

Hope underpins the economics we need, but what should i..

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I took part in a [fascinating event organised by Philosopher's Football](#) on Saturday, chaired by my friend Andrew Simms. I confess it felt a bit like a Green New Deal workshop but we were joined by Danny Dorling, Lindsay Mackie and an enthusiastic group who discussed Corbynomics v Scroogeconomics. Having said which, party politics was pretty much ignored during the afternoon.

What was discussed was how the economic narrative can be changed. Urgency was added to the debate by the realisation that another economic crisis now appears very likely. The issue is not if this will happen, but when. As Danny Dorling put it, rather well I thought, the next crisis will also be different.

His analogy was the world wars. The First World War could be seen (rightly or wrongly does not matter since the message was believed, which is the critical point) as a mistake meaning that those who led the country were forgiven. When the Second World War happened those who were sent to fight it would not forgive their parents for being so naive as to believe the country's leadership after 1918 and so let world war happen all over again. Change had to happen as a consequence and when it came that change must have seemed incredible to people who had suffered the indignity of the General Strike, the near demise of the Labour Party, Jarrow, the mass unemployment and what went with it all. So the question is, how do we prepare for this next crisis?

Policies were discussed. If I am honest many of the themes will be fairly familiar to readers here so I am not going to dwell on them. I do instead want to muse on the more existential issues discussed.

General discussion began with reference to the cursed bankrupt household analogy beloved of the Right, but rapidly moved on to have a very largely positive tone.

The value of living as individuals, households and businesses in community was emphasised. In that context one person's austerity is another person's loss of income.

The recognition that we do have a functioning state, albeit one that is being dismantled, was stressed. It is, after all, not that what we want is either untried or found

to be wanting: of course the state needs improving and its accountability has always been open to question, but the evidence is all around us that what we want works. It is just being deliberately prevented from doing so.

And the power of markets may not be as great as we think. For example, if tax havens are the outpost of neoliberal power then they have, to an extent, been tamed. Campaigning can deliver change.

That said countervailing power needs to be preserved: trade unions need to be recognised for the massively important roll they have to play in society, and even be cherished. Much of what they do is little noticed but vital to protect people when they feel vulnerable.

What we did not spend as much time on as hoped was monetary and banking reform. That will need to be addressed another day. But what was really interesting was how optimistic it was possible to feel.

I would like to put that in context. Quite literally during the course of the discussion I got an email to which I referred during the event. It was sent in response to my blog in the Contemptuous State and said:

Having just read 'Contemptuous Government', the latest in a longish line of your blogs which I have read, how do you appear to be so positive and upbeat? Is it a matter of courage and that Churchillian phrase about 'believing in the justice of our cause'?

I admit I am not always upbeat. Sometimes I am just very annoyed, but my natural pessimism (and I do, of course, have some) is matched by a belief not just in the justice of the issues that I write about but also in the fact that those who argue as I do are simply right. I do think the world works broadly speaking as I describe it. Evidence has suggested I am not bad in forecasting outcomes based on those ideas. And I do think that people are naturally empathic and so do care.

I do not pretend that this means they believe in equality, but many of the arguments on what equality means are in any event deliberately spurious constructs, as Danny Dorling pointed out during the session. Rather I believe that people do have an innate sense of fairness. Watch a group of children and that is obviously true: even when they are being unfair there is an awareness of the fact.

In that case my optimism is based on a belief in people and that, fundamentally, most are and want to be good the vast majority of the time. What is more, I think most know that being so is good for them as well as others.

I will be candid, I see the teachings of neoliberal economics as a corruption (even a perversion) of this natural state. The greed that it says drives us does not, I think, do so when sufficient has been achieved. It has taken the invention of the one and only

industry in the history of humankind dedicated solely to the creation of unhappiness (otherwise known as the advertising and PR industry) to promote the myth that we are never satisfied, at quite extraordinary expense to both people and our planet.

And that advertising industry has been created by those wishing to ensnare humankind in ever accumulating debt that literally enslaves it.

I do believe that we can, and will, break these snares.

I think it will happen peaceably.

And I think it will be liberating when it occurs.

On the other hand, I accept that, as yet, the critical mass to deliver a tipping point has not been achieved.

If I can help deliver that tipping point, then I will carry on. This is already one of the longest running blogs of its type. I have no intention of giving it up any time soon.

But there is a question, and it is an important one that I have not resolved as yet. We know austerity is designed to crush us. But what is the name of the system we want?

It's not socialism, which is materialist at its core and so cannot resonate in the twenty first century.

It's not sustainability either - because I feel that too negative by being too focussed on resources and not human potential.

It can't be enoughness. I want more than just enough.

Is it durability? That embraces consistency, dependability, the freedom from fear, the wise use of resources, support for personal robustness, and more.

Or is it something else?

Suggestions welcome.