study located in the past, is to question the received frames of historical knowledge on a similar Marxist basis. Hence the more specific 'methodological' aim of the thesis is to advance a 'counter-history' of municipal socialism that challenges existing historical narratives, contributes to present theoretical and political debates on municipalism, and, more generally,

revisits historical accounts of the 1980s by excavating some of its political undercurrents and alternatives.

1.7. Theoretical contributions

In chapters 6 through 8, I identify and discuss three features of activist statehood in the GLC, related to the difficulties and potentials of pursuing left urban governance. Through these, I extricate three main theoretical insights, and consider their wider conceptual application.

The first concerns a new imaginary of an alternative urban political economy, seen in the GLC's outward-facing policies. I argue that, relatively small-scale and disparate as they were, the left GLC's policies are significant because they constituted one of the only left-wing efforts to reimagine the role and purpose of institutional power in the history of British government. The effort to 'change the balance of power', to paraphrase several GLC documents and commentaries, was limited in practice to minor reforms to the structure of urban capitalism – but I argue that in essence and in spirit they represented a challenge to capitalist interests, embedded in the attempt to improve the quality of life for the poorest and affect a more equitable distribution of wealth, while acknowledging the complex entanglements of production and reproduction in the processes of value creation and profit extraction. I label the NUL's efforts in this area 'urban state activism' to stress their combination of practical and campaigning attributes, the local state's scale of intervention in urban political economy, and the transitional and 'non-reformist' subtext of some of the interventions.

A second contribution considers the relative autonomy of the local state, in terms of the obstacles that formal and legal structures, financial resources, and bureaucracy pose for implementing a radical left politics. The NUL's engagement with the limits imposed by legality and finance highlight the inherently conflictual and antagonistic relations within and between different parts of the state, and reveal the co-constitution of structural constraint and political agency. Creative capacity to navigate or circumvent constraints demonstrates a certain plasticity to the state and shows how constructs such as legality and accounting are not fixed external obstacles but arenas of contestation themselves (Thorpe and Morgan, 2022). Legality reflects political values and forms an institutional common-sense, but can in some circumstances be reinterpreted and contested according to alternative values. Moreover, new institutional tools can be invented out of the materials given by statehood: by engaging in campaigning and forms of practical leverage like boycotts and contract compliance, the left GLC to a degree embodied an activist register, often seeking to effect changes beyond existing formal boundaries of responsibility and territory. I develop a concept of 'reflexive autonomy' to characterise these forms of creative boundary-pushing as part of the contested terrain of the local state. Reflexive autonomy, within the bounds of a more formal-structural 'relative' state autonomy from capital, emphasises adaptive and self-reflective action, particularly in deliberate attempts to reshape

governance, and reflects how the fissures and openings within state institutional environments are in constant flux as dominant and insurgent political forces respond to and shape each other's actions.

A third contribution of the thesis is to consider the more everyday level of working within local government, and to demonstrate that practical labour's centrality to the enactment and realisation of radical politics 'in-and-against' the state. In the GLC, new departments to service new policy committees allowed the recruitment of relatively large numbers of politicised radicals to serve as local government officers. Alongside aligned elected members, their efforts to push back against bureaucratic limits – especially in terms of the more diffuse social forces of obstruction such as uncooperative senior officers, labyrinthine processes and hierarchical cultures – form a crucial part of a project of internal institutional change, in terms of the relations of power among the GLC's political structures (that is, the relationship of radical councillors with the bureaucracy, and among the nominally neutral internal bureaucracy itself). Radical staff members, for example, attempted to develop more collaborative working practices that aimed to resist the impositions and limits of hierarchical professional culture and recompose the power relations of the state. An important problematic here concerns the challenge of working to reshape state structures without one's own political outlook or energies becoming moulded to its existing practices and privileges.

I locate an important theoretical node of political struggle in these quotidian spaces of labouring for the local state. Here the thesis builds on autonomist Marxist theory, which views the state as a set of social relations structured by capital and situates the inherent crises and instability of capital in the capital-wage relation whereby exploited workers also present an external obstacle to capital accumulation. Moving this insight across the border of the state, into the labour of government, I introduce the original concept of 'activist state-work' to capture the dissonances, contradictions, challenges and, crucially, *immanent possibilities* of everyday acts of contestation that bridge the gap between officialdom and activism. This concept involves recognising the activity of radicals working 'within' the local state – whether as elected councillors or as employees – as part of the same movement formations as more extra-institutional approaches, or at least part of a spectrum of contentious left-wing political activity. Recasting those working within electoral formations as continuing the activism of 'external' movements troubles a dualistic conception of anti-capitalist politics in which 'state' and 'activism' are neatly opposed. This means revisiting the GLC to bring into view the distinctly activist practices and collective actions at work within it. It also means detaching those 'radical' elements from straightforward identification with the whole institution, against the tendency to recount a historical narrative from a more orthodox institutional perspective.

These sets of reflections on the GLC left inform a broader central claim of this thesis: that the GLC experience challenges us to think beyond the inside/outside binary towards an *in-against-and-beyond the state* perspective that pays closer attention to the contradictions and contested space of the state's internal organisation, and shifts emphasis to a politics of *engagement* with

state forces that work otherwise to maintain class domination. Conscious contestation of institutional practices, and the everyday conflicts and challenges involved, reveal the local state both as a terrain of contestation – not a singular logic of power but a contingent and conflictual space wherein the conduct of governance is continually revised (Newman, 2014a) – and of possibility, within which the constituent power of grassroots action might be tethered to the constituted power of statehood (Routledge, et al., 2018). Moving beyond the in/out binary of the state also helps to excavate more hidden and under-valued forms of mundane, quiet or messy forms of everyday political contestation and reconstruction at work within the state (Newman, 2014b). By exposing potential points of rupture in the architecture of governance, such a perspective opens up the possibility of imagining and enacting projects of state transformation that might work the edges of such cracks and fissures to create ever wider openings (Newman, 2014b).

1.8. Chapter outline

This thesis is set out in three main sections. The first, in chapters 1 to 3, introduces the project and sets out its conceptual and methodological coordinates. Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature, with a particular focus on radical theory regarding the state, which the chapter addresses both in terms of how the state has been defined and understood, and how radical movements have practically engaged with the question of the state. It provides an overview of Marxist approaches to the capitalist state, and sets out a critique of autonomist and abstentionist positions. I then explore the fundamental contradictions and strategic dilemmas that confront radical left governing projects, before making a case for the theoretical importance of the quotidian register in the practices of the state, particularly in the everyday labour that materially reproduces the state. Chapter 3 sets out the research design, including the epistemological principles behind the thesis and choice of case study, and a description and discussion of the methods undertaken.

The second part of the thesis, in chapters 4 and 5, provides some contextual background to the case study, furnishing both its theoretical and historical context. Chapter 4 sets out a genealogical approach to the politics of the 'new urban left' – from its philosophical origins in the new left to its composition in a range of movements and their political perspectives. Chapter 5 provides a historical overview of London government prior to the GLC of 1981-1986, to account for the history of municipal radicalism which supplies the context for the left's turn to local government.

The third and main part of the thesis presents the findings from the case study of the GLC new urban left. Chapter 6 builds a picture of the more outward-facing aspects of the left GLC, outlining some of its most significant policies and political approaches, with an emphasis on its industrial restructuring and public transport policies. It argues that the left GLC was

characterised by an activist register and – in a contextualised way – constituted a more radical political programme than has previously been recognised. The aim of the chapter is to convey a sense of, and critical discussion about, the GLC's 'urban state activism' in putatively coherent form, against which the subsequent conceptual themes of the thesis are developed by exploring tensions and contradictions that cut across the inside/outside boundaries of the local state.

Chapter 7 traces some of the various legal and political conflicts that emerged around the left GLC, particularly in terms of the limits posed by legal and financial constraints. Delving into the detail of these structural limits exposes a range of relational and contingent processes and outcomes, and consequently the chapter argues for a more open perspective on statehood and the scope for radical politics to unfold through urban governance. I suggest that rather than constituting a fixed external limit, the structural forces of capitalism represented by an opposed central government co-evolved with and responded to the radical politics of the GLC. This dialectic approach to state structures, attentive to contingency and conflict internal to the local state or between different state scales, is demonstrated in the GLC left's creative construction of political leeway and leverage, including the development of new policy tools to pursue social objectives beyond the reach of the local state's statutory remit. To further develop this point, which I conceptualise as 'reflexive autonomy', the chapter also unpicks some of the contested internal relations within the GLC bureaucracy, exploring how everyday institutional dynamics shaped the development and outcomes of the left's policy agenda.

Chapter 8 picks up that thread by developing a theoretical argument for viewing the labour of urban governance as a crucial terrain of political struggle. It introduces a concept of 'activist state-work' as a heuristic that grounds the practice of *in and against the state* in the everyday labour of government work. The chapter explores the tensions and contradictions in the practical labour of bringing social movement commitments into the local state. I first set out an argument for greater attention to the quotidian environment of the local state as a field of labour, set against the conceptual limits of more structuralist critical accounts of the left GLC. I then consider ways the left 'opened up' its physical and political spaces to input from outside, and discuss the importation of new political and professional styles and their clash – and sometimes accommodation – with the existing traditional officer structure. The major theme of the chapter is in the difficulties faced by the participants of the NUL in navigating the competing subjectivities and demands of their roles as simultaneously representatives of radical movements and members of a state bureaucracy.

Chapter 9 comprises a lengthy concluding discussion, bringing some of the themes in the previous chapters together to summarise the main conceptual contributions of the thesis. It presents a set of broader concluding arguments about theorising the local state and anti-capitalist activism, using the GLC case study to inform a challenge to several linked conceptual limitations of the contemporary left. The chapter closes the thesis with a brief indication of potential avenues for linking future research to radical left organising.

Chapter 2
Revisiting the state debate for radicalism municipalism: Theoretical framework and literature review

> "Once the logic of capital, property and the market are broken, it is the diversity of social forms, the taking of popular initiatives, the recovery of popular control, the passage of power from the state into society, which marks out the advance towards socialism. We can envisage a 'partnership' between state and society, so long as the initiative is always passing to society, so long as the monopoly over the management of social life does not come to a dead halt with the state elite, so long as the state itself is rooted in, constantly draws energy from, and is pushed actively by popular forces. One of the reasons why some of the things which have developed around the GLC are so exciting, so prefigurative for the left, is precisely that one begins to see here and there a glimmer of the local state transforming the ways in which it 'represents' society politically..." (Stuart Hall, 1984a: 231).

2.1. Introduction

This thesis is situated within a broader context of left scholarship concerned with the horizons and strategic agendas of emancipatory politics. The following review of literature aims to furnish the core intellectual framework for this focus in two ways. First, to demonstrate the importance of engaging with the problem of state power for anti-capitalist strategic thinking, and second, to tease out some of the gaps and contradictions in existing radical intellectual resources, and open up new conceptual pathways for deconstructing the conceptual dichotomy between state and movements. The chapter brings together sympathetic critiques of autonomist and horizontalist organising models to construct an argument to move beyond the limits of both state-centric and anti-state models of anti-capitalist social change. Overall the purpose of the chapter is to situate the thesis in a theoretical territory of Marxist state theory, and to highlight some of the limits of an exclusively abstentionist position regarding the (local) state, while placing them among some other limits including a localist imaginary.

The chapter begins by sketching out how the state has been understood in left-wing radical theory, and how this has shaped the strategic approaches of social movements. The opening section first introduces early Marxist approaches to the state's role in capitalist society and utility for revolutionary transformation, and narrates this up to the more nuanced state theory of 'relative autonomy' epitomised by Poulantzas (1980). It then explores and critiques recent dominant state-critical perspectives, examines their roots in autonomist Marxism, shows how

these have become a dominant collective action frame for anti-capitalism, and briefly points out some of the practical and strategic limits of that frame. The second main section explores the potential for closer relations between movements and state formations. It first introduces Wright's (2010) tripartite model of movement strategies, and argues the key weakness of the 'interstitial' strategy, the dominant one that maps onto the anti-power action frame, lies in its approach to the state – which I argue to be self-contradictory. The section then brings in examples from recent European 'movement parties' and Latin America's 'pink wave' to emphasise a more complex set of possibilities in the mutual co-constitution of left governments and left grassroots. However it also notes the strategic limits within the state, and the section ends with a brief look at the contradictions faced by radical left governing projects, which argues that these contradictions should not be seen as immediate points of failure but as challenges and opportunities to pursue 'radical reforms', particularly where they can be staked to wider political conflicts. More generally, it argues an appropriately radical approach to governing requires an effort to remake state institutions from within. A third main section then addresses the spatiality of radical approaches to the state, including assumptions about political scale, the specifically urban dimensions of local governance and its potential utility for radical politics, and how radical municipalism is approaching the challenges the chapter identifies in terms of a specifically urban frame and a transformative approach to the local state. The chapter ends with a brief argument for the theoretical and strategic relevance of shifting view to the 'inside' of the (local) state, and suggests the quotidian labour and everyday practices of statehood are an important space of action, comprising the material quality of acting 'in-and-against' the state's internal contradictions. This forms a key argument returned to later in the thesis, mainly in chapter 8.

2.2. The radical left and the state: the state debate

It has long been recognised that oppositional social movements appear in cycles of contention, dependent on political opportunities and resources, and are shaped by political cultures and concepts (Tarrow, 2011). Anti-capitalist strategy thus responds to changing theoretical approaches, framed both by left political cultures and traditions and by the concepts that inform them. Throughout the history of the anti-capitalist left, a major strategic and theoretical battleground has been over how – or whether – to engage with the state; approaches to which are shaped by how we understand the state itself. This section offers a brief account of earlier Marxist theories of the state, before moving on to discuss how recent anti-capitalist movements have developed strategy in relation to a political outlook of autonomy.

2.2.1. Radical theories of the state

Anti-capitalist political theory has generated abundant critique and analysis for understanding and defining the state. Marxists have highlighted the state's coercive enforcement of capital accumulation (Harvey, 1976; Jessop, 1982) and facilitation of dispossession (Harvey, 2003; Parenti, 2015), while anarchist insights underpin critiques of its bureaucratic containment of human freedoms (Scott, 1998) and violent policing of dissent (della Porta and Reiter, 1998). Yet in contrast to work on capital and labour, Marxist accounts of the state – and hence the problem it poses for transitions beyond capitalism – have rested on a relatively thinner foundation. Marx never developed a rigorous theory of the state, and revolutionaries have looked instead to fragments of unsystematic reflections, which can sometimes be self-contradictory if taken as generalisable theoretical claims (Barrow, 2000; Jessop, 1982). A popular formulation comes from the *Communist Manifesto*, in which Marx and Engels (1968: 37) viewed "the executive of the modern State [as] but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie". Marx's more 'political' writing, such as *The 18th Brumaire* and *The Civil War in France* (Marx and Engels, 1968), also recognised that in the 'exceptional circumstances' of revolution, subordinate classes may use seizure of state power to establish themselves as a ruling class, necessitating the 'smashing' of the bourgeois state and the formation of new tools of communist self-government (Barrow, 2000).

Most importantly for early Marxist approaches to the state was Marx's provision of a philosophical groundwork. In his preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, he writes,

> "The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general" (Marx and Engels, 1968: 181).

This historically novel conception upended liberal state theory characterised by Hegel's image of the State as embodying universality at the apex of the social formation, by pointing to the primacy of material production (Chandhoke, 1995). However, as Chandhoke (1995) points out, the sophistication of Marx's materialist philosophy was lost when it was frozen into dogma by the Second International, which adopted the base-superstructure metaphor as a mechanistic interpretation of social relations. The result was to analytically separate political institutions from the social relations of production, and to treat both state and society in general as derivative of, and thus automatically following, the laws of capitalist economics (Chandhoke, 1995).

Yet paradoxically, this forced the problematic of the state to the centre of strategic debates about achieving socialism, which for much of the twentieth century were marked by the dichotomy of reformist social-democracy or revolutionary seizure of power. The key text for Marxists until

the 1960s was Lenin's *The State and Revolution* (1992), which was largely an elaboration of Marx's own ideas (Miliband, 1973). Lenin emphasised the state's repressive character, furnishing the bourgeoisie with "a special apparatus of coercion to subjugate the will of others by force" (1919: 475). Lenin thus placed this "coercive machine" at the centre of revolutionary strategy to "overthrow the power of capital … We shall use this machine, or bludgeon, to destroy all exploitation" (Lenin, 1919: 488). The strategic question was whether this could be achieved by reforms to push the state to progressively socialise the economy or only by a more immediate and decisive break. For revolutionary socialists like Lenin, prioritising reform would not substantially transform the exploitative relations at the heart of capitalist production (Lenin, 1992; Luxemburg, 1988a). This was because the state in capitalist society expresses a false neutrality in economic matters, with formal liberty under law merely masking the real unfreedom of private capital. For Rosa Luxemburg (1988a), reforms cannot contain their own force, but have their conditions of possibility delimited by the inherited social framework of the bourgeois state; since those characteristics are determined by previous revolutions, the only way to challenge capitalism is via wholesale revolution. In Luxemburg's account, working within the state's existing legislative apparatus would inexorably lead to socialist managers finding a clear-cut class struggle perspective inconvenient amidst the organisational priorities of parliament, in turn leading to a policy of "diffident, diplomatic conciliation" (Luxemburg, 1988a: 110).

At the same time, Lenin viewed the existing state as an insufficient instrument for wielding proletarian class power, and so needed to be replaced, at the first opportunity, by a workers' state constituted in parallel with seizing the existing state's coercive apparatus. Thus, the seemingly paradoxical position of viewing the state as subordinate to economic laws and derivative of capitalist social relations, but also the instrument of the abolition of bourgeois class rule, is resolved by recourse to an alternative state, emerging out of the rising consciousness and organisation of the masses. The smashing of the state machine would inevitably follow from its use to smash capitalism (Lenin, 1919, 1992). To be sure, the latter in Lenin's seizure of state power was eminently successful; but viewing the state as a simple instrument of class rule, it was relatively easy to reverse engineer its class basis – now understood as derivative and representative of the economic class rule of the proletariat (Chandhoke, 1995). The radical left subsequently concluded that the Bolshevik state's lapse into a violent, state-centric bureaucratism was attributable to an intellectual naivety that their new state fully reflected the proletarian will (Luxemburg, 1988b; Panitch and Gindin, 2017).

In the post-Lenin space, orthodox Marxism in the West settled into a gloomy view influenced by Stalin's concept of 'state monopoly capitalism', based on the idea that states in advanced capitalist nations deployed their specific capacities (tax, regulation, planning, military, police, etc.) to secure the interests of national monopoly capitals against competing national capitals or their national working class (Clarke, 1991). From the 1960s, however, internationalisation of capital, growth of welfare states, inability of states to manage unfolding crises, and their

subjection to new social conflicts independent of labour movements (especially in welfare provision and cultural values about consumer society), undermined the state monopoly capitalism thesis (Chandhoke, 1995; Clarke, 1991).

Instead the state came to be understood as a power structure in its own right. A key proponent of this view was Nicos Poulantzas (1976, 1978), who argued that the state does not necessarily secure particular economic interests but has “relative autonomy” to maintain the stability of the whole capitalist social system (Miliband, 1973; Poulantzas, 1978). The capitalist state procures legitimacy for itself through the formal structures of liberal democracy that give it the leverage to function for long-term system maintenance (Poulantzas, 1976). In stressing the ‘relative’ autonomy of the state and downplaying economic determinism, Poulantzas was not abandoning the materialist view of the state’s purpose, but rather asserting a more relational and dynamic character than the mechanistic base-superstructure metaphor allowed (Holloway and Picciotto, 1991). Seeing the state as either a ‘subject’ invested with absolute agency (the state-monopoly view), or as a ‘thing-instrument’ of the capitalist class completely divested of independent agency (as per Lenin), each reduced the distinct materiality of the state to the abstract force of class power in general, making it irrelevant to praxis (Poulantzas, 1980). Instead, while the state manifests capitalist logics, it does so as “the *specific material condensation* of a relationship of forces among classes”, interiorising and expressing social relations (Poulantzas, 1980: 129, original emphasis).

Analysis of the state must therefore be rooted in “the historical materialist category of the capital relation”, based on interpreting Marx’s *Capital* as a theory of the totality of social relations under capitalism (Holloway and Picciotto, 1991: 112). For Marx, “economic categories are fetishized forms of appearance of social relations” (Clarke, 1991: 9), which inseparably combine economic, political, and ideological struggles. But because capitalist society requires political domination and the exercise of force to appear distinct from economic exploitation – in order to construct capitalist relations as the ‘free’ exchange of labour power – the state is established as an autonomous body, granted a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence (Holloway and Picciotto, 1991). Hence, the particularity of the state both results from, and ideologically reproduces, the capital relation. Consequently, this new approach could insist on the *autonomy* of the state and its irreducibility to the mode of production, while also rejecting its *neutrality*, since its class character still reflects “a particular phenomenal form of social relations which has its genesis in [the] capitalist form of exploitation” (Holloway and Picciotto, 1991: 112; Poulantzas, 1980).

This more dynamic model of the relation between political structure and class power drew on wider sources of theoretical critique. From the sociological traditions of the Frankfurt School, a ‘German debate’ combined Weberian emphasis on the repressive and alienating qualities of state bureaucracies with the Marxist terms of class society (Habermas, 1976; Offe, 1984). Offe (1984) identified the specificity of the state as the management of class tension, whereby collective provision integrates working classes into the social system and reconciles their

demands with capitalist class dominance. For Habermas (1976), states perform a legitimation function, coupling direct economic planning with administrative systems that filter and subordinate the social aspirations expressed by competing political parties to the reproduction of capitalist society. Earlier, British debates had popularised Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony, emphasising the securing of consent through civil society institutions alongside the state's more directly coercive capacities. For Gramsci, class power is not exercised through the state as naked dictatorship, but is more subtle and pervasive, resonating throughout popular culture and therefore more persuasive and compulsive (Thompson, 1965; Williams, 1965). That is, hegemony corresponds to, but is not identical with, the exercise of state power. In each case, the state imposed capitalist social relations by expressing and reproducing bourgeois cultural norms, rather than directly facilitating bourgeois economic interests (Clarke, 1991).

The task for the left, then, was not to seize state power – whether by democratic or revolutionary means – but to transform it and destroy its alienating and dehumanising forms of rational-bureaucratic domination, while also seeking to transform the plethora of other institutions of class power in civil society. E.P. Thompson suggests the "embryonic hegemony" of a subordinate class might be extended "by exerting increasing influence in the intellectual and moral life of the nation, within its education institutions, through its control of organs of local government, etc." (1965: 346). A counter-hegemonic strategy would need to move beyond the dichotomy of reform and revolution, and enact a "democratic road to socialism" that "brings itself to bear on the internal contradictions of the state" (Poulantzas, 1980: 257).

This reformulation was a practical imperative: Poulantzas worried that in viewing the state as a unitary body instead of a field of social forces, Communist Parties would be outmanoeuvred. Thus although Poulantzas offers a more structural account of the capitalist state, which reproduces capitalism regardless of the class interests of a particular government, he gives a more strategic shape to anti-capitalist action through the concepts of relative autonomy and the state as a set of social relations (see also Clarke, 1991; Holloway and Picciotto, 1991). The state remains a strategic site of political struggle, but the task is rather to modify the relationship of forces within the state apparatus, spread across all sites of institutional power (instead of just the electoral/legislative space), and in which struggles at a distance from the state remain necessary. Troubling the dichotomy of 'capturing' or 'smashing' state power, the question becomes how the state can be *transformed* in ways that impact on wider class relations of power (Poulantzas, 1980).

2.2.2. The state and socialist strategy after neoliberalism

In recent decades, anti-systemic movements have voiced an evolving set of strategic conceptions regarding the state, shaped by critiques of prior moments of contestation and their conceptual coordinates. The collapse of the Soviet Union, the triumph of globalising neoliberalism, and the rise of the alter-globalisation movement against it, have all led to a

reticence regarding the direction of revolutionary energies toward the state. The Zapatista struggle in particular – that erupted spectacularly in 1994 in the Mexican jungle of Chiapas as a symbolic response to the neoliberal North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) – and the spread of its militant practice through theoretical *communiques* and networking *encuentros*, arguably prompted "a turning point in revolutionary thinking" (Dinerstein, 2015: 3). Zapatismo praxis forms the basis of "a master collective action frame with which anti-neoliberal groups could identify" (Ibrahim, 2019: 149), the heart of which has been a rejection of the state and state-centric strategies.

John Holloway has skilfully translated the Zapatista experience into a wider conceptual lens for the left with his influential exhortation to *Change the World Without Taking Power* (2002). Holloway challenges the 'state paradigm', which "puts the state at the centre of the concept of radical change" and assumes revolution to involve "the winning of state power and the transformation of society through the state" (2002: 157). As he argues,

> "The notion of capturing positions of power, whether it be governmental power or more dispersed positions of power in society, misses the point that the aim of the revolution is to dissolve relations of power, to create a society based on the mutual recognition of people's dignity. What has failed is the notion that revolution means capturing power in order to abolish power" (Holloway, 2002: 20).

Holloway instead proposes the opposite: the development of 'anti-power' whose first step is abandonment of state-centric strategies, originating in an 'Open' Marxist perspective of 'autonomy'. Here, autonomy means not just independence from formal politics, but a practical and conceptual separation from the power of capital. In contrast to orthodox Marxism's emphasis on the inexorable logic of capital accumulation as "the unilateral force shaping the contemporary world" (Dyer-Witheford, 1999: 65), the autonomist argument is that workers always resist their subjectification by capital. Each new way of organising production (and thus each form of the state) is as much a response to class rebellion as a constituent requirement of the capitalist system (Tronti, 2019). Defining the 'working class' as this immanent struggle against capital, this position opens a distinction between incorporation (labour power's *technical composition* by capital) and autonomy (working class *political composition* against capital). This perspective gives 'class struggle' some analytical clarity and avoids the temptation to identify demographic taxonomies of 'real' workers (Dyer-Witheford, 1999), moving beyond the workplace to identify a 'social factory' that subsumes everyday life to the field of capitalist power relations (Gray, 2018; Tronti, 2019). Hence, working class struggles are any rebellions of subjects against their organisation by capital – whether labourer, tenant, caregiver, consumer, etc. With this more expansive view, the autonomist position affirms the power and autonomy of the creative human energy Marx called 'labour' (which Holloway renames 'doing' to differentiate from its alienated form), the "living, form-giving flame" (Marx, quoted in Hardt and Negri, 1994: 1) that constitutes human society.

For Holloway (2002, 2010), the challenge for anti-capitalist struggle is to undermine the fetishization of that social doing under capitalism, in which relations between people come to obtain the unequal and alienated qualities of commodity exchange. He understands the state as the supreme form of fetishization, a network of social relations artificially abstracted into a seemingly independent 'thing'. Fetishism is also its fundamental logic and action – abstracting from lived social experience and replacing human subjectivity with procedure and formality, collective social bonds with atomised units of population (Holloway, 2010). Holloway here echoes the work of various other state critics influenced by anarchism and post-structuralism: the state puts things in order, simplifies social experience, and eliminates ambivalence and complexity to render subjects legible to administrative apparatuses of control (Bauman, 1991; Hardt and Negri, 2000; Scott, 1998). These abstracted state characteristics are reproduced conceptually when prioritising the winning of state power. Holloway thus condemns attempts to achieve social change through the state, suggesting that such tactics are inherently weighted with state practices, cultures, and temporalities, to the detriment of broader struggles against capitalism:

> "Any political organisation which focuses its action upon the state inevitably reproduces [the] characteristics of the state as a form of relations. To gain influence within the state or to capture what appears to be control over the state, the organisation must adopt those forms of behaving and thinking which are characteristic of the state" (Holloway, 2010: 59).

The logic of Holloway's position is that since the state is not separate from but emerges out of a broader ensemble of socio-economic relations, anti-capitalist intervention should focus on that wider ecology of social life rather than on taking state power and mimicking its fundamentally oppressive character (Holloway, 2002). This formulation intersects with an abundance of theoretical perspectives advocating abstention from state structures, including currents of anarchist and left-libertarian thought in European movements (Bonefeld, 2003; Hardt and Negri, 1994) and drawing extensively on Latin American movements such as the Zapatistas in Mexico and the *Piqueteros* in Argentina (De Souza, 2015; Sitrin, 2006). Proponents of political autonomy argue that transforming social relations does not require centralised articulation by party or state because grassroots movements already embody the kinds of exploration, change and becoming that constitute the basis for political alternatives (Motta, 2011; Zibechi, 2012). For some, the globalised spread of capital's colonisation of everyday life necessitates mass defection from the state and other institutions through which capitalist social relations are enforced; an 'exodus' or 'desertion' that evacuates the spaces of power and fosters self-organisation beyond them (Hardt and Negri, 2004; Virno, 2004).

Reflecting these perspectives, anti-capitalist activism in the twenty-first century has been dominated by the "post-ideological anarchism" (Curran, 2006: 2) of the global justice movement, which exhibits an eclectic and flexible mixture of anarchist principles and rejects doctrinaire ideology (Day, 2005). This horizontal and decentralised collective action frame is

characterised by a pointed disengagement from formal political channels and a celebration of 'prefigurative' organising models premised on modelling alternative relations and sociabilities within the practices of resistance (Azzellini and Sitrin, 2014; Dinerstein, 2015). Protest repertoires and issues of contention have expanded beyond the range of traditional labour movements. In the global North, anti-capitalist action was primarily mobilised through direct action campaigns against corporate globalisation and climate change, often in the form of carnivalesque occupations of space or forms of discursive satire reminiscent of Situationist practices (Ibrahim, 2019; Klein, 2000; Routledge, 2012), rather than by addressing state institutions. While this horizontal-autonomist perspective did not entirely monopolise the left, it became the hegemonic collective action frame for radicals whose associated intuitions and action repertoires have extended beyond anti-capitalism to seep into a wider ecology of justice movements (Hardt and Negri, 2017; Ibrahim, 2019; Srnicek and Williams, 2015).

The cycle of struggles in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis drew heavily on such autonomist and anti-statist ideas and tactics, peaking with the wave of occupations of urban squares in 2011. Many of these movements embraced a prefigurative-horizontal politics emphasising social transformation in the present over efforts to influence the state (Azzellini and Sitrin 2014; Graeber 2013; Swyngedouw 2014). These strategic stances may seem contradictory, given that the movements' grievances have typically been bound up with objection to austerity cuts to state provisions. As many have noted, however, they asserted a re-politicisation of the public sphere and public space, against a 'post-political' context in which anti-austerity claims could not be mounted within the formal avenues of political representation, exposing a crisis of political responsibility (Swyngedouw, 2011). As such the occupations of 'indignant squares' represented a "staging of dissent" that asserted and briefly materialised "alternative ways of being, doing and saying in common" (Kaika and Karaliotas, 2014: 244, 256; Swyngedouw, 2014, 2011). The movements – and the crisis that sparked them – engendered a delegitimation of neoliberalism and dramatically highlighted gross class inequalities, restoring some credibility to the radical case for transcending capitalism (Panitch and Gindin, 2017).

2.2.3. Limits to autonomy

On the other hand, the 'squares movements' have been strongly criticised for their organisational and theoretical frames, especially the anglophone Occupy movements. For example, their aversion to the "systematising function of ideologies as an abstraction of real concrete life" (Briziarelli and Guillem, 2014: 152) has been interpreted as a post-political surrender to hegemonic political frames, lacking a coherent class politics (Dean, 2014) and tending to voice 'inclusive' rather than countercultural or post-capitalist appeals (Gerbaudo, 2017) in ways that inadvertently reproduce market-oriented liberalism (Roggero, 2010). More broadly, however, the collective action frame of participatory horizontalism has been criticised for a vagueness regarding the relationship between strategy and aims, and a failure to carry through the task of "institutionalising democratic spaces that could last beyond the staging of

the event" (Kaika and Karaliotas, 2014: 256; Harvey, 2012; Ibrahim and Roberts, 2018). In some cases, as Srnicek and Williams (2015) note, there is even resistance to the idea that extending alternative ways of being is in fact necessary to effect wider social transformation.

By only operating at the level of civil society, the various 'indignant squares' of 2011 failed to coalesce into lasting political formations capable of effecting long-term social transformation (Briziarelli and Guillem, 2014; Ibrahim and Roberts, 2018). Several scholars have therefore challenged the horizontalist demand for movements' autonomy from political representation, which can be read as disinterest in, and evasion of, the real problem of the state, ceding it to corporate capital and right-wing political forces (Boron, 2005; Fraser, 2013), and abandoning the working class to the conservative and reformist pressures of existing representative organs (Barker, 2013). As Nancy Fraser (2013) and Chantal Mouffe (2013) have argued in different ways, 'principled separatism' is an inappropriate response to political institutions that are already indifferent to subaltern publics and radical demands; instead it is important to fight to democratise them. Although translating emancipatory claims into administrative policy can all too easily become a disempowering experience, rejecting such efforts as succumbing to domination can be equally disempowering (Fraser, 2013) – especially in contexts where the requisite alternatives to state functions or provisions are insufficiently developed. David Harvey (2010: 258) puts it more bluntly:

> "there is no way that anti-capitalist social order can be constructed without seizing state power, radically transforming, and re-working the constitutional and institutional framework that currently supports private property, the market system and endless capital accumulation".

Others have argued that over-reliance of anti-capitalism on workers' struggles misses the ways that capital has been able to creatively harness movements' own demands – including those for autonomy, seized on as the basis for new 'self-managed' modes of regulation in the post-Fordist economy (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005; Mouffe, 2013). Ibrahim and Roberts (2018) draw on Lenin to suggest movements that urge a general principle of abstention from institutions mistake "their politico-ideological attitude, for objective reality" (Lenin, quoted in Ibrahim and Roberts, 2018: 9); that is, they confuse the coordinates between normative horizon and political strategy, substituting a post-capitalist ideal with the practical process to achieve it.

Hardt and Negri (2017) take this argument further, arguing that a valid yet exaggerated caution about centralised political leadership has generated "a generalised refusal of organisation" among contemporary social movements, which render them "useless" (Hardt and Negri, 2017: 7; see also Gerbaudo, 2017; Srnicek and Williams, 2015). Answering the question of why movements capable of inspiring popular masses have so seldom been able to create lasting social transformations necessitates "questioning some of our basic political assumptions" (Hardt and Negri, 2017: xiii) and rethinking anti-capitalist practices in ways that prevent them turning into dogmas (Milburn, 2014).

2.3. Relating radical movements to the state

Given some of the limits of a rigid anti-state perspective, a number of conceptual tools have been developed for thinking through and beyond the contradictions of anti-capitalist involvement with the state. This section develops an argument for engaging with the state in a transformative manner, firstly on the basis of identifying internal contradictions to Holloway's autonomist approach. I then bring in examples from scholarship on European movements and Latin American states, before settling on an argument for 'non-reformist reforms' as a means beyond a dichotomy of pro- or anti-state radical politics.

2.3.1. Beyond the either/or of withdrawal and engagement

Erik Olin Wright (2010) has developed a three-way model of anti-capitalist strategies. First are ruptural strategies, adopted by insurrectionary anarchists and Leninists alike, that aim to smash the social system in a singular and universalising moment of revolution. Second, interstitial strategies aim to produce a multiplicity of 'cracks' within the capitalist social space, with no single moment of rupture but rather a cacophony of small ruptures (Gibson-Graham, 1996; Holloway, 2010). Finally, symbiotic strategies aim to work through existing institutions to deepen and extend popular social empowerment, on the basis that only by solving problems faced by all social classes can an alternative social system become popular enough to viably supplant capitalism – a position adopted by, for example, left-populists (Mouffe, 2018) or left modernists (Srnicek and Williams, 2015).

The interstitial stance is perhaps the dominant collective action frame of the contemporary radical left, manifested in a diverse range of autonomist – and often localist – strategies (Chatterton and Pusey, 2020; Wright, 2010). In this mode, a trajectory towards post-capitalism is generated through a process of metamorphosis, as 'cracks' in the capitalist edifice open space for hybrid alternatives that gradually link up to create ever-wider cracks until capitalism crumbles, unable to sustain itself (Holloway, 2010). They reject totalising narratives of capitalist power and emphasise alternative economic activities unfolding and multiplying within and despite capitalism (Gibson-Graham, 1996). Interstitial strategies function according to a theoretical anti-essentialism, whereby transformation is possible within a world dominated by capitalism and the state by exploding the structuralist categories of political economy and stressing that capitalism, while constraining the scope of emancipatory social change, is not monolithic and does not impose rigid limits on possibility (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Wright, 2010).

For Wright (2010), however, the interstitial stance towards the state - whether in the tradition of social economies or a more countercultural anarchism – is undermined by a contradiction between a vision of civil society and economy as "loosely integrated systems which allow

considerable scope for direct action to forge new kinds of relations and practices", and a view of the state as a monolithic over-determined structure with "only marginal potentials for emancipatory transformation" (Wright, 2010: 335). As an example, in his later *Crack Capitalism* (2010), Holloway appears to concede the possibility of working against the state from within. He argues, however, that any such rebellion is likely to be "increasingly suppressed" by the "weight of inherited structures and forms of behaviour" (Holloway, 2010: 62). The revolution centred on the state is "a crack that widens and plasters itself over at the same time. Whether, and at what point, the hand that plasters succeeds in suppressing the hand that opens the crack is always the outcome of struggle …" (Holloway, 2010: 62-63). Yet he ultimately fails to interrogate these contradictions and antagonisms, falling back on a more rigid anti-state perspective when drawing his strategic conclusion "that the state is not an adequate interstitial form simply because, as a form of social relations, it is part of the social synthesis that we are rejecting: the state is part of the cohesive suction of capital" (Holloway, 2010: 63). Gibson-Graham (1996, 2006) similarly invoke a conceptual dichotomy of state and civil society that views only the latter as an 'open' space of hybrid practices generative of alternatives to capitalism. As Routledge, et al. (2018: 79) argue, this position "denies the complex, multi-scalar and diverse spatial forms that the state assumes in practice", conceptually closing down possibilities for the strategy of the 'crack' within the capitalist form of social relations. Rather, it is precisely an anti-essentialist critique of the state that corresponds to Holloway's concept of social transition by developing "our creative power in-against-and-beyond capital", switching the circuit of social production from 'labour' to 'doing' (Holloway, 2010: 247).

The *a priori* rejection of any strategy acting on the state contradicts the conceptual foundations of autonomist Marxism, whose recognition of the living movement of human labour within the categories of political economy underpins an "insistence upon the internal crisis of the state-form (labour within and against the state form)" and thus "points to the possibilities of social change not delimited by the parameters of structuralist formalism" (Charnock, 2010: 1283; Bonefeld, et al., 1992). In the step from theory to practice, this kind of thinking becomes trapped within "the same reified and abstracted categorisations of class, the market, the state, capital as the more orthodox variants that they themselves rail against" (Cumbers, 2015: 72). As others in the open Marxist tradition have argued, "categorical appeal to an alienated practice reproduces the alienation of practice rather than the (possible) practice which, to use an ancient Marxist expression, might turn alienation on its head" (Gunn 1991: 206). Instead, adopting a critical theory that is 'open' means refusing to subtract class struggle from any categories of analysis, refusing to "marginalise contradiction as incoherence" by disregarding the dialectical social relations that political concepts abstract from (Charnock, 2010: 1285; Gunn, 1991).

There is therefore no coherent theoretical reason that viewing the state as a form of social relations should mean abandoning it as a terrain of social struggle in which the antagonisms of class society are materially condensed and played out (Angel, 2017; Cumbers, 2015). For instance, Bob Jessop (1990), building on Poulantzas (1980), has sought to formalise a 'strategic-

relational' explanatory model to argue that the state apparatus is 'strategically selective', making some forms of political strategy more effective than others, as states select towards political formations that reproduce prevailing socio-economic relations and frustrate efforts for more radical change. However, because the state is not independent of a broader ensemble of social relations under capitalism, the socio-relational processes that produce the 'institutional materiality' of the state apparatus remain sites of contestation that can be intervened in and re-made (Jessop, 1990; Sotiris, 2014). From this perspective, if the state is not a unified and singular 'thing', nor a subject or agent wholly determined by capitalist logics, then social change requires treating it in exactly the same way as other efforts to open 'cracks' for non-alienated social doing in-against-and-beyond the capital relation.

Accordingly, in keeping with Holloway's own arguments about abstraction, to de-fetishise the state and approach it relationally could just as easily imply the *necessity* of engaging with it (Angel, 2017). The strategic implication is that anti-capitalists should prioritise de-mystifying the state – both by seeking to free our everyday social doing from its grasp and by seeking to transform the state more directly. However, if "some engagement with existing state structures and actors is inescapable" (Cumbers, 2015: 69), there is a need for a closer examination of what forms that struggle in-and-against the state can (or should) take, to which we now turn.

2.3.2. Between movement and party

The present conjuncture has seen a cautious return to engaging with the state among the radical left (Gerbaudo, 2017; Prentoulis and Thomassen, 2019). Recent years have been marked by the rise of new 'movement parties' that seek to synthesize the capacities of grassroots mobilisation and traditional electoral parties (della Porta, et al., 2017; Gerbaudo, 2017; Prentoulis and Thomasen, 2019). Much of the debate on new left-populist parties like Syriza and Podemos, for example, or factions like Momentum within the Labour Party, has focused on whether political parties can advance or blunt the cause of left politics in the electoral arena by channelling them into conventional forms of political bargaining (Douzinas, 2016; Panitch and Gindin, 2017, 2018; Seymour, 2016). Although movement-parties are not entirely new phenomena, nor exclusively left-wing (Prentoulis and Thomassen, 2019), recent scholarship has identified novel left organisational formations that attempt to navigate between the perceived failures of both autonomous-horizontalist movements to find durable expressions of dissent and of hierarchical-bureaucratic party structures to aggregate civil society interests (della Porta, et al., 2017). The key question has been how success is advanced or constrained by a twin process of formalisation of movements and movement-isation of political parties.

Prentoulis and Thomassen (2019) note that movement parties negotiate two sets of tensions, between horizontality and verticality, and between civil society and state. Observing attempts to create more horizontalist and participatory structures within electoral systems, some have suggested that movement parties represent a new link between civil society and state (della

Porta, et al., 2017; Prentoulis and Thomassen, 2019). Conscious structuring-in of participatory practices – such as citizen assemblies in Podemos – is important to parties' claims to be rooted in civil society rather than elite spaces, and aims to mitigate the tendency for formal organisations to shift in conservative directions (Michels, 1962; Prentoulis and Thomassen, 2019). On the other hand, however, there are distinct attractions and limits posed by representative structures and institutional legitimacy. Given that movements' sustainability depends on material resources and organisational coordination, the prospects for radical left projects might be improved if they can bridge the spontaneity of street movements and the organisational power and resources of representative organs – potentially combining into 'mature' political forms more responsive to the real landscape of political power (Ibrahim and Roberts, 2018). The party form, for example, offers ideological resources enabling a translation of diverse movement demands into new political identities, and connects them with motivational frames that help regenerate the faded hope of seemingly futile protests, channelled into voting "with excitement" (della Porta, et al., 2017: 119; Mouffe, 2018).

Once in office, however, the translation of these frames and hopes into policy has resonated much less with social movements and wider publics (della Porta, et al., 2017). Panitch and Gindin (2018) therefore point out that while parties like Podemos and Syriza might gesture beyond social democracy, their capacity to actually move in that direction has proven to be a more challenging question. Over time they have adopted a blurrier 'left populism', to some extent replicating the non-ideological frames of the squares movements, reshaping class cleavages into a populist language of 'people' against 'establishment' (Errejón and Mouffe, 2016; Mouffe, 2018). For the political theorists of Podemos, a populist language of 'real' democracy is essential for extending a left political imaginary and to reshaping popular aspirations into a new political subject embodied by the movement party (Errejón and Mouffe, 2016). For others, however, this represents a backpedalling from more crystallised anti-capitalist politics, disappointing radical factions in and beyond the parties, even if they are commensurate with the amorphous character of their constituent movements-cum-electorate of dissatisfied citizens (della Porta, et al., 2017; Gerbaudo, 2017). The overall experience of new European parties (not least Syriza and the Momentum/Labour axis in the UK) highlights that the limitations of horizontalist-autonomist movements are not resolved by simple recourse to electoral politics, which presents a different set of limitations (Panitch and Gindin, 2017, 2018).

Accordingly, several left theorists have sought to identify organisational forms that transcend the limits of horizontalist organising without collapsing class struggles into orthodox party-political leadership. Dean (2016) for example, imagines a renewal of communist parties not for electoral purposes, but as a vehicle for linking and universalising disparate struggles towards a new collective political subject – although her model has been criticised for being unduly comfortable with vanguardist structures and idolisation of leaders. Hardt and Negri (2017) similarly propose a rethinking of the conceptual coordinates of political leadership, but without abandoning core ideals of prefiguration, democracy and autonomy. Arguing that electoral

parties, whether in the opposition or in power, can "tactically have positive effects" (Hardt and Negri, 2017: 8) as long as they complement rather than substitute for movements, they try to offer a way past the worn-out dichotomies of both reform-revolution and horizontal-vertical. Their solution involves inverting the political relationship of leadership by leaving "strategy to the movements and tactics to the leadership" (2017: 18). However, they argue that the organisational coherence necessary to operate in the political sphere cannot be detached from the more fundamental strategic leadership of the social, rooted in the common organisation of production and reproduction.

Meanwhile, Wright (2010) suggests that because ruptural, interstitial, and symbiotic models of radical strategy each face specific limitations, all three in combination are better suited to social transformation, demanding dialogue and interchange across the various inherent tensions between them. A more productive theoretical and strategic pathway, therefore, might be to abandon claims to a singular ideal organisational form. A useful example emerges from municipalist coalitions giving a new strategic shape to diverse urban social movements. Sophie Gonick (2016: 210) highlights the "possibility of collaboration between competing modes of activism" at work in the post-*indignado* housing movements in Spain, in which the divergent ideological strands of autonomy and state engagement (might) begin to "act symbiotically to ultimately experience convergence". As she argues, separating out these different forms of contestation parallels a separation of state and civil society, reproducing "a binary division that can preclude inquiry into the porous boundaries that separate those worlds" (Gonick, 2016: 222). But when attention is paid to their actual conflicts and experiments, electoral politics and radical autonomy can appear to act in symbiosis, open to plurality and contingency, without blending into each other (Gonick, 2016).

2.3.3. State-movement relations in Latin America

Outside of the European context, perspectives from Latin America's 'Pink Tide' – where since the early 2000s left-wing movement-parties have had much greater success in accessing state power – are similarly useful for challenging such analytical separation of movements and state, as scholars have grappled with the emergence of political projects that trouble orthodox left imaginaries (Beasley-Murray, 2010; Ellner, 2014; Van Cott, 2005). At the local level, the presence of autonomous neighbourhoods in neoliberal national contexts, and anti-neoliberal national regimes re-founding models of local statehood for popular participation, both "expand the parameters of what is usually thought of as local governance" and demonstrate the possibility of grassroots-led "alternatives to what can seem to be a closed system of neoliberalised local governance" (Geddes, 2014: 3147). For example, writing about neighbourhood social struggles in Venezuela, Sujatha Fernandes (2010) argues that a tendency to focus on the figure of Hugo Chávez, as a populist leader giving orientation to an otherwise incoherent, unorganised and depoliticised urban poor, diminishes the histories of urban social movements that have played an important and continuing role in shaping the political process.

Other perspectives on Venezuelan politics have emphasised emerging processes of 'bottom-up' participatory democracy and spaces of popular deliberation and cooperation flourishing at the grassroots, organising new systems of social (re)production that are both autonomous of capital and the motor force behind the coming to power of left governments (Ciccariello-Maher, 2016; Zibechi, 2012). Yet a singular focus on movements 'from below' can in turn be inattentive, or even hostile, to the ambiguities and potentially productive interplay between horizontal grassroots organising and left-wing state institutions. For example, Caffentzis and Federici (2014) cite Venezuela's 1999 and Bolivia's 2009 constitutions as evidence of the powerful demands and principles of communalism emerging from social movements; but they specifically reject the implied benefits of looking to the state and downplay the concrete gains resulting from the institutionalisation of the political forces they celebrate.

However, despite their strong influence on autonomist and horizontalist thinking (Chatterton, 2005; Day, 2005; Dinerstein, 2015; Sitrin, 2006), radical movements in Latin America have rarely limited themselves in practice to strictly horizontal positions, nor have they *a priori* refused to engage with the state (Ciccariello-Maher, 2014). Self-critical reflection on revolutionary failure has instead led to a more nuanced sense of 'war of position' forged through a rethought and more dynamic sense of the relations between state and radical civil society (Escobar, 2010; Harnecker, 2007; Sader, 2011). For example, in contrast to a dichotomous view of state and movements, scholars on Venezuela's 'Bolivarian process' emphasise the forms of closer collaboration that have developed between them. For Fernandes (2010: 5), in the barrios of Caracas,

> "The relationship between society and the state is reciprocal: just as the strong figure of Chávez has given impetus and unity to popular organising, so the creative movements fashioned in the barrios help determine the form and content of official politics. To see Chávez as an independent figure pontificating from above, or popular movements as originating in autonomous spaces from below, would be to deny the inter-dependencies between them that both constrain and make possible each other's field of action".

Understanding these entanglements requires a shift of focus in two directions: first, to the more complex collisions and negotiations between social forces, as grassroots movements negotiate the fine line between autonomist horizontalism and party-mediated engagement with the state; and second, to an orientation to the state that is not merely about seizing state power, but radically transforming it (Ciccariello-Maher, 2014). The struggle for Bolivia's 2009 constitution, for example, saw progressive movements not only forcing legislative change, but simultaneously *accessing* and *creating* state power from the bottom up, as the water and gas 'wars' over privatised utilities forged autonomous neighbourhood micro-governments in El Alto that provided a basis for placing the movements' own leaders into local, regional and national office (Hylton and Thomson, 2007; Oikonomakis and Espinoza, 2014). Instead of seeing themselves in opposition to the state, radical movements have developed what the indigenous writer Pablo Mamani Ramírez calls "strategic ambiguity", identifying "as part of the state" to

highlight their new-found access and inclusion whilst "maintaining a sense of their autonomy to be able to put pressure on the state where necessary" (Fernandes, 2010: 28). In Venezuela, these relations are made more complex by the ways that the movements' own popular-democratic practices have been institutionalised as official decision-making organs resourced by the state. These complexities are reflected in Strønen's (2016, 2017) ethnographic study of *promotores integrales* (integrated promoters), lower-level state employees tasked with mediating the tensions between top-down implementation of participatory projects, and bottom-up efforts to imprint socialist politics on the state and transform its practices – relationships that are both mutually interdependent and fraught with intense contestation.

However, the subsequent waning of the 'pink tide', plagued by problems of democratic legitimation, economic crisis, and new forms of movement incorporation, has called the viability of state-movement alliances into question (Gonzalez, 2019; Silva and Rossi, 2018). Under pressure, even the more radical shades of the wave have become 'compensatory states', substituting comprehensive transformation of the class structure with redistributive programs funded by maintaining "their countries' extractivist vocation within the global capitalist order" (Nelson, 2019: 47). These processes highlight the underlying structural conditions of global neoliberal capitalism that challenge new left governments' fidelity to the emancipatory aspirations of the movements that placed them in power, as well as sparking divisions within the movements (Gonzalez, 2019; Sader, 2011). In a study of Latin American socialist states, Marcel Nelson (2019) argues that on top of facing pressure from 'below' from both dissatisfied socialist bases and antagonistic right-wing forces, certain 'power apparatuses' within the state have presented significant bulwarks against anti-capitalist transformation. He draws on the 'strategic-relational' approach (Jessop, 1990; Poulantzas, 1980) to emphasise a more dispersed view of state powers: because the state is an evolving terrain of power, dominant classes may 'permutate' its institutional structure to shift the locus of 'real' power and wield it against subordinate classes (Poulantzas, 1980; Sotiris, 2014). This creates in any attempt to govern from the left an "irremediable tension between the short-term survival of a socialist project in perilous conjunctures and its long-term viability and scope" (Nelson, 2019: 49). Left government must walk a difficult tightrope between pursuing a transformative program and defending its survival; between potential for conservativism and potential for collapse amidst effective counter-mobilisation by reactionary forces. The next section therefore moves beyond the issue of social movements' engagement with the state to explore perspectives on the inherent contradiction of pursuing anti-capitalist objectives through the state.

2.3.4. Contradictions of left government

For Poulantzas (1980), any electoral victory of the left must be considered only the beginning of a process of internal state transformation that counters the power bases of capitalist classes and advances its own permutation and democratisation of the institutional structure (Nelson, 2019). An electoral majority "can only be a moment … and its achievement is not necessarily the

climax of breaks within the State" (Poulantzas, 1980: 259). Shifts in the relationship of forces within the state must spread out to touch "its apparatuses and mechanisms as a whole" (Poulantzas, 1980: 259). Building on Poulantzas, an earlier iteration of Holloway's work, the London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group [LEWRG] (1979) of the Conference of Socialist Economists, introduced a useful distinction between the state as relation and the state as apparatus (its institutional structures). Whereas the former indicates the possibility of struggles within the state, the latter presents a more material challenge that requires a fine-grained tactical approach. For example, Panitch and Gindin (2017: 37) argue about Syriza that their specific shortcoming was not their engagement with the state as such, but rather with "not preparing adequately for the challenge of actually transforming state apparatuses". Costas Douzinas, a Syriza member of parliament, details the problems arising from this lack of preparation, which left them feeling like a 'government in exile',

> "held hostage to senior civil servants opposed to its (existing or feared) policies and to junior officials accustomed to minimal effort … They were denied files and data necessary for the development of policy and they had policies that were frustrated by officials unwilling to implement them" (Douzinas, 2016: 1).

Douzinas (2016: 2), however, argues that the contradictions of 'left governmentality' do not necessarily demand surrender or disengagement: "Being in contradiction, negotiating a way out of an *aporia*, offers a dialectical opportunity". The dream of an easier alternative implicit in so much revolutionary criticism of left politics within the state functions as an escape from those political dialectics, preventing serious thought about necessary strategic and organisational steps (Douzinas, 2016; Rooksby, 2011). Accepting the fact and consequences of contradiction, Douzinas (2016) points instead to the antagonistic but potentially productive interplay between three 'temporalities' for radical left movement-parties entering the state. The present is temporally dense and difficult, heavily defensive and gives rise to "huge existential difficulty" as the left is forced into measures it opposes; these can be 'soothed' by "escaping into the future, acting now from the perspective of a future perfect, of what will have been" (Douzinas, 2016: 8, 11). Here there is an important prefigurative element, which seeks to imagine and encourage a practice of "doing the state as if it were otherwise" (Cooper, 2020: 171). A medium-term plan is slower, probing for space to implement a more radical programme, "planning carefully and preparing state reforms … becoming brutally pragmatic and uncompromisingly principled … in close contact with the party and the social movements"; bridging to a longer-term "time of the radical left vision" that unfolds only by the continual back-and-forth between "implementing and undermining" policy (Douzinas, 2016: 10-11). These could be characterised as an interplay of interstitial and symbiotic strategies over different timescales, building toward the eventual capacity for a ruptural break with neoliberal capitalism. What marks radical anti-capitalist government, for Douzinas, is therefore not measured by advancement versus capitulation and defeat, but the extent to which it manifests the "contradictory and agonistic" nature of its engagement with power: where the movement

retains reasoned opposition to 'its' government and where that government proclaims a "radical and scandalous" denunciation rather than defence of policies forced on it (2016: 9).

A potential pathway through these contradictory dynamics is suggested by Ed Rooksby (2018, 2011), drawing on the work of Nicos Poulantzas and Andre Gorz. Rooksby (2018) is critical of traces of 'evasive' reformism in Douzinas's arguments, which displace radical transformation into the long grass of the future. But he takes revolutionary critics to task for "repudiating any responsibility for taking on government power within capitalism and, instead, pinning everything on a kind of *deus ex machina*, a semi-millenarianism, in which revolution … emerges as if from nowhere" (Rooksby, 2018: 31). As already discussed, the Poulantzian view of the state as condensing and traversed by social antagonisms necessitates "a more complex conception of revolutionary practice" (Sotiris, 2014: 155) that can move beyond the 'twin dead ends' of reformist and revolutionary evasiveness, both of which "gloss over problems while purporting to be solutions to those problems" (Rooksby, 2018: 32).

A more worked out strategy can be found in Andre Gorz's (1968, 1973) concept of 'non-reformist' or 'structural' reforms, which seeks to move beyond a reform/revolution dichotomy by grasping the possibility of their dialectical unity (Rooksby, 2011). That is, the ruptural transition of revolution can only emerge through symbiotic processes of struggles for reform and interstitial strategies of cultivating postcapitalist socio-economic relations (Rooksby, 2018; Wright, 2010). Gorz (1968: 7) contrasts 'reformist reforms', which subordinate their long-term aims "to the criteria of rationality and practicability", with 'non-reformist reforms' which seek to break out of that logic and disrupt the equilibrium of the capitalist system. Each reform creates concrete improvements for the working class that act as stepping stones toward further change (Gorz, 1968).

This argument builds on criticism of overly structuralist Marxist accounts of state spending, which point out that some provisions that exceed a basic minimum – such as leisure facilities, urban parks, etc. – cannot be straightforwardly assumed to be effective means of securing social control (Goss, 1988; Pemberton, 1983). Offe's (1984) view of a 'crisis of crisis management', for example, sees capitalism becoming increasingly dependent on state provisions that take a non-commodified form; yet because this leads to decommodification of certain spheres of social life, it has a destabilising action on both capital accumulation and capitalist legitimacy. Negri likewise agrees that whereas state spending underwrites conditions for capital accumulation, it also has an intrinsically social character that contains a disruptive potentiality (Hardt and Negri, 1994). That is, public spending organises workers in the public sector to a productively capitalist end, signalling an evolution of the 'state of social capital' (the expansion of capital into every part of society) – but this organisation of social production *itself* makes possible the liberation of workers, by engaging with work not in exclusively productivist terms but in terms of 'the social terrain of production' (Hardt and Negri, 1994). State spending thus has a dual character, imposing capitalist social relations while creating conditions for potential collective social agency. Others point out that if public provisions – for example those won in labour

movement struggles – cannot be assumed to mechanistically ensure the interests of capital, then analysis must allow for levels of state spending "to be driven higher than might be healthy for accumulation, and force capital to adapt to new and, at least conjuncturally, irreversible levels of social consensus about minimum service levels" (Goss, 1988: 166). Gorz's argument is that increases in public and collective facilities and resources build toward "the social control of all these sectors which are necessarily outside the criteria of profit", and thus will not necessarily reinforce capitalism but "weaken and counter-act the capitalist system from within" (1968: 97).

For Gorz, non-reformist reform is a pedagogical process that starts with struggling for "feasible objectives corresponding to the experience, needs and aspirations of workers", which gradually reveal the anti-capitalist implications of those aspirations and, at the same time, the capacity of the working class for "self-management, initiative and collective decision" as a "foretaste of what emancipation means" (Gorz, 1973: 154, 159). Such a strategy would run reasonable leftist reforms into confrontation with the forces of capital, pushing against limits of acceptability and generating a demystifying effect that reveals how some things governments can do in principle are, under capitalism, conditional on not actually choosing to (Rooksby, 2018). This is theorised as an expansive and progressive motion: because non-reformist reforms seek to destabilise capitalism, each round of reforms demands new measures to deal with those destabilising outcomes, generating a dynamic of cumulative radicalising change if those in turn continue to work against the integrity of capitalism (Gorz, 1968; Rooksby, 2018). Thus "a struggle for 'modest' reforms within capitalism would escalate organically into a more and more consciously and openly anti-capitalist struggle" (Rooksby, 2018: 36).

Importantly, non-reformist reforms consist of changes that simultaneously produce improvements to everyday life, internal transformations to the practice and function of state institutions, and the extension and consolidation of organs of popular power and working-class self-government (Gorz, 1968; cf. Poulantzas, 1980). Structural reforms need to be rooted in popular initiatives to the greatest extent possible, which makes the priority reforms that would embed organs of collective democracy in workplaces and communities, alongside broader forms of working-class control produced through de-commodifying collective provision and retooling production for social needs (see Chatterton and Pusey, 2020; Wainwright and Elliot, 1982). A key part of this process, as for Poulantzas (1980), is to facilitate the transfer of state powers to new instruments of self-government, dissolving political leaderships into those mechanisms and liquidating state institutions in the process (Gorz, 1973). Thus non-reformist reform can be seen as the method to enact the 'withering away' of the state (Rooksby, 2018). This perspective helps move beyond the impasse between the structural limits of electoral strategies of reform, which have some potential to galvanise mass support, and a revolutionary strategy that resonates little with workers today.

