DEMOOCRATISING AND GLOBALISING MARXISM
One of the most contentious and neglected issues in Marxism is the content, role and place of democracy in transformative visions and practices. For some, Marxism is antithetical to democracy; for others, vanguard democracy represents the pinnacle of Marxism, and still others pay little attention to democracy at all. Marxism has gone through different phases, each phase with its unique social base and foundational ideas. At the time of the Second and Third Internationals, Marxism’s social base was largely in working-class movements and parties, but shifted from the 1950s onwards to intellectuals overwhelmingly located in universities. This growth of and engagement with Marxism among intellectuals was in part due to the phenomenal growth and influence of university education (Hobsbawm 2011: 360). After reaching the peak of its influence in the academy during the 1970s, Marxism weakened through the course of the 1990s. In the late 1990s, however, a renewed interest in Marxism emerged among multi-class movements, middle- and working-class activists and intellectuals. These diverse social strata do not necessarily converge in their understandings of history, or their views of the causes and consequences of the dynamics of capitalism, but rather, share in their belief that ‘another world is possible’.

This is the context within which I focus this chapter on literature – both liberal and Marxist – that has explicitly engaged the issue of democracy.¹ Because
Marxist influence over the last half-century has largely emanated from intellectuals located within universities, I focus on the various ways in which liberal and Marxist scholars have placed democracy against and within Marxism. While democracy is a contested concept that often incorporates very different notions of social change and control, with various actors and processes, twentieth-century liberals and Marxists tended to focus on representative and vanguard democracy respectively, largely ignoring the importance of direct and participatory democracy. Bertrand Russell (1946: 14) pithily captured the central distinction: the Western understanding of democracy ‘is that it consists in the rule of the majority; the Russian view is that it consists in the interests of the majority’. Neither tradition emphasised government by the people. The bifurcation of democracy into representative democracy versus vanguard democracy severely limited the debate on democracy in the twentieth century. In the twenty-first century, political movements are attempting to transcend this dichotomous view of democracy and have placed direct and participatory democracy at the centre of alternative, emancipatory visions of the future through meaningful deliberation and participation in political and economic life by ordinary citizens.

LIBERAL CRITIQUES OF MARXIST-INSPIRED SOVIET COMMUNISM

In this section, the focus is on scholarship that has equated Marxism with twentieth-century ‘communism’ as this literature problematises the role of democracy in the communist movement and juxtaposes authoritarianism with representative democracy. Historically, Marxists did not focus their gaze on the importance of direct democracy, content with either vanguard notions of democracy led by the Party together with the advanced working class or with the representative democracy of the Eurocommunists and social democrats. This neglect of the importance of direct democracy and its relation to representative democracy was exacerbated by the liberal tradition’s collapsing of Marxism with authoritarianism and juxtaposing this with representative democracy as the only viable alternative.

There is a vast literature on Marxism that has been dominated by studies delving into the totalitarian and undemocratic nature of communism (for example, the work of Gabriel A. Almond, Hannah Arendt, Fernando Claudin, Joseph Schumpeter, Philip Selznick and Jacob Talmon). This image of Marxism as totalitarian, influenced by the larger political milieu of cold-war politics, was
uniform in liberal literature on communism, which was concerned with demonstrating the Party’s absolute control over the ‘masses’ (see, for example, the work of Almond, Selznick and Talmon) and continues to influence scholarship, as is evident in Francis Fukuyama’s *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992) which posits market capitalism and representative democracy as the pinnacle of human history. Similarly, Stéphane Courtois et al.’s *Black Book of Communism* (1999) concludes that communism is morally similar to Nazism, implicitly positing representative democracy as the only morally acceptable alternative. This anti-Marxist position also influenced the apartheid state, which framed the liberation struggle as part of the ‘rooi gevaar’ (red danger) coming out of the Soviet Union and influencing the South African liberation movement. The roots of this cold-war tradition hark back to the 1950s.

Many scholars in the mid-twentieth century were heavily informed by the liberal political tradition, taking representative democracy to be the one and only alternative to totalitarian communism (for example, Almond, Schumpeter, Selznick and Talmon). This tradition referred to vanguard democracy as totalitarian because of the way in which the Party (ostensibly made up of the advanced working class and revolutionary activists) enjoyed absolute power in the name of working class majoritarianism (see for example, Selznick 1952). This link between vanguard democracy and authoritarianism had merit, as Joseph Femia’s *Marxism and Democracy* (1993) shows how vanguard notions of democracy ultimately lead to absolute elite control in which individual voices are silenced.

