

emigrate from anywhere. U.S.-born Latinos obviously retain cultural characteristics of the countries that their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents left behind. But as Alba highlights, for many of them, these characteristics do not define their life chances. Political integration accompanies integration into other core institutions, like schools, jobs, neighborhoods, and families. Instead of searching for ethnic-specific explanations for Latino political behavior, we should probably focus on the key variables that pattern politics among whites. If education and geographic location increasingly pattern the white vote, the same goes for many second- and third-generation nonwhite Americans. Where they live and whether they graduated from college are likely more important drivers of their political decisions than the country their grandparents arrived from.

The majority-minority hypothesis inspires white backlash, while greater assimilation diminishes the importance of ethnicity in minorities' political behavior. This is the worst of all worlds for progressives counting on demographic shifts to transform our politics. But it's consistent with our nation's past: diversification and expansion of the mainstream has occurred before, and it is occurring again. And while college attendance rates are growing, the increase is slow enough that near-term elections will feature an electorate in which roughly four in ten voters are non-college-educated whites. Progressive policy dreams will remain just that unless Democrats reduce losses with these voters while winning back the children and grandchildren of immigrants increasingly drawn to the Republicans' message. As Shor has noted, "The joke is that the GOP is really assembling the multiracial working-class coalition that the left has always dreamed of." Only it's not funny at all.

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## **Red London** Joshua B. Freeman

*Red Metropolis: Socialism and the Government of London*  
by Owen Hatherley  
Repeater Books, 2020, 266 pp.

Few tourists strolling the south bank of the Thames in London realize that they are going through a carefully constructed showcase for what Owen Hatherley describes in his new book, *Red Metropolis*: the structures and programs put in place when the political left ran Great Britain's largest city. On one end of the procession sits County Hall, the massive, longtime home of the London city government, until the national government eliminated home rule and sold off the building. At the other end is a new City Hall, designed by Norman Foster, housing the current incarnation of the London government. In between lies a series of city-built cultural venues—the Royal Festival Hall, National Film Theatre, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Hayward Gallery, and National Theatre—and Oxo Tower Wharf, a mixed-use complex in an old power station, developed by a nonprofit cooperative with local government backing. Nothing is named after Marx, nor is the architecture a tip-off to the socialist vision behind it, but at least in its heyday, the South Bank announced to the world an alternative to capitalist urbanism.

In recent years, as Washington swings between gridlock and reaction, U.S. progressives have looked to local government as an arena for attracting followers, trying out social programs, and improving the lives of constituents. Seattle passed a \$15 minimum wage law seven years ago, followed the next year by Los Angeles (with both laws mandating phased increases), while the federal minimum remains a measly \$7.25 an hour. The Chicago City Council now has a six-member socialist caucus. Next year's election almost certainly will bring a crew of socialists to New York's City Council as well. But there has not been much systematic thinking, at least in the United States, about the possibilities and limits of

municipal progressivism, let alone municipal socialism.

Hatherley dives deep into the issue in his lively, opinionated account of what the left did when it had control over London's government. It is an eye-opening story of extraordinary accomplishment. During long stretches since the late nineteenth century, leftists or left-liberal alliances have directed the administrative structure for London, the Greater London region, or the boroughs within it. With the capital city often at odds politically with much of the nation—never more so than now, with the Labour Party in firm control of the region but floundering elsewhere—municipal leftism not only filled a vacuum in social provision when Conservatives ruled nationally; it also served as a model for what socialists might do if they won control of Parliament.

Housing and architecture figure large in *Red Metropolis*. Hatherley has a long-standing interest in the relationship between politics and the built environment, evident in his earlier books, including *A Guide to the New Ruins of Great Britain* and *Landscapes of Communism: A History Through Buildings*. But more importantly, from the late 1880s through most of the past century, housing has been at the top of the left agenda in London, as working-class families, generation after generation, have found it difficult or impossible to afford decent, sanitary living quarters. Though Hatherley's purpose is ultimately political, he provides a wealth of information and insight about design and planning. (*Red Metropolis* includes many photographs of the buildings under discussion, but readers unfamiliar with London geography might want to keep Google Earth open as they read.)