Here, Gramsci's concept of the 'integral state' can be drawn on to emphasise the socio-relational unity of state and civil society, as seemingly separate institutions woven together and co-constituted by their shared interplay (Jessop, 1990; Sotiris, 2014). Consolidating a

transformative dynamic within the state requires critical support and pressure from broad popular alliances, which can be assembled and mobilised through participatory mechanisms – built by movements and formalised by the state – that both deepen and extend democratisation against the temptations of top-down technocracy, and constitute crucial centres of grassroots power against capitalist factions within and beyond the state (Poulantzas, 1980; Nelson, 2019; Ciccariello-Maher, 2016).

2.4. Scale and urbanism from movement to state

The theoretical debates and contributions discussed so far have all concerned national states and parties. While geography is an implicit component of many of the cases and concepts, it is rarely interrogated in detail in radical-left strategic propositions regarding the state, nor in the wider literature on state-movement relations, despite being crucial to the linkages that social movements build with governments. The question of the relative importance of different political scales shapes how critical theoretical concepts are derived. Geographical analyses sensitive to problems of political scale can therefore help to understand how the complexion, potential, and limits of movement-state relations are constituted in practice. In this section I explore critical geographical debates concerning the relation of radical politics to scale and urbanism, in order to identify further practical and conceptual difficulties for anti-institutional autonomism, and to emphasise the relevance of the urban for anti-capitalist movement-building and transformative politics. This spatialised analysis in turn underpins an argument for the promise of radical municipalism, which returns us to strategic questions regarding the state and highlights possibilities of productive state-movement relations at the municipal level.

2.4.1. Scalar debates and limits to localism

Collective political mobilisation faces a fundamental contradiction: the geographies of contestation are not necessarily coterminous with the geographies of systemic processes (Miller and Nicholls, 2013; Nicholls, 2008). A persistent scalar assumption at work in radical theory is that the local is a privileged scale of intervention, with an emphasis on direct, horizontal, and autonomous forms of action (Srnicek and Williams, 2015). Those defending the political possibilities of locally-oriented action emphasise how prospects for collective mobilisation often derive from shared everyday experiences, and argue that post-capitalist social forms can only be built from ‘below’, grounded in the slow transformation of daily life as a “lived project of socialist construction” (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 251; Esteva and Prakash, 1998).

Critics of localism, meanwhile, argue that the underlying causes of political grievances attach to systemic mechanisms operating at a broader scale, and emphasise the socio-structural conditions on which people’s capacity to act depends (Hardt and Negri, 2000; Harvey and Swyngedouw, 1993; Swyngedouw, 1997). They caution that globalised and interconnected

economic forces destabilise those shared experiences that localists privilege, undermining the implied capacity for solidarity among neighbours, and that capitalism's aggressively expansionist dynamic can easily accommodate divergent particularisms (Hardt and Negri, 2000; Srnicek and Williams, 2015). David Harvey (1996: 40), for example, suggests localist frames can be "profoundly conservative" because the kinds of place-bound community loyalties they rest on have themselves emerged from an unjust socio-spatial order. Yet this perspective has in turn been criticised for downplaying social agency and conflating global and national scales with the monolithic power of capital, which can be functionally disempowering (Gibson-Graham, 1996, 2002). For J. K. Gibson-Graham (2002, 2003), supporters of a local political perspective do not necessarily ignore the hegemonic power of capital, but rather see autonomous practices and locally-sensitive projects as crucial to avoiding the 'dangerous arrogance' (Esteva and Prakash, 1998) of a global imaginary that mimics capitalism in its abstraction from the field of everyday life (Holloway, 2010).

The tension here, however, is not simply the difference between parochialism and universalism, but of qualitatively different 'structures of feeling' that permeate the ways theoretical concepts relate to social phenomena (Harvey, 1996). For Harvey (1996: 38), we cannot do without either perspective and their irresolvable antagonism, which opens up "a primary resource for the creative thinking and practices necessary to achieve progressive social change". This spatial argument is usefully connected by Chatterton and Pusey (2020: 41) to Wright's (2010) tripartite formulation of anti-capitalist strategies in their assertion that postcapitalist practices should "be alive to the power of micro-level autonomous radical social action, meso-level community and diverse economies and macro-level interventions by the state and other large-scale social actors", while remaining aware of the limitations of each. The core of the problem, then, lies not in different qualitative emphasis on global capital or everyday life, but in the appropriate means of translation between scales in different models of social change.

The problem Harvey (1996) identifies, however, is that in contrast to capital, anti-capitalists have been relatively poor at negotiating between and linking across different scales. For both local and global frames, the strategic connection between grassroots action and the abstracted ideal of global transformation remains theoretically weak (Cumbers, 2015). As Harvey (2012: 80) has argued, "when it comes to bundling together issues of this kind, left-analysis becomes vague, gesturing hopefully towards some magical concordance of local actions" or noting but ignoring the problem (Harvey, 2012: 80). This pinpoints a wider theoretical shortcoming of the radical left, which escapes "the difficult task of traversing from the particular to the universal, from the local to the global, from the temporary to the permanent" by resort to "vague hand-waving" and "wishful thinking" (Srnicek and Williams, 2015: 35). Harvey (2012) points to Elinor Ostrom's (1990) work on commons, which suggests that beyond a few hundred participants, autonomous self-organised forms of social production and reproduction begin to require more 'nested' decision-making structures as direct consensus-based negotiation between individuals becomes impossible. Yet theorisations of autonomy and self-governing commons

remain limited by their resistance to imagining what kinds of wider-scale institutions might be necessary (Cumbers, 2015). Harvey attributes this to organisational dogma about horizontalism, suggesting that because the notion of hierarchy has become "virulently unpopular", it has led to some woolly thinking and conceptual gaps:

> "To avoid the implication that some sorts of nested hierarchical arrangements might be necessary, the question of how to manage the commons at large as opposed to small and local scales … tends to be evaded" (Harvey, 2012: 69).

Moreover, Harvey (2012) and others have not only criticised the strategic shortcomings of localist frames of autonomy, but also the limits imposed by scale on their normative horizons, pointing to a fundamental difficulty between radical values of self-governance, on the one hand, and of equity and wealth distribution, on the other. Mark Purcell (2006: 1921) for example, warns about the 'local trap', the habit of leftist academia in which "the local scale is assumed to be inherently more democratic than other scales". For Purcell (2006), privileging the democratic self-management of local inhabitants within spaces constructed as homogeneous, bounded, and static risks producing forms of exclusion and gate-keeping, potentially isolating outsiders from territorially-bounded circuits of 'local' solidarity, or producing externality effects that might detrimentally affect others they are not accountable to – especially those, like migrant populations, who lack territorial stability (Routledge, 2010; Young, 1990).

Horizontalist themes of consensus, for example, embody claims to universality that deploy "particularisms … as universalisms" that end up dependent upon "homogeneous activist environments" (Routledge, 2003: 344). Nancy Fraser argues this universalism makes this 'neo-anarchism' ultimately vanguardist in practice, because it can only function in smaller isolated communities, where "everyone can always act collectively on everything that concerns them" (Fraser, 2013; Srnicek and Williams, 2015). These spatial problems lead Fraser (2013) to argue that an anti-institutional autonomism is not only strategically misguided, but "conceptually incoherent". In a diverse world, if the 'constituent power' of an autonomous council affects non-participants, a question of accountability surfaces: outsiders effectively become its 'public', from whose perspective it becomes an external 'constituted power'. The public-institution distinction neo-anarchism tries to abolish "returns, inevitably, to haunt [it]" (Fraser, 2013).

Moreover, inclusive-sounding conceptions of local community can in fact mask strongly conservative politics and risk reproducing forms of 'geographical apartheid' (Castree, 2004; Purcell, 2006). Some have warned of incipient forms of 'dark municipalism', as right-wing forces, including fascist groups in Greece and Italy, have begun to adopt languages and tactics of community 'autonomy' and 'direct democracy' that were previously the province of anti-authoritarian leftism (Symbiosis Research Collective, 2018). Nor is local self-management itself necessarily anti-capitalist; indeed, it forms a guiding principle for substantial elements of capitalist normality, such as wealthy American suburbia, where local self-determination means the freedom to organise localities on the basis of exclusion and segregation, or the prevention of

wealth redistribution through local taxes. As Symbiosis Research Collective (2018) point out, it is *because* suburbs have substantive political autonomy from local governments that they can enact and institutionalise reactionary agendas. Therefore, only some form of external (and authoritative) pressure towards openness can counter the tendency for territorially-bounded communities to become exclusionary (Harvey, 2012).

Similarly, in contrast to the 'post-ideological' stance of movements like Occupy that have posited open-ended democratisation as a voice against unresponsive neoliberal states, reactionary middle-classes – especially in places with left-leaning local or national governments – have become adept at constituting themselves as organised civil society, and mobilising protests that leverage discourses of democracy against socialist polities. For instance in Venezuela and Bolivia, these mobilisations relegate movements of the indigenous and urban poor (themselves often only ambivalently or strategically 'pro-state') to 'uncivil society' (Fernandes, 2010; Ciccariello-Maher, 2016), highlighting the limits and contradictions of a universalist conception of left politics that treats local popular constituencies in civil society as a naturally socialist-inclined democratic force arrayed against the forces of capital.

By contrast, Chantal Mouffe (2013) posits a view of antagonism as the crucial centre-ground of democracy, premised on generating democratic inclusion and productive social transformation through diversity and encounter. This 'agonistic' rejection of universality opens a variegated understanding of vulnerability (Young, 1990) that recognises the important appeal, for some publics, of engaging with the existing institutions of the state; for example, the disproportionate importance of endangered forms of state welfare for women and ethnic minorities (Fraser, 1994). Erik Olin Wright (2010: 112) remarks that as much as the agency of individuals or groups is vital to radical democratic politics, so too is the "power to have one's interests secured by the social organisation of society without conscious action", suggesting a form of empowerment independent of participation (Lukes, 2005).

2.4.2. Urban social movements, urban commons and the local state

The problems with dividing anti-capitalist strategies into a rigid dichotomy of localist or globalist collective action frames have led to attempts to assert a more robust spatial analysis attentive to the ontological specificity of the city or municipal scale (Merrifield, 2014; Nicholls, 2008; Uitermark, et al., 2012). As the work of Doreen Massey (1994) has made clear, the production of space is not a binary of singular localisms subsumed by global forces, but a relational and agentic process that emerges from the dialectical articulations between local-territorial experiences of place and the shifting, mobile and globalised geographies of people, capital, and culture. Henri Lefebvre (2003) suggests the urban operates as a 'meso' level, incorporating and mediating between the 'global' - the abstract space in which power relations are exercised - and the 'private' - the everyday space of daily life. The urban is where global relations and private life come together and attain coherence: the "specifically urban ensemble

provides the characteristic unity of the social 'real'" (Lefebvre, 2003: 80). The 'meso' level comprises and reconciles both what is "*in* the city and *of* the city" (Lefebvre, 2003: 80, original emphasis), accommodating structures that support both the connectivity and interdependency of global flows and the functioning of daily life. In this sense the 'urban' is neither 'local' nor 'global', but something that exceeds both (Lefebvre, 2003; Merrifield, 2006). Following Harvey (2001: 194), the urban – and its governance – constitutes a mediating 'power centre', and the ways it reflects and mediates the tension between local autonomy and globalised power is an important focal point for analysing anti-capitalist struggles in relation to scale.

Left analysis has long recognised the crucial role urbanisation plays in the mechanisms of capital accumulation (Castells, 1977, 1978; Harvey, 1985). Capitalism endures beyond its industrial moment "by occupying space, by producing a space" (Lefebvre, 1976: 21), as fixed investments in the built environment absorb surplus capital and enable the extraction of monopoly rents (Harvey, 1985), as well as providing capitalists with a shared infrastructure to facilitate the "smooth functioning" of production and distribution, including transportation networks, financial centres, and consumption spaces (Castells, 1978: 17; Lefebvre, 1996). The 'urban' occupies a central space in the geography of social reproduction, consolidating systems of social provision like housing, education, transport, and healthcare, and 'hard' infrastructures like water, roads, sewerage, and waste disposal (Castells, 1977; Merrifield, 2014). Focusing attention on such foundational "reliance systems" (Schafran, et al., 2020), helps refocus political questions on the components of material life. For urban Marxists, these systems have a dual function: they ensure the reproduction of labour power as a functional requirement of advanced capitalism (Castells, 1977, 1978); but they also furnish the basic components of "social life, family life, political life… outside the domain of labour" (Lefebvre, 1988, quoted in Charnock, 2010: 1292). Similarly, wider issues of public welfare, environment, culture and identity have important roots and resonances in the organisation of urban life and its socio-spatial outcomes (Massey, 1991; Soja, 2010). In this sense, the city can be understood not merely as a spatial agglomeration and mediator of social and economic forces, but more fundamentally a functional system, coalescing infrastructures that furnish essential needs for social reproduction, and thus comprising a *use value* itself (Castells, 1977, 1983).

The urban spatialisation of the reproduction of capitalism thus shifts attention to the urban scale of anti-capitalist struggles. For Henri Lefebvre (2003), in the context of the "urban revolution" wherein urbanisation has come to supplant industrial capital as the motor force of surplus value, the main objective of anti-capitalist struggles should be to proclaim a "right to the city", as a demand to access and transform urban life. Lefebvre's notion appropriates rights claims away from those contingent on state power and territorially-bounded formal citizenship to those based on habitation and rooted in social agency: the right to the city is reclaimed from the forces producing unjust geographies, but is also produced in the process of collective struggles (Harvey, 2012; Purcell, 2002). Urban Marxism thus shifts the horizon of anti-capitalist struggles from control over the mode of (industrial) production within the "relative poverty" of the

workplace (Negri, 2003), to a more expansive reclamation of the production of space. Lefebvre's concept implies not only a right of access to basic urban resources, but to empowerment to experiment with and realise alternative ways of life (Purcell, 2002; Schmid, 2012). For Negri (2002, 2003), urban struggles of the "metropolitan proletariat" over transport fares and housing, and struggles for territorial autonomy from the repressive state, represent a replacement of limited workplace-mediated struggles with more autonomous modes of organisation oriented to the entire social terrain. In the post-industrial era of financialised urban capital, the frontline of struggle has shifted to the metropolis (Hardt and Negri, 2009).

This urban spatiality underpins the politicisation of the local state (Cockburn, 1977). The local implies a greater proximity to the state's constituents because it is typically the local authority that provides, or organises and regulates the private provision of, the everyday services upon which urban residents rely, while urban planning knits these services together with urban economies through the regulation of land use (Cockburn, 1977; Dunleavy, 1980; Saunders, 1986). Even in highly centralised countries like the UK, where local authorities have limited policy-making powers, they are tasked with a more granular management of space and resources at the point at which macro-level policy meets everyday outcomes.

However, although urban struggles manifest a distinctive spatiality, they inevitably lead to a contradiction of scale. For Lefebvre (1991: 386), the politicised urban sphere can defuse and dissipate radical energies, because it can "facilitate the setting of relatively inoffensive 'objectives', such as the improvement of transportation or of other 'amenities'" as an alternative to directly confronting the power of capital. Cynthia Cockburn (1977: 160) similarly argues that contesting the urban ensemble of collective consumption risks replacing class struggles with a model of 'consumer action' that places citizens in a "politically and economically weak" position. Yet despite this, as both suggest, there is strategic potential in contesting urban services by explicitly redefining them as struggles at the point of capitalist reproduction (Cockburn, 1977; Lefebvre, 1991). The local state/urban nexus, by explicitly centring anti-capitalist struggles on the processes and systems underpinning social reproduction, also helps give a strategic shape to struggles against a wider array of forces – including racism and gender oppression – that situate people unequally regarding services, resources, and spaces (Massey, 1991; Soja, 2010).

Relatedly, a range of subsequent contributions to understanding cities have helped move beyond older Marxist accounts that render the urban as the passive spatial expression of more fundamental class antagonisms (Merrifield, 2014; Uitermark, et al., 2012). As the neoliberal state's withdrawal from social provision made arguments about the city's politicisation via state involvement seem untenable (Mayer, 2006; Merrifield, 2014), theories of globalising neoliberalism and economic restructuring picked up the slack – by positioning urbanisation at the heart of new accumulative regimes (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Peck, 2012). In this more dynamic view of urban politics, the city is productively plundered by capital through active dispossession of public space and resources and the financialisation of urban land (Hodkinson,

2012; Merrifield, 2014). Capitalist urbanisation “powers a dialectic of dispossession and insurrection”, giving a more straightforward shape to the relation between city and radical social movements than earlier Marxist accounts (Merrifield, 2014: xiii). Beyond the capital/labour conflict, this capitalist terrain of dispossession and ‘urban enclosures’ creates surplus populations ‘suspended’ from the productive sphere, generating a “latent political constituency whose only terrain left for struggle” is “the urban itself” (Merrifield, 2014: 9; Lefebvre, 2003). Nick Claire nuances autonomist Marxism to account for a spatial analysis of class composition (and class composition analysis of urban space), arguing that the re-composition of space emerges as an “epicentre of both accumulation and resistance” (2019: 261; Gray, 2018). New technical spatial compositions – from state-led urban renewal to financialisation of land and urban resources – maximise accumulation and discipline labour, responding to and sparking spatialised political energies within an open socio-spatial dialectic of social relations of power and urban space acting on each other (Claire, 2019; Soja, 1980, 2010). Importantly, this emphasis on spatial composition from an autonomist perspective foregrounds urban social reproduction as a site of struggle, as in the idea of the ‘social factory’, exposing the coextensive rather than binary nature between economic and social exploitation and differentiation (Claire, 2019; Gray, 2018).

Hardt and Negri (2004: 81) similarly argue that although new technological infrastructures de-territorialise the socio-spatial terrains of collective action, the “urbanisation of political struggle” characterised by “decentred and polycentric urban movements” undergirds the radically heterogeneous political subject of the ‘multitude’. They suggest that this new conflictual subject manifests as a specifically urban phenomenon, treating the city not only as a site of productive and reproductive struggles, but as an incipient commons. As the counter-part to capitalist enclosure, such an ‘urban commons’ has become an important signifier of the resources and relations in cities that serve as entry-points for anti-capitalist critique and activism (Chatterton, 2010; Harvey, 2012; Stavrides, 2016). In one sense, the ‘urban commons’ names the stocks of infrastructures, services and resources held in cities, under capitalist control but awaiting their collective reclamation by the multitude that produces them (Hardt and Negri, 2009; Harvey, 2012). Hardt and Negri’s metropolitan account of the commons, however, opens a more expansive definition, based on a view of the urban as a fundamentally dynamic structure generative of social heterogeneity (Nicholls, 2008). That is, the urban commons consists not only of collective consumption infrastructures, but of circuits of exchange, distribution, communication, and the “unpredictable, aleatory encounter” (Hardt and Negri, 2009: 252) that characterises the necessity intensity and generalised social cooperation of a radical subject capable of social transformation (Merrifield, 2013). Thus when Hardt and Negri (2009: 250) see “the metropolis as the factory for the production of the common”, they imply not only the reclamation of enclosed space from capitalist class interests, but a broader commonality of city life, the everyday production of a life in common (Chatterton, 2010; Stavrides, 2016; Harvey, 2012).

2.4.3. Radical municipalism

In this way the urban helps consolidate the local/global debate, by pointing to its distinctive combination of key infrastructures of everyday life with an intense proximity of social and political relations (Russell, 2020). Scholars seeking to define new radical municipalist movements have therefore stressed that they "appear to be adopting the 'municipal' as a *strategic* entry point for developing broader practices and theories of transformative change" (Russell, 2019: 991, original emphasis), contrary to the tendency to fetishise the 'local'. That is, rather than assume the sub-national scale to be already more democratic, or somehow signifying a more left-wing political stance, there is a strategic focus on the *production* of democracy at the metropolitan scale framed through issues of the organisation and production of space.

Privileging the municipal scale may not only push us to move beyond the limits of scalar attachments to local or national politics, but also of a mutually-exclusive binary of autonomy and institutional politics. For instance, Harvey (2012: 84) suggests the problem of 'scaling up' necessitates some form of "high-order hierarchical authority" that can link together local commons into a city-wide or regional commons infrastructure, in an egalitarian, democratic and socially just way. At the metropolitan or regional level, common management of certain technologically-intensive resources – such as transport, waste and energy infrastructures – requires integration and centralisation in ways that coordinated local actions are unlikely to achieve (Cumbers, 2015; Gorz, 1985). Harvey (2012) points to powerful forces of capitalist (re)enclosure, arguing that autonomous social movements are insufficient for protecting pools of common resources at wider scales without the backing of institutional authority. This caution about capitalist power highlights the local state's existing role in social reproduction, however 'corrupted' (Hardt and Negri, 2009), which forms a crucial interim stock of urban common resources protected from the private market. For example, in the British welfare system, local governments sustain much of the residual social infrastructures protected from the private market, which cannot be glossed over in the effort to build autonomous forms of collective self-management. For Harvey (2012: 88), radicals must find ways of forcing local states to extend their supply of "public goods for public purpose", while simultaneously struggling to subject them to the democratising and collectivist pressures of the commons (Angel, 2017).

This perspective helps move beyond a conceptual dichotomy of 'ideal-type' and 'actually-existing' commons resources, toward a strategic perspective that combines 'defensive' maintenance of imperfect public-common resources with 'offensive' expansion of new urban commons (Huron, 2018; Joubert and Hodkinson, 2018). Russell and Milburn (2018) have thus put forward a model of 'public-commons' partnerships where activists induce institutions into deploying public resources and organisational capacity to fund and incubate commons projects and help coordinate their social and capital surpluses. Through each cycle of investment, public-commons partnerships enrich democratic subjectivities and generate a resource base for new

commons, creating a self-expanding circuit of community ownership and self-government (Milburn and Russell, 2021).

For Thompson, "the novelty of new municipalism resides in a newly-politicised and radical-reformist orientation towards the (local) state, in imagining new institutional formations that embody *urban* rather than state logics" (2020: 2, original emphasis). In this sense, while there is nothing inherently more valuable about the capacities of local over national/regional states (nor can they easily be generalised from their specific contexts), the municipal scale enables a shift of focus. Against the tendency to see capacity for social change resting solely with 'top-down' statehood, the starting point is the mobilisation of an urban grassroots, from which interest in the local state unfolds to the extent it can support such a movement. Similarly, this emphasis on the 'bottom-up' production of urban democracy compels an interest in creating new institutions of collective self-government. Russell and Milburn (2018) suggest that a project of institutional change can help embed a democratic socialist set of values, in the same way that neoliberal institutional reform has been used to entrench the market as the formal political rationality governing everyday life (Brown, 2015). As such, the interplay between social movements and 'left governmentality' might generate a productive circuit of commons expansion that helps notions of democratic self-governance resonate in popular culture (Russell and Milburn, 2018) – echoing at the municipal level the revolutionary-reformism emphasised by Gorz and Poulantzas, coupling it with a more thoroughgoing and spatialised conception of self-governing economic activity. Here, while there is no essential advantage to the municipal scale, it offers a strategic entry-point for social movements "to be able to cultivate networked militant particularisms that can be channelled through and beyond state processes" (Routledge, et al., 2018: 79; Russell, 2019).

2.4.4. Local state autonomy and struggles with the centre

Of course, municipalist platforms seeking transformative changes to urban life and the institutions that govern them have faced substantial limitations and obstacles (Blanco, et al., 2019; Janoschka and Mota, 2020). Besides the difficulty of getting candidates elected in the first place, and facing hostility from the status quo of autocratic neoliberal governance actors, a number of structural restrictions to the scope of radical local authority action come into view – not least that some ideological conflicts over policy are impossible to resolve locally without national legislation (Janoschka and Mota, 2020).

Uneven development produces a fundamental antagonism at the heart of local-central relations: local autonomy is necessary to respond to spatial variation, and local states' representative-electoral role means they might need to represent interests diametrically opposed to those of national governments, but their capacity to represent those interests is constrained by national mandates (Boddy, 1984; Duncan and Goodwin, 1988). Therefore, as Egan (2001) notes, local state autonomy to pursue radical politics is a product of two interrelated factors: the capacity to

pursue political interests without interference by the central state; and the ability to operate within local economic and social conditions. In a recent study of municipalist governance in Madrid, Janoschka and Mota (2020) point to three ways that the scope of radical local authority action is restricted. Two of them – economic limits and legal-administrative limits – concern those more direct structural restrictions: on the one hand, constraints on tax revenues resulting from local financial crisis and austerity urbanism, and national state controls on expenditure; on the other, the neoliberal legality that diminishes the formal-institutional pathways of possibility for radical politics (Brabazon, 2016). They also point to a third – politico-institutional limits – consisting of the more contingent and indirect obstacles placed in front of radical policies, including the inertia of conservative local bureaucracies and the limited organisational capability of municipalist movements and their representatives in local government (Janoschka and Mota, 2020).

Each of these limits must be situated, however, within the wider capitalist political economy in which local governments operate; it is much easier for local states to pursue interests without significant interference if they are congruent with central governments' politics and with capitalist class interests, and if they are not at odds with prevailing economic conditions (Duncan and Goodwin, 1988; Saunders, 1984).The relative autonomy of the local state thus intersects with the more theoretical 'relative autonomy' of the capitalist state within the overall capitalist social formation. In that context, as Egan (2001: 5) argues, *local* autonomy only becomes meaningful insofar as it contains possibilities for contestation at the points of contradiction and struggle that traverse the capitalist state: "the 'independent impact' that characterises the local state must be substantive, not merely formal" to have any practical meaning. In the context of critical state theory, then, local-central relations must be accounted for not only in terms of the constraints that capital and state impose, but also on the potential for conflict within and between different positions in the state apparatus (and between state and capitalist interests), where relative autonomy is the outcome of "a continually contested and changing relationship based on the current balance of forces" (Egan, 2001: 5).

Yet it is precisely this recognition of structural constraints to local governance that undergirds municipalism's commitment to building extra-institutional power. The recognition is that while engaging with institutional politics may be necessary and productive, gaining power does not alone ensure continuing responsiveness to movements (Bua and Bussu, 2020; Russell, 2020). An important counterbalance is therefore the autonomy of allied social movements, which informs a central strategy of unrolling new participatory forms in order to engage citizen publics and generate new mechanisms of democratic self-government – which, it is hoped, will reverberate back into the local state in the form of empowered popular movements (Blanco, et al., 2019; Bua and Bussu, 2020).

2.5. In and against the local state

Many of the arguments discussed above are 'state-centric' (at least in the focus of their analysis), and thus counter to the ways that radical municipalists have tried to de-centre the state and highlight the points of countervailing power outside it. Thompson (2020) suggests we need to stop 'thinking like a state' and start 'thinking like a city'. Yet in switching our gaze from state to city we paradoxically open up new perspectives on urban government; substituting city for state puts more emphasis on the urban contexts of local statehood, moving from an object-oriented approach to the state to a relational view that takes in the network of (contested and contingent) relations that comprise the urban polis. From this relational perspective, taking control of the local state is motivated not by re-valorising its existing capacities, but by a project of transformation: both in terms of its function (such as underwriting new forms of collective ownership) and of its form – modifying the ways of doing local governance and reconstructing local states into more collectivist institutions (Russell, 2020). As one contributor to a recent conference on municipalism put it, the question becomes "not what the local state can do, but what can we do to the local state?" (Geddes, 2018).

This final chapter section remarks on some emerging theoretical approaches to the state's internal composition and prospects for its transformation. These will inform the arguments, based on the conceptual interpretation of the case study findings in chapters 7 and 8, for the strategic utility of acting 'in-and-against' the state.

New municipalist theorising is contributing to radical approaches to the state and the micro-level challenges of *internal* institutional transformation as experiences of left local governance accumulate. For example, through an analysis of energy municipalisation by Barcelona, James Angel (2021) nuances Jessop's strategic-relational theory to take account of what Painter (2006) calls "prosaic geographies of stateness". Painter (2006) argues everyday life is saturated by 'state effects' that involve us in quotidian relations to state institutions, whereby state officials and citizens engage together in 'prosaic' practices that are "improvisatory, contingent and heterogeneous" (Angel, 2021: 529). For Angel (2021: 529), however, this agency and everyday quality of prosaic practices is enmeshed with broader state-economic "processes reaching beyond the immediate", in multi-scalar geographies of power. In this sense, prosaic practices and structural processes co-evolve, constituting and constraining each other's fields of action. An important example of this prosaic-yet-processual state geography is how "the perspectives and practices of the municipal officials charged with delivering" policies diverge from the ambitions of political representatives in accordance with wider policy and discursive fields at multiple scales, suggesting that quotidian micro-geographies internal to the state are important – if not necessarily wholly determining – sites of contestation (Angel, 2021: 540). This helps avoid an all-encompassing structural view that leaves no role for agency, revealing how "the processes that produce the state are themselves the product of messy and indeterminate everyday struggles, inciting a more forensic examination of the prosaic details" (Angel, 2021:

530). Thus space is allowed for 'subversive agency' without abandoning a Marxist understanding of the limiting effect of the capital relation. As Angel (2021: 541) concludes,

> "the suggestion that nothing can be done to the local state form within the constraints of a globalised accumulation process is as crude as the idea that winning the municipal elections is sufficient for transforming the local state".

From these perspectives attentive to the "slippages, openings and contradictions" (Hart, 2018, quoted in Angel, 2021: 542) in the processes producing the state-form, an important avenue for critical thought about the state would examine the 'prosaic' labour of government officials, especially of anti-capitalists navigating the 'role entanglement' (Cooper, 2020) of employment by the state (explored in chapter 8). Stefano Harney (2002) has demonstrated the theoretical significance of government work, arguing that it is important not only because of its centrality to reproducing the state, but also because there is potential for political progress inherent within it. In an analysis drawing on direct experience and a reading of popular culture, Harney (2002) challenges popular images about state workers as the inflexible and anonymous figures of the bureaucratic 'insect colony'. Instead, he points to the complexity of political administration and argues that state work has a dramatism and dynamism – potentially generative of social change – inherent in working the borders of bureaucratic constraint and social agency (exemplified by the vast accumulation of dramatic fiction about the state's coercive apparatus) (Harney, 2002).

An implication of these perspectives is that nothing is inevitable. Even if constrained, the contingency of the existing capitalist state form and the economic regimes it co-evolves with and potentially contests demonstrate the possibility for new situations to emerge out of the interchangeable geographies of state, economy, cities, and social movements. A transformative dynamic can be complicated or undermined by the actions of state managers and employees, whose conflicting interests, can be generative of contingent situations that compel the state to 'select' differently, in ways that shift broader balances of class and political power (Angel, 2017; Jessop, 1990). Accordingly, revolutionary dispositions among movement representatives, alongside or against elected politicians, necessitate a certain comfort with contradiction and internal conflict (Douzinas, 2016).

In sum, the emergent theory-building of municipalism highlights some of the practical and theoretical challenges of the unstable ground between movements' autonomy and the capture and use of progressive local government. In the process, the conscious and collective reimagination of the conduct of urban statecraft in municipalist strategy challenges a conceptualisation of states as singular, coherent and intransigent entities clearly bounded from civil society.

2.6. Conclusion

This chapter has introduced debates in normative radical left theory that focus on relations between the state and anti-capitalist social movements, and has sought to couple those debates with perspectives on scale and urban systems. Following an outline of Marxist state theories and an introduction to the 'relational' state theory of Nicos Poulantzas, the discussion raised a critique of abstentionist strategies regarding the state, and showed some of their limitations in relation to their practical operation in recent social movements. As the chapter has detailed, while acknowledging the important contributions of autonomist and horizontalist theory and practice, a number of scholars have put forward engagement with the state as a necessary step in developing and extending radical social change. These perspectives are important, because while they adopt a strategic or ambiguous openness to engaging with the state, against the "false prospectus of exodus" (Cumbers, 2015: 74) offered by autonomist thinkers, they are nevertheless rooted in a fundamental critique of the capitalist state. Correspondingly, they reject any totalising prioritisation of state-centric strategies, seeking instead a transformation of state institutions rather than a simple instrumental approach that keeps its bureaucratic structures intact (Douzinas, 2016; Nelson, 2019).

However, although several studies have engaged with the difficulties of state-movement relations or of left activists operating within state bureaucracies (Angel, 2021; Bianchi, 2018), they remain a patchwork of unsystematic analyses. More research is necessary to bring out the complex sets of practical and theoretical challenges involved in operating in the ambiguous space across both 'streets' and 'institutions', and more fine-grained attention to the prosaic experience of acting 'in and against' the state is needed. The growing body of scholarship around radical municipalism offers a useful framework for connecting and thinking through these challenges, both as a set of empirical examples and as an emerging process of 'collaborative theory-building' supported by new networks and in collaboration with municipalist platforms (Barcelona en Comú, 2019; Russell, 2019).

Similarly, despite their acknowledgement in genealogies of new municipalism, existing interpretations of prior histories of 'municipal socialism' fit uneasily in this new theoretical space. Cooper (2020) mobilises what she calls the 'British municipal radicalism' of the 1980s to rethink the meaning and potential-ideal qualities of statehood; but the history of radical urban government in Britain has yet to be revisited from the theoretical perspective of new municipalism. That is the purpose of this thesis.

Chapter 3
Research design

> "The GLC showed what was possible. And for that reason the GLC experience has been almost completely eliminated from the historical memory ... you know it's like the GLC didn't exist ... it's really important to bring it back into historical memory in a way that isn't romanticising it but is learning from these experiences." (Wainwright, interview, May 2018)

3.1. Introduction

As I established in the previous chapters, the overarching question shaping political and scholarly debates about radical municipalism – and the driving inspiration for this thesis – asks what kinds of political possibilities surface when radical left movements engage with and 'enter into' local states? Is it strategically viable to occupy both the 'streets' and the 'institutions'? These questions invite a revisiting of wider radical concepts about political agency and the capitalist state; as explored in chapter 2, much of the habitual left thinking on these terms is limited, and leaves space for more complex and relational explanations of the possible terms on which anti-capitalist activity might engage with statehood. This forms the major drive for this study, while providing the bearings for the focus and approach of the research: these questions are inherently *normative* and invite responses that stake political positions. The research design is thus shaped by the normative and radical principles of scholar-activism, based in a Marxist epistemology of critique and reflexive theorization about anti-capitalist strategy, described in chapter 1. This chapter sets out in more detail the research design and methodological principles underpinning this thesis.

The first section explains the overall methodological approach – setting out the general principles behind selecting an historical case study, and then introducing the GLC case study focus in terms of its relation to those historicising principles. The next longer section details the research undertaken for this thesis and the sources of data collection. Following a brief reflection on researching social movements, I describe two main approaches to data collection, oral history interviews and archival research. The section discusses these alongside some reflections on their practical problems and limitations, which are heightened when studying contentious political movements. In particular, I address the unstable role of archives in the production of knowledge, and the important role of the 'radical archive' in both sustaining the memory of and collaboratively producing knowledge about political and social struggles.

3.2. An historical case study approach

The research for this thesis takes the form of an historical case study. The case study is not a method itself but a 'design frame' (Stake, 2005; Thomas and Myers, 2015; Yin, 2009), defined not by choice of methods but by 'analytical eclecticism', attempting a holistic view that encompasses "the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, program or system in a 'real life' context" (H. Simons, 2009: 21). The case is chiefly a vehicle for identifying and illustrating archetypal or novel phenomena, and thence opening new conceptual terrain to be mapped and understood by more abstract interpretive means (Hamel, et al., 1993). It functions as an analytical framing device through which interpretive claims are made (Thomas and Myers, 2015). A case study may also employ multiple and overlapping methodologies, constituting a wide enough range of sources of evidence to generate "richly and thickly contextualised, holistic analyses" (Snow and Trom, 2002: 150). Smith (1978) argues singular phenomena should not necessarily be framed in the diluted constructs of generalising social science. Rather the in-depth exploration of a case builds 'miniature theories' that contribute to wider fields of knowledge through 'connective understanding', which emerges from the consonance or dissonance readers may reflexively uncover with their own studies and situations (Smith, 1978; Thomas and Myers, 2015).

Accordingly the overall framing for this research encompasses each of these definitional factors: investigation of a singular and bounded social phenomenon; thick description of complexity; primacy of interpretation and theorisation; multiple methods; and reflexive, 'miniature' theorising.

As a historical case study, it also involves interpretive and explicitly ideological historicism. Scholars of historical methods have argued that case studies located in the past necessarily reflect the historian's underlying philosophical ideas. Baker (1982: 235), for example, argues historical geographers must "embrace ideologies as well as being themselves explicitly ideological". This is in part because historical study is necessarily ambiguous. For Hegel, "The term *History* unites the objective with the subjective side. … It comprehends not less what has *happened*, than the *narration* of what has happened" (cited in White, 1987: 11–12). Historians may hide this ambiguity, but all historical research is based not on past events as such, but on their 'traces' (including, in relatively recent instances, people's own memories): "distilled into documents and monuments on one side, and the praxis of present social formations on the other" (White, 1987: 102). Historical facts do not come ready-made, but arrive only through interpretation, in the transmutation of archived traces into the passions and struggles of real people (Samuel, 1994).

3.2.1. Principles of critical historical research

In terms of theoretical function and purpose, the historical approach in this research is an outcome of the choice of subject, rather than the starting point. However, several critical

theoretical perspectives are relevant to researching and writing about historical left-wing political movements that have guided the approach adopted here.

First, E. P. Thompson's historical writing is a useful guide to the moral principles of a left history. As orthodox histories tended "to obscure the agency of working people… to the making of history", Thompson sought to rescue the forgotten 'lost causes', the 'obsolete' and 'utopian' casualties of history, "from the enormous condescension of posterity" (1980 [1963]: 12). Historical writing, in this sense, can be an act of reparation as much as of theory-building and lesson-learning. As an historical study oriented toward imaginaries of potential social change, this thesis therefore offers a (fragment of a) 'counter-history' of municipal socialism in Britain. The history of municipal socialism typically consists of accounts of occasional institutional detours into socialist policy along the longer road to urban neoliberalism, jumping from early municipalist figures like Joseph Chamberlain and Sidney and Beatrice Webb to the tragic-heroic death of left-wing councils at the hands of Thatcher in the 1980s, only rarely considering their relationship to social movements (Russell, 2018). On the other hand, traditional labour history has tended to focus on the peaks of activity of an organised and relatively homogenous industrial working-class during its earlier history (Navickas, 2018), with attention to the later 20th century mostly weighted to large industrial upheavals like the miner's strikes. Consequently, one tangential aim of this thesis is to offer elements of a revisionist history of the municipal left that challenges the existing narratives – writing history "against the weight of prevailing orthodoxies", as Thompson (1980 [1963]: 11) puts it.

A second major theoretical perspective is a wider materialist critique of the 'discipline' of history, as embedded within and reproducing modalities of power. History not only claims a privileged place within the hierarchies of knowledge, but exercises that power in the disciplining of social life, lending a normative framing and background to the disciplinary world of state and capitalism (Samuel, 1994). Rooted in an appreciation of the material and social relations that underpin the production of knowledge, left historians like Raphael Samuel have argued that "history is not the prerogative of the historian" but rather a "social form of knowledge: the work, in any given instance of a thousand different hands" (1994: 15). Arising out of the social divisions of intellectual labour, history is as much a contested and contradictory discursive field as any other. And far from its own self-understanding of empirical rigour, the production of History has largely been regressive – shearing off the 'chaos' and dynamism of lived experience and reducing it to a legible and authoritative narrative, made sense of in light of the historian's own presumptions (Samuel, 1994). Drawing on this approach, this thesis has therefore aimed to revisit historical accounts of the new urban left in the GLC to offer a new account more attentive to the dynamism of that lived experience, and – as per the discussion below – that gives voice to quotidian memory against official history.

Samuel has also been instrumental in recognising a more grassroots-driven presence of history in everyday life, undermining the assumption that History was the exclusive preserve of an elite of accredited academics (1994; Hoyle, 2017). As packaged iterations of 'the past' became

increasingly accessible in the late 20th century through television and heritage industries, so too did the tools and compulsion to document daily life. For Samuel (1994), this tide of DIY public history-making – although all too easily appropriated by conservative politics – contained a radical spark, as localised and 'democratic' forms of knowledge challenged the epistemic authority granted to professional historians. These 'devoted collections' of material outside of official archives and records constitute an alternative world to the value-driven imperatives that decide the worth of historical data (Samuel, 1994). Amongst these stories, which established historians are trained in unseeing, are those of voices most denied historical representation. Similarly, the French historian Pierre Nora contrasts the 'dominant' narratives of History imposed from above, expressed in the "spectacular and triumphant" sites of official national memory, with 'dominated' preserves of memory, including the traditions of oppressed people who have little historical capital, and whose places of refuge and sanctuary constitute "the living heart of memory" (1989: 23).

For historians, there is a danger that the 'moment of abstraction' – the point at which theorisation becomes distanced from lived reality – abandons fidelity to the voices of the past and develops instead into an authoritarian temptation to fix the past into a neatly coherent explanation. This temptation can, however, be mitigated by commitment to the human energies of the actual people who make history happen and produce new knowledge as they move along on its tides – as Samuel aspired to with the History Workshop movements he inspired in the late 1960s and 1970s (Samuel, 1980). Building on the ideas of working-class self-organisation of the New Left (detailed in chapter 4), this movement of working-class (and later feminist) historical scholarship was explicitly collective and partisan, spurning the social conventions of established historians with its emphasis on popular participation and researching 'history from below' (see Berlin, 1996; Gentry, 2013). More recently, a growing interest in histories of protest and resistance has similarly seen calls for historians to provide a conduit for linking research with public debates, and to furnish those debates with the parallels between historical protest movements and waves of collective action in the present (Navickas, 2012). In this spirit, this thesis aims explicitly at connecting an historical instance of contentious politics with emergent perspectives and social struggles today – as well as directing attention to hitherto under-recognised elements of creative activity, against the tendency to reach for more mechanistically structuralist explanations, or for 'melancholic' accounts to shape narratives dominated by failure (Brown, 1999). A critique of methodological structuralism is a recurring theme in this thesis. A critique of 'left melancholy' is raised in the concluding chapter 9.

3.2.2. The case study: the Greater London Council

An important conceptual implication of this emphasis on the multiplicity of alternative historical trajectories is that sustained attention to one such trajectory can help to think through and imagine different potential futures. This is the main rationale underpinning the choice of the 1980s GLC as an historical case study to address the research questions. My primary interest in

'radical municipalism', where contemporary paradigmatic examples are only available internationally, prompted a search for the possibilities of left urban movements and experiments in radical governance closer to home. With no major municipalist projects currently underway, the major examples of British radical urban government are found historically. Some of the most well-known are Poplar's rebellious 1920s council (Branson, 1979) and the wave of 'municipal socialist' councils in the 1980s, of which Liverpool (Frost and North, 2013), South Yorkshire (Clarke, 1987; Payling, 2014), some London boroughs and the GLC are the most prominent. In focusing on the 1980s period, my historical interest has dovetailed with an emerging interest on the British left in renewing the prospects for a 'municipal socialism for the 21st century' (see for instance Blackburn, 2020; Brown, 2020; Guinan, 2016; Hatherley, 2020). The rise and fall of 'Corbynist' politics in the Labour Party has prompted renewed interest in key moments of left-Labour history, including the left municipalism associated with figures like John McDonnell MP (with a brief return to national political prominence as Corbyn's deputy) and Ken Livingstone.

In terms of the history of struggles in the local state, the experience of Labour from 2015 to 2020 (coupled with a growing interest in European municipalism) jars loose some of the accumulated conceptual bearings of the 1980s as a period of British political history. For example, as the political centre of gravity loosened during Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party, the custodians of official memory shifted uncomfortably from an easy dismissiveness of 1980s left-municipal politics based on their self-evident folly, to a more full-throated defence of neoliberal capitalism. As the left's enthusiasm from the Corbyn years dampens and the Labour Party beds in for a renewed period of centrist neoliberal hegemony, we should not let the conceptual sediments of 1980s left-wing politics settle back into place. It should instead invite historians to revisit the well-worn channels of narrative and, following Marcuse (1964), excavate the historical alternatives that haunted that decade as subversive tendencies and forces.

Consequently, this research has taken inspiration from the historicist arguments of Stephen Brooke (2014, 2017), whose work seeks to rescue and revise historical understandings of 1980s Britain in ways that are not overdetermined by the 'long shadow' of Margaret Thatcher, but instead consider the wider range of alternative trajectories of social and political life available outside Westminster. Similarly, in the historical accounting of left-wing politics, the 1980s has acquired an image of overwhelming defeat, of 'the forward march of labour halted' with the decline of a traditional working class (Hobsbawm, 1978; Stedman Jones, 1984) followed by defeats for the left both in city councils and within a rapidly rightward-drifting Labour Party (Seyd, 1987; Panitch and Leys, 1997). It is undoubtedly true that in the course of the 1980s, moments of crisis and rupture produced profound socio-political changes, witnessing the gradual spread of neoliberalism and associated phenomena such as deindustrialisation, financialisation and the rise of individualist over collectivist working-class identities (see for example Hall, 1988; Hall and Jacques, 1990). Yet a wide array of diverse and sometimes flourishing radical projects that pointed to alternative political possibilities have been corralled

by this narrative of *New Times*, disappeared behind the sentiment of oblivion conjured up by invocations of, for example, the miners' heroic defeat. Against that tendency to view the 1980s predominantly as a period of reaction, it is important to recognise how that decade's significant transformations in the composition of work, class, gender, race, sexuality and personal life were neither wholly concordant nor totally contradictory. Echoing Brooke's claim that what distinguishes the 1980s is "the velocity and the swift compression of trajectories" (2014: 24), one former GLC worker noted that:

> "It's difficult to explain the 80s, …[it] was an incredibly crowded decade … there were single issues but people were involved in a load of different things, so although the GLC was a very important part of the 80s it was just part of the things which happened in the 80s. … if you ask someone like me it's difficult to actually [explain], we were just very busy" (Finch [GLC Story], 2017).

Thus Brooke (2014: 21) argues that while they may not have gained hegemony, there were nevertheless a plethora of "other guiding spirits transecting the 1980s and animating it in complex and ambiguous ways", of which the left GLC is an important example. This may explain why some have argued that "the GLC has been almost completely eliminated from the historical memory … it's like the GLC didn't exist" (Wainwright, interview, May 2018). Indeed, some have argued that this disappearance corresponds precisely to the left GLC's ability to demonstrate an alternative trajectory of possibility. For example, Doreen Massey, who worked there, suggests that

> "[t]he viciousness of the attacks on that GLC, and the fact that these attacks continued long after its abolition, with the clear intent of destroying it even as an imaginative resource for the future, are themselves a hint of the potential it offered" (2007: 81).

Narrowing the scope of my research to the 'new urban left' in the 1980s GLC is therefore geared toward 'rescuing' it as an imaginative resource from the 'condescension' of pessimistic existing records of the 1980s that foreground the overwhelming power of capital and state.

Historical studies can also serve as comparative examples, because they emerge from new contexts which can shed new light on historical instances, opening up new conceptual horizons, as "historical practices are interpreted in relation to new imaginaries which they may inspire and support, but also challenge and complicate" (Cooper, 2020: 176fn9). With a conceptual frame transmitted from the present – particularly in terms of the framing example of municipal radicalism and the Barcelona experience that I began the thesis with – a comparative lens can be set up. Viewing past practices from present perspectives helps provincialize certain limited forms of theory production (by bringing out their historically and geographically specific conditions) and blurs the boundaries between apparently fixed and mutually exclusive concepts and projects. This approach avoids the pitfall of simply resurrecting a blueprint for social action from the past. As Cooper (2020: 176) points out, the drastically altered political landscape of the

present "makes any notion of return, even in urban Britain, naively nostalgic". Nostalgic representations of the past have a tendency to downplay the ordinariness of people's lives and social struggles, and nostalgia as a political affect feeds off a sense of loss and demise which can easily mutate, in terms of social struggles, into melancholy and its attachment to defeat and passivity (Brown, 1999; Nunes, 2021). Nor should there be room for an aestheticization of historical struggles – as much as the artefacts of the GLC period can have an enjoyable aesthetic quality (Figure 2), the point is not to indulge in 'retro-chic' appropriations of the heritage of past struggles, but to reanimate them as part of a living project of present-day social change. In this sense the wider political stimulus for this thesis is not to mourn the GLC's loss, but to excavate the sources of inspiration and strategic innovation that lie dormant in its memory. Thus, this case study approach aims not only to answer the research questions but also to rescue and reveal the possible from past instances of possibility, to mine the GLC experience for some of the conceptual and strategic lessons it can bring to the present.

Figure 2 Example of GLC activist ephemera.
(*Author montage from various unattributed sources.*)

3.3. Research methods

In the remainder of this chapter, I outline the methods used and discuss some of the more specific methodological challenges associated with them, particularly in relation to studying contentious political movements.

3.3.1. Social movements and historical research

There is now an abundance of literature reflecting on the unique methodological problems and difficulties in the study of social movements (Klandermans and Staggenborg, 2002; della Porta, 2014). In addition to the standard research challenges of participant wariness and access, social movement actors often raise a unique set of cautions, such as wanting to protect themselves from potential state surveillance and policing measures (Hintz and Milan, 2010) or from an exploitative research relationship (Gillan and Pickerill, 2012; Milan, 2014). Historical research presents a further set of difficulties. The most pertinent is that working-class political activity

tends to go unreported by mass media, and therefore fewer satisfactory records are available. Newspaper accounts that do exist are often highly partisan and cannot be read as attempting to produce an objective record (Clemens and Hughes, 2002). As in the case of the NUL, the intense media focus means the scarcity of stories gives way to the problem that newspaper accounts were especially selective and often entirely fabricated (see Curran, et al., 2019; Mitchinson, 1987).

In addition, as Moorhouse, et al. (1972: 134) point out in their study of rent strikes, useful evidence from grassroots movements can be difficult to locate since they "tend not to leave behind them well rounded, unbiased accounts of their activities", and records of participants or observers are often "highly anecdotal or [reported] in such a way that the most significant details are not made clear". In many cases, even where detailed records were produced, no arrangements for collection and storage were made, much less for making them accessible. These challenges can be avoided for contemporary movements if researchers have access to first-hand accounts, but historical distance makes such first-hand accounts more difficult to access. As Clemens and Hughes (2002) argue, the limited types of material available on social movements of the past constrain both the questions that can be asked and the answers that can be constructed.

Studying the GLC from a social movement perspective presents an additional research challenge: it is difficult to establish an analytical lens focused on political actors in social movements when much of the available material is institutional, printed by a local government and stored in its official archives. A quote from Ansel Wong, the GLC's principle race relations advisor, provides a snapshot of such difficulties:

> "Like everything else I think the contributions made by people… institutions and organisations, are soon lost if they're not captured, archived and celebrated. … Because we haven't archived their contributions, we haven't acknowledged their contributions, we haven't celebrated it, we haven't put it anywhere, in any digital forms or archival forms or anything like that. So too with the GLC. In the sense that, alright, all the documentations are in the archives, but … [readers] wouldn't appreciate the context in which some of these things happen. … And each little bit had nuances and developments that were as instructive and illustrative as any other on a strategic level" (Wong [GLC Story], 2017).

To combat these difficulties, the data for this thesis has been collected from a variety of sources; material from the large official collection at the London Metropolitan Archives forms only a secondary role to material gathered from smaller 'radical' archives. More direct and first-hand accounts are provided from oral history interviews with GLC councillors and officers. These two main types of information are supplemented by narrative accounts and conceptual perspectives contained in secondary literature, as well as some miscellaneous sources for historical material. Table 1 below provides a schematic outline of the sources of data collection, and Table 2 outlines the indexing codes I have used to cite archival sources.

Table 1 Sources of data collection

<table>
<tr><th>Secondary sources</th><th>Interviews</th><th colspan="2">Archival data</th></tr>
<tr>
<td rowspan="2">Theoretical and popular books and articles about the GLC

Biographical/ autobiographical work (books, articles, online blog posts)

Published interviews</td>
<td>6 elected GLC members (all committee chairs or vice-chairs)

4 council officers (all Industry and Employment)</td>
<td colspan="2">May Day Rooms, London
GLC Story archive*
Miscellaneous London radical left archives
Relevant publications: City Limits, Community Action

London Metropolitan Archive, London
GLC publications (research reports, policy documents, handbooks, leaflets, press releases)
Other GLC documentation (minutes, memos)

Bishopsgate Library, London
GLC Transport Committee and related documents (reports, correspondence, minutes)

British Library, Boston Spa
Relevant publications: London Labour Briefing

Southwark Local History Library, London
GLC-related housing struggles (press clippings, pamphlets, research reports)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td colspan="2">*GLC Story archive (May Day Rooms)

16 interviews:

1 councillor (ILEA)

10 council officers (Women’s, Industry and Employment, Programme Office, Police, Arts and Recreation)

5 activists involved in organisations receiving GLC grants (2 not transcribed)</td>
<td>GLC publications (research reports, handbooks, posters, badges, postcards, pamphlets)

Other GLC documentation (minutes, memos, policy documents, correspondence)</td>
</tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Miscellaneous primary sources located outside the archives named above:
Television news reports (YouTube and other internet sources).
Publications (booklets, pamphlets, handbooks) purchased in bookshops or from online sellers.
Original and photocopied documents gifted/loaned by interview participants.</td></tr>
</table>

Table 2 Referencing system for primary sources

In order to maintain a consistent and relatively uncluttered referencing framework in line with the Harvard referencing system, this thesis uses an *ad hoc* indexing system for citations referring to archival sources. The reference codes are repeated at Appendix 1 alongside the extended index.

The system employed typically follows the formula:

[Archive]/[Document type]/[Committee/department]/[Year]

The main exception are GLC press releases, where I replace the third and fourth parts of the code with a number that corresponds to the specified document.

The codes used are as follows:

Archive codes	
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
MDR	May Day Rooms
BI	Bishopsgate Institute
Document type codes (LMA)	
PR	Press Release (followed by press bulletin number in text)
R	GLC Reports and Publications
Committee/department codes	
GLC	Greater London Council (general)
EMC	Ethnic Minorities Committee
GLEB	Greater London Enterprise Board
IEC	Industry and Employment Committee
IU	Intelligence Unit
PC	Policy Committee
Planning	Planning Committee
TC	Transport Committee
WC	Women's Committee

Miscellaneous exceptions

- All items held at the Bishopsgate Institute are cited by BI/ followed by [author and date].
- Some LMA items outside the above document types are cited by their original archive reference number.
- Some MDR items outside the above document types (e.g. not produced by the GLC) are cited by MDR/ followed by [document author or title].
- Items I hold personally or from interviewees' personal libraries are cited by title and year.
- References to the publications *London Labour Briefing* (held at the British Library) are cited by *Briefing [Month and year]*.

3.3.2. Published sources of secondary data

Firstly, a range of published sources provided both factual data and interpretive/theoretical perspectives. These include a range of contemporary and retrospective reflections on the GLC from both participants and outside perspectives. The most prominent in terms of informing this thesis are Ken Livingstone's autobiography *If Voting Changed Anything, They'd Abolish It* (1987), the biography *Citizen Ken* by John Carvel (1984), and the collection of in depth accounts in *A Taste of Power*, edited by Maureen Macintosh and Hilary Wainwright (1987). Other key sources in this vein are the more general accounts and assessments of the 1980s municipal left in Gyford (1985), Lansley, et al. (1989) and Boddy and Fudge (1984), and several articles in left journals and magazines, sometimes written by participants in the GLC – both in smaller circulars like *Community Action* and *London Labour Briefing*, and more widely-read journals like *Marxism Today* and *New Left Review*. Several first-hand accounts available from other sources, such as internet blogs, have been useful in informing some background knowledge and empirical detail. Additionally, some scholarly works (mostly unpublished PhD theses, as well as Dan Egan's *Politics of Economic Restructuring in London* (2001)) have been relied on for supplementary data where direct access to data has not been possible, especially for quotations from council officers (Atashroo, 2017; Atkinson, 1995; McLaverty, 1989; Youngpyo, 2007).

Sadly, there is still no comprehensive general history of the 1980s GLC, and it is especially surprising that little has been written on the *Fares Fair* cuts to public transport prices, or on the Women's Committee, the first in British local government (although it is the subject of the only non-English work on the GLC I have encountered, in Rodríguez Prieto y Seco Martínez (2006a, 2006b). The left GLC appears in some works focused on wider themes – for example, Cooper (1994) focuses on gay and lesbian politics in local government, Beckett (2015) and Brooke (2014) discuss it in wider-ranging historical works on the more subterranean political side of early 1980s Britain, Curran, et al. (2019) on the British left's toxification by the media, and brief mentions appear in various works on internal Labour Party politics (e.g. Kogan and Kogan, 1982; Seyd, 1987; Wainwright, 1987; Baston, 2000). More recently, growing attention has been paid to the GLC's innovative cultural policy and the work of opening municipal arts and cultural resources to ordinary people and marginalised groups (Atashroo, 2017, 2019; Bianchini, 1995; McFadzean, 2021; Peck, 2009; Williams, 2020). A growing interest in the 1980s GLC is evidenced by Hatherley's *Red Metropolis* (2020), which provides a polemical history of London government and its relationship to socialist politics. Hatherley's historical account contains much descriptive detail omitted from this thesis's contextual chapter 5, and usefully connects the political threads that run through the history of London governments, from the 1930s London County Council (LCC), the 1980s GLC, to today's Greater London Authority (GLA).

The organisation of citations reflect availability rather than use: where sources are easily accessible online, the citation has been included with the main bibliography of works cited;

where publications are more difficult to access or only available in archives, they have been included in the list of archival sources. The rest of this section details the two main sources of empirical data, interviews and archives, and reflects on some of the challenges and shortcomings of the approaches taken.

3.3.3. Archives and radical recordkeeping

Archives have long been recognised as resources of the powerful, acting not as neutral containers of historical evidence, but as "active sites where social power is negotiated, contested, confirmed" (Schwartz and Cook, 2002: 1). They collect and organise artefacts of power, out of which particular realms of historical knowledge are produced and maintained. In its European origins, the archive is coterminous with the place from which power is exercised: those who commanded were also entrusted with the official documents that served as providence of their authority, according rulers "the hermeneutic right and competence" with their "power to interpret the archives" (Derrida, 1995: 10), as well as investing the documents themselves with power. For Jacques Derrida, teasing out the roots of the word (*arkhe*, denoting the essence and origin point of things) along with its later use, the archive "names at once the *commencement* and the *commandment*" (Derrida, 1995: 9, original emphasis). It "coordinates two principles in one", simultaneously referring to history – "*there* where things *commence*" – and law – "*there* where authority, social order are exercised" (Derrida, 1995: 9, original emphasis). Archived legal documents, for example, are both objects of truthful evidence and of power – they both encode the law and serve as its foundational referent. Even as this initial legal-sovereign conception of the archive has given way to notions of 'public records', archives have historically remained places of power, granting the documents they enshrine authority as "depositories of truth" (Duranti, 1996: 245). This authentication function is conducted under the jurisdiction of state institutions, and through the course of European history archives and the buildings that contained them were increasingly securitised in proportion to the authority ascribed to their materials (Duranti, 1996).

These discursive and material origins, together with the resources necessary to sustain an archive of materials and the compunction to do so as a marker of status and authority, have therefore made archival repositories typically the preserve of the state and the wealthy, "established by the powerful to protect or enhance their position in society" (Schwartz and Cook 2002: 1). They are the mechanism through which the past is controlled, privileging certain stories and marginalizing others. Consequently, they document the lives of elites and state institutions in great disproportion to those of ordinary people. Archivists themselves therefore exercise "enormous power over memory and identity", as their ability to (re)shape and (re)interpret the presentation of historical artefacts also helps organise "the fundamental ways in which society seeks evidence of what its core values are and have been, where it has come from, and where it is going" (Schwartz and Cook, 2002: 1). In the archives, social memory is not discovered and restored, but continually remade (Cook and Schwartz, 2002).

Thus, while this thesis relies heavily on archival documents to evidence its analysis, this belief in the power of the archive to satisfy truth claims should not be understood as objective or impartial. Rather, the archival content that informs historical analysis is always selective, interpretive, and normative. The archive that contains most of the documentation relating to the GLC is the London Metropolitan Archives, under the aegis of the City of London Corporation, charged with the role of official keeper of memory and identity for the wider city (including the local state institutions that have tried over the years to abolish it). This thesis relies on the large quantity of documents held there, especially GLC press releases and minutes of council meetings. Their rigorous organisation and classification of documents can be a great help to researchers, and lends a disciplinary legitimacy to the records cited, with record codes easily traced to their box and collection. As Osborne notes (1999: 53), the archive functions as a "principle of credibility… [a] bottom-line resource in the carving-out of claims to disciplinarity", upon which historians place a premium. The rigid classificatory schema and the tracking of traces gives the archive both an epistemological credibility, as a place associated with particular kinds of knowledge and reasoning, and an ethical one, as a sign of status and authority, 'authorising' the historian to speak (Osborne, 1999).

