

Council Democracy: Towards a Democratic Socialist Politics

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Abstract:

This introductory chapter provides an outline of the main contours of a theory of council democracy and offers a preliminary sketch of council democracy's relationship with the major strands of democratic theory. Council democracy is a project of deepening democracy which includes the decentralisation of the state, democratisation of the economy and solidarity with similar international struggles for self-government. Council democrats view capitalist market relations as something that not only have to be tamed, but transformed in a manner which alters the underlying relationship between capital and labour and eliminates capitalists' controlling power over workers and the state.

Introduction

Capitalism and democracy have long been uncomfortable bedfellows. But with the ascendancy of a neoliberal rationality of governance, the expansion of corporate power and the increase of income and wealth disparities, the uneasy interaction between the two has gradually led to a hollowing out of democracy by powerful economic interests. Today, not only is policy and law-making in most advanced industrial democracies dominated by a wealthy elite, but a marketplace rationality has seeped into governing institutions and the practices of daily life, undermining the very fabric of democracy as collective self-rule.¹ These developments reflect the influence of Friedrich Hayek's theory that markets should be freed from excessive political regulation and government intervention in order to deliver maximum productivity and efficiency. The post-World War II belief in a mixed economy and the necessity of a strong role for government in economic planning has been replaced by a neoliberal consensus concerning the dangers of government intervention in the economy. Democracy, understood in the minimalist sense as the presence of free and fair elections, is

viewed as having no place in the economic sphere due to the dangers democratic controls pose to individual freedom.

The response of the mainstream Left to the rise of neoliberal ideology has been largely to capitulate and adapt to liberal democratic capitalism as the unsurpassable horizon of modern politics. The collapse of the Soviet Union and mounting criticisms of the Marxist imaginary led to the development of a host of other theoretical interests focussed on civil society, new social movements, deliberative mini-publics and participatory co-governance schemes. At a time when powerful economic actors were increasing their control over political processes – undermining the very basis of liberal democracy – theorists of democracy were turning away from an interest in the economic sphere and a concern for the obstacles that capitalist market forces posed to democratic renewal. In their seminal text published in 1992, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, Andrew Arato and Jean Cohen constructed a new justification of civil society and self-limiting democratisation movements.² Their focus on strengthening democratic culture through participation in civil society was based on a rejection of the Marxist strategy of striving for an emancipated, self-managed society. While Arato and Cohen made an important contribution to theorising a pluralist and differentiated society, their new Habermas-inspired political agenda came at the expense of an adequate theorisation of the contradictory relationship between capitalist relations of production and democracy.

In an era of the ongoing erosion of democracy by corporate power, there is an urgent need to reconsider the necessary underlying conditions of democratic government. Scholars concerned with the strengthening of democratic practices and the redesign of democratic institutions should consider the significant threat posed by capitalist market relations. Among other concerns, the sheer concentration of private power in capitalist firms can undermine the

capacity of democratic governments to realise collective democratic aims that may be against corporate interests. Capitalist firms also remain predominantly undemocratic authority structures in which workers must spend large amounts of their time and over which they exercise little control. The question of democracy within the workplace and broader economic institutions has been a marginal concern within democratic theory.³ Of those radical democratic scholars interested in transformative politics, ontological theorising has often taken precedence over an analysis of the material conditions of democratic societies.⁴

Council democracy is a project of deepening democracy which includes the decentralisation of the state, democratisation of the economy and solidarity with similar international struggles for self-government. Council democrats view capitalist market relations as something that not only have to be *tamed*, but *transformed* in a manner which alters the underlying relationship between capital and labour and eliminates capitalists' controlling power over workers and the state. The aim of this book is to place the idea of council democracy in dialogue with contemporary democratic theory in order to interrogate the lessons and resources that could be gained for strengthening democracy against the threat of capitalist market relations. Although contributors to this volume differ in their proposals for the principles, strategies and design of democratic institutions, they all seek to deepen democratic forms of governance and extend these to broader spheres of the economy and society.

In the wake of the chaos and calamity of the First World War, workers and soldiers across Europe organised into democratic councils in order to challenge existing social hierarchies and strive towards self-government and workers' control over production. The European council movements arose with little planning or foresight through the spontaneous

organisational tendencies of workers in opposition to capitalist alienation, political domination and bureaucratic control. The programme of the council movements was for democracy, social reforms, pacifism, the socialisation of the economy and a transformation of the hierarchical systems that oppressed them. Council democrats strived for a deepening of democracy in existing political institutions and an extension of democratic principles throughout society including to workplaces and other economic institutions. They sought to defend important political rights embedded in a democratic republic, while furthering a programme of democratisation through the socialisation of the economy and the introduction of democratic control mechanisms into authoritarian institutions.

Inspired by the Paris Commune and the councils formed during the 1905 Russian Revolution, the council movements of the interwar period were the most impressive of a number of attempts at instituting workers' control over economic institutions throughout the twentieth century.⁵ The councils experienced a rapid rise and dramatic fall with most of the energy and mass support behind the movements dissipated by 1920. In Russia, soviets arose and assumed *de facto* power alongside the Provisional Government in March 1917 during a period of dual power before the October Revolution. Workers councils also emerged across Germany during November 1918, following a sailors' mutiny at Kiel, which led to the abdication of the Kaiser and a political struggle over the future form of the German state. A number of short-lived council republics were also established in Bavaria, Austria and Hungary in addition to workers' councils arising in Italy and the United Kingdom. While these council experiments were brief, they achieved remarkable lasting successes, including contributing to ending the First World War, bringing down the Russian and German monarchies, introducing the eight hour workday and instituting women's suffrage in Germany.⁶

The classic image of council democracy consisted of a federal structure of councils that would exercise political and economic functions with a socialist system of co-operative production. The central institutional features of the council system were joint executive and legislative powers, a federal structure of local and regional councils leading to a national council and recallable delegates operating under imperative mandate.⁷ However, as the councils developed during a period of revolution and crisis, there was much debate over their proper role and relation to existing institutions such as unions, parties and the state. In particular, there was a critical ambiguity concerning whether the councils would exist alongside, transform or replace state apparatuses.⁸ The more radical elements of the movement were inclined to view the councils as complete alternatives to state institutions, while more moderate factions tended to conceptualise ways the existing state could be democratised and transformed.

While there was significant disagreement between council democrats, they were united by the underlying position that socialism could only be achieved through a deepening and extension of democracy into broader spheres of society. Rather than rejecting democracy as a bourgeois sham or advocating for a top-down legislation of socialism from above, council democrats sought to create a democratic socialist society based on participatory councils integrated into a federal structure of self-government and economic self-management. This started with a dissolution of the army and police and its replacement by a peoples' militia, the replacement of state bureaucrats by elected officials, and the institution of workers' management of factories. In practice, the council movements attempted to transform oppressive institutions and enact wide-reaching democratic reforms. This involved collective mobilisation to develop a countervailing power against existing authority structures. They realised that to implement thoroughgoing processes of democratisation they would require significant

resources, organisation and ideological development in addition to strong support from the general population. Their underlying strategy was to extend democratic principles from the political sphere to other domains of society where democracy-resistant institutions and forces remained embedded, including the army, government bureaucracy and workplace.

Partly as a result of their short and contentious existence, the political experiences of the council movements have been inadequately incorporated into the history of political thought. They have fallen between the cracks of the interpretive frameworks of orthodox Marxism and liberalism and misunderstood as either a form of top-down social democracy or council dictatorship. On the one hand, the council movements were disregarded by many German social democrats as a period of uncertainty and chaos before the establishment of liberal institutions and the Weimer Republic.⁹ The councils were also misunderstood in the former Soviet Union because they were taken over and incorporated within one-party Bolshevik rule. Political theory has failed to acknowledge what is original and distinctive about council democracy and to take stock of the valuable contribution participants in the council movements have made to political thought and practice.

