

## ***“Green Justice in a Climate of Terror”***

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by Chris Layton

In his ground-breaking Green Alliance speech in March this year Charles Kennedy coined the phrase Green Justice to sum up the ethos which inspires Liberal Democrats as we address the global challenges of poverty and environmental degradation.

A key step to endorse and give shape to that strategy was taken by Party Conference when it called for "a Europe-South initiative for a long-term global framework to cap CO2 concentrations by contraction of greenhouse gas emissions down to the level needed to stabilise the climate, and convergence to equal emission quotas per head of population".

In so doing it gave timely political backing to the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution which has urged this strategy of "*Contraction and Convergence*" as the best prospect of achieving "equity, economy and international consensus" and whose report is a key element in the Government's current energy review.

The policy has urgent relevance to the deeper global issues raised by the suffering of Afghanistan and the struggle with terrorism. Though a modified Kyoto climate deal has been rescued from oblivion, the world's carbon emissions will still be over 20 per cent higher than the 1990 level in 2010. Meanwhile climatic upheavals continue to take their grim toll, not least in the drought and famine which have gripped Afghanistan and large parts of central Asia in the last three years.

Halting climate change implies a 60 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions during this century and even bigger cuts in the rich north. That sounds daunting. Yet the technologies are becoming economically available to make that shift - through wind, tidal, solar and hydrogen power, through energy efficiency and decentralised combined heat and power. The need is for a strong political framework which gives clear market signals for a long-term investment effort by the world business community.

As for equity, the talk of world community in face of terrorism has starkly exposed the failure of a global system that relies on hegemony instead of solidarity and forced a complacent West to acknowledge the need for a fairer sharing of world wealth and resources. What sharing could be more fundamental than a fair sharing of the limited capacity of our atmosphere to absorb the polluting emissions which, until now, have been the concomitant of economic growth?

The US justifies its failure to act on climate change by claiming that a solution to a global problem must involve all countries. Yet the developing countries which have a vital interest in action cannot commit to play their part if restrictions on emissions are designed to freeze the gulf between rich and poor. Contraction and Convergence of greenhouse gas emissions to equal quotas for every world citizen will meet the need for equity but give the world time to plan and develop its response through new technology and ways of life, while trading of emission quotas will maximise the efficiency of change.

In his Green Alliance speech Charles Kennedy pioneered the idea of a global Community on these lines. Today the Government's energy review, together with mounting cross-bench support in the House of Commons, offer an opportunity to press the Government to adopt this strategy. If the Prime Minister takes it up he would find ready collaborators amongst other states of the EU and an opportunity for global leadership at the Earth Summit next year.

The US under Bush may continue to hang back. That is why Europe and the South must lead the way. But recent events have underlined the surreal geopolitics of a US energy policy which will rely on Saudi Arabia and central Asia for over half its oil supplies and puts its faith in expanding nuclear power. As the US learns painfully that it is not omnipotent, it too will need the security of a sustainable energy policy in solidarity with the rest of the world. Once again Liberal Democrats are pointing the way.