Underpinning this allegiance to the liberal tradition was a critique of the dangers inherent in popular participation in politics. With the rise of fascism and the post-World War I establishment of totalitarian regimes (ostensibly based on mass participation), there was a tendency to link ‘participation’ with the concept of totalitarianism (Pateman [1970] 1999: 2). Thus the liberal tradition conflated totalitarianism with communism, participatory democracy and authoritarianism. In response, by the middle of the century, scholars in the liberal political tradition had cast grave doubts on popular participation in politics. In South Africa this resonated with apartheid policies that sought to exclude the majority from politics and embrace a narrow representative democracy for the white minority. In effect, what the ascendance of the liberal political tradition represented was a shift from a democratic theory centred on participation of ‘the people’ to a democratic theory based on the participation of an elite minority (104).
For many liberal scholars the intellectual roots of this shift could be traced back to Schumpeter’s *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* ([1942] 1975) in which he argues that democracy is not a theory of particular ideals or ends, but rather, is a political method with certain institutional arrangements for arriving at political decisions. Like the scholars he later influenced, Schumpeter (269) looked suspiciously on a participatory and decision-making role for the people and preferred to support the idea that a democratic method was defined by competition for votes among leaders. Schumpeter’s characterisation of the democratic method and the dangers of popular participation were widely accepted by the 1950s tradition, which built an entire canon of scholarship on these basic principles (Pateman [1970] 1999: 5). The disregard for popular participation ultimately bifurcated democratic politics into representative and vanguard democracies, both of which rely on elites – elected officials or advanced working class – as the guiding force in society. In many ways, the apartheid state adopted the liberal cold-war view of Marxism, though it was not itself liberal.

One of the most influential statements of the inherent dangers of mass participation and its links with communist totalitarianism was Talmon’s *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (1952), in which he traces the history of what he calls ‘totalitarian democracy’ and is interested in showing how representative democracy and totalitarian democracy, while originating from similar traditions of eighteenth-century political theory, ultimately diverged in opposite directions (3). Demonstrating his distrust of popular participation, Talmon (250) argues that direct democracy, unlimited sovereignty and egalitarian social ideals hold within them the tendency toward totalitarian control of society. He further argues that the modern abstraction of human beings from their social relations (that is classes), which he sees at the core of the Marxian tradition, is a powerful vehicle for totalitarianism. For Talmon, communism is inherently totalitarian and popular participation in politics lends itself toward this end.

Shifting from the political implications of popular participation, the liberal tradition drew a link between individual psychology and vulnerability to communist manipulation (see for example, Almond 1954). Again strongly influenced by the liberal political tradition, scholars were increasingly concerned about the lack of capacity of the general population for democratic politics. Political sociology provided prolific empirical studies into political attitudes that summarised the primary characteristics of citizens from the lower socio-economic categories as not only displaying a lack of interest in politics, but,
more importantly, harbouring ‘widespread non-democratic or authoritarian attitudes’ (Pateman [1970] 1999: 3). This led many in the liberal tradition to conclude that the ‘classical’ view of a democratic person (capable of participating in decision-making processes) was unrealistic and increased participation would lead to instability of the current system (see for example, the work of Almond, Seymour Martin Lipset and Schumpeter). The liberal tradition, therefore, drew a link between the ‘authoritarian’ personality traits in the ‘masses’ and the attraction to communism. For example, Lipset’s *Political Man* (1963) adumbrates the link between education, socio-economic status and national development and a tendency toward authoritarianism and an attraction to communist ideology. The average person on the street was, the argument suggests, simply not equipped for participation in the political system.

