

GOOD SOCIETY / GREEN SOCIETY? THE RED-GREEN DEBATE



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DIRECTION FOR
THE DEMOCRATIC LEFT

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I. Foreword

Caroline Lucas and Neal Lawson

Politics isn't working. The poor get poorer and the planet burns, and our collective inability to deal with either creates a third crisis – that of democracy itself. The choices presented by the main parties at the last election were important but hardly decisive. Essentially, it was a debate about who would cut what and when? Nothing is changing when everything should be.

There are two dimensions to this. First the parties themselves: none of them are capable of both embracing the changes that the country needs and then putting them into action. Labour is still too tribal and three decades on still too much in the shadow of Thatcherism, so that its progressive traditions and values do not shape its timid and often reactionary policies. The Liberal Democrats are even more torn, as their left-leaning activists experience a sharper version of the right-wing takeover suffered by Labour.

The Greens have the best answers but have yet to turn their latent support into substantial representation. The recent elections in Germany show that, when the voting system allows it, Greens can win. In the UK, Greens are not yet part of the mainstream because vested interests want to keep them out.

The second dimension is ideological. Until now, the three crises of inequality, sustainability and democracy have been addressed separately. Yet the reality is that you can't tackle any one element of the triple crisis without simultaneously tackling the other two. In the real world they are all linked – in the political and campaigning world they are separate. We have to join up intellectually and organisationally.

Also, the forces for change in each area primarily address only the symptoms of decline and rarely if ever the causes. Mostly the root cause is markets that are too free and sometimes states that are too remote. But addressing such fundamental issues is seen as 'too political' by the big non-governmental organisations and charities.

It means that all three are getting worse. The inequality gap is widening, climate change and species depletion is accelerating and yet the

government – and too many senior people in Labour – seem to want to return to 'business as usual', calling for more growth, as if its economic team have still failed to understand the fragility and inequality inherent in the debt-fuelled, finance-bubble 'growth' of the Labour years. No wonder people's faith in politics is declining.

Neither the poor nor the planet can wait while a centre-right government pulls out all the stops to make things even worse. And for the same reason any alternative must include Labour, just as it must include the Greens and the progressive mass of the Liberal Democrats. So we all have to challenge ourselves and change. People who want to see the world change are first going to have to change themselves and how they operate. Two-dimension politics must die – and we must be the ones to mark its passing by reaching out across old political divides. It is time to put the glasses on and enter a new world of real depth.

Compass is trying to meet the challenge in part by deciding to open out its membership to Greens and social Liberals. Welcome then to three dimension politics. Compass now sits in the middle of a triangle, between social Labour, social Liberals and Greens, who see that you can stick to your principles and still get things done. In that space we want to conjure not just a progressive consensus but a new way of doing politics – a way that creates a sum that is greater than its parts. Out of our respective traditions, beliefs and cultures we are convinced it is possible to construct a set of ideas and a method of organising that can head off the triple crisis. If not, what else is the point?

The tensions and difficulties in this are all too evident. Political faith needs to adapt to the Facebook generation of multiple identities, shifting from a politics of hierarchy to networks based on trust. In short we have to learn to listen and lead. At the same time we have to solve the challenge of securing greater equality without destroy the planet. What is critical here is the notion of the Good Society – a world in which we move on from the eternal disappointment of relative material acquisition and express a more ambitious belief in the quality of life – like the time we have for the ones we love.

One of us still believes the transformation of Labour is possible and essential. The other wants to build the Green Party into a much stronger

political force. But both of us know that our own parties are necessary but far from sufficient. We need a compelling vision for the good society and a progressive alliance to make it happen.

This collection of essays on the ideas and structures of red–green green–red politics marks a critical start to this new development in British politics. It sets out the reasons why such an alliance is essential to both Labour and the

Greens, and the hurdles that need to be overcome to make it possible. We hope and expect it to spark a debate about how and why two traditions can work together to address the perils of a world in which the poor get poorer and the planet burns.

Caroline Lucas MP, Leader of the Green Party

Neal Lawson, Chair of Compass

2. Introduction: red–green dialogues

Victor Anderson

Red–green dialogue has taken many different forms at different times – but what does it mean today?

When these dialogues happened in the 1970s, the greens looked hopelessly vague and all over the place ideologically, while the reds (though divided among themselves of course) were clear about what they each thought and where they wanted to be going.

Today the picture is very different. Red–green dialogue today takes place after the fall of both the Berlin Wall and New Labour. The left is no longer at all clear. The organisations and intellectual influence of Marxism has declined in the UK. The Labour Party is suffering from an acute lack of sense of identity and purpose, having stepped back now from the extreme pragmatism and compromise of the Blair years, but not knowing where it is going next or what it believes in.

In contrast, the green analysis has developed and become stronger over the years. The principal reason for this is the science base of environmentalism, set out for example in the assessment reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, the evidence on biodiversity referred to in the economics of ecosystems and biodiversity (TEEB) reports, the Stockholm-based work of Rockstrom et al on ‘planetary boundaries’, and the recent work arguing that human impacts on the environment are now so severe as to constitute a new geological time-period (the ‘Anthropocene’). Add to all that the many ways greens have explored the different possibilities for articulating their ethics and politics, the different policy ideas that have been generated, and the different strategies which have been tried out.

Although social democracy still has more impact in the world than green politics does, the greens are no longer the poor relation in the dialogue that they once were, and they have a clarity which many on the left envy.

This might seem to provide a more equal and fruitful basis for dialogue. It does not, however, seem to be turning out like this, an impression confirmed for me by the experience of editing this e-book.

Is there any longer a ‘red’ perspective on the question of ecology? There are certainly socialists and social democrats engaging with these issues, but they do so from perspectives that don’t fundamentally challenge the green side of the argument. We have these varieties:

- social democrats backing both green and anti-green policies at the same time, as with Labour in office, with Ed Miliband publishing his ‘Low Carbon Transition Plan’ at the same time as other ministers were pressing ahead with expanding Heathrow
- some Trotskyites hopping on and off green bandwagons, such as movements against nuclear power, and more recently climate change, depending on how much support the campaigns are attracting
- a small number of Marxist intellectuals seriously engaging with green issues, such as those around the journal *Monthly Review* (based in New York)
- people from a left background persuaded by green arguments and looking for some sort of red–green synthesis position (some of the articles in this e-book essentially reflect that approach).

But where are the Marxist and Labour traditionalists who will denounce environmentalism as a ‘middle-class’ and/or ‘petit-bourgeois’ diversion? They don’t seem to be around any more. The state of the planet has got too serious for that view to still be taken very seriously, and of course even the most dogmatic sections of the left don’t quite have the self-confidence about denouncing everyone else that they used to have. Anti-environmentalism now appears to be a political position exclusively identified with the right or with the more short-sighted sections of business. There is of course also a large mainstream section of opinion, well represented in the Labour Party, which wants to have it both ways: anti-environmentalist in practice

because of their other priorities (e.g. expanding Heathrow), but not anti-environmentalist in any explicit or argued way.

Without left anti-environmentalism, the red-green dialogue has become very different. The dialogue now is primarily between the advocates of some sort of synthesis position, who believe the left's analyses still have something valuable to offer, and the advocates of something more like 'pure' green.

What are the issues in this dialogue, and what types of ideas might be brought to bear to sort them out?

One problem that looms large is, of course, capitalism. A taboo has generally grown up against using that word, even against any attempt to understand the nature of the social system we live in, and to understand that it is a system. Media and politics are organised around the idea of separate 'issues' rather than any systematic understanding, and around debate about what government ought to do, rather than about how society as a whole works and might change. And many greens who do understand that we live in a system have looked for other ways of describing and understanding it – so not 'capitalism', but 'industrialism', 'consumer society', and so on.

This in turn is linked to another issue, about what drives current society. For many greens, it is a combination of governments prioritising economic growth and people prioritising higher income (which, at the level of the economy as a whole, more or less exactly adds up to higher gross domestic product (GDP), or at least fits that policy aim very neatly). However this leaves profit out of the picture, and ignores the way in which the pursuit of 'growth' is really a sort of proxy or euphemism for the pursuit of maximum profit, and the way in which the drive for profit creates growth as a by-product, rather than vice-versa.

The next issue this links on to is the old question of whether economics or culture and consciousness are primary. On the one side, we might see economic change as shaping what people do. On the other, we can emphasise voluntary shifts in values and lifestyle. Many greens have a 'voluntarist' conception of social change, according to which things will change if and only if people want them to. However that ignores the power of 'objective' forces, such as the resource shortages and ecosystem change, which greens most of the

time draw attention to, and which, in a market-dominated economy, will feed through into the economy principally via price increases, as we see at the moment with oil and food. The left remains generally more realistic than the green movement is at seeing that consumption of resources is more likely to be limited by scarcity and price than by 'voluntary simplicity'.

If, however, consciousness is primary – or at least a pretty big part of what is involved in bringing about change – that opens up a whole set of political and cultural options, which have become an important part of the green side of the debate. For example, religious traditions can be looked to for sources of inspiration in changing consciousness, particularly because most of them, and Buddhism most clearly, include techniques for deliberate consciousness change. More recently, eco-psychology has developed, analysing the psychology of consumerism and denial. There are also people looking to philosophy and various branches of science as angles from which to explore 'new paradigms' to radically change thinking and culture. Dance, art, organic agriculture and market research are also looked to for their various contributions. And of course, there are people who prioritise just living it and doing it, and leave the theorising and strategising to others.

Much of that rich field of green debate and activity is outside the boundaries of what the left traditionally thought was 'politics', but increasingly 'reds' are having to contend with these shades and flavours of 'green' as well as those they can more easily recognise as forms of serious politics.

'Equality' has also been a part of the debate, but that too is no longer as simple as it used to be. There are as many types of equality as types of inequality – so this is no longer only about class, income and wealth, nor just about all those plus gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, disability and so on. Now there are other issues on the agenda: equality and inequality considered globally, the rights of future generations, and the rights of non-human species. On all of these additional dimensions, greens are generally more fully committed to equality than most socialists are.

The articles in this e-book range across many different areas. They are only a sample of the many things that can be said about red and green,

green and red, synthesis and argument. Compass has started to be a place where we can have this debate. This e-book is just one set of contributions. We are hoping for more, and inviting you too to contribute.

Victor Anderson is a currently inactive member of the Green Party and works for an environmental campaigning organisation as an economist. He has taken part in various cross-

party initiatives, including being Environment Advisor in Ken Livingstone's Advisory Cabinet at the same time as being a Green member of the London Assembly, and before that, working as a House of Commons researcher for the Plaid Cymru Group of MPs, following a Plaid/Green electoral pact in Ceredigion, west Wales. He has also worked in Whitehall for the Sustainable Development Commission. He is convenor of the Compass Sustainability Panel.

3. The question of growth

Victor Anderson

One of the most difficult issues in red–green dialogue so far has been economic growth. For many on the left, economic growth is essential and unquestionable, and the green view is seen as simply being ‘anti-growth’ and therefore completely ‘off the agenda’. However the reality is a bit more complicated, and a no-growth economy may not really be so far away as it looks.

Economic growth is defined by economists as growth in gross domestic product (GDP). There are a number of serious problems about taking the view that GDP growth should be a primary aim of government policy, of which these are the most significant:

- GDP measurements exclude many of the things that people value highly: leisure time, work–life balance, good health, a sense of meaning and purpose in life, a sense of security and so on. These points are well substantiated in the literature on wellbeing, for example the research carried out by Dolan et al. for Defra, and research summarised by Richard Layard in his book *Happiness*.¹
- GDP measurements do not incorporate any subtractions to take account of damage done to existing stocks (stocks resulting either from production in previous years or from the resources and capacities provided by the natural world). For example, the extraction of oil from the North Sea is valued within GDP but the cost of the depletion of reserves is excluded. Currently there is rapid deterioration in many of the world’s ecosystems (surveyed for example in a Millennium Ecosystem Assessment report,²) but this finds no expression in GDP figures.
- GDP totals and averages also take no account of equality and inequality in the distribution of income, which is a key factor influencing

how much a given quantity of GDP contributes to general wellbeing. Median income would be a much more useful indicator in this respect than GDP per head.

- GDP measurements do not take into account work carried out where money does not change hands, for example volunteering, most housework and child care.

In response to the deficiencies of GDP, four different lines of ‘green’ argument have been constructed:

- GDP methodology should be amended in order to incorporate factors currently excluded. There has been a great deal of discussion of this in the academic literature, but progress on this point has been very slow because GDP methodology is agreed internationally through governments, and agreement on change is very difficult to reach.
- To consider GDP as simply one of a basket of indicators, and to de-prioritise it, taking it into account along with other indicators, such as indicators of health, wellbeing, natural resources, ecological footprint, environmental conditions and so on. Much of the relevant data for this is already collected by government departments, but not brought together in a clear way alongside GDP. In practice, government already makes many trade-offs between GDP and other considerations, a principle it would be possible to take further.
- Many environmentalists believe GDP growth is undesirable in principle. The evidence on this point is mixed. Clearly a great deal depends on which forms of economic activity are growing. For example, it is possible to imagine an economy with a large sector consisting of technologies that extract carbon from the atmosphere, something which would be positive for the environment and also for GDP. Because GDP combines together figures for many different forms of economic activity with many different types of consequences, opposition in principle to GDP growth is not a very clear principle.

1 R. Layard, *Happiness: Lessons from a new science*, Penguin, 2005; P. Dolan, T. Peasgood and M. White, *Review of Research on the Influence of Personal Well-being and Application to Policy Making*, University of Sheffield for Defra, 2006, <http://collections.euro-parchive.org/tna/20080530153425/> <http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/publications/index.htm>.

2 Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, *Ecosystems and Human Well-Being: Synthesis*, Island Press, 2005.

Nevertheless, critiques of economic growth should be taken seriously, especially in a long-run analysis, so that people can become clear about how difficult the achievement of 'green growth' (as currently advocated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the United Nations Environment Programme, for example) would really be, and what would be involved in achieving it.

- The view that continued GDP growth, regardless of whether it is desirable or not, cannot be sustained because of limits to resources and environmental capacities (including damage caused by climate change), at a time of rapid expansion in global demand (currently especially in Brazil, Russia, India and China and South Africa). This collision between limitations on supply and continually expanding demand is being reflected in the market through increased prices for commodities such as oil, basic foods and metals.

This is leading to stagflation, stagnation in output caused by rises in input prices. In the UK, this currently threatens all the government's targets for growth, inflation and deficit reduction. Because of this upward pressure on commodity prices, it is perfectly possible to envisage a halt to economic growth not as a result of any deliberate choice, such as through a shift in public or government priorities, but simply as a result of market responses to supply and demand.

If we look at these four approaches politically:

- Amending GDP methodology is moving ahead gradually and is positive but easily disappears into expert behind closed-doors meetings, which are very difficult to engage with.
- GDP as just one indicator among many should get wide-ranging support and ought not to be controversial – but this becomes a matter not simply of devising new indicators or a basket of existing indicators, but of changing govern-

ment processes and structures. The main aim of this would be that indicators other than the conventional economic ones get taken seriously in economic policy-making, for example within the Treasury.

