

Interview

THE NEW POLITICS OF ASSOCIATION: An Interview with Maurice Glasman

Neil Turnbull

NEIL TURNBULL [NT]: One of the focal interests of *RO:TPP* is the issue of the wider political ramifications of the so-called ‘theological turn,’ especially its implications for the philosophical—we might even say the metaphysical—foundations of the Left. According to many contemporary philosophers, we are currently witnessing a shift away from a kind of simple-minded, ‘progressivist’ view of history, towards a more complicated, perhaps even paradoxical, conception of the modern historico-political landscape in which the insights of theology are becoming important. What kind of transformation to the philosophical foundations of the Left seems to be taking place at the moment in your view? Specifically, in relation to this I would like to ask you about your understanding of what has become known as the ‘politics of paradox.’ What do you understand by this term, and why do you think it’s so important for the Left to understand its politics through that particular conceptual prism?

MAURICE GLASMAN [MG]: First of all, the ‘politics of paradox’ would not have been so pronounced in the work that I and my colleges do had it not come up in the conversations that I have had with John Milbank. I want to acknowledge the important role that John has played in developing and facilitating this whole engagement—as has Radical Orthodoxy more generally. I am pleased and

honoured to be interviewed by you and I hope that there's a possibility of a genuine, constructive, and long-term engagement in relation to this.

To answer your question, the paradox I am referring to is twofold. The first part is to move away from what I call 'mentalism,' which is the exclusive concern with rational thought in relation to politics—and to understand that real politics always involves clusters of rationally incompatible and seemingly contradictory (yet, politically vibrant) relationships that in fact give political ideology genuine popularity and meaning in everyday life. Those societies with the strongest democracy have the greatest liberty; it is only philosophers who see this as a contradiction.

So what I'm arguing, in relation to the politics of Labour, is that Labour has always been both secular *and* faith-based. It always had a view of the polity—whether it should be freedom of association or whether people should have free democracy—as based upon a very strong conception of the Christian life. And in another paradoxical way, Labour is the only political institution in Britain that healed the Reformation. It was an institution through which Catholics and the Low Church could come together in a politics for the common good. Another way of talking about this is that Labour has always been simultaneously patriotic and internationalist. Now, the idea that you narrow it down to one conception or movement is the problem of philosophy—particularly liberal philosophy, which has a legal constitutional conception of politics that is divorced from action, divorced from contestation, and has become increasingly rationalist. So paradox is both a genuinely truthful way of understanding politics and a much deeper way of understanding normal politics than conventional ideological formulations would allow; it also allows for a genuine renewal, I think, of Labour politics that is much truer to its traditions and enables much more unusual ideological formulations to take place. Above all, it is the paradox of the ancient and the modern. So if I say, paradoxically, that a modern politics has to be

rooted in ancient values, only a paradoxical formulation could comprehend what that means. We are sitting here in parliament, the idea that the Lib-Dems and the Conservatives have put forward for P.R. for the House of Lords; well it's just a desecration really. But a paradoxical politics would see the need for a democratic renewal alongside ideas of vocation and faith.

So paradox is absolutely vital. This is not about principles or even values; it's about tradition, it's about a general orientation, it's about resistance to the domination of capital, fundamentally, and also resistance to the domination of the rationalist state. So it's trying to conceptualise the social in a political way and therefore 'the paradoxical' is absolutely essential for actual sure action because it enables you to bring together people for common good without requiring ideological tests. Paradox is a neglected understanding within the discipline that is rebuked by any rational reductive analysis of what politics is. Simultaneously it's a way of being always open to other people and not excluding them because you have a difference of view in trying to rework positions. It is to encompass disagreement and energy.

NT: Is this a peculiarly British idea? Or is it a political universal?

MG: Hmm, that's a difficult question. Well you know, if you look at France sadly they declared war on paradox a long time ago, maybe during the French revolution, and it's been pretty much downhill ever since. I do not share John's affection for Foucault, for I see his problematic as deeply rooted in a very rationalist and kind of morally pure philosophy. You know, there's 'big problems' with that. French philosophy, in its more contemporary manifestations, has had some paradoxical moves but on the whole, you know, French thought is rationalist. I think Germany became fearful of paradox because there it has combined some very ugly political matters. Thus Germany became very sceptical of paradox for obvious reasons, good reasons, because it became associated with an authoritarian irrationalism. Now obviously I put paradox in

opposition to rationality, to reason. However, I believe in a *reasonable* politics that can understand opposing views and how they could be meaningfully held in a kind of civility. So, Germany hasn't been very paradoxical for a long time; America as an optimistic rationalist liberal progressive country is constitutionally anti-paradoxical—that's not to say that the music isn't fabulously so; I love jazz, which you know is obviously a fusion of folk and high art, and all of that. So I do think there's a peculiar link between the English political tradition and paradox, as represented in our institutions and in our common law and in the fact that we as a nation developed this common language and in the fact that parliament was always simultaneously democratic and hierarchical. We're kind of used to this stuff. I think the Italians are too.