In general, with their focus on the totalitarian character of Marxist-inspired communist experiments and their juxtaposition of totalitarian communism with representative democracy, these scholars challenged Marxism’s relevance in democratic conceptions of social transformation. One of the enduring legacies of the liberal tradition’s treatment of Marxism is that it narrowed the discussion of democracy to mean representative, electoral democracy, conflating participatory democracy with vanguard democracy and thus dismissing it as a form of authoritarianism. While the liberal tradition’s positioning of communism against representative democracy was largely an ideological tool to delegitimate Marxism, it also served to highlight the contradictory notion of democracy within the Marxist tradition. It also had the further effect of appropriating representative democracy as a liberal invention, distancing representative democracy from radical, egalitarian politics. The liberal characterisation, however, provoked responses from a range of scholars within the Marxist tradition that provided critique of Marxism (and communism) and reintroduced the importance of democracy for Marxism.

**MARXIST CRITIQUES OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY SOVIET COMMUNISM**

Liberal scholars were not the only critics of Marxist-inspired Soviet communist experiments. Indeed, a whole generation of Marxist intellectuals devoted a significant amount of intellectual energy to distancing Marxism from twentieth-century communism (for example, Theodor Adorno, Claudin, Max Horkheimer, Lukács, Herbert Marcuse and Palmiro Togliatti). ‘Western
Marxists’, from Antonio Gramsci and Lukács to the Frankfurt School’s critical theory to Jürgen Habermas’s communicative action, pried open the ideological straightjacket of vanguard party politics to allow theoretical engagement with Marxism to include culture, epistemology, aesthetics and reconciliation (rather than domination) with nature (Anderson 1976; Jay 1984; Therborn 2008: 87–91).

While not explicitly a Marxist, but still critical of the Soviet Union’s ‘communism’, Arendt saw the demise of class society, which she linked to a sense of hopelessness among the populace, providing the basis for totalitarianism. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) Arendt (313–314) argues that totalitarianism occurs when class society (and the concomitant institutions in civil society such as parties and labour organisations) breaks down and mass society develops in its stead. Because membership in a class is the primary integrative mechanism linking the individual to civil society, its demise causes people to lose their last remaining link to society, which ultimately makes them particularly susceptible to feelings of anomie (317). She thus shares in the liberal assumption about the psychological basis for attraction to totalitarian communism. For Arendt (351–352), the appeal of totalitarianism is its offer of consistency, predictability, organisation and a vision of the future, which is infinitely more attractive than the uncertainty of reality. Thus, the separation of individuals from meaningful social relations creates the conditions for the emergence of totalitarianism (315–317). Further challenging the liberal tradition, in *The Human Condition* (1958) Arendt develops her conception of the political in which she draws heavily on the participatory democratic tradition. Her critique of communism as totalitarian is fundamentally different from others in the 1950s in that she is interested in counterposing totalitarianism (which she sees as possible in both communism and liberal democracy) against a more direct and participatory democratic conception of politics. While the liberals see representative democracy as integrating people, Arendt (1951: 312) thinks it facilitates societal breakdown by excluding the majority of the population from politics and by weakening civil society as it separates people from each other. Arendt’s critique echoes Karl Marx’s (1967: 226–227) own critique as he argues that ‘liberal’ democracy results in alienation and the ‘separation of man from his community, from himself, and from other men’. Humans become separated from their communities to such a degree that society comes to exist outside of human beings rather than being integrally connected to the very essence of what it means to be human (Femia 1993: 25).
Similarly, Claudin’s monumental two volumes provide an incisive chal-
lenge to the liberal rendition of communism by offering his own critique from
within the movement. While certainly critical of the totalitarian character of the
International Communist Movement, Claudin differs from the liberal tradition
in that he does not equate totalitarianism with Marxism or communism. In
The Communist Movement ([1970] 1975) Claudin follows the history of the
Communist Party of the Soviet Union’s (CPSU’s) slide into totalitarianism,
and as he does so he juxtaposes totalitarian communism with democratic
and participatory visions of communism that are rooted in a Marxist tradi-
tion. Implicitly, Claudin is critiquing vanguard democracy and arguing for
direct and participatory democracy within the communist movement. Claudin
describes the Comintern as the totalitarian institution par excellence and
emphasises the extent to which Soviet foreign policy played a pernicious role in
the evolution of communist parties around the world. The CPSU encouraged
‘sectarianism and authoritarianism, favoring the dogmatization of Marxism
in its Bolshevik version and leading to underestimation of the national origi-
nality of other countries’ (Claudin [1970] 1975: 93). Importantly, however,
Claudin (640) also emphasises the possibility as well as the importance of ‘the
winning of autonomy’ by national communist parties, which he takes to be a
necessary condition for the working out of party positions responsive to local
conditions and concerns. Unlike the liberal tradition which sees communism
as inevitably tending toward totalitarianism, Claudin suggests that autonomy
from the CPSU was a precondition for communist parties to develop demo-
cratic practices. While his critique of the CPSU often suggests a more participa-
tory understanding of democracy, Claudin ultimately continues to work within
the parameters of vanguard democracy in which the national communist party
at the helm of the state would be the leading force in national developments.
Claudin thus challenges the confines of liberal scholarship on Marxist-inspired
alternatives, but does not develop a more participatory and direct under-
standing of democracy.

