Editorial

Hope and experience

The *Soundings Manifesto* project is aiming to be part of an intergenerational dialogue about the best ways to resist neoliberalism and put forward alternative visions of a good society. This issue of the journal, as well as publishing two more instalments in the manifesto, carries articles that engage with and extend its arguments in a number of different directions.

A recurring theme in these discussions has been the continuing importance of left traditions as sources of critical understanding for our current predicament (especially New Left thinking, and Gramscian understandings of hegemony and common sense). These ideas are now being taken up and developed by a new generation, while people who have their own distinctive critical traditions are also bringing their ideas to the discussion. At the same time there has been a renewed interest in history as a source of ideas, in terms of inspiration, lessons to be learned and alternatives to be recuperated.

In this issue Doreen Massey's manifesto instalment analyses the ways in which the language we use to discuss the economy shapes the way we think about it, and reinforces neoliberal values as common sense. Michael Rustin's contribution is written from within a New Left tradition that combines a critical and cultural analysis of capitalism with a focus on the social nature and interdependence of humankind; his analysis of a relational society shows how neoliberalism eats away at the values that sustain connectedness and mutual care.

Tom Crompton's article is written from the perspective of someone who has been involved for many years in the environmental movement and has given much thought to the way in which values are articulated in political discourse. As he argues, the most accomplished politicians - such as Margaret Thatcher - know how to implement policies that, as well as furthering their political aims, also reinforce their values and increase people's sense of identification with their project. The classic examples here are Thatcher's right to buy policies, and her promotion of

popular capitalism through offering up state assets for individual share ownership. As Tom argues, when politicians of the left argue for their policies in terms of neoliberal values - such as competitiveness, labour-market flexibility, choice - they are not only failing to put forward their own coherent alternative values; they are also contributing the further consolidation of neoliberal values as the only possible world view. The aim of this discussion is to make us more aware of what values we are promoting in our campaigning, and to point to the importance of forms of politics that articulate a different set of values.

Richard Johnson's article is an extended riff on finding sources for hope in Gramsci's work. As he points out, Gramsci was a man who wrote for the future even though he spent the last decade of his life in a fascist prison. Richard is arguing for an 'optimism of the intellect' - for 'theories and concrete studies that map out a more hopeful future, yet ground strategy in realist historical analysis'. He points to the importance of a deeper understanding of how political settlements are constructed, maintained and undermined, and of the terrain on which we operate: analysing civil society as a site of multiple forms of contestation can open up our ideas about what politics is and where it is to be found, and suggest ways in which we can work to create a new culture. He also argues that people in Britain today - especially young people - are better educated than ever before, and thus more able to be critical, non-conformist and creative. Aspiration can be social as well as individual, and there is plenty of good sense to be found in popular culture alongside its more commercial side. The real question is how to articulate all this potential into a political project.

Nick Stevenson's revisiting of the long revolution continues this vein of critical optimism. He argues that Raymond Williams's basic conception of a long process of democratic progress that began in the period of the industrial revolution remains an important mobilising idea and myth - a way of offering 'a carefully constructed narrative out of the many other possible ways of reading history'. Setbacks on this road to emancipation should lead not to giving up on the battle, but to renewed efforts to rekindle the spirit of democracy. Nick argues that Williams's emphasis on the voice of ordinary people, and the right of everyone to a dignified and meaningful life, reflects something that is clearly at the centre of current movements of revolt by young people across the globe; and it is also to be seen in the emergence of contemporary ideas about how to live well.

