

# Greening Newcastle

Welcome to **issue 12** of the magazine of Newcastle Green Party, July 2011

## Leave Clegg alone!

In late May, demonstrators were there at Newcastle Civic Centre to give LibDem leader Nick Clegg, due to deliver a talk on "Rebalancing the Economy", a hot welcome... except he cancelled at the last moment. But the protest went ahead with about 90 protestors, including a group from the Green Party.

Deep hostility to Clegg as an individual was evident in the speeches made that day. Clearly millions of voters entertain similar thoughts, punishing Clegg's party in the recent elections. Clegg stands accused of 'electoral treason', breaking his word, (especially, of course on student fees) simply to get a modicum of power as a (rather junior) partner in the ConDem coalition government. But perhaps personalised politics is misplaced and accusations of betrayal a bit naive.

At the Civic Centre protest, most speakers tended to reduce politics to demands for more street protests. The dominant feeling was that the 'working class' had been sold out by venal politicians like Clegg who are mere puppets, their strings pulled by big business.

### Dumbed down politics

The government still commands much support. The Conservatives did well in the local elections and, the big TUC march apart, most local protests attract but modest levels of support. Part of the problem might be the cheap sloganising (e.g. "No Cuts", implying no cuts anywhere to anything in the public sector) and the rather simplistic attacks on not just Nick Clegg but also alleged 'Tory toffs' (Eton, Bullingdon Club ...).

Such a politics is inadequate. It is naive to mock compromise or dismiss every alleged 'U-turn' as unprincipled. Nick Clegg was indeed foolish and opportunistic to sign that pledge about student fees. It is indeed better to state (honest) aims than make cast-iron promises. Any party is vulnerable to being overtaken by events and being forced to backtrack. New information



'Nick Clegg' (top right) confronts local Green Party members!

## Newcastle Green Party Branch meeting

All welcome!

**19.00, Wednesday, July 6th,  
British Legion Club  
(just down from the Lonsdale pub)  
Metro: West Jesmond**

comes to light, miscalculations become clear, the unexpected happens...

Radical governments will also face further barriers such as manipulated runs on a country's currency and other such attempts to derail their efforts. Look at all the efforts made by the USA to overthrow the Castro regime in Cuba. In such a context, it is very hard to stay on course.

Indeed Greens face an extra difficulty. We advocate full-blooded Proportional Representation. Its introduction would make coalition governments more likely, with an attendant need to strike agreements and, therefore, compromise. Nick Clegg might be better criticised for brokering a bad deal in which his party ended up carrying the can for the Tories.

But it is naive to dismiss all thought of compromise. After all, even Lenin's Bolsheviks, ruthless revolutionaries, had to make many concessions that went against party policy and previous intent (the New Economic Policy etc.). We Greens will have to be realistic about the compromises our councillors and MPs may have to make. The trick of course to manoeuvre intelligently so that overall advance can be maintained but that is somewhat easier to say than do!

### Bad politics, not bad individuals

It is also unwise to reduce political criticism to sneers about the social background of people like Clegg and Cameron. To be sure, their lives have been such that they neither know nor care to know about the ordinary people whose prospects are being damaged by government policy. But there are individuals from such privileged strata who have fought against injustice and inequity. Some may remember the campaigning journalist Paul Foot, a scion of the very upper class. The same is true of many other radical socialist leaders such as Tony Benn and Stafford Cripps (a few Greens have blue blood too).

This personalisation of politics is a bit pathetic. It reduces difficult matters of values, goals and policy to cheap name-calling. Indeed it can be quite demeaning. Some readers may remember those May Day marches in Newcastle in the years of the government of Mrs Thatcher when the main slogan was "ditch the bitch". Today's slogans might not be so crude but much of

the propaganda against the government still fails to assemble a deep and persuasive case, relying instead on moronic slogans like “Tory Scum”, “Burn the Tories”, and so forth.

The real enemy is not Nick Clegg as an individual but what he represents: a harmful and unsustainable current of politics, in his case so-called ‘Orange Book’ Liberalism. It is a vision of society in which the allegedly crushing burden of the state has been rolled back, thereby, it is claimed, releasing the entrepreneurial energies now said to be blocked by ‘red tape’, ‘oppressive’ levels of taxation and so forth. It echoes other visions of a ‘turbo-capitalism’ that, it asserts, can create new levels of wealth for everyone prepared to roll up their sleeves and do hard work.

