

Editorial

Neoliberalism and how to end its dominance has been a central concern in *Soundings* since its inception. In this issue, we carry the framing statement for our online manifesto, *After neoliberalism?*, written by the journal's three founding editors, Stuart Hall, Doreen Massey and Mike Rustin.¹ The aim of the manifesto is to focus attention on the nature of the neoliberal settlement, including the social, cultural and political battles that have attended its emergence and maintenance - and those that might help bring about its demise. It argues that mainstream political debate largely avoids confronting the systemic failures that underpin the financial crash, preferring to believe that normal service will shortly be resumed. And as long as this belief continues, political debate will centre on the extent to which state spending should be cut rather than on how to secure a political economy in which all of us have enough to live on, and a society in which the common good displaces profit as the ultimate goal.

As Andrew Gamble notes, Labour saw its vote drop below 30 per cent in 2010, amid a widespread sense that it had been responsible for the economic regime that had brought about disaster, and that it had few ideas for future change. His prescription for a renewed Labour Party has three main elements: a focus on extending democracy and constitutional reform; a rethinking of its ideas about cultural and national identity; and a drive to associate the party with creativity in the economy, especially through green technology. Andrew acknowledges that this is a difficult task but judges that Ed Miliband is taking steps in the right direction. In this vein, the Labour Party Policy Review process can be understood as a welcome attempt to think through the necessary conditions for creating a new economic and political settlement for Labour and the country. We are cautiously optimistic that this will help shift current debate on to more promising terrain for the left.

Natalie Bennett, the new leader of the Green Party, believes that her party occupies the large political space that was vacated when New Labour shifted to the right. And she argues that Labour continues to be too cautious on many issues. For example on education it has not come out against free schools, and its academies policy in many ways opened up the way for current Tory practice. And although

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it could be argued that the Green Party has the luxury of not needing to look like a government in waiting, it is also true that a lingering attachment to a privileging of choice over equality, and to competitiveness as a key way to achieve success, is evidence of the entrenched difficulty of moving away from the New Labour legacy. Natalie herself is not hopeful of real change in Labour, and suggests that the Greens are the way forward for those who seek a sustainable future and social justice.

Paul Mason has no doubts about the depth of the current crisis, and thinks that we are witnessing a global revolt against neoliberalism, especially from young people who believe that the system has failed to secure their future. This has been aided by the communications revolution, which assists the development of horizontal and networked groups. He believes that most critics of this kind of organisation are shaped by a time when there were 'structured, hierarchical movements with a clear counter-narrative and demands'. This time has now passed, and current movements reflect the new realities as well as the nature of contemporary working life - fragmented, short-lived, ephemeral, lacking ties. But in spite of this the social movements are seeking to develop a counterpower within capitalism, and ways of living differently. And given that neoliberalism is indeed incapable of delivering a secure future, it is likely that things will continue to kick off.

We believe that dialogue between such different positions is crucial. It is important - not to say self-evident - that critical politics takes many different forms. There are no easy answers to the task of challenging the dominant consensus, and direct action and campaigns within civil society will play a role in this, as will a diverse analysis and actions by some of the smaller parties. This is by no means to diminish the crucial contribution needed from the Labour Party, without whom there is no realistic prospect for change (or at least not in England).

The next two articles engage with specific issues through analysis that connects political action and winnable change with a wider challenge to current common sense. Paul Salveson argues that John Major's 1993 railway privatisation was driven purely by ideology; the railways at that time were by and large well-run and efficient, while privatisation has seen a rise both in subsidies from the tax-payer and costs to the traveller, as well as failures of safety and maintenance while money is siphoned off rather than invested. Paul then shows how a centre left strategy for the railways could change all this - through a new strategic body, making the constituent parts of the current system more accountable, and the gradual taking back of control

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of franchises as they come up for renewal. This would be combined with a renewed emphasis on community railways and an attempt to wrest control of rolling stock away from the banks, who currently own the lion's share of this most profitable part of the privatised system. In short, Paul shows how an incoming Labour government could transform the railways gradually, without significant costs, and with increased community involvement and popular support, at the same time as making an argument about why profit seeking is detrimental the running of the system.

Deborah Grayson and Des Freedman discuss another area where the left has an excellent and popular case to make - in favour of public scrutiny in the face of powerful media corporations. They argue that the government's response to the Leveson Report - brought into being through campaigning by Hacked Off and *The Guardian*, as well as the political courage shown by the Labour leadership in speaking up for the popular view - will show whether or not the corporations have been able to win simply through the exercise of their lobbying power. They also place ownership at the centre of the debate: democracy needs wider media ownership as well as legal protections (both to protect people against the press and to defend press freedom). Here is another winnable cause that challenges the dominant view.

Elsewhere in the issue, our roundtable discussion on the Olympics explores how deeply the Games were enmeshed in rhetorics of competitiveness, spectacle and private-sector led regeneration. Gavin Bowd ponders whether the new French government will have the courage and strategy necessary to carry out its programme in the face of neoliberal European obstacles. Danielle Allen demonstrates the importance of connectedness to political equality (yet another reason to deplore the apartheid tendencies of Tory cuts to housing benefits). Varun Uberoi and Tariq Modood argue that it is misunderstandings of the meaning of multiculturalism that have been largely responsible for the view that it is in retreat, and that in fact most contemporary leading politicians have made statements in support of inclusivity. Finally Cynthia Cockburn documents the steadfastness and endurance of women in organisations in Northern Ireland, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Israel-Palestine, who battle for peace in the face of overwhelming odds.

This issue has been edited by Sally Davison and Ben Little, the new *Soundings* co-editors. We plan to keep on developing the journal in the critical and pluralist spirit

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it has established over the last eighteen years, and wish to express here our great appreciation for the tremendous contribution to the project that was made by our predecessor and colleague Jonathan Rutherford.



Note

1. The 'manifesto' will be developed over the next year in monthly instalments, freely available online at www.lwbooks.co.uk/journals/soundings/manifesto.html. Extended versions of some pieces will be reproduced in the journal.