

# Transforming society from below and above

Neal Lawson



**Common  
Platform**

A publication by Compass with the  
support of Rethinking Poverty

Published February 2019 by Compass

By Neal Lawson

Neal Lawson is the Chair of Compass and was author of *All Consuming* (Penguin, 2008).

### **Acknowledgments**

This paper owes more to the 'bottom up than the top down'. In that vein, the author would like to thank Ruth Lister, Tom Crompton, Neil McInroy, Nick Mahony, Ken Spours, Linda Mitchell, Avila Kilmurray, Frances Foley, Danielle Walker-Palmer, Louisa Hooper, Louise Thomas, Simon Duffy, Remco van der Stoep, Zoe Williams, Joe Mitchell, Luke Walter, Hannah O'Rourke, Ed Saperia, Robin McAlpine, David Wilcox, Jane Foot, Bob Rhodes, Willie Sullivan, Brian Fisher, Helena Kettleborough, Gabriel Chan, Colin Miller, Gerry Mitchell and especially Sue Goss and Sally Davison for their invaluable insights and comments at strategy sessions held in 2016 and 2017 and the draft papers that emerged from those sessions.

In particular, the author would like to thank Barry Knight for his support and patience and Lisa Nandy and Sue Tibballs for their respective forewords to this publication. Between them all, they demonstrate some of the best thought and action when it comes to how formal politics and civil society can combine to create progressive and transformative change.

As ever, all faults lie with the author.

Compass would like to thank Rethinking Poverty for providing the funding that made this work possible.



**RETHINKING POVERTY**  
THE WEBB LEGACY

© Compass

All rights reserved. Except for the quotation of short passages for the purpose of criticism or review, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrievable system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of Compass.

**Please get in touch, join,  
support and work with us.**

Write to us at Freepost Compass

Email us at [info@compassonline.org.uk](mailto:info@compassonline.org.uk)

You can follow us on Twitter

[@CompassOffice](https://twitter.com/CompassOffice)

To find out more about Compass,  
please visit our website:

[www.compassonline.org.uk/join](http://www.compassonline.org.uk/join)

### **About Compass and this project**

Compass is the pressure group for a good society, a world that is much more equal, sustainable and democratic. We build alliances of ideas, parties and movements to help make systemic change happen. Our strategic focus, through the Common Platform, is to understand, build, support and accelerate new forms of democratic practice and collaborative action that are taking place in civil society and the economy, and to link that up with top-down/state reforms and policy. The question we are trying to help solve, with others, is not just what sort of society we want, but, increasingly, how to make it happen?

# Contents

## Summary

### Forewords

- Lisa Nandy
- Sue Tibballs

## Introduction

### 45° Change

- What it is and why it's needed
- An age of complexity
- What's the problem then?
- Bringing it all together
- Conclusions

## Next steps

## Further reading

## Initiatives: a new society is already here

## Summary

The argument is simple: the old ways of doing and deciding things, in which we were either cogs in a corporate or state machine, or consumers in a free market free for all, are failing to meet our needs as human beings or solve our social, economic and environmental problems. This failure and the digitisation and fast-emerging network society it spawns, has created the possibility of a new era driven by collaborative action, whose purpose is potentially aligned to human and planetary needs.

As ever in history, when old paradigms fail, people search for new ones. Beyond Westminster and corporate HQs, people are already busy building new organisations and transforming old ones, finding new ways of ‘deciding and doing’, that are more creative, innovative, productive, participatory, and more socially and environmentally aware. A new society is starting to emerge from the bottom up, facilitated by new digital technologies, that have the potential to deliver greater equality and democracy because they are built around flatter and more universal networks that allow everyone to know, speak, share and organise at the press of a button – all at, or near, zero marginal cost.

As such, this networked society will facilitate new forms of solidarity and agency, based on active citizenship, through the continual practice of negotiating and building a future collectively – as opposed to the past, when any future was either imposed on us or purchased by us as lone shoppers.

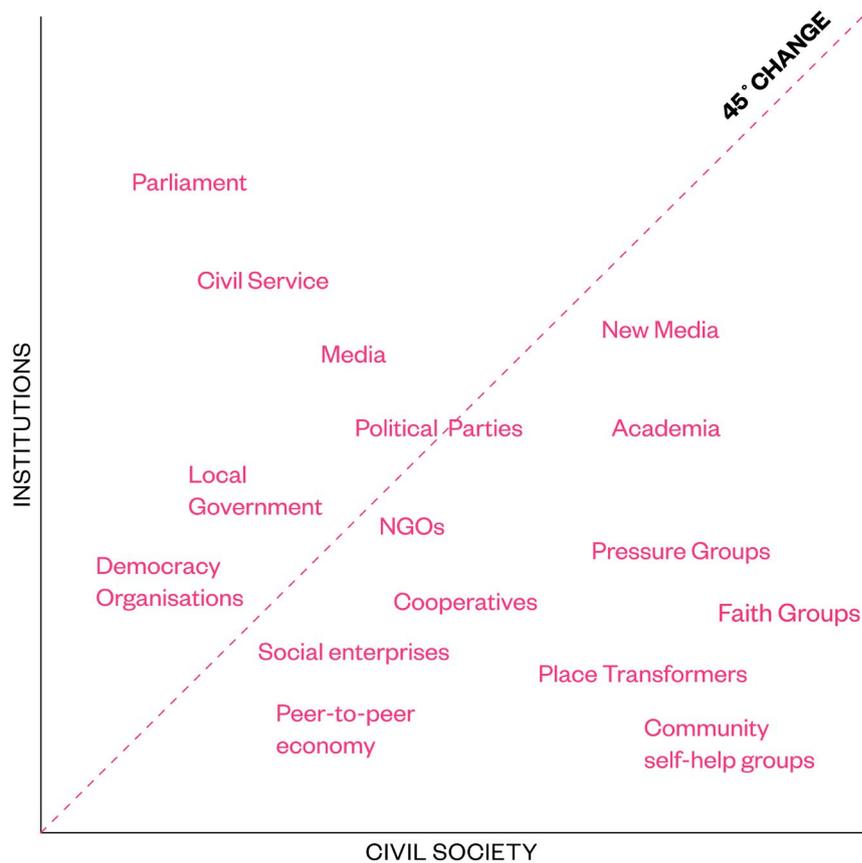
Furthermore, the abundant content and connections a networked society enables, and the scale and speed on which they operate, as opposed to the finite resources of the pre-digital era, offer the potential for the future to be more egalitarian because we will start to value collective control of our lives and our society more than we do consumption for the sake of it.

But this shift to what Compass calls a Good Society, one that is much more equal, sustainable and democratic, is not a given. The same technology that can liberate us can also enslave us through populist abuse and new forms of corporate digital domination. To ensure it is the needs of humanity and the planet that benefit from “the most profound transformation in our information environment since Johannes Gutenberg’s invention of printing in circa 1439,” according to *The Observer’s* [John Naughton](#), then the state as a vertical or top-down force is going to have to play two essential roles:

- First, to counter the power of what [Shoshana Zuboff](#) calls ‘surveillance capitalism’ through anti-competition, privacy and other laws.
- And second, to help join up, scale up, accelerate, replicate and project these emerging forms of collaborate action to ensure they become the predominant form of ‘deciding and doing’ in the 21st century.

But these emerging forces and organisations are going to have to adapt and develop too. It’s not good enough to stay as a largely defensive reaction in a local or sectoral silo. A Good Society cannot be won or sustained in spite of the system – only with it. Otherwise, any victories are partial and temporary. However hard, these new formations will have to form broader alliances, both across civil society and with the state, nationally and locally. They must become a sum that is greater than their parts, if the opportunity and need for a paradigm shift is to be realised.

The intersection between this emerging horizontal bottom-up change and the more vertical state is the diagonal fault line through which a new society can and must be born. This is 45° Change.



The idea of 45° Change offers a theory and practice of transformation, as well as the agency that can make it happen: the active citizen. As the late David Fleming, an environmental writer, argued: “Large-scale problems do not require large-scale solutions; they require small-scale solutions within a large-scale framework.”