- The view that growth is undesirable is arguably a 'fringe' view that not a lot of people find persuasive – but the arguments deserve to be examined seriously and not just dismissed.
- The view that growth cannot be sustained on the basis of its current trajectory is what is most urgently on the agenda right now. Most politicians, journalists and economists talk as though the rise in commodity prices is an external factor we can do nothing to influence.

However, it seems clear to me that the prices of oil, food and metals are very much the outcomes of how the world economy is run and develops. A different path of development could give us less pressure on resources, and hence less upward pressure on commodity prices – and as a result, a better prospect for sustaining GDP growth.

That would involve, for example, an energy policy less dependent on fossil fuels, food consumption less dependent on meat, much more efficiency in the use of materials, and the establishment of international systems of payment to incentivise the conservation of ecosystems.

UN 'Rio 2012' conference in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012 – which has 'green economy' right at the top of its agenda – will provide an important opportunity for government representatives to discuss these issues, 20 years after the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992, when the Climate Change Convention and the Convention on Biological Diversity was signed.

Ironically, rather than putting a stop to economic growth, environmentalist policies may turn out in the long run to be the only way the world economy can have a chance of keeping growth going.

4. A little more conversation: why greens and reds should start by changing the way that they talk – a feminist perspective

Deborah Doane and Ruth Potts³

When Ed Miliband was elected leader of the Labour Party, commentators immediately urged him to be ‘decisive’ and ‘strong’. Many worried that he lacked the authority to see critical changes through his party. Few praised his open and collaborative style, arguing that while these were all well and good, and probably contributed to his election, they were far from the characteristics of a natural leader.

The now infamous phrase, uttered by Margaret Thatcher in the midst of the economic crisis of the early 1980s, ‘this lady is not for turning’, typifies the style of leadership we have become accustomed to. ‘Good’ leadership is ‘strong’ leadership, as exemplified by hierarchy, closed doors and grand-standing decision-making. Is this really a good thing? Might a healthy, dynamic democracy not involve a little more conversation?

Despite its centre-left promise, New Labour epitomised the Thatcherite approach, replete with conflict and bitter rivalries – which arguably contributed to its downfall, once the ‘centre could no longer hold’. Tony Blair’s refusal to change his mind about war with Iraq, even when mounting evidence showed the enormous potential fall-out of this decision, sowed the seeds for backlash from the grassroots (and the nation), which felt betrayed, ignored and abandoned. It seemed to typify an era of out-of-touch, technocratic middle-management that left many angry and alienated, and failed, critically, to sense the mood music of the nation.

Given this disillusionment, and in the light of challenges that we face, Miliband’s alleged ‘short-falls’ could be exactly what is needed to support the emergence of a new progressive politics

able to meet the critical questions of today and tomorrow. In the modern political lexicon, leadership is a quality other people display, rather than an ability we can assume ourselves. This narrative disempowers us all. The ability to listen is often associated with so-called ‘female’ and devolved approaches to leadership,⁴ and those who have this ability are sometimes portrayed as ‘weak’ or ‘indecisive’. Yet it may be exactly this kind of leadership that has the potential to guide us through an uncertain future.

Meeting the challenges of a still volatile and fragile financial system, the slow burn emergency of climate change, resource scarcity and an era of great social flux will require a full range of human qualities, and the engagement of many people, not just a narrow, top-down ‘leadership’. The issues that face us demand the take up of new rules of inclusive engagement on an unprecedented scale, rules that have already evolved in social justice groups, including the green, progressive left-wing and feminist movements.

‘Feminism’ as a concept has fallen from favour in recent years. We are encouraged to move on from a struggle between women and men, the key points at issue apparently having been won.⁵ People point to the achievements of New Labour, including equal pay or stronger maternity and paternity rights. Prime Minister David Cameron, when asked in public whether he was a feminist or not, replied, ‘I don’t know what that means any more’ and ‘probably not’.⁶ But if we have secured equality, why has this failed to support a wider range of voices in our decision-making processes, and a more collaborative approach to political decision-making?

In fact, the battle is far from won even on the terms of the existing system. Overall, women in the UK still earn 20% less than men. Gender imbalances in sectors with particular relevance to the multiple economic, environmental and social crises we face are particularly striking: only 22% of MPs are women, with a pitiful 14% of women in the cabinet. Similar disparity holds in the science, economics and finance sectors. In the UK, the pay differential in the banking sector is more marked than in the rest of the economy: women are paid on average 40% less than their male counterparts. In science, the figures are equally stark: only 9% of science professors in UK universities are women.⁷ And beyond the UK’s

³ The authors would like to thank the Hoyden Collective, and in particular Molly Conisbee and Eleanor Moody, for their input to this article.

⁴ See for example, B. Bush and C. Brush, *A Gendered Perspective on Organisational Creation*, ET & P, 2002.

⁵ See for example, Dr Catherine Hakim’s ‘preference theory’, which posits that preferences predict women’s choices, but we believe critically fails to demonstrate causality.

⁶ K. Banyard, *The Equality Illusion: The Truth about Women and Men Today*, Faber and Faber, 2010, p.1.

⁷ H. Devlin, ‘The science of sexism’, *Eureka*, magazine of *The Times*, January 2011.

borders, gender inequality is far more profound: 70% of the world's poor are women.

We have failed to consider that these continuing disparities might be indicative of more than a failure of policy. They show that structural remedies alone, while vital in and of themselves, are insufficient if culture doesn't change with them. In our view, legislative remedies, such as equal opportunities or maternity rights, while important signposts, are only palliative approaches to changing a political and economic culture that ultimately favours one set of culturally determined gender-defined traits over another. If we simply grant all to have access to existing structures and processes, we merely make an unbalanced system a little more balanced, and fail to set people free.

Because of this narrow focus on structure and a failure to embed equality, we're already seeing a rapid shift backwards for women under the coalition government. A legal case taken by the Fawcett Society has contested the cuts on the basis that the policy will hurt women far more than men, and the poor in particular.⁸ Long undervalued by the economy, the 'caring professions' – in the NHS, and teachers, social workers and even the police – are under full-frontal assault from an ideologically driven programme of cuts. Experts in 'finance and accounting' have been brought in to bring the 'order' and 'efficiency' needed to improve services that are seen to be 'soft' and 'lefty' (itself a pejorative effeminate term in the right-wing lexicon). What this reductive focus on efficiency misses is the human element: the need for human services to be dynamic, responsive and flexible. The reductive focus also misses intrinsic values, such as nature, time and well-being, which are not valued in the current system.

A deeper approach to ensuring gender equality would have to include reform of our decision-making processes with positive impacts for all. Decision-making structures that favour masculine voices over feminine have precipitated the range of crises we currently face: the tendency to over-reach,⁹ the belief that competition and markets can solve any problem and the triumph of the individual over the collective. We need a revolutionary reappraisal of our approach to politics.

Changing the way that we make decisions, we believe, would lead to a more fundamental change

to our systems and the values that underpin society. The progressive left and the greens are natural allies in this respect, embodying this new politics, which could transform the political landscape for good. In *Delusions of Gender*, Cordelia Fine makes a compelling case, drawing on a range of evidence that many of the character traits we define as inherently masculine or feminine are, in fact, socially conditioned.¹⁰ By maintaining decision-making structures in which one set of gendered traits are privileged, we reinforce the stereotypes and restrict the range of approaches at our disposal.

Lessons from other parts of the world and other movements show that the right combination of structural approaches and cultural reform can lead to more groundbreaking changes, not just in gender equality but in other areas, from economic reform to the response to climate change.

To get a glimpse of what a more balanced gender system can achieve, we can look to Norway, where quotas have been applied to boardrooms and management bodies since 2002. In 2002 just 6% of board positions in Norway were occupied by women. Six years after the implementation of the minimum 40% quota, board representation had risen to an unprecedented 44.2%.¹¹ Shock tactics employed by Conservative minister Ansgar Gabrielsen in 2002 were brusque but effective. She claimed, 'Sometimes you have to create an earthquake, a tsunami, to get things to change.'¹² Norway's approach forced open the decision-making process, ensuring that more voices were heard and arguably resulting in less risk-taking.¹² Norway was the only Western industrialised nation to escape the global financial crisis; it has a healthy banking sector and record low unemployment.¹³ While the equality element may only appear palliative, there are clearly some deeply ingrained differences in their approach, compared with what we experience in the UK.

In Iceland, the last female employee of mainstream Icelandic Banks resigned her post in 2006, convinced that the behaviour of her colleagues was putting the system at risk.¹⁴ The only Icelandic investment house to survive the crash was completely operated by women. More generally, Iceland is far more egalitarian than the UK, and women have been at the heart of the reconstruction process after the crash. According

8 See C. Goddard, Fawcett's day in court: our response to today's hearing and judgement', www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/index.asp?PageID=1204.

9 For an analysis of gender and risk, see A Sibert, 'Sexism and the city: irrational behaviour, cognitive error and gender in the financial crisis', *Open Economic Review*, 21, 2010, pp.163–66.

10 C. Fine, *Delusions of Gender: How Our Minds, Society, and Neurosexism Create Difference*, WW Norton, 2010.

11 Rowena Lewis and Dr Katherine Rake, 'Breaking the mould for women leaders: could board room quotas hold the key?', a Fawcett Society think piece for the Gender Equality Forum, October 2008.

12 Ansgar Gabrielsen, the minister responsible for introducing 40% boardroom quotas for women in 2002, cited in Rowena Lewis and Dr Katherine Rake, 'Breaking the mould for women leaders'.

13 J. Guo, 'The rescue that really worked', *Newsweek*, 22 April 2010.

14 M. Lewis, 'Wall Street on Tundra', *Vanity Fair*, April 2009.

to a senior British executive, who regularly deals with Iceland:

There is never a problem with me being a woman, whereas in the UK there is always an undercurrent. Most Icelandic men genuinely view women as equal. They are not shackled with our social and class history, and they don't have all-boys public schools which breed chauvinism. Corporate women in the UK can be very aggressive, because they are defensive and because they have to be.¹⁵

So it is not just down to the quotas – it is also the style and approaches that change where there is more equity in the system as a whole. More radical shifts may be possible where we start from a different decision-making process. Social movements have clearly learned the value of a radically different perspective of power and decision-making. In the UK, Climate Camp, a grass-roots green movement, which first emerged in 2006, adopted non-hierarchical consensus decision-making approaches, which have ensured a greater degree of participation across all sections of the movement, including women. This is not to say that gender is not an issue, but it is noticeable that roles and leadership are significantly more evenly distributed than in other organisations and activist groups. Consensus decision-making is used precisely because it:

brings together the best from everyone's ideas... Decisions are reached in a dialogue between equals, who take each other seriously and who recognise each other's equal rights. Because, in consensus, we all actively agree to the final decision we're much more committed to turning it into reality.

This engaged and consensual process has prevented messianic leaders from emerging within the movement and has maintained its peaceful nature often in the face of significant challenges ranging from the way that protests have been policed to revelations about the presence of agent provocateurs. This openness has also created the space in which the dynamism and creativity of the movement has been able to flourish. In an age where we will need to rapidly re-engineer the way that we organise the

economy and society, it provides an interesting illustration of the way in which a more open and engaged decision-making process encourages creativity and engagement.

La Via Campesina is another broad-based social movement with millions of members worldwide. Recognising that women play a key role in food production – 70% of global food production is undertaken by women – led its members to adopt a formal governance structure that reflects the role of women. Because women lack access to decision-making, physically and through lack of information, they have embedded their objectives for women in society in their own structures. Not only do they ensure equal participation and equal access to resources for all, they set out to educate men too. And while the movement's key aims are to achieve food sovereignty and secure the rights of small producers, its members understand that gender equity in all walks of life is a key to achieving these objectives. Thus, among other things, they run a campaign to fight against violence and discrimination of women. 'Until we commit to ending violence against women, we will never build the model of a just society', they write.¹⁶

Looking at the UK's formal 'political' organisations, the Green Party operated without a single 'leader' until 2008. Today, the party's only MP and leader is a woman, and one of the two Green MEPs and one of the two Green London Assembly members are women. While it is not possible to draw a direct causal link, it is interesting that the party has so many high-profile women. Current societal norms may have demonstrated that a single person – a spokesperson – was exactly what was needed to bring the Greens into the mainstream, but the underlying practice of the party over time has ensured that it is more gender-balanced than any other UK political party. The Labour Party, conversely, while awash with intelligent and capable women, has not seen women take the helm of the party except in deputised forms, in spite of the 1997 watershed election, which suggested a more balanced party might become the norm. The structure and the process were unchanged, and the label 'Blair's Babes' firmly placed women as subservient.

In our view, the only way to bring forward a truly progressive and inclusive politics (and society) is

15 R. Sunderland, 'After the crash, Iceland's women lead the rescue', *Observer*, 22 February 2009.

16 La Vie Campesina Policy Documents, 5th Conference, Mozambique, 16–23 October 2008, <http://viacampesina.org/downloads/pdf/policydocuments/POLICYDOCUMENTS-EN-FINAL.pdf>.

to radically restructure decision-making so that it is more open. The critical theorist Nancy Fraser describes the concept of ‘participation parity’ as a means of identifying the structural blocks to equitable participation. If these blocks are both practice-based and cultural, doing this means not only bringing more women and diversity of opinions and backgrounds into decision-making processes, but changing the way that decisions are made so that it is more open and collaborative. Once we alter the decision-making structures, we will begin to see values currently characterised as masculine or feminine as human: allowing for more inclusive, collaborative polity. This matters because, as we face up to a range of systemic challenges, we will need to apply all of the resources at our disposal to their solution.

In the book *The Spirit Level*, Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett conclude that across a range of indicators, the social, economic, environmental and wellbeing indices of more equal societies almost always do better.¹⁷ Our hypothesis is that this also applies to gender equality. The progressive movement has been largely blind to the positive potential of greater gender equality to date and has failed to align its values to its processes. Both green and red have the opportunity to unleash this potential and usher in a new active and engaged era for democracy.

Encouraging gender equality – through enabling more collaborative ways of organising at both the local and national level, and by introducing participatory decision-making – would support an era of distributed democracy, where citizens and government could enter into a new dynamic social contract, where the state enables local participation while guaranteeing fundamental rights for all. A green–red alliance, partic-

ularly in the context of UK political history, would be uniquely placed to take this forward – because it draws on a history of mutualism, cooperation and inclusiveness – which can be reinterpreted for troubled times. To quote political theorist and activist Emma Goldman, ‘The free expression of the hopes and aspirations of a people is the greatest and only safety in a sane society.’¹⁸

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From 2004-2009 Ruth co-ordinated nef’s media coverage and public affairs. She contributed to and helped to launch nef’s *Clone Town Britain* reports, *The Happy Planet Index* reports, *Interdependence* reports and the first ever *National Accounts of Well-being*. She also co-ordinated media for the Working Group on Climate Change and Development (also known as the Up in Smoke coalition). She helped to bring together the Green New Deal Group and managed the launch of the Group’s first report, *A Green New Deal*, in July 2008.

¹⁷ Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson, *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone*, Penguin, 2009.

