

# Levelling up versus democratic localism

Rhian E. Jones

Democratic localism offers a strategy for addressing regional equality to which the Labour leadership should pay more attention

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The Johnson government's pledge to 'level up' in response to regional inequality has been derided for its continuing lack of political substance. Responses from the Labour Party leadership have tended to ignore the development in several parts of the UK of approaches focusing on democratic localism or 'community wealth building', in which local leaders, groups and communities in neglected or 'left behind' areas are not only achieving central aspects of what 'levelling up' promises, but doing so with more progressive principles and intentions than those that underpin the Tory-led project. The obvious example of this is the 'Preston Model', a project brought in over the past decade by a Labour-led city council. While some criticisms of the Preston Model and community wealth building are misconceived, others are valid areas of question or concern for the left, in particular those that centre on the democratic nature of these economic experiments, and the risk that their focus on the spending policies of local or regional authorities ignores the potential for genuinely democratic community decision-making. This article looks at the extent to which community wealth building has integrated or accommodated these concerns; the potential for doing so in future iterations of the strategy; and how a focus on these alternative strategies could offer a path to renewal for the Labour Party nationally.

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## Labour and 'levelling up'

In December 2021, a poll revealed that the Johnson government's flagship policy of 'levelling up' was understood by fewer than half of British voters. A further quarter of respondents did not even recognise the term.<sup>1</sup> This is surely unsurprising after two years in which the government has itself struggled to clearly define the policy, beyond its general understanding as a pledge to tackle regional inequality in the UK - a clear acknowledgement of and response to the Conservative Party's new-found success in former Labour-voting so-called 'Red Wall' constituencies in the 2019 general election. These largely post-industrial areas in the North and Midlands have quickly become a byword for the economic decay and political neglect which followed the country's reshaping under both Conservative and New Labour governments in the 1980s and after: they have experienced the loss of a manufacturing and industrial base leading to concentrated structural unemployment; the replacement of this base, if at all, with low-quality and precarious jobs in warehouses and call-centres; the decimation of public transport, council services and civic amenities by a decade of austerity and cuts to local authority budgets; and the consequent sense of being economically and socially 'left-behind' by London and the South-East - a sense which is of course validly rooted in the unequal allocation of resources by successive governments.<sup>2</sup>

An important part of the Conservatives' focus in the 2019 general election was on 'culture war' clichés, which posited a deep divide between socially conservative provincial Britain and a 'woke' metropolitan elite which they and their supporters sought to identify with Labour under Jeremy Corbyn. This rhetoric did not require any tangible policy result. The rhetoric on 'levelling up', however, promised material economic and social improvement which the government has so far failed to deliver. The newly-named Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (formerly the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government) produced a white paper on its strategy in February 2022, but this was widely regarded as having added very little to commitments and positions already criticised as being vague and lacking in detail.

Many responses to 'levelling up', though fully recognising the need to tackle regional inequality, rightly deride its continuing lack of substance. But a more strategic left response might go beyond such critique to draw attention to the existence and growth in several parts of the UK of policies that are already

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attempting to address central aspects of what ‘levelling up’ promises - often with proven success. These policies are driven by, and focus on, democratic localism: local leaders, groups and communities, in areas often characterised as neglected or ‘left behind’, are pursuing a variety of initiatives aimed at rebuilding their local economies. ‘Levelling up’ may be a meaningless phrase from a government uninterested in fulfilling its potential, but it is nevertheless being given substantive substance at a local level. The most well-known example of this is the ‘Preston Model’, adopted by one Labour-led council in response to budget cuts and austerity, and to the failure of previous models of regeneration that relied on outsourcing and corporate developers.