The idea of 45° Change can help guide anti-poverty campaigns, democracy reforms, new economy approaches, climate change and all the big threats and opportunities that face us. But none of these can be achieved alone. It is nothing less than the transformation of society we must seek.

This publication is just the start of a journey of discovery, learning and alliance building locally, nationally and globally that Compass is calling The Common Platform.

## Foreword Lisa Nandy

The UK is engulfed by political, economic and constitutional crisis. There is no clearer indication that our institutions are failing than the stalemate over Brexit. From a parliament that is incapable of debate, compromise and collective leadership, and a media so obsessed with the soap opera that the deeper currents lie unscrutinised and unseen, to political parties that have essentially ceased to function, our institutions, built in a different age, are no longer fit for purpose.

Outside the city walls, there is a clamour for change. In towns like mine, Take Back Control caught the mood like no other slogan in my lifetime. For too long, people have felt decision-making to be remote and unaccountable, imposing change that is unwelcome, stripping them of meaningful choices and denying them agency over their lives and communities. This mood is global. From the rise of Trump in the USA to the *gilets jaunes* protests in France, the neoliberal settlement, that has held for most of my lifetime, is over.

As this important report shows, people across the country are looking for new levers of power in the knowledge that, if change is to come, it will come from ourselves. In every part of the country, this 'horizontal' power has an energy that is impossible to ignore.

Horizontal power has profound social consequences, bringing people together to effect change and reawakening political awareness. The change people are making is lasting. The lesson from thirteen years of Labour government is that, while the energy co-op conceived and run by hundreds of local people endures, the Sure Start designed and funded from Whitehall does not.

Horizontal power poses profound challenges to our existing institutions, from the disruptive influence of social media on parliament, political parties and the traditional media, to the creation of community and municipal energy companies that have challenged the stranglehold of the big six energy firms on our broken energy market.

The council's approach to austerity in my town, Wigan, was to create The Deal, a plan written with and by hundreds of local people, which has saved our libraries and kept our streets clean, while seeing an upsurge in volunteering, recycling and other civic engagement. It has shifted power from the town hall and made decisions flatter, more dispersed and better as a result. Through all of the projects documented in this report, we are glimpsing the future.

As Abraham Lincoln put it in no less a moment of historical rupture, “the dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present”. Our institutions will be remade or face extinction. Across the country, local and regional leaders, community groups and non-governmental organisations are coming together to fill the vacuum created by the inadequacy of our existing institutions and offering us hope in these stormy times. Our best hope remains each other.

**Lisa Nandy** MP for Wigan and co-founder  
of the [Centre for Towns](#).

## Foreword Sue Tibballs

Leading an organisation that exists to understand and support social change, I absolutely recognise the emergent world that 45° Change describes. How, in these networked and more complex and fluid times, change is itself changing. Bubbling up from the grassroots and appearing at the margins are projects and movements driven by people who are thinking, behaving and working in new ways to tackle shared goals. Community responses to knife crime, food shortages and the refugee crisis. Social enterprises that marry purpose with profit. Major corporates working with large NGOs and academia to develop new approaches to help mitigate climate change. Councils who want to collaborate more than commission.

This stuff may not, at face value, feel so new. But behind all this activity there are some profound shifts. The nature of power. The limits of accountability. The importance of trust. Permission to try. The foundational importance of relationship. And of place. Practitioners are recognising change is complex and that new ways of thinking are needed that can embrace and work with – not against – this complexity.

Civil society is playing hard in this new space and leading some of the most significant change: from society-wide changes in attitudes and cultural norms – such as on equal marriage – to important changes in legislation – such as the campaign for a Living Wage – through to genuine transformations in local communities and individual lives. And it is great to see this recognised. Mainstream politics tends to take a dim view of civil society. Both Labour and the Conservatives can't help but see civil society in their own image, and so as an extension of the state or market. Both share the impulse to control, and in so doing, constrain civil society and limit its value.

But, as is happening elsewhere, civil society is busting out and disrupting the established order. It works in ways and goes to places that the state and the market find difficult. Its arms extend from multi-million pound, global NGOs to the mums in East London who decided to take on the housing crisis. It is steeped in a long history of social reform and yet also flourishes in a world where technology makes connection fast and free. At the Sheila McKechnie Foundation, we describe the potential of civil society as *Social Power*. This describes the potential civil society has to make a positive difference. It might also neatly sum up the opportunity offered by 45° Change.

What this short treatise offers, most importantly, is a political encapsulation of this new way of thinking and working. Someone remarked to me recently that in the wake of the refugee crisis, the left opened food banks and the right organised a new political movement. A crude analysis but one that hits home. If we, on the political left, want to see progressive change happen, we need a clear articulation of our approach that can drive and grow a political movement alongside our practical work. 45° Change might just be it.

**Sue Tibballs**      CEO of the [Sheila McKechnie Foundation](#)

## Introduction

We want to change the world. It's a mess and getting worse. The planet burns and the poor get poorer. Many of us run faster every day, but we don't know where to or why. To compound this exhausting, nerve-racking misery, our democratic and political system doesn't seem capable of providing any way out, just variations of doing the same thing in the forlorn hope of a different outcome.

Change, not just a bit of it, but a lot of it, demands we think and act differently. If we are serious about a world of love, compassion, time, beauty, creativity, honesty, respect, empathy, air we can breathe and a planet we can share with other species and organisms – if we don't want to die wishing for something more than more stuff – we have to get intensely serious about understanding how transformative change happens.

But thinking how to really change the world is hard. If we could do it, we would do it. So instead of doing the hard thing, we distract ourselves with other 'priorities', often addressing the symptoms of a dysfunctional world, not the causes. Change at scale is now so complex, unpredictable and vast that it feels impossible to know where to start. How do you even begin to boil the ocean of a democratic and political system that can't change itself, let alone start changing society?

Instead of just giving up, we can and must bring thought and action together in manageable ways, with an eye to how we can systematise what we are already thinking, seeing and doing. This is a symbiotic and iterative process – there is no theory without practice and vice versa. We have to start small, local and particular, but only with a view to scale up to a systems level. Nothing less will do.

This pamphlet started out as a project to look at ways to achieve a world without poverty. But it soon became apparent to me and the sponsor of the project, [Rethinking Poverty](#), and notably its director Barry Knight, that we could not look at poverty in isolation from wider transformative change. Instead, we would need to develop a broader theory of change, one not constructed in some policy ivory tower but based on the living reality of the emergent forces that are struggling to achieve change in the here and now. And then build from there.

What we seek through this work is not more technical policy and management answers to the huge challenges and opportunities we face, not a repeat of the old 'solutionism' of top-down elites, but a way of seeing, being and doing that allows the infinite possibilities of collaborative action to be realised, in a future that isn't imposed on us but is instead negotiated by all of us. Such a future is necessarily complex, difficult and uncertain, but, as we hope to show, achieving it is

the only way to make progressive transformative change possible in the 21st century.

Through this report, and the further work it suggests, we are seeking to understand and articulate what is already happening and why, and, crucially, how it can be accelerated, scaled up and joined up – so that what is emerging doesn't die, and isn't crushed, ignored or co-opted, but instead becomes the predominant way in which we govern our lives and society. This is where theory has to step in, to help us understand what is happening and why, to explain and popularise how the world is already being transformed – even if, currently, only in small ways.

As the Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci explained to us, the idea of the 'interregnum' is the moment in which the old is not yet dead and the new is not yet born, and during this moment morbid symptoms appear. This, then, given Trump, Brexit, climate change, austerity, the new machine age and the rest, is the latest big interregnum, in which we are constrained by old 20th century institutions, such as the free market, while the new is fighting to emerge in different communities and sectors as a fresh governing idea.

## **45° Change**

We need a way out that is coherent, desirable and feasible. The idea of 45° Change is a starting point for this, because it builds not just on theory, but also on the ground of an emerging reality of a better society that is being practised and developed by people who have got fed up with waiting for others to do it for them or to them. But the insight of 45° Change is that these emerging forces, if left alone, will struggle to become predominant, and instead eventually wither away in a cacophony of noise. That noise desperately needs to be transformed into a symphony of transformative and systemic change.