Another generation of scholars responding in the 1970s and 1980s were
those studying Eurocommunism, a movement that challenged authoritarian
communism in general and the authority of the CPSU in particular. Analysts
in this tradition tend to draw a distinct line between the pre-1960s, charac-
terised by CPSU hegemony, and the post-1960s characterised by national
communist parties’ relative autonomy vis-à-vis the CPSU (for example, Boggs
and Plotke 1980). Scholars of the Eurocommunist movement were largely
interested in showing that certain European communist parties developed deep commitments to representative democratic institutions in the post-1960s era. According to Carl Boggs and David Plotke (1980) the Eurocommunist parties challenged the CPSU’s hegemony and reintroduced the importance of democratic practices in the transformation of society. After the Sino-Soviet split and the concomitant demise in CPSU hegemony, communist parties in Europe began rethinking ideological and strategic themes that distinguished them from both social democracy and Marxism–Leninism (7). They argue that in this transition Eurocommunism expanded Marxism by theorising the importance of embracing diverse social groups (for example, the middle class, religious groups, women’s groups) in a mass party that engaged in political struggles within the existing representative institutions and was guided by a principled support for social and political pluralism (7). They recognised that representative democracy allowed for diverse social interests to be aggregated by political parties. In short, Eurocommunism reclaimed and expanded on Marxism by merging the commitment to socialism with democracy, seeking the gradual internal democratisation of existing state apparatuses, and hence, advocating a peaceful transition to socialism (Ross 1980: 40). Following Karl Kautsky, the Eurocommunists understood that universal suffrage could make the state an ‘expression of popular will’ if diligently pursued by the working class (Femia 1993: 59, 100). They rescued the idea that representative democracy can be an instrument of emancipation rather than domination, but this depended on the working class’s capacity to shape the state. Eurocommunism’s critique of the Soviet Union’s vanguard democracy did not translate into an appreciation for direct democracy in conjunction with representative democracy. Nevertheless, this scholarship is useful in highlighting the importance of representative democratic practices in the transition to socialism and helped rescue democracy in Marxism from the liberal scholars’ rendition.

Another critical Marxist tradition has challenged the omnipotence of the Soviet Union’s influence within national contexts. In this vein, there has been research into the Marxist tradition in the US labour movement in the 1930s and 1940s that contests the totalitarian conception of communist parties. For example, scholarship on the Communist Party’s influential role in American unionism in the 1930s challenges the view of pre-1960s Soviet hegemony and argues that of the dynamic unions that emerged from the Depression-era labour upsurge in the United States, communist unions were the most democratic and responsive to their working-class base (see for example, Stepan-Norris and
Zeitlin 2002). Through analysis of historical documents Judith Stepan-Norris and Maurice Zeitlin challenge the scholarship on the totalitarian and undemocratic character of the Communist Party and its pernicious role in American unionism and argue that in the 1930s the Communist Party was not only highly responsive to its working-class base, but was also the main expression of indigenous, working-class radicalism. While this scholarship is important in demonstrating the Communist Party’s responsiveness to the working class, it still works within the vanguard understanding of democracy in which the Party plays the pivotal role.