The Preston Model has been positioned by some as a positive countermodel of local democracy and municipal socialism, a complement to Corbynism’s economic alternatives as expressed in Labour’s 2017 *Alternative Models of Ownership* report, commissioned by John McDonnell and Rebecca Long-Bailey. This explored how workers and consumers could be given more direct ownership and control of the key economic sectors that maintain public infrastructure.<sup>3</sup>

Similar ideas to those of Preston have been taken up by other regional, local and combined authority leaderships across England, as well as at devolved government level in Wales and Scotland. These strategies operate under various banners - ‘community wealth building’, ‘the foundational economy’, ‘universalizable localism’ - but all constitute an effort to generate both wealth and wellbeing through the use of local resources, ideas and leadership, bringing together communities and interest groups, including local Labour parties and trade unions but also small businesses and environmental groups concerned with decarbonisation and renewable energy.

In the local elections of May 2021, Preston was one of the few councils to resist the national swing away from Labour, retaining all of its incumbent council seats and increasing its vote share in others. This echoed results in the 2019 general election, where Labour in Preston had again bucked national trends. In places outside Preston, like Salford, where councils had also chosen to focus on local investment in services and infrastructure over outsourcing, Labour also performed significantly well. In Wales, the governing Labour Party increased its representation in the Senedd and gained a historically high share of the vote.

These successes were notably absent not only from the immediate media coverage of the local elections, but also from the response of Keir Starmer, who

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took days to offer his congratulations to Welsh Labour's leader Mark Drakeford and skipped over the electoral success of Labour councils in Preston and Salford, as well as the 67 per cent of the vote won by Andy Burnham as mayor of Greater Manchester: Starmer's favoured narrative was one that reinforced the 'uphill struggle' of the party to re-establish itself as credible in the wake of 2019's defeat - and reflected Labour's ongoing failure to seriously consider the implications of devolution for its political analysis and structures. However, Labour's results elsewhere in the local elections - and in the accompanying by-election in Hartlepool - had shown that the party's post-Corbyn direction was failing to bear fruit. Meanwhile, Hartlepool's new Tory MP, Jill Mortimer, claimed her victory was based on the desire for material change, with people voting for 'jobs and investment', again paying lip-service to the promise of 'levelling up'.

Such voting patterns indicate that places like Preston and Salford, where Labour is shaping a more radical agenda, offer a possibility for renewal that is a clear alternative to the direction the party is currently taking nationally. A key factor behind Welsh Labour's success in 2021 was Mark Drakeford's decision to set the terms of coronavirus restrictions in Wales, as well as to provide financial support to businesses. This unprecedented display of autonomy put the kind of 'clear red water' between Cardiff and Westminster that had previously been more often talked about than practically demonstrated. Andy Burnham, who shortly before the local elections had used devolved powers to bring Greater Manchester's bus services under regulation by its combined authority, in response to the damage done to services by austerity and privatisation, stated similarly that political success for Labour lay in embracing devolution and going 'beyond Westminster'. Salford's mayor, Paul Dennett, made an explicit connection between success in the local elections and the 'traditional' Labour values - 'economic collectivism, a belief in the positive power of the state and local government to plan the local economy, social solidarity and the desire to put people before profit' - that had informed his council's programme of insourcing services, building new council homes, libraries and nurseries, and investing in local infrastructure and job creation.<sup>4</sup>

Starmer's response, however, disregarded the support which evidently still existed for particular Labour administrations and local authorities, and the related fact that these authorities were putting forward agendas based on local and regional autonomy and on principles similar to those that had shaped the agenda of Corbyn

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and McDonnell in 2015-19 - local empowerment; reversing the reliance by councils on outsourcing services and staff to private providers and agencies; and letting local authorities and community interests, rather than private developers, drive regeneration schemes. The implications of these results - that Labour's national direction was failing to generate support for the party at the same level that particular local and regional leaderships had achieved - went unacknowledged and unexamined. The narrative chosen by Starmer, besides suggesting a knee-jerk antipathy to overtly left-leaning projects like the Preston Model, also reinforced superficial explanations for the 'collapse of the Red Wall' that obscure the political complexity of the last few decades in these areas.<sup>5</sup>

