European alternatives

A roundtable discussion with Marina Prentoulis, Sirio Canos and Simon Dubbins, introduced by Doreen Massey

Doreen Massey: introduction

The first aim of this discussion is to think about what kind of a moment this is. When we began the *Soundings* manifesto, one of the things that provoked us into action was the recognition that, while there'd been a massive economic implosion with the financial crisis, there had been no political crisis, and the ideological hegemony of neoliberalism had been very quickly reinstated as the unquestionable common sense. There was no dislocation in the ideological and the political spheres, though there had been such a massive economic crisis. And that is why there is so much in the Manifesto about common sense and discourse, and the ways in which we think, and the need to change the terms of the debate. Our argument was that there will be no moment of more radical change - change that might affect the balance of social forces and make a difference to the relations of power - unless there is a crisis in the different instances of the social formation. An economic crisis is not enough. You also need a fracturing of the ideological and the political.

But over the last few years there has been gradually emerging a potential crisis in the political - in the formal political structures, in the self-confidence of an establishment that assumes its right to rule. There's been the decline of establishment parties - including in a couple of places the collapse of the old social democratic parties that have moved to the right and submitted to the terms of debate of neoliberalism. And there has also been the rise in 'new' parties - in the UK, the SNP, UKIP and the Greens.

So in the last chapter of the manifesto we tentatively raised the question of the possible emergence - both in this country and more widely - of a potential

crisis of the political. I don't have a definitive answer to that question, but it is at least a question that one feels it is possible to ask at this moment (even in the UK, notwithstanding the recent election). We have seen the election victory of Syriza and the astonishing rise of Podemos in Spain, and these clearly are rattling the forces of the establishment, as is the movement for independence in Scotland. This has had effects. Whatever the outcome of the negotiations between Greece and the EU establishment may turn out to be, one of the most significant achievements of Syriza is a politicisation of the economic. The possibility that there may be an alternative has been put on the agenda. And that's really important, because one of the main bases of the ideological hegemony of neoliberalism is the way in which it removes the economic from political and ideological contest, the way it turns the economic into a matter of technocratic expertise. Remember the (quite recent) era of the technocrat: we had technocrats in Brussels; we had technocrats in government in Italy; we had technocrats in government in Greece - because economics was solely a matter for experts. Hence the troika, and hence, conversely, Syriza's stand of wanting to talk to people in Europe who have a mandate, rather than just to 'experts'. That dominance of technocrats was the basis for TINA - there is no alternative - and the basis through which a lot of the ideological hegemony of neoliberalism was established.

What Syriza, and the looming threat from the even bigger economy, Spain, has done is to open the debate up a bit. As Marina has frequently and eloquently argued in her capacity as a media spokesperson for Syriza, all this is not just a technical matter of economics, it's political. So one of the questions to look at now is whether there is the potential here for engineering a serious ideological challenge. Could this be a moment that is more open, in various ways, than it was when we began to write the Kilburn Manifesto?

I have to say that sometimes, sitting here in England, I do feel a bit removed from all the places where the exciting things are going on. And there are reasons for this. One of the most important differences is that in Greece and Spain, and more recently in Scotland, there has been a history and presence of a relationship between strong grassroots movements and trade unions and formal left party politics. It is a complicated relationship, and it is very different in each place. And it's not always easy, but in all of those places it is very active and it is fundamental.

As we have argued in the Manifesto, that kind of relationship is necessary, both

for any movement towards the left and for any kind of meaningful democracy. We need to be working in both the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary arenas. Of course one of the serious lacks in England at the moment is a lack of that feeling of extra-parliamentary impetus that could feed into something like Podemos or Syriza.

The second theme here is therefore the nature and importance of the relationship between formal political parliamentary structures and social movements.

Finally, one of the most depressing aspects of the current situation in Europe is the way that the debate has been set up as nation versus nation, country versus country. In Europe that was always going to be the case as soon as the structure of the Euro was decided: it put a single currency in place across a set of countries that were riven by uneven development and without mechanisms to cope with that. So, embedded within all the rhetoric of unity that surrounded the Euro was precisely a future that was going to be country versus country.

