

symbiosis

We Are Assembling a Movement for Real Democracy in Every Community

CONGRESS OF MUNICIPAL MOVEMENTS





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We live in daunting times. Even as decisive, radical action to halt ecological devastation is needed more than ever before, the world's ruling classes plow ahead, enriching themselves at the expense of people and planet and preparing their fortresses to hold back the coming tides. Our calls to action are infused with the fierce urgency of now like never before.

It is ordinary people who face devastation in the ecological crisis, and it is ordinary people who do not hold the reins of power. From climate change to state violence to gentrification, this is the essence of the problems we face: a crisis of democracy. When we organize, we can resist, but resistance is not governance. Even popularly elected governments disempower ordinary people, by placing an elite political class above us to rule on our behalf.

And so grassroots movements battle a many-headed monster. One eviction may be stopped, but the condition of housing precarity for millions



endures. Powerful local blockades arose in response to pipeline projects, only to see their protest camps cleared or the pipelines simply rerouted. Some of the largest demonstrations in human history rocked world cities in 2003 and could not halt the invasion of Iraq. The profit system continuously conflicts with the interests of our communities and our environment, begetting crisis after crisis. And political authority, insulated from the needs of poor and working people, works to impose the will of the rich and powerful. It is the system that is the problem.

We need a better approach, beyond the particular struggles to contain the excesses and brutalities of our present system, toward a coherent movement strategy that creates the systems of tomorrow. Democracy, ecology, freedom, cooperation, the commons, self-determination, the equality of all people: we do not merely fight to defend these values, but to enshrine them in our society's institutions and governance.

Over the course of the past year, our organizations have been strengthening our relationships with one another, learning from each other, generating shared resources, and honing a common vision of how to create together the genuinely democratic world that we need.

We have come together as a network called Symbiosis, to help gather the vast ecosystem of solidarity economy projects and participatory democracy in communities across North America into a mass movement for revolutionary change.



Our Strategy

To transform society, we must build the new world in the shell of the old. Ordinary people—neighbors and co-workers, students and strangers—can organize spaces to meet one another, forge relationships, and overcome the isolation of everyday life.

We can create institutions together, of real democracy and human connection out of the places we live and work. Through organizing participatory institutions at the grassroots, we can meet our immediate human needs and form a new basis of power, for channeling the collective action of working-class people: to build and, yes, to fight. The vehicles of our resistance against capitalism and state repression can and must also be the building blocks of our democratic future.

As we cultivate local cooperative economies and ever-more sophisticated systems of mutual aid, we can grow a new commons in the hands of ordinary people, a genuine socialism from below, an economic democracy.

Most importantly, our networks of community councils, popular assemblies, tenant unions, and other bodies of participatory democracy can form a counterweight to the institutions presently governing our lives, organizing society in parallel against capitalism and the state. Our labor unions can seize the workplace; our tenant unions can take control of housing; our councils and assemblies can restructure political authority around their own processes of confederal direct democracy.



This framework—of building popular power outside the governing institutions of our present system, to challenge and displace those institutions through truly democratic ones of our own—is called “dual power.”

Such a process of political transformation is not only revolutionary in changing institutions; it also has the potential to transform ourselves. Radical democracy is a framework for helping to overcome racism, patriarchy, and other social hierarchies, by disassembling the material underpinnings of oppression and unravelling prejudice through common struggle to bring principles of equality to life. It is through this lived practice of cooperation and solidarity that we can learn to be democratic beings, to be citizens, who have re-learned the art of making decisions together.

Our organizations are bringing elements of this vision to life in our own communities, but we did not simply invent this strategy for ourselves. It has been present, in whole or in part, in revolutionary movements across history, from the sectional democracy of the Paris Commune to the popular committees of the First Intifada. It is increasingly a feature—even the common sense—of many radical movements worldwide. Since the Zapatistas marched out of the jungle in 1994, to demand a world where all worlds fit, we have seen a convergent evolution towards this kind of politics, from across a diverse array of progressive political traditions. From the Black liberation movement to the Kurdish freedom struggle, from housing justice initiatives to worker cooperatives, from immigrant organizers to indigenous revolutionaries, from base-building socialists to



social ecology, from people's movement assemblies to Occupy, from the block clubs to the shop floor, the conditions of our time are shifting radical politics towards an embrace of dual power, towards assembling real democracy in the here and now.