Yet the London Metropolitan Archives' vast collection of GLC papers is, as one expects, an institutional archive – a tidied and official record of the GLC, privileging its public face. As Clemens and Hughes (2002: 204) argue, organisational documents "may also omit or distort crucial information in order to present the organisation more favourably, for the sake of present legitimacy or future legacy", especially by downplaying or excluding "internal turmoil". Only information deemed important to the functioning of the GLC are available, whether for its public image, for audit trails, or just for maintaining organisational continuity and coherence to actions and decisions. Minutes were prepared following standard procedures, and represent a dryly written official record, unable to convey many contextual elements, such as the mood of the meeting or off-record remarks and incidents. Although minutes typically record individual contributions, most other documents erase authorship, as documents entering into the circulation of the GLC bureaucracy (except for internal correspondence) were transmuted into the neutral language with which the organisation speaks *for itself*. Indeed, some GLC publications and publicity were criticised by the left within the GLC for toning down their initial radical intentions. As such, official archived records help illuminate only to a limited extent the interior life of the GLC.

As a number of observers have pointed out, the corresponding underside to the production of power-knowledge in the archive is the production of silences (Thomas, et al., 2017; Carter, 2006). Silences are produced through privileging written documents over other kinds of record, the destruction of records, and by various forms of inaccessibility or secrecy. Even in liberal societies where records are deemed public assets, there are pressures on archivists to keep material "secret to spare the blushes of the powerful", while the powerful go to great lengths not to create incriminating records at all (Fowler, 2017: 22). More frequent and mundane, records

are simply not considered historically noteworthy – even where they have been produced in the context of a state institution. One GLC officer, for example, recalls that “the London Met Archive has all the committee minutes. What it doesn’t have [is] all the research files and everything else, as they weren’t considered valuable” (Bunyan [GLC Story], 2017). Bunyan recalls purchasing ten filing cabinets containing the GLC’s police monitoring records – for the organisation Statewatch – from Camden council to whom they had been handed during the GLC’s abolition – the contents were not considered valuable so would likely have been destroyed. The writing of history, meanwhile, often only furthers these archival silences, involving “a series of erasures” that displace, amalgamate, and telescope historical reality to fit a “consecutive narrative” and impose “order on chaos” (Samuel, 1994: xxiii).

This enforcement of silence is, however, especially true of records of the powerless and resistant subjects. As Carter (2006) argues, archival silences are a manifestation of power that deny access to marginal groups and prevent (or erect barriers to) them producing their own social memory. Records of social movements are thus often absent from public archives, as groups with fewer resources are faced with the difficulty of collecting and maintaining, and making available, the documentary evidence of their actions (Carter, 2006). A great deal of material likely languishes in attics and basements, or was simply never thought worthwhile, practical, or prudent to keep.

To some extent, this archival silence might be intentional. Carter (2006) points out that marginal groups might choose to deliberately withhold the material that makes up their stories as a form of resistance to the power-knowledge nexus of state archives – or for more practical reasons like protection from state surveillance and ethical concerns about confidentiality. On the other hand, these silences have been increasingly contested in more direct ways, as archiving has gained purchase as a practice of resistance (Pell, 2015). The British labour movement has a long record of preserving its history through its more official organs or through socialist historical organisations – made available in spaces like the People’s History Museum in Manchester or the Bishopsgate Institute and Karl Marx Memorial Library in London. More autonomous social movement groups have built on this history by establishing their own archives, often linked with other kinds of social and community spaces and actions (Pell, 2015). In London, organisations like the 56a Infoshop Archive (Pell, 2015; http://56a.org.uk/archive-2/) are notable examples, in which ongoing political struggles have been inseparable from their ‘activation’ as archives. In the context of critical approaches to archives that consider them as actively producing forms of knowledge and power, the radical archive can be understood as a form of counter-power. As Susan Pell (2015: 33-34) argues, “autonomous, activist archives reaffirm the archive as a key site of political power, yet at the same time they subvert the archive’s role as a tool of domination”.

A number of archives have recently emerged in the immediate process of social movements’ mobilisations, as participants have both created and deposited political materials in sometimes very short periods (Palacios, 2020). In the course of protest events unfolding, participants begin

to recognise their importance and the need for photographic and oral testimonies to be recorded. Recent examples include the 15th of May Archive in Madrid (See https://archivosol15m.wordpress.com/about/), the online Occupy Wall Street Archive (https://occupyarchive.org/about), archives documenting the Arab Spring movements (https://www.crl.edu/focus/article/7437), the US Black Lives Matter uprisings (http://www.digital.wustl.edu/ferguson/), and the General Archive of the 2011 student movement in Chile (http://movimientoestudiantil.cl/). These participant-led archives ensure "the most ephemeral voices of citizenship are collected", and demonstrate that "the movements themselves are capable of writing their history, and do not run the risk of others doing it for them" (Palacios, 2020: 5). Radical archives not only collect activist materials as resources for writing their history, but also contribute to the social struggles they are a part of – collectivising knowledge-production, helping activists claim authority over their own representation, and supporting communities' self-determination and empowerment (Pell, 2015; Flinn, 2011).

One such 'radical' archive, which has been a crucial resource for this thesis, is the May Day Rooms (MDR) in Fleet Street, London. MDR opened in 2013 as a space for social movements to "safeguard historical material and connect it with contemporary struggle" (https://maydayrooms.org/about/). The archive consists mostly of material from post-1968 struggles, largely in the UK, but includes earlier and international collections. Materials are contributed from a wide variety of sources, producing a broad and democratic basis to the collection. My primary interest was in the *GLC Story* collection held there, but it was also useful to dig through other collections, including resources on housing struggles in London, and a number of collections related to autonomist Marxist and anarchist organisations of the 1970s and 1980s – much of which has contributed to this thesis.

Archives like MDR not only resist the asymmetry of representation among the voices of the past in more established archives, but also contribute to changing the meaning of the archive itself (Cifor, et al., 2018; Pell, 2015). As the workers at MDR identify simultaneously as activists, advocates, and community organisers, they engage in a critique of the ethical orientation of archival labour, basing their work on external ethical foundations rather than on principles of objectivity (Cifor, et al., 2018). The collections play an active role in the social movements and engagements that archival workers are a part of. Beyond treating collections as passive repositories of data, radical archivists can 'activate' their materials through practices that bring them into conversation with present-day struggles. MDR, for example, regularly hosts meetings for campaigning groups in its building – including workshops where participants can learn about past struggles, browse the archival materials and relate them to ongoing campaigns, and contribute to the archive by cataloguing and translating the materials. Radical archives are thus both helping to sustain collective memory of social movements and helping to inform organising and strategy in the present. More expansively, they contribute to the formation of alternative imaginaries of social change, in reciprocal ways where archivists and users mutually inform each other's practices (Brilmyer, et al., 2019: 6).

A more tentative methodological reflection is that spending time in a radical archive like MDR can also be treated as an ethnographic 'field'. Pell (2015), for example, treats the 56a Infoshop archive as an ethnographic site, regarding it as a living space supporting experimentation and collaboration and helping alternative and counter-hegemonic practices emerge (see also Moore and Pell, 2010; Hall, 2001). A more ethnographic gaze highlights the ways that archives, and the sets of practices that unfold within them, develop as part of a wider social environment. However, even in the course of a non-ethnographic study, it is worth noting the affective and material relations between archivist, researcher, activists and communities in the radical archive. These relations constitute a cultural and political ecology – not only between the persons present but between them and the records they consult; in the context given by the archive's structure and purpose, materials begin to 'speak' to each other as representations of individual struggles within and among wider political milieus. Thus at the May Day Rooms the GLC collection is supported and animated by collections covering the wider cosmos of political struggles in the 1980s (Figure 3). Archive staff help to guide this process, able to reflect on political argument at the same time as suggesting other materials, and allowing researchers into some of the archiving process (such as digitising material).

Figure 3 May Day Rooms archive and reading room
(Source: May Day Rooms)

Finally, and perhaps tenuously, absorption in the archival materials reveals some sense of the affective world of historic left-wing activism – as a wider world of objects and their associations come into view: in the GLC case, from the advertisements for radical bookstores and plays or 'lefty' personals in the GLC-funded *City Limits*, to the assemblage of postcards, pin badges, posters, and other ephemera that have little solid evidentiary use but a powerful ability to evoke the spirit of the time. One particularly joyful moment, as an example, was the discovery of a GLC document prefaced with a Walter Benjamin quote, which was drawn on to explore the potential of new media technologies for new democratic circuits of production and exchange in the arts (MDR/IEC 1985). Another was a handwritten note bundled in a folder of Popular Planning documents, refusing to sew the recipient's "rotten old knickers", accidentally revealing a world of domestic politics among the more official record of trade unionist activity. As one

way of reconstructing some of that sense of immersion, I tried to deploy materials from the archive in different ways – such as compiling as many of *City Limits*' 'hit list' (songs popular in their offices) from 1981-1983 as could be found online, and collecting them in a playlist to listen to while researching and writing. It is unlikely that this immersive sense has impacted significantly on the conceptual conclusions of this thesis, but it perhaps did help contribute to a more intangible sense of understanding of the case study, with a 'thick' sense of data unavailable outside of ethnographic research.

3.3.4. Oral history interviews

Semi-structured interviews have occupied a central role in social movement research as a means of understanding the motives, ideas, feelings, and self-perception of participants (Blee and Taylor, 2002). They provide opportunities to discuss the participants' experience in depth and allow for a more direct approach to answering research questions than is available through archival research. The ability to hear first-hand accounts of experiences and respondents' own interpretations was especially valuable, especially given the 'silences' of archives discussed above. Documentary evidence drawn from archives can only tell a partial story, and interviews can add a broader scope of meaning and interpretation than would be otherwise available.

First-hand accounts come from ten semi-structured interviews with key participants within the GLC, consisting of six councillors in leadership positions, and four officers employed as political advisors and researchers. These interviews ranged between 40 minutes to 2 ½ hours in length, and in two cases follow-up interviews were conducted. Participants were asked some biographical questions, and some wider reflective or conceptual questions. The interviews were mostly open-ended, however, geared toward allowing the participants to reflect on the memories significant to them and allowing them to direct the flow of conversation. For this reason, most lasted much longer than the hour originally scheduled (averaging about 100 minutes). This proved useful for the purposes of this research, as participants had the scope to bring up stories and recount conversations and observations that spoke to themes and issues not accounted for in the interview questions (and that could be raised in subsequent interviews with other patricipants).

The interviews specifically gave respondents the opportunity to situate their experience in wider political and ideological contexts, connection lines that can be difficult to draw from archival sources where radical politics in action has been translated into the dry and depoliticised language of 'official' local government documentation. The ability to direct more focused questions relieved pressure from extensively consulting the archives, and allowed for clarification and additional rich detail and depth on issues that appeared more opaque in document form. The open-ended nature of semi-structured interviews also enabled a dialogue on wider themes and categories of analysis. Following Castells' (1983: 342) approach to interviewing urban movement actors, some questions were posed specifically to invite

theoretical reflection and debate, aimed at conducting a "mutually beneficial conversation" from which both researcher and participant benefit intellectually. This partly ties in with the aims of militant ethnography to facilitate collaboratively produced knowledge and "ongoing activist (self-) reflection regarding movement goals, tactics, strategies, and organisational forms" (Juris, 2007: 165).

One minor disadvantage of interviews at some historical distance is that as participants get older, their recollection of events might fade – at some points, respondents apologised for having difficulty clearly recalling details and acknowledged that their interpretations of events might have changed or been coloured by the subsequent portrayal of those events. A more difficult challenge however is that historical research puts the researcher at a disadvantage when sourcing participants. Most interviewees were accessed in a 'snowball' fashion via recommendations and passing on contact details. Some were contacted via institutional websites, and one through a mutual acquaintance. Access to interviewees was therefore highly reliant on chance, and many others proved difficult to find. After thirty years, tracing the right people can be more difficult: people move, contact details become obsolete (if they were ever available), and the names of colleagues are forgotten. Some invitations to interview received no response, for many named sources no contact details could be found, and several key figures are now sadly deceased.

Another more difficult challenge for researching social movements concerns the relative position of participants within the movement. As Blee and Taylor (2002: 93) argue, "[t]he propaganda and internal documents of social movement organisations, as well as the personal testimonies and recollections of participants, are often produced by official leaders and those who are articulate, educated, and confident about the historic importance of their movement activities". This is certainly the case for those interviewed for this thesis, and those who were more prominent in the movement are typically more easily remembered, and potentially more easily accessible. The GLC was an enormous organisation, and even its more activist-oriented committees and sub-groups often had significant staff numbers – the Women's Committee, for example, had six councillors and eight 'co-opted' members, and a support unit of 77 workers by 1985. Yet all interviewees for this thesis were either politicians in senior positions as committee chairs or vice-chairs, or were employed in relatively senior positions. In addition, all were white, and although some came from working class backgrounds prior to their involvement in the GLC, most have had a public professional career since, whether in academia or in politics. As prominent representatives of the movement, their perspectives were likely most influential on the already available written record, and thus reflect rather than challenge it. Unfortunately, it was especially difficult to locate any participants who had less senior roles in the GLC. All efforts to contact people further outside of this social orbit reached dead-ends, for the reasons noted above.

Blee and Taylor (2002) caution researchers about problematic distinctions between movement-builders – the professional activists and those doing the radical strategic thinking – and

movement 'users', the people the movements are ostensibly 'for'. The scope of this research has been limited to the builders over the users. However, in the course of conducting and publicly presenting this research, a number of people who recalled the GLC have shared their memories and experience of it, or of left-wing politics in the 1980s more generally. Although they are not directly quoted here, the thesis has benefited from those informal conversations. Nevertheless, a large quantity of potentially important contributions remain missing from more marginal elements of the NUL, representing a major weakness of the interview approach.

Some of these shortfalls have been mitigated by access to the oral history interviews collected by the *GLC Story* project (see http://glcstory.co.uk/) that began in 2015 with a Heritage Lottery award as a means of retelling the 'forgotten' history of the GLC in order to generate "intergenerational dialogue in political spaces" (GLC Story, 2017: 3). Its founders, Deborah Grayson and Natasha Nkonde, were involved with the Soundings journal and inspired by the radical political lives of its early editors – including Doreen Massey and Mike Rustin who both worked at the GLC – but were "struck by how little knowledge there was about the radical socialist history of London" (GLC Story, 2017: 3). They recruited young London activists and organisers to interview people in and around the GLC, resulting in a collection of 16 interviews (one of whom I also interviewed) and a small but thematically rich archive of documents sourced directly from participants (and several others) now held at the May Day Rooms archive. Five respondents were activists external to the GLC but involved in projects or initiatives it funded, ten were council officers at varying levels of seniority, and one was a councillor. While this resource perhaps suffers (to a lesser extent) from the same problems of selective memory and forgotten perspectives, the resulting data is a significant tool for reaching out and engaging more marginal perspectives. This thesis has made extensive use of the *GLC Story* interview transcripts, for which I am very grateful to the organisers and the community of young Londoners who conducted the interviews. Because they come directly from audio or transcripts, citations of GLC Story interviews are referred to in this thesis by name and date with a 'GLC Story' attribution. A list of interviews is provided in Appendix 2.

Finally, research on social movements frequently experiences a difficult disjuncture between the inherent individualisation of academic research, and an emphasis on collective practice, strategizing and theory-building (Hintz and Milan, 2010). Handling the problem of individual perspective is, however, largely a matter of the conceptual approach of the researcher. Castells (1983: 365), for example, reports on his epistemological approach to interviewing that "We did not interview individual actors, but individual informants as subjects of a collective process". Methodologically, this is dealt with by weaving together individual narrative accounts with the more rounded perspective provided by other kinds of historical material, namely written documentation.

3.4. Conclusion

This chapter has set out and discussed the methodological principles behind the approach to the research and described and discussed the research methods adopted. It has offered a critique of traditional approaches to historical research and of the archive as a repository of truth tended by powerful interests, and has set out my alternative approach to the discipline and its methods. This chapter concludes the first part of the thesis which has established the theoretical, epistemological, and methodological background and framing for the research. The following part of the thesis begins the discussion of the case study by providing important contextual background across two chapters: chapter 4 establishes the roots of the 'new urban left' and chapter 5 explains the history of municipal politics in London, up to the point where these two histories converge with the left GLC takeover in 1981.

Part II: Situating the GLC’s new urban left

Chapter 4
The theoretical and activist origins of the new urban left in Britain

> "The influx of people that have given the GLC this great reputation in the gutter press for being the end of civilisation as we know it, is the fact that it is the post-1968 generation in politics, the people that became politically active after the student troubles ... People who tended to be motivated, as I was at that time, to finally say we've got to get involved and do something."
> (Ken Livingstone, 1981: 18)

4.1. Introduction

This chapter explains the ideological and historical roots of the 'new urban left' (NUL) in London from which the participants in the radical GLC emerged, tracing an arc from the ideological developments of the New Left from the late 1950s onward, through many of the extra-parliamentary movements, organisations, and campaigns of the late 1960s and 1970s, to the turn to local government in the late 1970s. Drawing on historical and theoretical literature, it takes a genealogical approach focused on the ideas generated within the movements. The chapter's purpose is to set up the historical background to the events described in chapters 5 to 8, and furnish additional theoretical content that helps situate the politics of the NUL in the GLC case study. It also functions to introduce the NUL and to demonstrate how the left in the GLC was deeply rooted in radical political traditions – which is important background for the argument about the left GLC's radicalism in chapter 6.

The chapter begins by outlining the NUL's formative roots in developments within the Labour Party. A second section then describes the NUL's philosophical origins in the intellectual new left, followed in section three by the ideological and political influence of diverse historical movements of the 1960s and 1970s, collectively described as the 'grassroots new left' (Youngpyo, 2007). A fourth section explains the strategic move which tied together the various historical currents into the analytical category of 'NUL' – its turn to local government, strongly influenced by emergent radical analyses of the local state.

4.2. Origins of the new urban left

From the mid-1970s, new political coalitions between the Labour left and a broad range of social movements began to emerge, at the same time as the left of the Labour Party started to organise more intensively to contest local elections. Most of the literature on this new coalition, which came to be known as the NUL, traces its beginnings to the disappointments of the Labour

governments of the 1960s and 1970s, and to the alternative radical movements of those decades that had appeared to replace the Labour Party as the primary means of agitating for a socialist vision (Atkinson, 1995; Seyd, 1987; Wainwright, 1987).

The '1968' generation of radical student activists had actively shunned the Labour Party, seeing it as part of the 'establishment', not a potential vehicle of socialist transformation (Lansley, et al., 1989; Wainwright, 1987). Under the late 1960s Wilson government, individual Labour Party membership halved from 800,000 to 400,000 due to discontent over its conservative economic policies, its attack on trade unions, and its support for America's war in Vietnam (Hobsbawm, 1980; Wainwright, 1987). The '68' left's approach to local government was even more indifferent, perceiving it as little "more than old white men coming along to general management committees and talking about rubbish collection" (Livingstone, 1984: 263).

Throughout the 1970s, however, a slow process of recomposition took place as New Left socialists, disappointed with the outcomes of 1968 and having underestimated the material and ideological power of the British state – turned towards efforts to democratise and radicalise the Labour Party (Seyd, 1987; Wainwright, 1987). At the same time, a significant minority of the Labour Party faithful, including key party figures like Tony Benn, turned leftward with similar disillusionments (Seyd; 1987; Wainwright, 1987). By the end of the 1970s, Benn was confidently predicting that a reinvigorated Labour left meant "many of those people who left us in the 60s will be rejoining us" (interviewed by Hobsbawm, 1980: 9). John Gyford characterises this transformation through the 1970s as the "coming home" to the Labour Party of the "class of '68" (1984a: 5).

Some of the seeds of this transformation had been sown as early as 1968, when trade unions rebelled against Labour Employment Secretary Barbara Castle's "in place of strife" white paper, which proposed constraints on shop-floor militancy. This instigated alliances between new union militants and the (then weak) Labour left, which were strengthened when unions mobilised again against the Conservative 1972 Industrial Relations Act, which legislated similar constraints. Similarly, opposition to the 1972 Housing Finance Act brought Labour left-wingers into campaigns alongside local community activists and housing campaigners, many of whom were otherwise opposed to electoral politics (Wainwright, 1987; Gyford, 1984a).

Although much of this renewed left focused on efforts to reform the party itself at a national level through groups like the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy (CLPD), others turned their attention to the potential of socialist organising on a local level, both reorienting socialist strategy around urban questions of collective consumption and provision (Gyford, 1983b; Pickvance, 1987) and seeking to shift the mechanism of that provision with a new emphasis on 'democracy', civic involvement, and the diverse social bases previously excluded from traditional Labour politics. This formation was first defined by Gyford in 1983 as the 'new urban left', describing a new style of local government politics characterised by a loosely connected array of activities not previously viewed as the purview of local councils – including women's committees, funding for radical groups, and campaigning on non-local issues like

Northern Ireland and nuclear weapons (Atkinson, 1995). For Gyford (1983a), the NUL's defining feature was a relatively novel focus of left activists on local government. Boddy and Fudge (1984: 7) define the actors in the NUL as a "political grouping … [that] embraces socialist councillors, party and community activists and radicalised elements of local government professions". However, unlike many commentators focused solely on its relation either to the Labour Party (e.g. Seyd, 1987) or to local government (e.g. Kingdom, 1991; Stoker, 1991), Boddy and Fudge acknowledge the broader origins of this grouping and the wider network of "complex overlapping membership, alliances and divisions" that fed into it (1984: 7; Gyford, 1985).

This coalition is thus difficult to concretely define, with characterisations shifting according to the emphasis given to each constituent part (Atkinson, 1995; Lansley, et al., 1989; Gyford, 1985). The NUL is most precisely understood as a project of coalition building, without any homogenous characteristics either socially or politically, and with pluralism at its centre. It encompassed interests that were sometimes contradictory or in conflict, although in broad terms was able to present a relatively coherent image of shared opposition (and was effectively considered as such by the press). As some have pointed out, this surface coherence masked a lack of unity – at once organisational, political, and strategic – that led to more explicit divisions in certain situations (Atkinson, 1995; Lansley, et al., 1989). However, it is important not to understate the convergence of political ideas at work.

The remainder of this chapter outlines the main political ideas and activist currents within the NUL, aiming to draw out a relatively coherent set of political-strategic coordinates (albeit 'meta-theoretical' rather than strictly empirical), beginning with its wider intellectual roots.

4.3. Theoretical roots in and beyond the 'new left'

The theoretical and ideological spirit of the NUL most clearly had its origins in the British 'new left'. Unlike the 'old' or traditional left in the Communist Party, this new current sought a reorientation of socialist strategy after the failures of Stalinism, and argued for a shift toward a more democratic and open socialism as an alternative to either centralist Leninism or the parliamentary social democracy of the Labour Party. It also embarked on a sophisticated analysis of the balance of forces in British society, rooted in readings of Marx and informed by Gramscian notions of hegemony, and emerging theoretical work on class and culture in cultural studies. These broader theoretical debates underpinned a thoroughgoing series of critiques of the left's existing revolutionary strategies, a renewed analysis of the state's role in capitalist society and its usefulness to socialist strategy as discussed in chapter 2, and of the composition of class and class struggles in British society.

The early new left developed a theoretical position of 'socialist humanism', based on the 'moral critique' of capitalism tradition in the British working-class movement, which emphasises

creative human action as the driving force of a historical movement toward socialist revolution, as opposed to structural determination or a vanguard leadership (Thompson, 1957; Williams, 1965). The early new left sought a positive socialism that "was not only economically practicable but was also intensely *desirable*; that … would revolutionise human relationships, replacing respect for property by respect for man" (Thompson, 1957: 106, original emphasis). From this starting point, new left intellectuals developed an emphasis on popular culture and working class consciousness – most famously in Williams' (1958) elaboration of the concept of a 'structure of feeling', a means of linking cultural and class analysis in which the rich moral and symbolic heritage of working class popular culture is seen both as intrinsic to the development of a rebellious class consciousness, and as evidence of working class agency and creative capacity (Youngpyo, 2007). This cultural analysis had a major impact on theorising about socialist strategy, particularly because it avoided the paternalism of an intellectual vanguard. But it was limited on its own unless it could "include the concept of the dialectical interaction between culture and something that is *not* culture" and avoid lapsing into populism (that is, seeing popular culture as separate from and unaffected by dominant ideologies) (Thompson, 1961: 33, original emphasis).

In response to these challenges, a second generation of new left theorists embarked on an ambitious project to understand the nature of British society as a whole, following Perry Anderson's (1964) provocation that the moral critique approach failed to account for how the working class is co-opted into the dominant capitalist worldview. With Tom Nairn, Anderson developed a historical theoretical position that the British working class had been uniquely hamstrung during the development of capitalism and had failed to develop "a coherent, aggressive self-assertion" (Nairn, 1964a: 51) for two reasons. Firstly, because a passive and fearful bourgeoisie had compromised with rather than overthrown the feudal landed class, passing on no "impulse of liberation" to the emerging proletariat, instead transmitting only "the deadly germs of utilitarianism" that would grow to sicken the Labour Party (Anderson, 1964: 43). Secondly, the labour movement suffered from its own prematurity, fighting its most rebellious phase against the unfolding of capitalism without a "structured socialist ideology" (i.e. Marxism), which only arrived "when the working class movement was at its lowest and least receptive ebb" (Anderson, 1964: 42). Against Thompson's celebration of a heroic working class culture, Anderson insisted that these historical conjunctures had ultimately produced a 'corporate' consciousness in the British working class to defend and improve its position within a social order accepted as given, which he contrasted with a 'hegemonic' class that "seeks to transform society in its own image, inventing afresh its economic system, its political institutions, its cultural values, its whole 'mode of insertion' into the world" (Anderson, 1964: 41).

In response, Thompson (1965) accused Anderson and Nairn of elitism and dogmatism, because they presupposed an already complete ideology of the working class which simply awaits its realisation, and because they identified 'authentic' socialism with their own understanding of

Marxism and refused to countenance any positive content to a labour movement that they mostly associated with Fabian intellectuals (see Anderson, 1964). Thompson instead characterised the history of the British labour movement as a series of popular movements that – although rarely explicitly fighting on a terrain of labour vs. capital, nor often particularly triumphant – nevertheless existed within complex social forces and political conflicts that deserve careful and respectful consideration. More pointedly, those complex social forces were the product not simply of subordination to a hegemonic class, but also of conscious and creative action on the part of the working class (Thompson, 1965).

At stake in these arguments were different understandings of Antonio Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony', and its implications not only for understanding history but for developing a forward-looking socialist strategy. Anderson and Nairn's emphasis on dominant ideologies left little possibility for the potential power of ordinary people, implying that social transformation only appears possible through a leadership adopting 'scientific' Marxism and leading a corporate class to revolution (Youngpyo, 2007). More charitably, in their schema the subordinated class must somehow build bases of power outside of the existing social and political order in order to produce a hegemonic ideology. In Thompson's view, however, the existing hegemonic order is reproduced in popular culture and ideology in the context of struggles between classes and social forces, meaning subordinate classes can only articulate counter-hegemonic projects within that same overall ideological formation. As Thompson argued, hegemony is always the product of cultural struggles and thus necessarily involves moments of resistance from within the "sub-political traditions" (1980 [1963]: 59) through which people recognise their social condition, building to the construction of counter-hegemony in the context of popular movements. Consequently, the task for socialist revolutionaries was to ally cultural analysis with economic and political analysis, and to search for potential points of antagonism and potential new provisional class alliances.

The new left was therefore the scene of trenchant debates on the nature of the British labour movement through history, its reformist strategies and its wavering ability to exert some class bargaining power, and especially of the Labour Party as the political instrument of that power. Thompson (1965), for instance, defended the Labour Party as the only possible institutional means through which a (counter-) hegemonic class project could unfold through the state. On the other side, Nairn criticised the reformist impulses of the party and its "*peculiarly weak left*" subordinated to the intellectual dominance of Fabianism and the "timid and dreary species of bourgeois rationalism" and technocratic management it had inherited (1964b: 49, 44, emphasis in original).

This analysis spurred on a comprehensive reappraisal of Labour's post-war legacy, criticising and deconstructing the 'parliamentary road to socialism'; given their most influential expression in Ralph Miliband's (1972 [1961]) critique of *Parliamentary Socialism,* which was a seminal text for the historical-theoretical debates sketched above. Miliband's central claim was that Labour had always been more dogmatic about the parliamentary system than about its pursuit of

socialism: "Empirical and flexible about all else, its leaders have always made devotion to that system their fixed point of reference and the conditioning factor of their political behaviour" (1972: 13). The Party was so "deeply imbued by parliamentarism" that it had only ever stood for social reform rather than socialism; and had constantly dampened possibilities for any more extensive social change through non-parliamentary action (Miliband, 1972: 13). Miliband's critique contrasted with those of the Labour left, which tended to focus on the theme of leadership 'betrayal' of socialist principles. While Miliband endorsed the left's aims of pushing for more radical policies and attitudes in defending those policies, his critique was more systematic, arguing that at every outbreak of class struggle outside of parliamentary forms,

> "[t]he Labour movement *was* betrayed, but not because the Labour leaders were villains, or cowards. It was betrayed because betrayal was the inherent and inescapable consequence of their whole philosophy of politics… [derived from] the belief, common to both industrial and parliamentary leaders, that a challenge to the Government through the assertion of working class strength outside Parliament was *wrong*" (Miliband, 1972: 144).

The left, in turn, was hamstrung by its own acceptance of the exigencies of the parliamentary system – albeit usually "with a certain degree of unease" – and by allowing its fundamentally different view of Labour's purpose to be "sufficiently blurred to suggest a common purpose", which let the reformist leadership maintain its hegemony (Miliband, 1972: 15, 62).

Activists of the 1960s were particularly influenced by the publication of the *May Day Manifesto*, a 'counter-statement' of socialist principles against "the new … 'managerial' form of capitalism" (Rustin, 2013: vi) by over 70 figures in the new left led by Stuart Hall, Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson. The *Manifesto* sought to challenge the way "the substance of socialism is continually bypassed, deflected, or … reinterpreted until it has lost all meaning" by Labour, especially when in government (Williams, 2018 [1968]: xiv). Another key aim was to think systematically, to confront the whole 'System' of managerial capitalism and to understand the left's various campaigns as deeply interconnected, stemming from and offering alternatives to the same political system. Yet the author's call to "work for … a different whole society" (Williams, 2018: 4) was not reducible to a singular political strategy. They exhorted the broader left to

> "stop subordinating every issue, and every strategy, to electoral calculations and organisations. … To be a socialist, now, is … to be where profit and convenience are hurrying, threatening, discarding men; to be where a wage is fought for; to be where a school or a hospital needs urgent improvement, or where a bus-service, a housing development, a local clinic needs to be fought through against the ordinary commercial and bureaucratic priorities … to be in any or all of these places and conditions, and to connect, to explain what is actually happening, so that ordinary people can begin to take control of it" (Hall, et al., 1967: 140-142).

The *May Day Manifesto* and other efforts from the new left had been an attempt to renew the positive content of socialism and expand its horizons in a more democratic and grassroots-led direction, rooted in an analysis of social change that centred "the *human* dimension, the agencies of human culture" through which people "act, experience, think, and act again" (Thompson, 1965: 351).

4.4. The Grass-roots of the new urban left

Much of this intellectual new left analysis developed in tandem with on-the-ground struggles. An increasingly diverse range of political organisations and social movements both brought new left ideas to a broader range of activists and helped to radicalise the new left itself by pushing a greater range of perspectives, such as from emerging feminist and anti-racist movements, into its political and class analysis. This section identifies those more specific movements and campaigns that fed into the political consciousness and practice of the NUL, especially in London.

4.4.1. Workers' initiatives and trade union militancy

Officers and councillors joining the GLC following the social movement ferment of the 1960s and 1970s were particularly influenced by militant workers' initiatives during those decades (Callaghan, 1987; Mackintosh and Wainwright, 1987). Many of these struggles had exposed the weaknesses of the traditional institutional forms of the British labour movement – the trade unions and Labour Party – that had "helped produce a limited economistic trade union consciousness among British workers" (McLaverty, 1989: 6). In response, the militant workers' movements began to challenge the division of functions between political and industrial action, pushing for more substantive trade union contributions to policy-making and for more robust and radical interventions into industry from local authorities and the state (Wainwright, 1987; Gyford, 1985). During the ensuing period of industrial militancy, this vacuum of political influence was increasingly occupied by a politicised cadre of Communist Party, Trotskyist, and independent radicalised trade-union activists (Callaghan, 1987; Lowes, 1998). In the interim between the defeat of Wilson's 'In Place of Strife' proposals (1968) and the wave of action against the Industrial Relations Act (1972), this cadre began to establish direct connections with the Labour left, often bypassing traditional union structures. This often meant going against union leaders' explicit instructions, as trade union officials tried unsuccessfully to prevent or discourage shop stewards from working with left MPs and councillors or autonomously entering into industrial action (Mackintosh and Wainwright, 1987; Wainwright, 1987).

However, whereas much of the far left was convinced that industrial militancy and wage struggles under recessionary conditions could multiply into a challenge to capitalism, the punitive government responses to the 'wages scramble' exposes the limits of industrial action in

its overwhelmingly defensive posture, and its lack of any positive alternative socialist programme (Callaghan, 1987). As Eric Hobsbawm (1978) argued, the early 1970s had witnessed a reinvigoration of syndicalism, but not one backed by the vision or strategy of its predecessors. Elements of the trade union movement, especially those inspired by other radical popular movements, thus began demanding something more transformative than the orthodoxy of defensive actions. Some Communists influenced by Gramscian ideas argued that putting the working class in a position where it could act as a leading force required moving away from blanket opposition to wage restraint and adopting a radicalised form of the Labour Government's 'Social Contract' in which trade unions would release financial and investment resources by cooperating in wage restraint, but demand greater input into the allocation and purpose of those resources (Callaghan, 1987). This perspective was largely undone, however, by the experience of the 1974-79 Labour government and the collapse of the Social Contract at the end of the decade. Disillusionment set in after the brief hope that an 'alternative economic strategy' with a radical industrial component involving shop-floor workers might materialise under Tony Benn's remit as Minister of Industry; instead, those policies collapsed under pressure from the CBI, the City, and the civil service (Wainwright, 1987; Panitch and Leys, 1997). However, beyond actual policy perspectives, the more expansive political arguments of the Gramscians would prove more influential – while their confidence in the possibility of meaningful reforms 'through the institutions' was controversial, their insistence on the need to "change habits, practices, values and institutions *now* in order to make socialism something more than propaganda" (Callaghan, 1987: 178, original emphasis) found much wider approval.

Meanwhile, networks of radical researchers used funding from trade unions and radical research organisations to conduct analyses of labour and work processes, technology and organisation, hoping to make useful contributions to the labour movement (see Coventry, Liverpool, Newcastle and N Tyneside Trades Councils, 1980; Wainwright and Elliot, 1982). The Institute for Workers' Control, for example, provided an important network and discussion forum for such ideas among engaged researchers, industrial militants, and left politicians (Wainwright, 1987).

Activists closer to the shop floor in industrial disputes took part in a renewal of autonomous organising and promoted ideas of workers' control and workers' democracy in opposition to right-wing union bureaucracies and the Labour government. In particular, the alternative workers' plan at the arms manufacturer Lucas Aerospace, which sought to contest redundancies by proposing alternative uses for their factories (and skills), became an internationally influential beacon of struggles for workers' control (Wainwright and Elliot, 1982; Mackintosh and Wainwright, 1987). Drawn up in 1975 and 1976 by a shop stewards 'Combine' committee coordinating across multiple unions and the seventeen Lucas plants, the plan proposed an alternative approach to nationalisation with its proposals for 'full workers' control'. In a politically charged rebuke to the nature of the firm's business and the priorities of the government, the core of the plan revolved around developing and producing more 'socially

useful' products and technologies – such as medical equipment and public transport vehicles – which as engineers they could both design and produce. This diffusion of ideas went some way to radicalising parts of the public sector unions, especially in local government, and would influence the strategy of 'restructuring for labour' in the GLC (see chapter 6) (Mackintosh and Wainwright, 1987; McLaverty, 1989). However, the Lucas Plan was effectively blocked by a Labour government uninterested in further nationalisation (especially after Benn, who supported the plan, had been removed from the cabinet), and despite the plan's strong support among Lucas workers it met with "unresponsiveness and inertia on the part of the trade-union establishment", who were reluctant to allow autonomy to unofficial shop stewards' organisations (Wainwright and Elliot, 1982: 179; see also Panitch and Leys, 1997).

While most unions broadly supported left policies – including nuclear disarmament and public ownership – there was an increasing polarisation in the unions over "the very purpose and character of trade unionism itself" (Wainwright, 1987: 206). In some unions, including the forerunners of Unite and GMB, militants pushed to politicise internal structures and organisational priorities, but leaderships clung to an apolitical 'business unionism' that represented workers in an entrepreneurial manner, offering private health insurance to workers and strike-free deals to large multinationals (Wainwright, 1987: 219). In others, however, such as the National Union of Public Employees (NUPE), a founding member of Unison, the impact of the left "was to crystallise a shift at all levels towards an explicitly political trade union", resulting in a "social unionism encouraging … a new kind of working-class politics" (Wainwright, 1987: 219, 227). In addition, although it remained a marginal practice among the wider trade union movement, trade union organisers began giving a base of support to other campaigns over issues like peace, the environment, and quality of services.

4.4.2. New social movements

A second key influence on the NUL were the 'new social movements' that emerged in the 1960s, beginning with the new grassroots practices of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). Launched in 1957 around the time of new left's turn away from the Communist Party after the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, the CND was a significant point of departure for left politics. As Callaghan (1987: 170) remarked, "for the first time in post-war Britain a spontaneous and radical mass movement could emerge independently of either CP or Labour patronage". Previously, single-issue campaigns outside class-based movements had typically been organised through liberal reform societies, collecting petitions or letter-writing, but CND's new radicalism represented a generational shift that decisively changed the composition of protest movements, both in terms of strategy and social make-up (Lent, 2001). The new left interacted with CND and theorised its significance throughout the late 1950s and 1960s. By bringing together socialist radicals and a wider ecology of ideas about peace, safety and quality of life, CND had a major impact on subsequent socialist theorising that began to link labour politics with the politics of the environment, community, identity, sexuality, and culture. As

Taylor and Pritchard (1980: 110) note, many CND participants moved on to support a varied range of other single-issue and community action campaigns, especially environmental movements. The practice and political composition of the peace movement would significantly impact the left, especially as associated ideals of 'prefigurative' politics germinated through a growing range of 'new' movements.

As theorists began to notice the deep differences between traditional industrial struggles and this new "field of social movements [which] extends itself to all aspects of social and cultural life" (Touraine, 1985: 778), they also pointed out that they represented not only a new composition of social struggles, but a response to substantive shifts in social conditions (Gilroy, 1987). The new movements were in part predicated on "the consciousness that we are entering a new type of social life" marked by "the crisis of industrial values" – one in which the central conflicts had become pluralised and movements recognised that the dominant capitalist system "controls not only 'means of production' but the production of symbolic goods, that is, of information and images, of culture itself" (Touraine, 1985: 780, 774). The shift thus entailed new kinds of political organising around different kinds of demands, based on commonalities in community or cultural identity, in territory and space, and in the type, quality, and degree of access to collective resources and services (Castells, 1983).

Yet this new range of social movements were not abandoning economic struggle but rather opening a 'new front' in opposition to capitalism, especially the student radicals of the '68' movements and much of the feminist and anti-racist campaigns that (in Britain) formed into popular movements soon thereafter (Callaghan, 1987; Gilroy, 1987). Critiques were ranged not only against the exploitation of the wage, but also exploited work in the domestic sphere, the alienating qualities of consumer society, the stultification of creative capacities, the degradation of the natural environment, the dampening of community and collective enfranchisement, and oppression of and violence against marginalised groups (Touraine, 1985). These movements undertook a search for new social values, working at the fissure of the contradiction between existing circumstances and the potential within them for greater social progress.

In the organisation and practice of the new social movements, the major themes were anti-bureaucracy and anti-centralism, and an emphasis on the merits of direct action and prefigurative politics over representative and electoral politics. The influence of Gramsci is apparent here too: participants reasoned that since the social order rests on consent and the social practices that reproduce it, a counter-hegemonic challenge to capitalism (and patriarchy, imperialism, etc.) is only made possible through a social practice that "embodies principles of action which anticipate an alternative social order" (Callaghan, 1987:179).

Most accounts of the NUL note the influence of the women's movement, the way it not only politicised spheres of everyday life previously considered either unimportant or unrelated to class politics and socialist transformation, but also developed new ways of organising (Gyford, 1985). The women's movement became "the main organisational form through which the idea of prefigurative politics has begun to influence the contemporary left", and was thus an

important focal point for “the process of continually making ourselves anew in the movement towards making socialism” (Rowbotham, et al., 1979: 140). Feminists took issue, for instance, over the format and style of political meetings, arguing women were excluded if childcare was not provided, and in more subtle ways by informal hierarchies of prestige, by the conduct of participants, and by the unequal emphases given to different discussion topics. These criticisms were important sources of inspiration – and direct political experience – for many who would later join the GLC and draw on these insights in looking to develop “alternative styles of organisation … less formality and bureaucracy” (Ward, 1981: 14).

The NUL was particularly influenced by emergent socialist-feminist arguments, most notably represented in pamphlets like *Beyond the Fragments* (Rowbotham, et al., 1979) that presented a critique of how feminist perspectives had been inadequately incorporated into socialist analysis and organisational practices, attacking the authoritarian tendencies of left-wing groups and warning against simply replacing capitalist hierarchies with socialist ones. Instead, it located in the women’s movement “the forms of organisation necessary to develop socialist consciousness out of … grass-roots industrial and social strength” (Rowbotham, et al., 1979: 3). Socialist-feminists also argued against a silos based approach to challenging different forms and sources of exploitation and oppression, and attempted to resolve divergent campaigns into a singular social force “uniting the social power of the community with the industrial power of those in production, and pitching this popular power against the state” (Rowbotham, et al., 1979: 5). The women’s movement also contributed to an emphasis on the politics of reproduction, as it campaigned over issues of childcare and domestic labour, and improved access to collective services like healthcare, abortion, nurseries, counselling, and domestic violence shelters (Rowbotham, et al., 1979: 136).

If the women’s movement had most sharply foregrounded prefigurative politics and the notion that ‘the personal is political’, anti-racist movements provided the main link between transformative struggles and concerns about culture and identity. Anti-racist campaigns and struggles were another important influence on the NUL – particularly in London. A number of self-organised community centres and popular organisations provided collective spaces for social solidarity, forming a base for political education projects and campaigns on issues that affected minority communities. More directly ‘anti-racist’ organising in the late 1970s primarily took the form of opposition to the fascist National Front (NF), which had been gaining prominence and achieving worryingly high local election performances up to 1977 (Crabtree, 1988; Gilroy, 1987). Racially-motivated crime was on the increase, and the response from the Labour Party and the organised labour movement was tepid – with the Labour leadership reiterating its support for immigration controls rather than opposition to racism. In response, groups of Asian youth began meeting to express their dissatisfaction and call for “multiracial, disciplined self-defence groups” (Crabtree, 1988: 110). A ‘popular front’ soon emerged in the form of the ANL, organised initially by Trotskyist groups with some backing from the Labour left. The campaign proved enormously influential on the Labour left, partly derived from its

organisational impetus in the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP), who had put the devoted time and energy of its members to developing strategic and organisational links with local black organisations, shop stewards' committees and local Trades Councils (Crabtree, 1988; Renton, 2019). By the end of 1977, the ANL had grown enough to push the national Labour Party into greater concern over the rise of the NF and to begin to campaign on anti-racist issues.

The ANL sought in particular to utilise music as a focus of politicisation and political organisation, and brought the rebellious yet vague sentiment of punk rock into conversation with concrete political issues through a series of concerts and discos branded as 'Rock Against Racism', including a 'Carnival Against the Nazis' in London's East End that attracted an audience of 100,000 (Renton, 2019). As Paul Gilroy (1987) argues, these popular anti-racist cultural initiatives provided a connective tissue between the cultural and community life of London's diverse inner-city populations and the predominantly white constituencies of left politics – illustrated at a symbolic level by black musicians sharing the billing at Rock Against Racism events with anti-establishment white bands like The Clash. Equally important to the success of the ANL, however, was its joint working with self-organised black and Asian communities in self-defence, which helped radicalise interest groups such as the Indian Workers' Association into rejecting cooperation with the police. By 1979 the movement began to have an impact on the labour movement, as its representatives moved into workplaces and encouraged workers to take actions like refusing to work with NF members (Crabtree, 1988; Renton, 2019).

At the same time, an anti-racist critique of the police began to emerge from the late 1960s, and especially after violent clashes at Notting Hill Carnival in 1976. Much of orthodox left was accused of failing to adequately recognise the significance of autonomous black organising against police abuse in the black community (Bridges and Gilroy, 1982). But many white socialists became increasingly concerned with police racism, linking it to existing left critiques of the function of police in securing capitalism and private property, including its surveillance and interrogation practices and its violent response to demonstrations and picket lines. Anti-apartheid activism was another source of anti-racist influence that impacted the NUL, especially after the formation of the radical City of London Group in 1982 and its 'non-stop picket' of the South African embassy. The key element of the City Group's campaigning was its aim to connect racism and imperialism in South Africa with the racism of the British state at home, and its attempts to broaden the single-issue anti-apartheid movement to include and work with other anti-racist organisations (Brown, 2017).

The NUL also took some ideological inspiration from other parts of the wider milieu of 'new' social movements, including campaigns around issues of sexuality and disability, although these would prove somewhat more peripheral to the central policy agendas of the GLC. Nevertheless, activists had built links with some of the more radical parts of these movements, including organisations like the London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard or magazines like *Gay Left,* a remnant of the Gay Liberation Front that dissolved in 1975. While many gay and lesbian

activists adopted a strongly anti-capitalist and revolutionary politics of sexuality, their ideas encountered even more resistance than other 'identity' movements, especially within the trade unions and among much of the more traditional elements in the new left. In the context of the new right's stage-management of growing material anxieties in everyday life into concerns about moral decay and 'deviance', it was particularly troubling for gay activists to see the left fail "to speak clearly to people's needs and in that failure abandon the political and social terrain to domination by reactionary images, models and philosophies" (Gay Left Collective, 1980: 3).

These struggles in sum provided a counter-point to how Thatcherism was reshaping the cultural terrains of ordinary social life. As Stuart Hall argued,

> "Thatcherism's … construction of the respectable, patriarchal, entrepreneurial subject with 'his' orthodox tastes, inclinations, preferences, opinions and prejudices as the stable subjective bedrock and guarantee of its purchase on our subjective worlds; its rooting of itself inside a particularly narrow, ethnocentric and exclusivist conception of 'national identity'; and its constant attempts to expel symbolically one sector of society after another from the imaginary community of the nation – these are as central to Thatcherism's hegemonic project as the privatisation programme or the assault on local democracy (which is of course precisely attacked in their name: what else is the 'loony left'?)" (1988: 8).

Each of these spheres of influence from the new social movements would thus be essential to the project of challenging the hegemonic project of the 'new right', which the orthodox left and its narrow focus on industrial change had been unprepared for. In the social-political context of the early 1980s, contestations over cultural and national identity, ecological issues, gender and sexuality, and race and ethnicity, each "acquire[d] in the perspective of an analysis of 'hegemony', an absolute centrality" (Hall, 1988: 8). Through the influence of the new social movements, London's new urban left became one of the few contemporary socialist projects to work from an alternative conception of its 'subject', of "those who it is making socialism *for* and *with*" (Hall, 1988: 8, original emphasis).

4.4.3. Community action

A third dimension of NUL politics came from the influence of a series of 'community action' campaigns that stressed organising *with* communities rather than *for* them (Gyford 1984a, Craig, et al., 1979). In the late 1960s, the community became a major focus for political action, as activists deserted conventional local politics for extra-parliamentary politics with an ambivalent relationship to the Labour Party (Gyford, 1984a). Strong campaigns were fought throughout the 1970s on issues of land speculation, community control of housing, local services, and local employment prospects. Community workers of the late 1960s and early 1970s rejected traditional community work practices and adopted instead "a commitment to organising and a willingness to use conflict strategies to achieve their objectives" (Loney, 1983: 23-24). The community action campaigns were also challenging conventional Labourist

assumptions, with an organising model based on helping people in deprived areas "be central to the solution of their own problem" (Baine, 1975, quoted in Gyford, 1985: 34). Community action was thus initially seen as an alternative to the Labour Party, as the "radical optimism" of the late 1960s met with a "pervasive scepticism" of the traditional organs of socialist politics in working class areas (Mayo, 1979: 132).

Community action was further radicalised by the Community Development Projects (CDPs) from 1969, set up by central government as part of a rising concern with urban poverty, that would become key nodes of struggle (Loney, 1983; Gyford, 1984a). This radicalisation came about partly because of project workers' alarm at the Home Office's inept handling of the projects, and partly through the way many project workers' existing radical tendencies were incubated in inter-project networks such as the CDP Workers' Organisation and the CDP Political Economy Collective (Kraushaar, 1982; Gyford, 1985). Workers in Coventry CDP were especially pivotal to this direction , arguing that the project should refocus its attention from the symptoms and victims to the 'structural' causes of poverty through a political economy approach (Loney, 1983). This challenged both mainstream social work theory and housing and planning economists by insisting that community decline and geographic concentration of poverty were consequences of the ordinary demands of the economy, not the poverty-prone dispositions of certain social groups (Sharman, 1981). This analysis took place in the context of a deepening economic crisis in which deindustrialisation and unemployment disproportionately hit inner cities. They coupled local experiences and data with broader analyses of corporate investment strategies, the uneven geography of growth and profit, and the perpetuation of wealth and privilege within the ruling class (Sharman, 1981; Banks and Carpenter, 2017). Meanwhile, waves of speculative private development of land and property – often led by the state as it pursued the 'revitalisation' of inner cities – worsened the problem for deprived communities, and the community campaigns thus found their attention pulled to issues of housing, planning, urban development, and local services as much as to (un)employment and wages the core problem of urban deprivation (Mayo, 1979; Banks and Carpenter, 2017). Community campaigns were thus frequently focused as much on opposing the housing and planning policies of (often Labour-run) councils as on predatory private development itself. This morphed into a critique of the Fabian paternalism of Labour's management of public housing and its centralised bureaucratic forms that excluded tenants' own choices and initiatives about their homes, often meaning ingrained racist and sexist practices in design, allocation, and management because planners took for granted a number of assumptions about the heterosexual nuclear family unit and the living arrangements of middle-class households (Griffiths and Holmes, 1984).

These problems had met with little political challenge from within the Labour Party until the NUL took them on in the 1970s. In fact, Labour councillors were often openly hostile to ideas of community control and collective (as opposed to state) forms of tenure, frequently seeing tenants' self-organisation as a threat rather than an opportunity for greater democratic

collaboration in aid of a socialist housing system (Griffiths and Holmes, 1984). Similarly, Labour councillors felt community involvement was as likely to mean dealing with NIMBYs and conservative busybodies as with those in poverty (Shapely, 2011).

Following these and subsequent critiques of formal participation processes (Arnstein, 1969; see Brownill and Inch, 2019), community workers and activists “rejected their allotted role as uncritical servants of the local state, helping to oil its wheels with ‘public participation’” and saw themselves instead as “‘organic intellectuals’, working ‘in and against the state’, and facilitators of working class mobilization to challenge the power structures that caused the problems people experienced” (Banks and Carpenter, 2017: 233). Community groups, supported by radical activists in the CDPs, developed a range of campaigning tactics to pressure councils to develop land to better meet people’s needs, especially the marginalised and dispossessed – they lobbied councillors, fought legal battles, disrupted public enquiries, and used direct action to halt development projects (Figure 4; Mackintosh and Wainwright, 1987). In particular, echoing the alternative industrial proposals of initiatives like the Lucas workers, they developed alternative community plans for regeneration – drawn up by local communities and put forward as alternatives to the orthodox narratives and assumptions of market-led development.

Figure 4 Anti-roads protest, 1976.

(Source: Alamy/PA. Ken Livingstone (second left) attends an anti-roads protest (another source of influence on the NUL) following the disruption of a public enquiry over the A1 Archway.)

The radical CDPs also aimed to strengthen the ‘bottom-up’ linkages through which a wider struggle for working class emancipation and against top-down management of the poor could be fought – looking to work with self-organised institutions like tenants’ committees and

unemployed associations (Banks and Carpenter, 2017). While the CDPs had a radicalising effect on community action, they paradoxically brought more and more community activists into the Labour Party as the CDPs came to be associated with it (Gyford, 1984a, Kraushaar, 1982), and as a strengthening left in the party made it more inviting. Several figures who would later join the GLC spent time as community activists while working with local Labour parties.

By 1980, this change of composition was accompanied by calls in the radical *Community Action* journal for a strategic realignment, "from focusing on tenants and community groups to the range of organisations in the broader labour movement" (quoted in Gyford, 1985: 35). In some places, support from Labour MPs lent legitimacy to community campaigns, but perhaps more significant, especially in London, was the way ideas derived from community action impacted Labour's election manifestos and actions in office (Sharman, 1981). The influence of community action and activists' experience of housing, squatting, and community planning struggles also contributed to the left's reappraisal of the potentials and limits of local government (McLaverty, 1989), to which this chapter now turns.

4.5. The new urban left and local government

At the peak of their activity and visibility in the mid- to late-1970s, autonomous social movements had little to do with local government and saw little potential in it. The turn to local government in the early 1980s has therefore frequently been seen within the radical left as symptomatic of the movements' growing weakness. Yet, as Mayo (1979) and Gyford (1985) have argued, it was not simply resignation but also the increasing prominence of the left within the Labour Party, which made the Party and engaging in electoral politics more welcoming to those who had dismissed it after 1968. By the late 1970s, this rapprochement was prompting many social movement activists to return to the perennial problem of whether or not to work within the Labour Party (Mayo, 1979).

4.5.1. The politics of the turn to local government

To some extent local electoral campaigns were an extension of national political concerns, where control of local government acted as a substitute for national government after Labour's defeat in the 1979 general election. Seyd (1987) notes that the Labour left's ongoing internal struggles against the right over issues of accountability and democracy meant that battles within local parties (such as over reselection of councillors or drafting of manifestos) had the effect of giving greater prominence to local councils.

At the same time, however, the political importance of local government came to the forefront of the political scene, as changing geographies of class, tenure, industry, and economic growth came together with an unprecedented assault on local authority budgets, autonomy and assets. Thatcherism's urban strategy linked policy initiatives in housing, urban revitalisation, and cuts

to local authority expenditure, aiming to increase competition for resources, promote self-reliance, and build the Conservative political base while weakening Labour's. Thatcher's "avowed intention of making town halls more responsive to market forces had the strategic effect of consolidating a shift in the balance of class forces" (Toulouse, 1991: 59), and thus put city halls at the centre of its political attack, to which a left response prioritising defence of local services was unsurprising.

However, the more specific political formation categorised here as the 'new urban left' (NUL) perceived local government as a positive instrument for social change in its own right. Beyond the generalised politicisation of the local state as the primary terrain of struggles in defence of existing social programmes from public sector cuts, discussed in chapter 2, Gyford (1983b; see also Seyd, 1987) identified the NUL's approach to the local state as a 'model' of democratic socialism in action, an example of what a national socialist government might look like. These aims were expressed in campaigning journals like *London Labour Briefing* and *Local Socialism* through the concept of 'mobilisation' (Gyford, 1983b). Activists emphasised the need to mobilise communities both defensively to protect services and positively for new alternatives – they urged the left to "adopt a campaigning perspective, mobilising outside the conventional political system, in the community and the work place" (Hain, 1980: 202).

Activists coming into the GLC were especially inspired by the account of *Red Bologna* by Jäggi, Müller and Schmid (1977), which emphasised many of the radical urban interventions by that city's Communist government underpinning the quality of everyday life, from a radical town planning agenda including free public transport fares and traffic controls, to progressive social policies in health clinics and elderly care (Ward, interview, July 2018). Bologna, under the uninterrupted control of the Communist Party from 1945 to 1999, was especially renowned in the 1970s for its comparatively high living standards and freedom from corruption – it was "the Italy that works" (Blitz, 1999) with internationally admired public services complemented by a radical strategy of democratisation and decentralisation, with a network of municipal and neighbourhood committees and factory and school councils. While the British left's reception of *Bologna la rossa* was an especially rose-tinted view, it nevertheless served as a source of inspiration – a 'reference culture' (Maccaferri, 2018) – for thinking about socialist urban administration in the context of a demotivated British left assaulted by declining living standards. The GLC transport fares cut, for example, intended to pave the way to free fares (discussed in chapter 6), was directly inspired by Bologna's transport policies, and the Communists' *Festa de l'Unita*, a huge annual political festival of food and music, was a direct inspiration for the GLC's cultural festivals (Hatherley, 2020; Maccaferri, 2018).

The 'local road to socialism' also fitted well with the left's established critique of Labour's actions in government during the 1960s and between 1974 and 1979, criticising among other things the Morrisonian legacy of baronial urban government (discussed in chapter 5), the alienating paternalism of huge public corporations, the managerial impulses inherited from Fabianism, and the indifference to cultural diversity and individual autonomy from the

bureaucratic welfare state (Hall, 1988; Seyd, 1987; Wainwright, 1987). By the end of the 1970s, a key – although perhaps too late – perception of this critical analysis was to realise that the emergence of Thatcherism derived much of its hegemonic momentum and popular appeal from precisely this dubious legacy of bureaucratic welfarism. Labour had left the door open for Thatcher and her allies in the press to trade on popular imagery of bloated and indifferent Soviet-style administration to underwrite their attacks on public services and local authority spending (Boddy and Fudge, 1984). This critique drove toward a new left project of socialist 'renewal' that could come to terms with and move beyond the limitations of a statist labourism (Hall, 1988). As Gyford (1983b; 1985) notes, engagement with the local state was one means by which the left could reach a democratic settlement between necessary opposition to the Conservative government's public spending cuts while freeing itself from the 'liability' of centralising statist socialism, whether parliamentary or insurrectionary. In opposition to the national Labour party's centralism and insensitivity to local issues, including its hostility to industrial decentralisation through workers' control and cooperatives, the local state was identified with a strategy of devolving power to the intended beneficiaries of the welfare state while fighting defensive struggles to protect its services (McLaverty, 1989).

4.5.2. New left theorising about the (local) state

For the social movements and community activists, meanwhile, involvement in the Labour Party for the purpose of engaging with local government was increasingly recognised as important. As one community activist reflected, "it was vital to get local politicians on our side, *or* chang[e] local politics from the inside by local activists becoming elected councillors" (Colenutt, 2011: 3). This strategy of action with or within the Labour Party was accompanied by a reinvigorated theoretical understanding of the state (Gyford, 1985; McLaverty, 1989). For John McDonnell (1984), writing when he was deputy leader of the GLC, the attempted use of the local state for radical ends was opened up by a shift in the ideology of socialists around theories of public administration, economics, and social movements. Since the 1960s there had been moves away from the traditional view of local government in the Labour Party, which had seen it in typically statist terms whereby socialists would capture positions of power and then deliver socialist policies on behalf of the repressed class.

> "The new ideology said, on the contrary, that capitalism is a social relation of production and domination that pervades all aspects of our lives, including that of local government. So we now sought not merely to lay hands on positions of power within local government but also to recognise that we were both in the state and against it" (McDonnell, 1984).

This move followed key 'new' Marxist debates and insights around the nature of the state (building on those theorisations in the earlier period of the new left), set off by Miliband's *The State in Capitalist Society* in 1969 and inspired principally by the emerging 'open Marxism'

developed around the Conference of Socialist Economists (CSE) (see Clarke, 1991). As per the Poulantzas-influenced state theory discussed in chapter 2, the CSE's principal argument was that the state was not simply a set of institutions that can be captured, hijacked or rerouted as a socialist vehicle, but rather a set of relations geared toward but not reducible to facilitating capital accumulation and bourgeois social relations. One pamphlet emerging from the CSE, *In and Against the State* by the London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group [LEWRG] (1979), had a particular impact on NUL thinking. Its authors, public sector and state-funded workers, rooted their analysis in the dilemma of finding themselves in the position of "after-hours" socialists: "We spend our evenings and weekends struggling against capitalism, and our days working diligently as agents of the capitalist state to reproduce the capitalist system" (LEWRG, 1979: 3). Public consumers (tenants, patients, parents, welfare recipients, etc.) were also faced with the contradiction of being recruited into oppressive relations with the state in order to acquire necessary resources. They thus required both new ways of understanding and theorising the state that could match their experience, and new strategies of engagement that would enable workers 'in' the state and others reliant on it to act against it.

