

DEMOCRACY UNCHAINED

Written by supporters towards the launch of the
Real Democracy Movement

Draft for discussion



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Introduction

Democracy Unchained is offered as a draft for discussion by supporters of the project to create a Real Democracy Movement. Brought together by people in Kent, Wales, Yorkshire, London and Scotland, it includes a range of thoughts about what is wrong with the existing system, a vision of what a real democracy could look like and how to make it a reality.

In their various ways, Trump's victory and the EU referendum vote are seismic events. Traditional forms of representative democracy have lost their appeal, authority and legitimacy. Many have come to conclude that the existing democracy, the state system and the capitalist economy which it prioritises, cannot provide, much less guarantee, the basic requirements of life – jobs, a decent standard of living, shelter, and human rights.

Above all, it is paralysed in the face of runaway global warming and eco-extinction. This opens up grave dangers as right-wing populist leaders and parties manipulate the discontent for their own reactionary ends.

Millions have demonstrated in Washington, London and around the world in opposition to Trump's presidency. Huge divisions have opened up in the very heart of state institutions. In the UK, the judiciary, parliament and the executive are in deep conflict over Brexit and its implications. Inequality, meanwhile, is growing and public services like the NHS are starved of funds and face collapse.

The clear and present danger is an opportunity to concentrate minds on the need to come together to create a Real Democracy Movement. The long history of struggle for democracy can inspire this work. Creating a vision for the future in a collective way and acting on our conviction is vital to counter the outright lie that no other future is possible.

Democracy Unchained is not intended as a completed or final manifesto. It is simply an initial document for you to critique, add to, improve and change. Your thoughts on what kind of organisation is needed are particularly important.

Please read it, share it as widely as possible, comment on it and put forward your ideas at meetings, online and via social media so we can produce a revised draft and prepare to launch the Real Democracy Movement as an organisation during the course of 2017.

Democracy: then and now

Democracy as an ideal first appeared in the ancient world, some two and a half thousand years ago. It has a rich and inspiring life story – and the latest chapter is only just beginning. What it embodies is the natural human aspiration for a society free from all kinds of oppression.

There are various claims as to where democracy first appeared, including Vaishali in India in the 6th century Before the Common Era (BCE). But present knowledge indicates that a developed theory and practice of democracy first arose in Greece, reaching its high point in the 5th century BCE.

“The challenge at the time was to develop new strategies for suppressing the abuses of power and injustice, to restore a functioning social order, and to do so from the middle of society. In other words, the community itself had to be able to accomplish something that otherwise only a tyrant was capable of ... The only way for Greeks to stay true to themselves was to change and, astonishingly, they largely succeeded in doing this.” (*A Culture of Freedom* by Christian Meier, 2011)

The idea that people themselves could find solutions to problems in a collective, non-hierarchical way did not arise from a cultural blank slate nor was it a European or ‘Western’ notion. Miletus, a Greek polis (city-state or body of citizens) on the west coast of today’s Turkey, was a “conjunction between the emergent Greek civilisation and the ancient empires of Mesopotamia and Egypt, nourished by their knowledge but immersed in the liberty and political fluidity which is typically Greek”, Carlo Rovelli notes.

The leading theoretical physicist, Carlo Rovelli, salutes the close connection between early democracy in Greece and the emergence of scientific thought: “Miletus is the place where for the first time, men decide collectively their own laws; where the first parliament in the history of the world gathers – the Panionium, meeting place of the delegates of the Ionian League – and where for the first time men doubt that only the gods are capable of accounting for the mysteries of the world. Through discussion it is possible to reach the best decisions for the community.”

Reality is not what it seems, Allen Lane 2016

“To an ancient Greek democrat (of any stripe), all our modern democratic systems would count as “oligarchy”. By that I mean the rule of and by – if not necessarily or expressly for – the few, as opposed to the power or control of the people, or the many (demo-kra-tia).” Classicist Paul Cartledge on his book, *Democracy – a Life*, 2016

The theory and practice of democracy existed – indeed was only possible at that time – alongside the subjugation of a slave class. Slaves who did not have citizenship rights carried out menial labour, while free citizens acquired the leisure to think about nature, society and thought itself.

But the existence of slavery in no way diminishes the ground-breaking innovation of the ancient Greeks, especially the Athenians.

They advanced a political practice based not on a supreme ruler or priest, but on the equal status of citizens. Their assembly appointed a sage called Solon as their archon or ruler in 594 BCE. He enacted a series of laws “valid for both high and low, fashioning straight justice for everyone”. Solon received his authority not from an aristocracy but from an “ad hoc assembly”. (Christian Meier)

The Athens assembly met 40 times a year, perhaps more frequently, with a quorum of 6,000 citizens meeting on the Pnyx hill. It aimed for unanimity and consensus but also put issues which had significance to formal votes. Women, foreigners, and slaves had no political rights, only adult male citizens. But, significantly, the majority of these were working people.

Historian Neil Faulkner explains in *A Marxist History of the World* how things worked: “The ten leading city officials (strategoi) were up for election every year. The Council of Four Hundred (boule), the main deliberative body, was selected by lot. The Popular Assembly (ekklesia), a mass open-air meeting of all citizens, was the sovereign decision-making body of the state. Justice was administered by jury-courts of up to 2,500 ordinary citizens. Ostracism was an election in reverse: if anyone secured 6,000 negative votes, they were expelled

Before the Common Era

900-800 BCE Lycurgus introduces Great Rhetra laws in Sparta, including equality for women

507 BCE Democratic experiment in Athens: Athenian leader Cleisthenes introduces demokratia, or “rule by the people”

500-400 BCE Democratic assemblies in Athens, Miletus and other Greek city states

494-493 BCE Citizen rights enshrined by Solon’s laws, aristocracy curbed

300 BCE- 50 CE Roman republic - a city-state with democracy for citizens

72 BCE Spartacus, a gladiator, leads slave uprising against Rome

from the city for ten years.” The Athenian form spread to other city-states across the Greek world.

Democracy in a recognisable form seems to have disappeared until towards the end of the first millennium of the Common Era (CE). Consultative assemblies – called by various names including Thing, Ding, Sameting, Folkmoot, Tynwald and Thingowe – took place in northern European societies. In England these were episodic gatherings in a country where the Anglo-Saxons and Vikings contested power in a divided country.

This conflict was brought to a close by a third party – the Normans. After the Normans conquered the country, they systematically went about building a unified – and above all, centralised – state under an absolute monarchy using the most brutal of methods. North of England rebellions were put down with maximum force.

In 1085 William the Conqueror commissioned the Domesday Book which surveyed property and livestock holdings for over 13,000 settlements. This was about taxation, to discover what had been owed during the period before the invasion. It was used to reassert the rights and legitimacy of the new rulers. The emergence of a defined, identifiable state with its claim to authority over all citizens would provoke a series of struggles for rights by those denied power and ruled in an arbitrary fashion. These struggles have continued through to the present day.

Milestones in the long struggle for democracy have directly or indirectly been the outcome of actions, sometimes by a few in secret, illegal societies, at other times by powerful forces, or large numbers who came together in militant groups or uprisings.

In 1215 King John was forced by his barons to sign the Magna Carta. This charter set down limits on the power of the monarch. It stated: “No free man

Common Era

970-1000 Assemblies of free people - Thing, Ding, Sameting, Folkmoot, Tynwald and Thingowe - meet in Old Norse, English, Icelandic, Danish, German, Anglo-Saxon societies

1215 Magna Carta signed in Runnymede enshrines equality before the law

1217 Charter of the Forest grants free common men rights of access

1265 Simon de Montfort introduces first Parliament

1378-1382 Ciompi (labourers) revolt in Florence

1381 The Great Rising in England: rebellion by citizens against taxation and the state

1525 Hundreds of thousands rise up for rights in Germany, emboldened by Reformation

shall be taken or imprisoned, or dispossessed or outlawed or exiled or in any way ruined, nor will we go or send against him except by the lawful judgement of his peers or by the law of the land.” Over the next centuries nobles, lawyers and judges used it as a bulwark to assert rights against the arbitrary wielding of power. It was the beginning of enshrining rights in documents, such as charters, agreements and constitutions, so that struggles would bring about real change.

Amongst the first mass movements was the Great Rising of 1381, following the Black Death pandemic. Anger at the levying of the Poll Tax sparked a revolt in Kent which quickly spread throughout the country and Wat Tyler led thousands of people in a march on London. The poor and the middle classes challenged the right of Parliament (on behalf of the landowners) to hold down labourers’ pay and restrict people’s movement. The rebels attacked not only the tax collectors, but the London citadels of their oppressors: the Savoy Palace and the Treasurer’s Highbury Manor. They opened up prisons and destroyed legal records.

As Parliament became more established from the 14th century onwards – although it could be easily dismissed – the Crown used it to reaffirm its own legitimacy. For example, the dissolution of the monasteries in the first half of the 15th century was carried through by an Act of Parliament which affirmed the break with Rome. The ending of the Tudor period with the death of Elizabeth I ushered in the Stuarts and in 1628 Parliament was dissolved for 11 years, a period known as the ‘personal rule’ of Charles I. Conflict became inevitable.

When Parliament was recalled in 1641 for Charles I to raise money for a war with Scotland, he was presented with the Grand Remonstrance. This was a list of grievances drawn up by MPs and presented to Charles I after narrowly passing through the Commons. Within a year, the English Civil War between Crown and Parliament had broken out, lasting until 1649.

Timeline

- 1642-1651** English Civil War between monarchy and Parliament
- 1647** Agreement of the People put forward by Levellers at Putney Debates
- 1688** Power of Parliament asserted over the British monarchy through Bill of Rights
- 1769** John Wilkes’ Society for the Supporters of the Bill of Rights
- 1765-1783** American revolution: independence from British parliament and king; republican constitution
- 1789** June 13 – July 9 National Constituent Assembly: – revolutionary Assembly overthrows French monarchy
- 1791** Tom Paine publishes *The Rights of Man*

In 1647, the Levellers – sometimes referred to as history’s first political party – drew up the *Agreement of the People*, which was debated by the Army Council at St. Mary’s church, Putney and which included rank-and-file soldiers’ delegates. This draft constitution advocated universal suffrage for men, strict limits on executive power and the abolition of monarchy. Charles I was executed in 1649 and England became a republic for 11 years.

John Lilburne, Richard Overton and William Walwyn campaigned for a political and constitutional settlement which embodied the principles of political freedom, “anticipating by a century and a half the ideas of the American and French revolutions,” as the late Tony Benn put it. Another group, the True Levellers or Diggers, sought to abolish private property rights.

During the 19th and early 20th centuries, the Chartists and later the Suffragettes led the struggle for the right to vote in Britain. This was the form through which the property-less, disenfranchised classes and women sought to achieve political and other representation as a means of gaining access to power.