NT: This may strike some as though you may be articulating something of an anti-philosophical position—as for most western philosophers paradox is just an irresolvable contradiction and intellectually an absurdity. But at the same time there seems to be an aspect to your work that's about recovering the Aristotelian dimensions of politics in a shift away from Hegelianism. Do you think you could say a little bit more about that? And why you think Aristotle is so important?

MG: I don't want to get into an outright objection to Hegel. There's some really genuinely interesting work being done there. Or a rejection of philosophy. But there is a polemic here against a certain form of rationalist abstract philosophy that has become really strong in the analytical tradition in Britain and the United States—most particularly in political philosophy, which I think has become a part of constitutional law and offers little more than an idea of what are the acceptable limits of politics. You could spend a lifetime trying to smuggle stronger synthetic notions of the good into their thin analytical framework—and you know Rawls said that “the right’ draws the line but that ‘the good’ makes the point.” I don't think that anybody has been making ‘the point’ for a very long time, so this mode of philosophy feels kind of pointless to me. In that sense

there's a very strong polemic against abstraction and against a certain way of doing philosophy, but that is not to be confused with an anti-philosophical position and neither is it to be confused with a relativist, postmodern, arbitrary—however playful—position which ignores the truth that exists in the world, the realities of power, the realities of humiliation, exploitation and oppression—which I hold to be real relational things. I would go further and say that contemporary philosophy has no conception of sin; what you get is that the most objectionable thing about political philosophy at the moment is the general conclusion 'wouldn't it be great if everybody was like us'—which is why they can't they look at the world and their own power within it. So there's an arrogance in contemporary philosophy that I don't like.

Also there's the path of reason against rationality which is another part of this story—that things are true! But truth is not exclusively about facts; it's about plausible stories that are rooted in reality. So the Aristotelian route is very important—there's a bit of a disagreement here between me and John on Plato. I think that the historical reality of the Platonic legacy has been in a kind of abstract, arbitrary removal from the world, 'the cave,' and a starting point from outside lived experience and ethical learning. So I root myself very strongly in Aristotle. Alistair MacIntyre is a very important philosopher for me inasmuch as he incorporated Aquinas into the Aristotelian tradition—which I think was very important in several ways, particularly in minimising Aristotle's absolute love of power—which I think is a very big problem. Aquinas' conception of Christianity has manifested itself in the enormously important role that Catholic Social Thought plays in my thought and in Blue Labour generally. But most of all because it's based on reasonable assumptions about the nature of the person; the person flourishes only in strong intermediate institutions that are based on certain forms of ethics and vocation. Also drawn from Aristotle is a certain conservatism of dispositions as regard status and the limits of markets. So my

position is not anti-philosophical at all *if* philosophy is viewed as a tradition of trying to make reasonable statements about the world that we're in and how we should live.

NT: That takes me onto the question of the significance of Christianity in your thinking. As you know, in the 20th century Christianity, if you look at its overall political trajectory, sided with the Right against the Left—sometimes for good reasons, because of what the Left was trying to do. Do you think that times have changed now? Is a re-alignment of the Left with orthodox Christian institutions is possible today?

MG: Oh certainly. That's fundamental. I've written about this, on the reconciliation of citizenship and faith (particularly concerned with the church). You mention for 'good reasons.' Obviously the Christian objection to the Left was that it was based on a soulless modernism that worshipped technology and power and that despised traditional institutions of love and solidarity. I think that when we look now, the Christian critique of Marxism was more or less right. There was terrible sin, wickedness, and evil committed by the Soviet Union that should never be forgotten. The abandoning of the dead in Siberia—I try to think of it every day. When I'm involved with polemics with the Left I urge them not to step back from this just because they improved literacy and built a lot of bridges—that doesn't really make up for it. There was also a trace of that in Fabianism—there was a certain form of eugenics, a certain form of sort of scientific know-all authoritarianism and I think that affects the Left right across the board. There was also a certain belief in a very facile conception of scientific—and social scientific—superiority; if you know the way that history's going then that gives you the right to rule over people and be very cruel. So I just want to honour the Christian and particularly the Catholic critique and recognise its importance. But then there was a terrible thing in the Christian support of fascism. That was also wicked. In terms of the Lutheran Church in