What's at issue is not nation versus nation but questions of political stance, and of class versus class. It's a question of politics not economics. It's a question not of who will be in and out of Europe but of what kind of Europe we might want to build. And it is for that reason, especially, that we should talk between different countries in Europe on the left. That is why we are so happy to have three people here who work across those boundaries.

Marina Prentoulis: a left populism

What Syriza has already done has been to deliver a very big victory - not just for us in Greece, but a wider victory against neoliberal hegemony and neoliberal discourse. The Syriza victory represented a first breech of European neoliberal discourse, and now we have to capitalise on this victory - not only in Greece but everywhere across Europe, and maybe even further afield. The road has now been opened for a different type of articulation; and in fact one of the biggest problems that we currently face is how the debate is framed. In the mainstream media the debate about Greece is always framed as being about the economy, or, as Doreen mentioned, it is framed as being a question of one country against another - Greece versus Germany. If we allow the framing of the debate as being only about the economy, people switch off - they don't see it as part of their problem, they don't think the debate has anything to do with them, or they think they won't understand it.

When I participated in a discussion on *Newsnight* in February (20.2.15) I was put into debate with a terrible German economist who was presented simply as a German economist, with no affiliation put next to his name, whereas I was presented as speaking from Syriza. Of course during the discussion his affiliation became very clear - but he was presented as an expert. We have to make it clear that the terms of the debate are political not economic. Equally we have to reject the simplistic story of Greece versus Germany - this can be very appealing because Greece has been humiliated, and it is easy to then see it as Germany attacking us again, but this does not help us to find a solution. So there is a lot of work to be done in pointing these things out and working to reframe the debate, in the media, in political work, and within every forum by all those of us who have a chance to write and speak about it.

I want to tell you a little bit about what happened with the social movements in Greece, and how we then moved to Syriza. At the beginning of the crisis in Greece, movements emerged that were similar to those of the Indignados in Spain, and we called these *aganaktismenoi* movements. These protest movements - when thousands of people protested in the central squares - were very heterogeneous, very fragmented and very diverse. There were groups in there that belonged to the left, but of course we did not join in with our party affiliation. And the whole movement decided at some point in an assembly that they would not accept any party affiliated activities or material - no banners, no party literature distributed, nothing like that. It was the indignant movement. You could have someone there who was indignant because he couldn't see any future for his children, or you could have someone who was indignant because they thought that these immigrants had come over and taken our jobs and are part of the problem. You had indignant mothers who could not get access to social services and were afraid of what would happen, or someone whose shop was closed and was feeling the economic pressure.

The movement was very fragmented and heterogeneous, without a collective identity as such. A lot of the people who were writing about what was happening in Greece were inspired by social movement theory; they engaged with debates about a common identity, and contemplated a collective 'we'. But this was not the reality - the movement remained fragmented.

Some colleagues and I also started looking at movements in Spain and Greece. We recognised the movement's heterogeneity, and began to think about ways in which theory could bring to the forefront something from these movements. We

drew on the work of Jacques Rancière to try and understand the movement as a break with the established political order - as a break with the 'police order' as Rancière would have it - and as people demanding an equal voice.

One problem was how to understand the demands of the movement: they were about autonomy, direct democracy, against establishment politics; they rejected representation but demanded a voice. Of course, this was taken up by academics like Hardt and Negri and many others, who discussed these movements as multitudes, as phenomena that would remain autonomous in their multiplicity and constitute something new, without verticality, without hegemony. We rejected that. We wanted to see how this movement would translate into another, social, side. For us, autonomy and hegemony are equally contaminating of each other. At some point there would be representation. Representation is always part - even if it is refused - of these movements. For us the movements registered the need for a new political leadership.

I want to acknowledge here that I and many of the colleagues I'm talking to were students of Ernesto Laclau, and that the papers I'm working on are strongly influenced by his work.[1] I am very sorry that he is not here with us today - that he is not here to see what is happening in Greece. I think that he would have loved that.