Hatherley begins with the Progressives, an assortment of liberals, trade unionists, and socialists, including George Bernard Shaw and Sidney Webb, who prefigured the yet to be founded Labour Party. The alliance ran the elected London County Council from its creation in 1889 until 1907. Among the LCC's legacy is what is considered by some the first municipal housing

project anywhere, the Boundary Estate, a solidly constructed and architecturally distinguished cluster of buildings just a mile from the Bank of England. That project and others that followed were designed in-house by the LCC's Architects' Department and built by its Works Department, a publicly owned construction company that paid union wages and erected schools, firehouses, and transit facilities as well.

Some of the city's individual boroughs also built housing, including Battersea, which used its own workforce to do so. (In 1913 Battersea elected the first Black mayor of a London borough, the Progressive John Archer.) During the 1920s, some Labour-led boroughs put up housing projects modeled on the housing complexes that had arisen in socialist-led Vienna. Meanwhile, a program of tree and flower planting was launched in Bermondsey to enliven working-class quarters. Later, in Finsbury, the Soviet émigré architect Berthold Lubetkin was hired to design the Finsbury Health Centre, one of London's great modernist buildings, as well as to create a plan for multiple new housing estates.

When the Conservatives won control of the LCC, they abolished the Works Department but continued to build public housing and government facilities, including the mammoth County Hall. As Hatherley shows, left-run authorities repeatedly established norms, expectations, and institutions that survived long into Conservative eras, if usually in diluted form.

Labour retook control of the LCC in 1934 and kept it for the next thirty-three years. With the party having suffered a massive national defeat three years earlier, it provided an opportunity to demonstrate that Labour could govern effectively without giving up its principles. And that it did, in spades. Most importantly, the LCC launched a massive program of housing construction. It also revamped parks with facilities for working people: pools, gyms, cafés, and athletic fields. And it created the modern London transit system, taking over two private companies that ran the Underground, which it integrated with trolley and bus lines. The design aesthetic of the newly created London Transport,

seen in station architecture, signage, typefaces, and posters (as Hatherley notes, a combination of European modernism and English Arts and Crafts), became the defining look of London, and to some extent still is. Less well-known was the creation of a free healthcare system for the city, over a decade before the founding of the National Health Service.

Two outsize figures shaped what left-wing government meant in London during the twentieth century: Herbert Morrison, the longtime leader of the LCC, and Ken Livingstone, who headed its two successors, the Greater London Council (GLC) and the Greater London Authority (GLA). They could not have been more different. Morrison, the son of a policeman, was a top Labour leader for a quarter century, serving as transport minister in a minority Labour-led government before heading the LCC. During and after the Second World War, he held positions as home secretary, deputy prime minister, and foreign secretary. A firm believer in top-down social democracy, Morrison fiercely opposed critics on his left and had little patience for popular participation in

governance. As part of the postwar Labour government, he unapologetically defended British imperialism. Hatherley, a left-wing writer and critic, seems surprised and a bit embarrassed by how much he admires what Morrison achieved in London, having made good on his slogan “Labour gets things done!”

Livingstone was an entirely different kettle of fish. The creation of the GLC in 1964, which replaced the LCC with a new, somewhat weaker government that included large suburban areas, diluted the power of the inner-city Labour bases. The Conservatives and Labour traded control until 1981, when Labour carried the local elections one last time (the GLC would be abolished five years later). In short order, a coterie of leftists within the party deposed the moderate head of London Labour, putting Livingstone at the head of the GLC and other Marxists of various stripes, such as John McDonnell, Mike Cooley, Hilary Wainwright, and Sheila Rowbotham, in positions of power.

Hatherley admires much about the Livingstone crowd. The “GLC New Left,” as he calls it, “was gloriously, explicitly,



Ken Livingstone (second from right) with protesters at the People's March for Jobs in London in 1983 (Hilaria McCarthy/Daily Express/Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

anti-racist, anti-homophobic, anti-imperialist, anti-sexist; it was celebratory, creative and propagandistic. It loved murals, pop music, bright colours and clothes; it scorned Morrisonian nationalisation and funnelled money into co-ops and communes. It was also much closer to the extra-parliamentary left, and refused the traditional Labour distinction between the ‘legitimate’ and ‘illegitimate’ left.” During a riot in Brixton shortly after he took office, Livingstone declined to attend the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana so that he could remain on the “front line.”