This is a coherent ideology and deserves to be treated as such. It is too crude to dismiss its proponents as mere tools of billionaires. After all, some of these ideas were developed in comparative isolation by thinkers who had no economic stake in the translation of their theories into public policy (the story is well told in *The Gods That Failed* by Larry Elliott and Dan Atkinson). Of course, there are occasions where there is a direct link: much criticism of the NHS comes from those who stand to richly gain from its dismantling.

But we should not simply treat our political opponents as venal rogues or mere puppets. After all, sections of the capitalist class in manufacturing lost out under Margaret Thatcher as did certain professions. She was scarcely their lackey! Resort to the ‘puppets’ argument can become a way of ducking the more difficult arguments that the ideologues of neo-liberalism deploy.

Sloganising can also distract from the serious development of our alternative. It is easy, for instance, to demand ‘free education for everyone’ but not so easy to spell out what it means e.g. what level of education, for how many people, for how long, with what goals and, of course, funded by whom, all in the context of parallel demands for public monies to be spent on better health provision, social care, housing, transport...

Meanwhile, Britain is paying huge amounts of interest on its national debt (over £2,000 per annum, per household year, with the government borrowing, as of April, £332 million a day), regardless of whether or not that debt is bigger than in the past or larger than that of other countries.

### **Persuading ordinary people**

It may be clear to us that ConDem policy helps the already super-rich get even richer while the poor, sick, disabled and other such groups are left with diminished wherewithal. It is equally clear that, when necessary, vital environmental protection will be watered down if it gets in the way of building projects and other activities deemed necessary for ‘economic growth’.

However, the Coalition government has – so far – been winning the arguments. It may make use of false analogies (most commonly the comparison of a household budget and that of national government) but these play well with millions of ordinary people. So too does government denunciations of welfare scroungers and ‘dependency culture’. We must seriously deal with such arguments, not just rely on slogans and personal abuse.

So let us give Nick Clegg a ‘warm welcome’ if and when he does show up in Newcastle. But let us also strongly wage the ideological war, never forgetting that the fundamental ‘deficit’ remains the ecological one. The recent reports suggest that runaway climate change is getting closer (see: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-13595174>), underlining how urgent it is to keep that big picture firmly in sight. Some sections of the anti-cutbacks movement seem unwilling to do so. It is, then, even more vital that the Green Party does that job.



**Sunderland Green Party members with Shirley Ford, 3rd from left, regional co-ordinator**

## **Wear on a roll**

The Green Party’s Sunderland Branch was formed in October 2010 by 4 members. In 2010, 2 Green candidates stood, gaining 151 and 174 votes respectively. Since then, there was a significant influx of new members, such that, in the 2011 local elections, the Sunderland Greens were able to challenge in 7 wards.

In the circumstances, this in itself was a remarkable achievement. In advance of the election, branch members did careful election planning. There was clearly negligible chance of outright victory. Nevertheless, the group agreed that we would target to win in one ward. As Dave Campbell was the most enthusiastic and willing to commit all year round to activism in his community, Pallion was picked.

It might have been reasonably expected that the Green Party’s 2011 vote would fall in the two areas contested in 2010, in absolute terms, given the General Election that year. Yet the absolute vote increased in both wards, quite significantly. This suggests that it is worth trying to contest elections in repeat years. It further suggests that paper candidates are not a waste of time.

In terms of electoral tactics, the results clearly vindicated taking a target-to-win approach. Whilst the Green vote in most wards hovered around the 10% mark, in Pallion it was 17%. The Green Party was close to beating the Tories into second place. This would have been a remarkable coup, at the first attempt!

Since the elections, Sunderland Greens have been in the local paper 5 times. Dave Campbell has retained the backing of the local residents group committee and is playing a leading role campaigning against the opening of another takeaway shop on Pallion Road. Local members have been sufficiently generous to recapitalise the branch funds after the campaign. Developments like the website and more stall literature can be afforded.

There is a long way to go but things have progressed remarkably well to date.



**John Lowther (right), Sunderland Green Party branch co-ordinator with branch member Dave Campbell who deservedly did really well in the Pallion ward of the city.**

# All Care?

It is now painfully clear that the cutbacks by Newcastle city council will hit some of the most vulnerable people in the locality. Symptomatic of this strategy is the planned closure of Byker's Chirton House, a vital centre for adult care and one deeply appreciated by its users. It was recently rated excellent by the Quality Care Commission yet its 30 staff seem set to lose their jobs. The Westerhope Centre is also in the firing line.