¹⁸ Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*, 1931

5. Values for a red–green politics

Guy Shrubsole

At his Fabian conference speech this January, Ed Miliband spoke of the crucial importance of values in Labour’s renewal as a party. He called on progressives to ‘draw on values that lie deep in our traditions’ and build new alliances that ‘draw on values that may not have always been central to our party... One of our tasks is to learn the lessons of the green movement and put sustainability at the heart of what we do.’¹⁹ This article is a direct response to that call, and an attempt to develop a set of shared values around which both environmentalists and progressives can build stronger campaigns.

The significance of values within politics has been the subject of much recent research. As the groundbreaking report *Common Cause*, published last year by a coalition of non-governmental organisations, puts it:

Effective political strategists... are well aware of the importance of using political debate, and even public policy, to promote those particular values that underpin their political beliefs, and therefore serve to build public support for their perspectives.²⁰

It is important to understand something of the psychology of values before looking at their practical application. Appeals to ‘values’ are often seen as being mere rhetorical flourishes by unfocused politicians or insincere corporate leaders. But a wealth of empirical evidence shows that, far from being vague and subjective expressions of intent, values are important guiding principles for life – and correlate with patterns of behaviour. A large body of cross-cultural research indicates there are relatively few human values, that these are inter-related, with changes in one affecting others, and that value types can be plotted in a circle of compatible and conflicting values known as a circumplex. Reinforcing values on one side of this circumplex both activates neighbouring values and diminishes the importance an individual attributes to the opposing set of values.

For the purposes of this discussion, we are most concerned with two opposing values types:

- *intrinsic (or self-transcendent)* values, which are associated with concern for equality, social justice and care for nature – and pro-social and environmental behaviours flowing from these
- operating antagonistically, *extrinsic (or self-enhancement)* values, which include concern for wealth and status.

All individuals hold all such values, but with differing levels of emphasis, probably depending on a wide variety of social influences – from the opinions of family and friends through to those promulgated by the media, political parties, advertising and campaigns of non-governmental organisations. Recognising how values shape behaviours is crucial, therefore, to designing effective campaigns seeking to make transformative changes to society.

Miliband has argued that the Labour Party should be seeking to ‘influence people’s values up and down the country so they share our progressive beliefs’.²¹ Similarly, campaigners on environment and development issues increasingly recognise that ‘some values provide a better source of motivation for engaging “bigger-than-self” problems [such as climate change and global poverty] than other values’²². Given that appeals to intrinsic values seem to encourage public concerns for equality and care for nature, some clear grounds exist for collaboration between progressives and greens. The task is to find specific ways of talking about the environment that best appeal to these shared red–green values.

One way in which values are almost certainly activated and strengthened in society is through the use of ‘linguistic framing’. Frames, which have an intellectual pedigree within linguistics dating back to the 1970s, have long been understood instinctively by politicians on both right and left. Among US neo-conservatives, the practice of framing an issue in terms amenable to the right is well honed. George Lakoff, professor of cognitive linguistics at UC Berkeley, uses the example of the phrase ‘tax relief’. By framing the issue of tax cuts as one of relief, conservatives steal a march on their opponents, having already

19 Ed Miliband, ‘The challenge for labour: becoming the standard-bearer of Britain’s progressive majority’, speech to Fabian conference, 15 January 2011, www.fabians.org.uk/events/transcripts/ed-miliband-speech-text.

20 Tom Crompton, *Common Cause*, WWF, Oxfam, Friends of the Earth, CPRE, & COIN, 2010, p.26.

21 Miliband, ‘The challenge for labour’.

22 Crompton, *Common Cause*, p.9.

suggested to the listening public that taxes are a burden and require alleviation. The concept creates a 'frame of reference', which instantly trips off other ideas in the public's mind, and activates extrinsic and self-enhancement values of use to neo-conservatives – such as a belief in economic self-interest, freedom from collective responsibilities, and unfettered individualism.²³ Lakoff has criticised American progressives for frequently allowing neo-conservatives to frame issues their way, and hence coming to own the political battleground. Reframing an issue is thus about changing the terms of the debate.

Environmental issues are often framed in ways that inadvertently undermine pro-environmental values. Take this speech by Defra minister Caroline Spelman, for example, at the Nagoya summit on biodiversity last year: 'We need to bring about a real change in the way we value natural capital and ecosystem services, and integrate them into the mainstream of our decision-making processes,' she said; 'Bees, for example, are worth about £440m to the UK economy.'²⁴ Ecosystem valuation clearly has its merits, but framing environmental protection solely on the grounds of its monetary savings sends a strongly values-laden message to the public. Such a framing further reinforces the perception that economic concerns should take precedence over people's sense of the inherent value of nature, or their feelings of connectedness towards it. Cultivating popular care for nature at a systemic level simply cannot be achieved through appealing to such extrinsic values, which the psychology literature shows are diametrically opposed to intrinsic, pro-environmental values.

Another pertinent example would be the framing of adverts to promote electric cars or solar PV panels, which often cast such products as status goods much sought-after by 'green consumers'. In the words of *Common Cause*, 'appeals to prestige and status will serve to suppress opposing values... such as community feeling... that must become strengthened if systemic concern about bigger-than-self problems is to emerge'²⁵. So the psychological evidence suggests that such framing is likely, in the long term, to undermine the very values and behaviours environmentalists want to promote – as well as neighbouring progressive values like

concern for justice and equality. A double blow, in other words, for red–green politics.

Labour has made significant progress over the past five years towards embedding environmental concern in its policies. The economic case for action on climate change was strengthened by the Stern Review,²⁶ while under Ed Miliband's direction at the Department of Energy and Climate Change Labour discovered new ways to frame environmental policy in terms of green jobs and the green economy. Yet progressives should become aware that by stressing the purely economic case for ecological sustainability, we are in danger of drowning out other ways of framing the issue; and insofar as the economic case plays to extrinsic values, we may even be undermining our own goals. A case, indeed, of knowing the price of everything but the value of nothing.

I want to propose some alternative ways of framing the environmental challenge that avoid appealing to unhelpful values, and instead emphasise values that are consistent with achieving environmental and progressive ends. These frames are: ecological equity, climate justice, green inheritance and the common good.

Ecological equity

Greater equality will help us rein in consumerism and ease the introduction of policies to tackle global warming.

Pickett and Wilkinson, The Spirit Level²⁷

Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson's tightly argued book *The Spirit Level* serves up a host of reasons why more equal societies are more sustainable. The authors show that more equal societies are better at recycling, and more likely to favour international environmental agreements. They argue that – just as countries introduced more egalitarian policies during the Second World War, such as rationing, to secure public buy-in to the war effort – overcoming climate change will require the burden of reducing emissions to be spread equitably across society. Furthermore, Pickett and Wilkinson point out, egalitarian societies are more concerned with dividing up the proceeds of prosperity than endlessly growing the economy – and, with status competition reduced, a whole lot happier to boot.

²³ See for example this 2003 interview with George Lakoff, http://berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2003/10/27_lakoff.shtml.

²⁴ Caroline Spelman, reported in R. Black, 'World Bank to lead economic push on nature protection', BBC News, 28 October 2010, www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-11642538.

²⁵ Crompton, *Common Cause*, p.34.

²⁶ N Stern, *The Economics of Climate Change: Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change*, Stationery Office, 2006.

²⁷ K. Pickett and R. Wilkinson, *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone*, Penguin, 2009.

Add to this our understanding that concern for equality and care for nature sit next to one another as intrinsic and self-transcendence values, and we can see that framing climate change as a matter of ecological equity makes sense for lots of reasons. Progressives seeking a more equal society can argue the case on grounds of sustainability, while greens should not be afraid to point out that social changes, not just technological ones, will be needed to combat global warming.

Climate justice

Our struggles and causes are not independent.
They are not about the people or the planet; they
are in fact one single common cause – justice.

*Kumi Naidoo, Director of
Greenpeace International, 2009²⁸*

When activists called for ‘climate justice’ at the Copenhagen summit, they were demanding not simply for justice to be done to the environment, but also for environmental justice to be meted out to the world’s peoples. Denying countries the opportunity to develop, by emitting more than our fair share and unleashing climatic change, is an act of gross injustice by the West. Recognising this and acting to repair that injustice should become an enervating principle of how progressives approach international development.

Framing environmental problems as a matter of climate justice has other implications, too. Rather than trying to protect ecosystems through placing a monetary value on them, an alternative progressive approach would be to grant them legal protection through the expansion of human rights law. This would not only enshrine a new human right to a clean and healthy environment; it could also result in establishing legal rights of nature – something that the environmental lawyer Polly Higgins calls for persuasively in her book *Eradicating Ecocide*.²⁹

By framing the dilemma of sustainable development as one of climate justice, progressives and greens can alter the terms of the debate from being about techno-fix solutions to those of ownership, distribution and access to environmental resources. Values of justice, in other words, are brought back into the picture. This is not just progressive – it is also much more rousing

than the cold-blooded, calculating appraisal of the environment as an economic resource.

Green inheritance

We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors;
we borrow it from our children

Native American saying

Ed Miliband speaks of a ‘lost generation’ of young people facing unemployment as a result of the recession. Journalists Ed Howker and Shiv Malik write of the ‘jilted generation’ of those under-30s who are inheriting the deficit left by the banking crisis, the rising costs of higher education and a country whose assets have been run down by privatisation.³⁰ To this list of iniquities should be added the parlous state of the environment that is being handed to the next generation. We need to develop a green inheritance frame that talks about the environment not simply in terms of the abstract rights of future generations but the rights of the next generation. Such a frame should combine the moral ardour that fires progressives fighting for the life chances of young people with the farsightedness of greens considering how to preserve natural resources over the long term.

A green inheritance frame would again speak to values of justice and equality, and suggest policies that enshrine intergenerational justice into present-day decision-making – such as an ombudsman for future generations, a hundred-year parliamentary committee, or the use of green taxes to fund citizen grants for young people.³¹

The common good

Our most basic common link is that we all
inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the
same air. We all cherish our children’s future.
And we are all mortal.

President J.F. Kennedy, June 1963

Lastly, red–green politics would benefit mutually from developing the frame of the common good. This ancient concept has been most recently restated by US philosopher Michael Sandel, and was applied by Ed Miliband to the context

²⁸ Kumi Naidoo, ‘Climate: a question of justice’, BBC News, 16 November 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/8362831.stm>.

²⁹ Polly Higgins, *Eradicating Ecocide: Laws and Governance to Prevent the Destruction of our Planet*, Shephard-Walwyn, 2010.

³⁰ Ed Howker and Shiv Malik, *Jilted Generation: How Britain has Bankrupted its Youth*, Icon Books, 2010.

³¹ For a proposal on how a 100-year committee might operate, see George Monbiot, ‘If an hour is a long time in politics, we must start thinking in centuries’, *Guardian*, 21 Oct 2008, www.guardian.co.uk/commentis-free/2008/oct/21/economy-green-politics.

of climate change in his 2009 Ralph Miliband Lecture, in which he defined the common good as that which 'goes beyond the satisfaction of immediate wishes to treat citizens as citizens, speaking honestly about the tough choices we face'.³² Ippr's Matthew Lockwood summarises the approach as being 'to confront the public with the toughness of the problem [of climate change] and... appeal to people's sense of collective responsibility and fairness, especially to future generations'.³³

In values terms, a common good frame clearly resonates strongly with intrinsic and self-transcendence values, such as equality, justice and community feeling, and would reinforce the other three frames discussed above. Greens can take from it a sense of collective purpose in tackling the huge challenge of climate stabilisation, and an affirmation of the importance of commonly held environmental goods (such as the Earth's atmosphere, sometimes referred to as the 'global commons'). For progressives, it appeals to people's faith in public services and works to strengthen that support. To encourage environmental feeling, stronger analogies could be drawn between environmental common goods and existing public services; both constitute a shared resource, a safety net for all, require society-wide investment and are worth protecting even in hard times. A promising chance to develop this frame has arisen in the wake of the debacle over selling

off English forests, a case where environmental good and public ownership neatly coincide.

Conclusion

These frames are suggestions only. To be successful, frames must be widely accepted, speak to a shared understanding, and constantly repeated in order to gain cultural currency and build political space for action. Reframing an issue is also, of course, only the first step in generating the politics and policies that may eventually help resolve that issue. I hope, therefore, that this article will generate debate, and lead to the refinement or replacement of these suggestions with better ones. But that debate is a vital one to be had if we are to develop shared frames for a red-green politics – and build a lasting alliance based on values, not political convenience.

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³² Ed Miliband, 'The politics of climate change', Ralph Miliband Lecture, 21 November 2009, www.clickgreen.org.uk/big-interview/interview/12892-ed-milibands-ralph-miliband-lecture-he-politics-of-climate-change%E2%80%99.html.

³³ See 'A tale of two Milibands', Political Climate, 23 September 2010, <http://politicalclimate.net/2010/09/23/a-tale-of-two-milibands/>.

6. The left and its problem with sustainability: why less is more

Neal Lawson

Let's be honest, the mainstream left in and around Labour has never been good when it comes to the environment. Name me a leading Labour politician who really gets sustainability? The last I can think of was Robin Cook. Gordon Brown commissioned the Stern Report and then tried to build a third runway! Tony Blair saw aspiration rooted squarely in materialism. Ed Miliband did a half decent job as Energy and Climate Secretary – but as leader has been almost silent on the environment. Why?

There are three reasons I can think of. The first is the Tories have stopped being temporarily green and have reverted to being true blue. The electoral pressure to compete with Dave and his huskies is no longer on. But that is because of the second immediate reason: the cuts. The cuts are now the prism through which all politics is done. We live in an age of austerity and the only debate in town is how to return to an age of prosperity defined by producing more stuff. The Tories see more private spending as the answer and public spending as the danger. Labour rightly identifies cuts in public spending that are too fast and too deep as the problem. But neither question the fundamentals of a growing economy and returning to business as usual. Meanwhile, and sadly, the Liberal Democrats, who did have ideas on sustainability and who in Chris Huhne have an MP who does get it, have lost any legitimacy to talk about anything much. The underlying proposition of all is to get back in the same car that caused the crash.

The third reason is the spanner thrown into the works of climate change by the sceptics. Now I'm no climate change scientist but the overwhelming evidence is that climate change beyond our ability to manage it in human and species interests is close to being exceeded by world-wide

industrialisation. The planet continues to burn and we are to blame. But the silence of the left cannot be explained by any of these immediate factors. Something deeper is at work that explains why the left has a problem with sustainability.

The deeper issue has something to do with the fact that social democracy is in essence the politics of more: more wages and therefore more things to spend those wages on. Social democracy was founded as an organised reaction to the inequalities caused by a free market and was concerned with issues of distribution and not the fundamentals of capitalism and its requirement for perpetual growth. The fact that social democracy is today in an existential crisis in Britain, Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands and just about everywhere it was once a dominant force is no coincidence given the conflict between a politics of more and the end of human life as we know it on our planet. If we can think through the relationship between the politics of more and the near-terminal decline of social democracy then a new progressive politics might be born.