In his introduction to the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, Karl Marx infuriatingly, but brilliantly, wrote that we make history, but not in conditions of our own choosing: "The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living." Perhaps this time we can escape the grip of the past. The analysis of 45° Change ventures to suggest that it may be possible to once again find ways of making history in our current conditions.

Our potential for individual and collective change has never been greater. Today, boosted by social media, we know more and can communicate and organise exponentially more effectively than ever. Now, when change happens, it tends to come big and fast.

And there are so many people yearning for a better and more fulfilling life – merely being worker ants to feed a life of turbo-consumption increasingly feels far from enough, and such a life becomes truly alienating when the precarious economy fails to even provide the means

to meet basic needs. Yet the remote and bureaucratic state seems to lack either the power to take on the market or the soul to treat us with respect. While it has a crucial role to play in any progressive future, too often it humiliates us when it should demonstrate empathy and enable us to make the most of each other and ourselves. The state has the potential to play a positive role in society – but it must start to behave in very different ways for very different ends.

But the very fact that the old means of deciding and doing aren't working – that states are too remote and markets too powerful, is already making the space for change to happen and the new to emerge. In the absence of a system that works for them, and their aspirations for a good life and good society, people, and through them the organisations they are engaged in, are developing new, more participatory, ways of making things happen. In the face of austerity and climate change, people everywhere are creating new ways of working, thinking, making and serving. It is vital to emphasise that this isn't just about democracy or activism, but about the economy and how our material needs are met. To paraphrase Mrs Thatcher 'the economy is still the means and the goal is still to change the soul'. Rather, we don't want to change the soul – but bring out what we deem to be best about it; the capacity to care and create, not just consume and compete.

There is a cacophony of trial, experimentation and innovation going on: from new forms of local governance in Frome's flat-pack democracy, to the much-heralded Preston model for a foundational local economy, to trials for a citizen's income across Scotland, local currencies and the [Transition Towns movement](#); from new trade unions for precarious gig workers and renters, to food banks, citizens' movements, fearless cities and so much more. People are sharing, caring, communing, creating, building, producing, inventing and supporting – as never before.

Accelerated by technology, transformative change is emerging everywhere, but it tends to be isolated and sporadic. Like fireworks, these initiatives light up the darkness so that all of a sudden we see a pathway to new thinking and action that signposts a good society. But then, just as quickly, the flames go out and we are returned once more to darkness. Instead of fireworks we need floodlights that permanently light the way to a better world. Instead of a cacophony of siloed and disconnected initiatives, we need a symphony of new collaborative action. Instead of addressing the symptoms of the structures, cultures and interests that hold us back, we need to address the causes. Isolated, lonely and fragile, these emerging endeavours lack the resources, support, legal status, regulation and bandwidth to breathe and grow, to shift from surviving to thriving, to get to scale and become the new system that makes our society tick both effectively and morally in the 21st century.

For this to happen, we need a change model we can call 'and-ism'

– a combinational approach whereby the vertical and hierarchical institutions of the state protect and nurture this emerging horizontal bottom-up change. An either/or approach won't work. The transformation we need can't be delivered solely by the state; nor can it emerge fully from below without considerable assistance.

These bottom-up initiatives aren't driven by the DNA of the last century; instead they carry with them the seeds and sentiment, character and nature, of this century and the networked society that goes with it – a society that demands participation, pluralism, negotiation and a sufficient level of justice for people and the planet. But they need to be linked with the more vertical state if they are to consolidate and systematise the transformative changes we need.

There are periodic moments when society changes dramatically. We saw it in 1945 with the creation of the welfare state, and again in 1979, as Thatcherism unleashed the force of free-market fundamentalism. Society is ripe for change once more. However, that doesn't mean the 'right' things will necessarily happen. Some in society are already turning to populism, as if simple answers can solve the complex and deep problems we face. Indeed, the very complexity of the world today drives some people to pull up the bedcovers of simplistic solutions as a comforting response to seemingly intractable problems. Blaming someone else and putting your faith in a charismatic leader? We know where that ends. But between a failing status quo and rising populism, an alternative is emerging. It just needs to happen faster and systematically.

This pamphlet sets out what 45° Change is, why it is happening and needs to happen faster and bigger, and how this can be achieved. It is the start of a theory and practice of change that could help us build a good society.

# 45° Change

## What it is and why it's needed

The state has a vital role to play, but a good society is not going to be delivered to us by any government, however well meaning, based on the policy ideas of some think tank or the pressure generated by campaigning organisations. The mid-20th-century model of change is no longer sufficient on its own to address the complexity of the threats and opportunities that face us in the 21st century.

Nor, evidently, can the market play a dominant role in the reproduction of a society in which all humankind and the planet can fully flourish. The 2008 crash destroyed that claim, but even before the financial crisis, the deep-rooted monoculture of turbo-consumption had been pulling away at our moral, democratic and environmental consciousness for some years. The good society was never going to be delivered to us by a well-meaning but paternalist state, nor bought off-the-shelf in some private nirvana. So what will?

To understand that question we need to step back and get to grips with the nature of the moment, and the ways in which change is likely to take place now, given that we need to make history within the conditions in which we find ourselves. Those conditions, and the choices and chances we therefore have, are in large part driven by the technological and cultural forces at play, though they do not determine them. We can understand this better through illustration.

The big centralised government experienced in the middle decades of the last century – in the USA, the UK and indeed the USSR and elsewhere – was, to a great extent, a product of the dominant technology of the moment. Put simply, driven by electrification, the factory concept had reached its zenith in the shape of Fordism, a production line of workers doing only one particular job in a whole series of jobs, directed by managers and technocrats. This was not only highly efficient, it also gave its workers a sense of identity in full-time and relatively well-paid employment, allowed the nuclear family to flourish on one largely male wage, and underpinned the welfare state through the taxes the workers and firms paid and the relative predictability of the job for life it offered.

But Fordism was also connected to a whole way of life. It is often understood as underpinning 'mass society', and as shaping a system of governance, production and service across the whole of society, including the way government and public services functioned. It was the predominant governance or operating system of its time.

The centre could command and control not just factories but also states, and, if mobilised effectively, could win wars against other states. The era lent itself to more social forms of politics, whether communist, socialist or social-democratic. The factory was the driving metaphor of

the day and produced not just practical goods but social solidarity. The factory, and its surrounding streets, culture, working men's clubs and the rest, created a way to operate, not just for itself, but for society as a whole. But Fordist technology did not determine all aspects of life, or indeed the potential political forms within which it existed. Witness the fact that this economic and social operating system had regressive outcomes in Germany, Italy and Japan. This is why politics and our ability to fashion the moment is so critical.

During the 1970s, this top-down vertical dominance, which had emerged as the hegemonic system of economic, political and social life from the early 20th century, began slowly to lose its purchase. It was succeeded over time by post-Fordism, a regime based on greater flows of information, more intense global competition and the creation of more demanding individual consumer needs. Power, instead of taking the form of top-down control from the centre, was becoming dispersed.

Post-Fordism coincided broadly with the beginning of the era of neoliberalism, in which many of the checks and regulations on the operations of the market that had been enacted during the post-war period, particularly those concerning financial markets, were dismantled. Supporters of neoliberalism were determined to apply the rules of the free market to all aspects of life. Instead of factory planning, the notion of the market gradually became the governing model for the economy, politics and society. Instead of being guided by civil servants, managers or professionals who 'knew best', resources would increasingly be allocated through the interplay of supply and demand. The invisible hand of the market would work its magic. In fact, it did so with a great deal of state aid, but, increasingly, it was competition, the individual consumer and the heroic chief executive officer, that would decide how society would unfold.

Working with the grain of popular dissatisfaction with the remote state, a right-wing political project successfully exploited the economic crises of the 1970s to implant its ideological answers of how to best govern the economy and society.

But if the bureaucratic state had its limitations, market fundamentalism had more. Now, at a moment when we are experiencing another big turn of the technological wheel, space is opening up for more participatory forms of decision-making and production. As the blunt instruments of old models jar with the emerging complexity of the society around us, the demand for a new governing model is growing. It is time for another paradigm shift.