It is our intention to assemble these diverse forces as best we can in North America, to create the political space for us to define this movement and to grow it far beyond what we are individually capable of.

Beyond the Local

Each of our organizations have come together because we recognize that the changes required to secure our future are more than what each of us can do at the local level. We need to escalate our strategy towards a strong network, or confederation.

By organizing locally, we are pushed to embrace experimentation, but the lessons of experimentation should circulate between us so that we can dedicate our energies to pushing ahead into new territories of radical possibility rather than forever reinventing the wheel.

Of great importance is our ability to spread and seed new local projects. The future of our movement will depend on the rapid cultivation of radical democracy in all sorts of communities across the continent. For this, we need the visibility of a common platform, with the capacity to support people through developing their own initiatives or connect them to those



that already exist. We must develop an institutional nucleus and base of resources for this movement.

Ultimately, we will need such a confederation to carry our struggle beyond the local level. Ruling-class power is organized globally, and if democracy is to win, we must be organized at that scale as well.

As this project advances, the possibilities are endless. We could implement exchange programs between community organizations in different municipalities, to learn more about organizing in a different context and to cement strong relationships that bind our movement together. We could create an organizer training program that rotates around North America. We could establish institutional relationships with existing cooperative funds to directly channel resources to the grassroots. We could forge ties with forming confederations elsewhere around the world and move forward a truly global movement.

As the branches of the tree grow outwards, its roots dig deeper.



Movement Congress

Toward that end, we plan to host an in-person gathering in September of 2019—a congress of the movement.

The goals of this congress are to:

- Connect organizers, activists, and thinkers who share this vision of a pathway to a free society, to learn from one another and knit together our movement with new and strengthened relationships;
- Deliberate as a gathering of movements through a participatory and democratic process, to determine the vision and structure of the organization we create together; and
- Launch a continental confederation of local movements building dual power through radical democracy.

This congress and the movement organization we hope it will result in are to be collaborative co-creations among many individuals and partner organizations who will jointly shape its vision and aims.

Being driven by the intentions of its participants, the outcome of this meeting cannot be predetermined. We are excited about where it could take us.

[Join Us](#)



To individuals, we invite you to **join as members** of Symbiosis, organizing in your own community and contributing to our wider project of movement-building as you are able.

To organizations, we invite you to **join as member organizations of Symbiosis or as partners to co-host our congress.**

Together, we can transform the conditions of our time, and build our world anew.

All power to the people.

Asamblea de los Pueblos Indígenas del Istmo en Defensa de la
Tierra y el Territorio – Oaxaca, Mexico

Black Socialists of America – United States

Chicago Community Councils – Chicago, IL

Cooperation Jackson – Jackson, MS

Degrow US – United States

Demand Utopia – United States and Canada

Democratic Socialists of America Libertarian Socialist Caucus –
United States



Eugene Assembly – Eugene, OR

Institute for Social Ecology – Vermont

James and Grace Lee Boggs Center – Detroit, MI

Kola Nut Collaborative – Chicago, IL

Olympia Assembly – Olympia, WA

Solidarity Research Center – Los Angeles, CA

Symbiosis PDX – Portland, OR

Woodbine – Queens, NY



symbiosis

Symbiosis is a network of organizers and activist-researchers across North America dedicated to building community-based, popular power.

Participants consist of organizations as well as individuals who work toward building a free, egalitarian, and ecological society from the ground up.

We organize in neighborhoods, develop movement resources and materials, and help new projects get off the ground.

We are working to create a continental confederation of radically democratic, community-based municipalist institutions, to be officially launched at an in-person movement congress in 2019.