The left and social democracy were born as creeds of more. People were hungry and cold because capitalism failed to distribute the proceeds of growth fairly. Social democracy tried to rebalance the share of the cake and for a moment in time was remarkably successful. A combination of war socialism and capitalist fear of the sovietisation of western Europe led to dramatic improvements in money and social wages in the middle decades of the last century. Effective collective bargaining and the burgeoning welfare state meant the working class had never had it so good. It meant that society in this 'golden age' became more equal.

But then three things happened. First, the neo-liberal counter-revolution went into full swing. Union power and real wages declined and bubble capitalism was born, based first on internet stocks and then house prices. In the process, as capital went global the old institutions of social democracy, unions and national parties lost their bite. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the decline in union bargaining power a growing economy has led to a less equal society. Wealth has trickled up, not down. Real wages are flat and pay at the top has soared.

The second big event was growing awareness of climate change. The science began to show the

earth was warming at an accelerating rate – soon we will face the point of no return as planetary warming becomes a vicious cycle. But even when we know the people who will suffer most will be the poor of our nation and the developing world, the hold of more retains its grip on the psyche of the left. What is more, climate change is likely to hit the poorest hardest. Commodity prices like food are already increasing because of environmental change and who pays most for food – the poor.

The third big shift was the move from a society based on production to one based on consumption.³⁴ We identified more with what we bought than what we made or did. This process has accelerated and deepened our consumption patterns and in turn has undermined the levels of social solidarity that make left of centre politics possible. Class-consciousness has been replaced by consumer consciousness.

Given all of this, the position of the left and Labour on sustainability has not shifted in any fundamental sense. Yes there is a big nod to green issues because it is the politically correct thing to do, but meanwhile behind the scenes a pro-growth agenda continues as normal. Any notion of a truly post-consumption perspective is dismissed out of hand on the rationale that they, the rich, have got it and we, the working class, want it. A politics of post-materialism is derided and disregarded as the elitist politics of the affluent middle classes.

On one level such a view is understandable – those who have should not preach and moralise to those who don't. You can't change the rules of the game, the argument goes, when it suits you. And I'm sure that some middle class snobs look down their noses at the purchasing decisions of the working classes – and more fool them if they do. But none of that gets rid of the problem that even in a growing economy the poor get poorer and the planet burns.

The problem is not the quality of what we buy but collectively the amount, and how the culture of consumer capitalism systematically rules out other ways of being human. This takes us back to the founding problem of social democracy – its lack of a fundamental critique of capitalism and its reluctance to pose an alternative to it, instead settling for a fight for more scraps from the capitalist plate. In this social democracy

has failed to understand the dynamic nature of capitalism, in particular a capitalism–consumer society that is set free of the countervailing forces of a producer-based society.

Without strong unions and the prospects of not just social democracy but socialism the market does not do balance or common sense. The market is a shark that feeds on every profit-making opportunity. Enough is never enough. Profits, dividends and bonuses only count if they are bigger this year than last. The market can't be trusted to save the planet because that is not what it exists to do. It will sell you a flat screen TV and then persuade you that you need one that is bigger or with Blue Ray or HD or whatever the latest new gadget is, as there is always a latest new must-have, not-been-seen-dead-without gadget. We buy them not because we are stupid or because we are duped but because there is nothing else to do. Increasingly there is no other way of being human than expressing yourself through what you can buy.

And it has always been thus with capitalism. Rosa Luxemburg developed the theory of virgin territory: the need for capitalism to expand exponentially into new lands. For most of the last century this was a geographical colonisation but over time the more important colonisation was of our minds. Emotionally and culturally we became attuned to the requirement to endlessly consume. Our meaning, identity and status increasingly came from what we owned. Not only did this threaten the planet but it undermined social democracy – a mass political movement for equality based on labour could not get any 'purchase' in a world in which what mattered was what you consumed, not where and how you produced. This was the double bind for the left: the rise of the turbo-consumer presented a new challenge in the shape of climate change and it undermined the ability of social democracy to operate as a mass political movement. The more Labour panders to this consumerist agenda, the less capable the party is to resist more commodification pressure of currently decommodified areas of life. It is a vicious cycle of decline.

But the rise of consumer society raises another systemic problem for Labour and those on the left who fear that without growth greater equality is impossible. Only when the tide is rising can all the boats float higher. The belief has always

³⁴ Read my book *All Consuming*, Penguin, 2009, if you want to know more about the how and why of this shift.

been that growth makes redistribution possible and without redistribution there is no point in the left. The former point is exactly right but the latter is now seriously open to debate. The evidence of the last three decades is that growth has resulted in greater inequality as the Gini coefficient, the international measure of inequality, is at a higher point now than 30 years ago. This is because in a world dominated by the status competition realised through consumption as a series of never-ending positional goods, the rich will always pull away. Without a powerful social democratic movement the rich will get richer – not least because those at the bottom of the social pile are trying, more than ever, to beat the rich in the accumulation of more material things. Today the working classes don't want to defeat the rich and powerful – they want to be like them. The rich are not class enemies to be despised but inspirations and *OK magazine* heroes to copy. We want to be rich and famous like them. In such circumstances of rampant individualism and turbo-consumption equality becomes culturally and structurally impossible.

The left can never give up on the goal of a more equal society; if it does then it stops being the left. But to become more equal we have to stop the treadmill of consumption and the status competition that drives it, such that the most important thing in life is no longer having more than the people around you.

Here we enter the realm of the good society. Only when we have regard for other things like time and cooperation will we create the conditions in which redistribution becomes possible. Before, redistribution of wealth was possible by pure class strength, but those days have long gone. Having lost the power of the working class movement the left must shift to a moral movement that unites the interests of a majority of both the working and middle classes. We have to find a way of tapping into the insecurity, anxiety and exhaustion that abound across classes and find new ways to redistribute wealth, income and time. That way we can become more equal as a society and stand a chance of saving the planet.

We know from *The Spirit Level*³⁵ that the pain of unequal societies is relative not absolute. The poor in a rich society live more miserable lives than the poor in a poorer society. It is the gap

that matters, not after a certain point where the floor is. But the rich suffer too. Of course people want more if more is all that is available. It is an alternative we need, not an addition. If life is determined by consuming, then life becomes all-consuming. The lesson for the left is that only less can be more. We need a much more ambitious view of social democracy than the ability to shop as fairly as possible.

Those on the left were not always such dry materialists, but from the politics of William Morris and beauty we ended up with the politics of Morrisons the supermarket. Guilds were replaced by Gucci. Democratic ownership and control was replaced by turbo-consumption. Morally we have lost our way. The politics of more is the politics of capitalism. Jobs are secured at any price. Aspiration is defined as the right to earn and own. The Green New Deal is a way of bridging the red-green divide but it only papers over the cracks by trying to find technical solutions to growth. Meanwhile politicians of the right like President Sarkozy in France and David Cameron in the UK at least examine the politics of post-materialism and happiness – however shallow that response may be. The left needs to challenge and lead the debate for a more seductive vision of the good life than that offered by consumer capitalism – because a fairer distribution of resources within it is impossible.

People like Tim Jackson brilliantly give us a plan for prosperity without growth.³⁶ Herman Daly has set out the basis for a steady-state economy. But it is not the technical ability to save the planet we need, but a different vision of what we aspire to be and what it means to be human. The good society is about more than just more. Instead of the New Labour mantra of economic efficiency and social justice going hand in hand we need to turn to a really new mantra of economic sustainability and social justice going hand in hand. We have to find ways at least to slow the treadmill down in the biggest game of prisoner's dilemma we have ever played.

Climate change is the natural collective and democratic territory of the left. We have to do it together or not at all. Climate change proves our interdependence and the need for collective action. Even if what gets you out of bed is class war and the pursuit of equality, the survival of the planet is now the sharp knife at the throat

35 K. Pickett and R. Wilkinson, *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone*, Penguin, 2009.

36 Tim Jackson, *Prosperity Without Growth*, Earthscan, 2011.

of capitalism. It creates a new role for the state, solidarity and internationalism. It demands a new political economy and gives a fresh impetus to the politics of equality. All of a sudden the possibilities for a shortened working week, a living wage and a maximum wage are opened up – not by the traditional arguments and forces of the left but by climate change and the vision of a good society. It demands new policies be adopted in a way that is planned, effective and fair – or the changes will be unplanned, chaotic and savage. Climate change gives social democracy back its historic mission – making the market the servant of society.

Up until now, in the words of Matt Taibbi of *Rolling Stone* magazine, ‘organised greed always defeats disorganised democracy’. The domination of our culture by status consumption and competition means our place on earth is doomed. Social democracy has become about buying things we don’t need with money we don’t have. For Labour and too much of the left growth

cannot be too high or too fast. That model is dead. It doesn’t work for the planet and it doesn’t even work as a way of making society more equal. Such an agenda undermines our ability to build the more equal society. Unsurprisingly the left started failing when consumption took a stranglehold on society. It could not beat them, so under New Labour it joined them. The left needs a new game.

Unsustainable is a great word – it says exactly what it does on the tin. It means things can’t go on and we cannot avoid the consequences of staying on the same course. Our lifestyle is going to come to an end. We have to change; the issue is when and how. Will the market decide or will we decide? We can do so much better than be the willing slaves of capitalism. Social democracy can now be reborn in red and green – its mission to save the people because it saves the planet.

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7. What has been the experience of red–green coalitions?

John Hare

In a period of just four years from 1995 to 1999 an informed observer might be forgiven for thinking that a new political phenomenon was appearing in European and international politics: the red–green coalition. Green parties became partners at ministerial level in social democrat, ‘rainbow’ or left coalition governments in Finland (1995), Italy (1996), France (1997), Germany (1998) and Belgium (1999). At the same time, the strong growth in electoral support for parties such as the Swedish, Australian and New Zealand Green Parties – all countries with significant social democrat or Labour Party governing traditions – made it appear likely that further red–green coalitions were imminent. A new zeitgeist, it seemed, was emerging.

A decade later the picture looks very different. There is not a single red–green coalition in government at national level, the apparent candidates for power have failed to enter government at all let alone with left parties (particularly the Australian, New Zealand and Swedish Greens) and increasingly we see the apparently automatic logic of red–green coalitions being challenged by a wide variety of often eyebrow-raising alternatives by both parties; who would have predicted the Irish Greens and Fianna Fail? Or, more peculiar still, the New Zealand Labour Party and the (Christian fundamentalist) United Future Party? The failure of a red–green coalition to form in New Zealand choice was made even stranger by the clear practical availability of a green alternative in the NZ Parliament – in fact the mathematics favoured a Labour–Green coalition. And these cannot be dismissed as political aberrations; the Czech Greens joined a centre-right coalition that lasted from 2006 to 2010, the Swedish Greens chose to merely ‘co-operate’ with the social democrats from 2002 to 2006 and Australian Greens are currently providing no more than de facto confidence and supply support to the Australian Labor Party at

national level and state level in Tasmania and are in coalition with Labor only in one state (the Australian Capital Territories).

Meanwhile in Germany, despite seven years of red–green government at national level, the centre-left SPD formed a ‘grand coalition’ with the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) at national level in 2005 and at local level the CDU is in governing coalitions with the SPD in three *Länder* and with the Greens in a further three. By contrast, the SPD and the Greens have only managed to create two red–green *Land* coalitions, with at least one further Land – Hesse – currently governed by a centre-right alliance as a result of the SPD’s refusal to join a ‘red–green–red’ alliance with the Greens and the Left Party. Back in the 1990s there were a dozen *Land*-level red–green coalitions and governing alliances between either the SPD or the Greens and a centre or right party were very much the exception.

Obviously there are practical reasons, usually dictated by the electoral numbers, which underwrite most of these examples, but the failure of the red–green coalition appears to need some explaining. At least part of the weakening of the tide of red–green coalitions is an expression of the contemporary weakness of the senior partner in those coalitions, the centre-left, without whom electoral success has always been impossible. But one cannot help speculate on whether this reflects on the experiences of those left-centre parties that entered coalitions with green parties and suggests that the experience may not have been a politically fruitful one for them. Was the red–green coalition a historical aberration?

The answer is, probably not. The first thing to acknowledge is that although the wave of red–green governments was eye-catching and (for those of an eco-socialist disposition) encouraging, it was, in many ways, an illusion. Four of those coalitions (France’s Plural Left in 1997, Italy’s ‘Olive Alliance’ of 1996, Finland’s ‘Rainbow Alliance’ of 1995 and Belgium’s ‘Progressive Alliance’ in 1998) included Greens for primarily symbolic reasons; none were essential for arithmetical victory in the legislature. In the case of France and Italy these governments were the result of pre-election pacts (the practical impetus being electoral systems that encouraged pre-election co-operation) and ministerial

office was the reward for participation – but as a result Green Party ministers were dispensable and correspondingly weak. In Belgium, Green Party participation was symbolic of the ‘newness’ of the 1999 government, only the second post-war administration to be created without the Christian Democrats, and the first for 40 years. As with Italy and France, Green Party membership of the government was effectively honorary. In Finland the government joined by the Greens was led by the Social Democrats but included two centre-right parties; its popular name – the ‘Rainbow Alliance’ described its straddling of the political spectrum from left to right rather than an alliance of progressive parties and – judging from subsequent election results – it may represent Finland’s final attempt to hold together a consensual centrist and inclusive governing mode. The Greens finally left government on a single issue, in this case the decision to recommence building nuclear power stations, but the government did not fall as a result.

In reality there has only been one red–green coalition at national level that was a genuine mutually dependent two-party coalition – the SPD and the German Greens from 1998 to 2005 – so it deserves some serious examination even though it is obviously dominated by factors specific to Germany. What were the distinctive features of this administration?

First, it is worth pointing out that both the SPD and the Green Party enjoyed a little luck; the 1998 election gave a clear electoral mandate to the red–green coalition – the Free Democratic Party (FDP; roughly the equivalent of the Lib Dems in the UK), the normal coalition partner in Germany, lost seats itself and was also a partner in the discredited and defeated alliance with the CDU, which had lost the whole election. This left the SPD free to choose the Greens as a coalition partner; indeed it made it appear the only fair and ideologically coherent choice and gave the coalition the kind of public credibility that the Liberal Democrats in the UK in May 2010 could only dream of. But it is still important to remember that there was nothing inevitable about the choice. The scale of Germany’s post-unification economic problems and Schroder’s Blairite reflex to turn right meant that his first instinct was to form a ‘Grand Coalition’ with the CDU and it was apparently only the unaccept-

ability of this to the wider party that led him to open talks with the Greens.

Coalitions always pose the ‘who gets what?’ question and the ministerial split was twelve–three in favour of the SPD. This was a fair reflection of the electoral strength of the two parties since the SPD had six times as many seats as the Greens. But in addition to their numerical weakness the Greens were offered two relatively peripheral and ‘feminine’ ministries – Health and Environment as well as the more ostensibly prestigious Foreign Ministry. However it is important to understand that the latter was in reality a minor appointment too. By convention the junior coalition partner in Germany is usually offered the Foreign Ministry – it is a prestigious blue-chip appointment, but in reality Germany’s post-war choice to exercise a low-key, collectivist international role, the ‘economic giant, but political dwarf’, meant that the Foreign Minister was not a significant player. Of course, events dictated otherwise; Joschka Fischer was to play a central role in defining the red–green coalition as first the Kosovo crisis, then September 11, the invasion of Afghanistan and finally the Iraq invasion all landed on his desk, but this was pure chance.