## An age of complexity

The days of simple, lever-pulling, linear change are receding fast, but so too is the inequality and chaos of markets that only work for a small elite. Instead, what we are witnessing is the emergence of a more complex, interconnected and networked society.

Writing in the 1950s, Ross Ashby, an early cyberneticist, developed the Law of Requisite Variety. The law states that any system can only be governed by a system equal or more complex than itself. The Fordist world, with its long, linear and hierarchical forms of production, was relatively simple to govern. Post-Fordism, with its greater complexity, was less susceptible to central control and relied instead on more distributed power alongside the imposition of markets.

A new era of environmental and social justice will require still more complex forms of oversight based on interconnected networks of bottom-up organisation, more capable of responding to the inherent complexity of the 21st century. Today, what matters is the extent to which political and economic organisational governing bodies are connected, responsive, adaptive and agile. Increasingly, we need an operating system that is defiantly open, porous and fluid – to be at least as multifaceted as the world we endeavour to govern. The metaphor for this age is neither the machine nor the market, but the eco-system.

This means that we need change that can take account of complexity, but we also need change that can happen quickly and at scale. The reforms of the 1945 Labour government were preceded by a ‘100-year conversation’; and the neoliberal counter-revolution took some three decades to enact. But the speed at which ideas and thoughts now build and are communicated across the globe is accelerating the rate of change dramatically. Networks can reach scale fast because of the multiplying and aggregating effects of many people communicating instantly with so many others. Again, this doesn’t guarantee that change will happen – or that the change to come will be the one we hope for – but it makes bigger and faster change more likely.

It is a future that is negotiated, not imposed, and therefore demands a new way of inter-relating. Sue Goss has called for a way of organising together she terms the ‘[open tribe](#)’ – a way of organising that both values beliefs and identity and is responsive to complexity. This is a model that recognises and celebrates our sense of identity, and the belonging that comes from tribal loyalties, including shared values or the membership of one party or organisation over another. But it also acknowledges the need for openness. The open tribe adapts and thrives; it is not a closed gene pool. To be open means to know how to relate to, and have empathy with, others. The old tribal loyalties, developed during the Fordist era, are inadequate for the kinds of network organising we need in a more complex society.

In the belief that creativity stems from new combinations of old ideas, [David Bohm](#) has observed: “Real dialogue is where two or more people become willing to suspend their certainty in each other’s presence”. And here is the trick that has to be pulled off: how do we suspend certainty in what we believe, while still being true to our values and being open to others? To make change happen now we have to become comfortable in embracing uncertainty, doubt and ambiguity if we are ever to venture into all the grey and difficult areas, or to break out of the pattern of seeking to demonstrate that we are always right. In processes of negotiation and dialogue, we learn, adapt and grow, but also find that the best change happens when as many people as possible are involved in the process – when the complexity of the governing body at least equals the complexity of the body it is governing.

The process of collaboration enables us to be vulnerable with others, to say ‘we don’t know’, to rely, respect and depend on them. Dealing with complexity requires the courage to be imperfect – to know we don’t have all the answers, to let go and take chances. [Brené Brown](#), the hugely popular American academic, tells us that allowing ourselves to be vulnerable is “the birthplace of innovation, creativity and change”.

Collaboration is a political practice where tenderness trumps toughness, and through which every voice is regarded and respected. It is a practice in which our enemies, surprisingly, turn out to be our teachers – because being ‘right’ is not enough. Instead we only make big and lasting change happen through negotiated interconnections, in which we recognise ‘the grain of truth’, as Gramsci called it, which always exists in our opponents’ arguments.

Not only do these practices better match the complexity of the challenges we face, they also are now able to take place at a rate and scale that is unprecedented. Social media and digital flows of information enable us to learn, share, talk and organise as never before. We can reach anyone – in our community or globally – who wants what we want, who has answers and resources that we need, often at zero marginal cost.

So, in just about every aspect of the economy and society, an unprecedented array of new organisations are being formed, to build, make, grow, show, care, learn, support, facilitate, enable and innovate. But digital technology doesn’t just make small, local and specific responses more possible, it also helps us act and behave differently, as citizens, partners and co-creators, not bosses, managers or order-takers.

Of course technology can be privatised and monopolised – as it is by the likes of Google, Amazon, Apple and Facebook – and can be used for unhealthy, as well as healthy, debate. Interviewed by John Naughton for [The Observer](#) in January 2019, Shoshana Zuboff says:

This antidemocratic and anti-egalitarian juggernaut is best described as a market-driven coup from above: an overthrow of the people concealed as the technological Trojan horse of digital technology. On the strength of its annexation of human experience, this coup achieves exclusive concentrations of knowledge and power that sustain privileged influence over the division of learning in society. It is a form of tyranny that feeds on people but is not of the people. Paradoxically, this coup is celebrated as “personalisation”, although it defiles, ignores, overrides, and displaces everything about you and me that is personal.

This emphasises the critical role of politics, culture and ownership. Given that the technology cannot be wished away, we must find ways to bend it towards progressive purposes. Not least this is because civil society organisations are able to embody emotional and cultural differences that the state and market at best try to imitate or co-opt. Vern Hughes, writing in [Open Democracy](#) argues that:

Our experience of love, care and belonging are formed by our relationships in the civil sphere, not by the market or the state. Our lives are subsequently shaped, battered and sometimes improved by the state and the market, but the primary formation of our unique selves and our values is the work of civil society

Hughes argues that the moment has come for civil society organisations to come into their own:

Today, in an age of distributed networks and powered by the internet, the costs and logistical difficulties of linking disparate components together have more chance of being overcome. [...] Intellectually, it is possible to conceptualise a common voice and agenda for civil society around the authentic representation of itself in the public arena and a reversal of the power transfers from civil society to states and markets that have characterized much of the last century. Technologically, it is now much more feasible to activate this common voice and agenda.

This connects to Ashby’s point noted above, that complexity can only be met by complexity. These new forms of organising are emerging not just because the technology allows it, but because they are better suited to meet the profound challenges of the moment.

In a powerful essay on organisational change, [Margaret Wheatley and Myron Kellner-Rogers](#) set out four principles to follow, which are based on the experience of what actually happens when organisations try to change. All four principles are important, but it is the last one that matters most:

The fourth principle from life is the best prescription we've found for thinking about organisational change efforts. To create better health in a living system, connect it to more of itself. When a system is failing, or performing poorly, the solution will be discovered within the system if more and better connections are created. A failing system needs to start talking to itself, especially to those it didn't know were even part of itself. Standards rose dramatically once customers were connected to the system.

This principle embodies a profound respect for systems. It says that they are capable of changing themselves, once they are provided with new and richer information. It says that they have a natural tendency to move towards better functioning or health. It assumes that the system already has within it most of the expertise that it needs. This principle also implies that the critical task for a leader is to increase the number, variety and strength of connections within the system. Bringing in more remote or ignored members, providing access across the system, and, through those connections, stimulating the creation of new information; all of these become primary tasks for fostering organisational change.

So, the answer to the problems, challenges and opportunities we face as a species is to recognise that, as Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers argue "people only support what they create".

[Fritjof Capra](#) argues that the generation of new forms comes about when the instability of the existing eco-system creates the need for the spontaneous emergence of a new order that comes out of collective creativity:

Human organisations always contain both designed and emergent structures. The designed structures are the formal structures of the organisation, as described in its official documents. The emergent structures are created by the organisation's informal networks and communities of practice. The two types of structure are very different, and every organisation needs both kinds. Designed structures provide the rules and routines that are necessary for effective functioning. They provide stability.

Emergent structures, on the other hand, provide novelty, creativity and flexibility. They are adaptive, capable of changing and evolving. In today's complex organisational environment, purely designed structures do not have the necessary responsiveness and learning capability.

What we see in these emerging organisations is the incredible innovative, creative and productive potential we all have when our embedded and tacit knowledge is unlocked and interconnected. It is not just for the sake of equality that we want to transform the world; it is also because a greater equality of our inter-connectedness allows

us to be so much more effective, efficient and productive. So just as early industrialisation ran rings round the agrarian economy, so a participatory networked society will be exponentially more creative and rewarding than the neoliberal economy.