Germany there was its absolutely despicable relationship with Nazism and its support for the rich and the privileged. Also, although I feel the Catholic critique was fundamentally right, Catholic politics has been fundamentally wrong—well there you go, there's another paradoxical position for you! However, Christianity has a tradition and a conception of the person that is capable of love, capable of loyalty, of faithfulness and responding to kindness. The whole idea of loving institutions and loving relationships is rooted in the fundamentally Christian conception of the person; it holds that the person is capable of good and bad, is capable of wickedness and grace, and that these things are true. This is a very real, true conception of the person; it is one that maintains life isn't just individual martyrdom because to flourish a person needs an institutional arrangement that facilitates the good, and this must take place in a world constituted by power and by sin. The church has great things to say about the essentially social, creative, loving nature of the person in a world of sin. This is the foundation point for the Labour tradition. I've said many times, and it's important, that the most important person in the history of the Labour movement is Jesus. That's not a religious statement, that's a historical statement. If you look at the Labour movement, the idea that you defy the power of the market and the power of the state through the sheer power of association with others in pursuit of the good is a fundamentally Christian idea. You know Jesus had the apostles; he was the son of a carpenter. So the figure of Jesus actually was massively inspirational for the labour movement in Wales, in Scotland and in England. In the North it was overwhelmingly a Catholic Jesus, in the South it was overwhelmingly a freeborn English Jesus. But the key idea here is that through association with others you are not defined by the existing definition of power. Now that is a huge element of the Christian tradition of social action and something that the Left should actually have massive respect for.

NT: How do you deal with the question of the relationship between politics and modernity? One of defining orientations of the Left has been an embracing of the modern in order to find a way of dealing with its diremptions, its existential fractures and so on. Historically, the Left has advocated ways of living with these things in ways that are ‘progressive’–‘forward moving’ in historical terms. A lot of people on the liberal left have complained that you are anti-modernity–engaging in a reactionary politics of nostalgia; a backward-looking kind of politics that doesn’t really embrace the modern but effectively flees it. How would you respond to that particular charge?

MG: Okay, nostalgia is another form of wickedness because it sentimentalizes the past. But nostalgia’s twin is modernism, a modernism which believes that we do not have a history and that we do not emerge from relationships and traditions of thought. This is a modernism that despises the continuity of things through time and believes that you’re constantly in a revolutionary moment of beginning again. And this is where the paradox lies. In order to have a genuinely relevant modernism you have to have an appreciation of the ancient institutions that shape that. What is the most successful economy in Europe? It is the German economy. It has the most high-end, value-added, productive sector, and when you look at the German economy one of the key institutions is a genuine vocational economy. There market regulation is actually restricted by guild membership; belonging to particular parts is an absolutely central aspect of the apprenticeship/journeyman/master model. These are the ancient medieval institutions described, for example, by the Labour leadership in 1995 to 97 as ‘Jurassic,’ and that were bound to be swept away. It was called the ‘German problem.’ It was Christian Social Democrats who devised the basis for this in the post war consensus. This was actually a medieval corporative model where labour and capital were represented on the boards of companies. For the Left this was class betrayal. For the right this was an unbelievable obstruction to the

free movement of capital on labour and management's right to manage (you can remember this language very well from the Miners' Strike). So in Germany, there is a very strong vocational element, a very strong balance of interests in corporate governance element and also regional banks, which you're not allowed to lend outside the region or the county that you're in. Yet this has produced the most successful and sustainable form of modern capitalism.

So the reaction of all forms of revolutionary modernists, whether they be economic liberals or whether they be modernist art critics—of which we know many—is a despising of tradition and the reasonable nature of tradition, and a rejection of the very reasonable statement that the future is going to be built on a reassembly of the inheritance of the past (and it's not going to be delayed, writing on a tabula rasa). The first response to forms of revolutionary modernism is to show their contempt for the beliefs of ordinary people. And that's exactly where I'd like to be, showing a love of and reverence for meaning. We need to recognise that modernity is constituted by working with what we constantly inherit, not a revolutionary dramatic idea of originality as something absolutely new but a combination of previously disconnected forces.