In addition to these responses, a prolific neo-Marxist literature contesting the Western canon focuses on the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 (for example, Rabinowitch 1968 and [1978] 2008; Smith 1983). This body of scholarship demonstrates the democratic potential in the months before and during, as well as in the first years after the 1917 Revolution and the many forces working against its success. We can also point to the 1956 Hungarian protests, the 1968 Czechoslovakia movement and the 1980s Solidarity movement in Poland for examples of attempts to create democratic practices within communism. In the former East Germany, Rudolf Bahro’s *The Alternative in Eastern Europe* (1978) offers a powerful critique of authoritarianism from within and provides a vision of a democratic alternative. Hal Draper (2004) worked with the idea that ‘socialism was a process of complete democratic change’ that could only happen through ‘socialism from below’ and thus argued for a third-way socialism that was neither Stalinism (that is vanguard democracy) nor social democracy (that is representative democracy) (Renton 2004: 7, 19). Yugoslavian thinkers such as Mihailo Marković and Rudi Supek argued for shop-floor democracy that is not simply a function of central planning but that decides ‘all questions of production and distribution’ (Femia 1993: 31). Despite these attempts, direct democracy was not a focus for many twentieth-century Marxists as it throws up serious challenges to top-down central planning and the paramount role of the Party; the more direct participation on the shop floor and the less predictable economic planning from above. Nevertheless, this scholarship challenges the idea that communism is inherently anti-democratic and demonstrates that there was also a deep appreciation for radical forms of democracy within the Marxist tradition. Also in the second half of the twentieth century a thriving scholarship emerged from Marxist historians and philosophers such as Christopher Hill, Hobsbawm, Edward Thompson, C.L.R. James, Marcuse, Horkheimer, Adorno and Jean-Paul Sartre, all of whom pioneered humanist,
open Marxism(s) that recognised the importance of spiritual and cultural values. Along these lines, Marxists critiqued ‘liberal democracy’ for turning people into isolated beings alienated from their social nature (Femia 1993: 20) and argued for the participation of ordinary people (Barber 1984; Bobbio 1976). Other Marxists such as Louis Althusser (1970 and 1972), Ralph Miliband ([1969] 2009) and Nicos Poulantzas (1973) explored questions of the state and its relation to the economy.

In the latter part of the twentieth century, a new generation of Marxists emerged that looked to the world-system and periphery for their inspiration. For example, Immanuel Wallerstein (1974) offers a critique of the Soviet Union when he argues that capitalism operates on a world scale with the politically and economically powerful core profoundly shaping the prospects of the politically and economically weak periphery. In his analysis, cold-war rivalry is no longer understood as a battle between capitalism and an alternative, but rather as Soviet modernisation within the logic of capitalist accumulation. Samir Amin ([1985] 1990) shares Wallerstein’s broad perspective, but has also counterposed the strategy of delinking as an alternative to building socialism in one country in the context of anti-systemic struggles within the global periphery. Amin argues that countries in the periphery must delink from the capitalist system to a degree, in order to achieve development in their national interests. Inspired by 1968 (Wallerstein) and Bandung Third World revolutionary nationalism (Amin), both conclude that, in the light of Soviet authoritarianism, a socialist alternative has to be profoundly democratic.

There has also been scholarship, explicitly on the global South, looking at the way in which Marxism has influenced movements and parties (see Glaser’s and Saul’s chapters this volume; Ismael and ‘at El-Sa’id 1990; Mortimer 1974). Much of this scholarship shows the authoritarian practices of movements in the global South, but also highlights the importance of developing democratic alternatives. For example, Cathy Schneider’s (1995) investigation into the Communist Party of Chile’s attempt to organise shantytowns in Chile’s sprawling townships is an eloquent statement of popular mobilisation from below. There have also been important contributions looking at African socialism and Afro-Marxism that explore the various attempts in post-colonial Africa to chart out socialist paths in varying conditions (Arrighi and Saul 1973; Cabral 1973 and 1979; Fanon 1962; Saul 1990; see also Glaser this volume) as well as important contributions to Marxist theory on the global South from the dependency school that argued that underdevelopment emerged as a result of
global capitalism (Baran 1957; Frank 1967). Many of these scholars were taking on issues of extending democracy beyond the political sphere and beyond the Party by recognising power relations in society.

This more recent scholarship helps us re-imagine the importance of direct democracy in transformative politics as we move beyond the twentieth century’s bifurcated understanding of vanguard versus representative democracy.