At the time of writing, it is not clear what the new Labour council will do. The absence of Labour Party representatives last April at the meeting called by Friends of Chirton House, to which all parties were formally invited does not bode well. [The Liberals and Conservatives were also absent though the Green Party did provide a speaker]

At the same time it seems that only the most critical cases will get support in future and, more generally, the relentless programme of handing over this critical field of provision to the private sector will continue. Indeed well over 80% of all adult care in the city is now in the hands of firms whose prime motivation is profit maximisation. Meanwhile, it looks as if higher charges for home care are in the pipeline.

The argument used by the council is of course the need to save money in the light of the government's overall austerity programme, including the grants it gives to local councils. The Evening Chronicle quoted a figure of £1,560,000 as the potential saving for Chirton House. At first sight, privately provided care does seem the cheaper option (though the National Audit Office has just warned that 'social enterprises' in the whole care sector may not be as cheap as claimed). Cuts to council services are also encouraged by fears amongst the major parties of a public revolt against higher taxes to cover the costs of on-going or better provision (something that is likely to pose problems for Green Party councillors and MPs).

There is also much waffle about modernisation and streamlining, with claims that, in the long term, there will be a better service overall and one built around the individual (there are also accompanying noises denouncing what are stereotyped as 'one-size-fits-all' measures)

That is little comfort in the here and now for those who depend on facilities like Chirton for respite, recovery and rehabilitation provision. Nor will it be much help if a streamlined service means longer travel to more distant facilities. Chirton users are likely to face long bus journeys to the alternative centre way across the city in Lemington.

Given that the whole rhetoric of those in control of health and social care has been about services being localised and personalised, the closure programme will make provision less local and less personal, given that many individuals, not just direct users but their families and friends too, are personally attached to long-valued centres like Chirton House. It is sheer vandalism to throw away the community networks that built up around such centres. Some Big Society!

Such a policy must have discussed for some time. It is too big to be just a knee jerk local response to the national 2010 Spending Review. There are clearly issues about transparency, consultation and democratic decision-making at stake. For that reason alone, the Green Party supports calls to freeze proposed closure and increased charges until there has been a full, comprehensive and open review of long-term need for adult care in the city and alternative options for funding it.

## Purging public services

Beyond that, there is also an ideological commitment to a certain kind of economics in which the public sector is depicted as but an unproductive burden on the rest of society, as wasteful as it is ineffective. Thus the state is something to be 'rolled back', the regulatory framework so much 'red tape' to be cut, public spending money 'down the drain' to be ruthlessly curbed, and, of course, welfare 'scroungers' chastised. The fetters on business enterprise and voluntary initiative, it is further felt, can be thus released and the community thereby blossom.

Of course firms like Capita and Serco have a vested interest in such a worldview since they stand to profit greatly by policies inspired by such an ideology. But it is not just a question of political subservience to the capitalist interests or even corruption, though many Conservative politicians in particular are awash with directorships and are otherwise sit snugly in bed with big business. Across society attitudes have changed towards public taxation and collective provision, even a sense of duty towards one's fellow citizens.

There is indeed fertile ground for arguments that we no longer need the 'old-fashioned' welfare state and that individuals should be free to spend their money as they want, be it on a private care package or on a new SUV. Other people may just think that the cutbacks will only affect someone else, adopting an "I'm Alright Jack" attitude of indifference to the hardship being inflicted on others.

Many see only a quasi-criminal underclass of 'dole wallahs' (but not the far worse problem of the idle rich on the roof of society). They believe all the stories about public sector waste. There may sometimes be a bit of truth here but often the claims are misleading, if not mendacious (see, for example: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/jun/24/bad-science-local-government-savings-ben-goldacre?>).

At times it does seem as if council staff get not only higher pay and better pensions but also perks not open to other workers (paid days off for events like the recent Royal Wedding). Rightly or wrongly, the resentments felt by those in the charitable and commercial sectors do reinforce support for a 'rolling back' of the state.

Such thinking has been encouraged by the general trend in recent decades towards more 'private' lifestyles, more materialistic values and a generally more individualistic culture. It has been given different names: *The Individualised Society* (Bauman), *Individualization* (Beck), *The Culture of Narcissism* (Lasch) *Egotopia* (Miller) and perhaps most famously *Bowling Alone* (Putnam).