NT: Since the 1970s a lot of the intellectual innovation on the left has come from what you might call 'theory'—with a capital T, what we might dignify with the term 'the Theoretical.' A lot of this had its roots in the work of Althusser—but from him you get Foucault and the whole postmodern turn and, of course, the recent proliferation of many, many different social, political, and cultural theories. I think this engendered the *Marxism Today* moment in the 1980s and 1990s, which was very influential in informing a lot of the cultural politics of the New Labour era. What do you think about that particular moment? You seem to be saying that the Left should draw its inspiration from history and not from theory. How would you respond to those who try to make the case for it being the other way round?

MG: Do I believe that theory or philosophy on its own holds the answers? No. There's got to be a relational approach to disciplines. For me, much of this moment was the return of an egotistical romanticism where great thinkers believed that they were going to reconceptualise the world. I think that the judgement on that that will be pretty low grade on the whole. There were obvious contradictions and problems in Althusser. Specifically, what was his epistemological position and how could he have an understanding the whole? The Frankfurt school, which ended up in a sort of Kantian/Habermasian position, was always a form of cultural criticism rather than real political engagement. I don't know if the lifeworld is really going to yield too much, because the world is always constituted by power and you've got to find strategies of resistance. You can do this by the rehabilitation of Aristotle via Macintyre. Polanyi is also an enormously important thinker for me because he has a conception of capitalist commodification—which is a crucial theoretical insight (lacking, by the way, in the vast majority of the people which you were referring to). He recognised that capitalism operates as a system of power that tries to turn human beings into commodities. Democracy and Christianity are the two fundamental ways in which human society has resisted that move. Now that's a historical position and a theoretical position and an orientation towards practice. So theory is a friend, a partner, and a guide—at best an orientation of people in the world who wish to act in fellowship with others in order to make the world a better place. It's not about totality. The whole yearning, “if you can't have totality then what you have is postmodernism,” this is what I call the idiot dialect: if you can't have it all you've got nothing. This is no way to make a marriage work.

NT: I would like shift the discussion a little now and ask you to talk a little bit about your ideas on economics, especially its relation to the idea of the 'good society.' This question emerges with a vengeance after 2007/2008. Given the

likely sluggishness—at best—of the economy in the medium term, how do you think that the politics of Blue Labour translates into a model of economic growth or even a model of economic dynamism that might deal with this particular situation and is compatible with the idea of the good society?

MG: Just to say that the whole world begins in the economy. It's not that politics is secondary; politics is fundamental and very important. But it's based on a fundamental theoretical orientation that says that the economy is not something entirely separate from politics. This returns to what I was just saying about commodification—that a capitalist political economy is a threat to human existence because it wishes to turn human beings into commodities, both in terms of consumption and in terms of their role in the productive process. To separate politics from the economy is a mistake, a mistake about production and a mistake about consumption, too. It's a mistake about production because knowledge, skill, innovation, and growth are built on association. The first thing to say here is that the Blue Labour position is first and foremost a political economy. The politics flows from Aristotle, but so does its political economy. It's Aristotle with a big twist of Macintyre thrown in, but it's also Aristotle with a big twist of Polanyi thrown in. Also, there is a very strong respect for Hayek in this position, in that there was this socialist calculation debate in the 1920s; here you had socialists arguing essentially that if you develop a big enough computer you could put in all the data and you could predict what peoples wants and needs would be. You could plan the economy on that basis. Hayek said well, hang on, this is a mistake about prices and the discovery process given by prices and our legal order. I'm a member of that dissident left-wing tradition that thinks that Hayek won that debate and that millions of different decentralised decisions made by people on local knowledge and tacit knowledge are absolutely incapable of being modelled, are incalculable. This is part of the critique of the state in relation to the sole resistor to the market order.

NT: And this is another aspect of your anti-rationalism?