Our problem was finding ways of translating what was happening in Greece and Spain into a new hegemonic relationship. We therefore looked at the notion of populism - a political project beyond the traditional left and the right distinction - and sought to make this new project the moment when populism was claimed back by the left. Let's start talking about a left populism without being ashamed about it, and start doing work on it academically and politically, including talking about that in the media. I am still working on looking at how this articulation process was happening through Syriza.

Syriza was part of the movements, but it was not like Podemos - it did not come out of the movements. By 2011 it had already been around for seven years as a radical left coalition - since 2004, when the movements occupied the squares of Greece. And we still understood ourselves as the left. The left was a signifier in our name - Syriza is an abbreviation for Coalition of the Radical Left.

That also means that there are different tendencies and viewpoints within Syriza, some of which regard as problematic the opening that Syriza was offering beyond

traditional left discourse. For a lot of us it was very difficult, very painful, to create this articulatory process of left populism for Syriza. We were part of internal and external struggles at the same time.

Some of the parties in the Syriza coalition were already talking about 'the people', though those that did so came from a number of different traditions - including some Maoist traditions. But for a large minority this was unacceptable - the class signifier had to be central to our identity. For some, using the term 'the people' meant losing a crucial part of the left identity. There were big struggles about that inside the coalition.

For some of us, though, what was important was to articulate a new left - the old left rhetoric has a canon, and frequently does not even feel the need to engage with what is happening around it, and the situation we find ourselves in. We wouldn't have achieved very much if we had stuck to traditional left dogma. Obviously, we wouldn't be in government, but also, we wouldn't have this opening for a new discourse.

One very important internal struggle was over the issue of dissolving the participating parties in Syriza to form a unitary party (which took place in 2013). Coalition had meant that the different organisations within Syriza still had their own place and their own autonomy. So it was a very intense struggle to try to create a unified party based on different tendencies within the party, not on different organisations. In my view, this was something that had to happen.

We are not out of trouble yet, either as a party or as a government. We still don't know what is going to happen in the negotiations, and I am very much afraid that some in our party will have serious objections regarding their direction. There will be intense struggles - not only at the negotiating table but also within the party.

The opening of Syriza beyond the traditional left was also signalled by adding the initials EKM to the party's name (United Social Front); this signified that Syriza wanted to become something more than the small radical left group it had been in 2009, when it had only had 4 per cent of the vote. Instead, the intention was to create a clear antagonistic frontier between the 'people' - who rejected the lending agreements and those imposing them - and the political and economic establishment.

As you know this was later expressed in the electoral victory of Syriza on

25 January, when we won 36 per cent of vote. And since then the government's popularity has further increased. And crucial to this success was the process of opening up Syriza, and constructing a 'people' that was much broader than the left, and could accommodate people that saw themselves as democrats or socialists. This was a very important process.

In Britain it is important to keep arguing that this is an issue for the European Union, and for the people of the union as a whole; and to continue to insist that this has to do with neoliberal policies and specific governance within the EU. Some people want to destroy the European Union, to take us back to the 1940s and 1950s, and here there is a lot of work to be done in Britain. There are new discussions happening. All of us have to work together and insist that these discussions take place in ways that question neoliberal dominance within Europe.

Sirio Canos: the people versus the elite

We are living in absolutely extraordinary times in Spain. Podemos was only created at the beginning of 2014, but within five months, on a tiny and crowd-funded budget, it had won five MEPs in the May European elections. Soon after this, Podemos was already topping the national polls in direct voting intention. Furthermore, it is no overstatement to say that Podemos has radically changed the political arena in Spain. It has put topics on the table that were not there before. And it has also changed the nature of the political discourse - because when you suddenly have a party that doesn't talk to people as if they are stupid, everybody else has to step up their game too. For the first time in years we are having conversations and discussions about politics with actual content. But by far the most important thing is how excited people are about politics. People on the streets, and in bars and cafes, are talking about politics in a way that would have been unthinkable before; there is a feeling that politics matter and that what we think matters to politics.