The long struggle to achieve democratic representation and a share in power outlined here has been transformed today from an ideal into a meaningless generalisation by the political establishment, the mainstream media, schools, universities and churches. They have appropriated the term ‘democracy’ and we need to reclaim it for ourselves so we can give it fresh meaning and content.

If ‘democracy’ is just about having a vote once every five years to decide who is to ‘represent’ us, then, yes, we live in a democracy of a certain type. If we can more or less speak our minds

The present ‘democracy’ is unrepresentative of people without power. It is subverted by unelected and unaccountable bodies such as ‘think tanks’, elite corporate lobbyists and by the mainstream media. The Parliamentary system has become a self-interested elite with time-consuming rituals that are not fit for purpose.

RDM supporter **Pamela**, London

1792 Mary Wollstonecraft writes *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*;

London Corresponding Society formed

1795 Mass rallies in London for democratic reforms

1819 St Peter’s Field rally Manchester for parliamentary reform followed by Peterloo massacre

1832 Reform Act extends franchise to middle class males

1833 Friendly Society of Agricultural Labourers founded (Tolpuddle Martyrs)

1838-1848 Chartist movement

1844 Rochdale Pioneers set out principles for co-operatives

The present system does not represent or work in the interests of the majority of the population. Most of the time its elected representatives do not reflect the electors' needs or wishes.

RDM supporter **Marcelle**, Hackney

and write articles critical of what goes on, then again we have to say we live in a democracy and not a dictatorship.

But if *real* democracy is about the power of the people, about a political and economic system that works for and serves the interests of the majority (see chapter 4 for more about this), then it is plain that what we have is an ill-disguised fraud on the people. Surely, the United Kingdom

and its governing institutions cannot really be labelled truly democratic when:

- our votes count for less and less because governments put the interests of business, banks and developers above those of the majority
- Parliament lives under the shadow of the executive, unable to decide anything of significance
- an outdated voting system is designed to reinforce the existing political system
- key decisions that determine the way we live are taken in the boardrooms of giant corporations and hedge funds, which are not accountable to anyone
- eight people own the same wealth as the poorest half of the world's population, according to Oxfam
- climate change is allowed to get out of control, threatening all forms of life on the planet.

A network of lobby companies advance the interests of giant corporations, pressing governments to agree destructive trade deals like TTIP, TTP and CETA. These deals are made in secret under immense pressure at international level and only subject to parliamentary approval later.

Timeline

1848 Year of democratic revolutions - the Spring of Nations - in Europe and Latin America;

Marx and Engels publish the *Communist Manifesto*

1867 Reform Act extends right to vote to workers for the first time

1868 Trade Union Congress founded

1871 The Paris Commune: democratic council as seat of power, involves many women

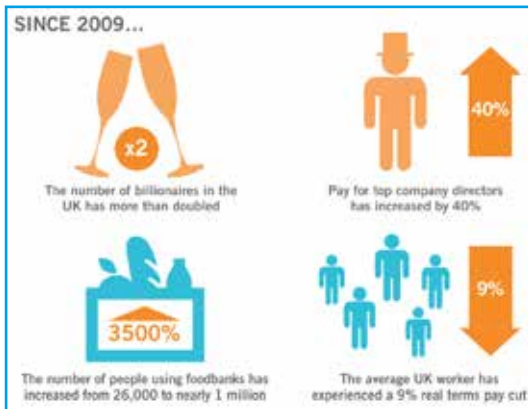
1884 Reform Act widens vote to male workers

1888 Mass trade unionism grows in Britain

We cannot really be said to live in a democracy where:

- important resources and services are in the hands of private corporations and run for profit
- the mainstream media is in the hands of a few powerful corporations while the BBC most of the time acts as a mouthpiece for the state
- trade unions have few rights to mount effective strikes without facing punitive court action.

Inequality has reached unprecedented levels, with vast numbers relying on food banks and means-tested benefits to scrape a living under the impact of



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Outmoded and seemingly corrupt institutions are hell bent on controlling and masking what their real power is all about. Historically most if not all establishment structures and layers are based on so-called elites treating the masses in a condescending way which starts at schooling through to work.

RDM supporter **Tom**, Rotherham

austerity that favours the 1%. New research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies has found that one in five low-paid men aged 25 to 55 now work part-time. While 95% of top-earning men normally work full-time, 20% of the lowest paid now work part-time. That means wage inequality for men has risen over two decades. What is democratic about that?

1900-2000

1900 Establishment of Labour Party

1916 Easter Rising in Ireland

1917 The Russian Revolution: Tsarist autocracy and Provisional Government overthrown.

Soviet workers' council republic established by Bolsheviks. Russia exits war.

Revolutionary upheavals around Europe

1918, 1928 The Representation of the People Acts - women get the vote in Britain

1926 General Strike in Britain

1945-1960s Struggles for self-determination by colonial peoples

We are living through the transition from a so-called liberal democracy to an illiberal democracy or corporatocracy, from a welfare state to a market state. Others suggest that we live in a world of ‘post democracy’ or a ‘hollowed out’ democracy. They all contain aspects of the real state of things where:

- new generations are unable to obtain affordable housing because of exorbitant rents and soaring house prices
- the National Health Service is starved of resources and plans for its future privatisation, drawn up in secret by overpaid bureaucrats
- women, black and minority ethnic communities, migrants and people with disabilities are targets for abuse, discrimination and super-exploitation
- the education system is fragmented and is increasingly passing out of local council control into the hands of businesses who run academies
- students leave universities tens of thousands of pounds in debt
- access to justice is unequal, with only the wealthy able to afford decent legal representation
- Britain has the largest prison population in Western Europe (150 per 100,000)
- a secret surveillance network can access every call, email and social media activity without anyone ever knowing about it.

Workers, older people, communities, towns, cities, whole regions and countries within the UK are powerless. There is representation – but it is representation without power. Overwhelmingly, for example, people are against fracking and nuclear power. But these policy decisions are made by government, endorsed by Parliament and rammed down people’s throats. Our voices and votes are disregarded and the majority are effectively disenfranchised.

1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations

1950 Signing of the European Convention on Human Rights

1949 People’s Republic of China proclaimed, ends Chinese civil war;
Yugoslav workers’ councils created

1955-1968 American Civil Rights movement

1956 Hungarian workers create revolutionary councils

1959 Cuban revolution

1966 UN General Assembly adopts International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

A political system in crisis

All over the world, existing political systems and therefore democracy itself are in crisis. This takes a variety of forms, varying from country to country, from continent to continent. One sure indicator is the loss of faith in older established political parties; another is the rise of right-wing populist and nationalist parties accompanied by outbursts of xenophobia in search of someone to blame. Historically-formed allegiances have broken down as voters lose trust in political institutions and traditional parties.

Labour for example was not long ago the dominant party in Scotland, taking charge when the country regained its Parliament. In 1999 Labour won 39% of the vote and 56 seats in the Holyrood elections. Their support for the Union at the time of the independence referendum in 2014 quickly accelerated a sharp decline in support from Scotland's voters, leading to a political meltdown. At the 2015 general election, Labour lost 40 seats (ending up with just one). Last year Labour's share of the vote in the Scottish parliamentary elections was reduced to 22.6% and they came in third behind the Scottish National Party and the Tories.

In Britain, as with most other Western countries, the democratic elements within the set-up are controlled and manipulated. The forms of representative democracy may remain (the occasional vote), but in reality the people have been shut out of any involvement in the making of decisions. The democracy that has evolved does not allow for the real issues facing the world (global warming, health of the planet and everyone on it, war, poverty etc) to be presented to the people at all. Democracy has in effect been suspended and drained of any meaning as all the main parties come together to find ways of breathing new life into a system that is broken beyond repair. The will of the people has been subverted by the interests of the banks, the corporations and big business in general via parliament, the mainstream press and state propaganda.

RDM supporter **Peter**, London

1967-1968 Northern Irish Civil Rights movement

1968 French General Strike; Prague Spring

1969 Representation of the People Act (Britain) drops voting age to 18

1974 "Who rules Britain?" crisis election over miners' strike. Tories defeated

1980-1983 Solidarnosc for workers rights and social change in Poland

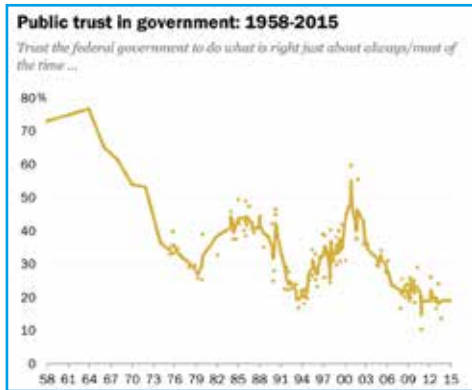
1989 Tiananmen Square protests in China. Fall of the Berlin wall ends rule by Stalinist regime in GDR. Wave of political revolutions across Eastern Europe

1998 Human Rights Act passed in Britain incorporates ECHR (1950) into UK law

Meanwhile, in the rest of the UK, left-winger Jeremy Corbyn has twice been re-elected as leader of the Labour Party largely because he did not represent the old politics but promised something altogether different and new. He is under constant attack from inside his own party, as well as the media, who fear a movement independent of the old party system.

In France, the failure of the Socialist Party presidency and government to tackle the profound economic and social problems facing the country is directly connected with the rise of the neo-fascist Front Nationale. In Spain, backing for the Socialist Party has evaporated and the left populist Podemos is challenging to replace it. Meanwhile, in Italy the disaffection with mainstream parties has resulted in a stratospheric rise for the Five Star movement, which is largely an online anti-establishment party without any firm principles.

In the Nordic countries, the anti-immigration Sweden Democrats with roots in the Neo-Nazi movement, is currently challenging the government, while the Danish People's Party became the country's second-largest party in 2015 with 21



per cent of the vote. Far right parties have also made gains in Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Hungary and Austria.

In the United States, the Democratic Party had long taken for granted that it would win in the industrial heartlands of the north-east and failed to campaign vigorously in the region during the 2016 presidential election. The rest is history. Donald Trump is in the White House because

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21st Century

2011 Arab Spring: democratic uprisings throughout Middle East

2011-2012 Global Occupy movements inspired by Arab spring, Iran, 15-M and Real Democracy Now in Spain

2013 Gezi Park movement in Turkey

2014 Scottish independence referendum, Right to Water movement in Ireland

2015 Syriza elected in Greece

2016 Half a million people join Labour Party under Corbyn

“... the old fear of liberal democratic theorists, that democracy would lead to the tyranny of the majority, has increasingly been replaced by a fear of the tyranny of the minority; we have gone ... from a fear of the masses to the problem of the 1 per cent as the chief threat to democratic equality ... as older forms of political mobilisation have withered and material inequalities have widened in the past three decades, both in the UK and in other developed democracies, political inequality has increased.” *Political Inequality: Why British democracy must be reformed and revitalised*. IPPR April 2014 Matthew Lawrence.

his populist message on jobs got through to workers whose living standards and employment prospects have plummeted while Hillary Clinton had little to say on these issues.