MG: It's anti-rationalist but reasonable. Hayek's position is reasonable because it's true. Therefore we have to work within constraints and limits and a certain contempt of humility, which Hayek uses but no other economic liberal uses. That leads to a position of the de-commodification of human beings and land, but a general commodities market in pencils, bottles—real commodities. That's because people shouldn't be exclusive judges of their own worth. There are many poets, writers, musicians—you know, what we call 'legends in their own living room'—but nobody would buy their work. The key to political economy for me is the idea that what you have to have is vocations, de-centralised institutions, the German social marketing economy, the combination of Catholic, socialist and liberal thought. This would allow us to resist the commodification of labour through the upholding of status, and to recognise the importance of interests on the pressure of capitalism to commodify, in the representation of the labour force and on the corporate governance structure. And then a system of regional banks that are not allowed to lend outside—in England it would be, you know, 'socialism in one county.' Where there's genuine regional banks, that helps to build up a civil society that reflects the balance of interests between unions, owners, churches, mosques, universities—brought together for the common good. The idea here is to generate energy, growth, innovation, and regeneration of the workforce. Here, the power of labour remains central, which it should be in any Labour conception of politics. A balance of interests between labour and capital is reconstituted here. One of the paradoxes of Blue Labour is that you can only have a common good if you recognise the importance of class. So there is a very important role for self-organised unions here, but they'd be reconstituted in a vocational sense where they uphold proper work and not proletarianisation. This goes back to an old Catholic debate. It was the French Catholics who first developed the concept of the proletariat—Marx picked up on it quite a bit later.

The proletariat were that class in Rome that were sacrificed to the state, had no status, had no land, and had no place. The proleterianisation of academics, for example in our new universities, is one of the most astonishing things, as is the way that the union is complicit in that proletarianisation and refuses to uphold a guild ethic, a self-regulating ethic, because it's concerned with part-time workers and various other forms of pay and conditions.

So in terms of the political economy, the domestication of capital is the role of democratic association, but it does not in any way minimise the creative role of capital in driving innovation and creating new energy. So it's once again back to faithful relationships. Capital is by its nature promiscuous. Capital by its nature wants to leave its relationships as soon as it has its satisfaction. Politics wants to entangle capital. I would argue since Athens democratic politics has always been the way that people protect their status and try to entangle capital in long-term, stable relationships. And that's still the foundation of the political economy. So there's a rejection here, in traditional left-wing terms, of the role of the state as planner; there's also a critique of the role of the state as a calculator—and a recognition of a much bigger decentralisation of institutions, but all-in partnership with the state in order to domesticate capital. But not to then have the terrible move on the Left where the state becomes the predominant administrative force—which leads to powerlessness as well. So just to summarise it in a trilogy—it is relationships-power-action; that means facilitating a relationship between capital, labour, and institutions locally in order to facilitate energy and growth.

NT: I wonder what you think about the power of finance capital in this context. Because one of the main arguments—and one that explains why the left has become so market-orientated, at least since 1979—is the belief that finance capital simply *cannot* be domesticated. It is just too powerful—too hyper-mobile, too

promiscuous in your terms—for any political institution or any set of political organisations to be able to tame it. How do you respond to that?

MG: You begin with Aristotle's statement that anything outside of relationships is either a beast or a god. In terms of Capital it has managed to combine the two very beautifully. What we have to look at here is very old left wing concept—*reification*. I would also say that we need bring back a very old religious concept—idolatry—because we tend to worship the power of Capital. But Capital, in order to reproduce itself, has to land somewhere; it has to exist in the world. It's a bit like God in that regard. You know that conversation between God and Moses, where Moses says we the children of Israel are your chosen people and you made yourself known through us and so you are basically stuck with it and have to live with it—otherwise you will be defaced in the world. Then Christianity built on that with the Jesus in the world as a manifestation of the divine. If we can domesticate and humanise God, you know, it's not too difficult to begin to think about domesticating capital. So that's a political battle—we have the City of London down there. In the history of the British state essentially the City of London is part of the ancient constitution. It's a commune and has been so since 1190. It used to be a self-governing city-state—which it still is—but has basically managed, by hook or by crook, to expel virtually all of the living people from its area. It now represents purely the interests of capital. So what we have to do is extend the City of London Corporation to all of London, to make everyone in London a citizen. When we talk about the promiscuity of capital we're also talking about the domination of the rich—and that's just old-style politics. They said that in Athens, they said that in Rome—that if you take on senators, if you take on the rich, then it would lead to poverty. But they brought in interest rate caps, they brought in taxation, they brought in ultimately vocational constraints as well. The church itself became a force and finance was eventually entangled. Now obviously globalisation is an attempt to say—well no, no, no, you can't do