In order to understand how we got there, it's necessary to have some background, as Podemos is the product of a very specific social and cultural environment, and Spain's recent economic and political history is very different from that of the UK. While in the UK Thatcher was introducing the first privatisation programme, in Spain we were still waking up from forty years of fascist dictatorship, based on autarchic principles. We did catch up pretty quickly though. In the late 1990s and early 2000s

we were already living the neoliberal dream, full on. Speculation on land and property had become the new national sport. Salaries didn't need to go up because credit was so freely available. Everybody felt like they had tons of money to spend. You went to a bank and said 'hey, I live in a skip and my guarantor is a hamster' and you came back with a mortgage for several million - absolutely no problem. Everybody was feeling wonderfully European, modern, and middle-class.

Probably because of that, we didn't notice what was going on in the background, i.e. the gradual dismantling of the welfare state and democracy. In addition to a large-scale privatisation of public assets, all major parties across the political spectrum gradually converted to the new neoliberal faith, accepting the free market and the free individual as facts of nature. The economy was redefined as a mixture of science and religion best left out of political discussions, and democracy came to be presented as the technical management of the country, as something based on consensus, in which two parties alternated in power but agreed on the basics, thus guaranteeing stability. Which is obviously nonsense - if politics is anything, it's having different alternatives, discussions, and debates.

And then - boom - the crisis hit us. The banks were bailed out, and we were left to pay the price: rising poverty, soaring inequality, and atrocious levels of unemployment. This reality check, however, only applied to common people. The elites were still living the dream. In fact, in a textbook example of the application of the shock doctrine, they decided to launch an attack on what remained of the welfare state, and tried to privatise healthcare and education. But they overdid it. And instead of sheepish acceptance, they got an explosion of social movements.

It started in 2011 with the occupation of the squares by the Indignados movement. Here it's important to remember that although the people occupying the squares were a minority, the polls showed that over 70 per cent of the population backed them and identified with their message. A message which was very clear: these politicians don't represent us; and the problems we're facing are not individual, but social ones: they have political causes and political answers. That over 400,000 families have been evicted from their homes by the very same banks that our taxes helped to bail out is political. That 1 in 4 Spaniards are currently living at risk of poverty is political. That one per cent of the Spanish population owns more wealth than the bottom 70 per cent is political. These are not the inevitable consequences of some mysterious force of nature; they are the direct result of years

of policies directed at favouring the needs of the elites over everybody else. This message resonated strongly across society, and led to the flourishing of all kinds of amazing and empowering social movements, from anti-eviction platforms and neighbourhood assemblies, to movements against austerity and privatisations, as well as constant demonstrations, marches and actions.

In the midst of all of this, in November 2011, we had general elections. And the Conservatives, who had been not just the greatest defenders of the cuts, but also by far the most corrupt of all parties, won by an overwhelming absolute majority. You can imagine how disheartening this was, and how it seriously made many of us question what we were doing. What was the point of it all? We could maybe stop the privatisation of one hospital, or a few evictions, but what did it matter, if at the end of the day, the same corrupt politicians get elected over and over again?

But then, when you thought about it, there really weren't any alternatives. The two main parties - the Conservatives and the Socialists - were virtually indistinguishable in their economic and labour policies. The Socialist Party had, in fact, been the party that had decided overnight to amend the Constitution (till then perceived as totally untouchable), in order to make debt repayment an absolute priority, above anything else, including people's wellbeing. As for the small left-wing parties - some of them did have really good policies, but they were mostly too busy fighting each other, and too anchored to their old language and mechanisms, to reach anybody who wasn't already on their side.