This volume explores different aspects of a discontinuous tradition I have called council democracy on account of its theorists' commitments to socialism, democracy and some role for workers' councils, either in a period of transformation or as organs of a future democratic socialist polity. It draws upon the practices and writings of council communists, social democrats, libertarian socialists, anarcho-syndicalists and radical liberals who were critical of the domination and exploitation of both top-down state socialism and liberal democracy. Many would have positioned themselves as internal critics of communism, while some sought to push social democracy or liberalism to their emancipatory horizons. In this council

democracy tradition one could count Rosa Luxemburg, Richard Müller, Ernst Däumig, Anton Pannekoek, Otto Rühle, Herman Gorter, Max Adler, Otto Bauer, Sylvia Pankhurst, Karl Korsch and Antonio Gramsci among others. By no means did these theorists agree on a set of doctrines, but they were informed by shared animating concerns and were similarly placed in their general outlook on the limitations and possibilities of radical politics. The political experience of workers' councils continued to exercise an influence over later theorists of the twentieth century and played a key role in the development of the political thought of Hannah Arendt, Claude Lefort, Cornelius Castoriadis, Miguel Abensour, C. B. Macpherson, and members of the Frankfurt School.

The examination of council democracy as a set of principles and strategies of democratic socialist reform provides new conceptual insight into our understanding of democracy. Council democrats contested the institutional structure of liberal democracies, drawing attention to the insufficiencies of national elections for holding elites to account, maintaining substantive equality and ensuring widespread participation. The presentation of the striking differences between council democracy and current forms of democratic politics reveals our troubling distance from a more substantive vision of democracy. Drawing from debates and events at an important historical juncture before the dominance of current forms of liberal democracy opens up a broader horizon of our political imagination and provides an expanded scope of the possibilities for transformation. While contributors to the volume adopt a variety of political positions, many share the conviction that the council movements could provide a germ and catalyst that inspires theorisation of new institutional forms and practices for democratic self-government in the present.

This collection also reveals the subterranean influence of the experience of the council movements on the history of political thought. Although the history of the councils has been a neglected area within political theory, the model of a council democracy remains an important touchstone for a variety of emancipatory theoretical projects.¹⁰ A return to the council tradition also opens new pathways to the interpretation of thinkers at the margins of the Marxist, socialist and anarchist canons – thinkers whose work has been disregarded or is difficult to classify within existing theoretical frameworks. The volume also seeks to cast light on the complex interrelationship between these traditions and challenge conventional accounts of their antagonistic relationship. In the process, it hopes to engender fresh reflection on the necessary conditions of a democratic socialist polity and effective strategies of political transformation.

Liberal democratic institutions face mounting challenges from technocratic and elitist forms of rule on the one hand, and authoritarianism and exclusionary forms of populism on the other. Citizens are increasingly sceptical not simply of particular political parties and governments, but of the system of parliamentary democracy itself.¹¹ In this climate, it is instructive to turn to past examples of how political collectives organised to deepen and extend democracy and struggle against the private power of wealthy elites and corporations. Engaging with the historical practices of the council movements enables political theory to examine a contextualised account of the problematic influence of capitalism and the modern state in democratic societies.¹² The return to public assemblies and direct democratic methods in the wave of the global “squares movements” since 2011 has rejuvenated interest in libertarian socialist and council thought.¹³ Despite their significant differences from the early twentieth century council movements, political protest movements such as Occupy Wall Street and the Spanish and Greek *indignados* have used general assemblies and spokes

councils to organise and co-ordinate their actions, thus potentially reawakening forms of council organisation and action. Following the hundredth anniversary of the emergence of council movements, contributors to this volume argue for a revised understanding of the councils' historic role and a new appreciation of their contemporary significance.

Theorising the councils

Difficulty arises in attempts to theorise the council form due to the lack of agreement within the council movements over the councils' proper tasks and structure. Even in the Dutch and German council communist tradition of the 1920s, theorists adopted a wide range of positions on the role of the councils and their relationship to trade unions, political parties and parliaments. Nevertheless, certain political problems and tendencies arise that assist in mapping the major theoretical elements of council democracy.

The most important feature of the councils, and that which distinguishes them most profoundly from other movements and institutions, is their attempt to overcome the division between the political and the economic by instituting workers' control over the production process.¹⁴ All council theorists shared a desire to extend democratic principles of accountability and control beyond the political state to broader spheres of social life, including workplaces and major economic institutions. Council theorists argued that private property and parliamentarianism enabled the bourgeoisie to dominate society by granting formal political equalities to all citizens, but failing to address material inequalities in ownership and control over economic resources.

Council theorists challenged liberalism's naturalised view of the economic sphere as a private realm of exchange between free agents and highlighted the pervasive structural inequalities that existed between workers and capitalists. Support for this view can be located in Marx's criticisms of liberal democracy in *On the Jewish Question*.¹⁵ Here, Marx argued that liberal democracy implicitly supported exploitation and domination due to the private ownership of the means of production and the vastly unequal distribution of resources. By leaving relations of subordination and domination in the economic sphere intact, Marx argued that liberal democracy failed to achieve a more complete social emancipation that would institute workers' self-management over production. Drawing on Marx's later insight that the underlying source of class antagonisms was the exploitation of labour by capitalists, council democrats called for a reorganisation of the fundamental relation between capital and labour such that the very need for a separate political state to rule over civil society would disappear. Many council democrats were inspired by the vision of the Paris Commune, theorised by Marx in *The Civil War in France* as "the political form at last discovered for the emancipation of labour."¹⁶ One of the major differences between this view and a Leninist model of economic production was that the former entailed bottom-up workers' control over individual workplaces integrated into a broader system of a rationally planned economy and a self-determining democratic society.

Council theorists differed, however, on how this would be achieved in practice. The problem, as formulated by the German council democrats, was how to socialise the economy in a manner which avoided two equally problematic outcomes. At one end of the spectrum, Leninist versions of state socialism seemed to lead to a "bureaucratic despotism," since ownership of the means of production passed exclusively into the hands of state officials. On the other end, if the exclusive ownership of factories passed to workers, as in the syndicalist

model, then non-workers and the rest of society would be denied an equal say over social production. Call this the socialisation dilemma. Differences existed within the council movements over the most effective strategies and the proper institutional framework to solve this problem.

According to the “pure council system” of Ernst Däumig and Richard Müller, councils should be organised in a pyramidal structure of local, regional and national councils.¹⁷ The system had a central council at its apex beneath which stood parallel economic and political structures: the economic councils were elected in workplaces, and the political councils in territorial constituencies. Lower level councils in both structures were elected directly and upper councils were composed of delegates elected from the lower councils. Workplaces would be placed under joint control of a workplace council and regional council to allow for more effective co-ordination across the system and a balancing of interests between individual enterprises and the needs of society as a whole. The model sought to ensure that co-ordination and mediation existed between the councils. It is notable for its attempt to chart a middle path between the federalism of anarcho-syndicalism and the centralisation of models of Leninism and Social Democracy.¹⁸ It is unclear in this basic sketch what the precise distinction would be between political and economic issues or how disputes would be resolved between different levels of the council system. The model has been criticised for its overly schematic design and for its mixture of territorial and workplace councils.¹⁹ Pannekoek, for example, was critical of all attempts to organise councils according to territorial units, which he considered as “artificial groupings” distinct from the organic development of workplace councils.²⁰