## **The Preston Model and its critics**

The story of Preston, and the city's turnaround in fortunes under an alternative economic model pioneered by Matthew Brown and his allies on the council's Labour group, is now becoming familiar, but its roots stretch back more than a decade. The model which Preston City Council adapted was developed in the US city of Cleveland, Ohio, which, like many post-industrial areas, had been suffering the long-term effects of de-industrialisation, structural unemployment and capital flight. The US think-tank the Democracy Collaborative, drawing on the long-established example of worker-ownership in Mondragón in the Basque Country, developed a programme of work which localised a proportion of the procurement budget of the city's hospitals and universities to generate opportunities for a network of purposely created worker co-ops, the Evergreen Cooperatives. These enterprises could fill supply-chain needs at the city's large institutions while also paying a living wage and directing some of their profits towards establishing more cooperatives in the city, including via the conversion to employee ownership of already existing businesses. This strategy created 5000 jobs from Cleveland's hospital network alone, and in 2018 the Evergreen Cooperative Laundry took over operation of Cleveland Clinic's industrial laundry from the private agency Sodexo, winning a bidding process against far bigger national and international companies.

As outlined in a 2019 book by Marjorie Kelly and the Democracy Collaborative's founder Ted Howard, democratised ownership of business, and a strategy of keeping wealth local, are two of seven principles of a 'Democratic Economy', alongside community, inclusion, putting labour before capital, ethical finance and

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sustainability.<sup>6</sup> Community wealth building's incarnation in Preston, developed with input from Ted Howard, is a form of municipal socialism which utilises local 'anchor institutions', living wage expansion, community banking, public pension investment, worker ownership and municipal enterprise tied to a procurement strategy at the municipal level.

In 2011, Preston's situation was typical of many parts of the country: it had been hit by de-industrialisation, austerity and government funding cuts, which had produced widespread and entrenched impoverishment and had even lowered life expectancy in some parts of the city. Its earlier hopes for regeneration had been pinned on a corporate-led development project, the Tithebarn, plans for which had collapsed in the fallout from the crash of 2008. Preston's council, working with the UK 'think and do tank' Centre for Local Economic Strategy (CLES), subsequently began to look at an alternative economic approach built on strategic alliances with local institutions. As in Cleveland, this approach hoped to redirect the local economy away from failed and wasteful models of outsourcing and private finance initiatives, and towards collective ownership and democratic participation.

Preston council worked with anchor institutions - the public bodies on their doorstep, including local hospitals, colleges and housing associations - to channel more of their procurement budgets towards revitalising the local economy. These institutions reorganised their supply chains and opened them to local competition, identifying where they could buy goods and services locally; they then redirected contracts towards local businesses for services ranging from office supplies and construction work to the provision of school meals. These contracts also involved environmental and social considerations: targeting employment at deprived areas, stipulating the use of sustainable or ethically-sourced materials, and focusing on social value rather than simply on bottom-line profit. In 2013, six of the local institutions that signed up for the effort spent around £38 million in Preston and £292 million in Lancashire as a whole. By 2017 this had risen to £111 million and £486 million respectively.

It is worth stressing that this increase in local economic activity is working its way through to reducing poverty in the whole community, through wage increases and targeting hiring practices at areas of structural unemployment and marginalised demographics. Encouraging the development of local supply chains has resulted in the creation of new jobs and higher wages as well as decreasing the number

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of precarious jobs and levels of in-work poverty. Where local suppliers lacked capacity to respond to these new procurement policies, the council saw this as an opportunity not only to encourage the growth of new businesses but also to enable more democratic forms of business ownership, through supporting worker-owned cooperatives; these new enterprises could then fill the gaps where no local businesses existed to bid for public contracts. The council encouraged the growth of cooperatives both through support for start-ups in new sectors and through employee buy-outs of existing companies. By 2020, Preston had achieved its highest employment rate and lowest levels of economic inactivity for over fifteen years. And in 2018 it had been voted the UK's most improved city in which to live and work.