The paradigm shift we need is not simply a question of structure: networks will also allow the development of abundance. Instead of a mindset of scarcity, think how commercial ventures like Airbnb and Uber – notwithstanding the problems of these companies – and social and civil networks such as the [Library of Things, Borroclub](#) and many others, are mobilising existing resources through zero marginal cost technology.

We are just at the start of this sharing and pooling revolution, which according to [Geoff Mulgan](#) of [Nesta](#) applies as much to things as it does to ideas and minds. Collectivising thinking is yet one more challenging but intriguing way in which our society is changing by aggregating and connecting knowledge and wisdom.

Ideas, music, film, information and data are now abundant, and fuel the growth of intangibles such as time, love, care, public space, voice, autonomy and collective self-determination, all key determinants of a good society. More of the things that really matter to us could allow greater sharing of basic material requirements. While the need for food banks is horrifying, the heroic social and voluntary efforts to run them point to new forms of effective collaboration. These basic needs must be met by society, but at the same time the treadmill needs to be turned off to stop endless consumption because it stretches society to breaking point. Another new pair of shoes you hardly wear might not feel as rewarding as an afternoon in the park with friends or time to care for a family member, friend or neighbour – or the connections and power to think and act differently and creatively with others both locally and globally.

The following matrix, developed from some of Jon Alexander’s thinking at the [New Citizens Project](#), provides a simplified, but hopefully useful, way of seeing how society has developed over the past 100 years or so. At each stage, there are both dominant and subordinate trends, with different governing and political systems vying for more influence:

<b>DOMINANT MODE</b>	<b>DOMINANT METAPHOR</b>	<b>DOMINANT DECISION MODEL</b>	<b>DOMINANT ROLE</b>	<b>DOMINANT RELATIONSHIP</b>	<b>DOMINANT IDEOLOGY</b>
Fordism	Machine	Impose/Manage	Cog	Dependence	Managed capitalism
Post-Fordism	Market	Compete/Choose	Consumer	Independence	Neo-liberalism
Networks	Digital Panopticon or Eco-system?	Manipulation or Negotiation/ Participation?	Populist or Citizen?	Authoritarianism/ Interdependence?	Surveillance Capitalism or Radical Democracy?

It is imperative to emphasize that the outcome is a function of political struggle, the Networked Society is still a site of fierce contestation.

## What's the problem then?

So, we can't just sit back and let a thousand new networked flowers bloom. This emerging and rather beautiful horizontalism is fragile and needs protection and support as it could so easily falter and die, not just by accident but by the design of those whose interests it doesn't serve.

In part, this is because these emerging organisations are usually formed in adversity, with few resources and in isolation from similar initiatives, often depending on the efforts of exceptional individuals. And in almost all cases they are formed and operate despite the predominant state and market system, not because of them. A term often used in this context is resilience. While it is entirely necessary for reasons of immediate social survival, resilience is essentially a defensive strategy and has limited, if any, transformative capability. Eventually people and organisations get ground down. It is not resilience we should aspire to but transformational flourishing. Eventually this bottom-up, networked and collective action model has to become the predominant model of deciding and doing. The sparks of innovation may fly at the edge of the wheel, but the margins can't change the mainstream without sustained structural help.

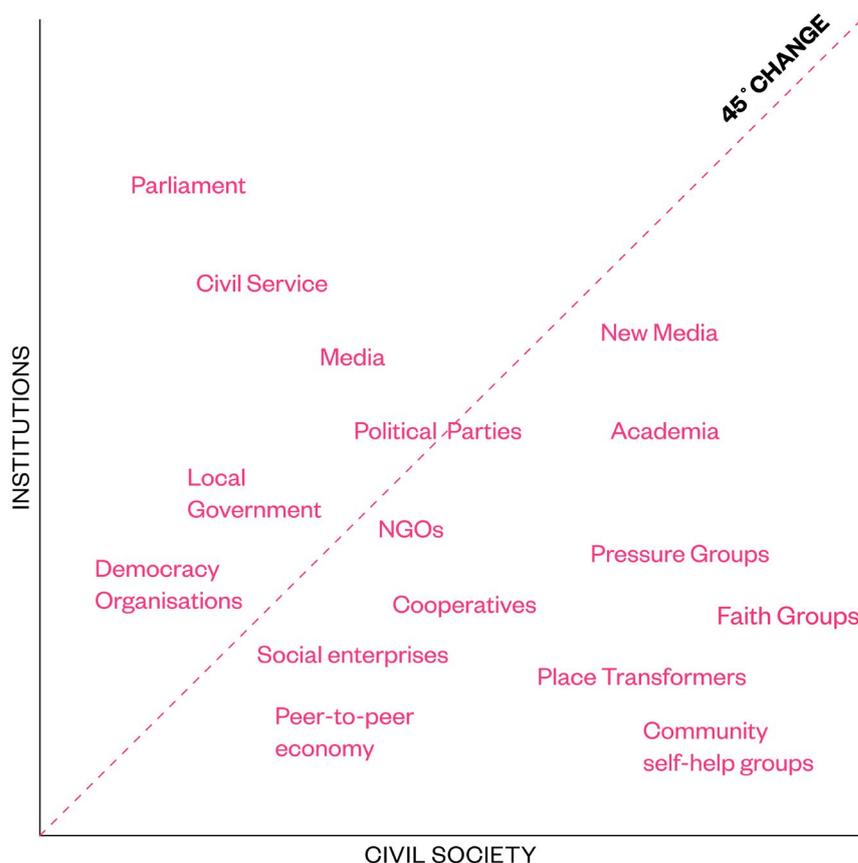
However, worryingly, though understandably, many of these emerging organisations are defiantly opposed to any big picture of thinking and acting, often harbouring hostility to going beyond either the very local or the specific. [David Graeber](#) has called such organisations 'bubbles of freedom', as they often eschew any connection with formal politics and the state. But without protection, scale and resources, most will fade away, leaving the big picture of social and ecological decline largely untouched. There is therefore a danger that these emerging seeds of a new and better society could amount to little: a cacophony of noise rather than an overture heralding a different kind of world.

Change requires a combination of the vertical state, a new moral economy and emerging horizontal organisations. The state has to play a decisive role in enabling and facilitating the full emergence of these new organisations, and the economy is going to have to bend itself to play a role that is as much about purpose as profit.

This is a very different role for the state. Yes, it will still act on our behalf where necessary, but its predominant role will not to be the faceless entity that does things for people and to people; but rather to support emerging organisations, which need to be legitimised and backed by the resources, laws and regulations that only the state can provide. Over time, government, nationally and locally, is going to have to be transformed to serve society. This, in turn, demands that the culture of our political parties and politicians changes; instead of masters they will be the servants of this emerging good society.

Critically, the heavy curse of an adversarial and tribal party system is going to have to be lifted. We need to go beyond the attempt to control a state machine that no longer works in the ways it once did. Only this combinational approach to politics will allow us to address the complex challenges we face.

But for this to happen, the people and organisations that are involved in the new participatory and more egalitarian practices and beliefs will need to engage with the formal political system, to look beyond the local, particular and immediate. They need to be political!



If 45° Change is the fault line through which a new society can be created, what matters are the spaces and ways in which people and organisations on the two sides of the line interact and work together. Both sides of the line need to change, to recognise the validity and importance of those on the other side and to engage with each other constructively and empathetically. The onus is on the state to change most, as that is where potentially progressive organised and democratic power still lies; this power needs to be used and distributed to support these emerging forces and counteract overbearing forms of capitalism.

But the combinational idea of 'both/and' covers a number of other key issues and tensions. For example, as Fritjof Capra argues above, we have already seen that there is, in effect, an internal 45° line between designed structures and those that are emergent. This combinational approach can be applied to the relationship between the past and the future, tradition and modernity, security and freedom, towns and the cities, the individual and society, and so on. In the past, politics has tended to be about the subordination of one group of issues and interests to others – majority rule – and it is this creation of 'either/or' binaries that has got us into this mess. While real tensions and interests, not least those of class, still exist and should not be brushed away, the future will be created by those who are best able to live with tensions, contradictions and paradoxes, to negotiate the most effective solutions.