Trump built on the staggering loss of trust in federal government. Only 19% of Americans today say they can trust the government in Washington to do what is right “just about always” (3%) or “most of the time” (16%). Fewer than three-in-ten Americans have expressed trust in the federal government in every major national poll conducted since July 2007 – the longest period of low trust in government in more than 50 years. In 1958, when the American National Election Study first asked this question, 73% said they could trust the government just about always or most of the time. (see chart page 10)

Richard Edelman, head of the communications marketing firm of the same name, says that two-thirds of the countries surveyed each year are now ‘distrusters’ (under 50% distrust mainstream institutions of business, government, media and NGOs “to do what is right”), up from just over half in 2016. “This is a profound crisis in trust that has its origins in the Great Recession of 2008. The aftershocks from the stunning meltdown of the global economy are still being felt today, with consequences yet unknown,” he writes in the introduction to his firm’s latest report on trust.

2017 January: millions march against Trump in hundreds of cities around the world; almost 2 million sign petition against Trump visit to UK

February: mass demonstrations in Romania to defend constitution

An Implosion of Trust

Like the second and third waves of a tsunami, ongoing globalisation and technological change are now further weakening people's trust in global institutions, which they believe have failed to protect them from the negative effects of these forces. The celebrated benefits of free trade – affordable products for mass consumption and the raising of a billion people out of poverty – have suddenly been supplanted by concerns about the outsourcing of jobs to lower cost markets. The impact of automation is being felt, especially in lower-skilled jobs, as driverless trucks and retail stores without cashiers become reality.

The 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer

More than three-quarters of respondents among both informed and general populations agree that the system is biased against 'regular' people and favours the rich and powerful. Government is now distrusted in 75% of the 28 countries surveyed. In the run-up to the referendum, the market-research firm YouGov found that 'Leave' supporters were far more likely than 'Remain' supporters to prefer relying on the opinions of ordinary people than on those of experts. On the question of Britain's membership in the EU, 81% of 'Leave' voters said they didn't trust the views of British politicians, compared with 67% of 'Remain' voters.

Behind the crisis of democracy

This present crisis of democracy is a reflection in politics of what has happened to people's lives and the decline in any real control in terms of employment, wages, housing, education, public transport, social care and other services. Democracy has increasingly become an outer shell, the form of politics, while the content in the shape of previous achievements has been undermined.

Democratic gains are present in all aspects of life, from the National Health Service, education, social housing and welfare services, to race relations and gender rights. They were all made possible by the right of universal suffrage and the contesting of capitalist exploitation through using the state to make reforms. But since the period of modern globalisation from the 1980s, when transnational corporations and investment banks became dominant, these reforms have been rolled back and undermined to breaking point.



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As a result, inequality has grown to unprecedented levels, average wages have fallen in real terms, housing has become a luxury that only a minority can afford, trade unions have been severely weakened and many services either privatised or contracted out to the 'third' or voluntary sector. The democracy that exists is also a kind of dictatorship by the corporatocracy in which people have no say and their voices are not heard. The transition from a welfare state to the present market-focused, corporate state, which transfers wealth from the mass of people to an increasingly elite group, is nearly complete.

What do you think?

Give your views on the proposals in *Democracy Unchained* and other ideas you may have. Send your comments to: info@realdemocracymovement.org
They will become part of a new draft that can inform the launch of the Real Democracy Movement.

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Please share this booklet widely – with friends, family, colleagues, in your community, your union, workplace, college, university and on social media.

A state that has failed the people

Most of the major problems and issues we face – here and in the rest of the world – boil down to a few simple propositions:

- the majority are powerless, lacking a decisive say in their workplaces, communities, towns and cities
- democracy is now a sham, a shell despite the efforts of generations of struggle to make it work
- policies are shaped and determined by market forces, the major corporations and banks that are driven by profit
- the economic and political system as a whole is unstable, rapidly losing legitimacy, and has entered a dangerous phase.

There is little doubt that humankind could, redeploying existing resources and technologies, build affordable housing, improve health care, tackle disease and meet the dramatic challenges presented by runaway climate change. So what is preventing us from doing just that, from living in a society that works for all?

Real (and some imaginary) barriers stand between the majority and society's ability to find sustainable, democratically-arrived at solutions. The obstacles are actually to be found inside 'the system'. So what is 'the system'? Can we pin it down? Can we identify where the power to make decisions in society lies? It is really important to do this so that we know what we are up against and what strategies and plans will help us turn things round or, better still, right side up.

When people talk about the 'system' more often than not they mean the way politics works (or doesn't). But it is reasonable to suggest that the 'system' *also* includes the way the economy operates because without the production of food, clothing and shelter society would not function. Taken together, the political system and the economic system form the heart of, and shape, a social system as a whole, which goes by the name of capitalism.

The present political process may be rejected and held in contempt by many people for a variety of reasons but this is the arena where binding and enforceable decisions are made on a daily basis that affect our lives and our futures. This is where laws are made, wars declared and banks bailed out, to list just a few functions of what is referred to as the state (see end of chapter).

So what is the nature of this political process? In the UK, there is no single document that brings together the constitution of the country, the rules which set out how the state is supposed to work and how it relates to the people. Nevertheless, it is possible to show how government works and how it interacts with other bodies like the legal system, the police, the armed forces, intelligence agencies, the Parliaments of other nations within the UK, local government and things like the BBC or the Arts Council.

Taken as a whole, these bodies represent more than government – they represent a state system of rule with its own turbulent history. As we drill down deeper into the system, the crisis of democracy outlined in Chapter 1 can equally be seen as an historic crisis of the present. How citizens are ruled over and decisions taken by others that shape our lives and futures is at the heart of the matter.

In the UK, the state's nature and form has changed over many centuries, during which it made the transition from an absolute monarchy to a parliamentary, capitalist type of state with a constitutional monarchy. This process has frequently been tumultuous, despite the attempt by conservative historians to paint a picture of smooth, inevitable, evolutionary progress that has more or less finished.

The revolt of the barons in 1215, leading to Magna Carta which established the principle of the rule of law and the beginnings of accountable rule led to civil war before it was enforced. In the 16th century Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries and broke the power of the church as landlords with their own courts and laws.

Then, in the 17th century, the people were decisive in the Civil War against the absolute monarchy of Charles I. They flocked to the New Model Army led by Oliver Cromwell and defeated the king, who was executed for crimes against the nation. For an all-too-brief period, England was a republican commonwealth. The political revolution of 1688 finally consolidated parliamentary sovereignty.

The great struggles for the vote that began in the late 18th century and continued into the 1920s, the fight for free trade unions, for a welfare state, for a free health service and many other episodes are examples of where the state's power has been challenged both from within and from below.

These immense, sometimes openly revolutionary struggles – which are only a fraction of our shared social history – in themselves show the importance of the state for people of all classes who have struggled for control, influence and for access to the levers of power itself.

Why? Because it is through the institutions of the state that political power is organised and put into effect throughout society, by force when and where it is considered necessary. Significantly the state, as we shall see in Chapter 3, creates the framework for capitalism to place profit and providing for shareholders above all other considerations.

Mystifying the state

Mystification of the nature of the state is common in part because the state assumes the form of a neutral body, acting as a kind of umpire, seemingly standing above society and yet with immense power over its citizens.

The absence of a codified constitution, which virtually every other country possesses, adds to the problem of identifying the ‘state’ as such. This problem is magnified by the fact that state power is not to be found in any single place but is in practice expressed through the actions of officials and politicians operating in an ensemble of institutions that together constitute the state. Of course, these institutions are often at odds with each other. The Supreme Court, for example, ruled in January 2017 that the executive did not have the power to trigger Article 50 to exit the European Union without the approval of Parliament.

These institutions and their relation to the people exist within a constitutional framework that in the UK is scattered in various pieces of legislation, rulings, precedents, customs and even traditions. It is a very British constitution that enables the ruling classes to duck and dive, adapt and manoeuvre as circumstances demand.

Historically, the state has come to perform some key roles and today:

- provides a framework for economic activity (e.g. currency, company law)
- makes decisions and acts in the name of the ‘people’, the ‘nation’ etc.
- funds and organises the education of future generations of the workforce
- moderates conflicts between social classes and other interests
- secures and defends the territory claimed by the UK state
- maintains political relations with other states

The core of the state apparatus comprises a relatively unified ensemble of socially embedded, socially regularised, and strategically selective institutions and organisations whose socially accepted function is to define and enforce collectively binding decisions on the members of a society in a given territorial area in the name of the common interest or general will of an imagined political community identified with that territory. *The State: Past, Present and Future*, Bob Jessop, 2016

- establishes and sustains a framework of law that is applied uniformly
- facilitates the creation of infrastructure like transport
- reserves to itself the lawful use of physical force within and without its territory (through the police, armed forces etc)
- contributes significantly to the dominant narrative and vision of society – that there is no alternative to capitalism, that democracy and free markets are equivalents etc. (see Chapter 4)

Professor Bob Jessop, who has made a lifetime study of the state and its role in society, notes that ruling in the “common interest or general will” is weighed down with contradictions because it is “always asymmetrical, marginalizing or defining some interests at the same time as it privileges others. There is never a general interest that embraces all possible particular interests.”

“Constitutions organise, distribute and regulate state power. They set out the structure of the state, the major state institutions, and the principles governing their relations with each other and with the state’s citizens. Britain is unusual in that it has an ‘unwritten’ constitution: unlike the great majority of countries there is no single legal document which sets out in one place the fundamental laws outlining how the state works. ... What Britain has instead is an accumulation of various statutes, conventions, judicial decisions and treaties which collectively can be referred to as the British Constitution.” UCL Constitution Unit
<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/whatis/uk-constitution>

The modern state

The state predates capitalism but changes its form and function as the economy and society develops. In medieval times, power rested with the Crown, which controlled economic activity through the granting of charters, licences and other privileges sold for money to merchants and landowners. As independent economic activity developed in the towns and countryside, the antagonism between the Crown and Parliament grew. After two periods of conflict in the 17th century, power shifted from the Crown to Parliament and into the political hands of the rising bourgeoisie.

Not long after Parliament had finally turned the monarchy into a figurehead institution at the end of the 17th century, England and Scotland formally unified their kingdoms at Westminster and created the conditions for what became Great Britain to pioneer an economic revolution.