It was perhaps this arena where the tensions between the SPD and the Green Party showed most clearly. The SPD were strongly committed to the Atlantic Alliance and to the Americans in particular; it was an Atlanticist perspective they shared with most Western European social democrats but was for them much deeper, a product of their bitter historic rift with the German Communist Party (the KPD) and its involvement in the (East) German Democratic Republic. By contrast, the German Green Party was largely born out of the anti-nuclear protest movement, which was also deeply opposed to nuclear weapons and to NATO.

In the run-up to the 1998 election, the Greens had dropped the demand to leave NATO from their manifesto in order not to render participation in a post-election coalition impossible, but sought instead to put NATO under international control, and the coalition agreement signed by the two parties clearly shows the divide between the two parties. One can almost pick out the sentences inserted by each side – on the one hand it affirms the ‘indispensability’ of the Atlantic

Alliance while on the other it 'binds the tasks of NATO outside the alliance to the rules and standards of the UN and the OCSE'.

In the event, Fischer came out clearly in favour of NATO military interventions in Kosovo and Afghanistan but famously refused to join the Anglo-US invasion of Iraq. Given the general Atlanticist consensus between the major German parties it seems highly unlikely that any other party would have taken such a decisive stand, and this may rank as one of the Greens' greatest achievements in the coalition. Incidentally, it may also be counted as a 'win' in practice for the SPD too, since popular opposition to participation in the war was probably the decisive factor in the red-greens' general election victory in 2002, a victory won in the face of a failed economic policy and general public unpopularity.

In the domestic policy carve-up, the SPD kept its hands firmly on the main levers of the economy, and should probably be regarded as responsible for all economic policy, although with hindsight they seem to have had relatively little idea of what exactly to do in this arena, certainly once the openly Keynesian Oscar Lafontaine resigned as Finance Minister after just one year. Unemployment, which had more than doubled in the decade following reunification, was the crucial topic. Schroder rashly demanded that he should be judged on his ability to reduce it before the next general election, a demand that proved to be a mistake – unemployment stubbornly refused to fall over the next four years despite the SPD's most business-friendly efforts, leaving an aura of failure over the administration. Generally, the coalition's failings in economic policy appear to have mostly damaged the SPD and left the Greens relatively unscathed, probably rightly given that they had no real responsibility for them. But one is left wondering what they would have done differently given the chance. They certainly never deviated in their public support for SPD economic policy and neither they nor any part of the red-green government offered any challenge to the EU's deeply conservative Stability and Growth Pact or to Helmut Kohl's transfer economy in East Germany.

Probably the Greens' biggest domestic success was in energy policy, where they obtained agreement for a phase out of nuclear power and the introduction of the feed-in tariff as part of the

'100,000 roofs' programme to massively expand Germany's solar array. The solar policy created a new industrial sector and was one of the few employment growth areas of the administration. It also produced imitation policies in France, Spain, the Czech Republic and eventually the UK. The Greens also managed to get SPD agreement to an eco tax on carbon fuel consumption. This was a source of a classic green-red conflict of the sort that delights sectarian anti-green lefties: good for the planet but bad for the poor. The carbon tax was undoubtedly green – it taxed fossil fuel use and thus both discouraged use and increased investment in efficiency – but it was also socially regressive. Taxes on spending, especially on necessities, usually are, of course, but the effect was magnified in this case by the decision to spend the money raised by the tax on reducing employers' insurance contributions, thus clearly shifting a tax burden from business to ordinary consumers. But the decision to allocate the money thus was the SPD's – part of Schroder's warm embrace of neo-liberalism – and while the tax was undoubtedly inspired by the Green Party, its use was all SPD.

Finally in the environmental field, the Greens won an agreement to phase out nuclear power, albeit by retiring power stations at the end of their usable cycle, so they would remain in use until well into the 2030s.

Apart from environmental issues and foreign policy there is one clear third area where the influence of the Green Party can be seen in the 1998–2005 government: that of redefining Germany's anachronistic citizenship laws. Existing laws were arguably racist; they allowed 'Volksdeutsche' (often non-German-speaking) from Eastern Europe automatically to qualify for citizenship while second-generation grandchildren of immigrants (people born and brought up in Germany) might not. The issue was one that all the main parties had steadfastly refused to face up to, but it had been important for the Greens in opposition and they kept it on the political agenda in office, successfully negotiating a redefinition, albeit one that was some way short of their full aspirations. The citizenship debate in Germany is one that probably has least relevance outside Germany, but it clearly had an important symbolic modernising role, and was one that the SPD alone would not have taken. It showed the

Greens clearly operating to the left of the SPD's agenda, and doing so with some courage and success.

If the green issues can be seen fairly clearly, what did the SPD gain from the coalition? In terms of policy it is a harder question to answer. Like the British Labour Party, the SPD had little left in the way of proper ideologically based beliefs by 1998; it was a managerialist party. Frankly the SPD gained power and position (again, like the UK Labour Party, after a battering 'wilderness years' era in opposition; they had last been in government in 1982), and there are no clear coalition policies that have an unequivocal SPD stamp on them except its general economically pro-market orientation. What price, if any, did the two sides pay for participation in coalitions? It could certainly be argued that the biggest failure of the Greens in the coalition was that they did not develop any real critique of consumerism and its wasteful consequences, either for the planet or for individual human beings, and this must be at least partly because they needed to share power with a traditional growth-model party. It is hard to assess the extent to which 'agenda-setting' really precedes actual change within a society, but it seems crucial for left and green parties, if they are to prosper in the long run, to systematically challenge the dominant ideology of possessive individualism within an oligarchic market economy. The German Greens' inability to formulate an alternative vision to that offered by modern consumerism is reminiscent of New Labour's meek acceptance of the values of aggressive neo-liberalism and its apparent refusal to try and win – or even start – a debate about the damage that growing inequality causes to both individuals and communities.

It also seems clear that the German Greens lacked a credible alternative macro-economic model, which left them with no option but to follow the SPD down the path of Schröder's 'soft' neo-liberalism. For the SPD the most obvious price that they may have paid is to sacrifice their own monopoly of representation of the German left. It would be stretching the knowable effects of the 1998–2005 coalition too far to attribute all of the SPD's subsequent electoral woes to it. Indeed, during the course of the government it appeared as if it might be the Greens who would suffer most at the polls – the Green vote dropped

in all 20 *Länder* elections during the course of the government. But the longer term has been harder for the SPD – it has steadily lost votes to the Greens and, more recently, to the Left Party. Some opinion polls in Autumn 2010 even gave the Greens a slim lead over the SPD at national level, raising the possibility that a future coalition would see the Greens as the senior partner and – possibly – Germany's first 'non-German' as Chancellor Cem Özdemir, co-chair of the Greens and son of Turkish immigrants.

Generally coalition appears to have offered more opportunities for the Greens, with the pay-off for left parties being either simple power or – less tangibly – image. The presence of green parties in coalitions has, in the slightly repellent language of marketing, allowed left alliances to 'refresh their brand', borrowing the widespread public perception that green issues are 'qualities issues', often coming ready-packed with photogenic media images rather than the dull jobs-and-services policies of the traditional left that were (and remain) hard to make shiny in the modern media marketplace. Certainly this factor seems to explain some of the various deals to bring in Green ministers to left coalitions that did not depend on Green Party votes for their existence.

The evidence that participation in coalitions with the left is always a good thing for green parties is not unambiguous – the Belgian Greens have struggled in the decade since, although they seem to be recovering, while the, admittedly slightly odd, Italian Greens have all but vanished. But the overall prognosis is fairly positive. The Finnish Greens may not have gained another ministerial seat but they have continued to grow their vote steadily. Meanwhile in France, the eco-alliance Europe Ecologie took over 16% in European elections in 2009 (just 0.2% behind the once-mighty Parti Socialiste). Now led by Dominique Voynet – who was the one Green minister in the Plural Left government of 1997 – they appear on the brink of a breakthrough.

At any rate, the experience of Green parties that dally with the right is ominous – when the Czech centre-right coalition fell in 2010 the Greens lost two-thirds of their vote and all their seats while the Irish Greens lost all six of their Dail seats, making 2011 the first Irish General Election for 23 years in which they failed to win a single seat.

Looking at broader issues there are other questions that emerge from the experience of the German red–green coalition; when ministries are split it is of course natural that junior partners will be shunted to the edges, to environment, development, culture, education and so on – to the peripheral or ‘feminine’ ministries. But it raises an important political question for all Green parties that joined governments across Europe or may be offered that option in the future. On the one hand it is central to green ideology that these issues should move from the edge to the centre of political thinking – but the question arises, do Green ministers in these portfolios challenge that zeitgeist, or merely confirm its categorisation of these portfolios as ‘junior’?

It would be good to see greater debate and discussion about the workings of red–green coalitions in practice since there is a genuine paucity of research in this field. On the green side there are seemingly interminable doctorates and learned papers on the splits between ‘realos’ and ‘fundis’ in Germany and elsewhere; on the left there are seemingly as many on relationships between the new left and the old, and where ecological issues and parties fit into these categories, but there is very little practical analysis of what happens when left and green parties govern together and what the consequences are. It would be a welcome and very useful addition for more parties and individuals that go through this process to publish a record of their experiences. In particular, it would be interesting for a British audience to have more published information on the practical workings of local government coalitions such as those that have taken place between the Labour and Green Parties in Kirklees and Lancaster, or those between the Green Party and Plaid Cymru in Ceredigion.

Postscript, 7 May 2011

The above piece was written in February this year and therefore did not take account the German Land election results of February and March, which represent events that are little short of a political earthquake in Germany.

The election season began in Hamburg in February where results were interesting but innocuous enough. The drama was provided by

the collapse in the CDU vote – it halved. This appeared to be the standard price to be paid by a governing party during a period of economic upheaval and, of particular salience in Germany, the ongoing bailouts of the eurozone’s weaker members, which are deeply unpopular among German taxpayers. The SPD picked up most of the benefit (up from 34% to 48%), while the Greens saw only modest growth (up 1.6%, gaining just two seats).

But the real bombshells were the extraordinary results that came in March in Baden-Württemberg, Saxony-Anhalt and the Rhineland-Palatinate. If the SPD had been hoping that Hamburg was to be the pattern for further gains based on the unpopularity of the CDU they were to be sorely disappointed. In Saxony-Anhalt their vote stagnated (up just 0.1%, up two seats), while in the Rhineland-Palatinate it actually *fell* dramatically – down 10%, losing 11 seats. The big winners in both were the Greens, which won seats in both Länder for the first time, doubling their vote in Saxony-Anhalt (taking nine seats) and *tripling* it in the Rhineland (taking 18 seats).

Striking though these results were, they were both clearly overshadowed by the Baden-Württemberg earthquake. The Green vote here doubled – but from a much more impressive starting point since they already held 17 seats and 12% of the vote. The SPD vote – again – stagnated, down 2%. Baden-Württemberg has been a CDU monopoly since the Second World War and they remain the largest party with 39% of the vote, but the extraordinary growth in the Green vote has seen the formation of green–red coalition, the first in German political history with the Greens as the senior partner. This would be a significant event anywhere, but in the richest and most conservative Land in Germany it is tempting to read it as a tectonic shift in German politics. The final Green vote of 24.3% is the highest Green vote in any German state or federal election. When I mused in February about the possibility that Cem Özdemir might be the next German Chancellor, it was as much to try and illustrate the speed with which Germany had successfully redefined its own citizenship laws and how this process had intersected with the rise of the Greens as it was serious political prediction. But it is no longer a mere debating point, it is – for now

at least – the most likely outcome of the 2013 national elections.

The idea of the ‘anti-party party’ teetering on the brink of power is strange enough, but the Baden-Württemberg result is truly bizarre. Winfried Kretschmann, the new Green President of the state, is apparently happy to state in public that ‘fewer cars are of course better than more. We must sell mobility concepts in the future not just more cars’ – standard stuff for a Green politician perhaps – but this state is the home of Daimler, Porsche and Mercedes, which employ 150,000 workers there. If ‘post-materialist’ politics is winning in Baden-Württemberg then surely it can win anywhere?

So why? In a word, Fukushima. The Japanese nuclear disaster could not have come at a better time for the Greens. For the CDU, and in particular Angela Merkel, it could not have come at a worse one. It was her decision in late 2010 to suspend the closure programme for Germany’s nuclear plants (the same programme initiated by the red-green coalition in 2000) that began the Green rise in the polls and the re-birth of Germany’s always powerful anti-nuclear protest movement. Of course the nuclear lobby is powerful in Germany, too, and has managed to withstand huge unpopularity in the past, but the Fukushima drama and the daily dripfeed of frightening images and bad news from Japan has galvanised popular attitudes. The Greens’ unambiguously ‘anti’ position on the nuclear question has left them perfectly placed to reap the electoral benefits. The Hamburg result (pre-Fukushima) makes it clear that this issue has been decisive to many voters (as has Merkel’s highly implausible re-conversion to the closure programme, which smacks of political desperation). The SPD has been unable to take advantage of the CDU’s discomfort because it too has always been a pro-nuclear party.

It is also important to note that the Baden-Württemberg result was also strongly influenced by the ‘Stuttgart 21’ project, a deeply unpopular rebuilding of Stuttgart’s main railway station requiring the destruction of a much-loved city

park. The issue has provoked huge controversy, not least because of some very unpleasant and public police violence. Perhaps these scenes of riot police once again cracking the heads of the ‘Generation of ’68’ carried historical resonance, because this time the 68-ers are respectable, middle-aged and peaceful, while the police and the authorities appeared like thuggish trouble-makers. But again the SPD have been unable to capitalise on opposition to the project because they have always supported it; the new coalition intends to deal with the issue by referendum.

What do these results say about the wider relationship between red and green parties? Certainly Germany seems to offer a very ‘classic’ template for the slow but steady replacement of an old left party by a new left one, and these results seem to confirm the tentative suggestions I made in February that this process is under way in Germany. The extraordinary salience of issues like nuclear power in Germany have clearly given the Greens there huge leverage and – crucially – the electoral system has allowed them to grow this into a significant political role. The SPD meanwhile have been left floundering in a rather unhappy no-man’s-land of soft neo-liberalism and populist vote-chasing that is reminiscent of the worst of New Labour. The UK electoral system has saved Labour in the UK from having to fight the same strategic battle with a new left party and will surely mean that they are extremely unlikely to be usurped by the Green Party of England and Wales. But they face the same problem of steady leakage of millions of voters (many of whom are not being lost to other parties, but are simply refusing to vote) and of having no distinctive and credible ideological identity. In the search for any of these, they might do worse than look to Germany and look for endorsement from the Greens. Offering a few parliamentary seats in exchange might be a deal well worth the cost.