Another example of an attempt to solve the socialisation dilemma was offered by Karl Korsch who proposed a model in which capitalist ownership would be eliminated and three different types of councils would have an equal say in determining production. He considered that certain controls over management and production should be exercised at the level of the individual factory, but that factory-level self-determination should be integrated with consumer-group councils to represent the interests of consumers and of representatives of the state (a “council of councils”) to adopt the perspective of society as a whole.²¹ This model sought to balance the needs of workers to exercise self-determination in their workplace with the interests of the community in co-ordinating production between individual units and across industries. Regardless of the final institutional plan, a majority of workers within the council movements were in favour of increasing workers’ control over workplaces and of socialising most industries. In Germany, for example, the national congress of councils voted unanimously for the government to implement immediate plans for socialisation.²²

A second and related aspect of council democracy was how council institutions would relate to existing state apparatuses. For the radical theorists, namely the Spartacus League, Revolutionary Shop Stewards and the left-wing of the USPD, council democracy aimed to replace rather than supplement a liberal parliament. This can be differentiated from the position of council delegates from the SPD, who believed existing institutions could be transformed in order to implement socialist policies.²³ For the more radical theorists, there were three main grounds for claiming a qualitative difference between the proletarian character of council institutions and bourgeois parliamentary institutions. First, council institutions exercised legislative and executive functions and were considered a “working institution” that would directly create and administer laws. Pannekoek argued that this format would prevent the development of career politicians and bureaucrats because there would be

no need for political parties or large, permanent, unelected bureaucracies.²⁴ Second, delegates were directly elected from workplaces and could be immediately recalled if they did not follow the directions of workers. This was thought to prevent the rise of a bureaucratic class. Third, they were considered to be class-specific organs that would represent the interests of workers. We have good reason to doubt whether councils would have been able to overcome the problems of bureaucracy and political separation identified in council theorists' criticisms of liberal institutions. In practice, wherever councils took on large amount of political and administrative tasks the executive organs of these councils tended to undertake most of the work with only occasional oversight from the main council bodies.²⁵

Proposals also existed to combine a parliament with councils in various ways. Karl Kautsky believed that the question of "national assembly or council system?" need not be framed as an either/or issue. Kautsky proposed integrating a system of councils with a national parliament. The workers councils would represent workers' interests and act as a pressure from below on elected representatives to ensure the implementation of socialist policies. Heinrich Laufenburg believed that a parliament could be integrated within a broader council system, although under the sovereign authority of workers' and soldiers' councils.²⁶ Claude Lefort would later read into the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 plans to integrate a system of workers councils with a parliament and workers' unions to represent individual workers' interests. Various other propositions existed within the council movements to combine different aspects of these systems. Proposals to draw elements from the council system, while retaining key aspects of a representative government, legal system and constitutional state have proved more influential among contemporary theorists inspired by the council tradition.

A third question concerned the proper role of the councils and whether they could be considered temporary organs of revolutionary struggle, embryonic institutions of a post-capitalist society or an initial stage in a longer process of revolutionary transformation. While the Bolsheviks (post-October Revolution) and SPD considered the councils as temporary organs to be replaced by one-party rule or a centralised social democratic state, council democrats tended to view the councils as ideal organs of revolutionary struggle that would play some role as more permanent institutions in a post-capitalist society. A “structure versus process” divide can be discerned in the literature. On the one hand, for those who believed the councils contained an essentially proletarian structure, such as Däumig and Müller, they conceived of them as the institutional basis of a post-capitalist polity. For these theorists, the councils were governing institutions that should be directly democratic, enable workers to participate in decision-making and exercise control over major industries in a rationally-planned economy. On the other hand, for Karl Korsch the essential aspect of the councils lay not in any determinate institutional form, but in the openness of the councils to transformation and their ability to begin a process of institutional development beyond the confines of the state towards new experiments in organising social production.²⁷ Theorists such as Pannekoek and Castoriadis occupied a middle ground, at times advocating for the importance of specific features of the councils as genuinely proletarian in character, while also supporting the importance of the councils as an open form capable of transformation and development. While there is no necessary opposition between the two poles, it does indicate genuine differences in why theorists valorised the councils.

Fourth, council theorists also claimed that the councils enacted a fundamentally different conception of representation than that practiced within parliamentary democracy. Council theorists were generally suspicious of representation and desired for people to take direct

action within their spheres of competence. In circumstances where representatives were logistically necessary, council theorists argued they should remain in constant contact with their electors and be subject to immediate recall. A major theme of political writing on the councils is the proletarian character of directly-elected delegates subject to immediate recall. Theorists from Marx to Müller and Pannekoek to Castoriadis all viewed recallable delegates voted by workers from within their factory organisations as a superior form of representation to parliamentary elections.²⁸ First, the delegate model was believed to enable a more direct expression of the interests of workers due to the delegates' organic connection to workers within their factory. Second, delegates were viewed as less likely to form a separate class that could potentially become distant from and dominate those who elected them. In this regard, the feature of immediate recall provided an extra measure of accountability, which was occasionally exercised, for example, when Russian delegates voted for a "Liberty Loan" to assist the Provisional Government to continue the war.²⁹ The principle of delegation was also commonly reported to have arisen naturally or spontaneously from workers' organisations without much need for discussion. As Anderson notes, "no one ever questioned the principle that delegates to the Central Councils should be revocable, at all times. The principle became an immediate reality."³⁰ According to Appel's account of the formation of councils, the workers viewed the delegation model as "a means of control from the bottom up."³¹

Although this system was often touted as a more direct form of democracy and unmediated expression of the will of the people, as delegates were selected to sit on progressively higher levels of councils, ordinary participants in the council movements began to exercise only an indirect influence over the decisions of higher council delegates. The reality of many council systems during their brief existence was that executive organs gradually took on more power and responsibility, although lower councils still retained a right of recall. Their theory of

delegation remains vulnerable to long-standing criticisms of delegation theories of representation such as the difficulties of representing a plurality of interests and in engaging in meaningful deliberative processes of transformation.

Fifth, council democracy sought to reconcile two fundamentally distinct principles: workers' control over production and a universal conception of democracy. Democracy aims to realise certain goals for all citizens such as equality under the law, voting equality and equal rights of participation.³² As organisations representing the interests of workers, the council movement embodied the working-class struggle against the oppression of capitalists; but as a movement aiming to put an end to capitalist relations of exploitation and domination, council delegates sought to create a free and equal order in which all individuals could flourish as part of a self-determining society. In Marx's famous formula, the proletariat was a class with a "universal character" whose emancipation would put an end to class-based systems of oppression, thus liberating all those who did not live off the exploitation of the labour of others.³³ However, in practice, the council movements struggled to balance the tension between these sometimes competing principles, which led to different responses to the problem of democratic inclusion, transitional political strategies and questions of membership of the councils.