The development of new technologies made possible the innovative system of the manufacture of goods in factories rather than in people's homes or small workshops. So the state focused on facilitating the development and expansion of the new economy, while those involved in production and trading got on with their business, assisted and encouraged by the political system. Economic and political power was thus shared for mutual benefit and has remained so to this day.

The state played a crucial role in the 18th century by building a powerful navy that literally ruled the waves. Its essential purpose was to fend off all threats to Britain's trading routes from rival nations like France and pirates alike. Forts were established in the West Indies, for example, to protect colonies and facilitate the slave trade that provided much of the capital required to develop production in Britain. By the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815, Britain's economy was predominantly capitalist and became the driving force for the biggest empire in history.

The rise of the corporatocracy

Over several centuries there has been a mutually conditioning process whereby the developing capitalist economic form has shaped trade, governance, law, the state and constitution. Of course, within that there is resistance and there are parties that have, at certain moments, implemented reforms and created, for example, the National Health Service and a welfare state.

Throughout this period, the essence but not the form of the state has remained unchanged. However, in the last 30 years the state has undergone a dramatic change in its form and in its role in relation to economic and financial forces.

Corporate-driven globalisation, aka neo-liberalism, has transformed most aspects of modern life, including the way we are ruled. As a consequence, the state's relationships with the people have been shaken to the core which has led directly to the crisis of democracy that we are now living through in countries around the globe.

When the post-war economic order – with its currency controls and restrictions on the movement of capital – broke down in the 1970s, it led to a hyper-form of globalisation which was in full swing by the 1990s. While globalisation is many centuries old, its new form was something qualitatively different. Revolutions in information and other technologies helped sweep away the old economic order of national economies directed by national state bodies.

By the 21st century, fewer than 100 transnational corporations (TNCs) dominated the world economy, operating on a global scale with semi-autonomous centres in most industrialised countries. Some were merely brands that outsource their production to cheap labour regions in Asia and South America. Investment now moved freely from country to country in search of maximum profits while trade barriers were torn down. Countries like India, China and other nations of Asia were integrated into the world economy.

As deregulation continued apace in the 1990s, a global financial system emerged that changed the nature of banking. A web of financial devices like derivatives and credit default swaps were invented while millions of mortgages were diced and sliced prior to selling them. Financial markets made and broke governments dependent on them for loans by moving capital in and out of countries overnight.

Many corporations became richer and more powerful than the states that seek to regulate them. Some of the largest TNCs now have annual profits exceeding the GDPs of many low and medium income countries. It is estimated that the TNCs account for 80% of world trade each year.

The changes in the state have been equally dramatic, especially in the UK. No longer seeing itself as a mediator between classes, or provider of support to domestic industry, or sustaining welfare, the state adapted itself to the new conditions and to theories developed by right-wing economists like Milton Friedman.

From the 1980s under Thatcher to the New Labour governments under Blair which lasted until 2010, the state was refashioned. In came privatisation of state assets like energy and transport, outsourcing, the Private Finance Initiative, financial deregulation and the introduction of the market in education, the National Health Service, social care and many other areas of public life like the arts.

State institutions were cut down in size as more and more functions like prisons were transferred to the private sector. Each department within government was directed towards the facilitation of the global market economy, encouraging inward investment and putting ownership of key structures like airports up for sale to corporations and global banks. In came 'light touch' self-regulation of the financial system.

The state made a transition from a welfare to a surveillance, market state where the business of the government was business itself. As inequality and alienation grew, so did political disaffection with a system that identifies itself with big business in an openly partisan way.

The financial crash of 2008, and the speed at which the state used taxpayers' money to prop up rotten, corrupt banks who had speculated with other people's

A crisis of governability has engulfed the world's industrialised democracies. It is not coincidental that the United States, Europe and Japan are simultaneously experiencing political breakdown. Rather, globalisation is a common culprit. Across the West's open societies, globalisation is producing a widening gap between what electorates are asking of their governments and what those governments are able to deliver. The mismatch between the growing demand for good governance and its shrinking supply is dangerously compromising the purpose and power of the Western world. Voters in industrialised democracies are looking to their governments to deal with the decline in living standards and the growing inequality resulting from unprecedented flows of goods, services and capital. Electorates also expect their representatives to deal with surging migration, global warming and other knock-on effects of a globalised world. But Western governments are not up to the task. Globalisation is challenging state capacity by penetrating borders and rooting around the policy levers that democracies have traditionally had at their disposal. It is also shifting wealth and power from the West to the rising rest, concentrating globalisation's downsides on workers in advanced economies while also denying their governments the level of control over commerce and security that they once enjoyed. The inability of leading democracies to address the concerns of their citizens only increases public disaffection, thereby further undermining the legitimacy and efficacy of representative institutions.

The governance gap: globalisation and the crisis of democracy in the West, Charles A. Kupchan, European University Institute, Florence 2015

money and assets, sent shock waves through society. When the 2010 coalition imposed the most ruthless spending cuts in living memory, it was self-evident that while the banks were too big to fail, real, living people could be cut to the bone.

The crisis of globalised corporate capital has led to political changes in which large numbers, even the majority realise that despite having the vote, they are effectively disenfranchised.

Decisions by national governments and central banks (like the reduction of base interest rates to – and below – zero) are influenced by their internalised sense of responsibility to preserve the integrity of the system, to keep the show on the road – at all costs. That's what is meant by acting to preserve the status quo.

Regional and global agencies created to solve the problems and advance the interests of capitalist social relations, like the European Union, the European Central Bank, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation, have transcended nation states in their influence and power.

Key decisions that determine the way we live, that result in these multiple, interacting crises are determined not by the needs of the majority, but are taken in the boardrooms of giant corporations.

The single determining principle of their decision-making process is to satisfy their shareholders' requirement for a return on their investment in the shape of dividends. A network of lobby companies advance the individual and collective interests of these giant corporations pressing governments to agree trade deals.

Ironically, as a result of the decisions taken by corporations, governments and central banks to optimise the conditions for generating shareholder value, the fundamental social relations that define the capitalist system are breaking down.

As the system has become ever more dependent on credit for its survival, control of the giant, increasingly transnational corporations has passed into the talons of the managers of global investment funds – 'vulture' funds.

This is how representative democracy, fought for so hard by the Chartists and the Suffragettes amongst others, which found its expression in the formation of the Labour Party, was undermined. This is how representative democracy was hi-jacked by the forces of anti-democracy, how government and the present Parliament has become the means through which corporate and financial power impose their interests on the 99%.

Fracking, for instance, and the continued extraction of oil, although unpopular and even suicidal according to nearly all scientists, are imposed from above in the interests of the corporations. Local objections, even local council decisions, are simply over-ridden.

The state is in crisis because its claim to rule for the whole of society is increasingly hollow and rejected as a fraud. Today the present, narrowly-based state lacks the capacity to tackle major crises that are global in character like climate change. The free market narrative it imposes on society offers no tangible alternative to those who reject these 'Western values' and, instead, can be attracted by terrorism and other outlets for their frustration.

These powerful corporate forces require the capitalist type of state to follow a course of action which brings it into direct conflict with the majority: destroying living standards, trashing rights and smashing expectations. At the same time they are oblivious to the reality that the conditions for life on the planet are being obliterated.

There is no other explanation to the signing of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement between Canada and the EU which gives enormous power to corporations and subjects goods and services to market forces. The crisis of the UK state came to a head in the summer of 2016 when, contrary to all expectations, 52% of the electorate voted to leave the EU, which itself had been transformed into a neo-liberal institution also known as the single market. A transition to a real democracy is long overdue.

Paralysis in the face of climate change

A failure to make binding agreements that enforce cuts in carbon emissions and leave fossil fuels in the ground has led to an out-and-out climate crisis.

Global temperatures have continued to rise, making 2016 the hottest year on the historical record and the third consecutive record-breaking year, scientists say. Of the 17 hottest years ever recorded, 16 have now occurred since 2000.

The climate has entered a new phase as a number of tipping points have been passed. There is enough greenhouse gas in the atmosphere to go over the 1.5°C increase in global surface temperatures that was agreed as a target at the Paris climate talks. It has arrived at 400 parts per million and what is new is that this is not a transient fluctuation or measured at a single location – it is a global average. It will continue to rise for the foreseeable future, and the result is damaging changes in the climate that are already happening.

Extreme heat – in July 2016 temperatures over 50°C in the Middle East, India and Pakistan for long periods.

Extreme floods – In October 2016 in Spain, Albania, Romania, heavy rains and floods. Areas in the the UK hit by floods 3 times in the last 5 years have still not recovered, and last year 3 huge storms damaged homes, business and infrastructure.

Drought – Ethiopia is experiencing its worst drought for 50 years, with 18 million people facing starvation. California is in its sixth successive year of drought. More than 600,000 acres have burned in wildfires, some burning on for weeks.

Stronger hurricanes – after Hurricane Matthew, the island of Haiti is in ruins, with 1.4 million people out of a population of 10 million needing food aid, 1.5 million homeless and typhoid spreading rapidly.

Rising oceans – Island peoples are already having to move inland. In the Marshall Islands and Kiribati, high tides wash through streets and farms. There is concern that 100,000 people from Kiribati will need to move in the next decade or so. Climate driven migration has begun.

Rapidly melting ice sheets and glaciers mean scientists now struggle to estimate how high and how fast sea levels will rise. In Siberia, the city of Norilsk is sinking because it is built on melting permafrost.

Not only the climate but also the eco-system is degraded. The latest Living Planet Index states that the number of wild animals will fall by two-thirds by 2020. Animal populations already fell 58% between 1970 and 2012, and losses could be 67% by 2020.

Clearly the disconnect between governments and reality has become the single most deadly issue facing humanity and indeed every other species too.

Institutions of the UK state

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, to give the state its formal name, is a constitutional monarchy. The monarch's prerogative powers were transferred to Parliament in 1689 (the Crown-in-Parliament). In turn, the executive or government has since taken control of these powers over Parliament. The power vested in the Crown-in-Parliament extends over the Union of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The sovereign is head of state. The monarch is chosen from the Windsor family by hereditary principles and confirmed by Parliament.

The government or executive

By convention, executive power is exercised by the sovereign's government which has to be able to command a majority in the House of Commons. The principal institution of government is the Cabinet, which directs the affairs of the executive and of the state as a whole.

The prime minister is head of the Cabinet and is appointed by the sovereign. By modern convention, he/she is a member of the House of Commons. The executive has power to raise revenue through taxation and to borrow, subject to approval by Parliament.

The government is accountable to Parliament but controls its agenda. Cabinet decisions are binding on all members (doctrine of collective responsibility).

The prime minister is normally the leader of the party which can command a majority in Parliament. The committee structure of the Cabinet is at the discretion of the prime minister. Appointments to the Cabinet and other ministers is at the discretion of the prime minister exercising prerogative powers.