Aspects of the Preston Model also challenge assumptions made about the Northern working class in dominant analyses of the 'Red Wall', which tend to centre on an imagined constituency of wholly white and usually male ex-industrial workers. Preston's South Asian community has been a key part of the city's diverse population since migrant workers arrived after WWII to work in Lancashire's manufacturing centres, and its arts and culture is celebrated annually in the Preston Mela festival.<sup>7</sup> During the Covid-19 pandemic, the city council helped international students at the University of Central Lancashire to develop a food hub.<sup>8</sup>

The local industries, anchor institutions and job sectors which constitute the Preston Model contain construction firms, cooking academies and cafes, artists' collectives, the city's university and the media cooperative Preston Digital Foundation, with the creative sector accounting for 6 per cent of the city's businesses. Rather than catering to a nostalgic vision of economic prosperity based around industrial work - which, in the context of decarbonisation and the climate crisis, can hardly be straightforwardly replicated - people in the region have responded to changed economic circumstances and grasped opportunities beyond de-industrialisation, rather than passively waiting for rescue by Westminster.

The Preston Model has not been without its critics, including from the left. Preston's approach to budget cuts by central government has clearly not been the militantly confrontational one of 1920s Poplar or 1980s Liverpool and Lambeth.<sup>9</sup> Moving sectors outside the market framework in the limited cases where this is possible, or mobilising trade unions to challenge the austerity settlement, are options that Preston City Council has not yet taken. It is, however, equally clear that Preston represents a significant break with the models of local government we have seen

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since the 1990s, rejecting as it does the Blairite orthodoxy of outsourcing council services and relying on external investment for regeneration of an area. Comparisons with previous forms of resistance within local government must be seen in a historical and political context that takes into account the deep changes that have taken place, both in the power of local government, and in the social forces on which they can call for support. Preston's strategy does not exist independently of the need for opposition to austerity, or in isolation from wider campaigns and struggles on the unequal distribution of political influence and material resources. As its developers themselves acknowledge, it is a step on the road to transformation, not a final destination.

Outside the left, community wealth building as attempted in Preston has been dismissed as 'protectionist': the localisation of procurement spending has been portrayed as undermining the potential for gains from trade between different municipalities or different parts of the country, and any short-term benefit to a region or municipality is seen as having been won at a corresponding cost to others. This assumption that community wealth building is a zero-sum game, which merely reallocates existing value while adding none of its own, has been addressed in Joe Guinan and Martin O'Neill, in their 2020 primer on the strategy.<sup>10</sup> They advocate a perspective which takes into account the disparity in tax paid by multinationals sequestered outside the UK and that paid by local businesses; and which notes investment by local employers and contractors in their employees' skills and development, including training and apprenticeships, which is likely to bear significant returns over time. As they comment, such returns 'would never be made in a world of low-quality employment opportunities and zero-hour contracts'.

Moreover, the principles that guide Preston's procurement strategy make it clear that local contractors must also prove they can perform credibly and competitively on value and quality in order to win a contract; they are not unfairly shielded from competition or offered 'soft' contracts. This approach has enabled local SMEs to compete with multinationals and other large firms that operate from London and the South East, allowing the repatriation to Lancashire of the vast majority of public wealth that was being extracted from the region. And this shift away from multinationals is an answer to the related accusation that community wealth building amounts to a strategy of 'beggar my neighbour': the focus in Preston has been on shifting spending away from large international companies, often



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headquartered outside the UK, not on taking business or spending away from neighbours like Blackburn or Bolton. Indeed, recent stages of community wealth building in Preston have included a regional ‘people’s bank’, covering a large area of the North West, which sees municipalities collaborating - not competing - in establishing more democratic models of finance and offering mutual support for small businesses and social enterprises.<sup>11</sup>

While critics of the Preston Model on the grounds outlined above often miss the point of its intention, there is a more valid critique to be made of its current institutional focus: namely that the alternative it has established for policy-makers and local authorities has not been accompanied by a popular momentum that puts local people in the driving-seat, and embeds awareness of these alternatives within communities themselves. This will be considered below in the context of places where similar strategies are being pursued beyond Preston.