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8. No red without green: why any socialism must be an eco-socialism

Rupert Read

The most influential political philosopher of our time remains the late John Rawls. His political philosophy of liberalism and his ‘two principles’ of justice are backed by much of the ‘left’ in the English-speaking world as (allegedly) a sufficient philosophical undergirding for its views, its policies, its fundamental stance. Rawls suggests that a ‘liberal socialism’ (or, in practice, a liberal social democracy) is one possible outcome of his thinking; this position is very popular for instance among those in the Fabian Society in Britain today, and is largely dominant even among ‘leftist’ academics. This surprises me, for reasons which will in part become clear below. I do not think that Rawls is a figure who should be taken seriously by the left – and I shall argue here that left-leaning greens certainly cannot take his philosophy seriously.

Rawls’s ‘celebrated’ difference principle says in essence that inequalities are justified if they lead to more income and wealth for the worst off in society. My argument in this article is that this principle is highly likely to be empty of consequences, unless it is a license for ecologically and socially unsustainable practices and modes of social organisation.

What is money? What, to be slightly more precise, is having a different amount of money – more money, say; more income or wealth than other people? It is the ability to acquire for oneself a share of (the fruits of) their labour-time, and/or the ability to acquire for oneself a share of the Earth’s resources larger than theirs.

The Earth’s resources, such as land and all its yields, are our natural capital. Yet they are treated by John Rawls, as by conventional economists, primarily as income. If one has a greater share than others of such income, as is of course allowed under Rawls’s famous ‘difference principle’, one is taking more natural capital than others.

Such takings are only seriously constrained, in Rawls’s system, by the ‘just savings’ principle, which regulates (by a sort of inter-generational application of the difference principle) the degree to which one is allowed to degrade the environment: one must not disadvantage the worst off in future generations by such takings.

But it now starts to look as if the difference principle will be either ecologically unsustainable or empty of non-egalitarian implications. Why? Well, it will be empty of non-egalitarian implications – it will be extensionally equivalent to a true egalitarianism – if it turns out that any departure between incomes – any significant difference in outcome of the kind that Rawls’s principles of justice allow – produces a result that is ecologically unsustainable, and thus violates the ‘just savings’ principle, on a sound reading of that principle. And we have some good reason to believe that that will be so.

What reason? One such reason that has risen to great prominence is the ‘contraction and convergence’ model being applied by many of those climate scientists and political thinkers and leaders in the ‘developing’ world who are looking beyond the Kyoto Protocol to a method of checking manmade climate change that will actually work – and that will be just. Those advocating ‘contraction and convergence’ argue that we must build down the levels of CO₂ emissions. The same model, I would suggest, can and in time surely will be applied to some of the other pollutants that would otherwise threaten the future of life on Earth, such as some long-lasting synthetics, and possibly even most non-renewable resources, including oil) produced by rich countries to a level to which the poor countries should be permitted to increase their emissions (to allow poorer countries as much development as they wish for, so long as it is truly *sustainable* development). In other words, that all countries should ‘eventually’ – within a time scale sufficient to stabilise the Earth’s climate (and that time scale may well now be shorter than a decade) – harmonise their CO₂ emissions at a level that the planetary ecosystem can tolerate.

How can the income that comes from taking natural capital and turning it into waste that is unsustainably harmful beyond a certain level justly be distributed according to the difference principle, if that principle results in any signifi-

cant differences? It cannot. The finitude of our shared ecosystem cannot tolerate any significant differences produced by the difference principle, except at the cost of injustice.

Any departure from the contraction and convergence model – any special pleading during the period of convergence, or any lack of willingness to converge or to agree to the contracted overall level of CO₂ emissions – if it be licensed by the difference principle would be so only at the cost of injustice. It would cost future generations, in particular. It would cost the Earth.

We must then start to take seriously a future in which there will be no difference in the level of non-renewable resources permitted to each person, and no difference in the level of potentially dangerous waste products permitted to each person. And ‘each person’ is each present or future person. A growthist expansion of the pie in order to distribute it so that the worst off become as well off as possible will harm future people, in that it will cost the Earth, in that the ‘pie’ has been expanded only because of more ingredients for it having been dug up and so on. In other words, the pie that we distribute has to have been made of something, but the ingredients are running out, and the process of baking the pie is baking us all (leading to the onset of dangerous climate change).

The only possible response a Rawlsian can make, I think, is to claim that inequalities can still be justified, if they lead to greater efficiencies in the use of resources than equal shares would yield, and thus will still benefit the worst off, even in a world with ecological limits. But just how plausible is this response, in such a world? For, in a world with ecological limits, in a steady-state economy, then one person having more than another is likely to be a permanent state of affairs, and how psychologically and socially tenable will this be? Permanent disparities in resources, one person or class having more than another for the alleged good of all – will just not wash, in a world where the allocation of resources is a zero-sum game, because of ecological limits. Rawlsian liberalism will be socially unsustainable in such ecologically confined circumstances as we are now entering into.

So Rawls does not provide an adequate philosophical basis for socialism. Rawls’s justification for inequality – the ‘difference principle’ – is a

dangerous distraction that must now be dropped, in favour of egalitarianism. In an era when at last we begin to take ecological limits seriously, and seriously to question the shibboleth of economic growth, the time is long past in which we can take a liberal political philosophy – which in effect enshrines consumerism as holy writ – seriously. It is time instead for a genuinely egalitarian and ecological political philosophy to take centre stage (I am working on such a philosophy; see my forthcoming book, *The End of Liberalism and the Dawn of Permanent Culture*).

And such egalitarianism must fully include future people (on which, see my article in *Open Democracy*³⁷), and not only present people. It is obscene to talk about socialism in a way that involves ‘enriching’ only those alive today. Arguing that everybody should be able to fly at will is arguing that we should be allowed collectively to stamp on the faces of our children as yet unborn.

Thus there can be no socialism that is not an ecosocialism. For only ecosocialism, as indicated for instance in the work of Gorz and of Joel Kovel, can claim to be taking seriously the claims of future people, their ungainsayable need to inherit a sound ecosystem. This will ultimately require the sublation of capitalism.

It is perhaps worth adding that this socialism for the future, based on principles of equal shares (equal shares in the atmosphere, in energy and so on), is likely furthermore to have wider beneficial social and health effects, just as food rationing and a greater level of income equality did, to the surprise of many, in and after the Second World War. In the postwar decade from 1945 to 1955 working class diets, nutrition and health outcomes significantly improved, especially among the young, despite – or rather, because of – the ‘austerity’ of life conditions. The same principle should apply now to carbon emissions, energy consumption and so on. There will be numerous significant and unanticipated advantages of this new green socialism, socially, physically, psychologically. A healthier population with higher well-being would result.

Socialism requires a serious movement toward equality now – a movement of the kind that has been powerfully argued for recently by Danny Dorling, Wilkinson and Pickett, and others – and a simultaneous, parallel movement to treat future

37 R. Read, ‘The last refuge of prejudice’, *Open Democracy*, 11 December 2009, www.opendemocracy.net/ruPERT-read/last-refuge-of-prejudice.

people (and in a certain sense animals, though this is a topic for a future occasion) as our equals too. There is no way of avoiding the conclusion that any true socialism worthy of the name must now be a genuinely and widely egalitarian ecosocialism. It is no longer possible to be a red without taking absolutely seriously the need to be deeply green.

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9. Why being ‘anti-cuts’ is not enough: the need to embrace a new green economic paradigm

Rupert Read

There is a spectre haunting ‘progressivism’, ‘the left’, the emerging anti-coalition coalition: the spectre of ecogism.

Why are we simply demanding ‘jobs’ and ‘growth’ (demands that the most-rapacious corporations are very happy to hear us make)? Why aren’t we demanding a complete change in our economic system, our way of life? Do we really just want to start the growth treadmill all over again? Have we not understood that the utter ‘market failures’ of recent years³⁸ certainly cannot be repaired and future occurrences prevented merely by a return to Keynes and a defence of the state?

Have we forgotten the spirit of 1968? Have we forgotten the work of E.F. Schumacher, Andre Gorz, Ivan Illich, the Club of Rome and Fred Hirsch?

For a new (green) left

Actually, I suspect that the answer to the question about whether we have forgotten the great thinkers of the 1960s and early 70s is that most of us never had a chance to forget them, because we never read them in the first place. I think there is a certain lack of political, philosophical and ecological literacy on the contemporary ‘left’.

We need to remember that the radical thinking of the 1960s and 70s was deliberately sidelined by the market backlash that followed. This is in itself a further reason for fighting the struggle of memory against forgetting, in this connection. We forget the fantastically provocative oeuvre of Illich (who argued that most ‘healthcare’ actually makes people less well and that true prevention simply involves making standard improvements

in public health measures, and the demedicalisation of life and of most illness, and that schooling was equivalent to deskilling and that what we actually need is to deschool society); and definitive works such as *Ecology as Politics or Farewell to the Working Class* by Gorz.³⁹ I suspect that most anti-cuts campaigners, reds and greens alike, simply do not know what these people said a generation ago. And this ignorance is bliss, so far as the cultural hegemony of essentially productivist–consumerist and economistic ideas is concerned.

For instance Gorz argued for a ‘leisure society’, an ecosocialism that, far from demanding endlessly more work for more people, sought to cut savagely the working week for everyone, freeing up half of people’s time to do as they (we) please.

When we simply demand that spending for hospitals and schools be maintained and indefinitely increased, we are missing the chance of creating a society in which far less money would be spent on (often pointless and indeed harmful) ‘treatment’, and in which students would be fitted for life rather than made to jump through a long and alienating series of academic hoops that often just perpetuate economism and obeisance to authority (albeit that the alienation is often so intense that a potentially healthy anti-authority reaction also occurs). When we simply demand ‘jobs’, we are tacitly implying that it is ‘of course’ ‘not possible’ for us autonomously to create our own work; we are tacitly accepting that our role is to be wage slaves, and explicitly urging that the economy in roughly its present form should simply be stimulated and continue. When we propound ‘growth’ as the alternative solution (to our potential sovereign debt crisis) to cuts, we are implying that we don’t have enough stuff and need more material wealth, and we are ignoring the possibility of a differently organised and more egalitarian society that will actually foster well-being and happiness, rather than simply consume all kinds of capital at a faster rate.

And it is important to stress that there is no viable response to this by asking ‘but why can’t we just have green growth?’ As Jonathon Porritt stresses in *Capitalism as if the World Matters* (hardly a work of hardline ecosocialism), while relative energy-intensity of economic activity has improved significantly in recent years, and while

³⁸ See www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=136437905300.

³⁹ A. Gorz, *Ecology as Politics*, Pluto, 1987; A. Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class*, Pluto, 2001.

China's declaration that it will pursue such a programme in coming years is welcome, there is no compelling evidence at all of absolute reductions in energy-intensity, or in overall emissions, *except when there have been significant reductions in the overall level of economic activity*.⁴⁰ There is no good reason to believe that economic growth and environmental degradation can be 'decoupled'. To bet without any evidence that such decoupling is possible and will be actualised we might call 'the green growth delusion'.

As Herman Daly and Aubrey Meyer have argued compellingly, the idea of dematerialising or 'angelising' economic growth is fundamentally absurd. As Daly has often put it: we can eat lower on the foodchain, by all means, but we cannot eat *recipes*.

The real bottom-line, the eco-bottom-line, is that growth just is not green. We can have less ungreen growth: but 'green growth' remains, as far as we can tell, an entirely oxymoronic objective. A shame, then, that it is the proudly stated objective of Cameron, Clegg – and Miliband.

The attractions of resting easy in the anti-cuts coalition

It is admittedly tempting for greens not to rock the boat of the anti-cuts crusade against the ConDem Coalition, and so to soft-pedal on the question of growth, because it enables us to have friendly relations with the left, to be comparatively well treated,⁴¹ and means we don't have to challenge the ruling paradigm (which is hard, and can be unpopular). But we need to be clear: growth is now almost always a bad thing;⁴² for a case study showing this in impressive detail see Richard Douthwaite's definitive account of the failure in human and ecological of growthism in Ireland – and this was penned before the Irish crash showed to one and all that that emperor had no clothes). There is a massive failure of imagination going on among those on the left right now. They fail to see that the ruling economic paradigm – shared by the mainstream left with the conventional right – of the economy as a system that can treat the environment as an 'externality' and must be kept growing forever, simply must be challenged, and replaced.

Two readings of the Green New Deal

The Green New Deal, the hugely influential brainchild of Colin Hines, Caroline Lucas, Larry Elliott and others, is susceptible of two interpretations. The 'green stimulus' interpretation, which has hitherto prevailed, sees the Green New Deal simply as 'green Keynesianism', a key way to 'get the economy moving' again. This is of course happily compatible with the mainstream economic paradigm. And this is the failure of imagination on the left today: NoShock, UKUncut, FalseEconomy and so on, for all their (many) virtues, *are not questioning growth*, and are not really questioning capitalism or offering a challenge to anything that 'the business community' wants to hold sacrosanct. (You don't challenge inequality by trying to raise all boats – that is the kind of flawed logic promoted by liberals such as Rawls, as critiqued in my previous piece, above. You challenge inequality by reining in the consumption of and the growthism promoted by the rich and their intellectual and political lackeys.)

The other interpretation of the Green New Deal, the one favoured by greens, is this: the Green New Deal ought to be thought of initially as an emergency programme to prevent an unplanned chaotic Depression, and thereafter as the first step in a planned 'just transition' from a hyper-destructive economy to one that will eventually be able to be permanently functional, in a dynamic equilibrium, what used to be called a 'steady state'. (See the founding work in ecological economics of Herman Daly. Again, once suspects that there is a lack of literacy, in this case economic literacy, on the contemporary 'left': Keynes has been impressively revived, but the rise of green and ecological economics, and strikingly the genius of Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen and his student Daly, are ignored or unknown.) But what level of economic activity, and most crucially of material throughput, will be long-term sustainable? It is virtually certain that the level of economic activity will need to *build down*, over time, from where we are now. (However, it should be stressed, and this is a central attraction of the Green New Deal, that the low-carbon economy that treads lightly on the Earth is also a high-labour economy, whether installing wind turbines or working on the land

40 J. Porritt, *Capitalism as if the World Matters*, Earthscan, 2007.

41 See www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=10150248400590301.

42 See <http://rupertsread.blogspot.com/2010/07/against-growthism-and-how-to-understand.html> and www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=10150248038625301.

or caring for old people properly. The point is: it will not be labour and jobs *for the sake of them*, but only worthwhile jobs for worthwhile purposes.)

The need for such a controlled building-down of the economy is not bad news. It does not mean that the ‘benefits’ of growth will be lost – for, once more, as Hirsch (in *Social Limits to Growth*) and Gorz showed long ago, most of those ‘benefits’ nowadays are illusory. The future will be a place where in due course we all work a lot less, and have time to do the things we really care about (How many people on their deathbed say, ‘I wish I had spent more time in the office?’). Where we know our neighbours, where we are far less vulnerable to huge uncontrolled financial, economic and military insecurities. In the future we will have much shorter supply lines, much more collective control of our own destinies; we will actually practise ‘subsidiarity’ rather than just mouthing it. We will consume much less, and be happier, healthier and more autonomous from corporations. Our communities will be worthy of the word.