**BEYOND BIFURCATION: DIRECT DEMOCRACY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

For twenty-first-century movements such as the World Social Forum, Occupy Movement, Brazilian participatory budgeting and Kerala’s democratic decentralisation, direct democracy is a vital part of constituting visions and practices. Movements around the world increasingly demonstrate their distrust of political and economic leaders as the institutions of representative democracy, and vanguard party politics is losing legitimacy, with headline stories splashed across the world of the 1 per cent’s (as opposed to the 99 per cent) complicity in the corruption of political processes. These movements demonstrate that ordinary people are tired of paying the price of an under-regulated global economy that provides enormous benefits to the 1 per cent, while the 99 per cent live increasingly precarious lives. Movements are increasingly calling on government to be accountable and responsive to people, rather than to corporations. In this context we have seen an explosion of movements across the globe which, while they vary significantly, share in their belief that ‘another world is possible’ through the active participation of ordinary people.

What is meant by direct democracy? Direct democracy (often referred to as participatory or radical democracy) is where ordinary citizens are directly involved in the activities of political (and economic) governance. Unlike representative democracy where elected officials act on behalf of citizens, or vanguard democracy where the party acts on behalf of the people, people participate directly in deliberation and decision making in direct democracy. It is about popular empowerment of ordinary citizens to make decisions and carry through with implementation. Key for direct democracy is the actual participation of ordinary citizens (in other words, direct democracy requires participatory practices). Obviously, participation is crucial for this type of democracy. But what is participation? For some it simply means showing up
to a meeting where citizens are informed about decisions made. For others it means consulting ordinary people about plans, although the power to make decisions lies with the leaders or officials. Neither of these forms are real participation. Meaningful participation requires that ordinary people engage in deliberation, make decisions and very importantly, have the power to ensure the implementation of the decisions (Pateman [1970] 1999). It is government by the people. For direct democracy to have meaning, then, ordinary people must directly participate in and control decision-making processes in the political, economic and social domains and have the power to ensure implementation, which requires access to resources and information. Open and transparent processes are a necessary condition for effective participation. There are examples of weak versions of direct democracy where citizens simply vote yes/no on various initiatives and referendums. There are also strong versions in which citizens directly make decisions about local governance and the distribution of resources.

One of the legacies of the liberal tradition’s (mis)appropriation of representative democracy is that direct democracy is often placed in opposition to it. Yet direct democracy is not a replacement for or competitor of representative democracy, but rather, the two forms of democracy are vital institutional spaces for deepening and extending democracy in society. Direct democracy is appropriate and desirable for local-level decision making, while representative democracy is necessary for complex and large societies in which direct decision making by every member of the polity is impossible for every decision. The two types of democracy should not be seen to be in conflict with each other; rather, direct democracy and representative democracy complement and deepen democratic impulses in each other. Indeed, the aspiration of government by the people is further realised through combining direct and representative democracy.

This recent emphasis on direct democracy was anticipated by South African scholar Rick Turner, who argued for radical forms of democracy within the liberation movement in South Africa. The search for humanist and participatory dimensions of Marxism was articulated by Turner in his The Eye of the Needle (1972). After his assassination in 1978, he became an iconic hero of the liberation movement, but it was only toward the end of the millennium that the ideas embodied in The Eye of the Needle started resonating once again with movements. Turner looked to the importance of imagination, human agency, values and consciousness, which, for him, lie at the centre of social and human transformation. In other words, social transformation and human freedom
only made sense in dialogue with each other as the one could not be attained without the other. He placed worker control and democratic planning at the centre of his understanding of participatory democracy and at the centre of human freedom (1972: 34–47). For Turner, vanguard democracy led by the Party impoverishes human freedom and social transformation.

One of the most famous recent examples of a direct democratic experiment is the Brazilian Workers’ Party’s (PT as it is popularly called) participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre (Baiocchi 2003; Baiocchi, Heller and Silva 2011; Bruce 2004). In 1986 the PT won the mayoral position in the city, but was not a majority in the city council. This led it to innovate. It decided to open up part of the city’s budget for popular participation. It held popular assemblies in neighbourhoods across the city where ordinary people got to decide what the city’s development priorities were. By democratising the allocation of part of the city’s budget, civil society was transformed into a robust arena of citizen participation. Neighbourhood associations increased from 240 in 1986 to 600 in 2000 and district-level popular councils increased from 2 to 12. Housing cooperatives jumped from 11 to 71 between 1994 and 2000 (Baiocchi 2005: 42). The participatory budgeting process not only gave civil society a voice to determine the investment of some of the city’s funds, but also created vibrant institutions in civil society (Goldfrank 2003). This is clearly a model of democracy that is different from vanguard democracy in which the Party dominates, or representative democracy in which elected officials make all the decisions.

