

The Municipal Socialism Game – sample scenarios

Fed-up with the way your town or city is run? Think you have a better idea of what should happen? Here's your chance to try those ideas out. Play the Municipal Socialism Game, an innovative and fun way to think strategically about politics. Join a team of comrades and work out how to change your city. Will you try and take over the town hall. Will you focus on mobilising outside the city chambers? Work as a group to develop your plans for socialist transition but don't be surprised to see them shatter in the face of unexpected events and crises. Warning: this will be serious fun.

Scenarios:

Round one

Trends towards working and shopping from home, provoked by the Covid pandemic, have been having a bad effect on your city's highstreets and centre. Many shops and offices lie empty, commercial rents are falling and urban development models based on rising city centre asset prices look increasingly unviable. One victim of this new environment is a contentious inner-city development. There has been a longstanding campaign against the development, which contains no affordable housing and requires the displacement of current residents. Now the private developer has pulled out declaring that the economics no longer add up. A new developer is willing to step in but are demanding large subsidies from the council.

Round two

Sometime ago a major fire in the river side area destroyed a former warehouse which once housed offices of the East India Company. The redeveloped site includes a small memorial garden which includes a memorial to the Indian Famine and exhibits about the famine's causes including discussion of the role of Winston Churchill. On its opening the local Conservatives have launched a campaign for its removal and now a far-right group are organising a protest with the intention of ripping out the memorial.

Round three

The local university has gone bust. They had borrowed heavily to invest in new buildings that look good in a prospectus but falling recruitment around the pandemic means they can no longer service their debts. The government has declined to step in. The ongoing decline of the city centre had already played a role in making the city less attractive to students but as the university was the second largest employer in the city it looks like the decline will accelerate dramatically.

Round four

The administrators have declared their intention to give the university's campus and estate to a private development firm, but their development plans cause widespread alarm.

The Municipal Socialism Game – Player Sheet

Rules

The aim of the game is to use resources and coordinate between groups in an imaginary city to build towards a socialist transition.

The game is played over four turns lasting ten minutes each, with each turn representing a period of three months. The MCs begin each turn by describing the situation within the city. Players come together to form groups of no more than ten people. Each of these groups is a city. All groups take their turns at the same time, and are unable to collaborate with each other. During a turn, players may select any two resources from the list on the other side of this sheet and give each a task to complete. Players may choose to give both of their resources the same task if they have only one task they wish to carry out. This will increase the chance of success.

A task is anything that could be considered a single project. For example, organising a demonstration, running a series of workshops on eviction defence, producing a website with videos and articles supporting the aims of a strike or setting up a squatted social centre. The MCs may ask players to elaborate on the specifics of a task the players have set for a resource if they feel it necessary to understand how it will work. Once players have described their tasks the MCs will decide how difficult each task would be to complete and assign an appropriate dice roll modifier, ranging from -2 to +2. An additional modifier of +2 is then added if players only gave their resources one task to complete. Players then roll two six-sided dice for each task they are attempting to complete. If the combined roll after the dice roll modifier has been taken into account is 0-6, the task fails. On a 7-9 it succeeds but there have been some unforeseen consequences. On a result of 10+ the task was an unqualified success. After the dice roll, the MCs will elaborate on the success or failure of the tasks and explain how, if at all, the city or its resources have been modified as a result.

At the end of the fourth turn the game ends, and players will discover what has happened to their city after a year of interventions.

The city

You play as a reasonably big city with a population of around 500k including a sizeable migrant population. It is built around an estuary. The city's main employer is the NHS, which has a large teaching hospital based there. The second largest employer is the local university. The council has a small Labour majority and is broadly centrist in its political character.

Resources

A **local anti-racist group** that has been active in the city for some time. They have organised several well-publicised and effective actions against deportations and police brutality

The Flat-pack bunch: Informal name for a group organising on 'flat-pack democracy' principles, attempting to build a cluster of local independent councilors, in order to push the city in a progressive and ecologically sustainable direction.

A **Local branch of Momentum:** They have a fairly diverse and reasonably large membership from most areas of the city and have had a mixed relationship with the city's Labour politicians, backing some and coming into serious conflict with others

An **Extinction Rebellion** group: They are reasonably well resourced and have direct action experience as well as experience of organising awareness-raising stunts.

A reasonably well-organised **student activist group** (a result of previous campus focused struggles, reasonable number of members).

A **Trades Council:** Attracting an older demographic (av. age 61) of dedicated unionists, the city's trades council has proven effective in helping to forge links between workplace unions and organising solidarity events and actions.

A **Community Arts Group** with their own venue: The group is politically leftwing (although a few participants see themselves as apolitical). The venue, which hosts arts workshops but is also used as a meeting and socialising space, has become a hub for mental health activists.

A **local queer newspaper:** A well-run local queer newspaper that is one of the longest running of its kind. Established during the 1980s, it still retains a politically radical edge despite having long-since adopted an advertising model in order to stay afloat. Wide distribution in the city centre and several neighbouring towns, with an online version too.