The possibility of a localist alternative to growthism – and to all-purpose statism

And so: the place of ‘the Big Society’ in all this is an interesting and telling one.⁴³ Is all that we want to do defend the state? Or do we want to build a more localised future, one in which people actually have far more power over their lives and far more free time? The ‘Big Society’ could be a wonderfully g/Green and social-ist idea – if being social-ist means favouring local autonomy and people being able to take control back over their own lives; if it means understanding that ‘small is beautiful’; if it involves the state *enabling* these things rather than controlling them or (much worse) preventing them. The tribal hostility to the ‘Big Society’ among most in Labour and some Greens too is decidedly unwise and unimaginative – but telling. A left that is thoroughly statist, gigantist and materialist will see no potential in the ‘Big Society’. It will miss its possibilities and its appeal at its peril – and at the peril of our common future.

Never waste a crisis. The financial meltdown of 2007/8, which continues today, morphing into a

sovereign debt crisis (which I predict will be the big news of 2011/12) and a corporate debt crisis, was and still is a chance for a profound change to our utterly dysfunctional political economy, for real bank-nationalisation – as I have argued throughout⁴⁴ and as the Green Party adopted as its policy at Conference last September – and for much much more.

The government’s cuts programme ought to be opposed as economically illiterate, yes. But a real Green New Deal as an alternative programme – one that will pay for itself over time, because of the savings (in money, climate-dangerous emissions and so on) it will generate – must not be used as cover for simply trying to grow our way out of an interlocking set of crises, most notably ecological and financial crises, *that were caused by untrammelled growthism in the first place!* It is time to get beyond the utterly failed conventional wisdom that permanent growth is a normal and welcome condition, that economic ‘recovery’ (meaning a return to growth) is what should be the height of our ambition, that there is no alternative to growthism.

We need to look not to Keynes but to Gorz and genuinely decentralist ecosocialism for a way of out this deep crisis that we find ourselves in.⁴⁵ A crisis drastically – entirely – underestimated by the suggestion that our priority ought to be maintaining government spending at current levels and seeking to expand the size of our economy even further, inevitably eating even further into our commons, our collective life-support system and our descendants’ inheritance.

The changes we need are huge,⁴⁶ and the political class shows hardly any sign of confronting them.⁴⁷ But, and here is the sad part, in this regard, most of the spectrum of opinion represented, for instance at the recent #Netroots conference (see the thoughtful post here by Gary Banham),⁴⁸ is simply part of the political class – part of what needs overthrowing. The real false economy is the very economy that we currently inhabit, and that neo-liberalism and neo-Keynesianism alike take as normal and unarguable.

Conclusion: a utopia for our time

There are deep psychological reasons why we resist thinking about an end to growth,⁴⁹ but we

43 See www.facebook.com/note.php?saved&¬e_id=10150303551600301.

44 See www.business-spotlight.de/news/head-to-head/should-the-government-nationalize-all-banks; <http://rupertsread.blogspot.com/2008/10/bank-nationalisation-now.html>; www.opendemocracy.net/blog/ourkingdom-theme/rupert-read/2009/07/14/the-bank-of-britain-a-proposal; and www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pm4XlvdMqxQ.

45 See <http://rupertsread.blogspot.com/2010/10/real-crisis.html>.

46 <http://rupertsread.blogspot.com/2010/11/change-we-need-to-escape-permanent.html>.

47 See <http://rupertsread.blogspot.com/2010/04/political-class-on-day1-of-election.html>.

48 See <http://kantinternational.blogspot.com/2011/01/report-on-netroots-uk-conference.html>.

49 See <http://oneworldcolumn.blogspot.com/2010/07/growth-and-death.html>.

are going to have to engage in such thinking, and fast, if we are going to avoid moving merely from the financial frying-pan to the climate fire. Our current growthist paradigm is through and through a false economy. A lie we tell to ourselves. A collective delusion.

The ecologicistic alternative on which the Green Party was so prophetically founded is an idea whose time has now very clearly come. We have breached the ecological limits to growth: it is this profound fact on which should centrally structure the attempt to build a real alternative to the mainstream which has failed, and which Miliband, sadly, is seemingly no more ready to question than are Cameron or Clegg. Because, while you can negotiate with the IMF or ICI, you can't negotiate with nature; you can't negotiate with the atmosphere.

The consumerist and productivist delusions of the twentieth century, of would-be socialism and mainstream capitalism, have been viciously exposed by the climate crisis and the financial

crisis. It is time to let them die, and to embrace instead a social and ecologicistic vision, which alone is actually capable of realising for us a future, and a better future too. For the truth is that the spectre haunting 'the left' is not scary; ecologism, living in balance with nature, is nothing less than the first steps to a blissful existence.

In conclusion, we need to insist that the fight against the government's savage cuts agenda is about opposing cuts that are socially dangerous (and economically wrong-headed), and not about growth as an alleged (and false) solution to the problems that ail our society. We need to insist that, in the anti-cuts coalition, growth is not insisted on, only such resolute opposition to rapid and savage cuts. There are some hopeful signs.⁵⁰ But for sure, g/Greens are going to have to keep paying careful attention to this, to ensure that an old-leftist growthist agenda does not prevail. For that would drive out the possibility of meaningful 'red'-green co-operation. And that would be a great shame, the loss of a historic opportunity.

⁵⁰ See <http://liberalconspiracy.org/2011/01/09/we-have-to-embrace-our-differences-when-opposing-cuts-netrootsuk/> as an example

10. Transition today: forget the class struggle, forget capi- talism; reclaim the present

Justin Kenrick and Alexis Rowell

This paper reflects on the common ideology underpinning both neo-liberalism and the socialist anti-capitalist movement, and the understanding informing Transition and the broader commons movement of which it is a part, with its focus on community and place; and on how a strategy of place-making dovetails with the political strategies required to move from a system based on ever-increasing consumption of resources to one that acknowledges limits.

The problematic ideology underpinning both neo-liberalism and anti-capitalism

Let's kick off with two well-known theorists, who both subsequently admitted that the key theory they have left us with was fundamentally wrong: Garret Hardin with his 'Tragedy of the Commons' and Karl Marx with his 'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles'. The key idea people walk away with from both theorists is that earlier forms of society were unsustainable, brutal and in need of transformation into capitalism, or through capitalism, to ensure our social and ecological well-being.

In fact, we should be taking the opposite understanding from both writers: capitalism is neither the solution, nor the route to some post-capitalist nirvana. The need is not to expand capitalism, overthrow it or transform it; the need is to decouple our need-meeting systems from it by pursuing life projects that rebuild and sustain community. In so far as possible therefore we need to literally ignore it! This is the key approach embodied in Transition initiatives and in the innumerable attempts by communi-

ties across the world seeking to live sustainably in their local environment, to protect or reclaim their commons, positioning humans within nature rather than in opposition to or in control of it, which is a recurring theme of the arguments of the traditional left and right.

Hardin and the so-called 'Tragedy of the Commons'

The so-called 'Tragedy of the Commons' is a term used to argue that left to ourselves (without the market and government to control our behaviour) we would each choose to exploit our ecological context for our own individual benefit even though this would inevitably lead to the destruction of the ecosystems (the commons) on which we all depend. In fact, the opposite is the case. Garrett Hardin, the inventor of the term, later admitted that the phrase describes not a tragedy of 'commons regimes' but a tragedy of 'open access regimes'.

An excellent example of an 'open access regime' is that of capitalism, where the only understanding of being 'rational' is of acting in one's own immediate, narrow self-interest. 'Open access regimes' are situations where people are persuaded to act in a way that has no consideration for the longer term of themselves, their children or others. In commons regimes, in sharp contrast, local people decide on the best shared use of local resources through dialogue and with an eye to the long-term viability and well-being of their communities and the ecology on which they depend.⁵¹

Commons systems persist across the global south. Commons regimes recognise the rich resources available to us by starting from ensuring the well-being of locality, and the well-being of others in their localities, rather than from a system of competition over resources made scarce by that very competition.

So, for example, indigenous people have moved to take control of national governments in places like Bolivia, to secure degrees of autonomy through legal means in places like Canada, or through creative modes of resistance in places like Mexico. In the UK, it is evident incrofting communities along the west coast of Scotland, whose successful campaigns brought their land back under community ownership, which led to the Scottish Land Reform Act securing that right for a whole range of rural communities. It

51 J. Kirkby, P. O'Keefe and L. Timberlake (eds) 'The Commons: where the community has authority', in *The Earthscan Reader in Sustainable Development*, Earthscan, 1995; J. Kenrick, 'Equalising processes, processes of discrimination and the forest people of Central Africa', in T. Widlock and W. Tadesse (eds) *Property and Equality*, vol. 2, 'Encapsulation, commercialization, discrimination', Berghahn, 2005.

is also evident in the Transition Town movement in which local people seek to establish sustainable local food, energy and production systems that can reduce their need for fossil fuels and diminish their carbon emissions, a movement in which people seek to rebuild their local economy and local decision-making to ensure sufficiency for all. The Transition approach is creative, empowering and immediately gratifying proof that focusing on place can improve life for us all, as distinct from fighting ‘the system’ in ways that can simply strengthen it.

Marx and the so-called ‘triumph of socialism’

Both the classic Marxist and neo-liberal traditions paint a picture of humanity as moving away from scarcity and towards abundance – whether through supposedly freeing the market from the state in the neo-liberal version, or through the seizing of the state by the producers of wealth as a consequence of ever-increasing exploitation in the Marxist tradition.

What makes capitalism unique for Marx is that it is a system in which human labour, our capacity to transform the world, can be bought and sold,⁵² and the money through which this process occurs measures and mediates the importance of certain forms of human action. It integrates us into the total market system, because it is the reason we are working.

Erik Olin Wright summarises the Marxist anti-capitalist thesis as resting on the belief that, although capitalism ‘creates institutions and power relations that block the actual achievement of egalitarianism’, ‘one of the great achievements of capitalism is to develop human productive capacity to such an extent that it makes the radical egalitarianism needed for human flourishing materially feasible’. This fetishisation of capitalism involves seeing it as an object, a pre-existing reality out there, rather than a bundle of particular coercive relations whose power rests on being able to persuade others that it is an objective reality in the world.

Where this Marxist analysis sees capitalism as the route to emancipation, Christine Gailey forcefully points out that the later Marx saw the real possibility for emancipation as being in communities protecting their rights rather than becoming absorbed solely by the class struggle.⁵³

According to Asch, this shift in Marx’s thinking (from the analysis of the *Communist Manifesto* to that of the *Ethnological Notebooks*) happened in a context where there had been a huge shift in our understanding of time and space. In space, Europeans had been largely focused on their own historical path and on the assumption that it was the only path possible, but emerging accounts of vastly different societies demonstrated the diversity of human society, and the persistence of commons regimes. In time, the discovery of human remains in association with the bones of extinct animals at Brixham Cave in 1858 created a revolution in understanding of human history: ‘the short chronology for human history based on the biblical narrative’ was extended ‘indefinitely backward, for tens or hundreds of thousands of years, or more’.⁵⁴

In Vera Zasulich’s 1881 letter to Marx from Russia, Vera asks whether the rural commune is capable of developing in a socialist direction or whether ‘the commune is destined to perish’?⁵⁵ Whether ‘the revolutionary socialist must devote all his strength to the liberation and development of the commune’ or whether all that remains is for the socialist to wait the decades it will take to pass through capitalism? In a draft response Marx wrote:

What threatens the life of the Russian commune is neither a historical inevitability nor a theory; it is state oppression, and exploitation by capitalist intruders whom the state has made powerful at the peasants expense.⁵⁶

Gailey writes that ‘Marx in the *Notebooks* stressed struggle between communities and the state over control of resources and labour’,⁵⁷ and she speaks of ‘Marx’s abiding scorn for the state as a vehicle for human emancipation’. In relation to the Paris Commune, Marx famously argued in 1871 that ‘the working class cannot simply lay hold on the ready-made state-machinery and wield it for their own purpose. The political instrument of their enslavement cannot serve as the political instrument of their emancipation’.⁵⁸ Furthermore, in his later writings Marx argues that the capitalist state of periodic disasters and ‘state of crisis... will end only when the social system is eliminated through the return of modern societies to the “Archaic” type of communal property’.⁵⁹

52 D. Graeber, *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Dreams*, Palgrave, 2001, p.55.

53 C. Gailey, ‘Community, state, and questions of social evolution Karl Marx’s ethnological notebooks’, in Jacqueline Solway (ed.) *The Politics of Egalitarianism: Theory and Practice*, Berghahn, 2006, p.39.

54 Truettmann: 380, in Asch 2007.

55 Gailey, ‘Community, state, and questions of social evolution Karl Marx’s ethnological notebooks’, p.39.

56 *Ibid.*, p.41.

57 *Ibid.*, p.48.

58 Marx, quoted in Gailey, ‘Community, state, and questions of social evolution Karl Marx’s ethnological notebooks’, p.45).

59 Gailey, ‘Community, state, and questions of social evolution Karl Marx’s ethnological notebooks’, p.41.

Just as Hardin's later reflections on the commons point out that there is not a 'Tragedy of the Commons', rather it is systems in which people do not collectively decide on their use of resources that are the 'Tragedy', so at the end of his life Marx's analysis became one that advocated not a march of modernising progress through capitalism to socialism, but that we protect commons regimes where they exist and restore them where they do not: Transition initiatives are doing just that.

What is power? Transition and the pleasure and power of place

Challenging the system or reclaiming the place?

In their critique of the Transition movement Paul Chatterton and Alice Cutler distinguish between the lasting systemic changes they argue we need to work towards, and what they see as the less substantial place-based changes the Transition Town movement encourages people to focus on.⁶⁰ They argue that 'changes to place don't really add up to a long lasting and substantial transition, not least globally',⁶¹ that the Transition Towns movement focusing on locality can deflect people from pushing for the systemic changes that are urgently needed, and that these Transition initiatives carry the potential of inadvertently absolving the welfare state of its responsibilities by themselves taking on community service roles.

Their 2008 critique is even more resonant in the UK today where, against a backdrop of draconian and unprecedented cuts in public spending, the Conservative-led government uses its 'Big Society' rhetoric to encourage communities to step forward voluntarily to take on roles which public sector workers were being paid to undertake. At the same time communities are being encouraged to step forward and buy crucial local amenities, which will otherwise be sold to private companies for private profit. The people in the Forest of Dean are – like communities surrounding all government-owned Forestry Commission land – being asked to step forward and buy what they already own. The enclosure of the commons continues apace.

In response to the argument that the Transition movement should be taking an explicit anti-

capitalist position, Rob Hopkins writes that Transition

doesn't start with a belief that growth, capitalism, whatever, are morally bankrupt and ethically malevolent [rather that] in the light of peak oil and the economic meltdown, their implosion is inevitable and we need to engage the same creative thinking that got us to this point in designing a new approach... I am taken with the idea of Transition coming in under the radar, and my experience is that the people who are picking it up and running with it are, in many cases, not people with a long background in anti capitalist work, but just people who often perceive themselves as apolitical and are taken by the vision of the whole thing.⁶²

Although in theory these understandings of power appear to be diametrically opposed, this may be more because we can experience power in very different ways rather than because one analysis of power is right and the other is wrong. When Chatterton and Cutler write that 'Transition Towns are ultimately subject to the same order of oppression, class structure, entrenched power and vested interests [as everywhere else]... each place and locality is woven together by networks of power which have been forged over centuries'.⁶³ they are prioritising the existence of coercive power – a reality we can all surely recognise.