One example of this dilemma was the debate over whether "workers" or "the people" was a more appropriate political subject of emancipation. Delegates within the SPD tended towards more universalist formulations, drawing from the Erfurt Programme to affirm that they opposed "all forms of exploitation and oppression, whether it is directed at a class, a party, a gender, or a race."³⁴ In a *Vorwärts* article, Friedrich Stampfer argued that a government must be elected by a broader section of the population than simply the workers and soldiers, which

necessitated calling a constituent national assembly as soon as possible.³⁵ Even Karl Kautsky argued that the councils suffered from serious limitations of democratic inclusion, for it was not simply the bourgeoisie who were potentially excluded from the councils but any individual who was not actively engaged in paid labour in a workplace.³⁶ While radical council delegates agreed that white-collar workers and members of the intelligentsia could rightly form councils, their theorising and actions led to the exclusion of women engaged in unpaid reproductive labour, the unemployed, peasants and even certain workers outside of major industrial centres. Questions were raised about this problem in various meetings of councils, but no consensus was ever reached about how to resolve these issues.³⁷

If tensions did exist between workerist and universalist aspirations of the councils, there were theorists prepared to resolve these primarily in favour of workers to ensure the proletarian character of new institutions. By council democracy, Pannekoek understood “workers power to the exclusion of the other classes.”³⁸ On balance, Pannekoek considered that the necessity of establishing workers’ control over production to ensure economic justice trumped the democratic principle of universality and democratic inclusion:

“If it is true that each person has a natural right to participate in politics, it is no less true that the whole world has a natural right to live and not to die from hunger. And, if to assure the latter, the former must be curtailed, then no one should feel that their democratic sensibilities have been violated.”³⁹

For Pannekoek, “whoever does not work as a member of a production group is automatically barred from the possibility of being part of the decision-making process.”⁴⁰ Richard Müller supported both manual and intellectual workers in council institutions, but scoffed at the idea that members of the ruling classes should be allowed to form their own representative councils.⁴¹ Luxemburg, however, was more sensitive to questions of exclusion and believed

in the importance of broad alliances across oppressed classes. For Luxemburg, “Social Democracy has always contended that it represents not only the class interests of the proletariat but also the progressive aspirations of the whole of contemporary society. It represents the interests of all who are oppressed by bourgeois domination.”⁴² While no less supportive of the working-class character of the revolution than other council theorists, Luxemburg was more attentive to the universal demands of democratic socialist politics.

Finally, there were significant limitations to certain aspects of the council movements’ vision of politics. For many council theorists, the overcoming of exploitative capitalist relations of production was the primary problem of politics. This led to difficulties in conceptualising how power operated along different axes such as gender, race and identity. It obscured the operation of other problematic social hierarchies even ones that existed within their own movements. This narrow vision of the scope of political conflict then contributed to their overly optimistic view of the management of conflict in a post-capitalist society. Due to their focus on capitalism as the principal foe to be overcome, they tended to downplay the possibility of the persistence of significant political conflict after the revolution. Their often utopian picture of post-revolutionary society was supported by an underlying assumption of a homogeneity of values and interests of workers. They underestimated the extent to which workers could still have deep disagreement both on ideological matters and on basic practical problems of how society should be organised. Their theorising tended to rely on the utopian desire for a fundamental transformation of human nature and sociability through a long process of cultural and ideological development. From our vantage point, it is apparent that the council movements were misguided in their belief that political conflict would be significantly curtailed in a post-capitalist society. As a result, there is little attention to the social institutions that would create and enforce laws (if any) or how conflict between

individuals or councils would be managed. One is struck by the radical underdetermination of the institutional dimensions of the council literature on this point. The neglect of theorising processes that would protect civil liberties and the absence of an independent judiciary in most proposed council systems raises questions about the capacity of these systems to safeguard basic civil liberties of minority and dissident groups.

One possible objection to my characterisation of the tradition of council democracy is that I have made reformists out of revolutionaries and obscured certain council communists' desires to abolish capitalism, eliminate class divisions and usher in a completely emancipated society. Within the council movements there were certainly radical elements who held such objectives, but council delegates supported a wide variety of competing principles and aspirations. While I believe we should emphasise the council movements' transformative potential, this need not imply fixed ideas about how democratic politics should intervene in economic relations or a schematic design for the final form of a future democratic socialist society. I do not believe the most useful and important aspects of council theory and practice lie in the more utopian demands for a complete transformation of human beings and society. Instead, we should seek to learn from their attentiveness to the corrosive effects of capitalism, inequalities in power, and their focus on active citizenship and widespread mobilisation as a pathway to democratic reform.

The councils and democratic theory

While democratic theory has drawn extensively from other historical periods such as Rome, Athens, the Italian Renaissance and revolutionary France and America, the European council

movements of the interwar period have failed to gain canonical status within the democratic theory literature. Leading democratic theorist, John Dryzek, considered council democracy a “dead duck” with few theorists or followers.⁴³ At the edges of the discipline, certain theorists have begun to return to the related concepts of economic democracy and workplace democracy, popularised in the 1980s by Robert Dahl, among others.⁴⁴ Recent historical scholarship has also provided new translations of primary sources on the councils, analysis of key historical actors and a compelling account of the continuity of attempts to develop workers’ councils.⁴⁵ However, no existing work connects this historical scholarship with current debates in democratic theory or explores the implications of the political struggles of the councils for contemporary democratic regimes. This introduction provides a preliminary theoretical sketch of council democracy’s relationship with the major strands of democratic theory.

Democratic theory has traditionally been concerned with the arrangement of political institutions and has viewed economic relations as related to but outside of its central considerations. The democratic organisation of workplaces and economic institutions has been examined by a number of theorists, but as the majority of mainstream democratic theory is liberal, it accepts liberalism’s defence of the economic sphere as a private realm of exchange that need not be organised along similar principles to the political sphere. Another major barrier to further engagement with the council movements has been the mischaracterisation of the councils by some of their most prominent commentators. John Medearis has demonstrated that the legacy of the councils within political theory has been heavily biased by the interpretations of figures such as Lenin, Arendt and Schumpeter.⁴⁶ After originally considering the councils as temporary organs of insurrection, Lenin altered his view in 1917 – following the councils’ rise in power – to support the councils as the

emergence of “a state of the type of the Paris Commune,” only to change his perspective once again – after the October Revolution – to subordinate the councils to the will of the Bolshevik Party.⁴⁷ The transformation of workers’ councils from democratic organs into administrative apparatuses of a communist state in the Russian Revolution has created strong associations of the council movements with Bolshevik one-party rule, leading to difficulties disambiguating council theory from state socialism and Leninism. The dominant, although disputed, interpretation of historians sympathetic to the council movements is that Lenin adopted a cynical strategy of supporting the councils until the Bolshevik party gained power, after which he moved to curtail their democratic agency and autonomy.⁴⁸ Furthermore, Lenin’s criticisms of left-wing and council communists in “Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder,” contributed to the neglect of these figures within Leninist and Trotskyist circles and ensured council theory a heretical status within orthodox Marxism.⁴⁹

Within democratic theory, Hannah Arendt is perhaps the most influential supporter of council democracy and one of the principal sources of transmission of the council tradition. Numerous commentators have pointed out the distortions of Arendt’s representation of the council movements, including her disregard for their socialist ideology and their concern for the democratisation of the economy.⁵⁰ For Arendt, the councils presented an alternative to the party system and representative democracy as institutionalised spaces for citizen participation, deliberation and action. Arendt’s mythologised historiography of the councils placed workers’ councils alongside Jefferson’s sketches of a ward system, New England town-hall meetings, revolutionary societies and other instances of grassroots democracy in a discontinuous tradition stretching back to the French Revolution. Her interpretation of the councils through her division between “the political” and “the social” has led to

misunderstandings and lost opportunities – both for her and her interpreters – which has prevented democratic theorists’ engagement with the tradition of the council movements.⁵¹

Minimal Democracy

In relation to the major current conceptions of democracy, council democracy is most manifestly opposed to minimal or elitist versions of democratic theory espoused by theorists such as Joseph Schumpeter and Adam Przeworski.⁵² The demanding vision of council theorists of an active and self-managed society stands in stark contrast to the minimal requirements of a competitive struggle between elites for votes, which liberal minimal theorists contended was best able to render elites accountable and uphold civil liberties. For council theorists, the normative value of democracy was based on the ideals of substantive political equality, self-government and all citizens participating in self-determining institutions. Council theorists were critical of forms of politics based on the actions of elites and the passivity of ordinary citizens as they believed this robbed citizens of the capacity to determine their own existence and to defend their interests. Council democracy relies on a fundamentally different appreciation of the capacities and limits of human beings’ capacities as political actors. Unlike elite theorists, council democrats did not believe that the basic political psychology of voters rendered them unable to make sound political judgements. They were more optimistic with regards to the capacities of ordinary citizens and the possibility of them adapting to a more active and engaged political culture. Pannekoek believed this would require that citizens “see themselves changed into new men with new habits, into men who feel closely united with their comrades as integral parts of a body animated by one and the same will.”⁵³