In all this, the state is uniquely placed to do certain things. If, for instance, we want higher taxes and a shorter working week, then only the state can bring these about. We need national and global leaders and parties because – as the anti-austerity 15-M Movement in Spain found – eventually people have to go home, and someone needs to sustain the action and represent us. Someone has to collect the taxes and be nationally accountable for how they are spent.

You do not have to agree with Emmanuel Macron's mostly centrist policy agenda to see the wisdom of his comment reported in the book *Revolution Française* by Sophie Pedder:

The great difficulty in politics today lies in the paradox between the permanent need for deliberation, which takes place over the long run, and the urgency of decision-making. The only way to resolve this is to articulate a great horizontal transparency, necessary for deliberation, and to resort to a more vertical relationship necessary for decision-making. Otherwise, you end up with either totalitarianism or political inaction.

If we are to shift from a 20th-century mechanical view of politics to a 21st-century embrace of complexity and fluidity, the way we view power has to change. We should start by embracing *Mary Parker Follett's* distinction between 'power over' and 'power with'. Power over is power as domination, as in the ability of the state to make people do what they would otherwise not do. This is still necessary, but in a non-deferential and complex world, power over has limitations and always fails to unlock and unleash the full potential of people, as they remain unwilling cogs in a machine of limited creative and productive capacity. Power with, along with its accompanying 'power to', is transformative precisely because it means that politicians and people work together in co-creating a better society. At every point, the future is negotiated rather than imposed. As the author Terry Pratchett writes in *Witches Abroad*: "You can't go around building a better world for people. Only people can build a better world for people. Otherwise it's just a cage."

Critically, the vertical includes the intellectual leadership necessary to create the frame and narrative of a new era. Thinking elites have always been essential to transformative change. As Margaret Mead is famously reported as saying, we should “never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has”. In [Rethinking Poverty](#), Barry Knight recounts the critical role of the Bloomsbury Group of thinkers and writers who helped create the intellectual context for the shift to the social settlement of the last century. As ever, we need a strong intellectual vanguard, one relevant to the challenges and opportunities of a networked society.

But civil society has to change and develop too. Its focus is often too narrow, local and short-term. People and organisations are not effective if they just stay in their silo; they need to become part of an interlinked eco-system. For example, if your main focus is on tackling poverty, you will not get very far if you ignore other big issues such as democracy or sustainability. Our first-past-the-post electoral system means that many views are underrepresented; so if you want greater equality, then democratic reform is your issue too (as it is for those campaigning against climate change). Likewise, climate change tends to hit the poorest first and hardest. Sustainability is an equality issue and vice versa.

So, change must come from a broad range of places. Just look at the eventual impact of organisations like [Occupy](#), [Climate Camp](#) and [UK Uncut](#). All were derided as not having a manifesto or programme and for appearing quickly and then disappearing just as fast. But, over time, their legacy has helped reframe the national debate around inequality and injustice. Occupy’s idea of the 99% versus the 1% struck a deep chord, as did UK Uncut’s campaigns to draw attention to the unfairness of tax evasion by the rich, who had helped cause the financial crash of 2008. All great movements are born in exile. What matters is how quickly and fully they can influence the mainstream of society.

But the shift we seek needs to go beyond even these vital radical sources. We need to link up, and make alliances where we can, with enlightened sections of the business community, more and more of whom are coming to recognise that the old free market model of profit maximisation simply isn’t working. Business People must be encouraged to play a part in the paradigm shift we need to see. Some already are. For instance, the toy manufacturer Lego recently did more to challenge the anti-immigration position of the *Daily Mail* than any political party had managed to do, through its advertising and marketing decisions. The decision by Volvo and other car manufacturers to switch away from petrol engines could be one of the big tipping points of our carbon emissions. The rise of the [B Corps movement](#) shows the power of

ethical and enterprising change from below. Change will be easier to win with the support of some of the major economic forces.

Ultimately, though, to effect real change, any emerging civic force is going to have to become sufficiently organised in its own right: it will have to aim to shift power, and move outside its own little bubble. Just recall how so many cooperatives, mutuals, friendly societies and the rest were displaced first by the big state in the last century and then by de-mutualisation. Without an approach that becomes explicitly political, it is likely, in this century, that it will be digital monopolies and authoritarian populists that crush these emerging forms of organisation.

In all this demand and pressure for change, it is crucial that we also seek to change ourselves. And here it is the expectations we have of ourselves – our actions and hopes, and our courage in meeting the threats and opportunities we face – that matter. [John Atkinson](#) identifies the challenges well here:

There are some long understood truisms when it comes to doing things differently, not least that people own what they create. We have reached a situation whereby we as the public divorce ourselves of responsibility for our world, giving over that responsibility to politicians who we then blame when they fail to change us. We need to learn to give up this model and find that the power of the state is only what we give it and really rather minimal. We can't expect our political leaders to help us do this, it flies against the cult of power.

Change will come when we learn to change ourselves and learn to drag the political process into our change, much to its inevitable discomfort. In doing this there is one thing we could learn from political parties. Organising counts for much more than an Organisation.

## Bringing it all together

Like any theory of change, the idea of 45° Change can only be schematic: it can help give shape to our thinking and action, but it is not a blueprint. Nevertheless, we can make an effort to see how things can start to come together, and, crucially, to understand the glue that will hold a transformative project together.

Change needs an agent, an interest and an argument, and the dominant ideas driving it should be those arrived at through broad ideological consensus, not something imposed by force, privilege or tradition. In the past, many progressives have focused on class as the agent for change. But class identifications have changed over time, and other kinds of experience have become important to people's sense of identity and purpose. While class still matters, we need to find a wider range of ways to bind people together. Furthermore, we have long shifted from being a producer society, where we knew and understood ourselves primarily by what we did, to become a society where we more often understand ourselves through what we consume. Material equality will still be an essential goal, whether we see ourselves as consumers or producers, but it is not on its own adequate to the scale of transformation we need: this is going to be predominantly a post-material project while still being avowedly anti-poverty. Indeed, it can only be anti-poverty because it is post-material.

In the context of a networked society, it will be as active and connected citizens that we will change the world: only as an alliance with a view, a voice and a desire to express it will we reach our collective potential for change. As autonomous citizens, with greater control of the institutions that influence us, we will be able to make the most of our lives. So this is the space where interest, process, technology and culture collide – and, critically, where means and ends meet: the good society is created through collective action, and the way we get there is through greater collective action. Such action is rooted in the everyday, the places and spaces in which we interact with each other, online and offline, and where we form solidarities of choice – solidarities that aren't imposed by work or class, but negotiated by us. This isn't about armies to be directed for the greater good, but about a consciousness that is learnt and adapted through all the forms of collective action that are going to be necessary in the world of today and tomorrow. The processes whereby we arrive at this point will be complex and unpredictable – but will generate solidarities of meaning precisely because they are negotiated and not imposed. Critically, we must defend and promote the public realm for this active citizenry; without a flourishing public realm our alliances and networks cannot be sustained.

The UK political system, steeped in top-down control and now opened up to the excesses of the market, is ill prepared for the society and culture that is emerging. We need wholesale reform of all our systems

of representation and governance. Above all, the adversarial party system has to go, and new forms of deliberative and direct democracy are needed in the state, public services, workplaces and communities. This is called 'liquid democracy', in which we give our 'vote' to a representative, take it back when we see fit, pool it with others or cast it directly. As Jamie Bartlett argues in [The People Vs Tech](#): "Each phase of democracy should be a product of its time – its genius is that it can change. [...] [Representative democracy] has somehow stopped evolving". This is because it was created for a mass industrial society that is no longer dominant. Bartlett goes on: "Democracy needs to refresh itself for the digital age and regain the trust and confidence of the citizens".