*Contrary to the rhetoric that national government money has run out, there are in fact several possible revenue sources. For example:*

*\* a 50 per cent tax rate on incomes over £100,000*

*(raising some £4.7 billion per annum),*

*\* closing tax loopholes (£25 billion);*

*\* a tax on vacant housing (£5 billion);*

*\* 'Robin Hood' taxes on financial transactions and bank super-profits (£20 billion).*

*Such reforms might take time but councils could introduce emergency measures like levies on private car parks (as in Nottingham) to buy a breathing space and save facilities like Chirton House.*

*PS. The fuel costs alone of Typhoon & Tornado fighter aircraft are estimated at £25,000 per hour, which, apparently, we can 'afford'.*

Whatever the label, much eroded are those values that led millions – including many well-to-do people, not just those in need – to support the welfare programmes launched back in 1945. Now many, including ordinary working class people not just the more well-heeled, heed the siren call of ‘tax cuts’ and privatisation. So, while there is still widespread support for the NHS, that for other parts of the welfare state seems less secure.

### **Siren songs**

The notion of an army of volunteers replacing statutory services may have some sort of romantic appeal despite the fact that it was the grave failings of charitable provision that led to the creation of the state welfare system in the first place. People may also be persuaded by fine-sounding phrases. Opening up public services sounds good but, in reality, it usually means handing them over to private profiteers, with attendant risks for unprofitable provision and for clear accountability. ‘Empowering communities’ sounds good too. In reality, it is often means the withdrawal of the very resources which the local community in general and voluntary groups in particular need to thrive).

Other siren songs include ‘personalisation’ and ‘individual care packages’. Yet there are many who do not want such ‘choices’ and/or are unable, mentally or physically, to make them. After all, in the case of health care, most people just want to be able to go to a *local* doctor and be told what’s wrong with them and what they have to do. They want, if necessary, treatment at a *local* hospital. They don’t want choice: they want access. Quite rightly, most people accept that general and progressive taxation is the best way to share the cost of such services fairly across society (surely the true meaning of a ‘Big Society’).

So-called ‘choice’ can actually increase costs severely via the unnecessary duplication of facilities and suboptimal use of many of them (especially in private health, if not social care). Some of the cost is, here, paid by the environment with increased waste, massive duplication of transport and so forth. Also choice (in health at least) can mean atomisation of care with people having to go from pillar to post to get what they need.

Similarly it may seem sensible to concentrate resources on the most needy/most at risk. Yet often it saves society money and does more to help individuals if intervention takes place early on when there is more chance of sorting out problems, instead of leaving them to fester and perhaps become insoluble. In other words, short-term ‘savings’ often turn into long-term losses. Meanwhile there are the extra costs and frequent indignities of the bureaucratic testing of eligibility.

Even ‘cutting costs’ can cost more money. It needs ‘bean counters’ and thereby can increase administrative overheads at the expense of the service itself. The public care sector may lack some of the financial disciplines of, say, a private firm but the latter can also screw up spectacularly, as the recent BBC series on *Business Nightmares* spotlighted.

By contrast, ‘red tape’ definitely sounds a bad thing and sometimes there are indeed pointless rules that get in the way of effectiveness. Yet this dread phrase also covers activities like inspections which, if managed properly, can prevent repetitions of some of the shocking incidents that have occurred in different parts of the care sector.

### **Public, private and voluntary**

Clearly there are arguments for a rethink of traditional care and other such services. High profile cases of abuse of vulnerable individuals within the statutory system have raised certain question marks. Some private and voluntary providers certainly do an excellent job. It is plainly daft to label the public sector ‘good’

and everyone else ‘bad’.

Indeed it is dangerous to generalise about the respective merits of the various alternative modes of provision since, often, like is not being compared with like. But it seems fair to say that the public sector tends to provide *comparatively* decent levels of pay, higher levels of staff training and more generous staffing than the private sector. It is probably easier to spot malpractice there than in privately run institutions. That said, most financial and physical abuse takes place within the family so it may pay to be more careful about nice-sounding notions such as ‘care in the community’.

There are also dangers that voluntary bodies are compromised, losing valuable independence when they start taking on contracts to deliver what was once the state’s task. So policy in this whole area is a bit of a minefield. Yet it is surely the case that demonstrably successful services like Chirton House ought to be protected, whatever the right overall mix of provision. The saga of private provision such as Southern Cross scarcely suggest that wholesale privatisation is the answer.<sup>1</sup>

### **Majority mugged**

Once the cuts begin to bite, scales may fall from many more eyes and opposition grow. The sight of bankers awarding themselves giant pay rises (a ruse avoiding accusation of extravagant bonus payments) will also anger many at the time when more and more ordinary people, not just the absolutely poor, are really struggling to make ends meet (the so-called ‘precariat’ because of their precarious position).

After all, most of us are only an accident or some other misfortune away from a need for the services that are now being cut. Most of us will, of course, grow old and will depend on collective welfare support if our final years are not to be eked out in misery.