## Localism beyond Preston

The Preston Model, as its architects have always made clear, is adaptable to cities, regions, towns and neighbourhoods beyond Preston. Prior to Andy Burnham’s decision to take Manchester’s buses back into municipal control, local authorities in Manchester and Birmingham had also brought in a Living Wage and applied strategies of progressive procurement. And similar principles have been implemented in North of Tyne combined authority, whose mayor, Jamie Driscoll, was elected on a platform that included community wealth building among its key pledges. Changes in the procurement strategy of local institutions are a central part of North of Tyne’s strategy, along with an emphasis on the cooperative sector and helping small businesses to transition into cooperatives; while their Good Work Business Pledge is designed to ensure that employees are paid the Living Wage, unionised, in secure jobs and have access to support, including around mental health. In South Yorkshire, Lewis Dagnall’s recent mayoral bid included a commitment to public ownership of buses and trams, along with ‘a green industrial revolution’ and policies for lifelong education and high-skill jobs. In Scotland, North Ayrshire Council launched the country’s first community wealth building strategy in May 2020. Its approach ties community wealth building to the potential for a local Green New Deal focused on achieving decarbonisation through the creation of sustainable infrastructure and regeneration projects. This has been followed by

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the Scottish government itself bringing in CLES's Neil McInroy 'to help embed this way of working in our economic development'. The varying forms of progressive spending, job creation and environmental protection that are taking shape under the title of community wealth building illustrate its status as an umbrella strategy: it consolidates a set of principles which can drive initiatives and projects according to the needs and resources of particular communities.

A further point of contention in the debate on community wealth building, and on localism in general, is the extent to which it can plausibly be 'scaled up'. Small-scale experiments in democratic localism have only a limited capacity to change larger-scale problems like predatory trade deals, capital flight or national legislative restrictions on trade union activity. In terms of the potential for scaling up, however, one could again point to Labour's *Alternative Models of Ownership* report, which featured Preston as an example but also included national proposals for restructuring production and extending economic democracy through worker-ownership schemes and worker buy-outs of established companies. These ideas, like the rest of the Corbyn project, have received short shrift from the Labour leadership in its transition after 2019. The path taken since has seen Starmer struggle to promote a series of vacuous 'visions for society' which contain barely more substance than Johnson's 'levelling up'. The 2021 Labour Party conference passed a motion, put forward by trade unions CWU and ASLEF, which noted the electoral success of councils with community wealth building agendas and resolved to adopt community wealth building as the 'main approach to local economic development across the UK by ensuring more of our economy is democratically and socially owned'. But one looks in vain for any current mention of this from the party leadership.

If Labour's task is to reengage with detached communities in a democratic and politically meaningful way, community wealth building has much to offer as a long-term strategy for rebuilding democratic engagement and political credibility on a local level, through focusing on bases of community support and solidarity, including welfare and social provision, as well cultural and leisure activities. The *Alternative Models of Ownership* report itself recognised that, while the economy needs to be transformed at every level, there are many instances where this is already being done, often with local authorities working in conjunction with community groups and cooperatives: from communities taking control of assets and continuing to run them as local amenities, through to larger authorities like the Welsh

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government implementing strategies that make large-scale finance available for economic experimentation.

The implementation of community wealth building principles by the Welsh government, in the form of the 'Foundational Economy', offers one form of scaling-up. The Foundational Economy Challenge Fund, introduced with a budget of £1.5 million and then increased to £4.5 million due to the level of interest and quality of applications received, has been used to support projects across Wales in the public, private and third sectors, including food and social care, construction and regeneration. But its implementation also recognises that the Preston Model is not a rigid blueprint for community wealth building, and that community wealth building itself is not a 'silver bullet' for countering the destructive effects of forty years of economic and political neglect. Lee Waters, Labour MS for Llanelli and former Deputy Minister for the Economy and Transport, stresses that: 'There is no exact template we can lift and shift to support Welsh communities. The Foundational Economy Challenge Fund is to trial different approaches ... stimulate debate and help spread and scale learning on what works ... it is an important part of the re-building work that needs to be done - alongside stronger transport infrastructure, enhanced skills support and effective digital connectivity'.<sup>12</sup>