Critical to this are new forms of connective leadership. Transforming the world will require new knowledge from both the horizontal and vertical knowledge-worlds. The popular production of knowledge from innovative horizontal practices will be assisted by new forms of lateral digital communication and exchange, whereby citizens can find things out for themselves and exchange experiences, thereby becoming more specialist. But the knowledge world cannot simply be transformed from below; it also requires progressive forms of specialisation from technical experts who are prepared to serve a universal and progressive cause because their vertical knowledge is informed by a horizontal dimension (for example, open source software and a new public internet will require progressive programmers). This accumulated sharing of knowledge has been referred to as the 'general intellect': Geoff Mulgan calls it '[the Big Mind](#)'.

Change of this type and scale is, by its very nature, messy. There will be shafts of light and moments of acceleration. It is doubtful that there will be a moment of sudden rupture, as with the fall of the Berlin Wall or the end of apartheid; but the transformation will be more akin to previous technological and cultural revolutions, which took place over decades – though the aggregating forces of social media and big data will allow change to happen much faster and be much bigger.

It is going to be a bumpy and exhilarating ride.

## Conclusions

*“The victory of ideas needs organizing.”*

V.I. Lenin

The beauty of this moment, and these processes, is that what’s happening is not essentially based on a book, a think-tank pamphlet or a charismatic individual. Much more encouragingly, it is based on real people doing real things, shaped by the context of the moment – that of a networked society.

We can and must fight for many things, not least to overcome the increasing levels of inequality and poverty that have motivated this project and halt the seemingly inexorable rise of climate change. But what we should not fight is the spirit of the age, which today means the sentiment, culture and processes of the networked society. The objective instead must be to bend modernity to the values of equality, democracy and sustainability. We have reasons for hope, as Henry Timms and Jeremy Heimans argue in their book [New Power](#), people today have ‘an inalienable right to participation’. Only by working with this sense of right, and the means to express it, will we make the breakthrough we need. There is a democratic and political battle to be fought over how social the networked society can be, but its flat structures, objectively at least, lend themselves to more open, participatory and egalitarian outcomes. The task is to make sure they are effectively regulated, owned and operated to meet these ends.

The state in the 21st century, therefore, has two roles. The first is to secure – through legislation, regulation and the provision of resources – a level playing field for the networked society, and a space where society can come together and overcome the privatising and monopolising forces that currently dominate these key platforms. The second is to put itself at the service of the newly emerging participatory forces and organisations.

The pursuit of these goals will result, not just in greater fairness or a sustainable planet, but also in a more innovative, efficient, collaborative and creative society and economy, in which value creation and human fulfilment grow exponentially.

We don’t know exactly how, when, or even whether, this emerging society will flip the system and become the predominant form of cultural, social, economic and political practice. If it does happen, it will be because of an approach akin to the idea of 45° Change. Richard [Buckminster Fuller](#), a 20th-century inventor and visionary wrote: “You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.”

To reiterate, this is a struggle for the kind of society we want. Nothing of value, and especially power, is ever given away. And, doubtless, what we will find is that as the pressure for change and the need to let go grows, some will advocate an even tighter state and even freer markets.

A new model is indeed being built in communities and sectors everywhere, but it needs a handmaiden, a midwife, to bring it fully into being. There come moments when the existing order can't provide answers that satisfy people's hopes or dissipate their fears, when tweaks to a system, which is fundamentally broken and dysfunctional, have no effect. We are reaching that point.

At this make-or-break moment, our best hope for change today lies not just in the state, but more importantly in each other.

## Next steps

This pamphlet is simply an opening argument; an outline of the broad approach to the type of transformative change we need to see happen. Working with many others, Compass wants to learn more and ask more of the right questions:

### **Working with civil society organisations we want to:**

- Understand and promote local and community work done in the past so that we can learn from it.
- Explore and promote the value of community development (through an upcoming provocation paper).
- Explore emerging collective action in localities and sectors, such as poverty and climate change.
- Understand what is happening, why and how.
- Examine whether there are common threads of motivation and practice.
- Help reveal some of the barriers to scale and find solutions to them.

### **Working with state actors nationally and locally we want to:**

- Explore where, how and why different state institutions are turning, internally and externally, to more collaborative and participatory models.
- Examine whether there are common threads of motivation and practice.
- Help reveal some of the barriers to scale and find solutions to them.
- Understand the limitations and opportunities of globalisation on the state.
- Establish how the tech giants can better work for the common good.
- Build bridges with the co-operative and socialenterprise sectors to work together more effectively.

### **We want to build bridges across the 45° fault line by:**

- Developing relationships and understanding between people and organisations on either side of the line.
- Helping emerging practice work more effectively with and through the state and the market.
- Helping the state re-orientate its role as servants of this emerging practice.
- Providing a theoretical underpinning to emerging thinking and practice in the form of a new governing philosophy of collaborative action, and a public narrative to describe what it is, why it matters and how it can be developed.
- Understanding how institutions and networks can co-exist more effectively.

### **We want to create new alliances:**

- Of people, parties and organisations that want this new governing philosophy of collaborative action to become the predominant way society decides and does things.
- That will help identify the resources to do this work.

### **We want to help shape companies, markets, enterprises and employee ownership and power in terms of:**

- How economic agents adopt more participatory processes for better social and environmental ends.
- Why and how economic democracy should/could be extended.
- Why and how new forms of union representation should be encouraged and supported.
- Why and how consumers and citizens should be empowered to influence the behaviour of economic enterprises.

We are calling this work the Common Platform [\[link\]](#).

## Further reading

### Compass

Compass has been on a journey for fifteen years, exploring ideas and moving from a party-centric approach to the idea of 45° Change, in the growing knowledge that changing party politics is necessary but insufficient. Our catalogue of publications shows how our thinking has developed:

- [Indra Adnan](#) and [Ken Spours](#) on The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Party
- Indra Adnan and Neal Lawson, [New Times](#)
- Uffe Elbaek and Neal Lawson, [The Bridge](#)
- [Sue Goss](#), [Open Tribe](#)
- [Neal Lawson](#), [Beyond Monopoly Socialism](#)
- [Neal Lawson](#), [Dare More Democracy](#)
- [Neal Lawson](#), [Markets, Machines and Morals](#)

### Other sources

Many other sources explore similar terrain, here are just a few of those that have inspired Compass thinking:

- Jamie Bartlett, [The People Vs Tech](#)
- Yochai Benkler, [The Wealth of Networks](#)
- [Civil Society Futures Final Report](#)
- Hilary Cottam, [Radical Help](#)
- Jeremy Heimans and Henry Timms, [New Power](#)
- Michael Jacobs and Laurie Laybourn-Langton, [Moving Beyond Neoliberalism](#)
- Barry Knight, [Rethinking Poverty](#)
- Frederic Laloux, [Reinventing Organizations](#)
- Mariana Mazzucato, [The Entrepreneurial State](#)
- Geoff Mulgan, [Big Mind](#)
- Smart CSOs, [Systemic Activism in a Polarised World](#)
- Sheila McKechnie Foundation, [The Social Power report](#)
- Hilary Wainwright, [A New Politics from the Left](#)
- Shoshana Zuboff, [The Age of Surveillance Capitalism](#)

# Networked Society Initiatives: a new society is already here

1. In Civil Society
2. In and around the state
3. New media
4. In the economy
5. In politics

It is impossible to map accurately the emerging practices discussed above onto specific initiatives taking place in society and the new economy. So much is going on so quickly, and no one can keep up or see the full picture. We list here some of the initiatives we know about which carry the spirit of new forms of collaborative action.

## 1. In civil society

Here a thousand flowers really are blooming. In every village, town, city, neighbourhood, community and sector new organisations are popping up and older ones are transforming themselves.

If people are helping the people, this is bound to be where change starts first and fastest. Go on any local bulletin board or test out some hash tags, and the world of deep and rich innovation and collaboration will be revealed. The site [Digital Social Innovation](#) lists many organisations using technology to tackle social change and [Nesta](#) is bringing together many social start-ups reliant on tech. [The Social Change Agency](#) is doing amazing things – not least with initiatives such as [Losing Control](#) and [Practical Governance](#).