On one point, however, council theorists agreed with Schumpeter and other so-called “realist” democratic theorists. They too acknowledged that at its basis, politics was structured by a struggle for power. In a report by the Executive Council of the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils of Great Berlin Richard Müller reminded delegates, “[a]ll political questions remain, in the end, questions of power.”⁵⁴ In the determination of political strategies, Pannekoek believed that consideration should come back to a single question: “here is the criterion for every form of action, for tactics and methods of fight, for forms of organisation: do they enhance the power of the workers?”⁵⁵ Central to the council movements’ conception of politics was that success lay in a realistic assessment of how a movement could effectively develop and deploy political power. An appreciation of their attentiveness to the underlying distribution of power between social groups reveals an under-acknowledged “realist” side of their political thought, in spite of their reputation for utopian thinking.

Participatory Democracy

Overall, the council movements’ ideas resonate most clearly with the concerns of participatory democrats such as Carole Pateman and Benjamin Barber.⁵⁶ Participatory democracy arose in the 1960s on the back of the student movements and the emergence of the New Left in Europe and North America. As democratic and libertarian critics of state socialism, council democrats prefigure participatory democracy’s critiques of bureaucracy, representative democracy and the separation of leaders from the masses, in addition to their emphasis on mass participation, cultural transformation and education. Both theories give citizens a central role in decision-making and promote self-determination and active

citizenship, inspired by earlier civic republican ideals of self-rule and civic virtue. Participatory democracy rejuvenated these basic themes of council democracy and diversified its concerns through a theoretical extension from class struggle to multiple forms of oppression and a greater emphasis on new social movements, student radicalism, and third world liberation movements.

Participatory democrats were dissatisfied with the lack of opportunities for participation in representative democracy and with the broad array of undemocratic authority structures that controlled citizens' lives. The project for a participatory society, shared by participatory and council democrats, is an attempt to both democratise the state but also to extend participatory democratic mechanisms to other structures of authority within society. Early twentieth century socialists sought to defend the gains of a democratic republic as "the indispensable political basis of the new commonwealth" and "consistently develop it in all directions."⁵⁷ Council theorists advocated a project of the democratisation of authority structures including the bureaucracy, civil service, army, workplace and other social institutions. They also considered that this project would require "a dedicated attempt to make and keep the German people politically active" through education and development so they would "get used to self-management instead of governance."⁵⁸ Their version of bottom-up socialism was based on a vision of active citizens in a participatory society.

The workplace is a crucial institution for both theories, but here significant differences emerge in terms of their political analyses and normative ideals. Pateman draws on a variety of sources – including Mill, Rousseau, G. D. H. Cole's theory of guild socialism and the practical experiments of workers' self-management in Yugoslavia – in order to demonstrate the viability of participatory democracy with a particular emphasis on the workplace as a

primary site of socialisation and development. Yet the priority is the moral transformation of individuals who take part in co-operative forms of industrial organisation. For Pateman, “the major function of participation in the theory of participatory democracy is therefore an educative one.”⁵⁹ The workplace is an institution in which individuals could be educated, “including both the psychological aspect and the gaining of practice in democratic skills and procedures,” to foster an active citizenry and democratic culture.⁶⁰

Council democracy offers two major points of contrast. First, for council democrats, the priority is not simply on altering workplace hierarchies for the benefit of an individual’s political education, but on challenging structures of power and changing the underlying dynamic between capital and labour. This more transformative aspect of the council democracy programme falls out of the purview of most participatory democrats.⁶¹ Second, council democrats wish to intervene at the level of the individual workplace to institute worker self-management, but also at the level of the economy as a whole to place democratic controls over the production and distribution of goods. Council democracy seeks to integrate self-managed workplaces into a broader framework of economic democracy in which productive assets would be placed under democratic control. Participatory democracy lacks an adequate conception of the barriers capitalist relations of production place in the way of democratic reforms, which leaves it without theoretical resources to address forms of economic domination. Living in a more unequal world, the council movements were more attuned to the concentration of private power and the political and economic domination arising within capitalist systems. They contended that the conditions of a truly participatory society required the transformation of state institutions and the reorganisation of the underlying economic relations between capitalists and workers.

Radical Democracy

Council democracy stands in an ambiguous relation with regards to the various radical approaches to democracy. On the surface, radical democracy's project of questioning and seeking to change the fundamental nature of liberal democracy in more emancipatory and egalitarian directions appears aligned with the ambitions of council democrats. However, there are also significant differences in terms of ontological presuppositions, theoretical framework and political programme which set them apart. Radical democracy is a broad category that includes a range of theorists from agonistic pluralists (Mouffe, Honig),⁶² radical liberals (Connolly, Wolin),⁶³ post-Marxists (Laclau, Rancière),⁶⁴ and can even include those who do not necessarily identify with the name and are perhaps better described as some form of communists or Marxists (Žižek, Badiou, Negri and Hardt).⁶⁵ Typically, radical approaches to democracy are characterised by their attention to fundamental differences and divisions within the body politic, the ineliminable character of contestation and the pursuit of an open and responsive political order. They are strongly influenced by various post-structuralist theories of language, identity and representation and often stake out their differences with competing theories at an ontological level.⁶⁶ Significant variations exist between radical democratic theory in terms of ontological commitments (abundance/lack; transcendence/immanence) and different modalities of political change (reform, renewal, reactivation, revolution).⁶⁷

On one level, radical democracy provides a welcome critique of forms of closure and exclusion that pervade political theory, including that of council democracy. Their attention to radical differences and their openness to sites of political contestation and emerging forms

of subjectivity offers a necessary antidote to the essentialism, teleology and economic determinism of certain orthodox approaches to Marxism. But while radical theorists offer important lessons on uncovering contingency, undecidability and pluralism, council democrats provide a stronger programme of political organisation and democratic transformation. Council theory was mostly written from the perspective of theorists organically connected to powerful workers' movements with a view to how this theory could be applied to practical questions of political struggle.⁶⁸ As a result, it has a more practical orientation and immediate material concerns, focussing on how movements should organise, develop their power and overcome concrete obstacles through the deployment of effective strategy. In contrast, radical democratic theory often unfolds at an abstract ontological level with unclear payoffs in terms of concrete commitments and practical political strategy. Supplementing radical democratic theory with insights from the council democratic literature offers an opportunity to not simply acknowledge agonism and remain open to difference, but to construct a positive political programme and engage with the central institutions of society in order to democratise and transform them.⁶⁹

Certain varieties of radical democratic theory, most notably those of Wolin and Rancière, but also Abensour, Tully and Negri, contain an unwarranted anti-institutional bias which inhibits their capacity to affect long-term political change. These radical democrats tend to focus on moments of rupture and transgression, which leads to a vision of politics as insurrectionary, episodic and essentially non-institutionalisable. This tragic view displaces our gaze from contestation over central political and economic institutions to the margins of political life in search of momentary political experiences that remain subterranean in mass bureaucratic societies. Often, such a theory results in a binary and Manichean schema involving a true forms of politics pitted against that which passes for politics in contemporary quasi-

oligarchic political structures (i.e. politics/the police, the political/politics, insurgent democracy/the State, revolution/constitutionalism, constituent power/constitutional politics, the multitude/Empire etc.). However, this unwarranted rejection of institutions as important sites of political struggle forecloses the possibility of challenging institutional power and embedding emancipatory logics in institutions for lasting political change.