## **From 'council wealth building' to community wealth building**

One question that is underdeveloped in the debate on the Preston Model is the degree to which it has managed to embed itself in local communities as a recognised strategy - engaging with existing grassroots groups and projects and with ordinary individuals, rather than being led from the top as an institutional strategy based around procurement. This debate is complicated by the inherent difficulty of measuring the impact of projects which rely on gradual improvement over disparate areas, rather than on 'big ideas' aimed at rapid and spectacular change. The long-term nature of the processes involved, and the amount of mundane work being done at everyday levels, do not make for an engaging story in the arena of either national journalism or electoral cycles. This is not, however, grounds for concluding, as political rivals of the council's Labour group have done, that community wealth building is no more than a 'marketing gimmick' that has not had a substantial effect on the local area, and in which locals are not interested. Evidence, even if anecdotal, suggests that awareness is growing of material improvement in the quality

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of local jobs, the new opportunities offered - from employment to leisure - and the experience of a revitalised local environment, even if there is less awareness of the political detail behind these changes.

Nonetheless, the risk remains that the democratic potential of community wealth building is lagging behind its more technocratic take-up among policy-makers and think tanks. Perhaps predictably, this risk is particularly acute when the strategy is 'scaled up'. Joe Cullinane, leader of North Ayrshire Council, gave a cautious welcome to the Scottish government's interest in community wealth building, but stressed the danger of its transformative potential being lost among political platitudes on 'inclusive growth' or 'well-being'.<sup>13</sup> In Wales, the 'foundational economy' is one of several ambitious national policy directions with a basis in localism recently taken up by the Senedd. But the direct adoption of this relatively radical strategy has meant that it has emerged without the kind of public and institutional introduction, discussion and negotiation that we might expect a new economic approach to generate in the country as a whole. This has restricted the political ability to build momentum behind these commendable principles, as some businesses cannot see its immediate relevance to their operations, and some local authorities have taken the attitude that, since they already prioritise 'buying local' in their procurement strategies, any more deeply transformative approach is unnecessary.<sup>14</sup> In addition to doubts over the level of popular engagement, there is also a concern about how easily the strategy can work alongside the Welsh government's adherence in many policy areas to a wider neoliberal agenda.<sup>15</sup>

Lee Waters states of the 'foundational economy' approach: 'The Welsh Government is kick-starting change. But the dividend will only come at scale if we have alliances for change. We must see co-ordinated working across departments in government, and between public bodies, and from civil society.'<sup>16</sup> This is true of community wealth building in general. Civil society organisations and groups around the UK, especially when they are long-established, have frequently been better than local authorities at achieving 'buy-in' and involving local residents in changes and improvement at a grassroots level - from renters' unions to credit unions to community-owned renewable energy and regeneration. One of the initiatives funded by the Foundational Economy Challenge Fund is the Skyline project, looking at community stewardship of public land in the Rhondda Valley, which found that parachuting experts into communities to develop programmes

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of regeneration - a tediously regular occurrence in post-industrial communities throughout the New Labour years - is less effective than 'in-reach' work that involves the communities themselves in drawing up priorities and identifying resources.<sup>17</sup>

Local authority and institutional support for community wealth building, and the variety of existing community groups pursuing projects on similar lines, should ideally be connected in the middle at administrative and operational levels, but this may need local authorities to cede a greater degree of directional control to communities than they often seem willing or able to do. The Wales Co-operative Centre, which receives funding from the Welsh government to support cooperatives and social enterprises in housing, education and social care, provides an instructive example of government funding being channelled to local initiatives. One task for proponents of community wealth building might be to bring these strands together in a similar way, by integrating or creating an intermediary layer where funding and resources could be directed by local ideas and priorities. This would require the supplementary creation of forums and channels by which individuals and groups could access and participate in the decisions made by local government - examples of this exist, for instance, in the form of participatory budgeting initiatives in North Ayrshire and parts of Glasgow and London.<sup>18</sup>