The prime minister is the minister responsible for "national security" and matters affecting the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6), Security Service (MI5) and GCHQ.

Powers of ministers of the Crown

Many Acts of Parliament grant powers to ministers or place statutory duties on ministers. Statutes also provide ministers with emergency powers. Ministers have common law powers and prerogative powers of the Crown. The use of these powers is subject to challenge in the courts. The Ministerial Code 2015 governs the conduct of ministers. Senior ministers are required to take oaths of allegiance to the Crown under the Promissory Oaths Act 1868.

Privy Council

The Privy Council is an advisory body to the sovereign and the Cabinet is its executive committee. Members of the Cabinet and leading members of HM Opposition become members of the

Privy Council. The Privy Council can issue Orders in Council to, for example, declare a state of emergency.

Civil Service

The Civil Service supports the government in developing and implementing policies. Civil servants are appointed independently and accountable to ministers.

Parliament

Parliament consists of the House of Commons, House of Lords and the sovereign.

The Commons is constitutionally superior to the Lords. Parliament is “supreme” – its laws cannot be challenged by the courts.

Parliament is responsible for enacting legislation but does not originate legislation. Parliament has to approve all measures to do with taxation and spending. Parliament scrutinises the work of the executive.

Parliament is mostly under the control of the government through the party system. MPs represent constituencies in all parts of the United Kingdom and sit in the Commons.

Parliamentary elections are held every five years on the first Thursday in May (next in 2020). Elections to Parliament are by way of single-member constituencies, in which the person with the most votes is deemed elected. All those over 18 at the time of the election are eligible to vote.

Devolved Parliaments or Assemblies

Parliaments or Assemblies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have a variety of powers over certain domestic issues devolved to them by Acts of the Westminster Parliament.

Local government

Local government derives its powers and responsibilities from Acts of Parliament and is constitutionally subordinate to Parliament. Central government provides 61% of funding for local government. Council tax raises just over 20% of all funding. Councils have responsibility for education, housing, social care, planning and building, roads, parking and transport, waste and recycling, libraries and archive, sport and leisure, children and families, registering births, deaths and marriages, environmental protection and various other services.

State agencies and quangos

For example, the BBC, the Prison Service, Border Agency, Historic England, national museums/galleries, Arts Council.

The judiciary

The judiciary is independent of the executive (Act of Settlement 1701). Removal of a judge is by a petition to the sovereign by both Houses of Parliament. It has never been used.

Judges are responsible for enforcing the rule of law, which is a common law principle dating back to Magna Carta. All citizens are subject to the same laws and to a law-governed state. On taking office, the Lord Chancellor swears to "respect the rule of law".

Judges are appointed by an independent Judicial Appointments Committee made up of 15 commissioners. The legal system is divided into criminal and common law. Serious criminal law cases are tried by a jury directed by a judge. The Supreme Court is the highest court in the UK.

Armed forces

The army, air force and navy are conventionally Crown forces but are under the control of the executive.

Intelligence agencies

These consist of MI5 (domestic) MI6 (overseas), GCHQ (surveillance and monitoring of electronic communications) and Special Branch which is an arm of the police working with the intelligence agencies. They are under the jurisdiction of the executive acting in the name of the Crown.

The police

The police are operationally independent but under the jurisdiction of the Home Office for England and Wales and devolved administrations elsewhere.

The case for a democratic revolution

The loss of legitimacy and authority of the present state-political system of rule, and a marked shift towards authoritarian rule, is indisputable. So what can and should we do about it?

There are two main options:

1. try to make the existing system more democratic and responsive to the majority who are effectively excluded from power
2. build a real democracy with new, people-centred forms of governance that value and incorporate past achievements.

Many are concerned that the gains we have already achieved down the centuries could be lost in an upheaval and may feel that *Option 1*, which would mean pressing for reforms, is preferable. But is it realistic? Is the capitalist type of state capable of being reformed and made into something that will work for the majority? *Option 2* is obviously a huge undertaking. It will involve mass social participation and creative practice over a sustained period. It is undoubtedly the hard choice but in reality it almost certainly is the only practical path to a real democracy.

The present state and capitalism are mutually interdependent. Although they are operationally independent, in effect power is shared – political on the one hand and economic on the other. The state and corporate power are clearly not the same – but nor are they completely separate. They are actually interdependent, mutually conditioning each other while they can also be at odds with each other.

For example, in the wake of the Brexit referendum, it is clear that most big business and finance wanted the UK to remain in the European Union single market. Political pressures have led the Tory government to abandon that goal and instead go for a new trade agreement with the EU. As a result some bankers are planning to relocate to mainland Europe or Ireland and Toyota is reconsidering its investment plans because a new deal between the UK and the EU is by no means certain. Corporate loyalty is to shareholders and lenders, not to the state where they operate.

The state sustains a framework that reinforces existing relationships within the workplace, namely the wage-labour contract. Under this, workers agree to labour for a specified number of hours (or wait around for a call while on a zero hours contract) and allow the employers to retain the surplus proceeds of their labour after wages have been paid and the state has taken its cut.

Bob Jessop, in his book *The State: Past, Present and Future* already referred to, explains this relationship, showing how the state “protects private property and the sanctity of contracts on behalf of capital as a whole”, adding: “This supports capital’s formal rights to manage the labour process, appropriate surplus labour, and enforce contracts with other capitals. Second, the rational organisation of capitalism requires free wage labour – which the state creates through its role in ... imposing an obligation to enter the labour market. It also enables workers to sell their labour power ‘freely’, secures conditions for the reproduction of wage labour, imposes factory laws, responds to the housing question, secures cheap food, and so on.”

Company law means that shareholders take priority when it comes to distributing profits and, of course, employers have the right to shut down an enterprise and/or relocate geographically. Ancient laws relating to private property ensure that corporate owners have the legal title to the means of production and can use the state to evict occupiers.

Marx argued that the form of political organisation corresponds to the form of economic organisation. Thus an economic order based on private property, the wage relation, and profit-oriented, market-mediated exchange seems naturally to ‘fit’ or ‘correspond’ with a political order based on the rule of law, equality before the law, and a unified sovereign state. ... in liberal democratic states, the freedom of economic agents to engage in exchange (a freedom belied by managerial ‘despotism’ in the labour process) is matched by the political freedom of citizens under the rule of law (a freedom belied by the state’s subordination to the logic of capital).

The State: Past, Present and Future, Bob Jessop, Wiley 2016

The capitalist type of state like the UK’s tries to create beneficial access to markets by way of inter-state trade agreements and underwrites and compensates for market failures. So while the banks were bailed out in 2008 and the burden passed on to taxpayers, the National Health Service staggers close to collapse for want of a similar injection of funding. Similarly, Chinese and French investors are pledged billions in subsidies for nuclear power plants while schools go underfunded.

The present state is clearly a taxation state. That makes it dependent on enterprises to pay corporation tax and

hand over VAT and for employers to enforce the deduction of tax and National Insurance from their workforce in order to finance state expenditure. In turn, this makes the state dependent on the growth of the economy to advance its revenues to meet the demands of its citizens. The impact of a growth-driven economy on the environment is secondary to the imperative of increasing Gross Domestic Product year on year.

The case for a democratic revolution

Therefore a transition to real democracy is incompatible with a narrowly-based state that is predisposed towards capitalism. The present state cannot tame or control capital – even if it wanted to – because the economy operates through markets which are by their nature beyond state control.

In any case, essential parts of the state are increasingly in private hands under contracts which are driven by cost cutting and profit. These include the probation service, parts of the prison service, sections of the education system and the National Health Service. Other parts of the state are organised at arms length in the shape of executive agencies and quangos, which are accountable to no one in particular.

Increasingly, of course, many services formerly carried out by central or local government have been contracted out or ‘outsourced’ to use the business term. Social care, for example, is in the hands of private agencies and care home owners. The market in public service contracts was worth over £100 billion in 2016, rising steeply under the New Labour and Coalition governments. It is about one-seventh of total government spending.

The people today have little or no power to influence the future, to shape policy, to determine the direction of travel of governments or councils, even to control their own lives or to make a difference. They have been shut out of the business of government, both nationally and locally. Representative democracy, where MPs are elected every few years into parliament, has little or no resemblance to real democracy. The capitalist system, in other words, is undemocratic because the people have been excluded. They have no input apart from the vote every four or five years.

Originally a challenge to the power of the ruling classes, representative democracy over the years has been transformed into a ritual, a safe way for the real powers in the country, the corporations, the banks and the rich to carry on ruling as before without serious challenge.

That is why elections alone which leave the present state intact cannot provide the solution. The issues are too deep to be solved solely at the ballot box. In any case, the party political system in the UK – which is effectively part of the state system – is broken. New movements and organisations have to take their place (see Chapter 5).

The impossibility of separating the present state from economic power is a powerful enough reason on its own for making a transition to new forms of democracy, taking a leap into the future. Self-preservation means the state will block with all the means at its disposal the merest hint of a transfer of power to the majority. That is a lesson from history we would be well advised to heed.

The 17th century struggle between King and Parliament, the American Revolution against Great Britain, the revolutions in France and then Italy – all became titanic struggles in which the masses played a significant role in overturning an old order that clung to power.

In the 20th century, movements against capitalism in Russia, Germany, Spain, Chile, Venezuela and for self-determination from colonial rule, encountered resistance of an often vicious and brutal kind. Only those that had a plan to replace the older order, succeeded.

While it may be possible to reform certain superficial aspects of the state, like voting procedures, the fact remains that by its nature the state favours the status quo. A state that is alienated from its citizens cannot, therefore, be made to work for society as a whole. You cannot vote capitalism out of existence.

Another reminder from history is that state change is crucial and necessary when further political, economic and social development become impossible within the existing structures. At that point the old state becomes a barrier to further progress by humankind. We have reached such a stage of history. Climate change, renewed dangers of military conflict in the wake of economic isolationism and trade war being pursued in the US are real threats to humanity as a whole. The failure of the capitalist economy to recover from the 2008 crash is driving a dangerous moment of the crisis.

The critical issues of the day for humanity in general – global warming, the destruction of the environment, sustainability issues, resources depletion, global poverty and unemployment – are side-lined because they are not solvable within the system that caused them in the first place. To create an ecologically-sustainable economy, for example, we will need to create an entirely different motive for producing goods and services to the drive for profit that is the DNA of capitalism.

The present state has shown in practice that it cannot create these conditions. To end our alienation from what we produce, from the state and from our fellow citizens, we should aim at the transfer of both economic and political power so we can move towards a society based on co-ownership and co-operation. As real democracy is something that the ruling elites cannot give, we have to build a new type of democracy, where institutions reflect the power of the 99% and work in their common interest.