this now. But the City of London invests less than 1% in Britain and then we bailed them out when they went wrong. So when there was international capitalist disorder, there were national solutions to this. So what we have to do is to think about forms of internal investment and ultimately Capital will have to make judgements about its long-term interests. The one night stand's turned sour—we know this. In relation to sustainable long-term returns on investment, we need to look at the German economy here; it is very attractive to investment precisely because it yields very stable long-term returns. Britain is increasingly unattractive precisely because its flexible labour market strategy is so flimsy. So, I think both the political domestication of the City of London, combined with a genuine negotiation—that was the problem with Gordon Brown; he bailed out the banking system and asked for nothing in return. This is Weber, not political action. Capital needs people; capital needs places. Obviously, in England we've got to front up and be prepared to build a genuine political relationship with Capital. Now that would work by means of a very old left-wing thing that we haven't thought about for a long time. We've got to build an alliance with productive capital against finance capital in order to facilitate long-term internal investment against short-term speculation. Labour's got to do that. I know I get shouted at by the Left every time I talk about a genuine private sector growth strategy, about bringing CEO's into the Labour Party to share knowledge on how to bring the workforce into a key innovative role. That's what they are talking about all the time, but they have no political partners in the political process; that's why they are despairing. The Conservatives are just craven to the banking system, the Lib Dems don't understand anything about business and Labour is going back to a position where it is very obscure about where it stands in relation to all this. So this is all about an offer to the unions about a genuine social partnership and forgetting about the class war aspect—whilst class representation remains hugely important—and an opening to capital to those who want to develop private sector growth within the British economy,

particularly the regional economy (and to stress to them that Labour is its friend). In that way you build broad-based political alliances that can take on extreme speculative volatility (pointing to the City of London).

NT: There is an argument that's been put forward by many of the Left that British capitalism is a very distinct kind of capitalism that has its roots in imperial preference and still tries to view itself as dissociated from any particular location—specifically, that is still more interested in its pseudo-colonial investments than national economic renewal. Do you buy into that?

MG: Halfway. But it does have an address and it's EC1. It's just down the road. The city of London acts as a sort of hub of an international global freetrade imperialism (a brilliant paradoxical conception of the British this; only we could do 'freetrade imperialism'—magnificent!). The maritime economy, which I really look at and appreciate because it didn't involve the domestic tyranny of the French—the landed imperial glory—was just a maritime system of ports with the commodification of labour and land and everything followed from that. Incredibly, the British ruled India with 1800 people who were basically employed by the East India Company for about 150 years. Light touch regulation I think!

NT: Minimal governance—only of nodes in networks.

MG: Yes. What we're left with post-empire is a system of tax havens through which companies in Britain are engaged in massive tax avoidance and money laundering. Essentially, the City of London acts as an offshore island that acts as a supreme hub of all tax havens, and it is within our power to regulate it. Now all of these people have children, all these attend really good schools. Also, London is a wonderful place to live. If they want to go and live in some culturally denuded spot in the middle of the world, fine, but I don't think that will happen. I think we have much more leverage in our negotiation with Capital than we think.

NT: I would like to ask you about the issue of the decentralisation of powers. I think it was Tom Nairn who, a long time ago, said that Britain wasn't a nation-state but a city-state. That there is a concentration of wealth and power in the London and environs to such an extent that London becomes a pathological phenomenon as far as the North, Scotland and Wales are concerned. How would you respond to this? Is your politics a decentralising politics with respect to the concentration of wealth and power in the South East of England?

MG: It is. It's not a 'Tom Nairn politics,' who went a long way on a very weak reading of Gramsci—that's a very immature left wing spat! Roughly there are two types of economy: maritime—which is freely contractual—and territorial—which is much more status-oriented and embedded. What you have with globalisation is the 'rising of sea levels'; we're all at sea. So a sense of place is hugely important in generating any kind of political resistance to the domination of Capital. However, this is made so much more complicated here, as we have a state which is so subordinate to the interests of the City. So this goes back to what I was saying about the political economy. What we had before was regional savings—you had regional banks, you had regional industries, you had pension funds—but they were legally compelled to invest in the City of London because of best value which demanded they get the best rate of return. The logic of this is that these were all inefficient. They were just sitting there getting sluggish rates of return, and pensions demand that they get higher rates of return. They put them all in the City. Then they all got lost in the crash. That's where we had to double step in and bail them out in order to protect our savings which had been removed from regional economies. So there was a double denuding. There's the political power concentrated in London and then there's the economic power which is reconstituted through the City. So everybody's energy, and the accumulation of our ancestors' energy, is centred into the City of London. This is the political nature of globalisation, that it forces the drying of regions

through rates of return which are in fact fantastical, which then requires state action that double decentralises. So a genuine return to regionalism is vital, but this has to be organic and it has to work within the sensibilities of people and not be perceived as another layer of government. For this reason I'm interested in constituting city parliaments that could address issues in relation to another aspect of globalisation—immigration, the breakdown of the common life and the stress on individual rights against the political common good. City parliaments would go along with the regional banks and would go along with vocational training that is located in the regions. Also, I'm very much in favour of bringing back *counties* and particular varieties of life which are very much worth preserving.