The LEWRG implied that neither a strategy of defending the status quo against cuts and restructuring, nor an all-out defence of working class autonomy against state encroachment building towards a revolutionary overthrow of the state, would suffice. Instead, the class struggle takes place necessarily within the established state apparatus and is thus necessarily a struggle *in and against* the state. Socialists "had to engage with the state, to extract concessions from the state, without accepting the forms which the state sought to impose on them" (Clarke, 1991: 55). The potential of such a strategy depends on the extent to which it is able to create, and constantly exploit and expand, an "oppositional space" within the state that supports "forms of organisation which, in opposing capitalism would at the same time prefigure socialism" (Edinburgh CSE Cuts Group, quoted in Clarke, 1991: 55). This contrasts with the Labourist approach of 'managerial space' to administer state resources in ways more beneficial for the working class; this might succeed on its own terms, but at the cost of confinement within the repression and exclusion of the bourgeois state form.

In and Against the State was especially useful for understanding the *local* state, arguing it is no more neutral in class terms than the central state, both inevitably "tied up with local capital" and forming "an important part of the capital relation, in its own right" (LEWRG, 1979: 32). Yet while the local state is just as repressive and integrated into the imperatives of capital accumulation, they saw it not simply as a monolithic instrument of the capitalist class, but also an arena and result of class struggle (LEWRG, 1979; McLaverty, 1989). Prior theorising about the capitalist state rested on the dubious assumption that the object of analysis was 'the' state, rather than a multiplicity of state forms and relations riven with internal contradictions and conflicts that might be exploited by savvy socialist councillors (Clarke, 1991; McLaverty, 1989). The role of left Labour councillors and workers within the local state would be to use their privileged position within the capital-labour relation to aid the self-activity of the

oppressed, to help tip the balance of forces in favour of the working class, and in this way to prepare the ground for a long-term struggle for socialism (McLaverty, 1989; see also Cockburn, 1977).

By the time of the GLC election in 1981, these debates around the nature of 'the local state' were widespread enough for them to "enter into the ordinary language of socialists" (Corrigan, 1979: 203) and were being developed in the specific context of election organising. As John McDonnell explained:

> "We'd been talking and discussing during that period, issues around 'in and against the state' and a more detailed discussion of what is the state? As much as a set of institutions, it's a relationship of dominance. And therefore how do you change that relationship? You go within the state, and you transform the state form. Now, again, that was iteratively being developed in all the discussions that we were having." (McDonnell, interview, August 2018).

These arguments about the local state and the adoption of an 'in and against' strategy thus formed a key element in the ideological makeup of the NUL. Although the key texts were generally written by academics and left intellectuals, the discussions surrounding them "undoubtedly had a big, if sometimes unconscious, influence on many of those who have formed the new urban left in local government" (McLaverty, 1989: 33). Some figures like John McDonnell and Mike Ward may have been more deeply absorbed in them (as per my interviews with them), but these influences and debates were an important feature of the NUL, regardless of whether particular councillors and activists had read the relevant theoretical texts. As Green (1987: 207) explains, "[t]hough few councillors had read the theoretical reformulations of the state by Marxist intellectuals, these ideas filtered down in pamphlets and conversational second-hand". Gyford (1985: 37) similarly points out that although many activists were unlikely to have the time or inclination to address the nuances of the state debate, "one should not underestimate the importance which many of them attached to the correct theoretical underpinning to their work".

4.6. Conclusion

This chapter has defined the NUL and excavated its intellectual roots and constituent parts, both in terms of its social composition and its ideas about the means by which socialist aims should be realised. Although intellectually rooted in the new left, these origin points were far from uniform, and frequently in tension, as noted above. They had varied impacts in different cities and different councils too. For example, feminism and anti-racism had a smaller impact in South Yorkshire and Liverpool, where a more homogenous and still militant trade union movement, meant the need to reach out to more disenfranchised communities was not seen as high a priority as in London (Wainwright, 1987; Payling, 2014). In London, the NUL brought

together a greater variety of social movement actors and influences than elsewhere, although this meant it was in some ways a more fragile coalition (Mackintosh and Wainwright, 1987). Regardless of the degree of prominence given to new social movements or to 'traditional' class politics, it could be expected that NUL councils would concern themselves with developing more novel and participative forms of politics, supporting workers and communities to collectively organise for themselves, and changing the internal operations of the council (McLaverty, 1989). Later chapters will consider these changes to the scope and culture of local government in the GLC. The next chapter now turns to view the background context for the NUL in the GLC from a different angle: the history of Labour and left-wing politics in London's governing institutions and the forms of organising adopted to win the GLC for the left.

Chapter 5
Red London? A century of politics at County Hall up to 1981

> "For what could not these multitudes, wasting their lives today in the penal servitude of one monotonous round of never-ending and ill-paid toil, competing with one another for the barren privilege of earning a scant subsistence – what could not they achieve if fired with a high ideal, inspired with hope, and filled with a desire to reorganise their inheritance for the benefit of themselves, their children and coming generations? The potentiality of true greatness is unending. It is in the power of London to lead the way in the great Social Revolution which will remove the crushing disabilities, physical, moral and intellectual, under which the great mass of our city populations suffer at the present time; ... to prove to the world, in short, that the centre of capitalism can peacefully enter upon the new and happier period of cooperative industrialism" (H. M. Hyndman, *A Commune of London*, 1887).

5.1. Introduction

This chapter sets out the important historical context of radical London government, explaining some of the recurring political battles and themes of municipal radicalism which helped to shape the political opportunities of the 1980s GLC discussed in subsequent chapters. The chapter narrates this political history with an emphasis on how the relationship of the radical left to metropolitan-level government in London has changed, as well as the many continuities in this relationship. The chapter's main function is to furnish important contextual background, but in relating this (rather abridged) political history, it also begins to identify themes of contested urban governance and contingent historical outcomes which are built on in subsequent chapters that more directly explore the 1980s GLC.

A first introductory section briefly covers the early roots of the relation of progressivism and leftism to local councils, before a second draws out some of the enduring themes and political battle lines in the history of London's governance (and its contestation). The third section then details the build-up of the municipal left in London in the decade prior to the 1980s GLC, following up chapter 4's explanation of the theoretical turn to local government with a description of the NUL's actual strategy for winning power.

5.2. The early roots of municipal socialism

Elected town councils are the historical backbone of the modern welfare state, building much of the infrastructure of today's public services from the bottom up (Crewe, 2015; Lansley, et al., 1989). From the late 19th century, local authorities – on the initiative of a diverse range of reformers, including socialists, radical liberals, philanthropists, and religious leaders – pioneered welfare provision and began the clearance of slums and construction of housing, parks, clinics, libraries, and swimming pools, among others. This early agenda for municipal services attracted a relatively wide consensus, not just among socialists and trade unions, with essential amenities seen as more effectively and safely delivered by a local authority than through private competition, with more accountability and incentive to reinvest in further improvements (Crewe, 2015). But, especially in its early decades, there were also widespread notions that an interventionist local state could be a means of 'elevating' the local culture and promoting social harmony – public gardens, concert halls, galleries, libraries, and colleges would "catch and raise the thoughts of men", and reformers looked toward "the time when joy will be considered as much a necessity in a city as anything… supplied by their local councils" (Barnett, 1894 and *Clarion*, 1901, quoted in Waters, 1989: 51).

The establishment of the London County Council (LCC) in 1889, in particular, coincided with a formative period in British socialist history. The late 19th century had witnessed a reorientation of socialist and labour movements as the turbulence and revolutionary fervour of the first half of the century ebbed away. Earlier municipal reform had been largely led by middle-class Whigs and Radicals concerned with sanitation and responsible spending as working-class socialists "were mainly concerned with the complete and, if necessary, violent transformation of society" (Barker, 1946: 28). But during the second half of the century, the labour movement shifted towards a more evolutionary and pragmatic socialism that would form the political foundations of the Labour Party (Thompson, 1965; Coates, 1975).

The Fabians, founded just five years prior to the LCC, were quick to recognise the opportunity it presented for implementing their reformist approach and their tract *Facts for Londoners* was highly influential on the LCC's first administration under the Progressive Party alliance of radical liberals and trade unionists, governing until 1907 – its popularity largely attributable to popular discontent with the prior system and heightened concern for London's social problems during that period (Davis, 1988; Pennybacker, 1995). The growth and consolidation of the Progressives was buttressed by the institutional turn of the 'new unionism' epitomised by the militant Social Democratic Federation, which was behind the successful Great Dock Strike of the mid-1880s, and whose leader John Burns easily won his Battersea seat (Pennybacker, 1995). Attracted by the promise of increasing powers for social improvement, socialists and trade unionists caucused with the Fabians within the liberal-radical Progressive Party, forming a 'Labour Bench' under the leadership of Burns.

This alignment of labour and liberal politics under the 'progressive' label arguably reflected a weakness of the labour movement in London, especially relative to the more advanced labour organisations in the industrialised Northern cities. One explanation points to the urban-environmental conditions of the city itself. Lacking a more unified factory-industrial proletariat, London was characterised instead by a "surfeit of acquisitive middle-class suburbanites", a burgeoning lower middle class of skilled workers, and the spatial concentration of poorer Londoners outside of the urban centre into a ring of deprived neighbourhoods (Pennybacker, 1989: 129; Stedman Jones, 1983). Davis (1989a) and Pennybacker (1989) suggest that in the context of the limited capacity to exert class power from a diverse and fragmented industrial base, labour politics in the city transitioned from a work-centred politics toward one based on neighbourhood and community concerns.

At the same time, however, the energy for municipalisation of urban services began to shift from the liberal-aligned utilitarianism of 'gas and water socialism' to the broader and more transformative question of democratic control of the economy, under which even slow reforms to local government could be seen as small constituent parts of a generalised nascent (parliamentary) socialist movement (Gillespie, 1989a). This shift was propelled by the founding of the London Labour Party in 1915, partly descended from the Labour Bench of the Progressives and inheriting much of that party's political and intellectual tradition (Gillespie, 1989a; Robinson, 2015). The Progressives involvement in a wartime unity coalition from 1917-1922 saw the LLP replace them as the main opposition party in the LCC, and Labour's first manifesto for the LCC adopted the Progressive slogan of 'Home Rule for London' and demanded full municipal ownership and management of major urban services. As they saw it,

> "By bringing economic activities under control of institutions of local democracy the closely linked problems of urban overcrowding, inadequate transport services, not to mention the high rents and insanitary conditions of slum housing, could be removed from the vagaries of the market and be addressed coherently" (Gillespie, 1989a: 103).

Yet London's fragmented class geography and rapid suburbanisation arguably meant London Labour was unable to become "a purely proletarian party", its electoral prospects instead relying on "an alliance of artisans, manual workers and middle-class reformers" drawn from the city's growing white-collar sector (Clapson, 1989: 128).

These factors may help to explain why, in the years since the birth of radical local government in the late nineteenth century, its political trajectory has typically been rightwards, towards technocratic and paternalistic management – both in terms of the actual policies of socialist and Labour politicians, and in the eyes of more left-wing critics. With a handful of notable exceptions - Battersea in the 1900s, London's East End in the 1920s and 1930s, St. Pancras in the 1950s, Clay Cross in the early 1970s – municipal politics in Britain were typically ignored by the left, regarded as the seat of a "rather reformist, Fabian type of politics" (Gyford, 1984b: 145), or worse, "nothing more than the rest home for the geriatric Right" (Seyd, 1987: 138). In

this way, the left had unwittingly abandoned the political ground of local government to those conservatives (regardless of party) who had tended to view it as a sphere of non-politicised expert management of city affairs (Robinson, 2015).

Nevertheless, a radical impulse was occasionally able to take root in local government, where projects for improvement in the quality of life and provision of the 'social wage' could support more traditional labour movement efforts to mitigate hardship through workplace struggles. In many respects, the history of left-wing involvement in local government contained the seeds of a radical politics that could be unearthed and renewed when the Left turned its attention back to the potential of local and municipal politics in the late 1970s.

5.3. The changing shapes and politics of London's government

The UK is a highly centralised country (White, 2005; Crewe, 2015), and local government exists within a rigid system of judicial and government control, whereby legislative authority is required to spend any public money (Barker, 1946; Egan, 2001). British local government is based on positive designation and has no constitutional protection, unlike many European systems that grant powers of general competence, although these too are coming under neoliberal attack (Atkinson, 1995). Any new municipal powers for greater public expenditure, whether on basic utilities or on high-minded cultural amenities, have had to be petitioned for and granted by central government. Local councils and other instruments of local governance like the GLC are creations of Parliament, which at the extreme end enables central government to restructure or abolish them (Duncan and Goodwin, 1988; Stoker, 1991). Throughout London's municipal history, one recurrent consequence of the competing interests – often along party-political lines – between local and central government, has been the creation of *ad hoc* compromise arrangements for the delivery of urban services, such as appointed boards or corporations, with limited degrees of local authority oversight and democratic accountability. Parliament can directly command local authorities to take a particular action, or grant them discretion, but local authorities themselves must always identify the statutory power behind any action they undertake (Duncan and Goodwin, 1988; Egan, 2001). If spending cannot be justified according to statute, it is '*ultra vires*' and illegal. Councillors who vote to spend money unlawfully can be 'surcharged' – held personally liable for the full amount of any debts or charges the council incurs – and barred from holding public office (a sanction not applied to MPs or members of public boards). Thus the room for political autonomy in British local government can be vanishingly slim. Nevertheless, there have been several significant struggles in London's metropolitan-level government that have sought to change the shape and scope of the city's powers.

5.3.1. The birth of London local government

London lacked a city-wide authority until 1855, when pressing administrative problems of rapid population and industrial growth, and intensifying concerns about public health, led to the creation of the Metropolitan Board of Works. However, out of deference to a strong local-individualist tendency of landowners, it was merely a "municipal dwarf" limited to infrastructure and sanitation works in a two-tier system that kept intact the "antique encumbrances" of parish vestries and the City Corporation, "in all its wealth and territorial integrity" (Barker, 1946: 17; Davis, 2008). With the vestries dominated by slum landlords and accused of "vested interests in filth and dirt" (Barker, 1946: 19), municipal reformers agitated for public utilities and more democratic administration, culminating in the *1888 Local Government Act*, which created the powerful London County Council (LCC) (but preserved the City) (Davis, 1989b). In 1889, however, a lasting obstructive move by the Conservative central government consolidated the vestries into 28 metropolitan Boroughs, reproducing a two-tier system of London government and continuing to protect the privileges of the City – in a way that deliberately created conflicts between the LCC and boroughs over divided by overlapping powers (Barker, 1946; Davis, 1989b). A 'Municipal Reform' party aligned with the Conservatives governed from 1908 to 1933, including a war-time national unity coalition from 1917-1922, during which a new London Labour Party (LLP) replaced the Progressives as the main opposition party. In 1930, the LCC took over health provision and the administration of the Poor Law, previously left to local Boards of Guardians, after the struggle of Poplar councillors to overhaul the laws about unemployment relief.

Speedy suburban growth meant by the time Labour took over in 1934, the LCC had effectively become an inner-city authority, with Labour's dominance akin to a one-party city-state (Davis, 2008). The LLP followed suit politically and sought to protect its seemingly unassailable position of control from further reforms (Clapson, 1989). In the first fifty years up to the second world war, the LCC achieved a great deal of municipalisation – it established the city's first municipal transport system despite fierce opposition from bus companies, it created a system of specialised education (technical institutions, art schools and polytechnics, later reorganised into the University of London), and brought the London Schools Board into its control. The LCC operated nearly three quarters of London's general hospital beds (inherited from the public assistance apparatus of the Poor Law, where modern local government in Britain effectively began), and by 1950 had modernised what had been an essentially Victorian level of provision (White, 2005). The Municipal Reformers' attempts to present themselves as moderates, anxious not to cede the territory of improving public services and the idea of 'progress' to their opponents, meant that even during their period of political dominance, London continued to witness an expansion of public intervention in the local economy (Gillespie, 1989a; Pennybacker, 1989).

5.3.2. The post-war recentralisation of government

The scope of Labour's powers and ambitions in the LCC, however, were dampened by the austerity of wartime, and, after 1945, by the national Labour government's nationalisation programme. The welfare state and nationalisation rescaled control of public services to centralised administration, removing many formerly local services from municipal control – most significantly unemployment relief and healthcare. Although councils still had considerable resources for their local schemes, their power to strongly intervene in local economies and social fabrics was stunted (Crewe, 2015; Lansley, et al., 1989). Thus, while nationalisation was largely celebrated by the British labour movement as its most historic accomplishment, the centralised and bureaucratic forms that it took also heralded "the true beginning of [the] withering away of local democracy", as White (2005: 76) argues. By weakening the powers and responsibilities of local government, and by centralising industries and services, nationalisation may even have "eased the path for privatisation when the political tables turned thirty years on" (White, 2005: 76). This deepened the democratic deficit of the British state, wherein local government "[became] geared to servicing and maintaining existing central policies rather than aggregating local preferences, formulating local demands, and transmitting them to the centre" (Bassett, 1984: 84).

With the LCC retaining responsibility for municipal housing came the impetus for further structural reform. Post-war central government funding for housing and planning unlocked major development and reconstruction opportunities, and for some two decades after 1945, the LCC Architects Department was the largest architecture office in the world (Hall, 2014; Hatherley, 2020), prompting Conservative opponents to accuse Labour of a form of gerrymandering by trying to "build the Tories out of London" (Young and Kramer, 1978: 68). This dovetailed with civil servants' longstanding irritation at the technical mismatches and irrationality of land-use and transportation planning, given the city's outgrowth and suburbanisation. In 1957 the Conservative central government set up a Royal Commission on London Government, which prescribed a larger authority covering the whole of Greater London, but a greater balance of responsibilities with a new set of 32 enlarged boroughs. This further reinforced the 'two-tier' system, and to many observers' dismay left the City Corporation completely unscathed, with statutory powers broadly aligned with the new boroughs (Hebbert, 2008; Young and Kramer, 1978). A contemporary critic pointed out the obvious political hypocrisy in the commission's assumption about the 'breakdown' of London government, whereas the City Corporation "has never, in its long history, endured a Labour majority and hence incurred the need for reform" (McIntosh, 1961: 247).

5.3.3. The GLC is born

From 1965, the boroughs would become the "primary units of local government", and take on most of its regular functions, while the new GLC was given strategic planning functions –

traffic, main roads, emergency response (fire and ambulances), refuse disposal and sewerage, main drainage, and parks and entertainment (*Report of the Royal Commission on Local Government in London, 1957-1960*, quoted in Young and Kramer, 1978: 21). The LCC's housing stock was to be progressively transferred to the boroughs, and its schools (given their cohesiveness under the LCC system) run by a new quasi-independent Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) . A key feature of the new GLC's responsibilities was the creation of a *Greater London Development Plan*, which would guide overall strategic planning decisions across the city. The inclusion of areas with more middle-class residents, and the reduction of powers of the new metropolitan-level authority suited the Conservative party's electoral ambitions and political aims: two levels of municipal government with overlapping responsibilities made it harder for Labour administrations to implement welfare-provision programmes, both because more primary functions became fragmented at the local level, and because any cohesive programme would require negotiation with (often politically unaligned) boroughs (Livingstone, 1987; McIntosh, 1961). This 'strategic' role changed yet again in 1970 when the GLC was given responsibility for managing the London Transport Executive (LT), making the administration of public transport its most significant duty.

5.3.4. Left-right struggles

From the vantage point of the 1980s, historians noted the striking continuities and recurrences over the previous century of London's municipal politics (Feldman and Stedman Jones, 1989). Although there had been some wide political shifts, the political fault-lines remained relatively stable, revolving around management of public services and taxation of land.

Influenced by the ideas of Henry George, the American economist and land-tax advocate who had visited Britain in the 1880s (Gerhke, 2009), the Progressive LCC was mobilised against landlords, and targeted the 'unearned increment' of ground rents for taxation, in order to fund housing construction outside the private market, as well as various (real and hoped-for) infrastructures vital to improving quality of life for ordinary people. The attack on the ground landlord – supported by many non-socialist progressives – "afforded its adherents a means with which to articulate an inclusive strategy of mobilisation aimed at the richest and most parasitic of London property owners" (Pennybacker, 1989: 135). London Progressivism thus came to be seen as almost exclusively left-wing, and much of its platform later migrated to the London Labour Party (LLP) rather than remaining within Liberal political traditions (Robinson, 2015).

On the other side, local conservatives were primarily motivated to protect 'freedom of contract' and keep rates low. They framed the formation of 'ratepayers defence leagues' as "a new spirit of localism" and a form of "popular democracy against the centralism of the LCC" (Pennybacker, 1989: 137). These battles over the injustices of industrial and rentier capital, on the one hand, and of taxation and rates, on the other, furnished the enduring political divisions in London's municipal politics up to the GLC's abolition.

For municipal politics within the Labour Party, left-right and revolutionary-reformist struggles were often reflected in tensions between emphasis on popular democracy or organisational capacity and competency that were fought out between different scales of municipal government and party organisation. There were major divisions over loyalty to different scales of administrative power, with the LLP and its secretary Herbert Morrison on one side imagining a Greater London regional authority as the instrument of a socialist programme, and the Labour-controlled Boroughs on the other side, deeply suspicious of the loss of power such centralisation would imply. Indeed, three different scalar visions for the construction of socialism could be traced through three of the first generation of London Labour mayors in 1919, who would become some of Labour's most prominent figures: George Lansbury's (Poplar) antagonistic localism; Morrison's (Hackney) technocratic metropolitanism; and Clement Attlee's (Stepney) national welfare state.

These divides over scalar loyalties at times tipped over into open hostility. For instance, Morrison made few allies in the boroughs with his repeated, unsuccessful attempts to alter the Labour Party Constitution to "eliminate the borough and sub-divisional parties in London and centralise all power over finances and selection of candidates in the hands of the LLP" (Gillespie, 1989a: 110; Clapson, 1989). Worse, London Labour was at odds with the national Labour Party, which opposed allowing it greater strength and autonomy within the movement. These divides signalled different political priorities that reflected London's class geography. For example, electricity supply in the East End became inextricably linked to Labour's political priorities of encouraging local employment and by the 1920s was dominated by local council suppliers. Conservatives in the LCC wanted to unify and then privatise electricity supply and distribution, but the LLP's opposition in the LCC, based on wanting a unified system but based on collectivist principles, was undermined by the conflict of interest posed by the boroughs – who were unwilling to relinquish the power it provided over local employment (Gillespie, 1989a).

On the other hand, for those in the LCC who sought a large-scale implementation of socialist visions through planning at a metropolitan or regional scale, notions of popular democracy were predominantly subordinated to assumptions about electoral representation of a passive working class. For example, although the LCC Labour group defended the political claims of the rebellious Poplar councillors and their campaign for equalisation of rates across London, Herbert Morrison saw the councillors' tactics as irresponsible and indefensible, accusing them of reckless posturing, unrealistic demands, and endangering the party's prospects of winning middle-class votes (Branson, 1979; Clapson, 1989). Left-wingers in the party feared the LLP was beginning to subvert the aims of the labour movement by incorporation into the state – George Lansbury, leader of Poplar council, denounced the ideological dominance of Fabianism – but trailed their success in Poplar by narrowing in on borough issues and leaving metropolitan-wide issues to opponents like Morrison. The consequence was that when the politics of unemployment relief shifted to a national level shortly afterward, "the left wing of

the Labour Party was [left] bereft of much of its political base and forced to move on to a political terrain which its opponents had already made their own" (Gillespie, 1989b: 184).

Subsequently the LCC era saw a gradual reduction in the ambitions of the LLP and a retreat from a radical democratic politics. Aims to municipalise services as part of a move to democratise control of the economy became limited to only those services already included in the purview of local government, and by the 1930s Morrison's policy had shifted from full council control, to joint boards, to advocating the Public Corporation along the lines of the BBC (Morrison, 1933; Clapson, 1989; Gillespie, 1989a). The Labour LCC after 1934 was underpinned by an ethos of pragmatism and competence, and from the outset Morrison presented himself as austere and capable rather than radical. The Labour LCC was characterised by little democratic input and little support for extra-parliamentary struggles and movements. Morrison identified the radicalism of left-wing councils as contrary to the inherent moderation of the working class and the labour movement, seeing his charge at the LCC as the institutionalised expression of these gradualist and anti-radical attitudes (Clapson, 1989; Gillespie, 1989a).

In opposition, Morrison had consistently courted the so-called respectable middle-class vote and avoided alienating the property-owning ratepayer, arguing that Labour's prospects depended on demonstrating its ability to "govern with financial rectitude, to prove itself more businesslike yet socially responsible than the Municipal Reformers" (Clapson, 1989: 129). Labour thus celebrated its first three years in office as a period of "no meanness and no extravagance" (*The LCC under a Labour Administration*, 1937: 131), and LCC party platforms during the 1930s showed little ideological variance.

In the earlier period, this was tempered by the urgent needs of slum clearance and reconstruction, a task that Morrison's LCC was more than adequate to (Clapson, 1989; Hatherley, 2020). The fact that the LCC faced little internal opposition in the period of Labour rule gave it a confidence and purpose, able to undertake ambitious housing schemes that other parts of the country might shy away from (Parker, 1999). Indeed, in the post-war Labour LCC, the torchbearers of municipal radicalism were the communist architects in the Architects Department, who aimed to embed radical politics in the built environment through the shaping of urban space toward a more communal, sustaining and pleasurable mode of life. This remained, however, a relatively paternalistic and technocratic vocation, with little democratic input and an inability to substitute for a transformation in economic conditions. Despite the radical architects' ground-breaking work, Morrison's successors Charles Latham (1940-1947) and Isaac Hayward (1947-1965) largely continued his bureaucratic and pragmatic politics, continued to see issues like housing as technical problems with technological solutions, and ultimately "lacked imagination as much as they lacked power" (Lansley et al., 1989: 2). In this period "[it] was the LCC technocrats who had the whip hand" (White, 2001: 47), and this sense of an essentially depoliticised and bureaucratic, if effective, institution would largely prevail until the renaissance of radical London government in the 1980s.

As such, the Labour LCC (and early GLC) worked in contrast to, rather than in alliance with, left-wing activists organising on the ground. For example, Labour in the LCC offered little sympathy for waves of successful rent strikes and other direct action against slum landlords in the East End in the 1930s, nor for the Communist organising that helped turn the district away from British fascism (Piratin, 1948; Srebrnik, 1995). Later it gave little support for left-wing St Pancras council's struggle, in the late 1950s, to reduce rents for council tenants and introduce radical policies like refusing to implement Civil Defence and a closed shop for council employees. Indeed many of St. Pancras' councillors, some arrested for flying the Red Flag over the Town Hall on May Day, were avowedly communist and soon found themselves expelled from the Labour Party for their actions. A newly elected LCC Labour member for St Pancras was threatened with expulsion for advising tenants to withhold increased rents (Mason, 1989; Moorehouse, et al., 1972; Pitt, 1998).

The LCC Labour Group had over time fused together a bureaucratic party machine, comprised of mostly right-leaning trade union officials and upper-middle-class professionals (in 1961 its 84 members contained only one unskilled worker, but eight barristers), under which it became both easy and routine to instil discipline and curb dissent, especially through appeals to party loyalty (Clapson, 1989; Mason, 1989). In short, the Labour LCC behaved consistently in an oligarchic and autocratic manner, and its rule was increasingly seen as unresponsive to the needs of Londoners and to the political aims of the labour movement (Clapson, 1989). As Mason (1989: 254) argues, "working-class London, the ostensible constituency of Labour, was excluded" from the LCC, never given the opportunity to "understand or truly claim it as their own".

5.3.5. The GLC before the new urban left: 1965 to 1981

With the baronial stronghold of Labour undone by the structure of the new GLC, the administration swung between Labour and Conservatives in each election except 1970, when the Conservatives won a second term with a reduced majority. The first Labour GLC administration (1965-1967) was characterised by uncertainty and cautious experimentation (Young and Kramer, 1978). Once again, it was the housing department which seized the greatest initiative, promoting a programme of house-building intended to match the LCC efforts. From its formation, the GLC was the largest housing authority in the country, and with nearly a quarter of a million homes was a key hub for implementation and demonstration of housing policy, and, by extension, municipal politics in general.

Housing was also a preoccupation of Conservative policy at the GLC, directed by Horace Cutler, the London party's Deputy Leader from 1965 and Leader from 1974. Cutler, a millionaire from the construction business who personally owned "50 to 60 houses" (*Observer*, 8 May 1977), was considerably more right-wing and laissez-faire than many of his colleagues, and advocated the wholesale privatisation of the GLC's housing stock. When the Conservatives

won a large GLC majority in 1967, Cutler – as chair of the housing committee – set about selling houses, and pegged council rents to those in the private market, as part of a strategy to "diminish the attractiveness of public sector tenancy and to increase the incentives for home ownership" (Young and Kramer, 1978: 83). Following the Conservative-run Birmingham the previous year, Cutler pioneered a form of the 'right to buy', so that when in power (1967-1973 and 1977-1981) the Conservatives pursued a campaigning sell-off scheme with discounts and subsidised loans for council tenants to purchase their homes. Ironically, the first GLC purchase came from a Labour member, who then resigned from the party over its opposition to sales; and a Labour MP was also among the first generation of buyers for council homes, reflecting a more generalised complacency and even ambivalence in the party over the ramifications of privatising municipal assets (Davies, 2013; Forrest and Murie, 1988;). The Conservative-led GLC's council housing sales campaigns strongly appealed to the preoccupations of the Conservative rank and file, combining positive arguments about empowering individuals via asset acquisition with anxieties over public expenditure going towards concentrations of working-class residents – as Cutler told the 1976 Conservative conference, council house sales were "the deadliest weapon we possess against socialism and Marxism" (quoted in Bassett, 1980: 296). The GLC scheme proved enormously influential on national Conservative policy, and Cutler became one of Thatcher's key allies, pushing the politics of the 'new right' from local government and readying the stage for its emergence nationally. As one obituary puts it, "if … the sale of council houses has been one of the most important aspects of privatisation, then Horace Cutler was its first prophet" (Cosgrave, 1997). Other proto-Thatcherite policies Cutler pursued included a planning drive to promote high-rise office developments for inner London and low-rise private suburban housing in the outer boroughs, which accelerated the rapidly emerging social problems in the city associated with deindustrialisation, population flight, and unemployment during the 1970s (Davies, 2013). By 1979 Cutler privately boasted to Thatcher that "we have been remarkably successful in dismantling one Socialist empire in London, namely housing" and looked forward to doing the same with education (Cutler, 1979).

The second Labour GLC administration (1973-77) came in well to the left of their LCC/GLC predecessors – arguably due to the experience of opposition (for the first time since 1933), disillusionment with ineffective national Labour governments, and the increasing prominence of councillors in 'grassroots' campaigns and organisations, especially tenants movements (Young and Kramer, 1978). This shift was also rooted in Labour's major defeats in local elections of the late 1960s, with the effect that long-serving and conservative-leaning Labour councillors throughout London made way for the selection of younger and more radical candidates by the mid-1970s (Gyford, 1985). Those defeats disrupted the assumption that Labour councillors would retain their positions for long periods in largely unchanging leaderships, making Labour groups more susceptible to sweeping changes in political composition (Lansley, et al., 1989; Seyd, 1987).

On the face of it, the second Labour GLC administration (1973-77) was in a particularly strong position to implement radical policies with the new national Labour government from 1974 introducing new welfare benefits, a massive state pension increase, a freeze on Council rents and a strengthening of the rights of private tenants. The 1973 Labour GLC was elected on a radical platform of service expansion and an ambitious programme of house-building (Lansley, et al., 1989; Young and Kramer, 1978), although with a greater emphasis on modernising and renovating existing dwellings than replacing them. Indeed the 1973 Labour GLC manifesto – *A Socialist Strategy for London* – was arguably more radical than the later 1981 manifesto, even though it was drafted by ‘establishment’ figures within the party. Carvel (1984: 51) suggests it represented “a final flowering of that post-war optimism with which both Labour and Conservative governments had encouraged local authorities to expand their activities in pursuit of solutions to Britain’s social problems.” It promised full-scale reversal of Conservative policies, especially in housing, where it promised massive increases in building, opposition to rent increases and municipalisation of private rented properties, and transport, where it promised radical reforms with “low flat fares leading to free fares” (Ward, 1983: 25) and the scrapping of motorway proposals.

However, the hopes of a small radical left contingent in the GLC were soon disappointed as the increasing effects of a nationwide financial crisis frustrated both left local government plans and the national Labour government’s more left-wing policies. The GLC faced a looming fiscal crisis caused by inflation (peaking at 26% in 1975), which cost-spiralled its ambitious housing projects, fares freeze, and the substantial wage rise it had given London Transport workers (Carvel, 1984; Lansley, et al., 1989; Young and Kramer, 1978). Even worse was the cost of GLC debts: long-term capital debts for construction of about £1.6bn, taken at interest rates of 3-4%, were maturing and had to be re-borrowed at 12-13% interest (Carvel, 1984). The Labour GLC was thus the first administration in a generation to consider major rate rises, or else either cut back its housing programme or significantly increase fares, which would likely “embarrass councillors who had once proposed free travel” (Lansley, et al., 1989: 10). An initial rates increase of 46% in 1974 (effectively an 85% increase when accounting for ambulance and water services, removed that year from GLC control to new authorities) was followed, under pressure from a Labour government considering similar fiscal restraints, by another rate rise of 80% in 1975, after which the Labour group still agreed housing cuts to limit further increases.

The 1973-1977 GLC under Labour thus failed to deliver on any of its key manifesto promises, partly because of economic difficulties and pressure to be fiscally responsible. Much of the left argued, however, it also lacked the political will and imagination to deliver the manifesto – aversion to rate increases was a greater motivation than keeping their manifesto promise to the electorate (Livingstone, 1987; Ward, 1983). This initial failure to fulfil its promises led to a renewed political divergence and loss of identification between the left, the party, and the GLC itself.

5.3.6. Financial constraints on the GLC

The restructuring of local government by Thatcher's government after 1979 shifted the balance of power even further toward the national level. Stoker (1991) counted more than fifty Acts impacting on local government between 1979 and 1987, with many seeking to restrict local government expenditure in different ways. Several other pieces of legislation limited the GLC in more minor ways, until the *1985 Local Government Act* – also aimed at restricting spending – abolished the GLC and six other Metropolitan County Councils entirely, hiving their statutory competences off to a complex variety of quangos and the London boroughs. These legislative efforts produced a "quite dramatic tension between central and local government", fought out in the courts and publicity campaigns – in stark contrast to the "stultifying boredom" surrounding the *1972 Local Government Act* (Duncan and Goodwin, 1988: 90, 91) that had initiated much of the GLC's existing statutory discretion and autonomy.

There were several reasons for local government shifting to the forefront of political debates in the context of Thatcherism. Most obvious is the local provision of services, allocated collectively or by criteria of social need, and funded collectively, which partially insulates individuals from dependence on markets, while supposedly 'crowding out' private enterprises from certain areas of social life (Boddy, 1984; Jones and Stewart, 1985). Local governments are also major public spenders, placing them at the frontline of Monetarist attempts to reduce state borrowing and taxation: the Conservative government's financial case against 'profligate' councils was that public sector borrowing contributed to inflation, and high local taxes hurt businesses (Boddy, 1984; Butcher, et al., 1990). Lastly, and perhaps more importantly, local state institutions can be independent bearers of ideological and political attitudes and expectations, playing a role in "the presentation and interpretation of the social relations" especially because "social relations are unevenly developed over space" (Duncan and Goodwin, 1988: 94).

5.4. The emergence of the new urban left in London

In the meantime, the left was gaining control or significant influence in local authorities throughout London. For example, in Wandsworth, future GLC member Mike Ward pioneered an industrial strategy combining rigorous analysis of the local economy with policies for radical interventions; left councillors created a community development team with a brief to "encourage and stimulate the development of voluntary participation in community projects" (quoted in Lansley, et al., 1989: 12); and in seeing community groups as allies in the fight against council bureaucracy, even "produced a pamphlet on how to influence the Town Hall" (Lansley, et al., 1989: 12). In Islington, the left was strong enough by the 1970s to conduct trenchant ideological battles with the Labour right, making gains in the mid-1970s and taking control on a radical manifesto in 1982. Lambeth, a power base for left activists including Ken Livingstone and Ted Knight, saw left councillors slowly bring the centre on-side, aided first by

a more open leadership style and later by the leader's embarrassment over council workers vandalising properties following a large-scale eviction of squatters (Lansley, et al., 1989). Radical policies were also pursued outside London, most notably in Sheffield – sometimes seen as the 'vanguard' of a renewed municipal socialism (see Payling, 2014; Clarke, 1987) – where a fully integrated public transport system was introduced with standardised fares and a free city centre bus.

In the GLC, initially, because in 1973 and 1974 the Labour manifesto was being implemented, the small group of left GLC members did not feel the need to caucus separately, and remained relatively weak within the council's structures (Carvel, 1984; Livingstone, 1987). Prior to the 1973 GLC, Livingstone (1987:41) recalls, "No London-wide left-wing organising took place in the run-up to the election", and consequently there was little change in the internal politics of the GLC Labour Group despite both the radicalism of the manifesto proposals and the sweeping changes in membership. Even after gaining left positions of the backbench advisory board and using it to put pressure on leader Sir Reg Goodwin for personnel changes, the left held only three vice-chairs and one chair of relatively minor committees out of the Group's fifty-eight councillors (Livingstone, 1987). The lack of left organising meant that ultimately, "the right kept their heads down and paid lip service to the manifesto while doing everything possible behind the scenes to sabotage the emerging new politics" (Livingstone, 1987: 44). By 1975, with the combined impact of financial crisis and a political backlash against rate rises, "the [Labour] Group's nerve was broken and it was in full retreat on most issues" (Livingstone, 1987: 55). The left railed against spending cuts, arguing for higher rates so that the commercial ratepayer would take on the burden, but further rates rises than already imposed were considered unconscionable by the leadership.

5.4.1. Organising a campaign for the 1981 GLC

In protest at the capitulation of the GLC Labour Group after 1975, a number of left-wing Labour councillors – including Ken Livingstone and future GLC chairman Tony Banks – formed a Labour Against the Housing Cuts (LAHC) campaign group (Lansley, et al., 1989; Livingstone, 1987). Initially limited to organising a Left network within the Greater London Labour Party, the group began to build a broader nationwide campaign to pressure Labour councils to adopt 'socialist policies'. A LAHC Conference in 1976 proposed commitments to wider ideals like "abolition of the private sector", as well as concrete policies like linking social expenditures to price and wage indices to protect them from inflation (*Red Weekly*, 1976a: 9, 1976b). While the left's policy prospects in County Hall were frustrated by the recession, the anti-cuts group was illustrative of the rising influence of the left in the Labour Party and one of the first inklings of a shift in the Labour left toward paying more attention to local government (Gyford, 1985; Wainwright, 1987).

After the Conservatives won control of the GLC in 1977, the left began a determined effort to gain control of the organisational machine of London Labour politics. Many of my interviewees, and much of the literature on the NUL, noted that the GLC had never been viewed as particularly fertile ground from which to build a London left power base. As John McDonnell recalled, “up until then the GLC had been used almost like the House of Lords. It wasn't seen as particularly politically relevant, people were sent up there … to get rid of [them]” (interview, August 2018).

From 1977 onwards, efforts were made to slowly change this perception. Activists grouped around the LAHC campaign and left councillors like Ken Livingstone began setting up a left forum for London, the basis for developing a new organisational style for the Labour left. By early 1980 a full-fledged left campaign invested in winning the GLC for Labour and for the left within it was underway. The reasons for this growth of interest in the GLC are varied, and include both the wider theoretical re-evaluation of the local state discussed in chapter 4, as well as immediate practical political priorities.

Margaret Thatcher’s general election victory in 1979 was the major practical impetus for the GLC campaign. For the left, “the immediate macro-political issue … was defeating, winning an election against Thatcher”, and the GLC was the next ‘major’ upcoming electoral battle (McDonnell, interview, August 2018). Yet in the course of discussions and organising for the GLC election, the wider electoral logics acted as a focal point for the NUL objective of mobilisation, through rethinking the role of local government:

> “… the GLC issue enabled us then to really start thinking harder about the role of local government, and regional local government in particular. So that meant having a more thorough discussion about – with the prospect of Thatcher in government – how we could mobilise around different struggles … And that's when people's minds got more focused on the role of municipal socialism, if you like, and so we looked at the potential that the GLC had in developing policies via local government, but also in terms of developing mobilisations and campaigns” (McDonnell, interview, August 2018).

The GLC was thus identified as a particularly relevant local institution according to the twin aims of the NUL in coupling defence of local services with a strategy of mobilisation to devolve power to workers and service users (Toulouse, 1991; Atkinson, 1995). With an unusually large resource base and strategic remit, it lay somewhere between the humdrum activities of the administration of everyday life and the wider ‘steering’ abilities of a larger state power, and was therefore able to act as a base for campaigning and confrontational activities at the same time as making direct improvements to quality of life and giving direct support to communities and social movements (although as will be discussed in chapter 7, without the legislative powers of central government, it had to creatively construct a certain amount of its own political autonomy).

Livingstone’s claim to have done all or most of the organising work himself over the following two years is perhaps overstated, but he was nevertheless the driving force behind it, especially

in the early stages. His personalised approach, in particular, laid a lot of the early groundwork. At the 1979 national Labour conference, he went "round looking for any and every London-based leftwinger and tried to persuade them to come to a meeting to discuss how the Left could gain control of the GLC and implement genuinely radical policies" (Livingstone, 1987: 71). This personal touch played a crucial role in recruiting left-wingers to stand as candidates, as Livingstone continued to harangue leftists in his London Labour circles. For example, he describes how he persuaded Valerie Wise to stand for election in the pub after meeting her at a local branch meeting (Livingstone, 1987).

Following the success of an initial planning meeting in October 1979, planning sessions followed in Labour left activists' homes, where they organised a further series of public meetings on specific issues. A similar small group devised *London Labour Briefing*, a monthly with an open editorial group, launching in February 1980 and running for much of the 1980s until a merger into the nationwide *Labour Left Briefing*. *London Labour Briefing* (hereafter referred to as *Briefing*) was an important component in building the campaign base for the left GLC. Its uncharacteristic open editorial policy made it a forum for debate over the problems facing the left in London. Livingstone explains,

> "We wanted to produce a left paper which was not under the control of any faction or tendency and would keep London's leftwing activists briefed with the sort of information network that we had lacked at the time of the 1977 GLC elections" (1987: 93).

Atkinson (1995: 81) makes a persuasive argument that *Briefing* acted as the 'house journal' of the London new urban left, providing "an organisational focus" that helped it to capitalise on the relative disorganisation and weakness of the 'old guard' Labour right (see also Carvel, 1984). In addition to the way *Briefing* was able to consolidate and give expression to existing anti-cuts campaigns, its innovative 'Street Life Supplement' aimed to give voice to the NUL's blossoming exploration of the political in everyday life, including sexual and racial politics, and wider questions not normally considered by the far left, such as motherhood, care, and isolation.

The other key component in building the left's campaign was its series of open meetings and discussion groups, advertised in *Briefing* and held in County Hall's public meeting rooms throughout 1980 and early 1981. These meetings not only discussed policy but were also educative – attendees learned how to get onto the panel of Labour candidates, how the GLC worked, and what was required of elected members (Livingstone, 1987). Keith Veness, a comrade of Livingstone's, argues, "the thing about the Left takeover of the GLC was that it was done in a year on the basis of six to eight discussion groups" (quoted in Atkinson, 1995: 75). The meetings served a dual purpose: they functioned both as a forum for discussing policy ideas and as a means of mobilising wider support and building an organisational platform. From these early meetings, two key priorities soon emerged: to determine the policy agenda through control over the manifesto, and to secure the implementation of that agenda by selecting left candidates.

5.4.2. A socialist policy for London

For the manifesto, it was argued that a drafting process guided by the wider membership by means of participatory democracy could more strongly pressure councillors to adhere to it. Livingstone argued, "Nobody dares to dissent from the manifesto because everyone was involved in drawing it up" (quoted in Carvel, 1984: 84). Within six weeks of the 1979 general election, five working parties had been set up within the local government sub-committee of the GLLP, with Livingstone chairing transport (something the right attempted to block, indicated the not uncontested nature of the left's organising), Mike Ward chairing industry and employment, Jeremy Corbyn chairing planning, and the GLLP chair David Nicholas chairing housing.

The May 1980 front page of *Briefing* announced: "GLC Manifesto – This Time We'll Decide". Written by Jeremy Corbyn, then a member of the GLLP regional executive, the article criticised the previous GLC manifesto process as "steeped in mysticism … emerging from a smoke-filled room" and written "by a tiny caucus emanating from County Hall" (*Briefing*, May 1980: 1). By contrast, Corbyn expressed determination that this time, the manifesto "will be different, it will be a socialist policy". The manifesto also had an important concretising effect on the theoretical momentum of the NUL. From its more abstract theoretical discussions, the strategic decision to organise around the GLC elections "focused people's minds on the role of the local state and the potential that it has", so that the intellectual momentum of the left "went from a general theoretical discussion into then, what were the individual policy areas that we could develop?" in the process of writing the manifesto (McDonnell, interview, August 2018).

The process of drafting the manifesto was, similarly, an important marker of its radical intent, providing an indication of the left's methods when in power. It was done on the basis of extensive consultation and input from a wide range of contributors both within and beyond local Labour branches – including trade unionists, radical planners, anti-cuts campaigners, and other community activists. Much of the manifesto was thus built out of the direct experience and political priorities of those who contributed during this consultation process. The manifesto was also voted on line-by-line at the full conference of the GLLP, allowing the inclusion of some important overlooked policy elements, particularly the stress of ethnic minority issues (Ward, 1983; interview, July 2018). As Ward (1983: 25) explains, the aim was to counter "the disillusionment felt not only with the Labour GLC but with national government too. Every detailed promise in the election manifesto was to have the mandatory force of a conference decision". Wainwright notes that the manifesto process indicates that "already in the build-up to the new GLC, there was a new methodology, which then was implemented when we started implementing policies" (interview, May 2018). This process was also an important departure from the traditional tactics of the Labour left, which had usually tried to promote radical policies in the party but paid little attention to the organisational and strategic means of securing them (Atkinson, 1995). A final flourish was to ensure the manifesto was not only made publicly

available, but introduced as an agenda item at the full GLC council meeting in March 1981, effectively forcing incumbent Labour members and senior members of the bureaucracy to encounter it.

5.4.3. Selecting candidates

The other major issue for discussion at the left's public meetings was candidate selection (Atkinson, 1995; Livingstone, 1987). *Briefing* ran monthly updates of the GLC selection processes, briefing readers on already-selected candidates' political positions, and published accounts of Labour Group debates and the voting records of GLC members, seeking "to arm *Briefing* supporters with relevant knowledge as part of the process of building an information network, to identify its political opponents and strengthen its strategic position" (Atkinson, 1995: 83-84). Within the GLLP, the left had pushed through new rules to require full reselection processes for every candidate, substantially improving its selection prospects. However, the main aim of the candidate selection strategy was not a grand takeover of the GLC, but more modestly to build a core of left councillors that could hold a leadership to account on the radical manifesto promises, even if they were unable to control the Group. An important element of the selection strategy was therefore to minimise disruption to the existing Labour Group by targeting seats where selections would already be open – firstly in the marginal Conservative wards that would be necessary for a Labour majority, and secondly where sitting GLC members were retiring. Livingstone issued "every left winger on the panel" of candidates with "a list of seats in order of winnability, indicating those in which the sitting member intended to resign, along with the address of the CLP secretary and a map to show where each seat was" (Livingstone, 1987: 117). This attention to detail allowed the left to get candidates into position without the messy work of contesting and deselecting sitting Labour members, meaning it avoided potentially adverse press coverage, dampened hostility from right-wing Labour members, and aided Livingstone's project to bring centrist members on side in his prospective leadership bid. In the event, only three candidates were deselected and replaced – including former Labour group leader Reg Goodwin. But it replaced six of the seven retiring members and filled three quarters of the places available in marginal seats (Carvel, 1984).

5.4.4. Taking over

The election of May 1981 delivered a slim majority for Labour – it won 50 seats compared to the Conservatives' 41 and the Liberals' 1, with 2 Labour members shortly defecting to the newly formed SDP. Of six by-elections after May 1981, only one resulted in a change of party, with a Liberal replacing a retiring Labour member. The composition of the new Labour Group was also precarious – of their 50 councillors only 22 were broadly on the left, with around 10 in the 'centre'. Livingstone had previously bid for leadership of the Labour Group after Goodwin's resignation in May 1980, and with some deft politicking had persuaded members to vote

tactically for him, but lost narrowly in the second round. The willingness of centrist members to support a radical for leader may seem strange – however, citing the centre's key figure, Illtyd Harrington, Carvel (1984: 80-81) explains several moderates had become tired of the old right's leadership style and were "ready to seek rejuvenation by going for an exhilarating rise on the bandwagon of the left". When the Labour Group met on May 8, 1981 – the day after the election – Livingstone launched a second long-anticipated leadership challenge and won it in similar fashion, having built a base of left support and convincing enough wavering centrists to support him over the incumbent leader Andrew McIntosh. The challenge had been widely expected – in the Conservatives' GLC manifesto, "Marx and Marxists were mentioned seventeen times" across its sixteen pages (Carvel, 1984: 10). When Labour introduced the manifesto to the full GLC meeting in March 1981, Cutler's follow-up amendment concluded by quoting the *New Standard's* warning that "if Labour wins the GLC elections we shall have a more or less Marxist state" (GLC, 1981: 164).

By contrast, the existing Labour leadership were remarkably complacent. McIntosh held a meeting the morning after the election with chief officers to inform them of his priorities, and held a press conference to announce them (Carvel, 1984). But he had done little to support allies to become candidates, nothing to solidify support from the old guard, and had no contact with any of the new candidates. As one recalls,

> "he never once spoke to me! Now if you're the leader, and you've got all these new candidates, the obvious thing to do is to get them on your side, isn't it? Now he would have failed with me … but at least he could have tried" (Wetzel, interview, October 2018).

Livingstone had instead spent the two days before the election meeting with or telephoning every Labour candidate he thought might support his leadership. He also got allies in the GLLP regional executive to convene the Group meeting at 5pm, to allow time for a caucus meeting in the afternoon. That caucus meeting was attended by "basically everybody who was prepared to see a change of Andrew's leadership … people who could be called hard left, soft left and centre and a couple of people on the right who decided they wanted to come and sit in" (Livingstone, quoted in Carvel, 1984: 17). Left activists had spent considerable time discussing suitable left candidates for the various committees at their public campaigning meetings, and the caucus meeting ratified these (albeit with some last-minute changes) and approved Livingstone standing for leadership. The meetings' attendance was already a two-thirds majority of the Labour Group, meaning if the decisions were stuck to, the full Labour Group meeting would be a formality. The Group's neutral chair George Page "quite pointedly failed to read out" a letter of endorsement of McIntosh from Labour leader Michael Foot (Livingstone, 1987: 139), and the leadership was won by 30 votes to 20. All 25 of the left's nominations for chairs and vice-chairs were voted in unopposed – as it transpired, McIntosh had not expected this and had not briefed his supporters to nominate anyone. The left's tactical win was almost too successful – Livingstone (1987) later pointed out it ran counter to the coalition-building strategy, and there

were worries that effectively running the GLC unilaterally would invite a backlash and lack of cooperation. There was also a danger of the left taking on too much of the administrative burden and perhaps being drawn too much into working with the bureaucracy at the expense of their wider political project. Over time, therefore, efforts were made to rebalance the administration and bring in some of McIntosh's supporters, although the key position of Finance chair was soon shored up by appointing the more hard-left John McDonnell, who also replaced Harrington as Deputy Leader in 1983.

5.5. Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the historical context for the left administration at the GLC, and highlighted some of the enduring political battles in that history. The picture of left build-up and success is easily imagined as one of intrigue and personal ambition on the part of Ken Livingstone – something his own account (1987; interview, November 2018) does not shy away from. Undoubtedly strong leadership and political experience played a significant part in taking over the GLC. However, this must be seen as part of a wider process of changing Labour politics in London. Livingstone and the other left councillors were backed by the coalition of forces that comprised the NUL, to the extent that grassroots pressure made the left GLC administration tenable and plausible as an expression of those forces. The takeover came about through a combination of tight tactical organisation and complacency from the Labour right – it owed much to historical contingency and often turned on tight margins, but was also down to the wider campaigning efforts of the left and its emphasis on openness and building a base of support beyond the Labour Party in the various social movements that many of the incoming councillors were part of. A combination of political experience in and beyond the local state meant that the new leadership of the GLC came into power with a political stance originating outside the potentially neutralising atmosphere of the institutions – with new aspirations and different ways of viewing issues and mobilising around them to traditional local Labour politics – as well as the experience and confidence to know how to transform them (Wainwright, 1987).

Alongside chapter 4, this chapter has identified a contingent historical situation and a unique consolidation of social forces. Through the above narrative, one begins to glimpse an image of statehood and party politics as terrains of struggle that present strategic openings and, through careful examination of experience and practice, suggest lines of entry 'into' the local state that do not necessarily follow the formal and traditional pathways of Labourism. The remaining chapters of this thesis turn to the experience of the left in the GLC. Chapter 6 delves into its politics and policies, chapter 7 explores the contested nature of structural limits, and chapter 8 excavates some of the practical experiences of left-wing activists working within the local state.

Part III: Remaking urban governance in the GLC

Chapter 6
"Changing the Balance": the urban state activism of the new left GLC

> "The balance sheet of a city's welfare cannot be stated in figures. Counters of a much more spiritual kind are needed, and some imagination and conscience to add them up, as well." (George Bernard Shaw, quoted in GLC, *'Transport in London: The Balanced Plan – The Council's Aims for 1983-1984'*, March 1983)

6.1. Introduction

The previous two chapters have traced the historical development of the new urban left and the political battles of London's metropolitan-level government, and their convergence up to 1981. This chapter focuses on the 1981-1986 GLC administration's novel political trajectories and outward-facing policy developments. From here onwards, the shorthand term 'GLC' refers to the left administration of 1981-86, unless otherwise specified. Where possible, because they are too often synonymous in existing critical literature, I have attempted to maintain a distinction between the 'left GLC' to mean the institution under left control, and the shorthand 'new urban left' (NUL), to refer collectively to left-wing councillors and GLC staff. The chapter's main argument is that the 1981-86 GLC should be understood as a form of 'urban state activism', seeking socio-economic transformation through the available tools of the local state. The left GLC offered an alternative vision of urban modernity premised on social and spatial justice, but one that was complicated and made contradictory by the uneasy co-presence of capitalist and anti-capitalist logics within the socio-political landscape of London's municipal governance. The left GLC's aim to 'change the balance of power' (GLC Transport Committee, 1985: 2) was implicitly connected with a wider politics of democratic socialism through grassroots mobilisation, even if it was not explicitly revolutionary.

The first section of the chapter gives a brief general introduction to the new policy direction of the Livingstone administration across three main areas of urban economic intervention: urban services, local economy, and grant aid. The second section argues that existing left critiques of the GLC's policies have routinely missed important contextual elements such as how we understand its constraints, how grounded its policies were in the constituent movements of the new left, and correspondingly how policies therefore shared key political roots through which they could cross-fertilise. When these elements are considered, I argue that the 1981-1986 GLC was – in spirit – more anti-capitalist than previously recognised when understood through the prism of 'urban state activism'. The following sections of the chapter then explore four different facets of this more radical political essence to GLC policies: first, I situate the policies as forms of redistribution of wealth with an important emphasis on quality of urban life; second, I

explore their relation to a radical politics prioritising social needs with attention to a feminist politics of difference; and third, I show how GLC policies were supplemented with a campaigning emphasis that sought to advocate for left-wing interests and marginalised groups and to support the mobilisation of social movements. Finally I argue that a radical politics is also represented by a robust awareness of the limits and contradictions of radical politics in the local state within a market economy. In sum, the chapter argues that although the policies of the GLC in the 1980s were not in themselves very radical, in several ways they gestured in anti-capitalist directions and thus constituted the outward expression of the NUL's urban state activism.

6.2. New policy directions in the context of urban crises

London in 1981 faced a set of unfolding and interrelated urban crises that threatened the infrastructure of the 'social wage', each in turn interlaced with social turmoil over the politics of race, migration, policing, gender, and sexuality (Thornley, 1992). London's inner-city problems were particularly acute, facing rising unemployment as homogeneous office-based and service industry environments replaced a diverse semi-industrial economic base, alongside declining quality of urban life with deteriorating housing conditions, managed decline of public transport, poor environmental quality, and planning decisions insensitive to community needs (LMA/R/IEC 1984a). Between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s, the city "lost a third of its manufacturing" base (Rustin, 1986: 117) and although London was experiencing long-term population decline, this was strongly outpaced by the loss of jobs: 330,000 were lost between 1976 and 1982, of which 200,000 were in manufacturing, with 32 million square feet of factory space empty by 1985 (Figure 5; LMA/R/GLEBa; LMA/R/IEC 1984a; Wheen, 1985). From the mid-1970s to 1985, total unemployment in London quadrupled, mostly in the period after 1979 with the introduction of Thatcherite Monetarist economic policies (Wheen, 1985). Socio-cultural antagonisms were no less intense, with tensions over racist policing exploding in 1981's Brixton riots, and women increasingly contesting both their roles in privatised social reproduction and the ways male violence constrained their experience of urban life (Gilroy, 1987; Rowbotham, et al., 1979; Valentine, 1992).

As discussed in chapters 4 and 5, the 'new urban left' that took power in the GLC was constituted from social movements contesting these variegated socio-economic issues (Atkinson, 1995; Gyford, 1985), and the 1981 Labour GLC manifesto enumerated a suite of responses to them. A new Industry and Employment committee would respond to London's employment and de-industrialisation crisis, while Transport and Housing committees were tasked with combating declining living standards with a cheap fares policy and efforts to halt the sale or transfer of GLC-owned public housing. The NUL's critique of racism and racist policing in London led to a new Ethnic Minorities committee, chaired by Livingstone as a gesture to its political importance, and a Police committee to "monitor the work of the

[Metropolitan] Police Force as a prelude to it gaining power to control the Police" (GLC, 1981: 85). These were soon joined by more new initiatives: a Women's Committee was launched in May 1982, following pressure from women's groups who were uncomfortable with their grants being decided by the male-dominated Grants Board (*Briefing*, November 1981a, June 1982a); a Community Areas Policy was developed and extended between 1982 and 1984, targeting local investment, support for local planning participation, and restrictions on office development to residential areas under development pressure (MDR/Planning 1985); and the GLC's Arts and Recreation department redirected arts funding from 'elite' to 'everyday' arts (LMA/PR/237), advocated for ethnic minority arts, and opened GLC-owned cultural spaces on the South Bank as public spaces of civic life; all of which have recently been well documented (Atashroo, 2017, 2019; McFadzean, 2021; Peck, 2009; Williams, 2020). Below I briefly outline three of these policy areas – transport, industrial planning, and grant aid – before surveying how they have been previously viewed, and then exploring them in more depth to support an argument about the radicalism implicit in the GLC's 'urban state activism'.

Figure 5 Total available square footage of factory and warehouse space in 1982.
(Source: LMA/R/IEC/1982).

6.2.1. Transport

Through public transport policies, *urban services* were framed as forms of wealth redistribution and a contribution to democratising access to urban life. After the disappointment of the 1973 Labour GLC manifesto ambition of 'low flat fares leading to free fares' (see chapter 5), the fares policy in the 1981 manifesto was prepared with greater detail and the backing of the

regional party conference (Livingstone, 1987; Ward, 1983). The *Fares Fair* policy consisted of a 25% cut to bus and Underground rail fares as a first step towards free fares, a cheaper short-distance bus fare, expansion of bus mileage and a raise in staff wages, backed by a fare freeze that would gradually cheapen tickets over time, especially given the high level of inflation.

