

## **Blessed are the environmentalists, for they shall inherit the earth**

### **Contraction and Convergence**

I WAS TREMENDOUSLY EXCITED when I first read about Contraction and Convergence (C&C) in the *Independent* in May last year. Until then, I felt only despair about climate change. I could see the problem, see the solution – drastic reduction of energy consumption, and also see that it isn't happening. Depending on individual and corporate awareness and conscience is clearly not going to save the planet. But Contraction and Convergence, the idea of Aubrey Meyer, founder and director of the Global Commons Institute, is a simple, equitable and comprehensive global solution.

The idea is for an internationally agreed overall reduction (*contraction*) in greenhouse gas emissions until they stabilise at a safe level, in a way that is fair because allowable emissions are shared out by region and *converge* by a set date to the point where every person in the world has an equal share.

What will it mean for us in the UK? Our national and personal emissions levels must drop by about 80% by 2050. One of the ways to facilitate this would be the introduction of carbon allowances.

### **Personal Carbon Allowances/ Domestic Tradable Quotas**

This is a system which places a limit on the amount of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub> – the main greenhouse gas) that the UK can release each year, and divides up the emissions as 'carbon units' equally between all UK citizens. Everyone would be issued with an electronic 'carbon card' recording their

carbon allowance, and units would be deducted each time one bought fuel, transport tickets and other goods and services. You would need to have enough carbon units, as well as the money, to make your purchases. Carbon units would be tradable so if you felt you had a real need to fly, for example, you could buy more units from someone who had spare – in other words, there would be a financial cost, rather than the current environmental one, to your using more than your fair share. Alternatively, you could cut down your emissions from other activities in order to save for a flight. Either way, you could fulfil your needs in good conscience (though you might well have to rethink your needs).

People have expressed concern to me that this system would make things like flying once more the luxury of the very rich. But if you look at it from a *global* perspective, you will see that flying and other high emission activities *are* still the preserve of the rich, well beyond the means of the majority of the world's people, but the ill effects are felt more by the very poor, who are worst hit by 'unnatural disasters' and extreme weather caused by climate change.

Colin Challen MP has put the Domestic Tradable Quotas (Carbon Emissions) Bill before Parliament, and is asking people to write to him to show their support for it. The text of the bill is available at [www.colinchallen.org](http://www.colinchallen.org) under 'articles', and you can write free of charge to Colin Challen MP, FREEPOST NEA 12589, Leeds, LS27 8YY. Please do!

### **A word on flying and buying trees**

In terms of global warming, flying is the most damaging individual activity, and air transport is the fastest growing source of CO<sub>2</sub> pollution. Looking at

flying from a peacemaker's perspective, we know that wars are already being fought over oil. If we don't act to prevent climate change, resource wars will become increasingly common, and the number of refugees from those wars and from severe weather and unnatural disasters will increase. It seems crazy to me to protest against the war on Iraq and then fly for a holiday – and questionable to pay for a peace activist to fly from the USA to give talks here.

Many people buy trees in an effort to offset the effects of flying. I have always felt that there must be a catch to this. There is. For starters, carbon is only held in store for the lifetime of a tree. When it dies and decays or is burnt, the carbon is released again – the problem is only delayed, not dealt with. So in the long-term, buying trees cannot make a flight 'carbon neutral'. Secondly, the effect of aviation on global warming is probably three times that of its CO<sub>2</sub> emissions because it creates high cloud (through water vapour discharges) as well as emissions. I don't want this to put anyone off buying trees, but I do think it's important to face the facts when deciding whether to fly or not.

I confess the moral high ground is above me here. Even since I became aware of the full implications of flying, I have flown not once but twice across the Atlantic to visit Catholic Worker communities in the USA. I hushed my conscience by arguing that I was going for a good reason and by making a personal commitment never again to fly just for a holiday, and not to fly within western Europe for any reason (because it's easy enough to travel in other ways). However, the more I understand about climate change, the closer I reluctantly come to the conclusion that it would be good to

make a commitment not to fly at all again. So, I know it's difficult facing up to the issues!

### **Radical change – but with support**

Having said that, if we go down the route of contraction and convergence, and tradable carbon allowances, it will at least be clearer exactly what our fair share of the world's resources is, and how much we need to do to achieve sustainability. There will also be much more incentive for businesses to develop low-emissions technology and green energy. The demand for them will bring costs down and we will have an economy that considers road-building costs an undesirable 'subsidy' and public-transport spending as 'investment', rather than the other way round.

However, only so much can be done through energy-efficiency measures and government spending. We *will* have to radically change our lifestyles, and if we get going now it'll be easier. So, be aware that home energy use, food and transport are the biggest issues in terms of climate change from a personal perspective, and that war and war preparation is one of the biggest problems beyond the personal, so any sensible application of contraction and convergence must address the military-industrial complex.

Blessed are the environmentalists – for only if we all become environmentalists will there be any earth worth inheriting.

### **For more info/resources**

Christian Ecology Link, 3 Bond Street,  
Lancaster, LA1 3ER  
[www.christian-ecology.org.uk](http://www.christian-ecology.org.uk)

Climate Outreach & Information  
Network, 16B Cherwell Street, Oxford  
01865 727911 [www.coinet.org.uk](http://www.coinet.org.uk)

In the Oxford region, SAGE is “an active group of Christians with a particular concern for our Lord’s creation” Contact Dr Martin Hodson, School of Biological & Molecular Sciences, Oxford Brookes University, Headington OX3 0BP  
01865 483954  
[www.sageoxford.org.uk](http://www.sageoxford.org.uk)

Flying: [www.chooseclimate.org/flying](http://www.chooseclimate.org/flying)  
International Panel on Climate Change: [www.ipcc.ch](http://www.ipcc.ch)  
Global Commons Institute: [www.gci.org.uk](http://www.gci.org.uk)  
Green electricity: [www.greenelectricity.org](http://www.greenelectricity.org) and [www.unit-e.co.uk](http://www.unit-e.co.uk)