Council democrats recognised the importance of institutions as possible sites of emancipation and developed a more useful and convincing account of the dynamics of institutional struggle. They were acutely aware of the essential role the state, bureaucracy, army, media and industry played in protecting and enhancing the power of the bourgeoisie. They targeted these institutions through an interventionist and transformative approach, which sought to challenge the concentration of private power and extend democratic principles of accountability and citizen control into democracy-resistant institutions from which citizens' voices had been excluded. Rather than circumventing institutions that make collective decisions, council democrats sought to reclaim and democratise them, utilising their strategic position as vehicles for liberation. In response to the problem of the bureaucratisation of institutions of power and the growth of an inevitable divide between institutions and citizens, council democrats proposed more strict democratic mechanisms of accountability such as the election of all public officials, the revocability of delegates, a workers' wage paid to all officials and the decentralisation of decision-making to local bodies. They also insisted that institutions should have strong connections to an active and mobilised citizenry capable of patrolling them and holding them accountable. In this way, council democrats direct attention back to the central issues of politics and provide missing elements of a coherent political programme.

Agonistic Democracy

Within the broad tradition of radical democracy, there are other theorists such as Chantal Mouffe and Bonnie Honig, who adopt an agonistic conception of democracy, which, contrary to the anti-institutional theorists, emphasises the importance of engaging with institutions. Mouffe advocates a Gramscian “war of position” within institutions through the construction of a counter-hegemonic project via the creation of a democratic “chain of equivalence” between different struggles leading to the creation of a new democratic collective will. Mouffe’s radical democratic project is perhaps the modality of political change closest to that of the council democrats, albeit with a stronger emphasis on liberal institutions, pluralism and an abandonment of “all hopes for a ‘true democracy’, a perfectly reconciled society, a perfect consensus.”⁷⁰ Yet they would dispute her assumption of the sufficiency of a liberal democratic framework for this task. For Mouffe, the political principles of “liberty and equality for all,” inherent within the liberal democratic tradition should be radicalised and expanded.⁷¹ Liberal democratic societies already views these as morally applicable principles, they simply need to be put more robustly into practice.

What is missing from her position is a sustained analysis of the significant barriers capitalist relations of production pose to such democratic transformations. The problem is not simply that liberal democratic societies do not act on their principles, but that these political principles exist alongside even more influential economic principles of competition, privatisation and accumulation, which due precisely to the institutional framework of liberal democracy, are able to subvert and erode democratic politics. While at certain points in history the tensions between capitalism and democracy were moderated by the compromises

of the welfare state, more recently, neoliberal variations of capitalism have hollowed out democracy while retaining its form. Mouffe underestimates the extent to which her project to “reinscribe socialist goals within the framework of a pluralist democracy,” would require engagement with and radical transformation of existing institutions beyond the framework of liberal democracy through the socialisation of the economy.⁷² To be sure, the council democrats are not very far from Mouffe’s own project. But she tends to bracket out material concerns and her theorising of differences lacks a coherent account of how capitalist relations of production could be effectively transformed within liberal democracy. In her latest work, *Agonistics*, Mouffe has very little to say about transforming capitalist relations, and instead is concerned with criticising neoliberal ideology and strengthening systems of representative democracy and alternative party politics.⁷³

Deliberative Democracy

Since the deliberative turn in the 1990s, deliberative democracy has not only become the dominant approach in democratic theory, but according to John Dryzek, “the most active area of political theory in its entirety.”⁷⁴ Its focus, even in the most recent “systemic turn” of deliberative theory, is on ensuring the legitimacy of decision-making through authentic dialogue and debate.⁷⁵ Deliberative theorists cast deliberation as a potential source of rejuvenation of democracy and a panacea for the current separation of governments from their citizens.

Council democrats understand the importance of deliberation, but they would question whether it should be considered *the* perspective from which to interrogate democratic

politics. Consider the challenges currently faced by democratic states: rising levels of economic inequalities, governments dominated by special interests and private lobby groups, a dismantling of the welfare state by powerful corporations on the advance, and supranational governance structures run by unaccountable technocratic elites. It is difficult to see which of these problems could be adequately addressed through the establishment of a deliberative forum or a higher quality of debate in current discussions.

The council movements were confronted with more immediate problems relating to other nondeliberative parts of the political process. Moreover, it was the councils' emphasis on these aspects that are of importance for contemporary politics. For the councils, the most crucial task was mobilisation of opposition forces against the institutional hierarchies of the old regime. What gave the councils their decisive influence was not the sophistication or eloquence of their arguments but the legitimacy generated through the mobilisation of large segments of the population in support of a transformative democratic programme with the political power to enforce it. Democratic politics for the councils involved the ongoing challenge to hierarchies that continually threatened to reassert themselves. The challenge of restraining elites who threaten to dismantle democratic controls cannot be met by introducing greater levels of deliberation within democratic institutions. The framing of the central political questions in terms of reaching a mutually amenable agreement was a strategy of the elites to create parliamentary institutions that they could then dominate.

At certain points in the political process, citizens seeking "fair terms of cooperation" in which to "reason together" is an important goal, but so too are actions that achieve substantive results in implementing democratic forms of control.⁷⁶ A narrow focus on how decisions are made and how citizens communicate with each other risks missing what is, from a council

democracy perspective, the substantive activity of politics, i.e., collective action that challenges consolidated hierarchies and equalises power between citizens.⁷⁷ Such issues can simply not be adequately addressed within the framework of procedural reforms to decision-making. An examination of the history of the councils provides a revealing example of the limitations of the deliberative perspective and the necessity of broadening the study of democratic practices to a variety of other approaches.

Overview of Chapters

In Chapter 2, Donny Gluckstein offers a historical overview of the development of councils in Russia and Europe following the First World War. He argues that soldiers and workers spontaneously developed councils during crises brought on by the breakdown of the old regimes and the awakening of hopes for political transformation. Although the councils first arose organically, their continued development was a result of conscious efforts of organised sections of the working class with decades of experience in political activity and organising. The councils developed in a similar manner in different countries, revealing a certain naturalness of this organisational form to political actors at the time. Gluckstein views these councils as potential alternatives to state power as radical elements within the councils strived to assert council democracy as a new form of political organisation. Gluckstein's historical analysis sets the stage for later theoretical discussions.

In Chapter 3, Gaard Kets and James Muldoon analyse the political experiences of actors directly engaged in the council movements in the early days of the German Revolution. They examine the minutes of meetings of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council of Hamburg from

November 1918 to March 1919 in order to shed light on the development of council theory during a formative stage of revolutionary activity. They explore the political tensions that existed within the councils through a historical reconstruction of key debates, which reveals a more complex picture of council communism than that which currently predominates. On the topics of democratic inclusion, the relationship of the councils with old institutions and the role of political parties and trade unions, no clear consensus emerged from within the councils as to the best strategy for the political movement. Decisions made by the councils often reflected pragmatic compromises and immediate responses to urgent problems rather than a stable and coherent council ideology.