At a national level, organisations such as [Citizens UK](#) mobilise communities across a range of issues such as the living wage and immigrants' rights. As is often the case at this level, faith organisations frequently champion moral causes and supply activists to get the job done. [Community Links](#) is another big mobilising force, while [My Society](#) gives information and access to power to people online. Elsewhere people are sharing and caring across local and national platforms as never before.

The recent [Civil Societies Future](#) project has analysed much of this work, and a lot of UK based civil society development is supported by the [Sheila McKechnie Foundation](#), and international support often comes from the [Global Fund for Community Foundations](#). In London, [Living Map](#) is helping communities to map social change and [Craftivist](#) is exploring the links between social change craft skills. But there are thousands more. In Birmingham, [the Impact Hub](#) is providing the space and connective leadership for people and groups across the city.

## 2. In and around the state

Much new action is local. The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham is working with [Participatory City](#) and others to build the influence of civil society, seeing its own role as servants to the community, not bosses over it. In Wigan, the council has set up the [Wigan Deal](#) to unlock the potential of the community to help transform services like adult social care. Inspired and helped by organisations such as [CLES \(the Centre for Local Economic Strategies\)](#), the Preston model is now famously demonstrating how councils can help lock in and build their own economic power. Barnsley Council has shifted control of many decisions closer to people, with councillors working with citizens to combine public funds with voluntary effort. The [Stove Network](#) in Dumfries almost forcibly took over vacant properties from the local authority and used them to create an arts-driven regeneration approach.

Other councils are experimenting with digital democracy and citizens' assemblies. And participatory budget making is starting to infuse more mainstream thinking. In Scotland, there is now a commitment to spend one percent of every local authority budget through a participatory budgeting process. [The Co-operative Councils Innovation Network](#) is building this well tested spirit into 21st-century circumstances.

The UK national state is slower to experiment, but there are signs of change. A parliamentary select committee recently used a citizens' assembly, run by [Involve](#), to think through difficult social care issues. Allied to Whitehall is the [Behavioural Insights Team](#), led by David Halpern, boosting practical ways to engage people as citizens and consumers to effect change. [FutureGov](#) is helping redesign public services for the 21st century. Outside the state, but working with it, is a growing ecology of advisers, practitioners and co-producers such as the [Innovation Unit](#), [Public World](#), [User Voice](#), [Happy City](#), [Shared Lives Plus](#) and [North London Cares](#). Many are finding inspiration for ideas like the Buurtzorg distributed nursing care model in the Netherlands.

### 3. New media

Technology is having the biggest impact on how we communicate with each other. Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp and many more platforms allow anyone and everyone to broadcast, debate, discuss and organise.

Others are taking new media further. [BuzzFeed](#) is a global independent news site and [The Correspondent](#) provides a citizen-funded news site independent from advertising. [CommonSpace](#) in Scotland reports news and views on radical independence issues. [Bureau Local](#) is for local investigative journalism and [CrossCheck](#) is a journalist and newsroom collaboration to combat fake news, while [Full Fact](#) provides an impartial fact check on the news. [The Bristol Cable](#) is a community-owned media outlet. [Wikimedia Commons](#) is a huge collection of media files, which anyone can use and add to. [Bellingcat](#) is a citizens' intelligence and investigations site. [Stir to Action](#) is a publication dedicated to new economic thinking and action. [Source Material](#) is investigating the vested interests that impede the democratic process and [Patreon](#) is allowing creatives to be funded to do their work. Finally, [The Guardian](#) is proving that a global voluntary readers funding model is starting to work for progressive journalism.

## 4. In the economy

Different parts of the economy are taking up the challenges of the networked society in different ways. Some big corporations, such as [Unilever](#), have adopted much more purpose-based approaches. Other business leaders have come together under the auspices of The [B Team](#) to look at more sustainable outcomes.

As ever, the really new projects are bubbling up from below. [Social Enterprise UK](#) is supporting a new wave of companies with a social purpose. The whole social impact sector is starting to take off, and other funding models such as [Kickstarter](#) are matching many more investors and borrowers. Initiatives such as [B Corps](#) are building a movement of firms that mix purpose and profit rigorously. Elsewhere, sharing and pooling is being made quick and cheap for social and environmental outcomes – learning from the likes of [Uber](#), [Airbnb](#) and [BlaBlaCar](#). [Glassdoor](#) operates like a TripAdvisor for employees, enabling them to rate the ethical behaviour of their employers. And workers are being organised in new ways, such as through the [IWA](#) (International Water Association) and Every Doctor (a closed Facebook group). Locally, projects like [Switched On London](#) are bridging the gap between consumer and producer interests. [The Co-operative Party](#) is renewing itself for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Other business-focused campaign and change organisations are developing new techniques, ideas and pressure for change: [The New Citizenship Project](#), the [Finance Innovation Lab](#), the [RSA](#), [ShareAction](#), [We Own It](#), [Blueprint](#), [the Forward Institute](#) and many others are building the pressure for the economic paradigm shift we need. [OpenCorporates](#) provides information on almost every country in the world.

## 5. In politics

Newer start-ups like the [Women's Equality Party](#) have an internal and external openness. Their annual conference is highly participatory and includes open-mic sessions; they encourage their members to belong to other parties, and gift-wrap their manifesto so that other parties will steal their ideas. The [Liberal Democrats](#) are currently exploring how to open the party up to more than just members and elect leaders from beyond Westminster. [The Green Party](#) has successfully introduced the idea of job sharing at the very top of the party. And [Momentum](#) in Labour demonstrates that the age of party activism is far from over, deploying techniques such as barnstorms brought over from the USA. [The World Transformed](#) now runs the biggest political education event in the country. Online petition sites, such as [Avaaz](#) and [38 Degrees](#), add to the ways in which people now engage with the political process, while [More United](#) and the [Progressive Alliance](#) attempt to cross tribal barriers in new and different ways. The [People's Power House](#) is bringing citizens together to shape better policy in the North of England. And the [General Election 2017 Tech Handbook](#) lists most of the innovations that happened in the UK that year.

In the think tank world, organisations like [Common Weal](#) and the [Next System Project of the Democracy Collaborative](#) demonstrate an approach about ideas and campaigning that have real impact. Local initiatives like [Flatpack Democracy](#) in Frome are now resonating in towns that want to break the old party-political log jams. [NEON \(the New Economy Organisers Network\)](#) is training, educating and using a new wave of activists in ways of running successful organisations and campaigns. [Newspeak House](#), led by Ed Saperia, is pioneering work around tech and political collaboration, and The [Alternative UK](#) is bringing organisations and ideas together on the ground. The [Centre for Welfare Reform](#) has created a citizens' think tank, sharing ideas developed by people with real-world experience of public services. [TASC](#) (Think-tank for Action on Social Change), in Dublin, is working across Europe on social and economic change. [The Rapid Transition Alliance](#) is working across academia, politics and campaigning to meet the challenge of climate change.

International initiatives such as [Fearless Cities](#), and parties like Podemos in Spain and Alternativet in Denmark, show how different organising models, much more attuned to the horizontal, can make an electoral break through. Meanwhile En Marche, the new party initiated by Macron, deployed sophisticated survey techniques and old-fashioned door-knocking to go from start-up to the presidency and legislative

power in just months. [Polis](#) is an online platform for decision-making emanating from Taiwan. Citizen Network is linking together individuals and groups around the world committed to equality for all. [Doteveryone](#) champions responsible technology for the benefit of all.

Meanwhile a plethora of organisations – [Talk Shop](#), [The Fourth Group](#), the [Electoral Reform Society](#), [Make Votes Matter](#), [Democracy Club](#), the [Sortition Foundation](#), [OSCA](#) and [Unlock Democracy](#) – experiment with new forms of democratic practice.

This is only a partial snapshot of what’s happening. We are sorry to all the initiatives we have certainly left out – and we would be delighted to know what you are up to.

**Compass**

[www.compassonline.org.uk](http://www.compassonline.org.uk)

**Rethinking Poverty**

[www.rethinkingpoverty.org.uk](http://www.rethinkingpoverty.org.uk)

**Designed by Small Axe**

[www.thesmallaxe.org](http://www.thesmallaxe.org)