Because London proper had been depopulating for decades, by 1981 its chronic housing crisis had abated. Instead, a high level of unemployment and the loss of well-paid jobs had become the paramount problem for the London working class and a top priority for the new GLC. The council made a giant sign listing the number of unemployed Londoners and placed it on the roof of County Hall, facing Parliament across the Thames. At best, city governments the world over have limited tools for addressing unemployment, with national governments controlling fiscal, monetary, industrial, and trade policy. The GLC rejected the usual urban strategies for a radical program of popular economic planning, converting shuttered factories to the production of socially useful goods and promoting cooperatives and neighborhood businesses.

Hatherley does not explore the results, but the actual number of jobs created apparently remained modest. Whenever the GLC did begin moving toward successful programs to fight economic inequality, the courts or the national government stepped in to squash them. Livingstone’s Fares Fair policy of lower fares and more public investment brought greater ridership to an improved London Transport, before a court case instituted by a Conservative borough shut it down. Only in the cultural realm did the GLC have pretty much free rein, sponsoring festivals, arts events, and murals, promoting Black culture, and opening up County Hall to everyone from striking miners to skinheads and Rastafarians. Not everyone was

pleased. The tabloid press saw this as further proof that the “Loony Left” had taken over, while some Black and Asian artists and critics found the cultural program out of sync with their communities.

The Conservative national government under Margaret Thatcher hated everything the GLC represented. Frustrated by its continuing popularity and unyielding stance, Thatcher, true to her counterrevolutionary beliefs, simply had Parliament abolish the GLC and six other metropolitan councils in 1986, leaving London one of the largest cities in the world without a democratically chosen government.

Individual boroughs continued as elected entities, but Thatcher crippled them as well. When the GLC was created, various boroughs had been combined and enlarged, which extended some inner-city, Labour-oriented boroughs like Lambeth and Camden into well-off suburban areas. With the tax funds those districts helped generate, left-led local governments undertook what Hatherley characterizes as “housing programmes of still unrivalled humanity, intelligence and originality.” But in a way that will seem very alien to American readers, the Thatcher government and the national governments that followed, both Conservative and Labour, choked such initiatives by imposing caps on borough tax rates and spending. It is as if Washington were to limit the taxes Chicago could collect and tinker with its budget.

The Livingstone-era GLC left nothing like the physical legacy of the LCC from Morrison’s time. Nor did its economic initiatives seem to have much lasting impact (though Hatherley suggests that they might have been an influence on the Labour program under Jeremy Corbyn, with former GLC finance chief McDonnell serving as Corbyn’s shadow chancellor and most important ally). Rather, Hatherley shrewdly observes, what the GLC did do was lay the basis for “the multicultural capital of the ‘creative industries’ that we know now.” But that London blossomed not under the aegis of the radical left but of finance capital, unleashed by the so-called Big Bang of deregulation the same year that the GLC was abolished.

When Labour finally won back national power, it did not revive the GLC. Prime Minister Tony Blair and New Labour disliked the democratic ethos of the old GLC almost as much as Thatcher had. Instead, a 1998 referendum established a U.S.-style directly elected mayor of London, with relatively few powers and an even weaker Assembly. When Livingstone launched a run for mayor, Blair, Chancellor Gordon Brown, and their allies maneuvered to deny him the Labour nomination; he then ran as an independent and won by a landslide. With his usual brio, he began his victory speech, “As I was saying, before I was so rudely interrupted fourteen years ago. . . .” But the second coming of Ken Livingstone was nothing like the first.

By 2000, London had changed profoundly. Decades of population growth and the Conservative policy of allowing public housing residents to buy their homes, which they could then resell on the open market, had created a massive crisis of housing supply and affordability. At the same time, neoliberal thinking had become dominant not only in the Conservative Party but in Labour as well.

With transit policy, Livingstone once again demonstrated a combination of progressive vision and practicality, introducing a congestion charge on vehicles driving in the city center to reduce traffic and raise money, dramatically improving bus service, and taking over privately operated rail lines and integrating them into London’s transit system. When it came to housing, however, instead of expanding the role of government, Livingstone diminished it. Rather than building new housing directly, the London government partnered with private developers, allowing them to build market-rate units if they built an equal amount of affordable housing. But with lax rules, most of what was built was too expensive for the Londoners most in need, and was often shoddy at that. Similarly, in return for paltry infrastructure investments, the GLA allowed developers to transform what was still a low-rise city with office skyscrapers.