It was in this context that Podemos appeared, and started doing things differently. First of all, it connected with social movements in a way no other party has done. Many of the people at the core of Podemos in fact come from social movements, and the demands and lessons from the squares have been incorporated into Podemos's ideas, structures, and mechanisms. For instance, in Podemos, democracy is not just something we talk about, it is something we do, at every level of the structure. Podemos doesn't have any membership, or fees. Anybody, even if they belong to another party, can join one of its locally-held, horizontally-organised meetings, and vote in its internal processes. The structure of the party itself was decided over a four-month-long process last autumn, open to everybody. Anybody could submit documents of political, organisational and ethical principles, discuss them online, and vote for the ones they preferred. Once the documents had been selected, anybody could present themselves as candidates to fill the positions

described in the winning documents. Manifestos are also voted on, as are possible coalitions.

The second thing we've done differently is realising that it's not enough to connect with social movements, because a movement by activists for activists is doomed to marginality. It is necessary to go beyond, to reach that social majority who doesn't get involved in politics or activism but who is still outraged and looking for alternatives. And that means, among other things, using a language that resonates with them.

In this sense, I think we might have a lesson to learn from neoliberalism. Whenever I'm in a train station and I hear a customer - instead of a passenger - announcement, a bit of me dies on the inside. Because it shows to what extent neoliberalism has embedded its own vocabulary and logics into our common sense - something Doreen has written a lot about.[2] This represents a substantial challenge, because, on the one hand, if you use only the existing common sense it is very difficult to challenge the status quo, but, on the other, if you draw on a vocabulary and logics which are completely alien to most people - as many small left-wing parties do - you stay marginal and nobody listens to you. So the way we've been trying to square that circle is to combine a bit of both, and to use terms from the existing common sense but in a transformative direction. There are many words which neoliberalism has emptied out of content - democracy, social justice, citizenship, sovereignty - which can be reclaimed, filled with progressive ideas and used to drive change.

Sometimes, however, new expressions can be useful. One example of this is *la casta*, which literally translates as 'the caste', and it is the term we've been using to refer to the highly corrupt political and economic revolving-door elite. This is a concept which already existed in Spanish society but didn't have a name, and the proof of that is how quickly it has spread. It's been like gunpowder. Since we started using it, even the conservative corrupt politicians it describes are using it to insult each other. It's absolutely incredible. It's a tiny, but important, victory - because it means we're starting to define the terms of the discussion.

This focus on terminology and narrative has also involved ditching the metaphors of right and left. This might surprise some of you, but Podemos doesn't define itself as a left-wing party. And the reason we don't is because right and left, while useful labels in certain analytical contexts, no longer help to understand the

political articulation of Spanish society. They've become a bit like football teams: colours which you support by family tradition or inertia, but which do not mean much in terms of content. Not only that, but they actually reinforce the status quo, as they split people along predictable lines, and prevent the formation of a social majority strong enough to actually challenge things.

The real division now is not between right and left, but between top and bottom. As the social movements have demonstrated, there is an overwhelming majority in Spanish society, coming from across the political spectrum, who agree on certain key points: that institutions should work for the people they supposedly represent, rather than for a tiny privileged elite; that decisions about our communal lives should be taken by democratically elected institutions, not unaccountable powers; and that the economy should always be at the service of democracy, not the other way round. It is this majority we need to represent and articulate. Because the real battle here is not one between right and left, but between decent people and privileged elites, between democracy and oligarchy. Instead of focusing on old divisions which split us, we've decided to focus on contents, policies, and principles that unite us.

As I said at the beginning, we're living in extraordinary times in Spain. The financial crisis exposed the existence of a chasm between the tiny ruling elite - both political and economic - and the majority of the population. Then the social movements, beginning with the Indignados, turned what had been seen as individual problems into political ones: they articulated that chasm as a crisis of representation and legitimacy of institutions. But that wasn't enough. It didn't matter how much we shouted from below, if there was nobody at the top willing to listen. So we needed a political tool capable of taking those demands to institutions. A political tool that could do more than simply connect with social movements - one that could reach beyond them, to that majority that does not normally get involved in politics. That is what Podemos is.