The *Fares Fair* policy was implemented in October 1981. As chapter 7 will discuss in greater detail, it was then ruled unlawful following a legal challenge from Bromley borough council in December 1981, resulting in a doubling of bus fares and a 93% increase in Underground fares, implemented in March 1982. During its six month life, *Fares Fair* had a demonstrable impact on ridership and achieved reductions in private vehicle journeys and traffic levels (Fairhurst and Lindsay, 1984; Wheen, 1985). A replacement policy to cut fares along broadly similar lines was introduced by May 1983, slightly scaled back but with a new Travelcard that substantially improved its take-up, achieving broadly similar increases in public transport journeys and greater reductions in automobile journeys. Importantly, this reduction in car traffic exceeded the 3-4% that planners calculated made the difference between congestion and free-flowing traffic during peak hours (Wistrich, 1983), which in turn improved journey times for bus users on the same routes. Adjusted for inflation, bus fares in May 1983 were about 10% lower in real terms than in 1980, and Underground fares about 20% lower (Glaister and Grayling, 2000; Fairhurst and Lindsay, 1984). These changes and effects are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3 Effects of fares changes on London Transport 1981-1983

	October 1981	**March 1982**	**May 1983**
Change in nominal average bus and Underground fares (from previous)	-31%	+93%	-23%
Real fares index (September 1980=100)	61.4	114.8	82.5
Fares simplification	4 bus zones and 2 Underground zones	-	5 Underground zones and Travelcard
Change in passenger journeys by bus and Underground (from previous)	+11%	-15%	+11%
Change in car commuting to central London (from previous)	-6%	+14%	-9%

Source: From Glaister and Grayling (2000: 10) and Fairhurst and Lindsay (1984).

Other transport measures, many of which are now mainstream urban policy, were introduced that acknowledged the distinct needs of different under-privileged groups. These included extending the Freedom Pass that allowed elderly passengers free bus journeys to the Underground (LMA/PR/202), a Dial-a-Ride minibus hire scheme for disabled passengers, and a

Taxi Card disabled people could use to take a £10 black cab journey for £1 (Wetzel, interview, October 2018; LMA/PR/79, 230, 548). A Safe Women's Transport scheme attempted to compromise between the unofficial curfew imposed by police advice not to go out alone, and the real vulnerabilities and fears of harassment and violence women face in public, by providing a network of late-night mini-buses similar to Dial-a-Ride (BI/Safe Women's Transport 1981; LMA/R/TC 1985a; LMA/R/TC 1985b; LMA/PR/123). A pavement parking ban, a seemingly mundane safety measure, also specifically aimed to address needs of the elderly and mothers with children, and was advertised with imagery of women with pushchairs struggling to navigate blocked pathways (LMA/PR/294).

6.2.2. Industrial planning

The promotion of *municipal enterprise* with targeted investments and industrial planning aimed to counter London's unemployment crisis in ways that strengthened workers' position. GLC economic policy significantly departed from other local authorities (except some left-led councils) whose standard approach was marketing initiatives to attract international capital. One GLC staffer recalls that in the previous GLC administration, London's comparatively low wage levels across European capitals were used as a selling point in promotional pamphlets (Wainwright, interview, May 2018). It also differed from Labour's national economic policy, which by the 1980s was more focused on Keynesian demand management and reflationary fiscal policies, rather than detailed concern with production and direct intervention in industrial planning (LMA/R/IEC 1984b).

The Greater London Enterprise Board (GLEB) was the most prominent outcome of the Industry and Employment committee's aims to develop and implement economic alternatives. Enterprise Boards were also set up at similar times in Sheffield, Leeds, West Midlands, and Lancashire, but mostly had much narrower terms of reference than GLEB (Cochrane, 1987; LMA/R/IEC 1984b). GLEB's primary mandate was to use local authority spending in the local economy for the dual purpose of combating the unemployment crisis and improving the conditions and bargaining power of workers within the labour market (LMA/R/GLEBa). The idea was that investing in long-term good-quality jobs, in sectors identified as important to London's employment base, could protect jobs at risk and reduce unemployment while also leveraging social criteria into firms and other investments (LMA/R/GLEBa; Egan, 2001; Youngpyo, 2007). GLEB began operations in January 1983 as an arms-length agency to help the Industry and Employment committee circumvent legal restrictions on capital spending and sidestep the slow bureaucracy of the local government committee system (LMA/R/IEC 1984b; Sharman, interview, July 2018). All nine directors were appointed by the GLC, with three nominated by the Southeast Regional Council of the TUC (LMA/R/IEC 1984b). GLEB provided loans or purchased equity in struggling firms: the argument as sold to the small and medium size enterprises it targeted was that many potentially viable businesses were unable to access capital from private funders; if GLEB provided it, the firms could prove their viability and access

future private investment (MDR/GLEB 1984a; Wheen, 1985). For example, GLEB could provide seed funding for initial infrastructure and premises, after which businesses could approach private banks for their eventual funding needs. In its first full year, GLEB preserved or created 1,995 jobs in 116 firms, at an average cost of under £4,500 direct investment per job – well under the average 1982 annual wage of £8,000, and at a fraction of the cost to the state of the government's Enterprise Zones (£68,000) (LMA/R/IEC 1984b; MDR/GLEB 1984b).

The other main objective for GLEB was to fold progressive labour market policy and elements of industrial democracy into its investments, based on a concept of "restructuring *for* labour", as opposed to *of* (LMA/R/GLEBa; LMA/R/IEC 1983a). The mechanism for this was Enterprise Planning, a development on the 1974 Labour government's proposed 'Planning Agreement' (never implemented after pressure from business lobbies), that would have given statutory backing to binding agreements between management, unions, and government agencies for any enterprise receiving public funds. GLEB financing was conditional on structuring benefits for workers into planning agreements, including promises on equal opportunities, accessibility for disabled workers, collective bargaining, and worker participation in decision-making (LMA/R/GLEBa; MDR/GLEB 1984c). To take one example, a bookbinding firm that had gone into liquidation was relaunched with investment from GLEB and small sums from its workforce and their union, contingent on new industrial relations agreements including equal pay, a worker-ownership structure, and the workforce electing their own 'worker-director' to the company's board (MDR/GLEB 1984a, 1984b).

GLEB also demonstrated an interest in alternative forms of ownership, and in some cases restructured enterprises into co-operatives or funded new ones. Up to March 1984, GLEB financed 45 worker co-operatives, with a dedicated London Cooperative Enterprise Board (LCEB) set up in 1984 funding a further 60 by mid-1985 (LMA/R/GLEB 1984; MDR/GLEB 1984a, 1985a). This can be estimated to be about 40% of all registered worker co-ops in London at the time (10% of all in Britain). Some of the lasting infrastructure of the cooperative movement in London was initially supported with GLC finances (Wainwright, interview, May 2018). In addition to GLEB funds, the Industry and Employment committee spent £3m on infrastructural support for co-operatives – partly in response to seeing feasible co-operatives fail through inexperience – including funding Cooperative Development Agencies (LMA/PR/384, 386, 593), providing training, and organising events such as an annual co-op trade fair (MDR/GLEB 1984c).

Similarly, GLEB developed a property strategy aimed at rehabilitating light industrial sites to let to small businesses, particularly those it funded (MDR/GLEB 1984c). GLEB argued that despite its property spend of £16m growing in value by 26% over just three years, it was "not in property for a quick speculative gain" (MDR/GLEB 1985b), but rather to offer an alternative to the displacement tendencies of profit-driven private development, by requiring commercial tenants to abide by agreements on pay and working conditions (LMA/PR/446) and involving

local communities to link development to local needs and environmental improvements (MDR/GLEB 1984a).

6.2.3. Grant aid

Finally, a programme of *grant aid* sought to empower an urban grassroots by devolving state resources to voluntary organisations (further discussed in chapter 8). Policies in terms of the public economy and private market were attempts to provide services and restructure the local economy to meet people's needs – but also to find channels through which people's needs could be democratically expressed. To do this, the GLC supported a diverse range of organisations in civil society, primarily through funding but also through providing common resources like information technology and reprographics. The idea was to build networks for a public economy based on people's needs, with the public 'authority' acting as a sponsor of popular democracy (GLC Industry and Employment Committee, 1985). To pursue its promotion of equal opportunities in the labour market, for example, the Industry and Employment committee funded 17 black employment projects and 14 women's employment projects that served as community resources and campaigns, as well as black and women's co-operatives, projects to encourage under-represented workers to join trade unions, alongside its own resources such as schemes to support black-owned and women's businesses to access premises or other services, sometimes with the GLC underwriting the costs involved (Figure 6; LMA/R/GLEBb; MDR/GLEB 1984a; Egan, 2001).

Figure 6 Matrix women's architects, funded by GLC Women's Committee.
(Source: MDR/GLC 1984. GLC funded 40 free hours per week for women's organisations.)

Initially the province of a Grants sub-committee chaired by John McDonnell (LMA/PR/234, 290), the rapid growth of grant-making eventually involved all of the new committees and some of the established ones in administering grants. Unlike GLEB and the fares policy, the grants programme was not planned in advance; the 1981 manifesto contained little in the way of detailed proposals for grant funding, bar the inclusion of a pledge to "support working people's industrial and political struggles for a better life and against the Tory Government" (GLC, 1981: 83). By 1983 the grants budget was nearly £40m a year – the Women's Committee's grant budget, for example, grew from £350,000 in its first year (1982-83) to £10m by 1986. This expansion of funding was outpaced by the quantity of applications. In the Women's Committee, temporary workers were employed to deal with the backlog, and reported arriving to find applications piled high against the office walls (Bennett, 2000), as women's groups reacted "in surprise and their bank managers in delight" at this sudden release of funds (Flannery and Roelofs, 1983: 69).

6.3. Perceptions of the GLC's political economy approach

Much of the 1981 Labour GLC manifesto's policy content was less radical than the reputation the GLC would later gain: for Wainwright (1987: 97) "it was essentially a programme of modernisation and Fabian-style intervention"; for Livingstone it was "nothing that a good social democrat couldn't do on a warm day … nothing particularly revolutionary" (quoted in Wainwright, 1987: 97). Given this mismatch between the GLC's reputation and its most outward-facing policies, many left commentators have criticised it for lacking an explicitly oppositional strategy (Harris, 1986). There are conceptual limits, however, to such forms of critique. In focusing on specific policies or policy areas, few criticisms have addressed how individual policies intersected with each other and added up to a wider strategy. Similarly, few critics delve into an exploration of what the new urban left understood itself to be attempting, often instead extrapolating from final outcomes and matching attributed motivations to whatever coherent ideological position can be read from that surface. My main contention in this chapter is that the GLC left *was* pursuing a more radical politics than has often been recognised, which I characterise as a form of 'urban state activism'. When viewing policies more holistically in their context, and connecting them to their political roots in the values of the NUL, a relatively radical set of activist interventions in the urban economy come into view.

6.3.1. Critiques of the GLC's lack of radicalism

A recurring theme is to suggest the GLC was not revolutionary enough, and to point out the mismatch between stated aims and practical realities. This can take the form of pointing out the difficulties of concretely realising radical principles, implying the tools are too small for larger problems. Such criticisms are numerous: for example, the GLC's size relative to the scale of

capitalist economic trends shaping the capital made its objectives “unachievable … at the London scale” (Eisenschitz and North, 1986: 429), as useful as “trying to drain an ocean with a teaspoon” (Cochrane, 1983: 285). The GLC could not impact the ‘commanding heights’ of the economy (Rainnie, 1985), leaving any attempted industrial restructuring exposed to co-optation or subversion by more powerful financial actors (Green, 1987). Within the state, meanwhile, radicals arrive with no institutionalised principles or rationales that favour them (Youngpyo, 2007). However, where critics don’t advance beyond this, this is a simple substitution of quantity for quality – they do not necessarily address whether the tools are *appropriate*. Take one short polemic from 1984:

> “Livingstone’s administration has made me proud to be a Londoner in a period when there was little else to be cheerful about. But … the GLC couldn’t get to grips with the fundamentals even if it wanted to. Local government is local government: not the last resting place of the epicentre of world revolution” (Widgery, 2017: 49).

If the targets of criticism are already aware of the obstacles regarding their activity, the critique adds little except to imply that the respective scales of power makes them futile.

A more substantive element of the critique is that local government policies cannot substitute for social change being led ‘from below’. Hence, to stay with Widgery (2017 [1984]: 50): “The left getting its hands on the chequebooks for a while is exhilarating, especially for those in receipt, but it is no substitute to real political change from below”. Again, the use of such criticism is simply to ask the reader to look elsewhere for revolution: if change comes from street-level politics, it is surely not the fault of the GLC left that “there has been no proletarian revolution in London yet” (Widgery, 2017: 50). There is an implied millenarianism here: that municipal activists might have chosen to pursue a more pure form of revolution, one whose tools are abundant enough to affect a qualitative change.

A third expression of this mode of argument is to personalise it, sidestepping a substantive strategic critique by letting a charge of bourgeois dilettantism settle in on individuals, who can then be blamed for watering down politics or overly identifying with professional practice. Thus,

> “The cheap fares policy is probably Livingstone’s single biggest practical reform, but London Transport has been offed with virtually no action by the transport workers’ union while Ken and Co. were busy head-counting at the Palace of Westminster and auditioning admen” (Widgery, 2017: 49).

A more strident version of this attack is to so closely identify left activists with the state that the limitations otherwise seen as the main problem become operationalised in active service to conscious co-optation and the preservation of bourgeois privileges. An anarchist pamphlet from 1984 declares, for example, that the left

> "…can only patronise their would-be voters with the carrot of future forced labour for all … The GLC obviously doesn't advocate the direct seizure and transformation of territory, of offices, of banks, of university buildings, of hotels, of palaces etc. as a method of dealing with the false scarcity of housing – because they know that County Hall might be amongst the first to be taken over" (MDR/Campaign for Real Life & BM Combustion 1984).

The hyperbolic attribution of motive aside, these critiques are important to recognise, because they had concrete practical impacts in suggesting revolutionaries ought not to engage with the GLC at all.

More sympathetic (and substantive) critiques recognise the presence of socialist principles but have been unconvinced of the ability of the concrete policies to realise them and bridge the gap between socialist desire and capitalist reality (Eisenschitz and North, 1986; Goodwin and Duncan, 1986; Gough, 1986). Cochrane (1986: 192) suggests that because theoretical principles and political practice are mediated in 'policy', there is a risk of losing sight of their connecting threads and reducing activists to "radical management consultants".

The most substantive literature in this vein addresses the Industry and Employment committee's policies, which attracted little press interest (Lansley, et al., 1989) but by far the most sustained amount of left-wing interest and critique (e.g. Boddy, 1984; Cochrane, 1983, 1986; Eisenschitz and North, 1986; Palmer, 1986). Many questioned whether the left GLC merely constituted a development on Keynesian state spending, a kind of 'municipal state capitalism' that failed to indicate a revolutionary path to economic transformation (Cochrane, 1986; Eisenschitz and North, 1986; Geddes, 1988). Active local state intervention in local economies was relatively novel, and Harvey (1989) situates 1980s municipal socialists and local conservatives alike in a wider trend of entrepreneurial urbanism. The GLC's economic policies were not aimed at inter-urban competition for growth and capital investment, but the 'interventionist' element aligns it with this long-term dynamic of responding to capitalist urban restructuring (Cochrane, 1986; Eisenschitz and North, 1986; Rustin, 1986). The perception of entrepreneurialism was perhaps compounded by publications like the *London Industrial Strategy* (LIS), a detailed plan for employment objectives across different market sectors, most of it framed in relatively narrow terms of job retention and creation, and separated into distinct sectors, leaving little sense of an overall strategy to push the economy in a socialist direction (Cochrane, 1986; Youngpyo, 2007). Some consequently interpreted the strategies merely as methods for "increasing the rationality of capitalism" (Eisenshitz and North, 1986: 426), to help London survive recession through methods of flexible specialisation that were being deployed elsewhere in decidedly anti-socialist directions.

Another source of critique concerned the political economy of urban services. The GLC's efforts to expand services like transport took place in a context of evolving Marxist accounts of the local state and welfare provisions. Work by Cockburn (1977) and Castells (1977) were influential in situating urban services in an overall framework of capitalist social relations by

stressing how collective state provisions secure class peace. Developments on these ideas argued that while collective provisions fulfil basic needs or meet levels of popular demand, they also establish regulatory control over people's lives (Goss, 1988; Pemberton, 1983). That is, state provision simultaneously enhances social welfare and provides opportunities for coercive systems of management to adapt people to the requirements of a capitalist economy (Gough, 1986; LEWRG, 1979; Offe, 1984). Even a 'universal' service like transport still reproduces managerial logics through fares enforcement – something that in the GLC context widely divided an anarchist critique of the function of ticket collectors and enforcement officers from the transport unions worried about protecting existing jobs (Livingstone, 1987; Mackintosh and Wainwright, 1987). Functionally it would be impossible for the GLC to satisfy both union demands for jobs and the left's ambition of free fares without an unfeasible amount of subsidy to LT – something explicitly rejected by the courts in 1982, and thus returning to the issue of limited capacity to effect change.

The GLC's grants programme, meanwhile, encountered criticisms and tensions that echo broader concerns about state funding in the voluntary sector (Clayton, et al., 2016; Penny, 2017). There were concerns that funding for community organisations potentially undermined the autonomy of grassroots organising, and created pressures toward compositional changes in community organisation toward professionalization and dependency on state funding, and thus loss of an organisational capacity to operate 'on a shoestring'. Although there has been a strange absence of serious interest in the GLC's grants, more recent criticism of the role of third sector funding in aiding a shift to more marketised forms of service provision can in retrospect make the GLC's grant-making prowess seem an unwitting handmaiden of neoliberal transformation in urban governance (for a critique of that narrative, see Clarke and Newman, 1997). The worry is that reliance on non-state actors and community goodwill aligns with a logic of 'austerity localism' that rests on "long-standing Conservative traditions of middle-class voluntarism and social responsibility" (Featherstone, et al., 2012: 178) – notwithstanding that in the GLC case, the majority of funded organisation were "truly the stuff of neoliberal, Thatcherite nightmares" (Brooke, 2014: 20), with a high proportion going to childcare projects and some trickling through to obviously political organisations like Babies Against the Bomb, *Spare Rib* magazine, and the Karl Marx Memorial Library.

6.3.2. Re-evaluating the GLC through the lens of external constraints

The section above provides several examples of how criticisms of the GLC strategy can be accurate on their own terms, but potentially miss important contextual elements that bring a different political dimension to particular policy areas and change how the left GLC should be viewed. In order to fully understand the GLC and address its political substance, we require an understanding of its constraints, not only in terms of situating it in a context that provides some points of comparison, but also in terms of how we understand specific policies as grounded in the constituent movements of the NUL and how well they already understood, and acted to

circumvent, those constraints. From that contextualisation the shared political roots for policies across the GLC can be recognised, which in turn allows their affinities and potential to cross-fertilise to come into view, even as their implemented forms appear distinct and separated.

In short, I want to argue that while the GLC, considered as a singular state actor, cannot reasonably be considered an anti-capitalist institution (although it was perhaps the most progressive left-wing local government in Britain since the 1930s), that level of analysis fails to capture a host of more radical anti-capitalist currents that the GLC's political composition permitted to gain an institutional foothold. In the remainder of this chapter, I set out some coordinates of the GLC's 'urban state activism', which consists of an emancipatory urban political practice aimed simultaneously at producing direct benefits for working class communities, and at cultivating radical political consciousness more broadly, by using the tools of local government.

In doing so, this chapter presents a relatively coherent political-ideological position, but it is important to note – and the following chapters will stress this further – that any analysis focusing solely on the 'whole body' of the institution will set up a false equivalence between a cohesive institutional and policy identity ('the GLC') and the political aspirations of those whose activities and aspirations haunted its corridors as subversive tendencies and forces ('the new urban left'). Russell argues that progressive policies alone cannot define a radical municipalism – rather, they

> "should be seen as positive symptoms of a political project that is not *fundamentally* about the policies themselves (which could hypothetically be implemented by a traditional social-democratic party), but about the construction of 'new forms of organisation' of our everyday activity" (2019, original emphasis).

Accordingly what can be identified as radical in a municipal government context emerges not from the sum of progressive policies themselves, but from their political inspiration and direction, by their transitional nature in supporting alternative common institutions beyond state and capital, and by the character of a strategic approach to transforming the state via the 'guerrilla occupation of bureaucracy' (Thompson, 2020).

6.4. A revisionist view of the GLC's urban state activism

This section aims to read some of the left GLC's policies from the point of view of their political roots and transitional direction. I identify three main qualities: a redistributive push involving (mostly indirect) redistribution of wealth and of (the production of) urban space; an emphasis on social needs tying together production and consumption, informed by a feminist politics of social reproduction and social difference; and a campaigning register aiming to help mobilise an 'external' grassroots.

6.4.1. Redistribution(s) and quality of urban life

Although no individual GLC policy could be singled out for its radicalism, much of its policy framing emphasised the way the local state's intervention in the urban economy could produce radical shifts in the balance of power from private capital to the working class, by reducing cost burdens like fares or improving the quality and accessibility of services. The economic logic was that moderate amounts of local state spending, drawn from commerce and industry, could leverage significant outcomes for individuals, especially those at the bottom of the income distribution, by allowing people more disposable income and less dependency on wage discipline.

These redistributive objectives drew on the GLC's wide resource base, with an annual budget of about £800m, excluding the operating costs of London Transport, which the GLC ran indirectly and subsidised with £186m, and the ILEA, funded by a separate supplementary rate (LMA/R/GLC 1983). The GLC was free from many of the costs of everyday service provision, and rich in taxable resources from wealthy districts, even as the city faced a significant unemployment crisis and an increasing squeeze on local finances by government legislation (see chapter 7). The left GLC's manifesto set out aims to use "the GLC's financial resources to redistribute wealth to the less well off", making the City and wealthier suburbs fund improvements in "the living standards for working people in London" (GLC, 1981: 83). The GLC's regional scale was key to this redistributive capacity. One former GLC officer explained that having a base of several million residents offered a different dimension of political strategy, making it possible to tackle broader development issues across the uneven economic geography of the city's 32 boroughs, each containing about 200,000 residents. An authority with powers to tax land values could help match resources to needs across unevenly developed spaces, countering the fiscal retrenchment typical of the entrenched growth machines in wealthier districts (Duncan and Goodwin, 1988):

> "…you're mobilising resources across London. That means you draw on equally the rateable value, the property values from Westminster and from Barking. And it means it's a gigantic redistribution engine if it's done well." (Sharman, interview, July 2018).

Fares Fair, for instance, was effectively a small degree of wealth transfer via increased taxation from commercial sectors to public transport passengers. Most fundamentally, the GLC's transport policies were concerned with reversing the long-term decline of public transport and the negative consequences of intensified motorisation, both to improve the experience of urban life, and to help people do more with their income. For Livingstone (1987: 191), the fares policy was specifically calculated to most benefit working class families and achieved this despite the government's grant penalties (discussed in chapter 7) more than doubling the offset cost in local taxes. Even seemingly technical measures like integrating the fares system in 1981 or introducing the Travelcard in 1983 could be transformative in terms of how people used public

transport and its redistributive effect. This could also be a counter to the paternalism associated with state spending: as Goss (1988) argues, as a universal service not subject to regulatory conditions over individuals (short of ability to pay the fare), it encourages ideas of citizenship rights, undermines the 'natural' appearance of private provisions, and does not invite the social stigmatisation of rationed state spending. Whereas some such services are necessary to sustain capital accumulation by facilitating social reproduction of labour power (buses, waste collection, etc.) (Castells, 1977), many also support social needs and desires that do not directly serve a profit function – such as art galleries, parks, libraries, and so on. Thus although public transport serves the function of getting workers to work, its improvement includes the recognition that people have a social world outside of work.

Similarly, the GLC's employment strategy could also be seen as a (limited) form of redistribution of wealth and power – drawing resources from the local state's tax base into industry was a way of shifting the balance of power toward workers through reducing the social difficulties of unemployment, improving the condition of being in work, and promoting industrial democracy and worker power. Whereas GLEB bore a superficial resemblance to 'standard' entrepreneurial urbanism (Harvey, 1989), its publications were keen to stress that it was not merely 'bailing out' failing industries but using those investments as opportunities to restructure enterprises to the benefit of labour (GLC Industry and Employment Committee, 1985; LMA/R/GLEBa; LMA/R/IEC 1983a). For proponents of local economic policies like Mike Ward, local councils could intervene in the economy in ways that advocated for workers and challenged established growth agendas (Ward, 1981; LMA/R/IEC 1984a). The director of the Economic Policy Group in the Industry and Employment department, Robin Murray, argues this aspect of the GLC's economic policy "most antagonised private firms" (Murray, 1987a: 18): rather than stabilising market forces (that is, improving the prospects for competitivity and capital accumulation in the long run against the market's short-term imperatives), improving conditions of *work* would inevitably come into conflict with the market. Although improved conditions might be held to improve productivity and thus accumulation in the long run, their immediate effect is ideologically opposed to capitalism, particularly because challenging managerial authority through industrial democracy undermines its capacity to discipline labour (Murray, 1987a). Thus socially progressive labour policies could be construed as functioning as a lever for forms of (albeit minor) wealth redistribution, in line with aims to "reclaim on behalf of the direct producers the profit otherwise appropriated by capitalists", with Murray therefore suggesting "it would be more appropriate to call them anti-market economic aims" (1987a: 17).

A more clear-cut example of redistribution was the GLC's grants programme. Moving resources from local state control out to the 'community' and civil society was cast as a distribution of wealth from rich boroughs to poorer residents across the city, in ways that also sought to distribute the power attached to such resources beyond the orbit of politicians' and municipal bureaucrats' control. Again, while funding for the voluntary sector has more recently been ambiguously connected with the austerity-friendly politics of 'localism', the GLC's strategy

was based on “progressive self-help and power sharing” (Lansley, et al., 1989: 58) and on “endowing certain constituencies with an independent cultural voice” (Bianchini, 1987: 107). Sponsorship of the voluntary sector aimed at complementing rather than undermining local state services; at amplifying their distributive effect, rather than acting as cover for their reduction. The GLC channelled resources to where public services were being asset-stripped, reasoning that it was better to let groups organise their own projects if that was their wish, given the NUL’s emphasis on self-definition of needs over more paternalistic forms of welfare provision. Community activists saw a place for the voluntary sector in securing the fulfilment of social needs if it could be developed in terms of generating worker and community control which might then reverberate back into the development and implementation of state services and influence the private sector economy (Gyford, 1985).

The limited redistribution of wealth the GLC was able to achieve was not inherently non-capitalist, and a large body of Marxist theory has pointed out how municipal state expenditure underpins conditions for capital accumulation in alliance with urban growth regimes (Castells, 1978; Harvey, 2001; Logan and Molotch, 1987; Offe, 1984). In the GLC, however, these redistributive aims were articulated in a more socialist language of improving the life and conditions of ordinary people by funnelling resources from richer boroughs to benefit poorer residents across the city.

Thus in transport, the fares policy could be seen as more fairly distributing the resource of urban mobility to lower income groups, as well as explicitly benefiting the broader urban community – including non-users of public transport – through “reduced congestion, fewer accidents and less pollution as the number of private cars coming into London declined dramatically” (Livingstone, 1987: 191). Alongside a range of other planning interventions to improve the quality of life, these broader social benefits can be situated as forms of wealth distribution in themselves. As Maureen Mackintosh, an economist who worked on the GLC’s transport policies, explains,

> “if you have a lot more buses, and if you open up the South Bank to the school kids that live around it, and if you put in cycle lanes… you actually and effectively change income distribution. You allow people to do more with their income at the bottom end of the income distribution” (interview, November 2018).

In this sense, framing the left GLC’s policy agenda in terms of improving quality of urban life implied an equalisation of individual access to resources in a way that countered the putative individual freedom of the private economy represented by, for example, the automobile (LMA/PR/260, 277, 375, 402, 876; LMA/R/TC 1985a). A stress on quality was also significant in GLEB investments – its in-house publication, *Enterprising London*, argued its strategy “sets itself apart from other public or private investment houses” by “stressing the quality of jobs, as much as the number of jobs created” (MDR/GLEB 1984b). A similar approach was taken to skills development, with training schemes set up not only to support workers into higher-skilled

roles, but to develop people in holistic ways, challenging the alienating functionalism of centring the needs of employers (Egan, 2001).

Beyond simple quality, however, the GLC contested the politics of public space in terms of collective rather than individual wellbeing. This was expressed in policies to plant flowers in previously bleak lawns, open cultural facilities and expand the free provision of cultural experiences, and the occasional very direct experience of the GLC's festivals and events (Atashroo, 2017; Hatherley, 2020). Again this is particularly evident in transport, where the proliferation of the motorcar and the revolution of the built environment it entailed had come to be seen as the source of major problems not only regarding the quality of public space but the valorisation of individual consumption over collective flourishing. If, as Lefebvre (1991) suggests, the character of produced space reflects the dominant social relations of production and normative values of social power, then the car was revealed as "the ultimate triumph of … the consecration of egoism … a personal liberation and a social menace" (Ward, 1991: 10, 13). The GLC's policies intersected with an unfolding political contestation of automobility that challenged its purported inevitability and attempted to de-naturalise its hold over the configuration of urban space (Henderson, 2009; Sheller, 2018). Campaigners against road-building shared a vision of resolving urban problems through facilitating collective and cooperative forms of movement against the forms of individualist secessionism that automobility embodies (Henderson, 2009). Wetzel, who chaired the GLC Transport Committee, recounts a conversation with road engineers in his department that demonstrates this perspective and the naturalised mindset of pedestrian-hostile planning that it was challenging:

> "I said [to one of the engineers] 'well if I gave you a budget of five million pounds, what would you do with it?' And he said 'build more subways for pedestrians under the roads'. I said 'well that's exactly what we don't wanna do! We don't want to treat human beings like rabbits having to put them underground. We want you to put traffic lights on the road to let the pedestrians cross.' … but that was the whole mentality" (Wetzel, interview, October 2018).

More recently, the power relations of (auto)mobility have been recognised as a crucial site for the reproduction of the technologies, ideologies, and social relations of capital (Sheller, 2018; Urry, 2004). The resulting urban layouts are ones in which the most nominally efficient forms of mobility are prioritised in (and over) public space, according to a hierarchy of value that both establishes, and is reinforced by, their embeddedness in infrastructural space. By contrast, the GLC's approach was "reconceptualising the way infrastructure relates to cities" (Mackintosh, interview, November 2018), reflecting a recognition of the specificity of urban geographies and everyday metropolitan life as a space and scale of political intervention.

Thus public transport investments and anti-roads policies were part of the GLC's redistributive push in terms of the reallocation of *space*, seeking to adjust the degree to which space was produced by, on the one hand, the capitalist 'projectile economy' of velocity and its acceptance of the inherent "costs of routine morbidity" that D. Simons (2009: 78) calls the 'will to

concrete'; or on the other hand, by pedestrians and social forces that de-emphasise private high-speed mobility in favour of access to mass transit. Altogether, these policies cohere as efforts at "trying to change the balance of power on London's roads" from vehicles to pedestrians, as a GLC Transport Committee booklet (1985: 2) puts it, signalling a broader commitment to collective urban mobility over the private and commercial interests represented by the motorcar. As one of the left's candidates for the 1981 election summarised in *Briefing* (June 1981a: 6),

> "Our strategic objective, to adapt a well-known phrase, is nothing less than a fundamental and irreversible shift in the balance of road-space and rail-resources in favour of public transport passengers and their families".

Thus GLC policies can be interpreted as expressing a radical demand for collective enjoyment of urban life, something recognised by supportive campaign groups demanding their "right to enjoy the city" (BI/Fares Fair Support Campaign, 1981). They demonstrate the important role collective consumption plays in a vision of a radically democratised socialist city, against the deleterious spatial configurations that result from the market economy.

6.4.2. Politics of needs and the economics of feminism

Another major theme of GLC policy intersecting with redistributive aims and contributions to quality of life was an emphasis on the fulfilment of social needs, as well as recognition of the diversity of needs and the important role of social reproduction the urban economy.

An important working concept for GLEB was around harnessing new technologies and retooling industry in service of 'socially useful production' (LMA/R/GLEBc; LMA/R/IEC 1984b) based on the 'economics of need' (LMA/R/IEC 1983b). This was a direct adaptation of the ideas emerging from the 'workers plan' at Lucas Aerospace in the 1970s (covered in chapter 4). An early left GLC decision was to support a boycott of Lucas after it fired Mike Cooley, a design engineer and contributor to the workers' plan. Cooley founded the Centre for Alternative Industrial and Technological Systems, which GLEB would work closely with (LMA/PR/249; Wainwright, interview, May 2018), and he subsequently joined researcher Hilary Wainwright, co-author of a book on the Lucas experience (Wainwright and Elliot, 1982), in a job-share position in the GLC, from which he was appointed GLEB's Technical Director.

At the core of the 'socially useful production' idea was workers' involvement in corporate planning to steer production toward more collectively beneficial aims. Although within market constraints, activists hoped that long-term planning could combine the application of new technologies and the labour movement's powers to produce needs-oriented people's planning in the urban economy. One expression of this was a series of 'technology networks' to align technical expertise with social needs (Figure 7). For Murray, industrial change need not only be the prerogative of capital, and the then-nascent 'flexible specialisation' was not inevitably a mechanism of discipline over labour; it also offered the opportunity to claim and channel

increased productive capacities toward collectively useful ends, if the state could intervene in the restructuring process to help align the interests of workers and consumers (Murray, 1987a, 1987b). This positive emphasis on the potential for restructuring meant GLEB was not merely interested in preserving industrial jobs in a context of long-term industrial decline (MDR/GLEB 1984a), in contrast to a more conservative trade union approach. Although it originated with a radical shop stewards' movement, this perspective was therefore "quite uncomfortable for the traditional trade union movement":

> "That, you know, actually economic policy did not mean more Ford factories, it did not mean defending the traditional manufacturing employment base, and that did not mean defending the jobs of men wielding spanners" (Ward, interview, July 2018).

Figure 7 'Pedelec' electric bicycle, London Energy and Employment Network.
(Source: MDR/GLEB 1985)

This criterion of social usefulness was considered not only in terms of productive outcomes but in relation to the labour process itself, aspiring to "conserve and recycle energy and materials rather than waste them, and … liberate rather than suppress human creativity" (Wainwright and Elliot, 1982: 10; MDR/GLEB 1985a). The concept was informed by a critique of the labour process, resonating with an Autonomist Marxist argument that divisions of labour and skill are not neutral or merely technical matters, but mechanisms of domination in their own right (Wheeler, 2021; Wright, 2017). The root of that domination is in ownership of the means of production, but its *process* includes how the "use of new technology and the design of systems moulds social relations all the way down the line" (Murray, 1984: 222). Socially useful production suggested a framework for overcoming the alienating qualities of both repetitive tasks in the workplace and throwaway products in the sphere of consumption. Intervening in the

restructuring of production at the level of technology and skills – or, in the Italian autonomist lexicon, recomposing the 'technical composition' of labour – in ways that emphasise the situated knowledge of workers, could also underpin new forms of political autonomy that cannot be produced from traditional forms of public ownership alone (Wainwright and Elliot, 1982). This aspiration for technological innovation to support the liberation of workers also aimed at a broader democratisation of certain forms of production. For example, a document inviting participants to a GLC workshop on the culture industries opens with an argument for a "genuinely radical cultural policy" that would "turn the 'one-way streets' of broadcast television, record production and publishing … into two-way systems of communication and popular cultural production" (MDR/IEC 1985: 1).

An important corollary of this politics of needs was an appreciation of the distinct needs of under-privileged groups, with aims to improve the equity and accessibility of services and of urban life more generally. This was influenced by "the economics of feminism", (LMA/R/IEC 1984b: 11), especially following early feminist work on social reproduction, that was "really saying domestic labour is part of the economy, so our industrial strategy must include supporting launderettes and other kinds of socialised domestic labour" (Wainwright, interview, May 2018). The *London Industrial Strategy,* for example, addressed 'hidden' labour sectors like domestic workers and important areas of reproductive labour such as childcare, healthcare, and cleaning (GLC Industry and Employment Committee, 1985). This represented a relatively early acknowledgement of unpaid gendered labour as a legitimate focus for state economic policy: the *London Labour Plan* argued that "childcare costs should be met by society as a whole, not just parents" (LMA/R/GLC 1986: 84), the *LIS* argued for finding ways of "pressurizing men to accept responsibility for caring work" (GLC Industry and Employment Committee; 1985: 207), while Ward outlined ideas for working with women's groups and women's cooperatives "seeking to collectivise and liberate aspects of domestic labour" (LMA/R/IEC 1984b: 11), including childcare projects, an 'experimental' collective laundry, and other municipal services like catering. The *London Labour Plan* also argued for reducing working time as a step toward socialism and gender equality, recommending cuts to the working day or week, longer holidays, a shorter working life overall, leave for adult education, and more generous parental leave – all of which might "at least … provide some material space to come to a more equal sharing of domestic responsibilities between men and women" (LMA/R/GLC 1986: 289).

Similar ideas were at work in a politics of equitable access in public transport, partly as a means for enabling greater access to mobility for under-privileged groups, given the ways power relations of gender and disability are inscribed in urban infrastructure and patterns of mobility (BI/GLC Women's Committee, 1985a, 1985b; MDR/WCa; MDR/WCb; LMA/PR/238, 434; see Sheller, 2018; Hamilton, et al., 1991). These aims were acknowledged and supported by external campaign groups in support of Fares Fair; for example, a meeting of libertarian communist group Big Flame offered the view that fare levels bear a relation to "the male domination of public space" (LMA/ACC/3029/002), while a joint press release by several

women's groups argued that improving access and lowering fares supported women's right to the city:

> "We are entitled to travel in our own city when we like and when we need to. But we are denied freedom of movement when fares are so high. London does not belong to Mr. Heseltine and Mr. Fowler – it belongs to the majority of people who are not rich like them and their mates in the city – London belongs to us!" (BI/Wages for Housework Campaign, et al., 1982).

6.4.3. Mobilisation and campaigning

One advantage of the GLC's lack of a precisely defined governance role, which had usually been a source of technical criticism, was that its role could be redefined in ideological terms by the left, and with its wide reach these terms could be articulated through a campaigning register. In contrast to earlier eras of municipal labourism, the NUL approach was to use local government as "a campaigning base from which to bring down the Conservative government", as Livingstone wrote in the first *London Labour Briefing* (June 1981b) after the 1981 election. It is thus important to read the left GLC's agenda for urban policy in light of their manifesto commitment "to build an effective lobby to minimise the excesses of the Tory Government" (GLC, 1981: 84). The manifesto set out an intention to persuade trade unions and ordinary Londoners to join a mass opposition "led by a Labour GLC" which "could become the focal point of a national campaign" (GLC, 1981: 83). This campaigning objective also demonstrated the left's recognition of limits, noting that it would "continually explain that so long as local government is hamstrung by capitalism it will not be possible to finally solve the problems working people face" (GLC, 1981: 83).

Adopting a campaigning politics also addressed the range of independent causes the new urban left coalesced around, voicing countercultural claims in spheres of social life often well beyond the GLC's technical powers (Cooper, 1994; 2020). They embraced a diversity of tactics for developing public awareness and support. For instance, as well as poster campaigns against racism and nuclear disarmament (although see the critique by Gilroy, 1987), the GLC sought to embed a radical political consciousness in the cultural fabric of everyday urban life by funding politically-themed concerts and festivals (Figure 8), supporting community cultural initiatives like anti-racist and peace murals (Atashroo, 2019), posters against predatory development in Docklands (Figure 9; Leeson, 2019), and opening GLC-owned cultural spaces like the South Bank Centre to the public (Williams, 2020).

A crucial element of this campaigning politics was the sponsorship and mobilisation of a wider left-leaning grassroots movement, to be cultivated in a new relationship between the local state and the urban community. A transformed relationship to the institution's 'outside' involved a dialectic of bringing the urban grassroots into the state, while distributing its powers and resources outwards. In the GLC, that elliptical strategy involved 'opening up' local government

to encourage greater democratic input and accountability (set out in chapter 8) while also 'opening out' the resources of the institution in a programme of funding and other forms of institutional aid to build the autonomous activist capacity of grassroots community and campaigning groups. This approach of popular democratisation differs significantly from subsequent concepts of 'enabling' or 'participatory' local authorities (Cochrane, 1993; Smith, 2000), not least because these efforts worked alongside aspirations to expand local state services (see Newman and Clarke, 2009), but also because this 'mobilisation' of the urban grassroots included support for organisations with explicitly oppositional politics and goals of transformative social change – even if many found themselves caught in the contradictions of providing immediate and individualised services while maintaining a more collective radical outlook. Voluntary sector funding was seen as a contribution to left-wing political activism from 'within' the local state, helping to render marginalised groups more visible and materially more confident – and ultimately hoping to reverberate the left's 'new form of politics' into the wider urban community beyond its immediate reach (Bianchini, 1987). For one GLC worker, whose role was to facilitate this outreach into the community,

> "We're basically growing activists at this time. We're helping everybody grow up in a political way. It's lovely. We're helping people see that they can shape what their local authorities are doing, that they can be part of it. We're opening it up to working class people in a way that it hadn't been before, really." (Otitoju [GLC Story], 2017)

Figure 8 GLC anti-racism year campaigns and festivals, 1984.
(Left: Livingstone launches Anti-Racism year 1983 with members of Amazulu, Aswad, and Spartacus (Briefing, July 1984b). Right: GLC free festival poster, City Limits, 1984.)

These twin aims converge perhaps most clearly in the Popular Planning Unit, set up within the Industry and Employment department as an attempt at “the involvement of those concerned … as workers or consumers in a more democratic or popular planning process” (LMA/R/IEC 1984b: 5). The emphasis on matching people’s everyday needs to fulfilling labour was not only to be imposed from above, but encouraged from below, with municipal resources facilitating the channels through which needs and aspirations could be expressed (Youngpyo, 2007). Ward set out the rationale for this emphasis in his introduction to the *London Industrial Strategy*:

> “[Public investment institutions] and political authorities to which they are accountable need the power and the knowledge of both trade union and community organisations if they are to carry out restructuring for labour. Without them, the GLC with its limited resources, and a handful of GLEB managers, will be quite isolated and forced back into a dependence on traditional managers” (GLC Industry and Employment Committee, 1985: 52).

Figure 9 GLC-funded community poster campaign, Docklands.

(Source: https://cspace.org.uk/archive/docklands-community-poster-project/this-an-old-post-1981/)

Popular Planning sought to support local groups to develop their own democratic planning projects, and to aid them in the struggle to implement them. In this way local authority “resources and powers are made use of to strengthen, support and give a voice to industrial and extra-parliamentary action” (Massey, et al., 1984: 226, original emphasis). This interest in drawing on existing social cultures and struggles to inform economic development was in stark contrast to the vision of the unit’s major antagonist, the London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC), effectively an alternative ‘local state’ that saw local populations “as an

obstacle to progress, something to be removed in order to allow proper room for the market to recreate geography in its image" (Duncan and Goodwin, 1988: 92). Popular Planning was driven instead by an emphasis coming partly from the women's movement on bringing out people's practical experiential knowledge as the basis of a "different kind of economic policy from below, as it were" (Wainwright [GLC Story], 2017).

In a more expansive analytical sense, Popular Planning also proposed the possibility of making public services and governance more responsive to people's wishes without implying the restoration of market forces – rather, according to Murray, the post-Fordist industrial context demanded overcoming the limits of bureaucratic centralisation in socialist planning and moving toward decentralised planning grounded in "liberated zones" and moved by the "guerrilla movements" and "post-revolutionary experiments" of the women's, anti-racist, and other progressive community campaigns (1987a: 102-103).

6.5. Contradictions of working 'in and against the market'

The crux of most critiques of the GLC's economics was that it could not transcend the logic of the market. Yet the left was well-informed and clear about the limits it faced. Several left-wing scholars staffed the Industry and Employment department in particular – including Doreen Massey, Maureen Mackintosh and Hilary Wainwright; socialist economist Robin Murray was policy chief (LMA/PR/427; see Murray, 1985, 1987a, 1987b), while committee chair Mike Ward generated his own stream of detailed reports (e.g. Ward, 1981; LMA/R/IEC 1984a; LMA/R/IEC 1984b). This scholarly capacity is important to point out, because the framing ideas set out above are not post-hoc interpretations but were explicitly articulated at the time. Numerous GLC outputs noted the limited capacity to achieve what critics might have wanted – for one thing, class power could not be conjured from nowhere, nor could a metropolitan government abolish the market (Murray, 1984, 1987b; LMA/R/IEC 1984a; LMA/R/GLEBa). The *LIS*, for example, points out the need for laws at the national level regarding monetary controls, foreign exchange, tax, and regulation before a more equal and democratic local economy could be made possible (GLC Industry and Employment Committee, 1985). The politics of need that framed the approach of linking investments to social(ist) objectives was specifically positioned 'in and against the market':

> "*In* it, because the workings of the market surround us: we, at least, as a local authority cannot abolish the market; *against* it, because at times hesitantly, sometimes with contradictions, we look to base our policy on needs: are Londoners so well-housed and fed, so well-clothed and their homes so well-furnished, that there is nothing to be done by the 400,000 Londoners who are unemployed?" (LMA/R/IEC 1984b: 1).

As Ward suggested in his introduction to the *LIS*, it was therefore crucial to recognise both that the market could not be ignored, and that it was not necessarily "a determinant of what is

produced and how" but should be approached "as a political force", against which non-market relations can act as countervailing forces (GLC Industry and Employment Committee, 1985: 39). GLC policies were therefore framed at the very outset by this overarching context of contradiction, worked through in their everyday development as difficulties arose and dilemmas were identified.

Thus the approach taken by GLEB recognised several contradictions inherent to this ambivalent position. One was that the aim of supporting firms to gain market competitiveness fundamentally conflicted with the aim of using investments to leverage the social aims of industrial democracy, equal opportunities, and socially useful production, because struggling firms would likely be least able to afford them, and in competitive markets revenue needs would ultimately be prioritised over other 'non-essential' costs (Atkinson, 1995; Massey, 1987). Goodwin and Duncan (1986: 20) thus point to "a large grey area between 'servicing capital' and 'restructuring for labour'", which made it difficult to challenge the "boundary between what is 'economic' and what is 'social' in the market economy" (Massey, 1987: 29). Managers in GLEB-funded firms thus saw themselves, in the words of a GLC economic advisor, as

> "caught between survival in the marketplace increasingly dominated by better-organised foreign firms and a band of social reformers seeking to establish a workplace utopia from the security of government offices" (Best, 1988, quoted in Lansley, et al., 1989: 86).

In some cases, even the mere threat of unfavourable market consequences was enough to prevent progressive restructuring taking place (Massey, 1987). The *London Labour Plan* reports about one firm where

> "both management and shop stewards felt that any radical restructuring in the firm's management might alienate their major customers and so force closure. The pressures to place all of the emphasis on commercial survival, and to neglect what are called GLEB's 'social objectives', are intense" (LMA/R/GLC 1986: 383).

Nor could alternative forms of social ownership escape these pressures: external market constraints could push workers in co-operatives to exploit themselves to compete (LMA/R/IEC 1985). Another quandary raised within GLEB was the difficult position being 'in and against' the market put workers in: enterprise planning might gain shop stewards more than the sole leverage of industrial action, but also potentially encouraged them to collaborate with management. Thus an involved trade unionist asked in *Enterprising London*,

> "if you are party to management decisions, does this mean giving up the right to strike? And how does a life-long shop steward handle wage negotiations, redundancy issues, or productivity targets when the union has a role in management? … we need to look at ways of representing members' interests positively, without necessarily giving up the 'industrial negative'" (Allen, in MDR/GLEB 1984b).

Accordingly, GLEB's method was not prescriptive, but open to the different approaches workers took to this conundrum: some workplaces embraced planning agreements and elected 'worker-directors', while others rejected this as a form of class collaboration, and opted instead for stronger collective bargaining agreements (LMA/R/IEC 1984b). One potential difficulty with this open approach, however, and the delegation to outside political forces implied by Popular Planning, was that the GLC left itself could not formulate a definitive framework for alternative economic planning, but could only offer "loose political guidelines" (Rustin, 1986: 79; GLC Industry and Employment Committee, 1985).

Meanwhile in the efforts to mobilise worker and community power, whether through supporting autonomous political organisation via Popular Planning or grant-aid, was recognition of another fundamental contradiction – the weakness of existing class struggles on the ground. For Massey, et al. (1984: 225), "the ideas now being developed with local authority resources grew out of realising the limitations of purely parliamentary democracy, and are based on or inspired by new forms of democratic, extra-parliamentary power", but were complicated by the problem that "the existing power of these movements is flagging". Arguably the weakness of the GLC industrial strategy could be attributed to the weakness of movements it sought to empower. For example, Clarke and Cochrane (1987) note that worker organisations in firms funded by GLEB were often too weak to effectively realise the intentions of Enterprise Planning. The paradox thus belongs not only to the local government left but to the whole urban grassroots, especially for critics who assume that organising outside the state can more powerfully challenge capitalism.

That political weakness must also be contextualised with the climate of extreme political hostility the urban left was operating in. The way redistributive policies – even when relatively mild, or those now deemed relatively unthreatening to capital – were staunchly opposed by a capitalist establishment provides a clue to their perceived challenge to capitalist hegemony. In retrospect, some of the severe hostility can seem absurd. For example, when the GLC put in an all-red pedestrian phase near a pub favoured by police, the police

> "made an official response to committee, to say we think this has been put in as a joke. Because you can't possibly stop the traffic for people to cross the road. That was the serious police leadership approach" (Moore, interview, October 2018).

The cover of one GLC booklet (GLC Transport Committee, 1985), otherwise a dry explanation of schemes like bus priority lanes and new traffic lights, is decorated with an ironic montage of some of the hostile newspaper coverage the schemes had faced (GLC Transport Committee, 1985). Paul Moore suggests "the stuff in there … that is non-controversial, isn't it? I mean, people would look at that and actually think it's a bit conservative" (interview, October 2018). Yet at the time, it was seen as "revolutionary" (Moore, interview, October 2018). Several other interviewees commented on how peculiar it seems in retrospect that essentially technical arguments, such as regarding regulating traffic, were recast as emblematic of a trenchant battle

between redistributive socialism and laissez-faire conservativism. Mackintosh points out the striking politicisation of arguments that are now relatively orthodox, like the principle of road space inducing traffic demand, which was seen then as "really, you know, mad Marxists" (interview, November 2018). Even ideas like introducing a Travelcard – helping frequent travellers do more with their fare – "was, I don't know why, it was regarded as socialist, a socialist radicalism" (Mackintosh, interview, November 2018) because it was interpreted as creating free fares.

Yet that hostility makes sense when seen as a particular conjuncture of class struggles that expressed broader political appeals. For Goodwin and Duncan (1986: 34) "the local state is a key place in the formation and maintenance of political perception, and hence of social relations". Transport habits can be extremely difficult to shift because the material economy of car ownership "provides too many advantages for too many people" (Ward, 1991: 11). Gössling and Cohen (2014: 200) suggest that the economic relations underpinning the entrenched patterns of automobile dependence (from the automobile industry down the commodity chain to manufacturers and distributors of metal, rubber, plastics, oil, concrete, etc.) transform otherwise reasonable transport policies into 'taboos' and produce political climates unwilling to acknowledge the "huge differences in the power geometries of individual mobility". This helps explain, at least, the heightened political sensitivity of the GLC's transport policies. Moore succinctly connects the sites and ideologies of roads with capital in his explanation of how the Transport Committee was perceived:

> "The line was this is you know, municipal socialism. The dead hand of municipal socialism. Burdensome regulation and all that. What we like is the free flow of the market economy, the roundabout. You know, cars racing round at a hundred miles an hour" (interview, October 2018).

Wetzel similarly argues that "They're always coming up with hysterical horror stories. But you know, you're actually challenging capitalism. And capitalists don't want any rules or restrictions … they just want to make a profit" (interview, August 2019). Assessing the GLC must therefore account for this heightened political sensitivity, whereby funding cheaper urban mobility through local taxes could be connected in the popular imagination to a partisan form of Marxist class struggle. This struggle over Londoners' wavering subjectivity is perfectly captured in television news interviews with Underground passengers on the day after Fares Fare was declared unlawful:

> "Well it was very nice for the short time while it lasted.
> …
> We all have to pay a fair share, and this subsidy of Marxism is ridiculous.
> …
> Well as a ratepayer I'm very pleased. [Interviewer: And as a tube traveller?]
> Uh, it's a pity" (*Thames News*, 18 December 1981).

Urban policy was therefore not only a material but also discursive struggle, a powerful pivot around which the subject-position of ordinary people could be turned (Hall, 1984a). Conservative government and judiciary alike used punitive legislation framed around arguments about fiscal restraint to encourage people to think of themselves as individuals unwillingly financing unwelcome intrusions of state power into civil society. The GLC, by contrast, was offering a view of interdependent members of society both funding and jointly benefiting from urban infrastructures of collective consumption.

Accordingly, despite the often-technical nature of the arguments, the veneer of depoliticised administration that policies were often couched in, and the fact that many GLC policies have since become mainstay urban policy, an argument can nevertheless be made for the radical-reformist nature of the GLC. The hostile reaction demonstrates that such policies were a real threat to capitalist domination – if only in terms of their ideological direction rather than concrete changes to the city's economy.

The issue of ideological direction is also noteworthy inasmuch as the GLC's limited powers meant policies were often largely demonstrative, voicing democratising and collectivising ambitions of more significance than their concrete impact (Duncan and Goodwin, 1988). For instance, GLEB staff argued the principles of direct democracy and human-centred production could serve as examples for other cities and for a national Labour Party programme (LMA/R/IEC 1983a). As Peck has argued in reference to Doreen Massey's intellectual contribution, GLC economic policies were rarely seen by their proponents as "materially transformative interventions in themselves, [but] more as 'demonstration projects' and 'parables' of socialist practice … [that] did not seek, naively, to wish into existence capacities for local intervention that did/could not exist" (2013: 109). Instead, they were developed in relation to wider political arguments, "inventively positioned within (an analysis of) dynamically restructuring metropolitan economies" from which they posed the possibility of alternatives (Peck, 2013: 109). The Industry and Employment chair Mike Ward saw the economic conditions of the 1980s as the "trough of a 'long wave' in the world economy", driven by "a much deeper crisis, in which the structure of industry for the next thirty years will be shaped by the political, economic and technological choices which now have to be made." (LMA/R/IEC 1984b: 5). The resulting economic approach thus sought not only to combat London's own crisis but to influence the "pattern of the succeeding upswing" (LMA/R/IEC 1984b: 5). As Ward points out,

> "I think I was always clear that the analytical capacity in the end was going to be more important than the executive capacity. That what we could do in terms of investment certainly in a five year term was not going to be all that significant. And we did create our institutions, but what they could do was always going to be fairly limited. And we had to set things up and see where they would take us" (Ward, interview, July 2018).

In this context, the GLC's politics are best viewed not as carrying out a defined overall socialist strategy, but rather as improvisatory experiments at the forefront of left economic thought, part of a wider framing of having "consciously set out to extend the frontiers of what is seen as Economics" and "reclaiming the economy for political movements that otherwise risk being marginalised" (LMA/R/IEC 1984b: 10-11). Their orientation was to challenge the capitalist orthodoxies governing urban space and to "confront the waste of resources and of human potential inherent in the working of the market" (LMA/R/IEC 1984b: 1). In this respect, the left GLC's wider function was to use public sector involvement in the local economy as leverage to contest assumed conventions about the organisation of everyday life, and show that alternative responses to urban socio-economic crises were available.

As a final conceptual point, the NUL's re-imagination of the possibilities of the GLC, in contrast to its prior perception as a distant and irrelevant authority, speaks to the usefulness of moving beyond a monolithic view of the local state. Once it was envisioned that the institution could be used in a different way, its capacities for radical social change came into view. As one interviewee put it, the GLC was like a "sort of slumbering giant":

> "You know, fantastic machine, very good officers, high class officers, big budget… But it was like a Rolls Royce, it just needed someone to put some petrol in it. That's what we did, and off we went, there we go" (Nicholson, interview, October 2018).

6.6. Conclusion

This chapter has provided an abridged introduction to the policy platform of the 1981-86 GLC, excavating some of its implicit anti-capitalist motives and implications, as a snapshot of its particular 'urban state activist' politics. What distinguished the NUL in the GLC from its predecessors was the way it conceived and cultivated new functions for local government linked to a radical left political-economic framework, and pursued that policy activism within a campaigning and mobilising register. The political thread that links the various policies is their indirectly redistributive basis, whether in the workplace or via their impact on quality of life and cost of living. They expressed radical and forward-looking agendas for strengthening the position of workers, cultivating workers' democracy, and improving access to and experience of municipal services and public space, that together comprised an attempted transformation of the GLC into 'a different kind of state' (Albo, et al., 1993). Contrary to the superficial appearance of the GLC's attempted economic restructuring as contributing to a long-term trajectory toward municipal entrepreneurialism, its deeper political substance shows that the recreation of London as a bastion of neoliberal order was never inevitable; the political potentialities of any given moment are open-ended (Massey, 1984, 2007; Peck, 2013).

Perhaps generously, these policies can therefore be read as forms of 'non-reformist reforms', heightening political contradictions in ways that highlight the limits capitalism imposes on working-class aspirations, and its fundamental incompatibility with, for example, good quality,

democratic and socially beneficial public spaces and workplaces. However, it is more accurate to identify this quality as subterranean and emergent, rather than suggesting each policy was purposely drafted to destabilise capitalism. In the wider scope of this thesis, the overview of the urban state activism of the left GLC offered here sets up the analytical themes of the following chapters. The next chapter identifies (more of) the difficulties and significant restrictions on the GLC’s capacities.

Chapter 7
Reflexive autonomy: the new urban left's negotiation of constraint

> "Local is within the straitjacket of parliamentary oversight in a very strict way here. And so lawyers patrol that boundary in a very meticulous way. … [and] here we were, busting that boundary in every way." (Nick Sharman, interview, July 2018)

7.1. Introduction

The previous chapter provided evidence to support an argument that the GLC's resources and the NUL's ideological, campaigning framing gave them an "ability to illustrate an alternative both to Thatcherism and to Labourism [based on] feminist, anti-racist, anti-nuclear and more generally socialist ideas" (Massey, et al., 1984: 225). The actual implementation of such an alternative was strongly circumscribed, however, by the landscape of local government powers, finances, and relations with central government in the 1980s. As discussed in chapter 2, attempts to develop socio-economic alternatives from within governing institutions face severe structural limitations in capitalist societies. In British local government, as per chapter 5, these structural constraints are especially pronounced through a combination of restrictive legal permission to spend and functional capacity to raise revenue within disparate local economic conditions (Duncan and Goodwin, 1988; Egan, 2001). Yet most state-critical theorists agree the capitalist state is not a monolithic structure that completely dominates social relations, but contains hollows and openings; it is an "arena of conflict" in which different parts of the state system are at odds with each other (Miliband, 1977: 96), which makes possible "struggle within or through the state apparatus against the state form" (Holloway, 1980: 18).

Drawing on this more relational state theory, this chapter argues that the legal and financial constraints imposed on the GLC could sometimes prove facilitative of moments of political agency and possibility (Jessop, 1990). I characterise this dynamic as a process of *reflexive autonomy*, in order to highlight the active negotiation of constantly evolving constraints. As established state structures, external domination from central state powers, and insurgent political forces 'within' (with pressure from 'below') respond to and shape each other's field of action, fissures and openings emerge that can be productively exploited to create space for political action and leverage. To the formal structural state metaphysics expressed by 'relative autonomy', I use the term *reflexive* to attach categories of creativity, emergence, responsiveness and agency, without losing sight of their interplay with structural constraints.

This chapter is organised in two halves. A first part explores the experience of developing policies in power, showing how the GLC's local autonomy was clamped down on by Conservative central government, the variegated impacts and outcomes of local-central

struggles, and the resulting debates within the left over how to respond strategically. This part comprises two sections: the first explores the legal battles around *Fares Fair* and reveals the contested terrain of legality, and the second offers a similar account of local government finance and the successive rounds of government legislation that sought to restrict local councils' spending. The second half of the chapter moves on to consider the construction of autonomy and institutional agency developed in relation to structural constraints, showing how elected members and radical staff were able to construct capacities to act within and despite those limitations, circumventing obstacles to the development of policy. This is again explored in two sections: the first concerns attempts to assert control over the process of legal consultation and to expand local government autonomy by manipulating the flexible and politically contingent nature of law against itself; the second involves crafting new tools of intervention for social change beyond the reach of direct policy powers, including the strategic use of withdrawal and non-compliance. A final section draws out some of the analytical themes of contingency and reflexive contestation within the local state as a bridge to the following chapter, which focuses in more detail on the internal dynamics and contradictions of activism within the GLC.

7.2. "Vandals in ermine": the legal battles over *Fares Fair*

The legal battles over the left's most significant new expenditure, the *Fares Fair* cut to public transport prices, demonstrate the structural and ideological role of law and the judiciary in maintaining the emergent neoliberal project (Brabazon, 2016). But, as I will argue below, they also show the flexibility and contingency of law (Cooper, 2020; Thorpe and Morgan, 2022), and the indeterminacy of its impacts and outcomes, especially when leashed to active struggles within the state for political alternatives.