Hatherley is scathing in his assessment of this turn in Labour’s London policies, but unsatisfying in explaining

why it occurred. Perhaps, he suggests, Livingstone, already at war with New Labour over its foreign policy (arguably not the best use of a local leader’s political capital), did not want to fight Blair and Brown for the funds that would be needed for Morrison-style projects. But Hatherley gives more weight to the temptation presented by the skyrocketing price of city land, a great deal of which was owned by the GLA and individual boroughs. By partnering with private interests, with the state providing land and the developers capital, housing and infrastructure could be put up, in effect, for free. Some boroughs went so far as to simply sell off council housing or allow private interests to take over management and use some of the land for luxury units. Instead of solving the housing crisis, such policies exacerbated it, with the government practically conspiring in gentrification. Economic inequality rose, rather than fell, during Livingstone’s second run.

Hatherley titles his chapter on this period “Faust in City Hall,” which on one level says it all. (How Marshall Berman would have loved this book and especially this chapter title.) But he never really explains why such a broad range of Labour politicians fell for the poisoned deal. Perhaps the answer does not lie in the particularities of London and Great Britain. New York City, after all, first under billionaire Michael Bloomberg and then under self-proclaimed progressive Bill de Blasio, adopted the same policy of giving developers the keys to the city in return for the construction of a modest amount of housing labeled affordable, which often proved too expensive for local residents. The sheer financial, political, and ideological power of big capital appears to have cleared the field of all resistance.

In 2008, Boris Johnson defeated Livingstone in his bid for a third term as London mayor. As had happened in the past, Johnson’s Conservative administration scuttled a lot of Labour’s policies while maintaining and extending its program in some areas, such as with transit. (At this point, Livingstone largely disappears from

Hatherley's narrative. His afterlife was not pretty, with a series of blundering and offensive statements culminating in his claim that Hitler was "supporting Zionism before he went mad and ended up killing 6 million Jews.")

The current London mayor, Labourite Sadiq Khan, grew up in a council flat. As the first Muslim head of the city, he represents a belated triumph for the multiculturalism and antidiscriminatory policies of the old GLC. But his own cautious progressivism has none of the transformative ambitions of either that body or the LCC before it.

Hatherley still believes in the possibilities for municipal socialism, but he does not lay out the case in much depth. The program he ends his book with is slight, nothing like the detailed plans the London left once poured forth. Mostly he calls for a devolution of power from the national government to metropolitan authorities. His one really radical notion is that London should abandon its commitment to growth (an ideology embraced equally by Livingstone and Johnson), recognizing it as "environmentally, geographically and politically disastrous"—a verdict that might be applied to many other cities around the world, too.

Throughout *Red Metropolis*, Hatherley grapples with what exactly socialism or social democracy have meant on a local level, and what they should mean. To move forward, he sees the need "to bridge the gap" between the LCC and GLC traditions: "the local social democratic state that has improved the lives of millions for the better, through aggressive, top-down transformations of health, housing, leisure and work; and the local social movements that have brought in the unruly energy and the strong democratic commitment that the most radical bureaucrats can too often forget about." Just how to do this is a challenge for which Hatherley has no easy answers.

It is in looking at the past, not the future, that Hatherley shines, but he rightly sees it as a source of inspiration for the present. In London, "more than a century of socialist and social democratic governments. . . have done good things, and

they have done bad things and indifferent things. But they have done them, and done them most often in conditions of great hostility. If they could do it, so can we."

The United States has its own history of municipal socialism and social democracy. Though not as rich as that in Great Britain, it includes socialist mayors in such cities as Schenectady, Minneapolis, and Pasadena, California, during the Progressive era; Frank Zeidler, who served in Milwaukee until 1960, and more recently Bernie Sanders in Burlington, Vermont; and city administrations that aligned themselves with the New Deal, and in some cases went beyond it programmatically. Like the history in *Red Metropolis*, the American experience suggests both the possibilities for progressive local action and the problems, especially the challenge of mounting large-scale efforts with local revenues and the inability to control the wider economic and political environment. Still, if the crop of municipal socialists emerging in the United States achieves anything like what the London socialists did, it will have much to be proud of.

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## **The Conservative Court** Aryeh Neier

*Supreme Inequality: The Supreme Court's Fifty-Year Battle for a More Unjust America*  
by Adam Cohen  
Penguin Press, 2020, 448 pp.

In 1963, I started work at the American Civil Liberties Union. My assignment was to establish new affiliates of the organization in states such as Texas and Oklahoma and to upgrade the capacity of long-standing state affiliates, such as those in Michigan and Pennsylvania. It was a thrilling time