Simon Dubbins: working together against neoliberalism

In some ways I come from a very different political culture. As trade unionists we get too few occasions to really engage in this type of discussion, because we're usually too busy dealing with the day-to-day stuff. In that respect, I really appreciate being part of this discussion.

I should start by saying that when Syriza won the election in February we immediately issued a statement from Unite, welcoming their victory and arguing that it had reinvigorated feelings of hope for millions of people across Europe. And we have been following what is going on in Greece extremely closely. And I'm proud to say that, against some resistance, including from a lot of our European colleagues, we pushed to get a big delegation there when, under the previous government, Greek shipyard workers were in danger of being jailed simply for taking action about unpaid wages.

Why is this? Because, basically, neoliberalism has been rammed down our throats for such a long time now, and it is what all of us are facing every day. It's there in the outsourcing of our members' jobs, in the privatisation battles that we're constantly facing, in the attacks on our pensions, in the squeeze on wages. It's driving the whole issue of precarious work. Our members live it day in and day out, and our union is on the frontline of trying to push back against what is happening, and against that whole ideology. And we recognise the international nature of that battle.

It's very important that we have a broad understanding of what's going on internationally, and where the whole neoliberal drive originated from. That other 9/11, which is so rarely talked about these days, is the day in 1973 when Pinochet came to power in Chile. That can be seen as opening shot of the international neoliberal campaign to reverse the Keynesian consensus. Everybody had thought for a long time that this type of ideology was discredited, but its supporters had hidden away in the Chicago school. People like Friedman and Hayek were nurturing a new generation of supporters, and they got their chance with Pinochet. There was a vicious and brutal attack: as is often the case, extreme violence was used in order to push through the ideology.

This campaign was rolled out through other dictatorships in Latin America: Reagan and Thatcher were among its keenest Anglo-American supporters. Neoliberalism was also rammed through in Eastern Europe and some of the former soviet republics at the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall, and here we are now in the European Union, which in the past has been seen as the bastion of social democracy, embarking on vicious attacks on people's living standards via the Troika - not just in Spain and Greece but also in Portugal, Ireland and Italy. It's the same approach that informs the UK government. Here and everywhere, we all know the ideology, and the moves that they make, and we all know what the results are. Growing

impoverishment, growing difficulty, growing inequality. It never ceases to amaze me what a system they've managed to build - one that so systematically sucks up so much of the wealth that is produced, putting it into the hands not just of the one per cent, but of a fraction of that one per cent.

We are in a very challenging time. There's no doubt, from the point of view of the trade union movement, that organising is more difficult now than it used to be. The environment has changed. Some of the strongholds we had in manufacturing are no longer there. Organising people on temporary contracts is much more difficult. The whole environment is much more hostile.

But not everything is doom and gloom. Some of our work is not known as well as it might be: for example the networks of shop stewards that we have built around multinational companies, often based on European legislation, are much more developed now than they were twenty or thirty years ago. We have reps that are linked with their European brother and sister shop stewards in two or three hundred companies. That means we are starting to be able to react much more effectively than we used to be. We have carried out dozens of global campaigns against multinationals, and it's just unfortunate that I don't have time here to list and go through them all. We have sought to hold multinationals to account, and we have been able to get a grip on them. And it is critical that we get hold of multinationals and tie them down, because that is the infrastructure around which this global ruling class now operate. That is why we need to embed ourselves in these international structures, and expose what they are really doing.

There is a caveat: it is easier for us to get to grips with manufacturing and service multinationals that it is to get a grip on finance capital. So, the financial transaction tax which many governments have signed up to is excellent - but it's only a tiny start, and we need to go much further and get real control over finance capital, if we are going to, at some point, be able to defeat the whole neoliberal agenda.