I'm very also very interested in energy security. We have technology now which can turn freezing cold sea and wind into heat, and if you look at England we are very well-endowed with wind and sea. How are we going to turn that into energy security? What are the regional varieties involved in that? That's one very big project that goes along with micro regional projects to generate energy and growth. A genuine reconstitution of guild halls is one aspect of it, as is return of the country 100s so there's genuine political potency in the countryside. All of that would broker a much stronger sense of both political and economic county life. Cities having a hub role of linking up with the world and feeding back into the countryside in terms of technological innovation and in terms of best practice. So it's got to be institutional, a reconstitution of genuine regional variety.

NT: Is this a German model of national politics? Is your vision a federalist one, based upon the *Länder* system of devolved power?

MG: Yes, it's going to have connexions with that. But in England we've got our own counties—England has earned the right to forge its own way in this respect.

NT: I think that takes me onto my final question, which touches on a concept that has had a spectacularly bad press in the recent philosophical and sociological literature, especially on the left—the concept of the nation. The idea that the nation is pernicious fiction—something imaginary—that is currently being reinvented because of anxieties that Britain is experiencing on another leg of its long-term relative decline, has provided a focus for a kind of cultural critique of Britishness and national identity more generally (we can easily apply this critical discourse to the US). How do the concepts of nation and nationhood play out in your particular view?

MG: Hugely. I'm Jewish, and I think that's an important background. It's an historical love based on my being born here. It's also been relevant because alone in Europe those of us who managed to get here lived; all of my relatives who were in Europe were killed. There's a real personal love of this country because there was liberty and democracy and bravery in this country, and I honour it. And I honour every family who lost a son or got hit in the blitz. You know there is a real bravery in this land and that's an immediate family story. I don't consider the nation a constructed thing—when you're shot in the head it's hard to say that's a 'social construct.' That is the problem with postmodernism; it is not an exclusively linguistic world; there's power, there's cause, and there's no alternative but to participate in the stories of the world. Here in this building is Parliament. The House of Lords is one great fairy story, there's engravings everywhere of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. In the chamber there are twelve huge statues of the lords who held the knife at the throat of King John at the signing of *The Magna Carta*. We have a story of conquest and of resistance to conquest, of the balance of power, of the mixed constitution. You can say, well, these were socially constructed, but they were also really manifest in the world. And so there is a genuine tradition of democracy and liberty which does exist in England that's very unique and very wonderful. So, I work within

the ancient constitution as a general orientation framework which believes there should be a balance of power in all institutions. Winston Churchill said it well: “as a freeborn Englishman I should never be at the mercy of one power alone.” Managerial sovereignty is about holding power over you—there’s something deeply unEnglish about that. I see liberalism as a revolutionary force; I believe socialism is a conservative force in resistance to that; that’s embedded in a very long history of resistance, whether it be resistance to the king or the capitalist.

Now we have a problem, because we had an incredibly superficial constitutional conversation before we gave national devolution to Scotland and Wales. We thought that it wouldn’t matter; it matters. I write a lot about England. I think the Scottish tradition is quite different; I don’t think they have that balance of power ideal and have still got quite clannish chieftain models. Wales is a much richer story. Whilst congregationalism is hugely important in Labour history, in fact the relationship between England and Wales is rich and complicated. We’ve got to get back to England and a renewal of the English political tradition which is vitally important. This is the whole concept of radical traditionalism that I’ve put forward. I don’t think patriotic commitment is to be dismissed in the same way as faith is dismissed as just a mistaken mythological fantasy. We’re an ancient country, a great country. Our contribution to the world has been extraordinary relative to our size. It is still the case that the world looks to us as defenders of liberty and democracy and as a force for innovation. So I’d say with no trace of hesitation that I really love my country and I believe it to be true.

NT: Thank you very much.