7.2.1. *Fares Fair* hits the legal buffers

The Transport Act 1969 gave the GLC responsibility for administering London Transport (LT) as an arms-length company. LT operated largely independently of the GLC, with only its budget (and thus fare arrangements and service plans) determined and approved by the GLC including subsidies to cover the expected shortfall in operating costs. Dave Wetzel, chair of the GLC Transport Committee between 1981 and 1986, describes the process of dealing with the LT Executive as "like pushing a balloon… you push this part and that part bulges out, you know? It was very hands off" (interview, October 2018). The GLC could only instruct the LT board to prepare a budget for approval, meaning budget planning had to be conducted through persuasion (Wetzel, interview, October 2018). Nevertheless, the left GLC was confident their fares policy was their most legally unproblematic initiative (Livingstone, 1987). The Conservative Transport Minister who introduced the 1969 legislation explained that it allowed the GLC to prescribe any fares policy to the Executive, including running "at a loss for social or

planning reasons" so long as it took financial responsibility (*Hansard*, 17.12.68, col. 1248). At the time it was passed, MPs including Margaret Thatcher and Michael Heseltine spoke in support of that reasoning (Livingstone, 1987). The left was confident that "Public Transport is one of the major areas of our manifesto where we can bring our socialist policy to life, because the power to really implement it is there for us to use" (*Briefing*, June 1981a: 6).

Yet when *Fares Fair* was implemented on the 4th October 1981, funded with a supplementary 11.9p rate[2], it was immediately challenged in court by the Conservative-led Bromley Borough Council in suburban outer London. (The doctrine of *ultra vires*, noted in chapter 5, is mainly policed by judicial control: authorities can be taken to court to challenge the legality of their decisions). Bromley argued *Fares Fair* was financially unfair on outer boroughs, on the basis that their ratepayers benefited from fewer urban transport services but shouldered an equal rates burden, in effect subsidising other parts of London (Carvel, 1984; Wetzel, interview, October 2018; Moore, interview, October 2018). This was, of course, tacitly an argument against the policy's redistributive character (as discussed in chapter 6), founded on a political argument over the fairness of state taxation; and while the legal argument purported to be a technical one of fiduciary duty, it really hinged on whether to consider redistributive policies unfair in law. Carvel (1984: 129) implies that Bromley presents an alternative kind of 'activist' local authority, stressing that the case had no inevitability and relied on strong-willed councillors that "most people thought … were off their heads".

On the 28th October 1981, the Divisional Court dismissed the case, but despite their finding that the fare reduction was legal, both judges thought full fares abolition would have been illegal, and suggested *Fares Fair* was at the margins of permissibility. The implication that there were in fact legal limits to the extent of subsidy exposed a legal instability that provided the opening for further challenges from Bromley. The case was heard quickly by the Appeal Court, whose unanimous judgement on 10th November 1981 declared both *Fares Fair* in particular, and subsidy to LT in general, unlawful. Lord Justice Oliver focused not on the GLC's statutory discretion, but on a clause in the 1969 Act about 'economical' administration (Atkinson, 1995; Carvel, 1984). The prior assumption had been that this simply instructed LT to avoid a deficit *after* accounting for GLC subsidy, but Oliver took it to imply an overriding instruction to run on ordinary business lines. This was a devastating blow for the left, who had expected to lose on a technical issue that could be easily remedied – but the ruling effectively implied the GLC had no statutory power to run LT at a deficit in the interests of Londoners (despite having done so since taking control in 1969) (Livingstone, 1987).

[2] Rates on both residential and non-residential (e.g. commercial, empty or non-profit) properties were charged according to their nominal rental value, against a percentage multiplier (usually referred to by pennies in the pound) that could be determined by local authorities. If a property's nominal rents were assessed at £10,000, an 11.9p rate would amount to an annual charge of £1,900.

The concurring judgements of the other two Appeal judges, Lord Denning and Lord Watkins, were even more politically incendiary and exposed the obvious political motivations behind the court's decision. Carvel (1984: 132) suggests their judgements were "larded with gratuitous comments of such political insensitivity that the question of their legal merits was obscured in the ensuing public debate". Denning argued that a manifesto issued by a political party to win votes was irrelevant because many people voted for parties not manifestos, and suggested parties should, when elected, "consider again what to do" (quoted in MDR/*City Limits*, No. 7: 32) on the basis of "what was practical and fair" to ratepayers[3] (quoted in Carvel, 1984: 132). Watkins meanwhile argued the GLC had acted hastily and arbitrarily, accusing Livingstone in particular of "a bad case of an abuse of power" for instructing LT, implying the GLC leader did not have that right if it disregarded "the interests of the ratepayers" (quoted in Carvel, 1984: 133).

After the GLC appealed the decision to the House of Lords, on 17th December 1981 all five Law Lords (predecessor to the Supreme Court, consisting of specially appointed members of the House of Lords) ruled the fares policy, and the supplementary rate to fund it, unlawful. Four accepted Oliver's explanation that the GLC's obligation to have LT break even exceeded any social and transport policy objectives, and that the fares cut could not reasonably be argued to adhere to "economic necessity": "…the GLC abandoned business principles. That was a breach of duty owed to the ratepayers and wrong in law" as Lord Scarman put it (quoted in Carvel, 1984: 135). But they did not state what level of subsidy would have been legal without the supplementary rate, creating confusion over whether Oliver's ruling over any subsidy still stood. This confusion was compounded by one judge, Lord Diplock, who disagreed on subsidy but argued that *Fares Fair* imposed an unfair financial burden on ratepayers because the additional spending caused a loss of £50m in government grants (see section 7.3. below). That is, it did not simply reallocate costs between ratepayer and passenger but doubled the rate burden in a "thriftless use of monies … and a deliberate failure to deploy to the best advantage the full financial resources available to it by avoiding any action that would involve forfeiting grants from central government funds" (quoted in Carvel, 1984: 136). Here the law was working smoothly alongside Conservative government intentions; the implication was that incurring any grant penalty exercised by the Treasury was unlawful, making the penalty redundant except as a deterrent and giving arbitrary government spending targets the force of law. Again, the argument was that local authorities ought to act as prudent trustees of ratepayer money, not as political agents entrusted to raise and spend resources in accordance with other political goals. One irony – and another illustration of the contingency and instability of these

3 Denning was particularly well known for right-wing bias: in the previous year he made several rulings against workers in industrial struggles and in favour of companies including Shell and BP, all of which were overruled by the House of Lords (MDR/*City Limits*, No. 7). He also made a polar opposite judgement in favour of Conservative Thameside Council's abandonment of a comprehensive education scheme, on the basis that the Conservative manifesto had promised to do so (Livingstone, 1987).

legal and financial constraints – is that the government likely lacked the power to actually impose the penalties, which was only corrected with new legislation in 1982 when government lawyers noticed the oversight (Carvel, 1984).

Another way government policy worked alongside legal argument to damage the GLC was that the lack of equivalent subsidy to British Rail (BR), upon which Bromley's initial case was based (because its residents used BR commuter services, not LT's Underground), was in fact a consequence of Ministerial intervention. *Fares Fair* was intended to include a BR subsidy, but when GLC councillors visited the Transport Secretary Norman Fowler, he accepted their legal right to do so but promised the removal of an equal quantity from BR's government subsidy, rendering that part of the policy pointless and producing a lop-sided and disjointed urban public transport policy (Moore, interview, October 2018; Livingstone, 1987). Fowler's threat prevented a fare cut whose principal beneficiaries would have been south London commuters in boroughs with mostly Conservative voters: the government therefore effectively engineered a move to quash the whole policy on the basis of a political rather than legal threat, while preventing it from potentially attracting Labour support in suburban areas (Livingstone, 1987). Livingstone points out another contradiction: that more conservative judges might have taken a strict constructionalist approach to the points of law, but the Appeal Court judges and Law Lords were all considered 'liberal' judges who "liked to dabble in the classic American supreme court sense, to interpret the law in a political way" (quoted in Carvel, 1984: 137).

Carvel (1984) suggests the Law Lords' decision was one of the most remarkable court defeats ever experienced by a local authority, its significance overshadowing the policy itself: it undermined the council's statutory discretion to set fares and declared a major manifesto promise put before an electorate unreasonable and 'arbitrary'. The judgement was met with widespread astonishment, not only in the left but in much of the press. Wetzel called the judges "vandals in ermine" (Carvel, 1984), having "done more to vandalise the transport system than any kids could do with their marker pens and their pen knives" (interview, October 2018). In the Labour Group, even the right-leaning councillors came to believe that "the vast majority of judges were … a politically conscious arm of the establishment" (Livingstone, 1987: 189).

This sabotage helped grow much of the GLC's popular support, seen as an underdog in an unfair fight with a politically-motivated judiciary (Carvel, 1984; Figure 10). They highlighted the fact that for local authorities in Britain, elections provide no legal legitimacy for actions not specifically permitted by Parliament. This was especially a blow to the NUL, which had spent the past two years organising to shape the manifesto and the internal mechanisms of the regional Labour Party to ensure elected councillors would abide by it, only to be faced with the legal irrelevance of their electoral mandate (Livingstone, 1987). Livingstone also pointed out the judgement would make manifestos legally dangerous and democratic elections farcical:

> "…if a Tory council or ratepayers group challenges your decisions in your manifesto they are going to argue that you came into the council with a closed mind. That is going to make elections ridiculous. You'd have to have a legal disclaimer saying nothing in

> the manifesto would influence you in any way" (Livingstone, quoted in MDR/*City Limits*, No. 7: 33).

The episode revealed the ways British law is fundamentally grounded in the principles of a market economy, and exposed a contradiction of capitalist democracy: that some things (local) governments can do in principle are conditional on not actually choosing to (Rooksby, 2018). A *Briefing* editorial (December 1981: 1) pointed out the "grave and immediate threat" to radical local government, with any policy now "in danger of falling foul of the Judges Law … the Judges and their Courts are part of the extra parliamentary reserve forces of the Tory Party".

Figure 10 Popular opposition to the legal decision on Fares Fair.
(Left: BI/London Transport Trade Union Defence Committee, 1982; Right: Briefing, June 1982b)

7.2.2. Defeat reveals the left's fragility and leads to tactical disagreements

The fallout from the fares decision also led to bitter debates within the NUL over the question of legality and strategies for implementing left policies. As Atkinson (1995) notes, it brought to the fore key divisions within the fragile coalition and stress-tested the left/centre coalition in the GLC Labour Group. These debates were complicated by the ambiguity of the Law Lords' judgement, which prompted "widespread confusion over the legality of different levels of subsidy" (Lansley, et al., 1989: 49). With the GLC required to reverse the fares cuts at its next

full Meeting, Livingstone prepared a motion of non-compliance, but found it difficult to win support across the Labour Group because councillors of the party's centre and right were hesitant over advice from chief legal officers that such a vote could be interpreted as breaking the law. After the regional London Labour Party passed a resolution calling for the GLC to refuse any fares increase, the non-compliance strategy narrowly passed by 23 to 22 votes in the Labour Group meeting. But they also narrowly decided (by 22 to 20) to allow a free vote, and in the full council meeting all but one of the 22 opposed Labour members broke away with three SDP/Liberal Alliance members to vote for a 100% fares increase drawn up by GLC and LT lawyers. With the vote tied at 24 each, the GLC Conservatives, who had hoped to embarrass the left by abstaining and highlighting Labour's split, were scared by the GLC Director-General's warning that departing from the LT officers' recommendations (even by abstention) could mean contempt of court and risk surcharge, so sent 3 members to ensure it passed by 27 votes to 24.

The reversal of the fares package followed two other major setbacks for the left. An ILEA attempt to reduce the price of school meals was blocked after 20 hesitant Labour councillors voted with the Conservative minority (of 13) to defeat 24 left-wing councillors, after GLC lawyers warned it would risk surcharge (*Briefing*, August 1981a; August 1981b). Attempts in Housing to prevent stock transfers, cancel sales contracts entered into by the Cutler administration, and boost the housebuilding program from 35 to 1500 new starts were each vetoed by, respectively, a government statutory instrument, a court case, and Heseltine himself (*Briefing*, August 1981c; November 1981b). Some activists argued the Labour administration should resign and take up majority opposition, calling it "the acid test to distinguish socialists from social administrators" (*Briefing*, April 1982: 4). For them, it had become clear the manifesto could no longer operate within the legal constraints imposed on local government. If the council was legally obliged to implement Conservative policies, they argued, let Conservative councillors do it.

7.2.3. The GLC left recalibrates

However, formal dissension within the GLC Labour Group did not last. Although Conservative opposition helped the left defeat LT's proposals and a succession of 12 amendments in a chaotic January 26th GLC meeting, LT management continued with its plans regardless, and by 8th February 1982 a budget plan passed the Labour group that implied the fare rises and other manifesto defeats, on the grounds it would have been a charade to offer further resistance (Livingstone, 1987; Carvel, 1984). The majority position within the GLC left was articulated by Livingstone:

> "…we would never be forgiven or understood if we ran away from the tasks before us … we must not allow ourselves to be talked into surrender by those whose thinking has become fixated on the concept that Labour will always betray or be defeated" (*Briefing*, March 1982a: 5).

Accepting this logic, despite the disagreement over tactics, the unity of the GLC left was shortly re-established. Despite an editorial meeting in February 1982 passing a resolution supporting resignation, by the March issue of *Briefing* the editorial line emphasised that misreading defeat as wilful compromise or capitulation meant "allowing ourselves to take political responsibility … allowing ourselves to be used as instruments of the Tories and the capitalist state" (*Briefing*, March 1982b: 3). As they explained,

> "When you come up against a brick wall which blocks your path, there is no point in hitting your head against it. The task is to think carefully about the forces and equipment which will be needed to make a hole in it or bring it down. We are not accepting defeat. We are simply measuring the scale of the tasks which confront us" (*Briefing*, March 1982b: 3).

Carvel (1984) suggests that this heralded the more pragmatic 'second' administration of the GLC left, focusing more on the practical business of developing and implementing its policies within a clear-sighted conception of the limits of power. GLC councillors and officers spent the following year developing and testing more detailed proposals for a new cut that would match the spirit of *Fares Fair* but more robustly defend itself within the ambiguous new legal position. GLC councillors were visited by representatives from Hammersmith trades council and the RMT union who had sought legal advice and argued the GLC had broken the legal requirement of the London Plan to provide an efficient transport system (Wetzel, interview, October 2018). Senior GLC officers and the chief solicitor initially ignored this, saying they must follow the Lords, until Labour-run Camden council advised they would take legal action against the GLC. This became the basis of a new 'Balanced Plan' – named to imply a sense of moderation (Wetzel, interview, October 2018) – to return fares to a level 20% lower than in 1981. Although short of the initial *Fares Fair* aims, additional measures such as a Travelcard pass and ticketing integration between LT and British Rail helped it to achieve greater rises in passenger numbers and a greater fall in car journeys than the 1981 policy (see table 6.1 in chapter 6; Mackintosh and Wainwright, 1987; Wheen, 1985).

7.2.4. The 'Balanced Plan' exposes the contingency of law

This new plan was prepared from May 1982, "with meticulous attention to detail and a ponderous mock display of open-mindedness" (Carvel, 1984: 203) to avoid accusations of arbitrariness or dogmatism. LT executives were pleased with how the plan would both streamline operations and increase ridership, but still worried about the Law Lords decision, their lawyer decided to file a 'friendly' court challenge to the GLC. This was well prepared with help from legal advisers, but in the event the High Court carefully avoided the issue of rates and concentrated on transport law (Wetzel, interview, October 2018). As Carvel (1984: 203) recounts,

> "to the layman it seemed as if everyone in that courtroom, including the judges, started from the premise that the Law Lords had made a ghastly mistake and that somehow a way must be found to redress it by teasing out favourable conclusions from the gaps in their often contradictory judgements".

In January 1983, High Court judges ruled in favour of the GLC, arguing the plan was 'totally different' from the 'arbitrary decision' of 1981, because it could be reasonably argued to result from a carefully researched strategy and justified according to economic arguments about efficiency, traffic reduction and road safety (partly based on statistics from the six months of cheaper fares in 1981-2) rather than inclusion in a manifesto.

Overall, the *Fares Fair* episode demonstrates the highly constrained legislative environment for implementing radical policies in British local government then and now, even for policies whose radicalism was more discursive than substantively counter-posed to capitalist social conditions, as chapter 6 discussed. Yet it also demonstrates the contested and contradictory terrain of legality for local governments in which nearly identical policies were ruled illegal when implemented according to political arguments about improving quality of life and its contribution to broader redistributive aims, but perfectly legal when transport economists showed the economic development benefits of efficient public transport (Mackintosh, interview, November 2018). The obviously partisan nature of the judges' comments helped the left to see the flexibility of legal argument, and meant they could seize on contradictions and loopholes in the judgements to ultimately justify the policy. In the process, activists learned that despite suffering heavy defeats, remaining in office held some scope for increasing their capacity to resist and begin to establish an "alternative state machinery" (*Briefing*, March 1982b: 3). Section 7.4. below further discusses this relational expansion of legal leeway.

7.3. Financing GLC policy

The second major source of political autonomy and constraint for the GLC was finance. Traditionally, local government finances are divided into revenue spending and capital spending. Revenue spending funds everyday services and overheads, and can only be financed by local taxes, charges (e.g. fares or rents), or grants. Capital spending, for long-term projects and one-off expenses like land purchasing or new construction, is typically financed by borrowing or sales receipts that cannot be used for any other expenditure (Cochrane, 1993; Stoker, 1991). In the 1980s, much of UK local government's resource base for revenue came from 'rates', the name given to local property taxes. In an otherwise highly centralised political system, rate-setting was one of the few elements of autonomy left to local government. Councils were somewhat limited, however, by having no control over the valuation process, and as of 1981 the most recent valuation had been in 1973, with high inflation making most properties substantially undervalued (Egan, 2001; Jones and Stewart, 1985). Control was traditionally

exerted from the centre by restricting the type rather than the quantity of expenditure (Carvel, 1984; Wheen, 1985).

7.3.1. Thatcher tightens the financial straitjacket on the GLC

Although efforts to force reductions in local government spending were begun by previous Labour governments (Boddy, 1984), the Conservative government from 1979 sought to radically change the balance of power and constrain the total quantity of local government spending, especially in higher-spending Labour councils which it saw as profligate and contrary to principles of free enterprise (Butcher, et al., 1990; Cochrane, 1993). This strategy was pursued in two rounds. The first, between 1979 and 1981, featured withdrawal of central government funds that supplemented local rates such as Rate Support Grants (RSG) and other grants to match local needs. This helps to understand why the scope of action available to the GLC was highly constrained from the outset. The second, launched from 1983, concerned more detailed intervention in determining acceptable rate levels.

In total, central government grants comprised 51% of GLC expenditure in 1980 (Carvel, 1984; Egan, 2001). Cuts would force councils into a choice between unpopular rates rises or cutting spending. However, simply cutting grants across the board would likely mean counterbalancing rates rises in many Conservative-run councils already operating at near-minimum service standards, so to prevent potential embarrassment for a Conservative Party pledging to reduce taxation, the Minister responsible, Michael Heseltine, devised a compromise mechanism called a ‘block grant’ (Stoker, 1991; Boddy, 1984). This withdrew grants from high-spending councils only, calculated according to a Grant Related Expenditure Assessment (GRE) that estimated service level needs for each authority, marking “a radical switch by central government from concern with total levels of spending towards detailed intervention in the affairs of individual councils” (Carvel, 1984: 112). Councils spending at the GRE could set an ‘average’ rate and government grants would make up the difference, but spending higher than 110% of GRE tilted the scales, withdrawing grants in proportion to the increase (Carvel, 1984; Stoker, 1991). This was designed to strongly disincentivise spending higher than the government-fixed GRE by more than doubling the effective cost to ratepayers of any additional spending, since rates would not only have to fund the full cost but also cover the forfeited grant.

The same legislation – the *1980 Local Government, Planning and Land Act* – also sought to restrict capital spending, introducing cash limits within each financial year, with block allocations of spending permission. This created a system whereby councils borrowed relatively freely from investors, but their capacity to spend that money was constrained by a system run by central government (Stoker, 1991). Local authorities could also spend from trading profits and asset sales, but the latter was restricted to just 20% of receipts. These controls proved relatively effective, so much so that by 1982 the government began to worry about the impact on the construction industry, and created a ‘mini-boom’ of housing improvements by asking councils

to increase capital spending; although limiting expenditure shortly became a priority again (Stoker, 1991).

7.3.2. The GLC evades the government's controls

As discussed in chapter 6, however, the GLC was in a relatively unique financial position, giving it some leeway to evade these controls. It also found an unlikely ally in the city's financial sector. John McDonnell (interview, August 2018), chair of finance until 1985, describes the respect the City had for Maurice Stonefrost, the GLC's finance comptroller (later Director-General) as a competent financial advisor. The leadership used him as a conduit to meetings with the CBI and Chamber of Commerce, with the result that the GLC was able to access borrowing at a cheap rate, on the strength of London's tax base and capital assets. As McDonnell argues,

> "what we were trying to do then is make sure that they didn't incorporate us, we incorporated them to a certain extent … it is about ensuring that you understand the nature of the state and the role of the state and the effective way of delivering policy via that state" (McDonnell, interview, August 2018).

Perhaps surprisingly, financial actors within the City helped the Livingstone GLC administration develop creative accounting measures to evade the government's capital controls, such as deferred payments, juggling spending between financial years, and capitalising expenses such as housing repairs to spread the cost (Lansley, et al., 1989). Consequently, despite the government's controls, the GLC's net capital expenditure grew by 11.5% from 1981 to 1985 (Table 4).

Table 4 GLC Revenue and Capital Expenditure 1981-1985.

	Net revenue (£ million)	**Net capital (£ million)**
1981/82	1179.2	358.5
1982/83	1301.3	333.8
1983/84	714.1	386.0
1984/85	820.8	476.7
% Growth (adjusted for inflation)	-41.6	11.5

Source: Adapted from GLC Annual Abstract of Greater London Statistics, 1984-85 (LMA/R/IU 1986).

Heseltine, increasingly convinced he was being undermined by a handful of 'extremists', devised yet another new system that would let him impose his will on individual councils (Carvel, 1984). A proposed bill for November 1981 would require a special request for any rates levied above a spending level acceptable to the government, to be approved by a local referendum. The financial consequences would have changed the political calculation of the left GLC's manifesto, "drawn up on the basis that the community as a whole, including industry and commerce, should contribute to the cost of providing services" (*Labour Herald*, October 16 1981), and making it now seem impossible to implement. However, in November 1981, Heseltine withdrew his bill under pressure from Conservative backbenchers, who feared the prospect of referendums becoming an ordinary part of British politics (Carvel, 1984; Duncan and Goodwin, 1988). He instead introduced a new bill which banned supplementary rates and precepts, in keeping with the Law Lords judgement on LT fares, thereby preventing councils from raising revenue during a financial year (Carvel, 1984; Stoker, 1991).

More decisive was the decision on *Fares Fair* two days before the bill's withdrawal, which entirely transformed the financial situation. The requirement to double fares meant the GLC could keep its other spending commitments within the constraints of the block grant system without being drawn into an immediate confrontation over finances. The cost of the fares package had not only been paying for reduced fares, but also service expansions, the loss of block grant, and a large shortfall for London Transport from Cutler's last budget (Wetzel, interview, October 2018). Declaring supplementary rates illegal also meant the fares rise, to take effect in March 1982, needed to pay for a rates refund. But this effectively meant six months of cheaper travel with nobody paying for it, leaving LT with a deficit of £125million.

The GLC's finance director, Maurice Stonefrost, refused an offer from the Transport Secretary to arrange for LT to borrow the £125m on a five-year term, not only finding it unconscionable to breach the central rule of local government finance – that it cannot borrow to cover current expenditure – but also concerned it would trap the GLC into indebtedness, since repayments and interest would both count as 'overspending' and contribute to grant penalties (Carvel, 1984). Instead, Stonefrost argued the £125m should be covered immediately by the rates in the 1982/83 budget. This was a particularly fortuitous financial decision, because a rate rise to cover the shortfall, as well as the anticipated loss of almost all government grant and with contingencies in case the last was withdrawn, were all costs that would not recur in future years, making significant expenditure available from 1983 with no need for additional rate increases (and in fact allowing a small rates cut of 6% in 1984 without sacrificing any policy objectives) (Carvel 1984).

Unlike the Labour GLC of the mid-1970s, and many other Labour councils, the left GLC had gotten past the 'pain threshold' of the rates relatively easily, while the Law Lords episode had strengthened the unity of the Labour group against a hostile central government, despite the political differences it exposed. Meanwhile, government grants had already dropped from 51% of GLC income in 1980/81 to just 18% by 1982/83, after which budgeting to account for the

complete withdrawal of grants meant the government could no longer penalise GLC spending (Boddy, 1984; Egan, 2001). Despite a scaled down programme for 1982/83, when only £40m was available, the GLC had significant funds available from April 1983, with £125m on the books for the 'Balanced Plan' of cheaper fares (£81m), a big increase in the Women's Committee budget (from £1m to £7m) and an expansion of GLEB funds (by £30m), all with no new rates increases and after adjusting for inflation. The counterproductive consequence of the hostile Law Lords decision has that the GLC was able to more or less escape from the government's system of financial controls (Carvel, 1984; Livingstone, 1987).

This spending capacity was compounded by the wider effects of Conservative government policy on the economic conditions of London, with increasing city centre land values expanding the GLC's rates base. As one officer explains, although the City's 'big bang' happened around the time the GLC was abolished, "it was already go-go years … so the rateable value of city property was shooting up" (Marris [GLC Story], 2017). With rates set to pay for one-off costs, "and far higher rates coming in from the city offices than they'd ever expected to get", the GLC "had more money than we knew what to do with" (Marris [GLC Story], 2017). Thus, although income from rates was limited by the lack of a recent valuation, amounting to an annual 3.7% decline of real rateable values between 1981-1986, GLC and ILEA rate revenues increased from £2.12 billion to £3.91 billion from 1980-1985, a 6.3% increase even after inflation and loss of grants (Egan, 2001; LMA/R/IU 1986). Another officer at the time noted that one outcome of this unexpected glut of money was the capacity to significantly increase spending on smaller radical projects (Finch [GLC Story], 2017). Some committees even struggled to spend their allocated budgets, especially in the new programmes implementing large and complex projects from "a standing start" (LMA/R/PC 1983).

7.3.3. The government introduces rate-capping and abolishes the GLC

The second major round of central government squeezes on local government finances was launched in 1983. With its strategy of funding withdrawal circumvented, the government shifted to direct intervention in determining rate levels. By 1983 the GLC's £867m budget was 53% over government targets and 86% over GRE, the widest margin of budget defiance of any local authority. County Hall accounted for over half of the national £770m 'overspend' (although this only represented about 0.5% of total council expenditure) (Stoker, 1991). Yet, as many at the time pointed out, this spending 'excess' was more about poorly (or deliberately punitively) calibrated targets than profligacy, especially because GRE assessments and related targets grossly underestimated the level of service need in poorer urban areas, especially London (Butcher, et al., 1990).

Despite most Whitehall officials warning the GLC could not possibly meet these targets, the Conservative 1983 election manifesto promised a new Rates Bill and rushed it through Parliament shortly afterward (Carvel, 1984). The *1984 Rates Bill* introduced 'rate capping',

giving the government power to determine a legal maximum acceptable rate in individual councils. The first published list named 18 authorities to be rate-capped from 1985/86, including the GLC, ILEA and 11 London boroughs – all but two Labour-led. Several councils were added and removed from the following two years' lists, including the variety of residuary boards from the abolished GLC and metropolitan county councils, before the heavily punitive *Local Government Act 1988* abolished local rates altogether and replaced them with the 'poll tax', eventually leading to Thatcher's resignation (Egan, 2001; Stoker, 1991).

The introduction of rate-capping coincided with the Conservative government's plans to abolish the GLC entirely. As early as the left's victory in 1981, the Conservative cabinet had been discussing the possibility of abolishing the GLC, and it became a 'last minute' addition to the 1983 general election manifesto (Duncan and Goodwin, 1988; Stoker, 1991; Ward, interview, July 2018). The government published its abolition White Paper 'Streamlining the Cities' in late 1983, the first step of which was the abolition of London Transport and its replacement by a new quango, London Regional Transport (LRT), under the direct control of the Transport Secretary, which took effect with the passing of the government's abolition Paving Bill in June 1984. LRT was a prototype of the kinds of boards that would take over other GLC responsibilities – the provision of transport itself would not be fundamentally different, but would be removed from democratic local control. The stated purpose was to cut public spending, but it was initially unclear how it would do so, as ministers simultaneously argued fares need not rise (Wheen, 1985). With the GLC's eventual abolition in 1986, remaining responsibilities were either divided between local boroughs and new statutory boards, or abandoned altogether.

7.3.4. Left resistance reverts to old habits and falters

Coming just one year prior to the GLC's abolition, which itself was beginning to appear impossible to prevent, rate-capping was much harder for the left to circumvent or resist. This was partly due to the government's closure of legal loopholes, pushing resistance more into the realm of 'all out defiance' (McDonnell, interview, August 2018). The campaign itself was also intrinsically weak. In relation to the GLC's scope for autonomy, the key battle for the left proved to be whether to implement creative accounting and use of reserves – which could maintain expenditure and even go for modest growth – or, because the GLC's was the first authority legally required to set its 1985 budget, to plant a flag for defiance and accept the risk of surcharge for the sake of the national campaign. The true financial situation (shared by some other but not all rate-capped councils) meant that councillors were in effect being asked to risk surcharge simply to fight the spirit of the law, rather than to directly protect jobs and services (Lansley, et al., 1989), rendering it a relatively weak argument except to a small minority intent on forcing a confrontation with central government. The argument was complicated by the GLC's large reserves – controversial because using them would imply acceptance of the fact of abolition and arguably undermine the case against it (McDonnell, interview, August 2018).

Thus, the main dividing line was over illegality, but to some extent this obscured a conflict over whether the campaign's aim was to defeat the legislation or to circumvent it. The 'soft' left hoped for a "dignified retreat" (Lansley, et al., 1989: 41) from illegality if some concessions could be extracted but largely kept quiet, meaning the overwhelming framing of the campaign was that it aimed to defeat the legislation – and in some ambitious texts, the government – in concert with a wave of popular mobilisation and industrial action that never proved forthcoming. Thus Lansley, et al. (1989: 38) suggest that almost everyone knew they were maintaining a fiction: on the one hand, that all but a few hardliners would follow through on the personal legal risks they faced, and on the other, that "a handful of councils could take on the might of Mrs Thatcher and win".

Instead of looking for ways to expand autonomy within the constrictive terms of the state form – in keeping with some of the GLC's earlier capacity to craft scope for policies and room for manoeuvre (even if that often relied on fudging between pragmatism and resistance, where contingency and happenstance substituted for a more worked out political arrangement and strategy) – the hard left (in both GLC and other councils) had imagined its way out of the contradictions it faced. It both miscalculated the level of popular power it could bring into being and underestimated the government's determination – already clear from abolition – to subdue radical local government. The more conciliatory majority, meanwhile (which came to include Livingstone shortly before the decisive budget meeting), had been stranded by their lack of frankness, realising too late that no concessions would be made and thus reaching the budget deadline with no ready alternative. The outcome was that creative accounting measures were framed not as evading government controls but as "ducking the fight with government by cooking the books" (McDonnell memo to Livingstone, October 1984, quoted in Lansley, et al. 1989: 40). In the event, rate-capping had limited impact on the GLC's financial position, because it could use its reserves and some accounting tricks to budget for £30m growth (eventually rising to £150m) with a rate 10% lower than the maximum (MDR/GLC Labour Group, 1986).

Thus in a broader sense, neither the strategy of creative accounting nor the more 'hard-line' of resistance and illegal budgeting "managed to escape from the parameters laid down by the definitions of the possible enshrined in the professional practice of local government treasurers" (Clarke and Cochrane, 1989: 53). As Clarke and Cochrane (1989: 56) argue, "financial rules are not 'innocent' abstractions but carry with them important political messages", determining what is significant. An important political implication they draw out is that radical projects within local government should not use systems of signification like accounting without fundamentally challenging them and exposing how they are not merely technical – and thus reliant on simple financial expertise – but actively shape values.

Nevertheless, although the in-fighting and personal recriminations within the GLC left that followed the 1985 budget meeting were significant – to some extent becoming the primary frame for left commentary on the GLC (see e.g. Atkinson, 1995; Seyd, 1987) – my analysis

suggests that the episode was an outlier in terms of the left's broader strategic approach to legality. The key lesson of the rate-capping campaign in terms of this chapter's themes of constraint, reflexivity and autonomy was the left's failure to adapt to the material terms and contradictions of being 'in and against the state', and to substitute a millenarian faith in popular mobilisation and a nebulous sense of forcing a crisis (which largely had little practical-strategic relation to their position within the state form) for negotiating those contradictions. By contrast, the following two sections discuss ways the left engaged more practically on the terrain of legality and contested policy in ways that expanded its scope of action.

7.4. Expanding relative autonomy through imaginative legal activism

Over-emphasis on constraints can obscure creative moments of agency and contestation – indeed it is often the action of contestation itself that makes such structural constraints visible and meaningful (Painter, 2006; Newman, 2014a). Bob Jessop's (1990) sophisticated 'strategic-relational' approach to state theory outlined in chapter 2, for example, argues that structure never wholly contains action, and attention to the relational dialectic between structure and agency can move beyond the limits of separating them out into dichotomous poles. In Jessop's perspective,

> "...structural constraints can only be meaningfully defined in relation to specific agents pursuing particular strategies … the scope for agency (and thus power) is itself constituted in and through the operation of structures as well as strategic conduct. In this sense structures can prove facilitative as well as constraining and will affect different forces differentially" (1990: 250).

Thinking state institutions in this way allows a conceptual shift from structure to process, offering a conceptualisation of the *state in motion*, driven by both scalar restructuring and political contestation, constantly "reworked and remade in ways that shift the balance of power across institutions and scales" (Routledge, et al., 2018: 79). As the legal and financial battles and outcomes of Fares Fair demonstrate, processes of centrally-led restructuring and local contestation both constrain and make possible each other's field of action, and show how the outcomes of conflicts between political energies can never be assured (Egan, 2001; Newman, 2014a).

7.4.1. Favourable interpretation of legal powers

In the GLC, creative engagement with existing structural constraints provided the foundation for some of NUL's policies. George Nicholson, GLC councillor and chair of Planning from 1983, recalls the chief executive of Southwark council delivering "an enormous list" of GLC powers that could be used to help the borough, and revealed "we had an enormous range of powers that

had never been used" (interview, October 2018). Section 137(1) of the *Local Government Act 1972* was especially useful, because it granted the GLC the expansive power to spend the product of a 2p rate across London for anything "which in its opinion is in the interests of Greater London or any part of it or all or some of its inhabitants, for a purpose which is otherwise not statutorily authorised" (pa. 137.1). Whereas with transport and housing, the statutes that established the GLC's powers also provided the legal basis for their restriction, the advantage of Section 137 was its ambiguity and scope – the GLC was within the law to selectively interpret the interests of "all or some" Londoners, so long as it could be shown to have properly consulted with legal opinion, and provided they were not regulated by existing statutory powers (Sharman, interview, July 2018; Bunyan [GLC Story], 2017; Bellos [GLC Story], 2017). It thus provided the legal basis for expenditure on each of the new committees that had no existing statutory standing and over which central government had no means of exerting control, including the grant-aid programmes administered by Women's, Ethnic Minorities, Police, Arts and Recreation, and other committees, and the investments of GLEB (Egan, 2001).

In addition to Section 137, the left favourably interpreted several other statutory powers that had previously been narrowly defined. For instance, significant expenditure on campaigning and publicity was enabled by two legal provisions. One was Section 142 of the 1972 Act, which gave the GLC permission to provide or assist the provision of information about services, voluntary organisations, and "other information as to local government matters affecting the area" (*Local Government Act 1972*, pa. 142.1). This allowed the GLC to produce a torrent of newspapers, reports, pamphlets, and books explaining its policies and positions or serving as popular resources. As an example, the 384-page *London Women's Handbook* (GLC Women's Committee, 1986) was the first publication of its kind to comprehensively catalogue services and campaigns for women in London. Others, like the newssheet *The Londoner*, presented a more direct propaganda effort, outlining GLC initiatives and explaining their political rationale. Although rather more circumspect in its language than organs like *London Labour Briefing*, *The Londoner*'s publication was sufficiently political to be condemned by Conservative councillors as "little more than an organ for propaganda" (LMA/PR/681, 754; Whitehouse, 2000). Other single-issue magazines and newssheets like the Industry and Employment Unit's *Jobs for a Change* and *Enterprising London* helped spread awareness of the GLC's policies and their relation to the urban crisis of capitalism, as well as advertising the availability of GLC grants. It also enabled the spending on festivals and awareness campaigns such as those against racism and nuclear weapons, as mentioned in chapter 6 (and sections 7.5 and 8.2 below).

Another legal provision was Section 71 of the *London Government Act 1963* (which created the GLC), incorporated with the same wording as Section 141 of the *Local Government Act 1972*. It allowed the GLC to "conduct, or assisting in the conducting of, investigations into, and the collection of information relating to, any matters concerning the county or any part of" it and with making such information available to the public (*Local Government Act 1972*, pa. 141.1).

The GLC was thus able to resource significant research programmes, expanded to include forms of 'action research' on issues like policing, housing and homelessness, as well as funding for external research organisations (Egan, 2001; Bunyan [GLC Story], 2017). The spending implications of each of these clauses helped insulate the GLC from the government's assault on local authority expenditure and from judicial interference (Boddy, 1984; Lansley, et al., 1989).

Similarly, Section 123 of the 1972 Act required the GLC to obtain market rent for leasing land or buildings, but the wording – "the best consideration reasonably obtainable" (*Local Government Act 1972,* pa. 123.1) – gave some leeway for defining this standard in accordance with the left's political aims. And while the *London Government Act 1963* required the GLC to set a market interest rate on loans, Section 137 of the 1972 Act empowered it to give grants to loan recipients for the purpose of repaying interest, effectively making loans interest-free and proving especially useful for GLEB spending (Egan, 2001).

7.4.2. New approaches to legal bureaucracy

However, although the left put much of its own effort into finding justifications for its policies, this process was closely entwined with recrafting relationships with lawyers and senior officers. The fact that the NUL was "totally different in ideology and approach" to previous GLC administrations was a source of alarm for traditional local government officers and legal officers, who were "desperately worried about powers in local authorities" (Sharman, interview, July 2018). The new forms of engagement with internal bureaucratic processes and the contestation of these relationships illustrates the importance of everyday 'prosaic' practices and relations to both structural constraint and political agency (Angel, 2021; Painter, 2006).

Ultra vires relies on demonstrating that a particular action is so unreasonable that no reasonable authority would take it, making consultation with lawyers an important part of demonstrating reasonableness. If an action is found to be illegal, the responsible politicians can avoid judicial sanction if they can demonstrate they received competent legal advice that supported their interpretation of that action as within the scope of their statutory authority (Egan, 2001). John McDonnell (interview, August 2018) stressed that after the defeat on *Fares Fair*, legal officers were determined not to suffer any further embarrassment, and so redoubled their efforts to ensure future policies were watertight. The building of these legal barricades was also important because of the climate of hostility from central government and their allies in local government and the press. Paul Marris, an officer in Arts and Recreation, explains that

> "…one of the reasons the legal department were so careful – because over the river, Lady Porter … extreme right-wing politician running the Westminster borough council … she had a section of her legal department scrutinising everything the GLC did waiting to pounce to prove that it was *ultra vires*" (Marris [GLC Story], 2017).

Under such scrutiny, it was important for GLC councillors and radical officers to develop their legal defences in a productive relationship with legal advisors. Firstly, this was about establishing the political authority of committee decisions and councillors' demands, rather than accepting contrary advice. George Nicholson explained that previously, GLC councillors had been "very passive…expected to be told pretty much what to do by [officers]. They rubber-stamped it. Well the [1981-86] GLC sort of turned that on its head." (interview, October 2018). Consequently, a lot of time for GLC councillors and officers was spent arguing with lawyers about funding and its legislative source: "… so you had a legal battle, a bureaucratic battle, and a sort of ideological development all running alongside each other, in which we were intimately involved" (Sharman, interview, July 2018).

At the most general level, the GLC left inverted the traditional relationship between local government policy and legal powers: instead of looking for what policies were possible within the scope of the law, they identified manifesto commitments and then sought forms of legal justification. This new process had to be established in relations with senior officers:

> "We would say to the finance officer don't tell me I can't do it, tell me how to do it. So we would want to do something and the finance person would say well you don't have the power to do this, you can only do this with section whatever it is of the Local Government Act or you could only do this with section – I said 'I don't need to know any of that, tell me which section I need to use to do it'" (Wong [GLC Story], 2017).

Secondly there was a learning curve for councillors and radical officers in how the processes worked within the legal bureaucracy and how to develop their legal and financial justifications in ways that would get reports signed off by the finance and legal departments. Maureen Mackintosh, an officer under Industry and Employment, explains how they had to develop the skill of reading legal reports:

> "You write something you want to do and you send it to the lawyer. Then there's a pause, then you get it back covered in red ink. Which if you read it one way says you can't do that. If you read it another way, says 'if you were to sort out all these things, maybe you could do it'. Learning to read a lawyer watching his back but essentially between the lines telling you what to do is a skill, which we all had to learn" (interview, November 2018).

Lastly, and most importantly was the recognition that the source of legal advice was fundamental because lawyers are not necessarily objective but have great leeway for interpreting the law according to political ideologies and preferences. GLC councillors explained that initially, they would go to hostile Conservative QCs, thinking that if they said an action was acceptable, it was surely watertight (Ward, interview, July 2018). But after the first year, they began to realise it was more productive to find lawyers prepared to advise policies were legal, and to give advice on strengthening the justifications for certain actions. One GLC

officer quoted by Egan (2001: 101-102) recalls hiring a left-wing barrister they knew, who deliberately attended meetings "at his stuffiest and most pompous". They go on to explain that

> "[y]ou don't have to be too deeply involved in critical legal studies to accept the fact that the law is a malleable tool that reflects the ideological battle at the moment … You just need somebody with a bigger stick" (quoted in Egan, 2001: 102).

As soon as this was understood, committee chairs were more careful to specify the lawyers consulted on important policies. Because the process of writing the policy brief and choosing a solicitor were powerful factors in shaping the resulting interpretation, it had to be pulled away from GLC officers' control. For example, Dave Wetzel recalls demanding the GLC legal team should find "not one of your fucking Tory barristers! I want a socialist who actually believes that we should win" (interview, October 2018). This internal pressure meant the chief solicitor found a cooperative barrister who eventually guided the GLC through the court approval of the 'Balanced Plan', a legal challenge from Westminster council, as well as a later challenge by the Freight Transport Association over the department's lorry ban.

> "…what he explained to me was, we're going to be attacked. … He said so what I want us to do, all your committee meetings between now and next year, we build our defences, we build our barricade. And then when they start throwing the stone balls at us, we're defended" (Wetzel, interview, October 2018).

With these lessons learned and combined, the process of legal consultation could even be productive rather than combative. Mackintosh notes that some GLC lawyers were accommodating of the left's approach and engaged constructively in explaining what to include and drop from reports and what their legal reasoning was: "And the result is a lot of stuff got done, that would otherwise have gotten judicially reviewed" (interview, November 2018). As Nicholson argues,

> "I always liked to have officers saying 'well you can't do that, or think about this, or maybe there's a better way of doing it'. That's kind of a creative relationship … to me that's when the GLC worked at its best, when first class officers were working with political ideas that had a strong basis, and collectively try to make them work" (interview, October 2018).

Accordingly, although these lessons had not yet been learned by the time of *Fares Fair*, the left's policies on the GLC were relatively well insulated from legal challenges; even though there were sometimes "torturous legal justifications" (Marris [GLC Story], 2017) the GLC could always demonstrate that it had taken its decisions reasonably and on the basis of sound legal consultation. This was especially true with spending under Section 137, meaning that some of the GLC's most controversial areas of policy like the grants programme never incurred legal sanctions.

7.5. New forms of leverage

In some instances, activists found their ability to develop institutional tools for intervention was limited, especially on issues beyond the scope of existing local government powers. Chapter 6 discussed the establishment of new spheres of interest, the use of campaigning and cultural interventions, and support for grassroots campaigning organisations, which can be seen as means to exert political leverage beyond the GLC's limited statutory powers. Yet new issues could also be brought into the sphere of influence exerted by GLC policy tools by expanding their legal capacity. Thorpe and Morgan (2022) argue that potentially transformative strategies are opened by creative engagement with forms of legality such as contracting, procurement, licensing, and planning that local governments exercise some control over. In the GLC, the strategic use of *non-compliance* and *withdrawal* provided some scope for developing new forms of political leverage beyond the traditional roles of local government.

7.5.1. Non-compliance on civil defence

One prominent example in the GLC of these new forms of political leverage was its non-compliance on Civil Defence planning. This refusal, marked by specifically withdrawing from defence exercises imposed by the government on local authorities in 1982, functioned as a rebuke to central state power. The notion of civil defence was argued to presuppose the possibility of surviving nuclear attack, an idea that lent itself to a more gung-ho attitude to the use, development, and maintenance of nuclear weapons (LMA/R/GLC, 1984; LMA/PR/189, 191, 413). In June 1982, London was formally declared a 'nuclear free zone', following Manchester in 1980, barring (or attempting to, by refusing compliance) the manufacture or transport of nuclear weapons or nuclear materials, and refusing permission for any new nuclear power stations (GLC, 1984; LMA/PR/157, 192). Funds the GLC received for civil defence were switched into a nuclear disarmament campaign, working closely with the CND (Figure 11), and the GLC also pursued other efforts including lodging complaints with a public inquiry over the siting of the Sizewell B nuclear reactor in Suffolk (LMA/PR/16, 106, 597, 639). The government's civil defence exercise 'Hard Rock', scheduled for the autumn, was postponed in July after nearly a third of councils, with CND involvement, voted for non-compliance (Arnold, 2017). In September 1982 the GLC Public Services Committee formally suspended civil defence preparations – maintaining the legal obligation "to only make plans" rather than maintain any level of readiness – and ceased maintenance of its four wartime control centres, instead opening three for public exhibitions and meetings (LMA/PR/423, 430). For Livingstone, the GLC's non-compliance alongside its sustained agitation on the issue meant the government was unable to resume its civil defence exercises "without revealing the truth about their plans" (1987: 233), which, indeed, were exposed with some GLC help (see Livingstone, 1987; Atashroo, 2017). This policy of non-compliance also represents an example of the GLC left's

willingness to muster policy moves to increase the leverage of its broader campaigning activities, which were the main focus of its anti-nuclear policy (MDR/GLC 1983; MDR/GLC 1985a).

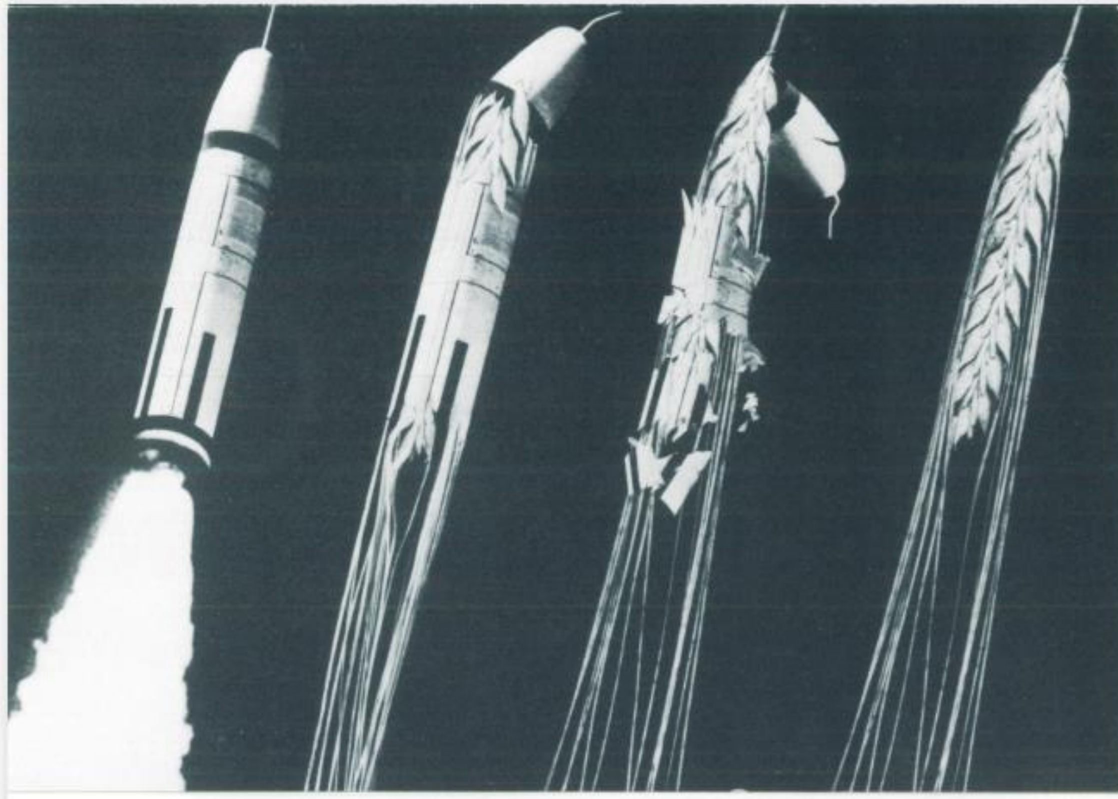

Figure 11 Target London No. 14. Peter Kennard postcard series.
(Source: MDR/GLC, 1985b)

7.5.2. Withdrawal and contract compliance

Another under-explored policy capacity the left drew on was the ability to demonstrate opposition and produce leverage by *withholding*, whether of purchasing, sub-contracting, land use, or other institutional involvements in local and global economies. For example, Cooper and Herman (2019) point to the strategic use of withdrawal – transecting with the non-state strategy of the strike or boycott – to gain political leverage beyond formal powers. Disrupting flows of capital has been well documented as a means of asserting social movements' power, but has rarely been articulated in the more quotidian terms of the policy compliance that local governance can secure. One example is a strategy of 'positive victimisation' devised by McDonnell to maintain capital spending: GLC capital budgets required approval from parliament, and when it refused the first year, McDonnell began threatening the withdrawal of GLC capital expenditure from Conservative parliamentary constituencies in London, which proved enough pressure to ensure it subsequently passed (McDonnell, interview, August 2018).

Another key use of (threatened) withdrawal was in contract compliance, structuring standards on, for example, wages and conditions or trade union rights into the GLC's Code of Practice,

which all external contracts were obliged to satisfy by Section 135 of the *Local Government Act 1972*. Through contract compliance in supplies, GLEB investments, and grant funding agreements, the GLC could pressure external firms and organisations to implement existing legislation on discrimination and health and safety, as well as basic working conditions like payment of a fair wage, written contracts, holiday entitlements, and protection from redundancy (GLC, 1986). Although relatively minor in the scale of London's economy, GLC contracting nevertheless involved £700m from 20,000 firms (GLC, 1986), making contract compliance a useful means of exerting influence in the private sector (Atkinson, 1995; Egan, 2001). It is difficult to judge the extent of this influence, but the GLC's ability to drop a third of its building contractors, according to Livingstone, "seems to really hit where it hurts – the CBI has screamed in protest and MPs have raised it in the House of Commons" (*Briefing*, July 1984b: 14). In this way, using the tools of divestment and withdrawal, the GLC could deploy the 'quasi-private powers' of choice in the marketplace to advance a social justice agenda where other policies had little leverage (Cooper and Herman, 2019; Cooper, 2020). A by-product of this capacity was that it could also open space for expanding public provision, for example by replacing building contractors with the GLC's own direct labour construction organisation, London Community Builders.

7.5.3. Boycotts for international solidarity

This tactic was also extensively used to support movements for change on non-local issues where local governments have no jurisdiction or statutory interest, especially where the left's political stance strongly contrasted with that of central government, such as on South Africa, Northern Ireland, or Israel/Palestine. In this sense, experimenting with contract compliance and withdrawal or withholding could be a means of expanding the territorial scope not only of local state interest but of action and influence (Cooper and Herman, 2019; Thorpe and Morgan, 2022). Strategies of divestment and boycott are especially apparent in the GLC left's campaigning against apartheid in South Africa, explicitly linked to support for campaigns like the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM). The GLC participated in the wider boycott movement from July 1981, instructing the Supplies and Contract Services Sub-committee to exclude all South African firms. However, only one contract from the department's £100m turnover involved South African goods (£19,000 on peach slices for the staff restaurant) (LMA/PR/248). In the run up to 1984's Anti-Racism Year, the Ethnic Minorities Committee drew up a more extensive 'anti-apartheid charter' that declared Greater London an 'Anti-Apartheid Zone', committing "the Council to taking specific action aimed at removing any links which council activities may have directly or indirectly with Apartheid South Africa" (MDR/GLC, 1983). The charter set out a range of practices to be pursued as part of the boycott strategy, including withholding all investments (and campaigning against companies with investments, such as Barclays and Natwest banks), ceasing any purchase of goods, withholding of any facilities (such as from sports or cultural events involving South African participants), discouraging the

advertisement of South African products in public sites like tube stations, and encouraging "the naming of streets and buildings after prominent opponents of apartheid" (LMA/PR/759).

However, other forms of withdrawal were difficult to implement, partly due to the difficulty of identifying which companies had more indirect South African interests, but largely because of legal limits. For instance, the GLC pension fund had a policy not to directly invest, but concerns were also raised by anti-apartheid groups about existing investments (*Briefing*, July 1982), including £10m of shares in Shell. The GLC was legally prevented from divesting, as McDonnell explained at the time:

> "The GLC is totally opposed to the racist policies of South Africa … the law governing our pension fund, however, does not allow us to make investment decisions on moral or political grounds – only for financial reasons" (LMA/PR/47).

McDonnell instead sought unsuccessfully to use his position as chair of Finance to table a motion at Shell's AGM, calling for it to reveal its rumoured trading activities in South Africa and Namibia (LMA/PR/47). This left the GLC only to pressure Shell in other ways, putting forward questions from the AGM floor and holding a press conference to explain its position (LMA/PR/297). The following week it similarly held a protest at the shareholder meeting of Rio Tinto Zinc, with whom the pension fund held £3m of shares, in protest at the company's mining profits from illegally occupied Namibia (LMA/PR/317). Being unable to divest legally, the GLC could nevertheless compensate by funding anti-apartheid campaigns, and used some of its institutional legitimacy to support ANC activists (Figure 12).

Figure 12 GLC anti-apartheid activities, 1985.

(Left: Livingstone speech in Trafalgar Square with Oliver Tambo and Jesse Jackson. Right: Bust of Nelson Mandela unveiled by Oliver Tambo, placed outside Royal Festival Hall. Source: Anti-apartheid Movement archive, https://www.aamarchives.org/)

Cooper suggests that on international and foreign policy issues, municipal policy tools were an example of 'glocalisation', helping to translate "locally materialising practices" into "global

connections and attention" (2020: 182; cf. Swyngedouw and Kaika, 2003; see also Kirby, et al. 1995). Ken Livingstone also drew this connection, arguing that the GLC's anti-apartheid activity "makes it clear that racism is not only a phenomenon in London" but "should be seen within a global context for the struggle for race equality" (LMA/PR/759). Such forms of 'subnational foreign policy' also present a wider challenge to a "settled state geometry" that restricts the territorial scope of local government interest, especially if dissenting from central state bodies (Cooper and Herman, 2019: 42).

7.5.4. Backlash to new municipal interventions

Consequently, however, municipal internationalism invited criticism over municipal over-reach and improper behaviour, which explains why political and legal reactions against such policy tools were particularly intense in the late 1980s and 1990s, with new legislation withdrawing discretion from local government and a several legal suits accusing councils of *ultra vires* action, often successfully (Cooper and Herman, 2019).

The institutional deployment of boycotts and non-compliance for municipal-level activism risked embroiling local authorities and the political tendencies they represent in messy questions of state power, coercion, and liberty. Building on 'free speech' narratives, the issue of revocation of previously available contracts, services, funds, or facilities over questions of approved political views strongly informed the right-wing backlash to 'loony left' policies (see Curran, et al., 2019; Hutchinson and Jones, 1988). For one minor example, when the GLC desisted grants for a church-based community centre because it was perceived to have failed on ethnic diversity commitments, this was drawn on to fuel arguments about its 'anti-Christian' bias (*Thames News*, 8 December 1983). This was especially fraught on the issue of equal opportunities policies, which sought to advance anti-racist and anti-sexist politics through their institutionalisation in codes of conduct, but faced criticism for over-reliance on coercive mechanisms to achieve broader societal outcomes, especially over the danger of associating radical left politics with the coercive tools of the state – that I revisit in chapter 8 on the issue of bureaucratic management (Gilroy, 1987; Sivanandan, 1990). Accordingly, although the expansion of legal capacities and crafting of new municipal tools can be useful extensions for popular power, they do not substitute for a wider hegemonic mobilisation of civil society, nor for the hard work of winning over ordinary people in a way that "genuinely addresses [their] real fears, confusions, the anxieties as well as the pleasures [and] tries to educate them to new conceptions of life" (Hall, 1994: 177).

Meanwhile, as the abolition of the GLC proceeded, its political latitude narrowed, as government legislation began expressly prohibiting a range of legal openings it had exploited. The *Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984,* which set out the process of abolition, mandated all GLC spending under Section 137 be approved by the Environment Secretary (MDR/GLC/Labour Group, 1986). Westminster City Council won a High Court injunction

against the GLC in January 1985 in response to the campaign against abolition, re-interpreting Section 142 of the *Local Government Act 1972* to contain no allowance for "any form of express exhortation by slogan" (quoted in Egan, 2001: 104). Legislation introduced after the GLC's abolition also retrospectively closed several legal openings that left councils including the GLC had exploited; such as prohibiting local authorities from publishing material that implies support for a political party, introducing compulsory tendering, and stricter controls over councils' decision-making in areas like sub-contracting and planning, turning them into quasi-judicial processes (Cooper, 1994).

Thus, although space could be created within the gaps and contradictions of law to pursue conflicting interests, these were ultimately closed by parliamentary sovereignty. Abolition of the GLC and the earlier removal of LT were not without political risks, prompting popular opposition against what seemed an unprecedented intrusion into (the principle, if not the reality of) local autonomy and democratic process. However, despite the GLC's publicity spend against abolition in its final year, this opposition never translated into a mass campaign, and it was difficult for the left to continue to resist or circumvent the legal constraints imposed by rate-capping and then abolition (Atkinson, 1995; Lansley, et al., 1989). Ultimately, the campaign against abolition merely made plain the lack of substantive local state autonomy; or rather, that the GLC's *de facto* autonomy was contingent on it not actually being exercised, and when tested at its limits, was revealed to have little *de jure* power. Yet much of the autonomy the left was able to exercise in the GLC was not a product of local governments' formal autonomy, but rather of its antagonistic and uncooperative relationship to central government and the judiciary, and of the deliberate negotiation and construction of alternative spaces and pathways of possibility; a constituent power emerging from social and political struggles and exceeding its formal constituted powers. In the final short section below, I therefore argue it constituted not 'relative' or 'local' autonomy but *reflexive* autonomy.

7.6. Summarising reflexive autonomy

Literature on radical municipalism, including on British municipal socialism, has typically viewed law as an external constraint, decisively blocking desired actions (Thorpe and Morgan, 2022). Moreover, the legal constraints faced by left governance have typically been analysed by state-critical radical scholars in straightforward terms that view institutions as cohesive actors and locate the disjuncture between political intentions and policy outcomes as a fixed function of the socio-structural contradictions of the capitalist state.

However, drawing on Jessop's (1990) socio-relational dialectic (Angel, 2021) and critical legal studies (Cooper, 2020; Morgan and Kuch, 2020; Thorpe and Morgan, 2022), we can see how the legal frameworks that underpin a capitalist economic model are in *tension* with radical political change rather than constituting a fixed external limit (Wright, 2010). The Conservative

government's successive legal and financial restrictions not only passively constrained the new left GLC, but were proactively exerted as ideological-political weapons to discredit left politics and minimise its reach. The GLC, meanwhile, deployed novel and unexpected powers often in creative ways that were not (yet) explicitly illegal because they had never previously been considered (Cooper, 2020: 182).

