



Doreen Massey: Space, Place and Politics

Ken Livingstone on London

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I'm going to stand up because I've been trained for forty years to stand up when I'm speaking and I can't ever really break the habit. I'm delighted to be back in this room because we had a debate here early in 2000 when English Heritage invited all the mayoral candidates. And I remember the look of absolute horror on the audience's face when I said if I was elected mayor I was going to abolish the existing restrictions on height and density in terms of development in London. And it never occurred to me I'd be here giving praise for what Doreen has done and the involvement I've had with Doreen in her work and her in mine over the period since we first met in 1976. I can remember I think the first time I saw Doreen. She was standing on a cold, miserable November evening outside the tenants hut in Kilburn where we were due to have our Labour Party ward meeting because I'd just been selected as Labour candidate and I think it was an absolutely miserable night and there was about three of us there and I think you were the first professional geographer I'd ever met and I'd never had any desire to meet any because when I did O Level Geography, one of the few O Levels I got before I dropped out of school, it was mainly consisting of drawing maps, remembering heights of mountains and rivers and insofar as it ever got political I think the nearest we got was when we'd have – I mean the teachers tell us the role that climate and coastline had played in holding back indigenous cultures from reaching the excellence of the British Empire. And as I recall actually we only really focused on those countries that had been part of the British Empire although by the time I was at school most of them escaped from the bloody thing. So my relationship with Doreen goes back to '76 and she was one of the first people I turned to when we won control of the GLC to kind of have some input into our industry and employment policy and she was one of my appointees to the Greater London Enterprise Board which we set up really to try and analyse and then correct all the things that Doreen still thinks are wrong with the London economy and they weren't quite as bad then as they are now so we didn't have a massive in – input in turning that round but then that wasn't our fault because an evil tyranny abolished us! And it was about that time that Doreen got the job at the Open University and it was very interesting because she went for the interview and months passed and they never announced who'd won and there was a debate taking in the shadows about why months were passing before they'd announced and people talked about whether she would have sufficient gravitas for this post and given she had spiky, multicoloured hair at the time I could see she didn't look like the typical professor that they were used to. And then there was this point shortly after it had been confirmed that she'd got the job when Sir Keith Joseph who was then still in government, was wandering around another university and was introduced to the Geography Department and said he was very worried about the coming politicisation of geography. So we thought there might have been a political undercurrent there. But along with Mike I - we had this thing called – after the abolition of the GLC we decided it was worth carrying on those debates and what was going on out of it and we had this aerial road group which of course Aerial Road is where Doreen lives where we turned up and had very intense debates over many years about what was happening in this sort of post war world, what we should do – and people like Robin Murray as well. And there was also...there a wonderful man, now dead sadly, and he'd also been one of our appointees to the GLEB board. He had this wonderful line because my appointees had to be questioned by the council board and so on where we had fortunately had the votes, one of the Tories sort of suddenly said "here's an Indian businessman from South Africa. What possible contribution can he make to the dynamic London economy?" and said something like – because he – this job was raising funds for businesses – and said "Do you have any experience of raising say fifty thousand pounds?" He said "None whatsoever. I seldom do less than fifty million!" And – I mean he came along to say at one point he'd been - because he was very active in the - the antiapartheid struggle in and advisor to the ANC – and got an early warning that apartheid was going to go and the ANC had to come up with a credible economic policy because as I say it was just a paragraph – a very inspiring paragraph – in