I'd like to touch a little more on Latin America, a continent where our union has tried to play a role. If there is a region at the moment that has been bucking the trend of neoliberalism, and asserting that an alternative is possible, it's Latin America. In the past many of us were involved in the Chile solidarity campaign, but now it's Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia. Their people have dared to buck the Washington consensus and say, no, the oil is ours and we will use it how we see fit. The gas is ours. The water is ours. We will build pensions, we will build

welfare states and we will work in that direction. And - you know what - the world hasn't ended and in fact economic growth in a lot of those countries has been extremely good. Of course there have been problems - and one of the reasons is that their efforts have been deliberately destabilised by an alliance between western government and local elites. But the alternative is there, and we have been trying to get our members to understand how important and how significant that is.

So: what is to be done? Some of it is not new. It's not rocket science. It's what we've always had to do. It's about organising, educating and agitating. We need different methods these days. We need to engage in different ways. We've had the disaster of our traditional allied parties - the social democrats, the Labour Party - and that partly explains many of the tensions between Unite and other trade unions and the Labour Party: the party that we fund and support. I will still be out knocking on doors trying to get a Labour Party elected in May, but don't believe for one moment that that is without a bloody great deal of frustration and annoyance at some of the stuff we are still having to put up with.

I want to finish with a comment on the relationship between the union movement and social movements. I know it can be awkward. It's not been the easiest one. I know from colleagues in Spain that the relationships between the unions and Podemos have not been easy, and I think it's the same in Greece as well. For example we've been too slow as a movement to get involved with the Occupy movement, and to embrace some of its activists and ideas. So there is a lot of difficult work to do, but the direction of travel has got to be to work more closely together. The struggles of the union movement are the struggles of the social movement.

I think what has been difficult sometimes for trade unionists, including myself, is that we are rooted in structures. We tend to think in regional committees, sector committees and all of that. And then when we encounter Occupy - I'll never forget going down there with some shop stewards, and the first thing we said was 'can we speak to whoever is in charge here?' - and they said, 'nobody's in charge here', and we said 'what do you mean? - you must have an executive or a committee or something'. So it is really difficult in that respect - getting to grips with the idea of completely open meetings and no party membership and so on. Overcoming those types of challenges is hard work and I would say that we need to be more flexible and more dynamic and try and engage.

But the flipside of that is that there is also something to be said about the stability

we have got as trade unions. Despite Thatcher, despite everything, we are still here and we are still connected to the workplaces - and my colleagues and I have no other agenda with the social movements than to try and support them, and help them link up with others who are in struggle, and help form links with that broader movement.

There are a lot of difficulties in the European trade union movement as a whole at the moment. Basically there are differences of approach between the Nordic countries - Germany, Austria and the Netherlands, who are not as hit by the crisis - and the Southern countries and the UK (I think the UK has in many ways got more in common with the austerity-hit countries of the south), and we need the Northern countries to engage more. But it's not the easiest job in the world to persuade them of this. There are some quite sharp discussions and exchanges going on. Here I find it interesting - and I constantly repeat this to some of our more Eurosceptic people in the union - that in continental Europe I don't hear a discourse about leaving the European Union at all, the discourse I hear is about creating a different European Union.

And I think that we on the left should not be getting into discussions about leaving the European Union, we should be thinking about changing the agenda and stopping neoliberalism, and creating a Europe for everybody. Europe needs to learn from its history. We played with nationalism at our peril and we will pull this continent apart again at our peril. And that's why I still have problems with some of the discussions on Scottish independence. For me, we have to ask ourselves if breaking off and forming smaller countries will make us more able to deal with global capital? To deal with multinational companies? I'm not convinced that countries fragmenting and getting smaller, as we've seen within Europe, is really the answer. I think we need more powerful transnational structures that we control, and which in turn can try to control global capital.

This is an edited version of a discussion that took place at the After Neoliberalism conference in February 2015.

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Notes

1. For an appreciation of Ernesto Laclau's writing, including on populism, please see David Slater, 'Ernesto Laclau (1935-2014): an appreciation', Soundings 58.

2. See Doreen Massey, 'Vocabularies of the economy', in Hall, Massey and Rustin, *After Neoliberalism*, Lawrence & Wishart 2015. Also at: www.lwbooks.co.uk/journals/soundings/pdfs/Vocabularies of the economy.pdf.