Kevin Morgan takes *The Spirit of 1945* as a starting point for a reflection on

how this high point in left history came about. As he notes, we have a wealth of experience to draw on, and our interpretation of history informs our current practice. Kevin argues that Loach sees 1945 almost as a bubble, a distinct 'moment', something separate from the long traditions of the left that preceded it. This is unhelpful to those of us seeking to recreate such breakthroughs since it offers no understanding of where it came from, whereas: 'through the longer histories of activism on which it depended, through years of swimming against the stream as well as with it, both hope and experience may be registered of how such watershed moments in history are actively made'. But Kevin also points to a more common problem in the telling of this history: the idea that 1945, and the particular form of Labourism that it embodied, were the inevitable result of all that had gone before - and hence the consignment to the dustbin of history of alternative possibilities that might have emerged from the maelstrom of the interwar labour movement. 1945 thus also represents the consolidation of Labour's settled role as part of the political fabric and tradition of the British way of politics. In his subsequent discussion of paths not taken and alternate histories, Kevin on a number of occasions evokes Edward Thompson's sense of all the different ways in which radical politics is constructed from below. (Incidentally, as Nick points out, Thompson also took Williams to task for insufficient attention to how history is made, a point which Williams subsequently took on board.)

The final group of articles shift to a more contemporary focus. Anna Coote and Jacob Mohun Himmelweit put forward a radical suggestion that addresses issues of gender equality, how to live well and what we value. They show that, although it is now normal for women to participate in paid employment, work is still largely based on a male-hours model. Women take on by far the larger share of unpaid caring work, and this leads to over-work as women struggle to combine paid work and caring, as well as to large numbers of women being forced to work in low-status part-time jobs; it also contributes to the under-valuing of paid-for care work, while men's long-hours culture means that they missing out on family life. Furthermore, just as the uneven distribution of time is linked to gender inequality, a culture of excess working hours is linked to one of excess consumption. They argue that the distribution of time should become part of political debate, and that we should be putting forward a norm of working thirty hours a week. This would greatly improve everyone's quality of life and be a big step forward for gender equality.

Editorial

Paolo Gerbaudo discusses the role of young people and horizontal movements in the crisis in Egypt. More than fifty per cent of Egypt's population are under twenty-five, and they have formed a strong centre and identity within the opposition movement. At the time of going to press most of them are supporting the recent army coup. The problems of a simple celebration of 'horizontalism' can clearly be seen here; during the period of Morsi government there was little engagement by the revolutionary youth in the formal political process - a necessary part of moving from resistance to the construction of a new and democratic future. And, equally, the traditional and older left did not show themselves capable of turning themselves into organisations that young people would want to engage with. As Paolo argues, this failure of inter-generational engagement has led to the welcoming of the coup as 'a deus ex machina, a state above the state'; the army has been called on 'to sort out militarily what civil forces could not sort out by themselves politically'.

The intense celebration of the role of digital media in the new social movements (something that Hilary Wainwright points to in her review of Paul Mason's work in this issue) could perhaps be seen a part of the general enchantment with digital media that Richard Maxwell and Toby Miller discuss in their contribution. Richard and Toby document the enormous environmental and social damage caused by the growth of the digital economy, and argue that this receives much less attention than might be expected because of our wider technophilia, and the continuing lure of i-gadgetry. Phones, tablets and the rest are for many people objects of lust and love - the acceptable face of consumerism. Meanwhile the electricity needed to power digital culture takes up a huge proportion of global energy supplies, and people working in electronics supply lines in the global south experience dangerous, dirty and poorly paid working conditions.

Sophie Mayer discusses new sites of contestation, and creative new forms of political engagement, in her discussion of the campaign of international solidarity with Pussy Riot. This has brought about a confluence of different ideas and ways of campaigning - from feminists (including recovered Riot Grrrl traditions), artists, poets, musicians, and civil liberties and free speech campaigners - in a mobilisation that has fully utilised social media and digital communications and produced a new and influential network of protest. Here is a campaign that has brought together the generations in a creative and alternative response to global authoritarianism.

In this issue we also - thanks to Alison Winch - restart our poetry pages. The

aim is to commission politically engaged poetry from different groups of writers. We begin with a selection of three poems from *Fit to Work: Poets Against Atos* (ftwpoetsagainstatos.wordpress.com). These are introduced by Mark Burnhope, who co-edited the collection along with Sophie Mayer and Daniel Sluman. As Sophie writes in the conclusion of her article:

> The poem and the song are the perfect vehicle for protest - small enough to smuggle by hand, learn by heart or send in a tweet, large enough for the whole world to join in.