their founding statement. And we started looking at the South African economy and it was the nearest – I mean it made the Soviet Union look like a liberal market economy. Almost everybody - there was a huge State machine all in the apparatus of repression and the majority of the White population worked in the apparatus of repression and then there were three corporations that controlled sixty per cent of the private sector – I mean this is the easiest economy in the world where you could nationalise everything. Only three ruddy companies and you'd got control of the whole thing. Um - but it was when I became Mayor my most embarrassing um sort of relationship with Doreen because she was pounding on with all this work about what's rotten at the heart of the London economy and what it does to the world and I was Mayor of the bloody city and she turned up to interview me about this and I always felt she was about to say leap over and bang my head on the table say you've got to do more to change it. But it was the dynamic and the contradiction. I always used to say when we were discussing it and about the London economy, this isn't the world I would have created. It's the world we're stuck with and not any longer and this is where our opportunities come because the scale of what's happened dwarfs anything since the Great Depression and I don't think it is going to be as bad as the Great Depression but it's certainly going to be worse than anything since. If you track I mean what's happening on Wall Street and overlay it with what happened from the height of the market in 1929 the share prices are going down exactly at the same rate and of course they are only half way down if you're plotting that against what happened in 1929 to 1933. And if you look at the collapse in world trade now given world trade was much, much smaller as a proportion of global GDP then but the collapse of world trade um over the last year or so is actually greater than in the period at the beginning of the Great Depression. Now the one thing we've got really going for us which all the neo liberals really hate having to admit, is that of course the State sector is much bigger and therefore if you look at the United States of America in 1933 when Roosevelt came to power I mean only five per cent of GDP was in the public sector and I mean of course now even in America it's well over twenty five per cent. And therefore there was very much less that the State could actually do but um it does mean we now face a huge potential for change and changing the nature of the London economy and making sure this doesn't happen again. And I'm glad to see that after a slow start I mean Gordon Brown has started to talk about the need to clamp down on all these little ghastly tax havens all over the place um and given about forty per cent of them are under our control one way or the other this would be would release hundreds of billions of tax um for investment in nations that most need it and also actually shift the tax burden within nations such as this where far too many great corporations and very rich people aren't paying their share. But it's a question of what we should be looking to move in to and here if you think the economic crisis is depressing it's when you start to look at the - the conference currently going on over in Copenhagen – I mean every new speech is more alarming than the last. But the Tyndall Climate Change Centre produced a Paper in November that completely challenged all the sort of hopes that somehow we could stabilise the increasing global temperature at an average of two degrees Celsius. They said that basically almost all the estimates underpin the Stern Report and Stern accepts this now, the debates about post Kyoto, all about can we stabilise at two degrees Celsius increase. And they said the chances of that is about seven per cent. It's only about a fifty chance of stabilising at four degrees. Now geographers can immediately start to work out exactly what that means in terms of catastrophic change for many nations, many nations bordering desert areas becoming virtually unable to sustain their communities, inundation and half the world's population now live in cities and just how many of those are on coastal areas. I mean when I – when I opened an office in Mumbai nowhere in Mumbai is more than a metre above sea level and it's a peninsula, surrounded on three sides. No question building a Mumbai barrier around it and the cost would I mean be inconceivable. So huge change is coming and I suspect that gradually as politicians wake up to the scale of crisis we face and recognise that what they're doing at the moment is totally inadequate there will suddenly be a mad rush to tackle it in exactly the same way that we had to recast the economies of Britain and America to mobilise resources to defeat Nazism we will have to mobilise and shift the economies the developed world I mean to actually tackle and defeat climate change. So this means a huge growth coming in renewable energy and in a whole range of green industries and in recycling because it challenges the fundamental underlying basis of what I mean Doreen and Mike and many other the people in this room I said would all agree is what's been at the heart at what's gone wrong. It's this huge growth of consumerism. It's the substitution of things for relationships that growth of consumerism was the ideology that drove the American economy

in the 1920's that came to Europe in the 1950's and was beginning and still is taking hold in much of the developing world. It isn't sustainable. And therefore what this crisis is about is not just re-balancing the banks a bit or a bit more regulation. It's forcing us to face up to the fact we really can't carry on like this. There isn't just another few more reforms that can patch it all up and get the show back on the road. The scale of the crises coming with climate change means we have to fundamentally reassess basically how we do everything. How we run our cities, how we run our economy, how we live our lives because it is the case to have any hope of human civilisation surviving we have to reduce our carbon emissions in the developed world by at least eighty per cent most probably ninety per cent by 2050. That means all of us. It isn't an abstract idea that applies elsewhere. It impacts on every aspect of our lives, every aspect of the way we will run our cities and therefore I am delighted – my final point is to say that Doreen is already involved in our next great adventure which is an organisation called Progressive London. We had a – it's to call together all those people that stand on the progressive side of the spectrum. So there's Greens and Liberals as well as Unions and Labour people and people who aren't involved in anything and many academics. And we called a meeting in January and six hundred people came. It's only focused on London and what we can do in one city and I think there's a huge desire out there to now re-think where we are, the problems we face and find the solutions for them. And I'm delighted that Doreen's going to be working with us on that amongst doing many, many other things as well. Thank you very much.