A way forward

Historically, the only real threats to the status quo from within the UK have come from outside the Westminster bubble in the form of great strikes and mass street protests. Now is the time to build a new kind of challenge, not for reforms to a bankrupt system, but for new kinds of democratic assemblies out of which can come ideas and actions for furthering the interests of the majority. A real democratic movement of the people on the issues of housing, poverty, low wages, rights, as well as the environment and global warming could unite most sections of society into a real force for change that would be difficult to resist.

The existence of undemocratic bodies at the heart of society and government should be addressed by creating a new written constitution that places power in the hands of the people. A convention that reflects our diverse society and the different nations within the UK would be tasked with drawing this up with the help of experts in the field.

This constitution would have to be carried into effect by people organised in assemblies, creating a network of popular power that challenges the status quo and acts as a means of a transition to a real democracy. It could enhance the principle of self-determination that would break the stranglehold of corporate power over the democratic process – and hand control to workers, consumers, students, parents and communities (see Chapter 4).

Parliament, with its enormously rich history, could be made into a powerful body to reflect the new power of society in place of the poodle without bite that it has become. For example, a new kind of Parliament could bring together citizens elected by local and regional assemblies where members can be recalled and/or re-elected every year.

The constitution could establish a co-operative not-for-profit system, which locally, nationally and internationally would lead to the possibility of restoring the planet to health and of transforming the social relations of human beings.

There are many barriers in the way, but the centre clearly cannot hold. A collective, concerted and above all organised movement will open a new chapter in the long march for democracy.

New forms of precarious employment

Since the crash and the recession that followed, the attempt to restore profitability has intensified the assault on jobs and conditions for those still in work, by undermining, redefining, loosening, weakening and in many millions of cases breaking the terms of the traditional employment contract.

Numbers have soared of those in part-time, and temporary jobs, in many new kinds of vulnerable employment – living on the edge, many on poverty incomes – while the total without work of any kind remains shockingly high. Close to half of all young people in Spain and Greece, and an average of 22% – more than one in five young people in the eurozone as a whole - are without work, and have been for long periods of time.

Those wanting to hang on to the rights supposedly defended by the European Union should note that in May 2014 in Portugal employment rules were changed to allow companies to dismiss workers for 'unsuitability', and companies in crisis to suspend collective agreements. They also reduce the period for which expired collective agreements remain valid, and extend exceptional measures that undermine collective agreements on overtime pay, according to the European Observatory of Working Life.

Capitalism relies increasingly on forms of vulnerable employment that are far removed from the conventional understanding of the contractual relationship between employer and worker. Globally, in 2017, 42.8%, almost one in two of the working population, amounting to 1.4 billion people are in vulnerable employment according to the International Labour Organisation. The figures range from an average of 10.1% in the developed countries to 78.7%, an eye-opening four out of five in developing countries.

Schemes to ensure that the employer benefits from access to 'a flexible workforce' have proliferated – from zero-hours contracts, to a dependency on agencies providing temporary staff, to modern slavery as highlighted in convictions in the UK of firms supplying labour to food processing firms and companies like Sports Direct.

The number of workers on zero-hours contracts in the UK has increased five-fold since the crash – from below 200,000 in 2007 to beyond 903,000 by October 2016, 2.9% of those in work, and the rate of increase is accelerating. Workers on zero-hour contracts typically earn around 65% of the average for all employees. According to official statistics, these workers are more likely to be contracted to large employers than smaller firms, and to work in the hotel and leisure industries. The health and education sectors follow closely behind.

An increasing number are supplied to employers through agencies trading in the hours they buy and sell. The number of agency workers increased by 30% between 2011 and 2016. Whilst terms and conditions of employment by an agency vary widely, an estimated 340,000 of these are on temporary, part-time contracts while 14% of agency workers are on zero-hours contracts.

Uber, the taxi drivers' nemesis, operates one of the most notorious new business models, setting and reducing price levels for rides but providing no guarantee of work, creaming off a high proportion of the cost of the journeys it supplies to the drivers, treating those who work for it as self-employed, whilst avoiding any responsibility for National Insurance, sick or holiday pay or pensions. Earnings for taxi-drivers – Uber and non-Uber – have nose-dived by as much as 40% since they came on the scene.

Often glossed up as a welcome freedom to choose, the proportion of workers classed as self-employed has doubled since the crash, reaching 4.61 million, nearly 16% of the working population. More than one in five workers in the UK, some 7.1 million people (22%), now face precarious employment conditions that mean they could lose their work suddenly – up from 5.3 million in 2006.

In today's deregulated economy, freelance workers are banding together to form mutual support groups, trade unions, mutual insurance collective enterprises and co-operatives.

Freeing workers from their contractual chains in this way can create the ground for a new, revolutionary transition beyond the wage-labour contract. A return to the status quo is not an option.

What do you think?

Give your views on the proposals in *Democracy Unchained* and other ideas you may have. Send your comments to: info@realdemocracymovement.org
They will become part of a new draft that can inform the launch of the Real Democracy Movement.

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Please share this booklet widely – with friends, family, colleagues, in your community, your union, workplace, college, university and on social media.

Signposts to the future

In a *real* democracy people would determine their own future, as individuals and communities, instead of as anonymous members of a society that treats them as ciphers – someone who puts a piece of paper in a ballot box every five years and then has no control over what happens next.

People often find it difficult to be free and open about themselves, other human beings or the surrounding world. The reckless abuse of the planet and its inhabitants can lead to such a deep estrangement that people become indifferent to the monstrous abuse of nature and people.

In our hollowed-out democracy, not to mention in war zones or impoverished parts of the planet, people have little or no control over the course of their own lives and that of others. Even the air that we breathe poisons us in many cities and towns.

Each individual sees herself or himself as part of an unstoppable machine, unable to influence anything. Our humanity seems to be stolen from us, and what is left is alienated and unnatural. No wonder that mental illness, drug-taking and other psychological problems have reached epidemic proportions. Our connection with the world – be it our natural environment, other human beings and even ourselves – is thus unnatural and constrained.

The aim of a truly democratic society would be to liberate society from these narrow, exploitative and unhappy social and personal relations.

Unlike other animal species, human beings in society connect with nature not immediately, but through the state and the economy, which includes working or obtaining the means of subsistence in other ways. In other words, the need to sell our labour mediates the way we connect with nature. In this process, our relationships are turned upside down and inside out.

Re-connecting with nature

Instead of being part of a natural whole, we are compelled to work and live in ways that destroy the ecosystems on which all economy, husbandry and livelihood depends.

Millions of workers are involved in forms of agriculture, industry and production that are fatally damaging for the planet and the life upon it. These include coal mining, manufacturing products like cars, running various energy industries and using and extracting precious metals. Others have to travel long distances to get to their jobs and buy cheap food full of pesticides and sugar.

For those who want to live in a more ethical or individual way, recycling or lowering their carbon footprints in a variety of ways, it is virtually impossible to avoid using things that exploit or harm human beings, animals and the planet's ecosystems.

Over time, the law, constitution, education, and so on have been shaped to promote the assumption that the capitalist economic form is the natural form of our social existence. We relate to nature at one or perhaps many removes through the prism of capitalist social relations. Until we transcend the whole concept of waged workers and profit-driven growth, and develop a completely different 'social metabolic relation' (as Istvan Meszaros, building on Karl Marx put it) we cannot protect the future of humanity or millions of other precious species.

A social licence

Overcoming our one-sided relationships with the world around us is, therefore, *the* challenge for real democracy.

It is little surprise that people are increasingly inspired by the understanding of the human-nature relation that is part of indigenous culture. Indigenous peoples' principles of stewardship, rather than ownership, of the earth's resources are intrinsically early communist forms which recognise that humans are part of nature and reliant upon it.

The social licence idea can help us consider the way forward and provide a vision of a future structure for managing the human-nature relationship. In this approach, communities have to agree to economic and infrastructure projects before they can go ahead. The social licence would replace the way governments ride roughshod over local people to impose fracking and other activities. It could transform the one-sided extraction-only relation with nature into a dialectical and natural relation, which is restorative and conservative as well as extractive. It can redefine and regenerate the concept of the commons.

Transforming the economy

It is through transforming our governing arrangements – or constitutional, state, legal bodies – that we can begin to make the socio-economic transformation. In a truly democratic society those who produce and manage would have ownership and control over the process and results of their labour. One way this could happen is through forms of co-operative ownership, management and planning.

Alternative ways of running parts of the economy and financial system have always existed. As capitalism became the predominant system, people created other forms of economic organisation in opposition to the profit model. In 1844, two types of enterprise were formally established: a shareholding, capitalist form of production on the one side and a democratic, co-operative form on the other.

Private profit versus co-ownership

The first model was enshrined by Parliament's 1844 Joint Stock Companies Act, followed by the 1855 Limited Liability Act which together allowed greater freedom for incorporation and the legal protection needed to minimise the risk of losses.

In this way, the scene was set for the proliferation of capitalist corporations. They became the primary organisational form for the accumulation of profit derived from the exploitation of the labour of contracted workers and the raw materials available on the planet. Together with private ownership of capital, the wage-labour contract defined the social relations of capitalist production.

Throughout this period, however, another form of organisation – cooperatives – were developing in the belly of the beast. They provided both an antidote to some of the worst effects of the capitalist form of organising production as well as an alternative, democratic model of social organisation.

The success of co-operation led 19th century political economist J S Mill to conclude: "The form of association, however, which if mankind continue to improve, must be expected in the end to predominate, is not that which can exist between a capitalist as chief, and work-people without a voice in the management, but the association of the labourers themselves on terms of equality, collectively owning the capital with which they carry on their operations, and working under managers elected and removable by themselves." John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy with some of their Applications to Social Philosophy* Book IV, Chapter VII, *On the Probable Futurity of the Labouring Classes*, 1852

In 2016 the co-operative idea was inscribed by UNESCO on its Intangible Cultural Heritage list. In fact, this way of organising goes back to 1761, when weavers in Fenwick, East Ayrshire, Scotland, established the first recorded co-operative. The movement proliferated as conditions for the new working class made life intolerable. But it was not until 1844 that the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers set out the ‘Rochdale Principles’ as the basis for development and growth of the modern co-operative movement.

Co-operative movement is surprisingly big

In the United States, 30,000 co-operatives provide more than 2 million jobs (NCBA 2013).

America’s 838 distribution co-operatives provide electricity to an estimated 42 million people in 47 states. Their service territories collectively cover 75% of the U.S. landmass.

Co-operatives and credit unions have more than a billion members around the world (ICA 2013).

Co-operatives provide over 100 million jobs, 20 per cent more than all the world’s multinational enterprises put together (ILO 2014).

