

# BEYOND A RIGHT TO FOOD: ALTERNATIVE OWNERSHIP & PUBLIC POWER

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# WHAT IS A RIGHT TO FOOD?

“A legal obligation to:

1. Respect existing access to adequate food and not compromise such access
2. Facilitate people’s access to food – e.g. through wages
3. Provide food where necessary or desirable.”

(Dowler & O’Connor)

- International precedents exist in varying forms – often constitutional.
- Campaigns growing in parliaments, local authorities and at grassroots.

# DELIVERING A RIGHT TO FOOD

- Sounds OK, but:
  - What food?
    - And for whom?
      - Produced how?
        - And where?
- The real question concerns delivery...
- I set out two envisioned trajectories:

*a Right to Edible Commodities and a Right to Food Systems.*

# 'A RIGHT TO EDIBLE COMMODITIES'

- State-supported food banks or similar food assistance programmes?
- A subsidy to existing beneficiaries in our concentrated and harmful food system... (sounds familiar).
- A painkiller - not a cure... that potentially offsets and obscures fundamental dynamics that are causing hunger and food insecurity.

## ‘A RIGHT TO FOOD *SYSTEMS*’

- A legal bridgehead towards transformational food systems change (hopefully).
- Empowered, financed legally-responsible local authorities driving establishment and protection of direct supply chains in order to meet legal duties.
- Community Wealth Building approaches offer initial inspiration for first steps such as universal free school meals for all ages, as already happens in Finland.
- Joins emergent food provisioning to existing agroecological sites of production?

# SOLIDARITY NOT CHARITY

- Right to Food legislation should give LAs and communities imperative to act but freedom to design their own responses...
- What role, for example, for public-commons partnerships running community kitchens or community-led retail? What space for experimentation?
- And for production and processing, experiences with community wealth building in Preston show capacity for supporting co-operatives...
  - A means of beginning to rebalance food systems power?

## ...A BIT UTOPIAN?

- Local authorities decimated by austerity, indebted food producers or exhausted community activists... how could *this* ever happen?
- Beyond grassroots approaches we must explore how we would leverage state power to tilt the scales in our favour if/when the opportunity arises.
- The question of a Right to Food and approaches to ownership highlights strategic questions we must consider in advocating transformation:
  - How do we approach the state? (who is we?)
  - What makes for *transformative* reform?

## WHY IT'S NECESSARY

- A Right to Food can help recognise the role that food plays in our society as a commodity available only to us through work in exchange for money.
- Attendant historical dynamics of marketisation, enclosure and speculation underpin current agricultural challenges... and impediments to change.
- A gateway to decommodifying our food system? A 'non-reformist' reform? That requires a movement...



# WHY IT'S POSSIBLE

- It is naïve to presume this is imminently possible via parliamentary means...
- But the Right to Food as an idea has the potential to unify workers, producers and campaigners across the food chain.
- Trade unions are championing the idea... For producers the will is there for alternative routes to market, so an opportunity to unify around a demand?
- It is already an idea *out there*... but we have to stretch understandings of possibility and have the right ideas 'at hand'.

**THANKS FOR LISTENING!**

Please feel free to reach out with any further questions on

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