However, when Hopkins highlights people's ability to engage in creative community projects that can transform their neighbourhoods, this is also a reality many of us can recognise. Hopkins' analysis highlights the existence of a very different sort of power: there is not just coercive power, but one grounded in relationships of care, which is most evident in the connections people have with place and each other.

The urgent need to slow down into place, dialogue and respectful confrontation

Can we respond to the urgency of the situation by acting in a way that reconfigures, redistributes and re-orientates power through remaining open to those who appear to still be holding all the power? Can we redirect mainstream structures and thinking in our society, while at the same time building alternative lifeways, and when

60 P. Chatterton and A. Cutler, *The Rocky Road to a Real Transition: The Transition Towns Movement and what it means for Social Change*, Trapeze Collective, 2008.

61 *Ibid.*, p.33.

62 R. Hopkins, *Transition Culture*, 2008.

63 Chatterton and Cutler, *The Rocky Road to a Real Transition*, p.34.

necessary confronting and halting the boom and bust cycle of economic growth? This cycle – when it is booming – destroys marginalised nature and marginalised people, and – when it is going bust – threatens those within the borders of the consumerist culture with temporary or permanent expulsion.

Schopenhauer (1788–1860) wrote: ‘All truth passes through three stages: First it is ridiculed. Second it is violently opposed. Third it is accepted as being self-evident.’

In relation to the transition from a fossil-fuelled high-emission society and economy, it is clear that everyone will ultimately have to acknowledge the need for such a transition; the question is whether that will be only once it is too late and too self-evident, or whether it will be in time. The Transition movement is a movement of people who are not willing to wait to find out, nor to wait until governments act.

People in Transition initiatives seek to tackle the causes of climate change by developing localised organic food-growing systems, local renewable energy systems, and the like. Many of us also seek to change government policy so that it can enable rather than continually block communities’ attempts to develop resilience.

Rather than making our starting point working with the government and hoping they will create the conditions for a sustainable society, we are getting on with it and asking them to stop getting in our way. Rather than campaigning against the government and making them the central players in the drama, we strongly encourage them to recognise the truth of the situation, and that their own electoral self-interest lies in adopting a policy framework that supports resilient communities.

Gandhi clearly demonstrated that – alongside recovering submerged commons systems of mutual care, and developing respectful dialogue with those in power in order to persuade them that they need to recognise and enable change – there is a very real place for respectful confrontation. This is a way of challenging those with power, which asserts the very values they believe their system is based on, but which the confrontation reveals are evident in the movement for change that the powerful are opposing, rather than in the system the powerful seek to defend.

Such confrontation is non-violent not because people refrain from violence out of fear of the overwhelming power of the state, but because people are aware of the overwhelming power of their case, and are certain that those upholding the status quo will ultimately have no choice but to accept the change they are calling for, and respect their right to their way of life.

As Gandhi said of his successful campaign of non-violence against British rule in India: ‘First we were ignored. Then we were ridiculed. Then they fought us. Then we won.’ Transition and other community-focused responses to climate change, resource depletion and the need to revitalise community are seeking to recover a way of life that acknowledges limits and takes pleasure in doing so: to recover the pleasures of a sustainable hedonism in place of the emptiness of conspicuous consumption. How to live in the present, in your local community, with respect for nature, rather than living for the future, in globalised systems, and fighting to subdue nature. This is the only argument worth having.

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II. Trading in our ethics – a more progressive green–red agenda for trade

Deborah Doane

Since the global economic crisis, talks about international trade policy have all but stalled. Nonetheless, the severe crash, and ad hoc responses from governments around the world, have thrown into stark relief the ongoing challenges faced by globalisation. So intertwined are global markets that it is virtually impossible to shield individual populations from events that happen halfway around the world, which previously would have had only localised effects.

Policy choices in the past several decades have made the rising trend towards liberalism of markets completely unstoppable. From the US to the UK and across Europe, policy-makers have weighed down singularly on the side of free markets, calling anyone or any country advocating something different anti-globalisers, anti-progress and ‘protectionist’.

But they have not all been silent, with many aiming to return to the matter as quickly as possible. Gordon Brown wrote in 2009 in the *Wall Street Journal*,

The simple truth is that trade is the most serious casualty of the global financial crisis, with a vicious circle emerging of falls in exports leading to falls in production and rising job losses leading to further falls in consumer demand... There can be no recovery in the global economy without a revival of world trade.⁶⁴

Thus, the UK’s response to the aftermath of the most recent economic crisis was to press for further trade talks at the G20 and to ‘not retreat to protectionism’. Indeed, bailing out the banks was a symptom of the blind faith we’ve placed in the potential of global trade markets to solve our economic ills.

However, as Brown was single-mindedly evangelical in his support for open markets,

he sidelined some of the emerging evidence that demonstrates that such hyper-globalisation of our markets can actually make us more vulnerable and is not always compatible with our ecological needs. The system of freer trade, advocated by Milton Friedman in the 1960s and taken up by successive governments across the West ever since, is leaving behind it a wake of problems and challenges for the future. A social democratic agenda for trade would likely be far more tempered and nuanced than what has dominated policy arenas on both the left and right for the last three decades.

Is trade all it is cooked up to be?

With global trade now pushing towards \$30 trillion a year, it is hard to imagine a world in which we don’t consume goods and services from around the world. With our clothes made in China, our call centres in India and our vegetables from Kenya, few are able to harbour themselves from the world of freer trade.

But the real picture isn’t as rosy as we assume. Between 1996 and 2000 four of the top five fastest growing developing countries were deemed to have ‘trade restrictive’ policies, and it has been found that trade has increased inequality at home as well, as lower-skilled jobs quickly move overseas.

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has produced several studies of trade liberalisation in less economically developed countries, which reveal its links with rising poverty, increased unemployment, widening wage inequalities, and reductions in average wages. In fact, its most recent *Trade and Investment Report* (2010) recommends a shift away from export-led development. Instead, UNCTAD suggests that building domestic demand in developing countries may be more effective: ‘This implies a profound rethinking of the paradigm of export-led development based on keeping labour costs low.’⁶⁵

The main critique of free trade is that it has encouraged a ‘race to the bottom’ in which countries are forced to compete based on lowering costs and standards, ultimately leading to downward pressure on wages and the environment, and forcing the hand of governments that bow to demands from the corporate sector for lower taxation. Furthermore, as countries are

64 G. Brown, *Wall Street Journal*, 28 May 2009.

65 UNCTAD, *Trade and Investment Report 2010*.

forced to open up their markets, they are vulnerable to competition, ultimately killing domestic business growth in favour of global multinationals.

Having embraced the global competitiveness agenda, Europe now faces these dilemmas, as individual countries are finding it increasingly difficult to defend their economic policies against external intrusion. Ireland, at the vanguard of opening up to trade, especially in financial services, is now paying the price of a regime that offered little protection against the elements of global competition. It is now in a position where the very companies that left it high and dry in the crisis are prohibiting it from addressing the problem in a way that would help its population, such as raising taxes or underpinning social welfare programmes. High levels of debt put markets on the rampage, forcing countries to cut services and taxes, and sacrifice their values.

There are four reasons to be wary, which are discussed below.

Lowering social standards

Of course, one of the main drivers of trade in recent decades has been a growing offshoring of manufactured goods from rich countries to poor countries with cheaper labour markets. In 2006, China's labour costs in manufacturing were just 3% of US hourly wages.⁶⁶ Aside from the lower labour costs; however, we've also seen a worrying trend of more temporary work and insecure work, and an ongoing problem of poor working conditions. In the past ten years there has been a dominance of voluntary standards over legally binding rules, with businesses pledging to maintain social and environmental values while fending off regulation. As a result, rather than a so-called 'race to the top', where businesses compete on ethics, we've seen a rapid decline in protection of workers' rights, among other things.

The ecological consequences

The ecological consequences of trade are rarely touched on in mainstream talks on trade, as there appears to be a disconnect between the

demands for economic growth and its commensurate consequences. This is a serious gap in our policy thinking.

Export-led growth in agriculture in places like Spain or Morocco has severely harmed already-stressed freshwater systems, for example. Our desire for cheap food combined with export-led growth strategies for poorer countries raises demands for everything from soya to palm oil – products harvested in ecologically sensitive regions of the world.

Increases in trade are invariably coupled with increases in consumption, ultimately leading to increases in CO₂ emissions. Rather than a decline in emissions, as production data seems to show for the UK, if you look at embedded emissions, our contribution to CO₂ is rapidly rising. The UK is one of the biggest 'carbon importers'. Because of our method of working out international climate agreements, the burden of cuts falls far more heavily on developing countries, as we can effectively hide our own emissions. It is no coincidence that China now has one of the highest levels of emissions (not per capita) in the world – most of this comes from manufactured products that are exported to and consumed by the West.⁶⁷

Increasing vulnerability

Developing countries have long argued that they needed a fairer trading system that enables them to protect infant industries. The much-hailed success of East Asian economic growth in the 1980s through increased trade was actually coupled with very protective measures that are not allowed under today's global trading rules, such as subsidies and import barriers.

Freer trade, however, has led to more vulnerability. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, many poor countries embarked on export strategies for a host of industries, from financial services, to water, to agriculture. Developing countries sold off vital agricultural lands, prioritising export-led growth over small-farmer production. Was it successful? Certainly not – and the knock-on effects were severe. The UN special rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier de Schutter, says that trade liberalisation is among one of the key factors that has trapped many developing countries in a vicious cycle of low agricultural

⁶⁶ P. Krugman, 'Trade and wages, reconsidered', 2008, www.princeton.edu/~pkrugman/pk-bpea-draft.pdf.

⁶⁷ D. Clark, 'Carbon cuts by developed countries cancelled out by imported goods', *Guardian*, 25 April 2011.

productivity and dependence on cheap food imports. When we rely on agriculture for export-led growth, farmers leave their land as they fail to get a decent price for their food in competition with the cheap (often subsidised) imports, and they migrate to the cities. But the need to keep food affordable for urban, hungry populations overrides these concerns, as we so clearly saw in Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt, where riots were initially sparked by people's inability to afford basic foodstuffs. In the short term lower import tariffs to let in food ensure urban populations are fed, but in the long-run it is a disaster because local farmers can't compete', says de Schutter.

Is there a progressive trade policy? A social democratic vision for a trade agenda shouldn't entirely retreat into protectionism, but should focus on the idea of protection – how do we protect populations and the environment more effectively through a balanced approach to trade? In fact, the principles of a fairer trading system are firmly rooted in both 'green' and 'red' traditions.

Red traditions of a fairer trading system

Promote equality

Nobel-prize winning economist Paul Krugman writes that while trade may be shown to raise GDP, it doesn't necessarily help the poorest. Equality isn't important only between individuals – it is needed between small and big business as well. Poorer countries should be entitled to liberalise trade at their own pace, protecting infant industries and local agriculture. The last food price crisis, in 2007/8, led to riots in over 30 countries around the world – most of them were entirely reliant on imported food for their survival. However, one country, Malawi, after years of facing severe food shortages resulting from trade liberalisation, ultimately rejected a trade-led growth strategy and instead sought to subsidise its local farmers. As result, it survived the crisis not only intact, but as a net food exporter in the region.

Promote strong human rights

Supporting trade with countries with higher labour and human rights standards has been mocked as being 'anti-competitive'. But Labour has a long tradition of ensuring rights are protected, and trade policy should prioritise

strong standards, rather than seeing them as a consequence. Social values aren't matters for 'competition' – they are fundamental rights that must be defended. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) could certainly use more teeth to ensure that its core standards are fully implemented and upheld, moving away from woolly voluntary standards. Unfortunately, recent policy from the Tory–LibDem government has gone in the opposite direction, having removed funding for the ILO.

Promote fair-trade

The fair-trade movement arose out of a red agenda – people who demanded a better economic deal for the world's most vulnerable. And it has delivered, but not to the scale needed. The promotion of fair-trade standards contributes to better outcomes for poorer producers and makes consumers far more aware of the consequences of consumption, especially in primary commodities. But fair-trade is often under threat. Support to poorer producers to meet the standards, work to ensure fair competition between social labels and ongoing defence of the right to use labels to identify fairness are needed.

Green traditions of a fairer trading system

Promote the environment

Trade and the environment should go hand in hand. If we were to adopt a consumption-based approach to counting and being responsible for our CO₂, then what we trade and how we consume would be a far greater consideration. It would be obvious to adopt more locally based strategies when embedded emissions are extremely high, such as for air-freighted food or bottled water. But even manufactured goods, from cars to TVs, need a green makeover, and we should be giving preferential trading status to goods that meet high environmental standards. Products made with palm oil (there is no such thing as sustainable palm oil) should be banned, alongside tropical hardwoods or anything else with an ecologically damaging footprint. Offshoring call centres because of presumably cheaper labour costs also has to be weighted against the rise in data centres with fairly high energy footprints.

Promote better trade governance

The World Trade Organization (WTO) is a much

maligned governing body. Many would argue that it should either be reformed or scrapped entirely. It has certainly failed to bring about trade governance that is not dominated by a few rich players, and its inability to embed social standards is clear. Green Party policy suggests that the WTO should be transformed into a General Agreement on Sustainable Trade, to better reflect the interests of smaller countries. This could only work if the governance of the organisation was balanced, and the systems of arbitrage for dealing with conflicts were not dominated by the voices of international business.

While this is not a trade policy per se, NGOs have been campaigning for a commission for business and human rights, to ensure that where our companies are working overseas they are held to account for their actions. So where domestic governance in human or environmental standards is weak, there would still be a forum for people to seek justice where harm has been caused.

Promoting the local, green economy

The on-again, off-again policy of a green investment bank to provide upstart finance to UK-based energy infrastructure and reduced emissions is a clear example of a policy that favours local sustainability over globalised trade. It is not about 'me-first' and 'protectionism', but takes into consideration a hierarchy of issues such as carbon emissions and the need to generate strong local economies through sustainable employment. And if we are to trade, we should be investing in green industries where we can add value, emulating countries like Denmark, which lead in the manufacture and trade of a range of environmental industries,

such as wind energy.

Conclusion

The UK will continue to have a long list of needs that could never be satisfied through domestic production alone. Similarly, developing countries will undoubtedly benefit by fair-trade in some circumstances, provided that they can maintain a level of self-sufficiency and protect their population where they need to. They need to be able to climb up the value chain, so they are not constantly working as store-room continents for the rest of us, vulnerable to our every whim.

Moving from an entirely globalised approach to trade policy towards something that prioritises sustainability and a degree of self-sufficiency will certainly be pitched as regressive in today's global political context. This is no small concern. While it is easy to say we would like to adopt policies more in line with a true green-red agenda, it will take concerted effort to move in that direction. As many, especially in the developing world, are now almost entirely reliant on trade, it will take some time, and a long-term vision, to shift in this direction.

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