The United Nations estimated in 1994 that the livelihood of nearly 3 billion people, or half the world’s population, was made secure by co-operative enterprise (ICA 2013).

The 300 largest co-operatives in the world have a combined annual turnover or revenue of US \$2 trillion, which is more than the gross domestic product (GDP) of Italy, the world’s seventh economy (UNSDN 2013).

Between 2007 and 2010, European co-operative banks’ assets grew by 14 per cent (Birchall 2013). Co-operative financial institutions did not produce any of the ‘toxic’ paper that destabilised the global economy.

In the economic downturn, credit unions and co-operative banks did not require bailouts, the value of co-operative shares remained stable, and most co-operatives experienced modest growth and continued to extend credit to members, including businesses, in the midst of global credit shrinkage.

More recently, the Mondragon corporation, a federation of autonomous, independent workers’ co-operatives, based in the Basque region of Spain, has proved highly successful. Founded in 1956 it now employs 74,000 people in more than 250 businesses. It operates production facilities and corporate offices in 41 countries with sales to 150.

However, Mondragon and companies like John Lewis are subject to the huge pressures that come from the capitalist system which dominates the global

economy. Noam Chomsky notes that even an advanced case like Mondragon is “in a market system and they still exploit workers in South America, and they do things that are harmful to the society as a whole and they have no choice. If you’re in a system where you must make profit in order to survive, you’re compelled to ignore negative externalities, effects on others.”

Other long-standing examples of not-for-profit organisations have thrived side by side with the for-profit economy for many decades. Some, like the Nationwide and the Co-operative in the UK have a measure of democratic participation. Others, like the NHS, would greatly benefit from it.

Occupations to protect jobs and resources

But why wait for a business to fail before seeking control? Those in employment can begin by occupying their offices, plants, banks and set up a system of workers’ control of production as a first step to running the whole of the economy as a network of not-for-profit co-operatives. Clearly this would need to be part of a larger movement in society so that those occupying are not left isolated and subject to legal threats or eviction.

Experiments with and proposals for new models of democratically-owned and controlled organisations can be found all over the world, in every sector of the economy. #BuyTwitter is among the most recent with practical proposals for converting the social media platform into a global public service.

Moving beyond capitalist production

So what is needed for society to move beyond the social and legal relations that constitute capitalist production and enable the co-operative economy to rise to predominance? It has to acquire the political power to revoke the foundational precepts and supersede the practice of capitalist production and would:

- advance co-operative principles in every organisation
- violate and overturn the regimes of regulations set out by global agencies such as the World Trade Organisation and the International Monetary Fund
- replace capitalist alliances with co-operative regional economies linked into bodies like the Earth Co-op
- build resistance to international free trade deals like TTIP
- undermine the concept of ‘private property’ with a new commons.

A new ethos – a new concept of citizenship

The dramatic emergence of a socially-oriented ethos is something that participants and observers have seen and experienced in movements like Chartism, the Paris Commune and the Russian Revolution. More recent examples include assemblies in Tahrir Square in Cairo, Occupy Wall Street, Syntagma, where Athenians gathered to resist the Troika, and the Gezi Square movement in Istanbul in defence of a park.

The assertion of an alternative to a dictatorial state, protection of ecosystems as well as cultural heritage all came together. City centres actually created ‘capitalism-free zones’ where people caught a brief, but inspiring glimpse of how things could be different. A spirit of inclusiveness, sharing and community has characterised democratic moments throughout human history. Such movements foreshadow a new concept of citizenship in tandem with a different kind of economy. Instead of a system where political ‘choice’ is restricted to variants on a system dominated by corporate rule, the state and political systems, like the economy, must be directly controlled and driven by the common interest, rather than the money-making classes.

Power to the Assemblies

If democracy is characterised by the self-determination and self-rule of the people, it must be from, for and by the people. Citizens reach decisions and put forward policies that they themselves co-design, based on the common good, rather than the will and might of the current power holders.

Through real and ‘virtual’ assemblies, people can assert their power and direct control over their lives as equally as possible. People will feel encouraged to act for the common good in a society where any surplus is used for the benefit of all.

The sovereignty of the people – where power rests with the majority in society – is the underlying principle. That majority, however, must also recognise the rights and interests of minorities. Participative assemblies can help to ensure that these different interests can be expressed and accommodated.

All citizens have a say and control through their communities through democratic local assemblies that carry legitimacy and support from ordinary people. Each street and area has the confidence to control and administer resources to enhance the wellbeing of all.

Karl Marx proposed in his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* that society – not the state – would become the real collectivity: “Democracy,” he wrote, “is human existence, while in the other political forms humans only have legal existence.”

Alongside democratic ownership and control of economic and financial resources, we should build on the formal democratic rights we have achieved and give them real meaning and content through a new political framework. This would rejuvenate the House of Commons, and include the abolition of the totally unelected House of Lords, the monarchy and the secretive Privy Council. A framework for a new democratic Britain could be built around:

- local and regional Assemblies with executive as well as deliberative power and control over resources in place of existing local government and other structures
- Assemblies to decide how best to meet a range of needs in their own areas and send delegates to a national Convention/Parliament with law-making powers
- delegates to reflect diversity in our communities, with distinct voices for women, minority ethnic citizens, older people, young people, workplaces, students and small businesses
- an electoral system in balance with the new participatory system
- all matters discussed, debated and decided upon with full public access
- delegates to be paid no more than the average national income
- all delegates subject to recall and removal by local/regional voters at any time
- mass involvement in the new democratic process through digital technology
- extensive and binding consultation with voters before decisions are taken at any level
- freedom of political expression and the right to organise politically, in communities and trade unions free from state control.

There would be a national and international approach when making domestic policy and vice versa. For example, local decision-making about production would take into consideration effects on wider communities and the planet as a whole. The earth's resources would be respected as a “common treasury ... for all,” to quote from Digger Gerrard Winstanley.

Different kinds of democracy

There would be a good balance between different types of democracy: including participatory, representative, liquid (aka delegative) democracy, deliberative and direct forms, all of which would be accessible via any digital device and promoted via new (social) and traditional media (TV, radio and publications) as well as face-to-face events. Understanding and practising these variants would be part of school curricula.

State structures

In the transition from the present, the function of state structures would be solely to ensure the needs and requirements of society for the common good. The rights of ethnic, faith and cultural minorities would be respected and have free expression. Inclusiveness and equity is the underlying principle – everyone would have an equal chance to be involved in decision-making.

Co-operative online platforms like Loomio are already being developed to provide the digital infrastructure supporting the decision-processes of real, participative direct democracy across the globe. Others, like the developers of VocalEyes are pushing for bottom-up adoption in colleges, universities, and communities in local electoral wards.

While new technologies have reduced the need for bureaucratic structures to ensure the smooth running of a citizen-based democracy, any remaining functions best organised centrally will be carried out by a transitional, state. By making information technology available to everyone, bringing the economy under the control of communities, workers and consumers, and discouraging bureaucratic trends wherever possible, the state as a separate body can eventually be dispensed with.

These and other draft proposals can take us towards achieving the ideal of a real democracy.

What a *real* democracy means to RDM supporters

People before profit, or profit to the people. In a real democracy women would have a 50% representation in public life. There would be a living wage for all, and enable equitable sharing of talent and resources all over the country. Free education and health care for all, nationalised transport system, nationalised utilities and reward for sustainable energy development and keep fossil fuel in the ground. Retire the monarchy, do away with titles of privilege and get rid of Trident. Elect local and national assemblies with power of recall for representatives who go off piste.

Pamela, London

People would have the power and direct control of their lives as equally as possible. People will act for the common good. A society where the profit is given for the benefit of all.

Dylan, Kent

Society would be inclusive, allowing freedom of speech, equality of opportunity in education, work, healthcare and housing, No one should be poor, homeless or ignored under a true democracy. It should be from and for the people. It needs to acknowledge the environment, improve not deplete it and have respect for all other life we share this planet with when making policy. It needs to think internationally, when making domestic policy and vice versa.

Marcelle, Hackney

A good balance between representative, liquid and direct democracy, all accessible via any digital device and promoted via new (social) and traditional media (TV, radio and publications) as well as face to face events.

Peter, Swansea

Well-opposite to all the establishment are attempting to do. Bottom-up politics and ensuring the divide-and-rule criteria become history. Countering the liberal notion of competitive individualism and the dog-eat-dog mentality that people are socialised into believing there is no alternative to. A state that gives people the freedom and confidence to mature to a more amenable way of interacting with their environment. Each street and area would feel the confidence to control the food production or resources to advantage the majority wellbeing.

Tom, Rotherham

The people must have real power to make decisions. The sovereignty of the people should be the principle, and this can best be established at first locally. Resistance can lead to action, to local assemblies with power and to alternative strategies for co-operative-type initiatives to start with. Participative democracy will need to be re-established, through trial and error and with the benefit of new research by the new democracy movements, as the way that decisions are taken for the people.

Peter, London

What do you think?

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Why a Real Democracy Movement is needed

Previous chapters have argued the need to make the transition beyond the present state if we are to create a real democracy. The question arises: is a dedicated organisation needed to achieve this aim or can growing spontaneous anger and resistance take society to a new place?

There is a real urgency about all this. The coming to power of Trump in the United States and the referendum vote in favour of leaving the European Union in the UK have created a seismic shift. Liberal democracy has become illiberal democracy, with governments deploying populism, nationalism, racism and crude appeals to patriotism to confuse and divert the justified anger felt by countless millions bled white by the system.

In the UK, the state wants to revive Britain's imperial past as it hopes to become a major global power after leaving the EU. The failure of Labour and others to put forward a progressive alternative to the neo-liberal single market strengthens the Tories and their narrow, corporate agenda.

Trump has stunned the United States with his Bonapartist dictatorship, ruling with a narrow group of advisors who specialise in fake news, lies, racism and 'alternative facts'. America's revered constitution is in tatters, torn apart by a clique that rules through proclamations and Twitter messages.

The immediate response of millions in America and around the world to Trump's anti-Muslim visa and immigration ban – and before that, the huge numbers of women who marched against his rampant misogyny – have raised the stakes to an unprecedented level. The more than 1.8 million people who by early February had signed the petition against Trump's visit to the UK showed a new global movement on the march.

This movement is up against the system itself in the shape of the existing state and the reactionary governments who direct it. So here are some questions to think about:

- can a spontaneous mass movement lead directly to significant economic and social system change?
- what kind of movement can protect and sustain people and eco-systems?
- can occupying spaces, physical or economic, 'edge' capitalism out?

- what about simply ignoring the system?
- could electing a 'progressive alliance' at the next election offer a way forward?
- or is there a need for a movement that is specifically focused on charting the path beyond the present state and capitalism to a real democracy?