Drawing on the theory and practice of 'radical municipalism', with which community wealth building is often compared, Bertie Russell and Keir Milburn have proposed Public-Common Partnerships, in which independent projects for the common ownership and governance of assets would develop their own plans for the local area before forming partnerships with local authorities.<sup>19</sup> The group Stir to Action, having been critical of the lack of investment in co-operative development from many local authorities engaged in community wealth building, have proposed a 'community anchor' model. This would see those already part of the democratic business sector working with local government, to raise interest in and awareness of cooperatives, and to support existing social service organisations to establish a co-operative development function, particularly bringing in marginalised communities. In Preston, Stir to Action - supported by Cooperatives UK and working with local communities - has been involved in producing written and visual resources on co-operative development aimed at Lancashire's South Asian communities; these resources could also be adapted for immigrant resettlement programmes, and for other groups including ex-offenders and young people.<sup>20</sup>

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Analysis by the New Economics Foundation of figures from the first two years of the current government found that, far from ‘levelling up’, consecutive policy failings in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and supply-chain disruption have worsened inequalities within and between nations and regions of the UK.<sup>21</sup> The urgent need to address inequality surely requires actions based on the proven success of existing initiatives, rather than a long-winded development of ‘levelling up’ policies from scratch, followed by their top-down imposition. The Labour Party leadership’s willingness to acknowledge or directly make this argument is in many ways irrelevant. As approaches like the Preston Model have evolved at a local or regional level, so support, guidance or permission at a national level, however useful it would be, is demonstrably unnecessary. What is necessary, however, is that grassroots projects and ideas, and groups and individuals outside party politics and civic institutions, are integrated into the fabric of future incarnations of community wealth building. This would secure progressive change that does not rely on a political vanguard leading from the top, and is not vulnerable to the vagaries of the electoral cycle. With little real prospect of economic and social transformation being led by the Westminster government, the British left may need to look beyond the electoral horizon to ‘level up’ on its own terms.

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### Notes

1. <https://www.politico.eu/article/leveling-up-britons-mystified-boris-johnson-flagship-policy>.
2. See Doreen Massey, *World City*, Polity 2007; Danny Mackinnon, ‘Regional Inequality and the Collapse of Labour’s “Red Wall”’, *Soundings* 76, winter 2020: <https://doi.org/10.3898/SOUN.76.01.2020>.
3. See <https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Alternative-Models-of-Ownership.pdf>.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/may/21/labour-thrive-reprise-radical-values-salford>.
5. See <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/oureconomy/labour-red-wall-and-vicissitudes-britains-voting-system/>.

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6. Marjorie Kelly and Ted Howard, *The Making of a Democratic Economy: Building Prosperity for the Many, Not Just the Few*, Berrett-Koehler 2019.
7. See <https://prestoncitymela.co.uk>.
8. See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-59182663>.
9. See <http://socialismtoday.org/the-preston-model-behind-the-red-gloss>.
10. Joe Guinan and Martin O'Neill, *The Case for Community Wealth Building*, Polity 2020. See pp72-5 for their comments on this perspective.
11. See <https://www.preston.gov.uk/article/2498/North-West-Councils-partner-up-for-Community-Bank>.
12. See <https://www.iwa.wales/agenda/2020/01/its-time-to-focus-on-the-everyday-economy/>. On the 'foundational economy' as wider analysis and strategy, see The Foundational Economy Collective, *Foundational Economy*, Manchester University Press 2018.
13. Matthew Brown and Rhian E. Jones, *Paint Your Town Red: How Preston Took Back Control and Your Town Can Too*, Repeater 2021, p84.
14. *Ibid*, p76.
15. See Daniel Evans, Kieron Smith and Huw Williams (eds), *The Welsh Way: Essays on Neoliberalism and Devolution*, Parthian 2021.
16. <https://www.iwa.wales/agenda/2020/01/its-time-to-focus-on-the-everyday-economy/>.
17. *Paint Your Town Red*, p119ff.
18. *Ibid*, p88ff.
19. See <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2021/06/paint-your-town-red-review-labour-preston>; <https://www.common-wealth.co.uk/reports/public-common-partnerships-building-new-circuits-of-collective-ownership>.
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