The next section of the book turns to theoretical questions in the tradition of council democracy. In Chapter 4, Gabriel Wollner seeks to address two prominent complaints about the democratic deficits of capitalist economic relations through a modified theory of council democracy. The first complaint relates to the absence of democracy within the workplace and the lack of workers' control over their own workday and over the activities of their firm. The second complaint concerns the barriers that powerful economic actors place to implementing democratic decisions. Drawing from Karl Korsch's theory of "industrial autonomy," Wollner argues for a fundamental transformation in property rights towards a system in which different rights formerly exercised by capitalist owners would be distributed to workers and consumers in order to enhance the level of democratic control over the economic sphere. In this sense, council democracy would simultaneously work towards democratising the workplace and enhancing the power of democratic politics over economic actors.

Chapter 5 addresses the issue of how we might transition from current capitalist relations of production and consumption to a democratic association of producers based on workers'

councils. Nicholas Vrousalis analyses two competing answers to the question of socialisation that have dominated since the Russian Revolution, and seeks to map out a third alternative which avoids the pitfalls of either extreme. On the one hand, statism associates socialisation with ownership of the means of production passing from private hands to exclusive control by the state and its agents. On the other hand, syndicalism associates socialisation with the workers taking exclusive ownership of the means of production. Vrousalis discusses a way out of this dilemma proposed by Karl Kautsky and then criticises it for the subordinate role workers' councils play in his proposals. Vrousalis argues for what he terms a "Madisonian" solution based on a workers' parliament, which overcomes the issues plaguing the statist and syndicalist alternatives.

Michael J. Thompson criticises a romantic tendency of the council tradition which proposes a radical anti-statist vision of politics based on an expressivist view of human nature. In Chapter 6, Thompson proposes we replace this desire to abolish the state with a more mature position that seeks to expand the democratic potential of the modern state and extend the underlying principles of democracy into the economy. He defends a position of "council republicanism" which integrates workers' councils into the institutional framework of the modern constitutional state in order to promote a democratic socialist form of politics. It is only the centralised institutions of the modern state that enable the maximisation of the principle of non-domination in social relations and enhance the democratic control of social and economic activity. Council republicanism therefore promotes a more substantive vision of democratic politics than that provided by liberal democracy or pure theories of council democracy.

In Chapter 7, Christopher Holman analyses Castoriadis' engagement with the council tradition. Starting with Castoriadis' early theorisation of the councils within the context of his critique of bureaucratic management, Holman traces the influence of the council tradition into Castoriadis' later writings on creativity, autonomy and self-institution. While previous commentators have tended to isolate the influence of the councils to Castoriadis' early writings, Holman argues that the institutional form of the councils present a concrete space for the expression of creative desire that is so essential to Castoriadis' later philosophical anthropology. Furthermore, Castoriadis' unique reinterpretation of the tradition seeks to emphasise the role of human creativity within the councils. For Castoriadis, Holman claims, the councils are more than an attempt to rationally organise the economy according to some fixed political schema. Instead, the councils are the institutional means through which human beings can enact and affirm their own underlying autonomy and creativity.

Shmuel Lederman discusses in Chapter 8 the reinterpretation of the council tradition by Hannah Arendt. Beginning from Arendt's famous distinction between "the social" and "the political," Lederman uncovers a distortion of the council tradition in Arendt's work which sought to ignore or downplay the socialist tendencies that lay within it. Yet at the same time, Lederman argues that this distortion enables Arendt to contribute an original dimension to the tradition. For Arendt, the councils enabled citizens to speak and act together which created a space for political freedom to emerge. Arendt's reinterpretation of the council tradition can be seen as a radical critique of liberal democracy due to the emphasis it places on direct participation and citizen empowerment.

Benjamin Ask Popp-Madsen returns in Chapter 9 to Claude Lefort's two different interpretations of the council tradition. Following the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, Lefort

theorises the councils in a similar manner to Castoriadis and other prominent members of Socialism or Barbarism. However, in 1976 Lefort offers a very different portrait of the Hungarian councils as representing a self-limiting form of power which sought to distribute political and economic power across a parliament, councils and trade unions. Lefort's reformulation of the council tradition seeks to institutionalise conflict within a political regime in order to protect it against totalitarian tendencies. Popp-Madsen places this theory in the context of Lefort's writing on democracy as instituting an empty space of power and theories of a mixed regime. He argues that we should interpret this theory as an argument for a socialist democracy which can be differentiated from both the liberal democratic and radical democratic interpretations of Lefort's work.

John Medearis seeks to examine the history of workers' councils in order to advise on strategies of transforming contemporary institutions in the present. In Chapter 10, he locates a number of central principles of the council movements that guided their programme of economic democratisation. Yet tracing some of the technological, economic and social transformations that have occurred over the last century, Medearis questions whether democratising the factory, or workplaces more generally, offers the most effective strategy for transforming the broader political economy. The factory, which occupied a crucial position in early twentieth century economic life, has now been superseded by other forms of organisation. The altered nature of such relations means that to draw the right lessons from the council movement would mean dramatically transforming their political strategy to suit contemporary circumstances.

In Chapter 11, David Ellerman offers a theoretical justification for a form of workplace democracy. He argues that a philosophical defence of workers' control of workplaces and the

products of their labour is possible outside of the lineage of Marxist and communist theory. In place of the common theoretical tradition of the council movements, Ellerman turns to principles drawn from the abolitionist, democratic, and feminist movements in order to construct a novel defence of self-managed workplaces.

In the concluding chapter of the volume, Dario Azzellini examines how the legacy of the council movements has been furthered in contemporary social movements. In particular, he turns to worker-recuperated companies (WRCs) and political collectives striving for local self-government. Workplace occupations became widespread in Argentina in the 2001 crisis and then spread to other South American countries. Practices then developed in Europe and North Africa, employing the principles of self-determination, co-operative production and direct action. Local self-administration through direct democracy was most prominently practiced by the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico, but in this chapter Azzellini focuses on more recent examples in Venezuela and Rojava, Kurdistan. He analyses how communities formed local councils and constructed political organisations that drew from different socialist and councilist currents of political thought. While the circumstances are very different from those faced by the council movements a century ago, Azzellini argues that the principles and tactics of some of these contemporary social movements can be considered in the same tradition of council democracy.

Contributors to this volume all seek to interrogate the tradition of council democracy from different historical and theoretical perspectives. On the hundredth anniversary of the formation of councils in Germany, Austria and Hungary, historical circumstances have considerably altered the conditions which first gave rise to the council form. The following

chapters seek to provide answers to the question of the ongoing significance of the councils and how they should motivate and guide political actors in the present.