Thus although critical accounts of legality do not easily resonate with the street-level energies of citizen-led collective action (Thorpe and Morgan, 2022), contesting law in the context of municipal policy activism can positively feed into transformative social change. Despite the relative smallness of the municipal toolkit, this capacity points to limited means of bending the state apparatus against the capitalist state-form by exploiting the contradictions of urban governance (Rooksby, 2018; Russell, 2020). The back-and-forth between constraint and agency narrated above shows how, in the GLC, moving radical policies from conception to outcome was a contingent, contradictory process, strongly impacted by internal relations within the local state and how they influenced or responded to individuals, dispositions, and new forms of political thought, co-evolving with wider structural forces (Angel, 2021; Painter, 2006).

The degree of political leeway the NUL could construct in the GLC can therefore be characterised as a form of *reflexive autonomy*. This term avoids the implication that any *de facto* legal autonomy attaches to the spaces of local government, and rests within the framework of Poulantzas' (1980) more structural conception of 'relative' autonomy. In particular, I use this term to emphasise the deliberate, creative, and responsive character of the forms of political agency constructed by the left in the GLC, as well as the fact that these actions and openings are continually, in turn, responded to by agents of the ruling class in the central state.

This concept draws on related strands to theoretical ideas of reflexivity: epistemologically, it refers to a circular relation of cause and effect, where relationships between forces are bidirectional rather than split into active and passive sides; sociologically, it emphasises how individuals and social collectives are capable of self-inquiry and adaptation (Ashmore, 1989; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Lynch, 2000). Reflexive activity is the opposite of habitual thought or action – a low level of reflexivity would mean being shaped by the social environment, a high level would mean enacting one's own norms and desires upon that environment. In critical legal studies, 'reflexive law' refers to the capacity for legal systems to allow a substantial zone of individual autonomy within general guidelines, and to flexibly refine themselves according to data transmitted from local experience (see Capps and Olsen, 2002; Dorf, 2003; Febbrajo, 2019). From the perspective of research practice, reflexivity acknowledges the political-normative dimension of any theoretical paradigm (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Synthesising these various definitions, *reflexive autonomy* figures as a mediating mechanism between structural properties and collective action; an expression of self-conscious and adaptive political agency, which also recognises the adaptive and proactive capacity of structural systems. It can also function as a normative term that values the creative expression and expansion of autonomy within otherwise highly structured environments.

This quality in the GLC can be identified in the creative navigation of constantly evolving constraints. Local state capacities were flexibly wielded to stake claims to wider spheres of interest and exert leverage for social change, rooted in a campaigning emphasis on expressing a self-assertive, democratic grassroots politics. Much of the left GLC's policy was not only characterised by an 'activist register' in terms of its willingness to assert a radical politics, promote causes, and represent broad political aspirations, but additionally by claiming or inventing new powers – both as a challenge to (new) constraints on its powers, and as means of exerting leverage beyond its existing reach. In this way, doing (local) state activism aims not only to recast urban society through radical policy interventions, but to unsettle and challenge fixed configurations of state power, both revealing the powers of statehood to be "emergent, contested and in flux" and reflexively engaging with the question of what local government can do for radical politics (Cooper and Herman, 2019: 43).

7.7. Conclusion

This chapter has offered a new framing of the GLC's experience of legality, which reveals the state as a terrain of contestation and possibility, wherein (albeit limited) institutional actions can collaborate with grassroots movements to channel radical projects through the state. Given its ever-narrowing legal and fiscal latitude, the degree of political leeway the GLC left was still able to establish is an important indication of the rewards of proactively reshaping internal relations and practices within local state institutions, flowing from an adaptive recognition of tactical openings and constraints (Egan, 2001). Accordingly, those activists with access to the 'inside' of the local state – whether as political representatives or workers – have a privileged role to play in the active maintenance of contestation and the cultivation and growth of internal spaces of opposition. Chapter 8 will now explore these relations and their contradictions in more detail.

Chapter 8
Activist state-work: antinomies of radical bureaucracy in the GLC

> "Because the state is a form of relations, its workers and clients, if they do not struggle against it, help to perpetuate it . . . Our struggle against it must be a continual one, changing shape as the struggle itself, and the state's response to it, create new opportunities." (London-Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 1979: 48-49)

8.1. Introduction

By exploring the interplay between macro-level structural constraints and the micro-level practices and relationships within the GLC bureaucracy, chapter 7 developed on conceptual themes of contingency and contestation to construct a concept of 'reflexive autonomy', which emphasises how elected members and radical staff were able to construct capacities to act despite the severe limitations of the capitalist state. This chapter expands on those insights by exploring the micro-level, everyday difficulties and contradictions of working within the local state faced by participants of the NUL. It situates the left GLC's policy programme and its negotiation of constraints in the context of a more quotidian project of state remaking, highlighting the internal dynamics of municipal activism in-and-against the established political cultures and practices of local government. To frame that internal approach, this chapter introduces a concept of 'activist state-work', drawing on Harney's (2002) conceptualisation of the state as a field of practical labour, and emphasising a range of particular and contradictory forms of subjectivity, practice, responsibility and accountability. The chapter develops this concept by reference to the quotidian experience of politicised officials and councillors in the GLC, whose activity blurred boundaries between political activism and professional labour. The practical negotiation of such forms of activist state-work – such as navigating contested workplace subjectivities and responsibilities, experimenting with new organisational forms, and distributing state resources to external movements – reveal forms of boundary-bridging between activism and statehood that highlight the potentially transformative dynamics within the labour of local governance. The unstable tightrope-walk between bureaucratic constraint and political agency at the nexus of state-work forms a key theoretical point of the overall thesis by helping to reframe the relationship between activisms 'in' and 'outside' the local state and in challenging the separation – in both theory and practice – between state and society in radical strategic thought.

The first section of this chapter, as a way of introducing the concept of activist state work, stages a debate between the more robustly structural critique exemplified by Gilroy (1987) and a perspective focused on contingency and contradiction, inflected by greater empirical detail of

the mundane aspects of state labour. To frame the latter, I introduce the conceptual basis of ‘activist state work’ in the work of Harney (2002), Painter (2006), and autonomist Marxism (Bonefeld, 2003; Charnock, 2010). The second main section then explores some of the NUL’s difficult encounters with the GLC bureaucracy and its efforts to open up the institution and invite in a broad constituency of social movements and community organisations. The longer third section then explores in more detail some of the specific contradictions of activist state-work, including the challenge of asserting forms of political control, ways of working against and with the established corps of officers, difficult experiments with prefigurative collective practices, and the potential of activist state-workers to undermine the power of the institutions they occupy.

8.2. Defining activist state-work

Returning to arguments made in the literature review in chapter 2, the notion of activist state-work advanced here seeks to reconcile an autonomist Marxist account of the state as a form of social relations with the autonomist view that capitalist crises pivot on the internal contradictions of the capital-labour relation. This reading directs theoretical attention to the ‘prosaic’ labour of state officials, which in turn demands revised historical accounts that approach state institutions as fragmented terrains where activists might undertake messy experiments not only in radical urban policy, but also in creating and exploiting ‘oppositional spaces’ within the local state (LEWRG, 1979; Clarke, 1991). First, however, it is necessary to identify the limits of more structuralist theoretical approaches to state-critical radical politics.

8.2.1. Beyond the structural logic of existing critiques

As chapter 2 argued, in state-critical radical theory, criticisms of ‘electoral’ strategies for achieving anti-capitalist social change routinely invoke the premise that it is the inherent quality of the capitalist state to neutralise any efforts to work ‘within’ its systems and attempt to turn its capacities toward radical ends. Critics like Holloway (2010) go further, arguing that the state context leaves its mark on activist movements who typically adopt reactionary and hierarchical forms of organising to adapt themselves to institutional work; while others have observed how using institutional coercive powers to achieve progressive ends easily invites resentment and backlash that damage movements more widely (Gilroy, 1987, 1990; Sivanandan, 1990).

Yet this perspective is based predominantly on an orthodox bifurcated reading of the state that separates it from entanglement in civil society while simultaneously deriving its structural and functional essence from the social relations of capitalism. While each criticism might have some general validity supported by historical observation, such perspectives leave little conceptual space for the contradictions and contestations that transect the state apparatus. In effect, they proceed from two unspoken premises: 1) they assume grassroots movements engaging with

power do so by approaching the state as a ‘thing-instrument’ of class power, while 2) criticising those movements by approaching the state as the omnipotent capitalist ‘Moloch-State’ and assuming any possibility of altering the state to be negligible – yet these are two sides of the same dead-ends critiqued by Poulantzas (1980). Consequently, they implicitly erase the possibility of alternative approaches to state power that base themselves on a relational and transformational approach to the state-form itself.

In this vein, left critics of the GLC have often overlooked the presence of a ‘bottom-up’ and social movement-inspired politics, largely reading the GLC as a cohesive actor explicable by reference to its policy outputs, and thus flattening an often-discordant internal politics. This position is compounded by the outward-facing appearance of the GLC, such as in its own publications, which by their nature present an ordered narrative of the GLC acting as a singular entity. As argued in chapter 6, critical assessments too often replicate this conflation of the institution and its occupants, reading the outcomes from a field of class struggle as unfolding according to a totalised systemic logic – while ascribing that logic to the left’s aims in government. In part, perspectives of this kind proceed from a fixation on political parties and electoral politics, which despite formal theoretical acknowledgement that much state power lies in the deepest recesses of bureaucracy, continues to dominate discussion of local government on the left. A widespread distrust of functionaries in managerial local states has not translated into recognising and researching their roles in setting and (un)settling political agendas; there is still “little understanding that political debates and political bargaining take place within the ‘machine’ as well as in the council chamber, committee rooms and party meetings” (Clarke and Cochrane, 1989: 36).

An example of this bifurcated approach is Gilroy (1987)’s critique of the GLC’s anti-racist posters and campaigning materials in terms of their political messaging. He highlighted a series of (unintended) discursive consequences and interpretations and argued the GLC failed to communicate an accessible or concrete strategy for combating racism. However, in extending this analysis to the programme and logic of what he calls ‘municipal anti-racism’ in general, Gilroy relied on a set of structural assumptions that omit key empirical details about the work of the Ethnic Minority Committee that pursued it. While Gilroy’s criticism of the published campaign materials themselves is forceful and persuasive, the narrow discursive focus of his textual analysis leads to some unkind conclusions: firstly, that through its posters and slogans, the GLC Ethnic Minorities Committee positioned itself as the only legitimate means of anti-racism, and secondly that for municipal activists (who saw events like the Brixton riots as the expression of an alienated and dispossessed urban underclass) the development of anti-racist policies and campaigns were merely a matter of political expediency, a “vehicle for the reincorporation of these marginal elements into the rituals of the political system” (Gilroy, 1987: 180). By expanding a textual reading to a critique of the GLC’s anti-racism as a whole, Gilroy offered only a selective evidence base consisting of final outcomes, rather than

investigating the practices, discussions, negotiations, planning and responses (that is, the *social labour*) that underpinned them.

Closer examination of the circumstances behind the GLC's advocacy strategies undertaken for this thesis reveals a far more complex picture of contingencies and constraints experienced at the level of 'everyday' state bureaucracy. Much of the anti-racism campaign's output was shaped by participants in a series of large-scale consultative conferences (LMA/R/EMC 1982; LMA/PR/125, 221), and driven by a diverse range of participants – often with little input and interference from elected Labour members – including, for example, a sub-committee for the GLC's 'Anti-Racism Year' comprised mostly of co-opted members from activist organisations outside the GLC (*Briefing*, July 1984b). That sub-committee in turn invited campaigns, community groups and individuals to form more independent working groups – such as the Anti-Deportations Working Group (MDR/ADWG, 1986) with an open and fluctuating membership and just one GLC officer liaising between it and the Ethnic Minorities Committee. Meanwhile, the Ethnic Minorities Committee's grants budget, which dwarfed its publicity budget, distributed funds to ethnic minority and anti-racist projects, based on an explicit effort to support existing radical black activisms (LMA/R/EMC 1983). In an interview with *Briefing* (July 1984b: 13), Livingstone provided a contextualised account of the problems with the posters, noting that the first batch ("dire in my opinion") was rushed because an initial commission to the GLC's retained advertising agency was withdrawn when it was taken over by a company with South African subsidiaries, as part of the GLC's anti-apartheid stance. No black-owned agencies could be found to take over, and the white workers' co-operative that finally received the contract had too little time to consult. That agency was then subject to strong criticism from the Ethnic Minorities Committee's members, who withdrew the first batch of posters, rejected the co-operative's next set of new ideas, and responded to external pressure by pressing for "a harder message" that moved beyond individual racism to take up the issue of "state racism as well" (Livingstone, *Briefing*, July 1984b: 13). Although Gilroy (1987) was also critical of those 'harder messages', these contextual details evidence a richer texture of anti-racist activism internal to the GLC than Gilroy's account, despite working at the GLC himself as a researcher monitoring the Metropolitan Police – another form of grounded and largely autonomous anti-racist activism.

Atashroo (2017), noting the absence of such contextualisation from Gilroy's account, suggests that structural critiques that restrict scope for political agency are likely to lead to conclusions that unfairly and un-empirically conflate intentions and outcomes. Thus Atashroo (2017) criticises Gilroy's approach for framing contingent outcomes as the reflection of a cohesive institutional logic, misreading unintentional failures regarding phrasing slogans and designing posters as representative of a wholly disingenuous exercise in co-opting social movement energies. Even if Gilroy's critique perhaps reflected a general scepticism among London's black radicals, without contextualising the most outward-facing outcomes in the everyday activity of decision-making in sub-committees and working groups, the fact of that perception becomes

proof of the 'inside' radicals' insincerity. Atashroo (2017) points out that this discursive position has likely strongly influenced subsequent perceptions of the GLC, especially given the intellectual status held by Gilroy in the British left. Situating outcomes outside of their political context

> "holds up the failed campaign as indisputable evidence that all of the GLC's claimed attempts to listen to and develop appropriate policy to serve London's black British communities were a wholly empty endeavour" (Atashroo, 2017: 181).

There is, therefore, a pressing theoretical need to move beyond the limits of structural (and surface-level textual analytical) accounts, to explore their contextual gaps, and to bridge the realms of state and labour. To begin with, that means situating the internal dynamics of the GLC left in relation to social movement practices, rather than as part of an overarching institutional logic. This shifts analytical focus beyond an account of the local state as a singular and coherent agent, and toward one as a terrain of contestation. Moreover, accounting for those contingent internal politics requires an adjustment of scale and scope, moving from the overall edifice of the GLC to the spaces of everyday labour within it.

A new conceptual perspective of this kind is invited by recent municipalist scholarship, which pushes beyond a view of states acting progressively to refocus on the relational engagement of social movements and activists in local government (Angel, 2021; Russell, 2020). In this view, policy outcomes do not necessarily match the political aspirations and efforts behind them, but reflect forms of political struggle internal to the local state. However, new municipalist literature has not yet developed new state-theoretical approaches, with only some writers putting the movements' emphasis on grassroots democracy into conversation with radical theories of the state (Angel, 2021; Bianchi, 2018). Those tentative steps suggest that refocusing concepts of (radical) municipal statehood on the quotidian experience of labouring in the state offers an opportunity for more deeply exploring the dynamics of structural constraint and transformative politics. Municipalist scholarship has also not yet drawn clear parallels with prior histories of the urban left in government. Recent work on the GLC's cultural politics has begun to reappraise and excavate its internal dynamics (notably Atashroo, 2017 and McFadzean, 2021). My aim here is to furnish those practical experiences with a theoretical framework, expressed by the concept of 'activist state work'. The account below puts municipalist insights, often shaped by an emphasis on quotidian practices and prefigurative politics (Angel, 2021; Cooper, 2020; Roth, et al., 2020), into conversation with an autonomist Marxist reading of the state as a set of social relations structured by capital (Bonefeld, 2003; Hardt and Negri, 1994).

8.2.2. The conceptual basis of activist state-work

The concept of activist state-work builds on Stefano Harney's innovative conception of state work, which is concerned with theorising the labour that underpins the creation and persistence

of the state, and exploring "the mutual insinuation of state and workplace in both subjectivity and politics" (2002: 7). Harney's auto-ethnographic account of working as a midlevel manager for the left-wing Ontario government's anti-racist secretariat in the 1990s provides a useful corrective to Gilroy, from a very similar subject positionality. Harney (2002) suggests that despite its centrality to anti-capitalist theory, labour is conspicuously absent from the metaphysics of the state. But labour is the world-making activity internal to the state, the everyday "practices and techniques" that produce the outcomes we assign to its "ghost-like abstraction" (Mitchell, 1999: 89). This gives some materiality to Poulantzas's notion of the state as a field upon which class struggle takes place. Harney (2002) notes this has usually been interpreted to mean the state internalises and condenses struggles over resources, meanings, and decisions 'out' in civil society – but, he asks, what if Poulantzas had considered "the materiality of this struggle as truly a field of labour?" (Harney, 2002: 10). What new possibilities surface if Poulantzas's concept of the state's 'institutional materiality' is defined as embodied practices and infrastructures that underpin and respond to wider forces of political economy – that is, as labour and production under capitalist conditions?

Emphasis on the state as a field of labour also resonates with Painter's (2006) concept of the 'prosaics of stateness', which emphasises the ways that state effects are deeply embedded in the ordinary fabric of everyday society, dependent on intertwined and mundane relationships between practices, persons, and organisational structures. For Painter (2006: 754), "Understanding states in terms of prosaic practices reveals their heterogeneous, constructed, porous, uneven, processual and relational character". Painter's (2006: 761) recognition that "the outcome of state actions is always uncertain and fallible" because they pass through myriad small and mundane actions of groups and individuals helps to explain "the gap between state institutions' claims about their effectiveness and their actual effects", which state-critical academic theory typically resorts to overly deterministic claims about. Here, the concept of state-work places labour at the nexus of the porous boundaries between state and society.

Harney's (2002) suggestion is that there is a certain uniqueness and frisson to labouring in the state, that casts it – perhaps alarmingly and counterintuitively – into the realm of desire and fantasy: not because the work represents will to domination, but because if the state is a social abstraction, an ideological projection of social forces structured by capitalism, then state work is the labour of producing that abstraction. In turn, it might be recognised that state work is the work of society, turned on itself – "a practice of society on society" (Harney, 2002: 5). Accordingly, conceptualising the state through labour highlights a certain instability, predicated on the contradictions of the labour-form itself.

The concept of activist state-work therefore also draws on autonomist Marxist theory (discussed in chapter 2). This conceptualises the inherent crisis of capitalism in two linked ways – de-fetishising the social relations underpinning the state-form and locating potential for anti-capitalist subversion within the labour-form – that inform a theoretical interest in exploring the internal dynamics and antagonisms of the labour within state institutions. As argued in chapter

2, while autonomist Marxist critics have a blind spot regarding the state in strategic approaches to social change, their theoretical foundations can be deployed to usefully reveal and problematize the unstable relations that transect state institutions. In particular, the autonomist recognition of labour as the internal crisis of capital (and thus also of the state-form) points to possibilities of social change that a reified view of state institutions would not be able to conceptualise (Charnock, 2010). Reincorporating the dialectical social relations that transect the state into political concepts (Bonefeld, 2003; Charnock, 2010) demands inclusion of the internal contradictions within the practical labour of state work, experienced at the level of everyday acts of contestation. In this sense, the instability of labour relations creates potential for political progress and disruption, latent in the dramatism and dynamism inherent to working the borders of bureaucratic constraint and social agency (see Newman, 2014a). Because the state is not independent of wider social relations, the labour that produces the state also potentially drives the crisis of the state and governability.

Developing on this theoretical basis, as well as the emphasis in chapter 7 on reflexivity, my concept of *activist state-work* refers to proactive attempts to restructure the social relations internal to the state on a more progressive or radical basis. It represents the effort of state workers, conscious of their activist intent and mobilised by a set of values external to the state, to productively capitalise on the contradictions of government work. To that end, it is an effort to imprint radical politics on the state from the 'inside'. Here, it is important to emphasise the perspective of autonomy, which helps to conceptualise how activists' subject-positions as movement representatives or bureaucratic functionaries must be disambiguated but can also overlap and align. Autonomy in this instance figures "as a *contradictory* process marked by the contested relation within, against and beyond the state, capital, the law, policy and as *surplus activity* that cannot be subordinated to power" (Dinerstein, 2015: 10, original emphasis). Enacting an antagonistic politics within and against the state thus depends not only on the correct strategic and ideological trajectory of left policies, but on this 'surplus activity', which can be seen in the more everyday political dispositions and affects carried into, and sustained within, the state by representatives of the movement. It should be stressed, however, that this is a collective rather than individual endeavour. As the authors of *In and Against the State* argue, its potential depends on the extent to which it can create, and continually exploit and expand, an 'oppositional space' within the state, which while comprised of the embodied practices of individuals, represents more than individual social agency (LEWRG, 1979). Similarly, by implication of statehood constituting a 'practice of society on society', it is also necessarily relational, implying a deliberate erosion of the in/out divide – and thus it constitutes a form of labour with the potential (albeit only prospectively, and in the margins) to de- and re-compose statehood in terms that challenge and redistribute the social topography of power.

8.3. Working at County Hall: encountering the GLC bureaucracy

The NUL set out to reconfigure the GLC's internal socio-structural relations: as McDonnell (1984: 1) wrote while deputy leader, "[w]e sought to undermine the capitalist form of social relation by replacing it with a relation … [of] co-operation and democratic control". Chapter 7 has already discussed some of these attempts to reshape bureaucratic structures and relations. This chapter more directly explores the internal contradictions faced in the construction of these new relations, as radical councillors and allied staff members struggled to assert political agency within institutional bureaucracies. This next section describes the forms of relations encountered within the 'machine' of County Hall and the emergent conflicts over subject-positions and responsibilities in negotiating the spaces of power.

8.3.1. The legacy of municipal labourism

As chapter 5 explained, prior to the arrival of the NUL, a long tradition of 'municipal labourism' had held sway in local authorities under Labour control (Gyford, 1985). This was strongly influenced by Herbert Morrison's political style in the LCC, which formed the basis of the *Model Standing Orders for Labour Groups*. Morrison was adamant that local parties should not instruct Labour councillors, warning that councils should not be "marionettes whose actions ought to be decided in detail from outside" (quoted in Gyford, 1985: 4). He also opposed appointing officers on the basis of their political leanings, arguing this would encourage toadyism, and instead relied on trusting relationships with professional officers "eager to demonstrate their expertise in practical terms" as an effective complement to Labour policy (Gyford, 1985: 5). Consequently, by the 1960s, research into local authorities showed Labour majorities correlated with "short council meetings, few questions, few items referred back for reconsideration, low attendance of the public, less ready availability of council documents to the press, and restricted admission of the public to committee meetings" (Gyford, 1985: 8). Livingstone's description of the 1970s Labour GLC chimes with this:

> "At County Hall, chief officers worked to their committee chairs to the exclusion of mere committee members. Unless you were a member of a particular committee you could not even get a copy of the reports going to that committee without enormous time-wasting effort" (Livingstone, 1987: 50).

Labour groups in councils responded to an increasingly hostile political atmosphere by trying to maintain discipline in ways that sometimes led them to become "not merely secretive but also increasingly remote from those whom they sought to serve" (Gyford, 1985: 9). Moreover, without an explicit project of internal change, backed up by a political ideology to remake the state, even principled Labour politicians had often found it irresistible to adopt the existing ways of doing things, fitting themselves – and, ultimately, their politics – into the institutional norms,

rather than working to adjust those norms to conform to their own political mandate. As Livingstone (1987: 56) complained about the GLC,

> "Organizations the size of the GLC develop their own momentum and styles of operation and those in control usually try to slip into the established governing structures rather than recast them to conform to their own way of working".

Committee chairs with personal assistants and typists, separate offices on the exclusive Members' Floor, chauffeurs, and other perks, could all too easily

> "catch the infectious self-important air that pervaded the building and begin to think that just being there was an achievement in itself. After that it was easy to forget why you had been sent there in the first place" (Livingstone, 1987: 50-51).

One former GLC officer identified this as a "mixture of insecurity and control-freakery", suggesting that the parts of the Labour Party traditionally dominant in local councils are deeply invested in the existing structure and resistant to changing them, partly because "you think, we've won this, got to keep it – you know, if we start breaking it down it'll all go", and partly an attempt to reduce the spaces for more radical ideas and activists to operate (Sharman, interview, July 2018). Thus, although the left within the 1974-77 GLC made some small and gradual impacts on internal culture, such as getting Group meetings extended to accommodate more speakers (Livingstone, 1987), the NUL inherited a situation in which the shape of the institution actively inhibited expressions of socialist radicalism, both in terms of organisational structures, processes and procedures, and in terms of the working and political culture and atmosphere those structures produced and that had never been challenged.

8.3.2. Opening up the GLC to the social movements

An important element of the cultural change imported into the GLC by the NUL was an attempt to open the institution out to the wider community, including aligned social movements. Part of this strategy related to the bureaucracy. In contrast to the Morrisonian tradition at County Hall, the new left leadership consciously used existing structures to get more politically sympathetic staff into the system. For many of the new committees this was straightforward: entirely new departments to service new committees would both have the status necessary to effect change, and not need to rely on staff in existing departments, whose support might be equivocal. New support units were staffed largely with radicals, often recruited relatively directly:

> "I got a phone call and this woman said 'The GLC is advertising for outreach workers for the Women's Support Unit, and they're going to want black women, and they're going to want feminists, and you are a shoo-in. So I don't know where you are but get up.' So I applied for that job, and I got it" (Otitoju [GLC Story], 2017).

This initial round of recruitment was complemented by the development of new staffing policies, with the staff committee seeking to widen the GLC's employment base by advertising opportunities more widely, such as in Afro-Caribbean newspapers (Dawe [GLC Story], 2017). For many new staff, working at the GLC was an opportunity to bring their political commitments into their work life, seeing the new administration as congruent with their personal values and those of the social movements many had participated in:

> "It absolutely expressed my political beliefs. The Livingstone administration at the GLC was an expression of my political beliefs" (Parkin [GLC Story], 2017).

Straddling these overlapping subjectivities was an everyday reality for radical GLC workers; where the work spoke also to individuals' activist identities, it resulted in blurred boundaries between their own political commitments and their contracted work in urban administration.

> "... there were a lot of political activists working in the GLC so we probably wouldn't make a distinction between what was our job and what wasn't our job" (Finch [GLC Story], 2017).

This blurring of political subjectivity extended beyond state labour to other kinds of activism and voluntary labour, casting workers into "a whirlwind of political and politically motivated social activity", as a GLC community outreach worker vividly recounts:

> "I live in this sort of feminist bubble, nearly separatist ... I spend every waking minute working for women. Either paid work or voluntary work. Or lesbians and gay men, or black people. So I'm a living activist, I'm running from producing a newsletter to answering the phone at [London Lesbian and Gay] Switchboard to doing a shift at Women's Aid" (Otitoju [GLC Story], 2017).

The emphasis on 'bottom up' grassroots politics for many participants drove attempts to give institutional support to organisations in civil society, opening the local state to outside influence and developing a new and more two-way relationship between state and civil society (Gyford, 1985). This can be seen as a strategy of democratisation, hoping to bring movements into the local state and democratise the spaces of power. It included relatively minor structural changes: committee meetings opened to the public, meeting rooms available for campaigners to use, and in some cases bringing in 'co-opted' voting members on some committees to represent relevant social sectors (GLC, 1985b). For instance, in the Women's Committee, representatives from feminist campaigns, as well as specific representatives for lesbians and black women, were sometimes elected directly from the floor during public meetings (GLC, 1985b; Wainwright, 1987).

Perhaps more significantly was a broader cultural change to the image of the GLC, particularly around the uses of the GLC's physical spaces – opening County Hall for campaigning groups to use, and frequently using the spaces outside and nearby at Jubilee Gardens to welcome protest

marches and hold political festivals and rallies (Atashroo, 2019; Mackintosh and Wainwright, 1987; Williams, 2020). As an example, the first formal GLC Meeting after the 1981 election, on 28 May, at the same time as establishing the new committee structures, also voted to provide a welcome for the People's March for Jobs, which had arrived in London the same day (Figure 13; LMA/PR/195). Valerie Wise, tasked with planning a reception, commandeered camp beds intended for use in the event of a nuclear attack and organised "a very emotional welcome" in which "the building was transformed … it was as though the People's March had humanised the very building in which the GLC was housed" (Livingstone, 1987: 152). Wise echoed this feeling in a report for *Briefing* (July 1981), explaining that "[t]his was the first time that ordinary people had come in substantial numbers to the building … [it was an] incredible sight … The Civic Reception in the evening was completely different from any other reception held there before".

Figure 13 People's March for Jobs arrival in London, May 1981.
(Source: Getty Images)

Both the literature on the NUL and the reflections of its participants in interviews are flush with vivid descriptions of this generative atmosphere of openness and engagement. Several interviewees commented on the liveliness of committee meetings, the surge in public consultation meetings, and the lively general atmosphere of County Hall – especially during evenings when campaigning groups held meetings and events (Figure 14). In many cases GLC councillors and workers engaged with meetings and conferences held in County Hall but organised on a more autonomous basis, expressing a more liminal mode of activism at the border of state and street-level politics (e.g. MDR/'London as it might be').

> "…it became the People's Palace, it became a place where political activists, people would have meetings and all sorts of campaigns, you know the Palestinian Solidarity would have its meetings in the GLC, and it was open in the evenings ... the [striking] miners were practically living in the GLC, sleeping in bits of the building" (Parkin [GLC Story], 2017).

> "And every night, you know I'd joke about it but it's true, every night County Hall's committee rooms would be packed out … So it was just like a complete renaissance in terms of the discussion of ideas. It was just dynamic all the way through. Ideas were being thrown up all the time … creativity on a scale I don't think that we've seen for quite a while" (McDonnell, interview, August 2018).

This generative atmosphere of movement-building is summarised by Femi Otitoju ([GLC Story] 2017):

> "We're basically growing activists at this time. We're helping everybody grow up in a political way. It's lovely. We're helping people see that they can shape what their local authorities are doing, that they can be part of it. We're opening it up to working class people in a way that it hadn't been before, really".

Figure 14 County Hall Lobby, with anti-racist banner and exhibition, 1984.
(Source: Getty Images)

Here, building on Harney's (2002) attention to labour, the GLC experience shows how state work can manifest as political activism, not only by carrying out the work of a radical government but also by bridging abstracted state policies with everyday social activism on the 'outside'. For some, it also represented an understanding of the structural limits of acting only

'within' the state, part of a strategic acknowledgement that alliances with sources of countervailing power outside the state were necessary to push against institutional obstruction and concentrated power bases within the state (McDonnell, interview, August 2018; Wainwright, interview, May 2018). Others stress that this involvement of ordinary people in the political process was fundamental to the NUL's ideology:

> "It wasn't like a nice extra, 'ooh we've got an idea now we'll do a bit of consultation. Oh look, we let social movements support us, how nice!'... they were the root of what we were trying to do. … In a kind of, some would say idealistic view, we always believed you take the stopper out of democracy and with good coordination, leadership [and] sort of an ideological thing that you take it through with people … that I think is the sort of fundamental ideology that lay behind what we were doing." (Sharman, interview, July 2018).

This bridging between movement representatives within and outside the local state thus comprises an important component of activist state-work – discussed further in section 8.4.5. below.

8.3.3. Culture shock

Living such forms of 'role entanglement', however, entails a series of tensions and contradictions. The most immediate tension faced by the new left-wing staff embodying an ingrained disrespect for authority and institutionalised practices was the presence of existing and longstanding GLC bureaucrats and a highly regimented bureaucratic structure (Clarke and Cochrane, 1989). For activists with backgrounds in community activism and the women's movement, especially, it was nothing less than a central political tenet to reject deference to the status quo and the legitimacy of established political structures and hierarchies. This meant friction with those who maintained – and especially those who actively sought to protect – established structures. Gyford (1985: 43) thus points out the acute sense of culture shock experienced in the GLC on both sides between longstanding officers accustomed to a quiet life of 'non-ideological' service, and activists with "a basic radical contempt for existing bureaucratic structures". One example of confrontation was the exclusive member's floor of County Hall, previously restricted to senior officers and elected members:

> "…only a certain grade of officer and elected member could walk around on the Principal Floor at any time. It wasn't written down anywhere, but people told me it, a lot. So I was very bad and walked around the Principal Floor, just for the hell of it" (Otitoju [GLC Story], 2017).

For incomers from the radical left, there were also difficulties adjusting to a general atmosphere of suspicion and hostility. Here, attention to the prosaic labour of state work can help to explain the important resonances not only of rational political action but of emotion, desire, and

interpersonal affects (Cooper, 2020; Painter, 2006). In some cases this could manifest as a startling hostility from senior officers:

> "I can remember the assistant Director General ... And I mean it was brutal stuff. I can remember her cornering me in a corridor and saying, 'We will bury you!' I mean, this was naked stuff, this wasn't subtle stuff! … It was actually what they wanted to do, they wanted to suffocate anything" (Sharman, interview, July 2018).

This atmosphere of hostility was also fed by the wider political context, particularly the level of surveillance and over-policing of the radical left in the context of the Cold War. For example, staff in the new Police committee worried about being bugged and had an expert look into it (Bunyan [GLC Story], 2017). This was not unwarranted paranoia: staff in several committees most linked to the 'loony left' received frequent threatening communications, culminating in an arson attack on the Ethnic Minorities Committee support unit's sixth floor office in County Hall in 1985. Elsewhere, it took many months to access files on the GLC's civil defence planning, where officers who mainly came from the Ministry of Defence were unwilling to respond to enquiries from a new leadership sympathetic to the CND, instead making it "quite clear that they considered the new administration to be quite mad and probably Russian agents" (Livingstone, 1987: 231-232). More typically, tensions with established staff surfaced over the wider principle of bringing activist commitments into the workplace:

> "…some people thought we shouldn't have any politics, you know, we were officers, and officers weren't supposed to bring their own [politics], because officers are supposed to survive the politicians ... but most of us were recruited because of our politics, and then once we got there, we were told that our politics had no place, and what do we do with that? (Otitoju [GLC Story], 2017).

Thus, even where there were strong political commitments from the administration, institutional resistance to change severely limited the impact of effective policymaking, especially in the left GLC's early years (Livingstone, 1987; Murray, 1987a; Ouseley, 1990; Wainwright, 1987).

8.4. Challenging and remaking the GLC bureaucracy

That environment of hostility and obstructionism, especially from senior layers of the bureaucracy, fuelled another major theme of activist state-work, of the contradictions and difficulties of developing 'socialist' forms of management and governance. As explored in chapter 7, GLC officers and councillors developed new ways of working with lawyers and amenable officers to find pathways through bureaucratic and legal obstacles. Yet a more longstanding challenge was to exert some form of control and mechanisms of oversight over a corps of bureaucratic staff whose reception was far from friendly.

8.4.1. Asserting political control

To counter the 'mandarin' power of the entrenched bureaucracy, the left leadership encouraged and developed more involved roles for Labour councillors. The Labour Group met weekly as a policy coordinating committee, wherein a core group of around "sixteen members who are virtually full time … operate[d] in much the same way as an executive body itself" (Livingstone, 1981; Egan, 2006). Within each committee, all Labour board members were given responsibility for different functions, which effectively gave all the members a role within and oversight of the GLC bureaucracy. Reporting to the policy coordinating committee made chief officers accountable to the whole Labour Group, rather than just to the leader, while the autonomy given to committee chairs meant a relatively strong united front in defending the programme against bureaucratic obstruction. As Livingstone put it, "We have overlaid the officer structure with our own member level structure" (1981: 16).

Within this new structure it was important that councillors, especially committee chairs and deputies, had the capacity to develop knowledge and expertise in their particular policy areas. The prior situation, of unpaid part-time members being ill-equipped to master policies, was recognised in the left's manifesto:

> "Elected members of the GLC are supposed to control a £2bn organisation in their spare time. Clearly this all too often leaves the power and influence with the officers. We believe this is unsatisfactory" (GLC, 1981: 90).

As Gyford (1985: 9) recounts, this situation – often exacerbated by an entrenched class gap between graduate-entry professional officers and manual-worker Labour councillors – made councils ripe for "instruction and leadership" from the officer bureaucracy (or from Whitehall departments). The manifesto therefore proposed legislation to allow councillors to be paid; interim measures included changing the timing of meetings and, more importantly, equally sharing the small 'responsibility allowance' of £40,000 amongst the Labour members who chose to work full-time, giving up their day jobs (Wetzel, interview, October 2018; Moore, interview, October 2018). This important change to the use of discretionary expenses meant full-time councillors had time to develop expertise, and to more proactively design their committees' workload: "Rather than just relying on the officers to bring things forward, we put our own agenda forward. And it's very important to get on top of the officers" (Wetzel, interview, October 2018).

Specific interventions were also necessary for exerting control over the officer structure, especially in the existing GLC departments which could not hire new cadres of workers. For example, Dave Wetzel and Paul Moore created a system to counter the 'unreconstructed roadbuilders' who would not easily accommodate the new priority for pedestrians and public transport. Moore gave each road project agreed by committee a number, and told officers, "'If I come round, and anybody's working on a scheme which has not got that number on it, then you're out.' You know, quite rigid" (interview, October 2018). The next step was to break up

the departmental structure, freeing “traffic management, bus priority people, all the people doing useful work” from their subsidiary position several layers down the hierarchy, and in the process “more or less” making the chief highways engineer redundant; “eventually he got the message and left” (Moore, interview, October 2018). For the building of roads that had been agreed by committee, a ‘sin bin’ section was created – “you couldn’t reform these roadbuilders so you put them into roadbuilding” (Wetzel, interview, October 2018) – where engineers were given responsibility for delivery but not planning.

Several other GLC officers and councillors recounted how some conservative senior officers left when they realised their new disempowerment, while others had to be reassigned to other work teams or departments to counter their obstruction; other existing officers were simply persuaded to leave (Parkin [GLC Story], 2017). They were replaced by more accommodating career-grade GLC officers. The Director-General after 1983, Maurice Stonefrost, has been particularly singled out for praise over his professionalism and willingness to work with the Labour administration (McDonnell, interview, August 2018; Livingstone, 1987). Eventually, some of the vacant chief officer posts were also filled by new left officers who had joined the GLC after 1981: Peter Brayshaw of the Economic Policy Group became assistant Director-General of Policy and Resources, and Judith Hunt, originally an equal opportunities advisor, became Director of personnel (after the existing officer was fired for obstructing the Staff Committee’s work) (Egan, 2006).

Another mechanism for establishing the authority of the democratic mandate was the GLC’s Programme Office, a more powerful form of scrutiny committee designed to make “the traditional parts of the GLC work to the Livingstone radical agenda” (Parkin [GLC Story], 2017). In monthly monitoring meetings, each department was required to account for their activity in terms of the council’s manifesto promises, as well as specific policy targets regarding women, disabled people, and ethnic minorities: “We just completely kept them to what they were supposed to be doing, and they hated us” (Parkin [GLC Story], 2017). The office was also instrumental in keeping elected members themselves to their mandate: “… it was a very powerful office because some of the councillors weren’t actually very left-wing and you had to slightly remind them what their manifesto was” (Finch [GLC Story], 2017).

A further, and perhaps most decisive, counter to bureaucratic power was a change to the GLC’s standing orders, a set of organisational rules designed to preserve hierarchy. Previously, elected members voted on reports, but were not supposed to be involved in writing them or in executing their policies; chief officers had no voting power but substantial scope for shaping policies through responsibility for their drafting and their execution. Existing standing orders also discouraged elected members from directly communicating with lower-level officers, keeping lines of communication only to departmental Directors, the Director-General or four assistant Directors-General (Livingstone, 1987). This hierarchical structure “concentrated considerable power in high level officers over the content and flow of information necessary for members to make decisions in committee and to exercise control over the implementation of policy” (Egan,

2006: 388; Clarke and Cochrane, 1989). It also gave senior officers managerial control over the activities of more radical new officers at lower levels – for example, by restricting access to work on important reports while 'containing' radical officers to relatively meaningless ones. The standing orders were changed to allow elected members to become more involved in committee reports, and to permit more communication with lower-level officers (Egan, 2006). The latter meant the obstructive senior bureaucracy could be bypassed by developing relationships and alliances with lower-level officers, going straight to the people who would actually be doing the work (Ward, interview, July 2018).

Some officers noted one of the reasons this worked well was down to councillors willing to assert their authority in defence of more junior officers, meaning that radical officers could experiment and make mistakes knowing that they would be defended by committee chairs prepared to take the responsibility (Bunyan [GLC Story], 2017; Mackintosh, interview, November 2018). Consequently, over time, the left began to gain a sense of ownership over County Hall as a place of work and a space of politics.

8.4.2. Problems of managerial logic

On the other hand, however, the implementation of administrative and procedural methods to tackle political and cultural problems may be insufficient, and even counterproductive, especially if 'management' implies the adoption of coercive mechanisms. As Wainwright (1987: 94) argues,

> "A political leadership under attack from the government, but in a position of managerial power, is not necessarily in the best position to lead a movement for democracy. There is always the temptation to go for the shortcuts and to use the sources of power most easily at hand - usually the least democratic."

For example, one of the areas where Gilroy (1987) is most persuasive is the argument that internal to the GLC, anti-racist measures failed to communicate anything about collective empowerment because they took the form of addressing individuals: through education courses like Racism Awareness Training (RAT), backed up by sanctions over incidents of racism. A consequence of this approach, argues Gilroy (1987), is that anti-racism could be depoliticised and presented as a means of securing better workplace efficiency and good management. Another, more dangerous consequence was the way bureaucratic reliance on coercive powers and hierarchical organisation were more likely to produce alienation than advance black struggles (Gilroy, 1987). Some initiatives like the GLC's own equal opportunities recruitment did address disadvantage within the institutional structure (and gave the GLC some credibility for its campaigning messages), but in the case of RAT, which situated the target for intervention and transformation in people's minds, their private attitudes, the primary outcome was to facilitate conservative charges of political overreach and notions of a particular kind of 'Stalinist' state socialism. Thus as a GLC officer notes,

> "… there was a twofold movement against this. The conservative lifers didn't like the fact they were being sent on racism awareness training, and thought it was patronising. But the black workers thought it was patronising as well, because they thought it made the issue of racism a matter of individual opinion, and you had to somehow change your opinions, whereas they said 'we don't give a shit what people think, we just want fair structures'" (Marris [GLC Story], 2017).

In many critics' view, this easy reliance on institutional coercive power ultimately had a disastrous role-reversing effect, drawn on to fuel a right-wing reframing of 'anti-racism' as a form of state censorship of free speech, helping British racism begin to articulate itself "within the discourses of freedom, patriotism and democracy" while associating anti-racism with "authoritarianism, statism, and censorship" (Gilroy, 1987: 313; see also the points made in chapter 7, section 7.5.4.). These points are far from unique to the GLC, and surfaced especially in local education authorities, tying in with wider concerns about state-led 'political correctness' (see Campbell, 1987; Gordon, 1990; Hall, 1994). While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to fully explore the unintended consequences of 1980s local authority initiatives and their articulation with right-wing backlash, Hall's (1994) analysis of political correctness is worth briefly recounting. Hall suggests that the triumph of the 'new right' in the late 1980s switched a popular hegemonic strategy into a defensive 'vanguardism'. This left coercive strategies – which had already received substantial criticism in radical quarters (e.g. Sivanandan, 1990) – as the remaining defensive posture of oppressed groups clinging to some institutional power. The political lesson to be drawn from this is a challenge to move beyond the managerial mode of politics that 'political correctness' expresses, in which

> "politics consists of getting 'our side' where 'their side' used to be, and then exercising power in exactly the same way they did. This binary strategy of governing society by 'policing' it will be justified because it is our side which is doing it. [Instead,] the task of politics … is to unsettle permanently all the configurations of power, preventing them – right of left – from ever settling again into that unconsciousness, the 'deep sleep of forgetfulness', which power so regularly induces" (Hall, 1994: 182).

The difficulty – one reflected in the GLC – is that anti-capitalist radicalism had not (and still has not) developed a language for articulating the practice of political leadership and the assertion of political power other than of administration and management (Hoggett and McGill, 1988). Indeed, as Egan (2006: 396) points out, many mid-level workers are likely to have similar problems and objections to the obstructive and authoritarian behaviour of senior managers; hence the "proletarianisation of professional-managerial labour provides possibilities for constructing alliances with lower levels of the state bureaucracy".

8.4.3. Bridging activism and bureaucracy

Consequently, for the left in the GLC, there was a process of learning that while radicals could not leave administration to the 'experts' and incumbent regimes, neither could they adequately

run the organisation by entirely bypassing, undermining, or dismissing the value of their labour and competence. This point was made by several interviewees, who stressed that for all the political noise about obstruction, the majority of relations with established officers were positive, and most of the officer structure was committed to serving the elected administration and worked effectively with the left. This was particularly valuable in the case of legal and financial officers with experience and expertise that newer radical officers likely did not have themselves (Finch [GLC Story], 2017). Clarke and Cochrane (1989: 44) note the development of a 'love-hate relationship' with financial officers in particular, seen both as "carriers of the message of 'sound finance' (i.e. cuts) and as technical experts, whose mastery of complex financial rules and arrangements" may in the right conditions help reduce and circumvent the effects of financial restrictions.

One officer suggests that for much of the existing staff, the influx of left activists was an exciting development, not because of any predisposition to the new left's politics, but because the new styles and practices imported by the left

> "hugely improved their jobs … they were better jobs as a result of all this stuff going on, because they were just being asked more interesting questions. And a lot of people really threw themselves into it" (Mackintosh, interview, November 2018).

Other workers stayed on specifically because of their enthusiasm for certain new GLC policies, such as the opening of South Bank cultural facilities to the public during the daytime (see Williams, 2020): "… a lot of people who weren't, you know, socialist, liked a lot of what was essentially democratisation of public space" (Mackintosh, interview, November 2018).

Here, there is a selective advantage to the ideology of political neutrality central to 'professionalism' in state bureaucracy, which is usually read as the technocratic labour endemic to 'post-political' neoliberal society: the idea of responding to strong political guidance from 'above' (and indeed, at the same time, 'below') is not inherently problematic to workers committed to an ethos of public service. Mackintosh suggests this is likely to be the case for any successful radical governing project:

> "…you've got this mixture of some fairly ruthless, professionalised, committed, not-corrupt people running the actual processes, and a great deal of very active political activity going on around you. And you're basically in the middle of a maelstrom, but an ordered one" (interview, November 2018).

As a brief counterpoint, one implication of this perspective is that, to some extent, the perception of bureaucratic obstruction could be down to a lack of political skill on the part of elected members. One GLC councillor, for example, argues that

> "usually when you hear politicians moaning about civil servants it's because they haven't got the authority or the knowledge to basically say to the people they employ, 'this is what we want to do, go away and do it'… The GLC officers by and large were

> very professional, top of their game, and respected … At the end of the day, you only had to say two words – do it – and they knew they're going to have to do it so get on with it" (Nicholson, interview, October 2018).

This argument raises a key contradiction of a radical management practice for urban government: if a new style of democratised and collectivist politics means councillors avoid actually asserting their authority, they may find themselves not taken seriously and overridden by opposed interests (see Davies, 2021). Yet placing too much emphasis on leadership from 'above' may also lead down the same bureaucratic cul-de-sac: without grasping how ideas are generated within the 'machine' of local government – that whatever ideas come from 'above' are always reinterpreted according to prevailing conflicts and common senses; that they may have some messy resonance with, or origin in, professional and managerial labour – a radical programme may find itself similarly outmanoeuvred. As Clarke and Cochrane (1989: 42) point out, "it cannot be assumed that 'socialist' programmes … are totally innocent of the environment in which they are developed". Thus as much as many radical GLC workers were keen to stress positive accommodations with longstanding officers, it remains necessary to conceptualise the internal spaces of governance as conflictual and unstable, subject at all times to competing political forces. That the implicit role of professional-managerial labour in the state is to remove as much friction from the system as possible can in this view highlight (as a kind of negative reflection) this immanent conflictual nature.

The alternative to these two managerial cul-de-sacs, suggest Hoggett and McGill (1988: 32) in a study of left-Labour local councils, is to develop forms of work that empower workers while attaching them to values and purposes "that are themselves socialist" and "located to the ends the activists espouse". Although overall the NUL failed to develop 'socialist' modes of management that democratised the forms of organisation and labour in the local state (McLaverty, 1989, 1991), the experience for some activists in the GLC nevertheless represents perhaps the most advanced vanguard of attempted change in this area, especially in some departments like the Women's Committee, Ethnic Minorities Committee, and Police Committee where workers were empowered to make questions of value and purpose a fundamental concern of their work, rather than only the prerogative of political representatives (Hoggett and McGill, 1988).

The possibility of a productive alliance with existing officers, moreover, also means the concept of 'activist state-work' is more complex than simply being 'in-and-against' the state; it is a more ambiguous position that is only strategically or selectively, and at different times in different contexts, 'in', 'with' and/or 'against' the state. The GLC experience confirms that bureaucracy is a contradictory organisational form (Egan, 2006; Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich, 1979); activist state-work intervenes in the contradictory space that professional-managerial labour occupies in local states, and reveals bureaucracy to be not a homogeneous bloc with universally conservative tendencies, but a terrain of power with openings for new alliances and *détourned* forms of hierarchy.

8.4.4. Prefiguring alternative workplaces

Beyond tensions between activists and the existing bureaucracy, the process of bridging bureaucracy and activism produces difficulties for activists themselves derived from the inherent tension between radical and institutional logics and objectives. As Newman (2014a: 141) describes, for progressive activists, being employed by the state is

> "uncomfortable work that [involves] key dilemmas: where to put your energy; how to sustain multiple, and often competing, loyalties and commitments; how to make a living while living your politics; how to combine working for an imagined future while living or prefiguring that future in the here and now".

Participants in the GLC encountered difficulties in the process of attempting to establish collectivist working practices, especially as a continuation of 'prefigurative' and personal-is-political politics pioneered in the women's movement. Prior to the influx of left activists, Labour in the GLC had never attempted to change the organisation of local government work; indeed, if there was any reference at all to workplace organisation it was the positive praise of Herbert Morrison, that "We all know our place and it works very well indeed" (quoted in Hoggett and McGill, 1988: 25). Labour had largely restricted itself to the aim of being a 'model employer' within the established economic structure.

By contrast, some of the new staff members sought to import practices from the social movements they had been involved in. In part, this was driven by precisely the concern raised in the previous section – that radicals would be co-opted into and absorbed by bureaucracy, and thus lose both political power and credibility (*Briefing*, April 1983). Staff in the Women's Committee Support Unit[4], for example, were acutely aware of criticism of co-optation into a 'femocracy' that would allow the established bureaucracy to steer policy and adopt the logics and temporalities of the state (*Briefing*, April 1983). Support unit staff therefore discussed and experimented with collective workplace practices that reflected the organisational methods common to the wider women's movement – aimed at prefiguring a communal and inclusive society – based on principles of maximum involvement and minimisation of hierarchy, such as equally sharing menial tasks like envelope stuffing (LMA/LSPU/WEG/01/025; Bennett, 2000; *Briefing*, April 1983).

However, their actual experience of enacting such principles demonstrates an entrenched contradiction to forming a collective inside a local government structure. For example, the institutional need for management at first prompted "an incredibly divisive kind of atmosphere" (Parkin [GLC Story], 2017), with staff becoming hostile to the first head of the unit, who

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4 A staff department servicing the new committee set up in 1982. Staffed by about a dozen women initially, the unit rapidly grew to over 70 workers by 1985 (Bennett, 2000).

eventually left after complaints about her perceived authoritarianism and lack of consultation – a clash with staff members' anti-authoritarian politics (*Briefing*, April 1983). During that time, the unit's rapid growth also forced workers to confront a growing set of difficulties with collective practices themselves. The minutes of staff meetings record increasing workload pressures from councillors wanting to address more campaigns and issues, which caused staff to question their motivation and capacity to adhere to the initial collective principles (LMA/LSPU/WEG/01/025). Six months after the first meeting, in March 1983, a staff discussion suggested it had become "more work to work collectively" (LMA/LSPU/WEG/01/025, p. 36). The minutes also note several emerging structural issues and contradictions: equal levels of responsibility were not matched by equal pay grades; the level of menial work was stilting staff members' development; and their collective workplace practices were failing to impact on, and encountering translation difficulties with, the wider GLC bureaucracy. As Atkinson (1995) notes, there was enormous difficulty to translating radical political readings of interpersonal dynamics in everyday life into concrete organisational arrangements and policy outputs at a time when such ideas had only barely been raised in the labour movement outside of radical feminist contexts; simply raising the issue at all was difficult enough. Moreover, the activist context also complicated a workplace politics of productivity, creating an informal expectation to work beyond paid hours, with staff feeling judged not only on the quality of their work but of their feminist commitments (*Briefing*, April 1983). Attempts to diagnose and fix these problems by reinstating a more hierarchical structure were, however, met with a great deal of political debate and dissent. Eventually, staff concluded that collective principles could still work, but had certain organisational limits, and consequently the unit was reorganised with some compromises over previously resisted practices like hiring clerical assistants (LMA/LSPU/WEG/01/025; Bennett, 2000).

A superficial reading of this episode, without key contextual evidence, appears to show co-optation into state power and embrace of bureaucratic domination (as interpreted by some of the literature on local authority women's units – see Bennett, 2000). However, closer attention to the experience of labouring in the unit reflects a more nuanced grappling with complex difficulties and contradictions. This was not "a hasty abandonment of feminist principles", but a lengthy process of discussion, as staff collectively explored their positions as compromised leftist bureaucrats, while also scrutinising their existing radical principles in relation to the practicalities and specific dilemmas of state-work, which demands lines of accountability not only to bureaucratic managers but to the wider public (Bennett, 2000: 31; Harney, 2002). These discussions were an active process of reconciling radical collective principles with a larger institutional system seen as arbitrarily imposing differential values, whereby that context also prompted joint exploration of the contradictions of collective work itself (Bennett, 2000). They also reflect a recognition that the reshaping of institutional practices cannot be achieved overnight, and indeed can conflict with other principles, like the ability to meet the expectations of a wider constituency of radical movements.

They therefore reflected a wider practical-strategic paradox for radical municipal politics: that in the absence of alternative systems of self-managed provision (which, as new municipalist projects show, might be incubated by urban governments), state-work is both a constraining force of bureaucratic domination and yet essential to a progressive urbanism. As Harney argues, labour 'for' the state is an inherently socialised, collective, and productive activity, even if its expression is typically corrupted: this makes "the state as a field of labour … hard to smash without damaging ourselves" (2002: 187). Activist state-work thus raises the question of human needs within a workplace structured by the demands of capitalist profitability, revealing the fundamental contradictions at the heart of both capital and the state (LEWRG, 1979; Rowbotham, et al., 1979). The challenge for activist workers in local government is to somehow sustain that social labour for society, while acting disruptively against the local state's more harmful practices.

8.4.5. De-statization?

A final constituent element of activist state-work therefore involves an effort to bend the social labour of the state against the state apparatus as such. To return briefly to state theory, Painter (2006) suggests a concept of 'state-effects' as the interpellation of citizens and subjects through material practices, mechanisms and institutions, according with a Poulantzian view of the 'state as a social relation' that de-fetishises the state as neither a completely separate 'thing' or 'subject' nor entirely an ideological fiction. One implication of this perspective is to focus on state-effects in terms of process, and thus on *statization*, as "the intensification of the symbolic presence of the state across all kinds of social practices and relations" (Painter, 2006: 758). According to Painter (2006), whether activities constitute statization does not depend on the categorisation of any particular institution but rather "on the nature of the practices in which they are engaged", meaning statization can occur through non-state organisations. Of significance for activist state-work, a further implication is that "in principle, organisations that are nominally part of the state could be mechanisms for a de-statization" (Painter, 2006: 758), opening a possibility that state work could entail forms of social labour that de-intensify the presence of state (and capital) in social life. As an example, in setting themselves the task of "realis[ing] the political potential of the popular movement" through the local state, municipalist movements like *Barcelona en Comú* explicitly aim to "dis- and reassemble the city's institutions from within on a more transparent and participatory basis" (Charnock and Ribero-Fumaz, 2017: 190).

Such forms of anti-state practice can be glimpsed – albeit in a subterranean form; as immanent potential rather than explicit political philosophy – in the political aims underpinning the GLC's grant aid programme (see chapter 6, section 6.4.1.). The GLC's grants were geared toward devolving resources to "foster an infrastructure of social collaboration" beyond the state (Wainwright, interview, May 2018). This was strongly related to an autonomist politics of 'self-help socialism' (Ward, 1978), shifting resources and power out of state institutions to

> "enable people and communities and organisations to be able to more strongly fight for themselves, because we didn't think we're supposed to do it for people, we wanted to enable other people to struggle" (Parkin [GLC Story], 2017).

For Campbell and Jacques (1986) this was a way of chipping away at the power of the state, but in a more genuinely democratic and power-sharing way than the anti-statism of Thatcher's neoliberal rollback. Beyond filling gaps in social provision, this 'self-help' politics included supporting the mobilisation of political activism more directly. One officer, for example, believed that "the women's movement could be so much more if it had the resources, and I saw the GLC as kind of our pool of money" (Otitoju [GLC Story], 2017).

This effort to cultivate popular mobilisation also dovetailed with other radical GLC policies, such as using the local state's financial resources to improve conditions of employment and support self-managed cooperative spaces and enterprises (LMA/R/IEC 1985), in order to facilitate limited autonomy from capital and thus support the organising capacity of urban movements; altogether an attempt at "legislating the class struggle back into existence", as Hatherley (2020: 116) suggests. But it could also be construed, in some activist officers' thinking, as a means of undermining state power by ensuring financial resources were distributed beyond its control:

> "Our principle was that really we've got to dismantle … We've got to break up the power of the GLC in order to share it with the popular movements" (Wainwright, interview, May 2018).

One officer, for example, recalls being told by a manager in a new work unit for campaigning against and managing the process of abolition: "'Your job now, between now and abolition, is to get as much as you can out of this building and into the community. Off you go.' And we took that pretty literally" (Otitoju [GLC Story], 2017). In some cases this meant the administration of formal grants, but also included, as abolition became imminent, items of office furniture like filing cabinets and typewriters that might be useful for community organisations. The outcome of such policies and priorities was that state and capitalist institutions would find themselves on the receiving end of campaigning efforts financially underwritten by the local state. As Wainwright (1986) reflected in a retrospective on the GLC in the *New Statesman*,

> "…Tory councils have faced GLC-funded campaigns against their privatisation schemes; City managers find their clerical workers organised with the help of a City based resource centre funded by the GLC; … the London Docklands Development Corporation, finds that all its smoothly packaged plans for turning Docklands into a property developer's delight are constantly disrupted by community campaigns – again funded by the GLC".

On some occasions funded groups even actively campaigned against GLC policies (McDonnell, interview, August 2018), such as an unemployed workers' centre that distributed anti-work leaflets at the GLC's *Jobs for a Change* festivals, attacking its employment policies as "Jobs for Xchange Value" (Islington Action Group of the Unwaged, 1987; LMA/PR/382). Thus to a limited extent the practical action of radicals within the local state could deploy its resources against its *own* institutional power.

Such means of turning the local state's resources against itself necessarily involved and invited difficult tensions between external social movements and the GLC's bureaucratic structures. Because many of the councillors and officers administering grants came from social movements themselves, there was a "a lot of discussion, anxiety about undermining the autonomy" of groups receiving grant aid (Wainwright, interview, May 2018). There were widespread worries – often borne out in practice – that the grants programme might induce reliance on state funds, professionalisation of activist work, or competitiveness between organisations (although, as Mayer (2013) notes, these issues were a relatively general condition of many urban movements in the 1970s and 1980s).

Again, the role of activist state-work here was not necessarily to smooth the process of administering community grants and iron out the tensions, but to deliberately set out to increase democratic pressure on the local state – meaning being willing "to share power and decentralise resources without being able to predict the outcome" (Mackintosh and Wainwright, 1987: 422). In effect, for radical state workers attempting to distribute resources while navigating the structural constraints of bureaucracy and law on the one hand, and the expectations and pressures of social movements on the other (not to mention a third limb of their own political principles), the tensions themselves might function as a productive and generative force for new ideas (Mackintosh and Wainwright, 1987). Such tensions also 'distribute' some of the responsibilities of activist state-work beyond those employed directly by the state – not only in the sense of creating 'state' labour through community funding, but in the way that devolving state resources prompts their recipients to take up some responsibility for taking part in that connective and de-statising work against the state. The NUL's more deliberate crossing of the boundaries between state and society demonstrates (again, only in a prospective and embryonic way) how this connective labour can be deployed to reverberate a transformative dynamic back into the state apparatus, as movements take up pressure where the space becomes available.