The answers to these questions depend very much on what our aims are and what we want to achieve. If the objective is to make capitalism a little fairer, a mass movement on its own might work although the opportunities are limited.

Those who argue against building a movement directed at the state include influential sociologist Professor John Holloway. In *Change the World without Taking Power* (2002), Holloway argued that alternatives to capitalism could develop in autonomous social spaces, within and outside of capitalism, and that challenging the state for power was to be avoided. In his later book, *Crack Capitalism* (2010), Holloway emphasises resistance in the form of the simple 'scream' or 'no'.

Economic thinkers such as Paul Mason have noted the increasing difficulty for the corporations of generating profit from the new economy and the rise of not-for-profit forms. They argue that occupation of more and more economic space by co-operative types of ventures will simply overwhelm capitalism and lead inexorably to a new commons.

Others argue that we should focus on community activism and mutual support. That is not a bad thing to do, but will it immunise communities from the miseries and poverty created by austerity capitalism, now entering a new phase of crisis globally?

It is crucial to set about trying to improve our lives and the lives of our fellow citizens – to be sharing and active. But if this is taken as a solution on its own, it can be overwhelmed by events. And in a certain sense it bolsters the idea that politics is beyond our reach, and there is nothing we can do to change it.

Drawing some lessons

We can draw some lessons from the mass struggles that erupted in the wake of the 2008 crash, when neo-liberalism's grip on people's consciousness was shattered. The Arab Spring of 2011 inspired the May 15 movement in Spain and Occupy in the US and the UK. In Greece, a left government was swept to power to resist austerity.

New technology facilitated communications between the young across the globe. They ignited a spark, sharing their views on politics, struggle, anti-globalisation and their opposition to political parties of the old kind. This was the start of an exciting change – a recognition that people do need to come together, to organise and challenge the status quo.

Many appraisals of Occupy tend to attack it for failing to be what it never set out to become, rather than recognising and learning from what it was. For example, Occupy Wall Street was criticised because it made no demands. But this was a deliberate policy. From its own point of view, the fact that it made no demands was a rejection of the power of those who might, if so minded, concede them and more likely ignore them. Instead, Occupy on both sides of the Atlantic critiqued a failed democracy which had come to represent the 1%.

David Graeber's book *The Democracy Project* (2014) gives a full picture of the rise and decline of Occupy Wall Street. He shows the strengths and weaknesses of consensus decision-making – explaining how it can be extremely democratic, though also problematic and open to abuse. While explaining that the actions of the US state were significant in ending the Zuccotti Park occupation, Graeber resists drawing any conclusions from that, of the need to change the legal/criminal justice system – or indeed to extend the movement to other sections of society.

In Greece, the new left coalition called Syriza tried the parliamentary route after the old parties had collapsed in the face of the country's overwhelming debts and the punitive measures proposed by the European Union, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund – the infamous Troika. Despite overwhelming support from the Greek people, the Syriza government was unable to defeat the forces ranged against it and eventually accepted the demands for a further bail-out. Syriza had made it a matter of European 'democracy' when in fact for the EU it was about the survival of the Euro and the single market.

The former finance minister Yannis Varoufakis is now on a mission to democratise the EU through his new movement, DiEM25. Podemos is pursuing

In his excellent book *Ruling the Void, The Hollowing of Western Democracy*, Peter Mair describes "an ongoing process in which there are party failings, in which democracy tends to adapt to these failings, and in which there is then a self-generating momentum whereby the parties become steadily weaker and democracy becomes even more stripped down". What emerged, as Mair describes it, is "a notion of democracy that is being steadily stripped of its popular component – easing away from the demos".

a similar path in Spain, focusing on elections when the mass of people are sick to death of the Spanish state and could be rallied to rebuild it so that it worked for the 99%.

In the UK, new social movements have also found their expression in surprising ways. Over 500,000 people have flocked to support Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party because he is seen as an agent of change. The support group Momentum has 20,000 members and another 170,000 supporters. In Scotland, the huge mobilisation around the independence referendum led to 120,000 people joining the Scottish National Party. That would translate to 1.2 million in a country like England with ten times the population.

We need to learn from Syriza, Podemos, Occupy, the Scottish Yes Movement – all of which drew into action millions who had never previously engaged in politics. Their strength was in mobilising, but their weakness was the absence of a vision of new democratic structures that could become a vehicle for transformation.

What has to be acknowledged is that we cannot create real democracy through pressure and protest alone. Of course, it is possible to win some concessions but these are increasingly rare. Mobilisations for action on climate change have, for example, produced precious little in the way of response from states and governments.

In reality, with the political and economic system in meltdown, what we have gained in terms of democratic rights is disappearing in front of our eyes. So, even defending what we have now means breaking down the barriers that the present capitalist type of state presents. Syriza tried to make the Greek state the servant of the people – and it proved impossible. A similar fate would undoubtedly befall Labour in a Corbyn-led government.

Conventional and establishment parties cannot defend the democratic achievements of the past because they are tied into a state system that favours the most powerful in society. That is why we need a new kind of movement. It will be a synthesis, not idealising the past, or even the recent past – but ready to re-make the idea of mass organisation in order to advance democracy itself.

Honestly addressing the question of power

Some are convinced by the cliché that power by its very nature must corrupt. But is there not a profounder truth – namely, that without a transfer of power the very essence of democratic transformation is excluded? Indeed, this is the conclusion

drawn by Toni Negri, the distinguished father of ‘autonomism’, the anti-authoritarian Italian workers’ movement.

In a 2016 interview, he concluded that “horizontality must be criticised and overcome, clearly and unambiguously ... the situation is probably ripe enough to attempt once again that most political of passages: the seizure of power. We have understood the question of power for too long in an excessively negative manner. Now we can reinterpret the question of power in terms of multitudes, in terms of absolute democracy ... ”

There is absolutely nothing in human nature or social potential which requires, or indeed makes it inevitable, that power must be exercised as a repressive force. Indeed, history can be seen as the ongoing struggle to realise the dream and the requirement that the vast majority – those directly involved in labour, the mothers, wives and carers who make society possible, those who create the means to live for everyone, those who look after others’ health and well being, those who perform in sport, art, education, culture and politics, the young, the old and the physically or mentally challenged – should gain real power.

‘Hegemony’, a concept first developed by the great Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci in his prison notebooks, is the ensemble of ideologies and cultural controls exercised by the power holders (i.e. the state and the corporations) to legitimise and maintain their grip. By way of contrast, a truly democratic ‘hegemony’ would therefore seek to create and promote philosophies and outlooks that the common interests of the majority in society are secured and perpetuated.

Shaping the Real Democracy Movement

The organisational shape and role of the RDM will be decided by those who become supporters and take part in preparing its launch later in 2017. Here are some approaches to consider in the meantime. For example, there is no reason why the RDM could not:

- counter the dominant forms of hegemony – i.e. the reinforcement of power through a range of ideologies. These include nationalism, racism, scapegoating of minorities, the fetish of free markets and ‘growth’. Newer forms include ‘1984’ notions like ‘post-truth’ – i.e. that there are no facts, and objective truth
- work with others to develop alternative visions, ideals of real democracy in meaningful ways

- provide moral and practical support and encourage a collective learning focus to strengthen each member
- address the question of power and how to facilitate a transformation of the present state
- develop partnerships, networks and alliances with those whose campaigns come up against the state and its power, such as trade unions, ethnic or religious groups
- initiate, and participate in, citizens' assemblies as places where democracy is practiced and alternative power bases created.

As part of developing alternative visions, a real democracy movement would draw lessons from earlier movements. Given this is the centenary year of the 1917 Russian socialist revolution, this period of history is already being revisited afresh by a new generation of students, academics, artists, playwrights, architects and designers and activists. The RDM's role could be to re-evaluate the achievements and contradictory outcomes of revolution, and, in an open discussion, create a new revolutionary ideal.

By drawing conclusions about the strengths and weaknesses of all those movements which have drawn into action millions never previously engaged in politics we can take on the task of building a new movement. Learning from their strengths is important. By addressing the issue of the state, rising movements can become the matrix for a real leap into the future.

What kind of organisation?

Humans have adopted democratic or semi-democratic organisational forms over the millennia. Collective decision-making and direct democracy, as we have seen in Chapter 1, were often the norm and citizens' assemblies of various kinds have sprung up at many points in history.

Communes, Soviets, trade unions, general assemblies, councils of action, neighbourhood or street committees, workers' councils, groups facilitated by digital democracy, participative, liquid or delegative democracy, sociocracy, and the general assemblies of the Occupy movements can all be effective, as indeed can political movements as well as party-type organisations. When trying to create and define the RDM we should assess these and draw from them to help shape a new organisation.

Experience shows that even the best or most advanced ways of organising can be abused and turned into something different from their original intentions. Searching for a perfect democratic process which can provide a cast-iron guarantee against possible bureaucracy, or people giving up principles is a pipedream. Any chosen form can potentially lead to problems and possible betrayals and so working to create as many safeguards as possible is vital.

The crucial motivation should be the desire to find ways to work together with a diverse set of outlooks while at the same time being able to act decisively for the common purpose of developing a real democracy. So, perhaps the most effective way forward is above all to ensure a democratic approach and mechanisms within an organisation that welcomes maximum debate and accountability combined with unity in action. This includes understanding the need to respond quickly to rapidly changing situations.

The RDM must work out a structure that is itself democratic. That may seem axiomatic, but the challenge is to create an organisation where decisions are taken democratically and the rights of dissent and factions are protected. There are many models to learn from and a priority will be to adopt a suitable structure.

The development of a determined but flexible and non-sectarian movement that models the kind of democracy it wants to build is a big challenge. It will require diverse practices, networking, ideological development and within the movement itself, a democratic structure. When considering what shape the RDM could take, here are some principles to think about. It could:

- ensure that everyone has a voice in the forums and networks where they want to have a voice and are active
- find ways to make decisions collectively and then to check back that they are carried out
- create a learning environment, not a bureaucracy, so that we are constantly critiquing and improving the way we work
- enable people with specialist knowledge and expertise to take responsibility for developing their areas
- hold face-to-face meetings as well as make intelligent use of communications technology
- ensure that social activities, art and culture play a major role in understanding the present and imagining the future.

Over to you

Please do give your views about these proposals and other ideas in *Democracy Unchained*. They will then become part of a new draft version that can inform the launch of the Real Democracy Movement. Please share this document widely – with friends, family, colleagues, in your community, your union, workplace, college, university and on social media.

Considering the urgent need for a truly democratic alternative to right-wing populism, please think seriously about becoming a supporter of the project to create the RDM. You can lend your support via the website:

<http://realdemocracymovement.org/>

We offer this booklet as a contribution to this great project. The door is open. Do come in.

What do you think?

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Send your comments to: info@realdemocracymovement.org