Another radical experience in direct democracy is the Communist Party of India (Marxist)’s (CPI[M]) democratic decentralisation campaign in Kerala, India (Williams 2008). While the CPI(M) is a vanguard party in name, in practice it has had to be extremely responsive and accountable to its support base, forcing it to create spaces of mass participation in state governance.7 Kerala became famous in the developing world in the 1980s for its achievements in human development, but had not achieved economic growth, which was necessary to maintain its redistributive programmes. In the 1990s the CPI(M)-led state government decided to try an exciting and novel experiment in participatory democracy (Williams 2008). The state devolved forty per cent of its finances to local government institutions that had to engage in local development planning with communities. Communities were involved in the deliberations, the decisions made and the implementation of development plans. A few elements of the decentralisation project are worth highlighting. First, a significant part of the funds were earmarked for local economic development
projects, mostly through cooperatives. In this way, the state was marrying direct democracy in the political sphere to the economic sphere. Second, the devolution of power and resources was not about bypassing the state, but rather was about using participatory democracy to strengthen (through becoming more accountable and effective) the representative institutions. Third, this shift to decentralisation was not simply a decision of the state, but was integrally linked to the organisational support of the CPI(M). For example, the CPI(M) helped train thousands of community activists, through thousands of hours of training and four thousand pages of training material. The point is that it requires immense organisational support to coordinate grassroots activists. Finally, the project has been successful in galvanising people to become more involved in the development of their communities.

It must be noted, however, that these recent experiments in direct democracy work within representative democracy. It was the PT mayoral election victory that provided the opportunity for participatory budgeting, and the CPI(M)’s involvement in representative democracy that created the space for the radical experiment in direct democracy.

CONCLUSION

What the PT in Brazil and the CPI(M) in Kerala teach us is that radical experiments in direct democracy are part of the twenty-first-century Marxist imagination. What is also particularly noteworthy of these two experiments in direct democracy is that they were spearheaded by political parties. The experiences of Brazil and Kerala suggest that Marxist political parties can transform themselves from vanguard parties to parties that champion direct democracy and representative democracy. While I have focused largely on political democracy, any attempt at achieving democratic, egalitarian, ecologically sustainable, anti-capitalist transformation requires economic democracy in conjunction with political democracy. Thus, the same systems of direct and representative democracy from the political sphere must simultaneously extend into the economic sphere where workers own and control the relations of production and make decisions about how production is organised and about the distribution of surplus. Recent events in Egypt, Syria, Tunisia, Argentina, Bolivia and at the grassroots in South Africa could be described as further examples of such movements in the struggle for political and economic democracy.
NOTES

1 This is not an exhaustive discussion of democracy in either tradition, but rather provides a rough sketch of the way in which liberals and Marxists have viewed democracy within the Marxist tradition.

2 While representative, parliamentary and liberal democracy are often used interchangeably to refer to elected governments or parliamentary institutions, I prefer to use representative democracy to explicitly refer to systems of government in which representatives are elected by the citizenry (universal suffrage) and constitutionalism, division of powers, basic universal and civil rights such as freedom of speech (both written and spoken), the right of assembly and artistic freedom are upheld. Representatives can be there in the role of fiduciary (that is, representing general interests and able to make independent decisions in their best judgements) or delegate (that is, representing particular interests and beholden to decisions made by their constituents) (Bobbio 1987: 47–48).

3 This is not to deny earlier attempts to envision a participatory democratic society. In the 1970s the New Left also pushed the idea of direct democracy, but it did not take root in many of the movements seeking social transformation.

4 There are, of course, important exceptions to this generalisation. The point I am making is that the dominant tradition within Marxism was vanguard democracy and not direct democracy.

5 He argued against the political participation of the ‘electoral mass’, because the ‘masses’ were only capable of ‘a stampede’ (Schumpeter [1942] 1975: 283).

6 The Italian, French and Spanish Communist Parties were the main parties that made up the Eurocommunist movement.

7 Like the SACP, the CPI(M) has factions vying for power. Since the 1990s the grassroots faction has been able to win enough space to shift the party into radically democratic spaces.

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Marxisms in the twenty-first century