One final conceptual implication, therefore, is that for activist state-work to sustain any radical thrust within local states, it depends upon a constituency of radical movements to sustain pressure and demand accountability. This can be a particularly difficult point of tension – radicals inside the state find themselves in a peculiar position (once again) of internalising social contradictions; they consider themselves a part of movements and understand where criticism comes from, but being on the receiving end of pressure and hostility is emotionally heightened, freighted with the language of betrayal and loss of trust. This in turn raises a key contradiction regarding transparency and accountability: a contributing factor to external

hostility can be a folding together of 'inside' activists with the local state itself, so whereas those 'inside' might recognise the problems and difficulties, and acknowledge that much of their activity involves papering over cracks (in Holloway's (2010) words), that knowledge can be invisible to 'external' organisation, contributing to a tendency to subtract political agency from structural analysis.

However, policy tools and the actions of radical bureaucrats alone cannot be expected to arouse an undifferentiated popular and left-leaning social force that exists *in potentia*. The concept requires a more dynamic way of viewing social movements – the radical bureaucrat is an extension of social movements, which are not "somehow out there" (Sharman, interview, July 2018), but nevertheless need some foothold external to the state in order for activist state-workers to gain any traction within it. Indeed as Sharman (interview, July 2018) pointed out separately, it is precisely that more dynamic perspective that highlights the problems with a model of inevitable compromise – what produces compromises or more militant activity in the state depends on the overall political formation and the social forces that activist state-workers are able to draw on. Accordingly, this would require movements to look past a principled position of abstention and engage with the messy work of political struggle that includes state institutions. Ultimately, the aim on both sides of state and street-level activism is a mutually beneficial relationship: to bend the powers and resources of the local state to aid the democratisation of the economy and the circulation of urban commons, which could then support the capacity of social movements to mobilise, and in turn increase democratic input into the local state, embedding democratic practices and lending it popular legitimacy in everyday urban social relations (McDonnell, interview, August 2018; Wainwright, interview, May 2018).

In the perspective of the wider history of the GLC, such possibilities were of course only very partial and riven with internal tensions, their limits also driven home by the process of the GLC's abolition by central government – the (selectively) anti-state politics of Thatcherism dwarfing the state-critical efforts of the radical left (Duncan and Goodwin, 1988; Hall, 1988). That state-critical radicals fought so hard against the central state's disruption of their administrative programme (Lansley, et al., 1989) further highlights the wider difficulty and concrete reality that state-work is a necessary but compromised form of social labour. If, as Douzinas (2016: 9) claims, "contradiction is the name of a left government that swims in a sea of neoliberal capitalism", contradiction is by extension both the ever-present and necessary characteristic of the activist state-work that serves the project of left governance. The various tensions and contradictions noted above are a clue that radical politics was taking place in the GLC – for Mackintosh and Wainwright (1987), the difficulty and messiness of working as a left bureaucrat in the GLC was precisely the evidence of its vitality.

8.5. Conclusion

The concept of activist state-work introduced in this chapter reinscribes the important internal contradictions of the practical labour of working in governing institutions (whether as political representatives or officials) as an important category of analysis in radical approaches to the state. The everyday experience of working within the GLC reveals some of the central tensions and contradictions inherent to left urban governance. Most fundamentally, labouring in the state as a participant in a radical activist project forces individuals to confront the tension between their commitments to 'being political' and the neutralising effects of institutional structures and cultures. In the context of a transformative rather than simply instrumental approach to the local state, the practices and subjectivities of activist state-work blur the boundaries between officialdom and activism, and trouble the rigid demarcation of state and civil society that frequently informs state-critical transformative practice (Cumbers, 2015; Routledge, et al., 2018).

The concept therefore challenges a reified understanding of the state more concretely than much state-critical radical praxis (e.g. Holloway, 2002), which often circles back to re-reify the state as a distinct and monolithic subject-object despite efforts to derive its mystified abstraction from capitalist social relations (Angel, 2017; Cumbers, 2015). Consequently, it can help move beyond the conceptual paradox that anti-state progressive movements frequently find themselves trapped within: that on the one hand the appearance of state institutions as separate from civil society is a function of its fetishized abstraction from real social relations, but on the other hand the structural determination of the state-form by more fundamental economic relations renders it an impossible space for radical political change. Instead, attention to ordinary, embodied social labour that pits acts of resistance and transformation against the structures and cultures of institutions requires thinking through new possibilities, and adopting the forward-looking conceptual perspectives of prefiguration and reimagination – positions that challenge existing expectations of what the State inevitably does for or to left-wing governing projects (Cooper, 2020). The final concluding chapter follows up these findings by summarising their wider theoretical implications for conceptualising (anti-capitalist activism and) statehood, and by teasing out some practical-strategic lessons of the GLC experience.

Chapter 9
Conclusions: rethinking the (local) state to 'take power differently'

> "Don't let's be purists and stand outside, for we can't fight the system bare-handed. We don't have the tools, brothers and sisters; we've got to get the tools from the system itself and hope that in the process five out of ten of us don't become corrupt. If we've got the tools and Ken Livingstone's GLC is prepared to give them, we should not hesitate to use them." (A. Sivanandan, speech at 1983 GLC Ethnic Minorities Support Unit conference, 1990: 73)

> "We are keenly aware of all the disasters that have resulted from the establishment of new sovereign powers, even in revolutionary form. But that recognition should not lead us to shun power and operate only in terms of opposition and resistance. That would concede the place to the current rulers and merely contain or alleviate in part their damage. It should not lead us either down the path of exodus and withdrawal whereby we create separate communities in miniature without transforming the society at large. These are not, however, our only choices. We can take power differently and set in motion a transformation of society as a whole." (Hardt and Negri, 2017: 288)

9.1. Introduction

This concluding chapter summarises the arguments made in the thesis by responding to the research questions posed in chapter 1, in ways that offer some reflections on their wider conceptual significance for state-critical radical theory and practice in the context of municipal government. These then inform some reflections for radical left thinking and some questions for further consideration in future research.

The first section of the chapter briefly revisits the overall research purpose, in terms of the challenges radical municipalism raises for debates and experiences of (local) statehood for the radical left and urban movements. The main part of the chapter is then organised according to the four research questions that guided the thesis. In sum, I suggest some conceptual pathways beyond existing frames of state-critical left theory. I argue for an understanding of the (local) state that conceives of it not as a singular logic of power but as a terrain of contestation, neither wholly fixed nor wholly malleable, but rather open to change and restructuring within a wider framework of institutional entrenchment of the social relations of capitalism. The concept of 'activist state work' points to the field of everyday labour within the state as a key point of that

potential contestation. This points more broadly to developing forms of anti-capitalist practice that are neither wholly inside nor external to the institutions of state power, and thus blur and de-naturalise the boundaries separating 'state' from 'society'. A final theoretical reflection builds on those arguments to raise some provocations for the contemporary UK left, particularly regarding radical approaches to power and the need to move beyond a 'melancholic' attachment to the sentimental hermeneutics of 'resistance'. The chapter ends with some general concluding thoughts regarding prospects for future research.

9.2. Aims of the research

The primary motivation behind this PhD project was to understand and evaluate attempts at social change from a normative perspective of Marxist critical theory. As I explained in chapter 1, my research interests and personal activist commitments converged in seeking out the potential of urban movements for radical social change, which seemed to crystallise in the experiences of 'new municipalist' projects such as *Barcelona en Comú*. The absence of an equivalent UK left municipalism led me to question the experience of historical urban left formations in British local government, which have previously been described as 'local socialism' or the 'municipal left' (Boddy and Fudge, 1984; Lansley, et al., 1989). From a normative philosophical approach aimed at connecting theoretical and empirical knowledge with practice, the purpose of selecting the 1980s GLC as a case study was to learn from that history to inform ongoing municipalist organising. There was, moreover, an element of continuity in understanding the history of the British left: from an emphasis on conducting research "from within rather than outside grassroots movements" (Juris, 2007: 164), even though my object of study was historical – and embedded in a different political conjuncture – I have come to see it as part of my own political heritage. Archival research often felt like I was excavating forgotten instances of familiar contemporary debates, and interviews almost always felt like conversations with comrades. Consequently the research process informing this thesis had little investment in disinterested observation (notwithstanding a careful historical attention to accuracy and detail), but was instead geared toward intervening in ongoing political and strategic thinking for the municipal left.

In particular, the research sought to make sense of the possibilities for social change in left-wing strategic engagements with the local state. Part 1 of this thesis established this problematic in relation to wider debates about state theory and revolutionary strategy. I argued in chapter 2 that a dominant 'anti-power' theoretical approach and its corresponding collective action frames have reached certain limits; yet moving beyond these in new movement-state formations means confronting a different, unique set of contradictions. Chapter 2 also set out the importance of the urban scale as a mediating institutional space between the limits of localist frames and the abstraction of national/global imaginaries: here, the particular issue of 'radical municipalism' emerges as an important problem-space for radical left theorising, by situating an 'in-and-

against-the-state' method in the context of a radical urbanism. The selection of the 1980s GLC as a case study, therefore, functioned as an analytical framework – a lens through which to explore wider questions of the limits and potential for developing political alternatives at the municipal scale within local states. As I have argued in the previous chapters, the GLC case brings into view not only the limits to such a project, but also – in a careful observation of constraints and creative activity 'behind the scenes' – the possibilities that lie dormant in the contradictions, gaps and fissures in the state's 'institutional materiality'.

The following four sections summarise those findings from the case study, and their wider conceptual implications, by relating them to each of the research questions.

9.3. Urban state activism: the GLC's political economy of generating autonomy

The first research question aimed to understand the basic empirical relationship between the NUL's political background and the politics it expressed in the GLC, and to tease out from that relationship a relatively coherent vision for an alternative urbanism:

> i. How did the politics of the new urban left translate into a policy platform for the GLC, and what kind of new urban imaginary for London did this represent?

Many different streams of socialist thought contributed to the programme of the Labour GLC from 1981-1986. The new urban left in London was part of a wider 'realignment' of the left that set itself the task of advancing 'beyond the fragments' to "recompose the fragmented forces of resistance on a class foundation" (Clarke, 1991: 60) and develop new cultures of opposition. Its principal ideological currents were rooted in the British New Left's perspective of 'socialist humanism' that sees the potential of ordinary people to change society, alongside a patchwork of feminist and other new social movement influences that added a prefigurative, personal-is-political politics of building a socialist practice in the present, rooted in the experience of everyday life. Activists also emphasised the importance of self-organisation, self-identification of needs, and grassroots 'bottom up' planning, as well as sensitivity to culture and identity. A militant shop stewards' movement pushed beyond defensive workplace struggles to embrace alternative plans for workers' control and industrial democracy. The NUL had no formal or ratified ideology in an empirical sense, but these common tendencies and tenets can be identified in their historical composition. While retaining an important renegade thread of contentious politics toward the state, these connections came to be assembled in the Labour Party left in the context of campaigns for local government.

In the GLC, these political tendencies were reflected – although also refracted and softened – in new policies aimed at changing the function of municipal government. Out of its political roots, the strategic priorities of the urban left in power could be identified as:

- A joining of defensive struggles with proactive development of new political ideas and innovations.
- A localism based not on a scalar fetishism but primarily on institutional capacity, seeing the potential of the local state to have significant material impacts on ordinary people's lives.
- A redistributive push combining appreciation of the importance of urban services with a more aspirational politics of matching economic activity to social needs.
- An emphasis on 'mobilisation' and campaigning to help strengthen the self-organisation of social movements, including an awareness of the need for autonomy of movements to advocate for their position and guard against co-optation.

In broad theoretical terms, then, the urban imaginary promoted by the left through GLC policies represented a pluralist democratic socialism, one in which the metropolitan state's role was to improve the quality of everyday life in ways that could voice collective aspirations and facilitate autonomy from capitalist domination. The main economic thrust behind this policy ideal was to enact forms of redistribution of wealth and resources, primarily indirectly by shifting cost burdens to raise the baseline conditions of everyday urban experience.

The NUL's efforts at redistribution were instrumentalised through the metropolitan organisation of production and social reproduction. Supporting people's social reproduction, making provision for hitherto un- or under-served needs and interests, encouraging greater democratisation of the urban economy, and above all aiding the production of free time by lowering everyday expenses, together represent a recognition that workers have lives and social value beyond the workplace. In this sense, redistribution of wealth can be read as redistribution of social agency. They show that (local) state functions are valuable not only inasmuch as they meet people's needs and enable access urban space, but also because they potentially provide a foundation for people to produce urban space and meet their own needs (Russell, 2020).

This has been an important theme in the 'new' municipalist movements. Local states could be given new roles as tools for amplifying radical self-governing commons, if new political forces and relations can be institutionalised through them (Angel, 2017; Leitheiser, et al., 2022; Pera and Bianchi, 2022), as in recent propositions for local states to take on investment risks to help accumulate community-owned capital (Milburn and Russell, 2021). Although limited by fiscal and legal constraints – especially in conditions of austerity – local states could help to anchor the production of forms of community self-governance, supporting the creation and spread of urban commons and acting as a conduit for social forces generative of postcapitalist futures (Milburn and Russell, 2021; Pera and Bianchi, 2022).

Insofar as they gesture toward using state powers to create space for working-class autonomy from capital, the implicit political substance of redistributive GLC policy priorities was therefore anti-capitalist.

This appreciation for redistribution to facilitate autonomy is most clear in direct efforts to support the capacity of communities and movements to self-organise, "to enable and assist people to express and exchange and coordinate the wealth of understanding already in their possession" (Mackintosh and Wainwright, 1987: 359). From this standpoint, while the state cannot be the starting point of a democratic politics, it can enable it. It demonstrates a wider perspective of socialist pluralism, which opposes notions of the state-management of a passive civil society, and instead emphasises the state's (potential) relationship with a multiplicity of sites of power in social life 'outside' the state (Hall, 1984b). Potentially, we can imagine the joining of movements with elements of the state, an ever-contradictory partnership of critical pressure and a circuit of solidarity in which a left bloc within the state roots itself in and draws power from social movements, while passing power out and supporting movements to mobilise as an essential and forcefully asserted counter-measure to the exercise of state power (whose pressure is actively embraced by elements within the state). The left GLC's implicit urban imaginary thus stands as an example of 'non-reformist reform', by attempting to meet real demands and aspirations while providing the resources, both material and ideological, for working class movements to mobilise in struggles for more.

The GLC's campaigning efforts also tacked in this direction. The NUL's outward-facing propaganda primarily voiced values around peace and anti-racism, but more broadly captured an inclusive and participative metropolitanism, based in democratic values of diversity and equity, and expressed through the extroverted media of billboards, murals, and music festivals. The GLC was credited with contributing to the production of new subjectivities for Londoners in ways that challenged the exclusionary national subject under creation by the 'new right' as well as the exclusively imagined subject of the traditional labour movement (Campbell and Jacques, 1986; Hall, 1988).

In sum, GLC policy was – at least in intention if not necessarily in outcome – aimed not at placating workers but at supporting them to voice political demands for more, both in their workplaces and in the wider urban polis. This conclusion emerges from a 'meta-theoretical' exercise (Lowes, 1998), retrospectively interpreting the ideological currents within the GLC as elements of a distinct urban socialist politics. However, as I have argued, it does reflect the NUL's own terms of reference. Moreover, as chapter 6 suggested, any assessment of the GLC's overall politics cannot be made from policy outputs alone – which must instead be seen as symptoms of a wider municipalist practice and imaginary whose lodestar is a transformative energy at the level of the institutional everyday.

Gathering the threads of these NUL ideologies, this thesis has characterised its policy programme through the GLC as a form of 'urban state activism'. This can be summarised as:

a) Use of local state resources to enact an indirect redistribution of wealth, achieved by shifting cost burdens and improving urban experience.
b) Use of local state resources to mobilise social movements, both by directly 'activating' aligned civil society organisations with funding and by indirectly cultivating autonomy from capital.

c) Adoption of an explicitly campaigning tenor to advocate for worker and community power in the urban economy and voice demands beyond the reach of formal policy levers.

9.4. Reflexive autonomy: generating leverage within the state

Converting radical political impulses into concrete policy outcomes would inevitably mean engaging with the possibilities and constraints available to local governments. The scope for action for local states subsidiary to strongly centralised national states, and within a wider structural framework of the capitalist state, can seem especially slim. Assessing the extent to which radical projects for social transformation can (or should) act through and on the (local) state turns on the question of its capacity to be transformed, from within and without, arrayed against its its capacity to withstand (or co-opt, or de-fang) efforts at transformation. The second research question therefore asked:

> ii. How were the capacities and constraints of the local state experienced and navigated by the new urban left, and what do they reveal about the composition of state power and possibilities for different kinds of statehood?

Guided by a robust and sophisticated state theory, participants in the NUL knew that they could not confine their manifesto commitments to the existing limits imposed by bureaucracy, financial accounting, and legality – seen by many as arbitrary or unjust – but that some sort of engagement or confrontation was inevitable. The left developed different techniques for navigating these limits. Their initial experience was unexpectedly formidable; yet, as discussed in chapter 7, the experience of navigating the legal conflict over fares had two important outcomes. Firstly, the way the ruling had positive knock-on effects, enabling additional GLC expenditure, revealed how the outcomes to engagement with structural limits cannot necessarily be assured. Secondly, it showed the relative malleability of legal structures and their susceptibility to favourable interpretation according to political preferences and balances of power, and showed how that interpretive element could be operationalised in the legal-bureaucratic system to favour radical policies.

The GLC left's subsequent ability to construct limited amounts of political leeway to pursue radical policies, such as through developing new forms of leverage beyond the existing capacities of the local state, reveals a certain plasticity to the local state, as a terrain of contestation rather than a fixed logic of power. Internal contestation and reshaping of bureaucratic relations supported the manipulation of legal and financial structures, while certain 'activist' tactics could take on a new shape within the local state as policy tools, such as participation in boycotts and withdrawal of consent.

These actions demonstrated the state's fragmented and contradictory nature, and showed how creative uses and subversions of power could create cracks and openings for projects that might otherwise seem impossible. That some space for action could be creatively crafted should not, however, imply a liberal conception of states as a neutral mediator between equal interests. The GLC left's struggles in this regard more closely resemble neo-Marxist theories of relative autonomy – the state condenses the social relations of capitalism, but those relations are asymmetrical and strongly select in favour of ruling classes.

My contention in this thesis has been that conceptualising activism within the state requires being able to maintain, and keep in tension, both of these opposed assertions: the state has, at the same time, a structural quality as a bearer of class rule, and a plastic and pluralist quality assembling contradictory forces and relations and mediating, unequally, between variable norms, practices, and (potentially) transformative visions. On the one hand, in the same way Gibson-Graham (2006) critique 'strong theories' of neoliberalism, viewing the state as a monolithic structure or force unhelpfully obscures the hybrid, uneven, and contradictory elements of the contemporary state and its technologies of governance, conceptually closing off possibilities for opposition and alternative projects. Yet on the other hand, ontological pluralism, similarly matched to poststructuralist 'weak theory' accounts of neoliberalism, risks missing the state's *relative* coherence as a form of capitalist social relations, and flattening its asymmetrical power relations to a liberal-democratic conception. Unpicking divergent political projects at the level of local government from centralised state power, for instance, does not require understanding the totality of the state as straightforwardly mediating opposed projects (that is, resolving or filtering out contestation), but instead points to the presence of struggles and contradictions; that the state apparatus is contingent and contested, and that alternative ways of engaging with it are already part of its material universe.

The conclusions drawn from chapter 7's discussion of the NUL's creative negotiation of legality and constraint suggest that the structural forces of capitalism and the state do not constitute a fixed limit, but co-evolve with and respond to dissident forces, where they are present. This dialectical approach to the contested spaces between state structures and political agency therefore reveals new possibilities for radical politics to unfold through – and hence for alternative roles to be taken up by – local states, by exercising leverage at the permeable and porous points of the internal social relations of urban governance. The conceptual keynote here is in the *reflexive* relations of autonomy: if structures do not wholly contain agency, there is a 'surplus activity' – comprised of creative and self-aware adaptation and subversion – that exceeds it. Conversely, however, reflexive autonomy implies that creative agency is never unimpeded, but meets its own adaptive responses in the spaces of power. Nor does this relational perspective suggest an equilibrium: rather, it is the very conflict and tension between dominant forces of capital and an insurgent undertow from 'within' the state that results in the cracks, the spaces to, in turn, be leveraged for oppositional projects.

Accordingly, while this reflexive view opens the possibility for new imaginations of how state powers can be claimed for transformative projects, the strategic space for left movements within the state relies on exacerbating rather than resolving the contradictions in the double-sided character of engaging in radical politics within the state. In the GLC, beyond the left's formal political programme, much of its transformative energy lay in its political disposition: taking up the commitments of outside social movements, engaging in openly conflictual forms of politics, and continuing to try to exert (popular) pressure on the instruments of government beyond their particular zone of control.

This implies that to be possible, the 'urban state activism' identified above requires a thoroughgoing internal transformation of local state institutions. The NUL's efforts in the GLC represent an embryonic de-statisation of this kind: trying to change the practices of urban governance, from the decision-making process to the conduct of work, and trying to dismantle the boundaries that exclude ordinary people from participation, investment, and ownership of the decisions and policies governing their lives. These findings can be summed up as follows:

a) The local state is a hybrid, contradictory and uneven space, and therefore a terrain of contestation that provides openings for radical political forces.
b) Those openings are not given, however – rather, structural constraints and political activity co-evolve and structure each other's field of action.
c) Political leeway for radical projects within the state depends on creative, adaptive and self-reflective forms of action – but dominant forces may respond in kind; 'structures' do not necessarily take the form of passivity and institutional inertia.
d) Each of those insights implies the necessity of internal transformation within the local state, based on an effort to intensify rather than resolve or filter the inevitable tensions and contradictions such an effort would raise.

9.5. Activist state-work: the labour and method of in-against-and-beyond the state

In light of this recognition of the contested and contradictory terrain of the state, the internal micro-level politics of the conduct of urban governance come into view as a necessary and significant point of theoretical enquiry. The third research question sought to understand how those internal dynamics are experienced by activists entering local states with explicit political commitments:

> iii. What contradictions arise from the experience of being 'in and against the state', and how do they manifest in a context of left government?

In the GLC, the introduction of alternative governance arrangements show the extent to which seemingly fixed constructions like legality are channelled, and can thus be shaped to some extent, through the practical activity of bureaucratic decision-making. As the pathways for transformative politics make their way through the porous structures of existing legal-

administrative apparatuses, revealing their reliance on political norms operating at the level of bureaucratic consciousness and institutional common-sense, they demand theoretical models attentive to the everyday dimensions of state institutions, and their susceptibility to 'ordinary' activist engagement and creative political energies.

Chapter 8 introduced a new concept of 'activist state-work' to think through the state as a field of labour in the context of pursuing radical politics into and through the state. At several points in this thesis I have made an argument for the theoretical usefulness of disentangling a top-heavy institutional view from an internal activist view. From that internal perspective, activist state work identifies boundary-bridging between the differentiated realms of 'activism' and 'statehood', which blur the distinction between the subjectivity of being 'inside' or 'outside' the state. The concept proposes a potentially disruptive role for activists in destabilising relations of power, based on an autonomist Marxist account of capitalist crisis embedded in the capital-wage relation and its continuity into the social relations within the state.

Through that analytical lens, several contradictions were identified in the quotidian experience of activist state workers, inherent to the dissonant subject-position and contradictory aims of performing officialdom and activism as the same labour in the context of the GLC. These included a conflicted negotiation of how political to be, how to be political while working for others, how to adapt collective principles to the demands of public service, how to deal with conflict and pressure from 'outside', how to aid community organisations and support their mobilisation from a position within state bureaucracy, and how to assert political control and guide bureaucracies without overstepping ethical bounds or inviting backlash.

Whereas grassroots politics are always at risk of incorporation into formal institutional logics, attention to these prosaic practices and dilemmas of activist state-work asserts the possibility of reversing the polarity of this shaping capacity: to shape rather than be shaped by practices and political consciousness, even if mainstream political forces and institutional inertia push powerfully in the opposite direction. At County Hall, although relatively limited, without significantly altering or dismantling the civil service-like bureaucracy, important changes were achieved and new practices implemented that represented significant departures from the existing scope of local government politics. The individual labour of activist state work moves back and forth with wider institutional efforts at change, both to craft new (counter)hegemonic blocs – as in the GLC emerged between radical councillors and officers, career officers, and external organisations – and to imprint and extend a new organisational 'common sense', those mundane practices of governance that form its environment to such an extent that they are typically taken for granted, faintly noticed and rarely challenged. If that common-sense gains its force and invisibility from the blandness of state work (to the extent that its ostensible political neutrality derives from its perceived triviality), the role of *activist* state-work is to denaturalise and expose the political rationalities at work within the state and to model alternative modes of governance. To an extent, the NUL in the GLC can be read as a converse of the state-logic of neoliberalism, which introduces the logic of the private sector into the public sector and thence

into everyday individual life; a socialist alternative aimed to imprint the participatory and collaborative principles of social movements on public institutions, which could then exert socialising pressures on the private sector (Youngpyo, 2007).

Yet in practice, such new approaches and arrangements are never uninfluenced by the priorities of the existing organisational environment in which they are forced to work (Clarke and Cochrane, 1989). The dedication and resourcefulness of the GLC's institutional activists conflicted with a powerful and entrenched bureaucratic machine, and in many respects their radical thrust for internal transformation was difficult to sustain. The more free-floating idea of activist state work must therefore be rooted in the concept of reflexive autonomy: it challenges deterministic perspectives on organisational bureaucracy by allowing space for political agency to transform the state, but without underplaying the powerful (and adaptive) influences of structure. As such it represents a grounded form of the dialectic of structure and agency characteristic of Gramscian political analysis, such as Jessop's (1990) strategic-relational state theory.

Another contradiction of activist state work identified in the GLC study is that while 'compromised leftist bureaucrats' (Harney, 1996) occupy a work-role and personal subject-position that are broadly opposed and contradictory, their labour also expresses an internal, somewhat inverted contradiction. State work is essential for the positive and progressive functions of the public sector in the absence of a robustly self-organised autonomous polity: for radicals to take on that work while seeking to undermine state power (i.e. in ways that might sponsor autonomous self-organisation) demands an uneasy co-presence of pro- and anti-state logics and activities. Thus the practical labour of progressing radical politics through the state involves performing the contradictory work of statisation – enacting the social presence of the state in everyday life – and de-statisation – undermining the state's power to reinforce capitalist relations by crafting and underwriting pockets of autonomy. Nevertheless, these contradictions potentially contain productive possibilities for state and anti-state practice to align. In the tentative forms of democratisation conducted in the GLC, and the NUL's even more embryonic and emergent dabbling in 'de-statisation', we can catch sight of a more porous and rhizomatic form of politics: an unfolding inside-out and outside-in that unsettles fixed boundaries and might potentially, in the agonistic clash of inherent tensions, engender the sparks for a generative dynamic of social change.

The autonomist Marxist perspective on labour is thus key to the concept: these contradictions are *internal* to the labour of state-work, especially pronounced (but not exclusively) if workers are radically misaligned with incumbent state bureaucratic regimes. As argued in chapter 2, autonomist critical perspectives have all too often become clouded amidst a reflex abstention from any form of engagement with state institutions. However, if labour functions as the basis of accumulation *and* its external barrier, the pivot upon which capitalist crisis turns, it follows that state-work, the labour of government, is at the heart of the instability and internal crisis of the state-form.

Accordingly, in an attempt to reconcile this 'red thread' of autonomy with itself and move beyond its calcified limitations, I have suggested that the concept of activist state-work constitutes a bridge between an autonomous politics of self-governing commons and the necessity, in order to expand and sustain such forces, to "occupy the strong points of a social structure that constantly bridle against it" (Lefebvre, 1966: 157). It is the grounded experience and subjectivity that embodies the paradoxical challenge of manipulating the state against itself (Milburn and Russell, 2021). In short, it is a form of engagement with statehood rooted in a decidedly anti-statist and anti-capitalist commitment to a future of self-governing commons.

Activist state-work is thus distinguished from ordinary institutional politics, even those with a radical agenda, by its commitment to disrespecting existing ways of working, existing bureaucratic structures, and the primacy of institutional rules, hierarchies, and norms. As such, it names a political disposition more than a specified set of practices, since such action will be determined by the forces it opposes, and because it will be beset by a wide range of unforeseeable obstacles and difficulties, both overt (such as the threat of being fired, censured, voted out, etc.) and more nebulous and implicit (such as weighing the balance between the benefits of a positive relationship with senior staff against more direct disobedience). It is a disposition, therefore, that is always unsettled, living in the permanently uncomfortable territory between compromise and rebellion. In navigating between the poles of state and activism, it is the unstable ground between a purist revolutionary's disavowal of "mucking around in everyday politics" (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 6) and a bureaucrat's ready absorption of inherited norms.

The experience of being in-and-against the state in a context of left municipal governance can be summarised through the concept of activist state work, as follows:

a) Pursuing activism within state institutions creates inherently dissonant subject-positions that unsettle the boundaries between state and society, de-naturalise the labour of governance, and therefore point to state work as an important practical and theoretical problem-space for radical politics.
b) Together with wider institutional changes, the labour of state work in an activist guise works to imprint new organisational common-senses; while the institutional environment will always shape consciousness and political outcomes, that shaping capacity can be reversed back against the state.
c) The boundary-bridging labour of activist state work is internally contradictory and relies on simultaneously producing and unmaking the social presence of the state; it therefore presents as a potential root of crises in the capitalist state-form.
d) Being in-and-against the state means being permanently unsettled, placed at the groundwork of a dialectic of dominant structures and insurgent agency – maintaining this instability demands an active radical outlook and disposition, disrespectful of power and proactively seeking points of leverage (even if this means sometimes cooperative rather than antagonistic relationships within the state apparatus).

9.6. Change the world by *taking power differently*: beyond power/resistance

The fourth research question aimed to prompt a broader reflection on how the GLC experience in particular, and what it shows about social movements' relation with local states in general, contribute to contemporary left theory and practice:

> iv. How does engagement with state power by social movements challenge radical theoretical approaches to the state, and what does that mean for the strategic thinking that shapes anti-capitalist practice?

My response to this final question requires summarising the concepts that have been dispersed across the various chapters of the thesis. This conclusion is essentially a synthesis and more abstract elaboration of the answers to the previous three research questions.

This thesis was always envisioned, from its outset, as a piece of 'action research', and although the choice of case study militated against conducting participatory research, it was researched and written with a purpose wider than contributing to niche academic knowledge. In the spirit of the new urban left's unwillingness to remain confined by the bounds of institutional norms and propriety, my more open-ended response to this question represents a set of provocations for the radical left, especially in Britain.

The central methodology of the municipal left that formed the object of this study was to advance struggles 'in and against' the state. This strategy adopted a strong critique of the capitalist state and the 'parliamentary' road to socialism, but without resorting to an anarchist or ultraleft refusal of engagement. Instead, the NUL primed itself to open up the structures of local state institutions to a process of democratisation and cultural change, which would reshape the relation between the state and those it 'represents' politically. A first general conclusion for the radical left is therefore to move beyond a binary narrative that clearly separates states from social movements and sees states in black and white terms, either straightforwardly amenable to transformative social projects or inherently damaging to movements and their prospects. States are not *inherently* either, and an antagonistic approach to their institutions and structures is necessary – both to turn them to radical ends and to fundamentally redesign and reconstruct them. The GLC study shows it is possible to use the resources and policy-making structures of a local state for radical ends. But this should not be equated with a straightforward electoral strategy, simply substituting existing elected representatives with 'our' elected representatives and governing as before. A key component of any prospective radical local governing project is to work toward a wholesale transformation of the operation of power.

One important conceptual challenge in this regard is to disentangle 'power' from statehood, and move beyond a binary mode of politics reflected in a 'melancholic' attachment to defeat and disavowal of power (see Nunes, 2021; Srnicek and Williams, 2015). Experiences of contestation within the state trouble a wider affective politics that separates power and resistance, where

proximity to power is cast as reformist and un-radical, and where left integrity is maintained by a disavowal of political successes (Brown, 1999; Gibson-Graham, 2006). Navigating between the twin poles of a naïve optimism and revolutionary defeatism requires rethinking a conceptual dualism of 'power' and 'resistance'. As Newman (2014a: 139) has argued, anti-capitalist thought and strategy too often situates "the relationship between 'activism' and 'governing' as a binary construct that maps onto a power-resistance model of social activism and social change". The dominant conceptual resources for narrating the relationship between activism and the state, and determining their normative content, have typically relied on a binary logic of social forces, separating out state and society, formal and informal politics, direct and mediated action; each of which positions 'resistance' at a remove from the sphere of power. This is even the explicit logic of some anti-capitalist theorising, such as Holloway's (2002) counter-position of 'power' as the enemy of 'doing'.

This imaginary offers a view in which dominant regimes of state and capitalism are situated as 'power' and confront a series of activisms – social and labour movements, protests and so on – situated as powerless. The stakes of this contest are defeatist, distillable to seeing social movements as noble and necessary, but ultimately doomed, forces of resistance, since the only tools for overcoming 'power' entail refraining from it (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Srnicek and Williams, 2015). This conceptual separation, and the anxiety about proximity to state power it betrays, forecloses opportunities for social change towards post-capitalist aims, because a guarded attachment to powerlessness transcends commitments to the messy work of social transformation (Gibson-Graham, 2006). Thus for Ross, "*Resistance* means that the battle, if there ever was one, has already been lost and we can only try helplessly to resist the overwhelming power the other side now wields" (2018: 325).

This has resonances in the concept of 'left melancholy', a term of Walter Benjamin's to critique emotional attachments to the victories and failures of the past, whose conservative underside is a greater attachment to past loss than to "the possibilities of political transformation in the present" (Brown, 1999: 21; Nunes, 2021). This imaginary and its emotional attachments are abundant in left activist conceptual frames, especially in Britain. One consequence of locating power wholesale in some constituents (e.g. the State, bourgeoisie, ruling class, etc.) and its lack in others (working class, social movements, subaltern, etc.) is an unconscious fetishism of that subaltern 'other' as devoid of power – an imaginary that, so long as messy involvement with power is to be avoided, amounts to a ratification of its present conditions. There is a danger of a slippage between the descriptive identification of working class exclusion from power, and a prescriptive moralism defining the 'good' exploited against the 'bad' powerful, in which the moral force of the exploited is asserted by their very failure to hold or exert power (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Brown, 1999). Theodore Adorno makes a similar point about left intellectuals' patronising treatment of the working classes: "In the end, glorification of the splendid underdogs is nothing other than glorification of the splendid system which makes them so" (2020 [1951]: 31). In this ontological universe, the 'resistant' subject is permanently fixed in

place, resisting a monolithic power in a tragic drama of eternal class struggle. Such attachments close down opportunities to bridge the gap between anticipating and realising a world in which the present situation of power and domination is transformed.

One expression of this left-melancholic habit of thought is, again, a strict adherence to abstentionism regarding the state. While there is a strong tendency for left engagements with state power to risk over-identification with institutions, leading to moderation, defensiveness, and allegiance to existing structures, there is also a tendency to produce poor critiques of left governing projects where they do assert a more radical politics. From either direction, on entry into state power, individuals leave the ontological universe of the 'activist' left and enter another, in which each action of the unwieldy and internally contradictory state is automatically attributed to their conduct and conflict within the state is downplayed (as chapters 6 and 8 argued, this is an analytical elision often made about the GLC). Such analyses, in both their pro-state and anti-state forms, limit the scope of action by minimising the possibility of productive pressure-alliance relations. In their pro-state variant, state actions can be attributed to prudent and pragmatic stewardship to be defended from outside agitators who haven't learned how the 'real world' of political power operates; in their anti-state form, potential critical allies are tempted into narratives of betrayal or futility.

However, neither of these positions reflect the reality of practical action within the state, which need not entail abrogation of activism outside it. Indeed, counter to the narrative that proximity to state power is inherently demobilising of social movements and heralds defeat and retrenchment for the left, it is arguably those very expectations themselves that demobilise, heading off any potentially messy encounter with the difficult challenges posed by power. This is not to imply that calls for action autonomous of the state are themselves defeatist, nor unproductive of solidarity – but rather that this reflexive habit of thought produces the very over-identification with power that the critique is aimed against. Paradoxically, then, an important corollary of thinking against the conceptual separation of state and society (and their mapping onto power and resistance) is a need to maintain an ontological distinction between the state and its movement/party occupants – to carefully unpick the actions of councillors and officials, for example, from local government in-itself.

The need to refuse a conceptual separation of state and society, and through that lens recognise the porous boundaries between these domains and the possibility of boundary-bridging, highlights a view of left social movements as a hybrid ecology of actors, whose actions influence and condition each other (Hardt and Negri, 2017; Nunes, 2021). The cultivation of linkages, formal or informal, or even antagonistic, between radicals within and beyond state institutions shifts emphasis in organisational and strategic thinking away from policing in/out boundaries and toward the engineering of complementarity, reciprocity, symbiosis, and convergence (Gonick, 2016; Nunes, 2021). From that point of view, a radical encounter with the local state might enable new solidarities, new spaces for political action, and new productive relations to the social and built environment of the city, to emerge. While far from complete or

articulated as such, this kind of transformative struggle can be glimpsed in the activist energies of those working at the GLC, as I hope to have shown in the conceptual progression from chapters 6 to 8.

Finally, any possibility of social change through the state depends on antagonistic approach. It requires radicals ‘entering’ the state to reject its existing ways of doing things, resist incorporation into a mindset that naturalises its predominant logics, refuse to straightforwardly identify with the institution (although allowing the institution to become more identified with a progressive left politics, as in the GLC case, can be useful in building a wider coalition of support), and voice clear opposition to the harmful and reactionary elements of state power. The willingness to oppose is an important component of breaking institutions out of the circuit of capitalist social relations, and at minimum necessary to resist co-optation and de-radicalisation. Yet this oppositional disposition also means asserting forms of authority and ‘socialist management’ (McLaverty, 1989). A radical agenda will get nowhere without imposing its vision on the state bureaucracy (aided, ideally, by the liberal-democratic legitimacy of an electoral mandate). As the GLC case shows, obstructive workers can be dealt with in a number of ways, but need not necessitate a socialist authoritarianism – appeals to professionalism and legitimacy can also result in productive relations between institutional activists and apolitical public servants.

Attention to and valuing the labour that goes into contestation ‘within’, and refusing to view it as a lesser expression of grassroots social movement practice, is not simply to pardon elected left representatives for their compromises and foibles, however, but acts in the opposite manner. Highlighting the potential for radical political commitments to be sustained undermines the defeatist and defensive attitudes, produced by over-identification with the state and its existing normative rationalities, that are characteristic of a statist social-democratic leftism. Examples of commitments to remaking the state, even where such efforts resulted in frustration and failure, instead demonstrate that an anti-state politics can co-exist with the holding of ‘power’, albeit only very ‘messily’ (Mackintosh and Wainwright, 1987). But at the same time, they disrupt received patterns of anti-statist thinking about ‘electoralism’, driven by rigid structural conceptions of futility and moralistic notions of betrayal.

The British municipal left of the 1980s was, of course, ultimately unsuccessful, failing to replace Thatcherism as the motor force of political, ideological, and cultural leadership, and even in some ways finding itself a ‘hostage to fortune’ as watered-down versions of many of its ideas either migrated to the political centre – such as advocacy of diversity and equal opportunities, participation schemes, and support for the voluntary sector – or became co-opted by the right, such as its criticism of the bureaucratic welfare state. It may also be the case that the left bears responsibility for that failure, and did not sufficiently marshal a counter-hegemonic force to the best of its ability (Atkinson, 1995; McLaverty, 1989). However, as Clarke (1991: 60) points out, “this does not mean that the struggles were politically or theoretically misguided. History judges losers harshly”.

The GLC left did not act from the perspective of failure but rather of a positive and optimistic politics, believing in the possibility of change even as their tools for achieving it were dramatically outgunned. Similarly, while the left's project was by no means united or politically coherent, their willingness to engage with the local state – and in doing so to face (and even welcome) criticism and pressure from the 'outside' – bore fruit in a number of initiatives that improved the quality of everyday life for London's residents. The broader political and strategic elements of the left GLC demonstrate the worth of a political strategy unafraid of messy involvement with political institutions, and the possibility of doing so while remaining committed to social transformation and anti-capitalist values. They show how reimagining the role of the state and transforming its internal operation can practically and conceptually suture urban government to emancipatory political horizons: stitching together projects usually seen as distinct or incommensurate, such as electoral politics and grassroots organising, activism and officialdom, or even the traffic management policy of a local authority and a socialist transformation of society.

9.7. Questions for further research and practical applications

This final section gathers some brief reflections on possible avenues for future research prompted by this study.

One potential pathway opened by the concept of activist state-work, which is of relevance to contemporary debates on radical municipalism (Joubert, 2022), would be to identify and further explore instances of micro-level contestation within local government. This scholarship exists (Harney, 2002; Newman, 2014a) but is partial and not yet linked to either municipalism or to radical left theorising. With some left-led councils struggling to assert a more forcefully radical political programme (Brown and Jones, 2021; Rahman, 2022), it may be that the struggles internal to local state bureaucracies represent the most pressing space for theoretical enquiry to translate into practical lessons. The concept may also present some analytical clarity for understanding smaller progressive projects within more 'standard' entrepreneurial local authorities: for example, could the forms of encounter involved in the work of mediating local state and civil society interests through public consultation be a space for democratisation and radicalisation? Can the boundary-bridging labour identified as activist state-work be identified in domains outside local states – as I mentioned in chapter 3, for example, there may be productive synergies with university labour. Indeed, this thesis represents and expresses, to some extent, my own multiple institutional and activist subjectivities through the labour of activist research, teaching, and lower-level local authority work, all at once.

More specifically to the GLC study, the breadth of the study in this thesis means more in-depth and detailed accounts of specific policy areas are lacking. Whereas some areas of left GLC activity like cultural policy have recently been well explored (Atashroo, 2017; McFadzean,

2021; Williams, 2020), several arenas of a forgotten radicalism within local government have not yet been rediscovered. Further research may find productive lessons adaptable to present concerns in the work, for example, of the GLC Women's Committee, the Police Committee's monitoring programmes, the Planning department's community policies, and the sponsorship of commons infrastructure such as in Coin Street in Waterloo. One of my interviewees urged me to focus on the GLC left's relations with unions – despite a wealth of fascinating data in this regard, it has unfortunately been beyond the scope of this thesis, but is an issue ripe for future study and bears important lessons. Moreover, this thesis has not had space to incorporate the lessons of the 'Can't Pay Won't Pay' campaign of direct action in response to the legal decision on Fares Fair. Again, there are important contradictions and dilemmas raised by that experience (not least of which involved the ambiguous role of transport unions within the state as both workplace and public service), which should be excavated to inform municipal radicalism today.

Another difficulty in translating the GLC's lessons to the present concerns its historical context. Contemporary movements cannot apply the same tactical considerations. Instead, a robust conjunctural analysis would be necessary, tracing the changes to the political opportunity structure represented by local government and its legislative and financial environment, within a wider conjuncture of a drastically different urban political economy to 1980s London. Similarly given the singularity of the case study, more generalisable claims could be made through comparison with present-day radical urbanisms or other historical cases – especially those under-recognised in (anglophone) urban geographical research, such as the troubled experiences of municipal leftism in Latin America (e.g. Eaton, 2020; Goldfrank and Schrank, 2009).

Comparative studies would be better able to draw out strategic lessons by enabling analysis to filter between specific contingent features and more generalisable terrains of capitalist urban economies and local states – particularly in terms of identifying useful strategic innovations and general or typical obstacles and opposing forces. Present-day comparison would open access to a different set of research methods that could mitigate some of the research difficulties regarding historical social movements: namely the relative scarcity of activists' own documentation, reliance on interpreting institutional sources and limited access to participants able to support those interpretations. Trans-local comparison, meanwhile, would strongly accord with the internationalist emphasis of municipalism already being recognised in international activist and scholarly networks (Russell, 2019).

Beyond those questions for further theoretical exploration, there may also be more direct and practical ways to apply the intellectual resources, frames of reference, and strategic innovations of the NUL in the GLC for today's left. One suggestion in this direction, as a function of 'critical solidarity' and engaged research, would be a set of practical guidelines, useful information, and critical encouragement for organising in-and-against the local state. For example, I can imagine a 'Critical Handbook for Radical Councillors' based on the GLC experience and folding in lessons and information from elsewhere. This would be pedagogical,

spelling out a sophisticated state theory that acknowledges states' structural but not overdetermined relation to capital, and examines the scope for altering their institutional apparatuses. But it would also be practical and polemical, interrogative and instructive, urging councillors or other radical staff to break from the technocratic tradition of Labourism. It might suggest activists, for example, avoid closely identifying themselves or their actions with the institution; be willing to side with activists and act with feet in both camps; help those 'outside' learn how councils operate and transparently account for 'internal' difficulties, helping to facilitate collective thinking toward solutions and incite external pressure; deal with discomfort for management and learn how to assert political authority; and find ways to expand democratisation and include council workers in higher-level policy discussion. It would also contain expectations for critical solidarity from aligned outsiders, such as urging radical organisations to support critical forms of professional practice and training, hold local authorities to account as both engaged activists and citizen experts, and aid the search for opportunities to open and work any available oppositional space.

In short, what I have recommended in this thesis is that those with radical anti-capitalist political agendas ought to engage with and seek to transform state structures, particularly at the strategic level of the municipality. The charge for that engagement, however, is to do so in alliance with forces autonomous of the state, and to do so with disrespect for state structures and their creative subversion in mind and heart – as a matter of both principle and strategic effectiveness. Even if penalties for breaking the law are as strict as ever, if ultra vires action can be struck down, and if the various other legal and bureaucratic constraints are now tighter, it would be defeatist and melancholic to suppose that there is less available creative thinking and capacity today among left movements than existed in the 1980s GLC.

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Appendix 1: Index of archival sources

A1.1. Personal collections

Indicated in text by author followed by year.

GLC Women's Committee. 1986. *The London Women's Handbook*. [eBay purchase]

GLC Industry and Employment Committee. 1985. *The London Industrial Strategy*. [H Wainwright]

GLC Transport Committee. 1985. *Changing the Balance: The GLC's New Traffic Schemes*. [P Moore]

GLC. 1981. *Minority Party Report: A Socialist Policy for the GLC*. [Labour GLC manifesto, as published in March 1981 GLC Agenda]. [K Livingstone]

Islington Action Group of the Unwaged. 1987. *Unwaged Fightback: A History of Islington Action Group of the Unwaged, 1980-1986*. Reprinted by 56a Infoshop. [56a Infoshop]

Ward, M. 1981. *Job Creation by the Council*. Institute for Workers Control. Pamphlet. [M Ward]

A1.2. London Metropolitan Archive

i. GLC Publications and reports (*LMA/R/[committee] [year]*)

Indicated by prefix LMA/R, followed by committee acronym where relevant and date. Where reports have no date, they are listed by letter indicating order of appearance in the text.

Ethnic Minorities [EMC]

1982. *Proposals for a special programme of anti-racist activities 1983-4*. [GLC/DG/PRE/50/01]

1983. *Race equality and ethnic minorities in London: Future strategy report 1983-1985*. [GLC/DG/PUB/01/151/1308]

Greater London Council [GLC]

1983. Livingstone, K. 1983. Report by the Leader of the Council, Extract from GLC Council Agenda, Tuesday 24 May 1983 [GLC/DG/PRB/35/040].

1984. *London and Civil Defence: A GLC Fact Pack* [GLC/DG/PRB/50/3057]

1986. *London Labour Plan*. [LSPU/DIR/01/076]

Greater London Enterprise Board [GLEB]

n.d. (a) *Saving jobs… shaping the future. An introduction to enterprise planning*. GLEB booklet. [GLC/DG/PUB/01/161/U0281]

n.d. (b) *Black Businesses: redressing the Balance*. GLEB Information Division. [GLC/DG/PUB/01/161/U0283]

n.d. (c) *Technology networks: science and technology serving London's needs*. GLEB booklet. [GLC/DG/PUB/01/287/U1454]

1984. *A strategy for co-operation: worker co-ops in London.* GLEB booklet. [4282/02/005]

Industry and Employment Committee [IEC]

1982. London's Economic Crisis: Borough Profiles – Why we need the GLC's Alternative Economic Strategy. [GLC/DG/PUB/01/155/U0226]

1983a. *Jobs for a Change.* Economic Policy Group Booklet. [GLC/DG/PUB/30/001]

1983b. *Inventing A New Economics Of Need: Life In The GLC's Economic Policy Group.* [LSPU/DIR/01/043]

1984a. (Ward, M.) *Resourcing the Cities*. Paper presented at the GLC Inner Cities Conference, 6 April 1984. [GLC/DG/PUB/01/155/U0224]

1984b. (Ward, M.) *Socially useful work: an alternative strategy*. Committee report, July 1984. [GLC/DG/PUB/01/155/U0225]

1985. *Worker Cooperatives in London* (Social and Economic Study Packs No.5). GLC Economic Policy Group [GLC/DG/PUB/01/205/U0516]

Intelligence Unit [IU]

1986. *Annual Abstract of Greater London Statistics Vol. 17, 1984-1985.* [GLC/DG/PUB/01/280/1632]

Policy Committee [PC]

1983. Livingstone, K. 'Report to Policy Committee', December 1983. [GLC/DG/PR/04-14]

Transport Committee [TC]

1985a. *London Transport under the GLC: A Record of Achievement*. [GLC/DG/PUB/01/159/1494]

1985b. *Transport Policies for London: A brief summary for public consultation*. [GLC/DG/PUB/01/155/U0244]

ii. Press Releases (LMA/PR/[bulletin number])

GLC Press releases were numbered within the year. Where a bulletin number repeats, they are cited with letters, chronologically rather than in order of their appearance in the thesis. All GLC press releases are in the LMA archive at GLC/DG/PRB/35.

16 (11.1.83) 'Sizewell reactor "a dangerous and costly irrelevance" – GLC.'

47 (26.1.83) 'GLC to check Shell pension fund investment.'

79 (9.2.83) 'GLC transport lifeline for the disabled.'

106 (21.2.83) 'GLC says "no" to Sizewell B.'

123 (20.4.82) 'Women's view on safe travel.'

125 (22.4.82) 'Ethnic minority conference at County Hall.'

157 (13.5.82) 'Nuclear Free London.'

189 (19.5.81) 'GLC's future civil defence policy.'

191 (20.5.81) 'GLC may scrap nuclear war defence plans.'

192 (1.6.82) 'Nuclear free zone takes off.'

195 (22.5.81) 'GLC leadership backs the jobs march.'

202 (29.5.81) 'Free travel on Underground for London's senior citizens.'

221 (19.4.83) 'GLC consults ethnic groups.'

230 (21.6.82) 'GLC's new travel deal for the disabled.'

234 (24.6.81) 'GLC grants panel planned.'

237 (24.6.81) 'New approach to arts in London.'

238 (25.4.83) 'Better transport for women.'

248 (3.7.81) 'GLC to ban South African goods.'

249 (1.7.81) 'GLC to consider supporting boycott of Lucas products.'

260 (5.5.83) ‘Big boost for London bus lanes.’

277 (7.7.82) ‘GLC boost for bicycles – and buses.’

290 (5.8.81) ‘GLC cash for community groups.’

294 (11.4.85) ‘GLC “Pavements are for people law” starts to bite.’

297 (16.5.83) ‘GLC to quiz shell over South African oil shares.’

317 (23.5.83) ‘GLC protest over Rio Tinto Zinc mining operations.’

375 (28.10.81) ‘Big new look at GLC road plans.’

382 (2.11.81) ‘GLC aid to centres for jobless.’

384 (4.11.81) ‘Brent co-operative development agency to get GLC help.’

386 (4.11.81) ‘Cash help for cooperative development agency.’

402 (15.9.82) ‘Big cuts in GLC road schemes.’

413 (23.11.81) ‘GLC says ‘no’ to civil defence exercises.’

423 (23.9.82) ‘GLC winds down civil defence and publishes war plans.’

427 (3.12.81) ‘GLC chief economic advisor.’

430 (28.9.82) ‘Can London survive the bomb?’

434 (29.9.82) ‘GLC gets safe women’s transport on the road.’

446 (14.12.81) ‘GLC’s new deal for workers.’

548 (17.11.82) ‘Taxis for the disabled – new GLC scheme.’

593 (1.7.85) ‘Workers co-ops create jobs and industrial democracy, says GLC jobs chief.’

597 (6.10.83) ‘GLC helps Scientists Against Sizewell.’

639 (24.10.83) ‘GLC challenges the economic case for Sizewell B.’

681 (3.11.83) ‘Motion for Debate.’

754 (25.11.83) ‘Privatisation: New GLC broadsheet slams profiteers.’

759 (29.11.83) ‘GLC draws up anti-apartheid charter.’

876 (12.12.84) ‘GLC go-ahead for lorry ban and permit system.’

iii. Miscellaneous

Cited in text directly by LMA reference code.

[LMA: ACC/3029/002] Leaflet: “Transport and Socialism: A Big Flame public meeting – 2nd March 1982”. In: ‘Branch notes and articles concerning LT Worker Unity In Action group and Fares Fair campaign’.

[LMA: LSPU/WEG/01/025] Minutes: Women's Committee Support Unit, Staff meetings, 13 September 1982-4 July 1983.

A1.3. May Day Rooms

Indicated by prefix MDR, followed by committee and year. Because the items collected by the GLC Story held at May Day Rooms are organised thematically rather than according to publication type or by numbered boxes, these are referenced according to the document title. Where a source is a publication, the publication title is given in the text without the MDR prefix.

GLC

1983. GLC Peace Year Publicity Initiatives. [document draft].

1984. *Grant Aid to Voluntary and Community Associations*. [booklet].

1985a. *GLC Peace Year*. [leaflet].

1985b. *GLC Peace Year Information Pack*. [folder containing leaflets, Peace Year diary, Peter Kennard postcards].

Planning

1985. *Community Areas Policy: A Record of Achievement.*

Women's Committee [WC]

n.d. [a] Women's Committee Leaflet. 'Women: This is your chance to tell the Transport Secretary what you want!'.

n.d. [b] Women's Committee Leaflet. 'Man-made London means…'

Industry and Employment Committee [IEC]

1985. Mulgan, G. and Worpole, K. 'One-way Street? Cultural diversity and technological change: the London Industrial Strategy and the cultural industries'. *June 4th Workshop at the GLC*.

GLC Labour Group [GLC Labour Group]

1986. *Labour Group Annual Report*. Document Draft.

Greater London Enterprise Board [GLEB]

1984a. *Enterprising London*. No. 1, May 1984.

1984b. *Enterprising London*. No. 3, Winter 1984.

1984c. *Enterprising London*. No. 2, September 1984.

1985a. *Enterprising London*. No. 5. Spring 1985.

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Anti-Deportations Working Group [ADWG].

1986. *Right to Be Here: A Campaigning Guide to the Immigration Laws*.

Periodicals and pamphlets

The Leveller, 1982. Interview with Ken Livingstone. No. 6. 14 May 1982.

London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group. 1979. *In and Against the State: Discussion Notes for Socialists*. Pamphlet.

McDonnell, J. 1984. Decentralisation and new social relations. *Going Local?* 1, pp. 3-4.

City Limits. 1981. No. 7. 20-26 November 1981.

Campaign for Real Life & BM Combustion. 1984. *'Wage Slavery – For No Change'*. Leaflet.

'London as it might be'. Conference invitation. 1982.

A1.4. Bishopsgate Institute

Indicated by prefix BI, followed by author and date where available. All items are from the Dave Wetzel collection, which was largely uncatalogued at the time of writing.

Fares Fair Support Campaign. 1981. '*Emergency Demo – Defend Cheap Fares'*. [Leaflet, November 1981].

GLC Women's Committee. 1985a. *Free Bulletin*, Issue 25, Aug/Sep 1985. 'Women on the Move: Special Issue on Transport'.

GLC Women's Committee. 1985b. *Women on the Move, GLC Survey on Women and Transport*, 1. Initial Research Preliminary to Survey: Women's Group Discussions.

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Wages for Housework Campaign, Black Women for Wages for Housework, The English Collective of Prostitutes, Wages Due Lesbians, and Women Against Rape. 1982. '*London Belongs to Us!/On Behalf of the Unwaged and Low Waged'*. Press Release.

Safe Women's Transport. 1981. Letter from Mary Evans to Edna Mathieson, 9 October 1981; Letter from Mary Evans to Dave Wetzel, 6 November 1981.

A1.5. London Labour Briefing [British Library]

Cited in text by issue date.

May 1980. Corbyn, J. 'GLC manifesto – This time we'll decide', p. 1.

June 1981. Benn, S. 'Public transport: Bringing socialist polices to life', p. 6.

June 1981. Livingstone, K. 'London's Ours', pp. 1-2.

July 1981. Wise, V. 'County Hall News', p. 19

August 1981a. Veness, K. 'Defectors renege on Labour manifesto pledge: School meals sell-out', p. 1.

August 1981b. Corbyn, J. 'School meals prices – why we must fight', p. 3.

August 1981c. Sanders, M. 'GLC Housing Transfer', p. 6.

November 1981a. Wise, V. and Ridley, K. 'Women, the GLC and the Labour Party', p. 14.

November 1981b. Corbyn, P. 'Council Housing fed to the wolves', p. 17.

December 1981. Editorial. 'Judges – Keep out!', p. 1.

March 1982a. Livingstone, K. 'Stay and fight!', p. 5.

March 1982b. Wise, V. and Knight, C. 'Editorial: Taking to the Streets', p. 3.

April 1982. Veness, K. 'The case for withdrawal: an alternative editorial', p. 4.

June 1982a. Wise, V. 'GLC Backs Women,' p. 22.

June 1982b. Wallcraft, J. 'Lessons of the Fares Campaign', pp. 10-11. [Photograph p. 10].

July 1982. Anand, V. 'The GLC's investments in South Africa', p. 20.

April 1983. Roelofs, S. 'GLC Women's Committee – Democratisation or Feminism?', p. 18.

July 1984a. 'You can't crush the spirit of the GLC', p. 1.

July 1984b. Roelofs, S. 'Getting racism out of town: interview with Ken Livingstone', p. 14.

A1.6. Miscellaneous

Singular items and internet sources. Indicated in the text by author/title.

Cutler, H. 1979. *Letter to Margaret Thatcher, 4 July 1979*. The National Archives. [TNA/PREM19/198 'Education: GLC Leader Horace Cutler letter to MT ("Future of the ILEA")']

Labour Herald, October 16, 1981.

London Government Act 1972. C. 70. London: The National Archives. [Online] Available at: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1972/70/contents/enacted

Thames News, 'Vox Pops', 18 December 1981. Available at: https://youtu.be/XzmIh9eUSO8

Thames News, 'Oxford Kilburn Youth Club', 8 December 1983. Available at: https://youtu.be/XoAbXU6VaeU

Appendix 2: Interviews

A2.1. Formal recorded interviews

Leader **Ken Livingstone** (interviewed 1 November 2018)

Chair Finance/Deputy Leader **John McDonnell** (interviewed 23 August 2018)

Chair Industry and Employment/Deputy Leader **Mike Ward** (interviewed 26 July 2018)

Chair Transport **Dave Wetzel** (interviewed 3 October 2018 and 28 August 2019)

Vice-chair Transport **Paul Moore** (interviewed 3 October 2018)

Chair Planning **George Nicholson** (interviewed 31 October 2018)

Council officer **Hilary Wainwright** (interview 11 May 2018)

Council officer **Maureen Mackintosh** (interviewed 2 November 2018)

Council officer **Bob Colenutt*** (interviewed 22 October 2018)

GLEB Board Member **Nick Sharman** (interviewed 26 July 2018)

(*One recorded interview does not appear in the thesis text but was instrumental in developing my overall knowledge of the case study.)

A2.2. Interview transcripts in *GLC Story* archive

Peter Dawe, interviewed by Deborah Grayson, 9 January 2017

Ansel Wong, interviewed by Zahra Dalilah, 16 February 2017

Tony Bunyan, interviewed by Zakeera Suffee, 2 March 2017

Linda Bellos, interviewed by Aviah Day, 7 March 2017

Paul Marris, interviewed by Lucy McFadzean, 13 March 2017

Di Parkin, interviewed by Josie Wales, 17 March 2017

Hilary Wainwright, interviewed by Claire Perrault, 2 April 2017

Nadine Finch, interviewed by Ayeisha Thomas Smith, 16 May 2017

Brenda Kirsch, interviewed by Josh Virasami, 13 June 2017

Femi Otitoju, interviewed by Natasha Nkonde, 10 July 2017

(Six other GLC Story interviews informed this research but do not appear in the text.)