Notes

- ¹ Martin Gilens and Benjamin I. Page, “Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens”; Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution*.
- ² Andrew Arato and Jean Cohen, *Civil Society and Political Theory*.
- ³ David Ellerman, “The Workplace: A Forgotten Topic in Democratic Theory?” 51; For theories of economic democracy see Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*; Robert Dahl, *A Preface to Economic Democracy*; David Schweickart, *After Capitalism*; Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers, *On Democracy: Toward a transformation of American Society*.
- ⁴ Lois McNay, *The Misguided Search for the Political: Social Weightlessness in Radical Democratic Theory*.
- ⁵ For other cases see Immanuel Ness and Dario Azzellini (eds.), *Ours to Master and to Own: Workers’ Control from the Commune to the Present*.
- ⁶ See Ralf Hoffrogge, *Working-Class Politics in the German Revolution: Richard Müller, the Revolutionary Shop Stewards and the Origins of the Council Movement*.
- ⁷ For an overview see Hoffrogge, *Working-Class Politics in the German Revolution*, 108–116.
- ⁸ This ambiguity reflected longstanding debates within Marxism about whether the state would need to be “smashed,” “dissolved,” “seized” or whether it would “wither away”. See, for example, Lenin’s discussion in “The State and Revolution”.
- ⁹ Karl Dietrich Erdmann, “Die Geschichte der Weimarer Republik als Problem der Wissenschaft”.
- ¹⁰ See for example the examination of the influence of the councils on the political theories of Castoriadis, Lefort and Arendt in this volume.
- ¹¹ Roberto Stefan Foa and Yascha Mounk, “The Danger of Deconsolidation: The Democratic Disconnect”.
- ¹² Jonathan Floyd and Marc Stears (eds.), *Political Philosophy versus History? Contextualism and Real Politics in Contemporary Political Thought*.
- ¹³ Alexandros Kioupiolis and Giorgos Katsambekis (eds.), *Radical Democracy and Collective Movements Today: The Biopolitics of the Multitude versus the Hegemony of the People*.
- ¹⁴ See Alex Demirovic, “Council Democracy, or the End of the Political,” in *An Alternative Labour History: Worker Control and Workplace Democracy*.
- ¹⁵ Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question”.
- ¹⁶ Karl Marx, “The Civil War in France”.
- ¹⁷ Ernst Däumig and Richard Müller outlined their schematic ideas for a “pure council system” in the journal *Der Arbeiter Rat* (The Workers’ Council) and other publications. Some of these writings were reprinted in Dieter Schneider and Rudolf Kuda, *Arbeiterräte in der Novemberrevolution. Ideen, Wirkungen, Dokumente*. For an excellent account of the pure council system see Hoffrogge, *Working-Class Politics in the German Revolution: Richard Müller, the Revolutionary Shop Stewards and the Origins of the Council Movement*, 108–116.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹ Karl Korsch, *Karl Korsch: Revolutionary Theory*, 200.
- ²⁰ Anton Pannekoek, “Social Democracy and Communism”.
- ²¹ Karl Korsch, “What is Socialization? A Program of Practical Socialism”.
- ²² Rudolf Hilferding, “Closing address to congress, 20 December 1918,” *Congress Report*, 341–44.
- ²³ Karl Korsch, “Evolution of the Problem of the Political Workers Councils in Germany”.
- ²⁴ Pannekoek, “Social Democracy and Communism”.
- ²⁵ Oskar Anweiler, *The Soviets: The Russian Workers, Peasants, and Soldiers Councils, 1905–1921*, 112.
- ²⁶ Korsch, “Evolution of the Problem of the Political Workers Councils in Germany”.
- ²⁷ Karl Korsch, “Revolutionary Commune”.
- ²⁸ Pannekoek, “Social Democracy and Communism”; Marx, “The Civil War in France”.
- ²⁹ David Mandel, *The Petrograd Workers and the Fall of the Old Regime*, 73.
- ³⁰ Andy Anderson, *Hungary ‘56*.
- ³¹ Jan Appel, “Origins of the movement for workers’ councils in Germany”.
- ³² Robert Dahl, *Democracy and its Critics*.
- ³³ Karl Marx, “A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right: Introduction”.
- ³⁴ The German Social Democratic Party, “The Erfurt Program.”
- ³⁵ Richard Müller, “Democracy or Dictatorship,” in *All Power to the Councils!*, 65.

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- ³⁶ Karl Kautsky, “National Assembly and Council Assembly” in *The German Revolution and the Debate on Soviet Power*.
- ³⁷ For an historical exploration of this issue see the contribution of Kets and Muldoon in this volume.
- ³⁸ Pannekoek “Social Democracy and Communism”.
- ³⁹ Ibid.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ Richard Müller, “Democracy or Dictatorship,” in *All Power to the Councils!*, 64.
- ⁴² Rosa Luxemburg, “Marxism or Leninism?” in *Reform or Revolution and Other Writings* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2006) 94.
- ⁴³ John Dryzek, “Democratic Political Theory,” in *Handbook of Political Theory*, 143.
- ⁴⁴ Robert Dahl, *A Preface to Economic Democracy*; David Schweickart, *After Capitalism*; Tom Malleon, *After Occupy: Economic Democracy for the 21st Century*.
- ⁴⁵ Kuhn (ed.), *All Power to the Councils*; Hoffrogge, *Working-Class Politics in the German Revolution: Richard Müller, the Revolutionary Shop Stewards and the Origins of the Council Movement*.
- ⁴⁶ John Medearis, “Lost or Obscured? How V. I. Lenin, Joseph Schumpeter and Hannah Arendt Misunderstood the Council Movement”.
- ⁴⁷ V. I. Lenin, “On Dual Power”. See also Anweiler, *The Soviets*, 165; Cf. Lars Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered: What is to be Done? In Context*.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid, 161–65.
- ⁴⁹ V. I. Lenin, “‘Left-Wing’ Communism: An Infantile Disorder”.
- ⁵⁰ John Sitton, “Hannah Arendt’s Argument for Council Democracy”; James Muldoon, “The Origins of Hannah Arendt’s Council System”.
- ⁵¹ See, for example, Jeffrey Isaac’s argument for increased civic participation and Andreas Kalyvas’ theory of a “derevolutionized constituent power,” both of which draw on Arendt’s theory of council democracy, but overwrite rather than contribute to a council tradition. Jeffrey Isaac, “Oases in the Desert: Hannah Arendt on Democratic Politics”; Andreas Kalyvas, *Democracy and the Politics of the Extraordinary: Max Weber, Carl Schmitt, and Hannah Arendt*.
- ⁵² Schumpeter famously describes democracy as “that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote.” Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, 269; Adam Przeworski, “Minimalist Conception of Democracy: A Defense,” in *Democracy’s Value*.
- ⁵³ Anton Pannekoek, “The Tactical Differences in the Labour Movement.” Quoted in Serge Bricianer, *Pannekoek and the Workers’ Councils*, 101.
- ⁵⁴ Richard Müller, “Report by the Executive Council of the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils of Great Berlin,” in *All Power to the Councils!*, 31.
- ⁵⁵ Anton Pannekoek, *Workers’ Councils*, 104.
- ⁵⁶ Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*; Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age*.
- ⁵⁷ Karl Kautsky, “Guidelines for a Socialist Action Programme”.
- ⁵⁸ Ernst Däumig, “The National Assembly Means the Councils’ Death,” in *All Power to the Councils!*, 45.
- ⁵⁹ Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, 42.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid.
- ⁶¹ Cf. Joshua Cohen, “Economic Foundations of Deliberative Democracy”.
- ⁶² Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics*; Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*.
- ⁶³ William Connolly, *Pluralism*; Sheldon Wolin, “Fugitive Democracy”.
- ⁶⁴ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*; Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*.
- ⁶⁵ Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times*; Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprisings*; Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Declaration*.
- ⁶⁶ See for example Lars Tønder and Lasse Thomasson (eds.), *Radical Democracy: Politics Between Abundance and Lack*.
- ⁶⁷ See Paulina Tambakaki, “Agonism Reloaded: Potentia, Renewal and Radical Democracy,” 577–88.
- ⁶⁸ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*.
- ⁶⁹ In this respect, council democrats are closest to the radical democratic theory of Chantal Mouffe, who is also critical of other varieties of agonistic theory for the absence of a theory of hegemonic struggle to supplement their understanding of plurality and agonism.
- ⁷⁰ Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 94.
- ⁷¹ Mouffe, “Preface: Democratic Politics Today,” 1–2.
- ⁷² Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 90 .

⁷³ Mouffe, *Agonistics*.

⁷⁴ John Dryzek, "Theory, Evidence and the Tasks of Deliberation," in *Deliberation, Participation and Democracy: Can the People Govern?*, 239.

⁷⁵ John Parkinson and Jane Mansbridge (eds.). *Deliberative Systems: deliberative Democracy at the Large Scale*.

⁷⁶ Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?*, 3.

⁷⁷ This problem is recognised by many deliberative democrats. See for example, Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers. *On Democracy: Toward a transformation of American Society*.

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