Already the trend is towards a society with many more people out of work, facing a punitive benefits system and drastically pared-down public services. There will be greater polarisation between rich and poor neighbourhoods. Apart from direct damage to individuals and families, such developments tear the very fabric of a healthy society, to the detriment of the vast majority, as studies like Wilkinson and Pickett’s *The Spirit Level* have conclusively shown.

So we need to take up causes like Chirton House. Of course this will mean more honesty about some of the failings of traditional welfare services. It especially means creative exploration of how to encourage citizen involvement and make the most of local knowledge.

It would be naive to suggest that public sector provision and workers therein can somehow be insulated from the hard times ahead (climate change, peak oil, competition from newly industrialised countries etc). Yet the current austerity package is not about coping with that coming challenge. It is more about a redistribution of wealth and power within existing society, making the mass of people pay for the greed and irresponsibility of the banks and sister financial institutions.

Greens support the struggle not just against harmful cut-backs and unemployment. But we also advocate a shorter working week. Without it, many people simply won’t have the time and energy to help build a truly big society.

---

1. See:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2011/jun/03/southern-cross-care-private-equity> and, more generally, [http://www.democraticdeficit.com/outourcing\\_the\\_big\\_society\\_with\\_capita\\_serco\\_and\\_g4s.html](http://www.democraticdeficit.com/outourcing_the_big_society_with_capita_serco_and_g4s.html)

# Smart? Dense!

Developers and their political allies often face opposition. Sometimes they defend their plans on the grounds that the city/town/village has got to accept its share of “growth”. Perhaps the latter line is most commonly used to justify more urban sprawl. In other words, new houses and so forth have got to go somewhere: only reactionary Nimbyists, they say, would oppose having more ‘development’ in their backyard.

However, they also try to dress up their goals with sweet-sounding buzzwords like “liveable”, “affordable”, “diverse”, “vibrant”, “inclusive”, “pro-active”... Thus local councillors and developers tell us that their schemes will make Newcastle “world class”. Part of the PR is, of course, liberal use of ‘greenwash’ which sounds environmentally friendly but seeks to advance the same expansionist agenda. So we have had “sustainable growth”, “sustainable development”, and more recently “smart growth”, even “eco-density”.

The fraud is that population growth and growth in per capita consumption need not necessarily cause sprawl and other ills if they are managed better. Oh no. It’s not whether we grow that is the issue, according to these smart folk, it’s how we grow. Yet it is a strategy that has been tried... and failed. The best example is Portland, Oregon, long the poster child of smart growth. People kept coming and the development pressures duly build up. Eventually they spill over, their buildings burying farmland, woodland and wetland. So Portland continues to lose its ‘green-ness’.

In reality, you can only jam so many sardines into a sardine can. With on-going growth, including net immigration, you end up with both density *and* sprawl. People who live in dense urban areas, in the tallest rabbit warrens (a.k.a. ‘loft living’), still consume resources and generate wastes – indeed, according to Canadian academic and pioneer of ‘footprint analysis’, Dr. William Rees, more so.<sup>1</sup> Rhetoric like “smart growth” disguises such truths. It also helps to conceal that far from catering for increased demands, vested interests like property developers are in reality trying to promote them.

## World class?

It is worth examining the aspirations of ‘world class’ status a bit more closely.<sup>2</sup> One way is to look at Vancouver, recently chosen as the world’s ‘most liveable’ city. It is growing a rate of 3% annually. At that rate, it will double its population in just 23 years. Where will another 600,000 people then live? Replace every house with an apartment tower, and then grow for another 23 years? Ad infinitum?

If Vancouver is the king of cities, it only shows how much the world’s cities have been degraded by noise, crime, pollution, traffic gridlock, unaffordable housing, homelessness, growing wealth disparity and other such collaterals of over-expansion. Of course Vancouver has some lovely bits. Stanley Park is world famous for its beauty. But all that spectacular scenery wears a bit thin after a while, especially if you earn the average wage. You

1. For sample analyses, see: <http://dieoff.org/page110.htm>

2. For example: <http://www.newcastlegateshead.com/site/corporate/newcastlegateshead-initiative>.

can’t eat “diversity” or “vibrancy”.

Vancouver has had an expensive face-lift recently, with multi-billion dollar monorails and Olympic venues complimenting the forest of new high rise buildings which sprout up with astonishing speed. But the makeover only serves to highlight the wrinkles Vancouver can’t hide: the homeless, the addicted, the mentally troubled and the stressed-out masses who must run faster and faster just to remain stationary. Many local homeowners now have to spend some 70% of their income on mortgage payments. According to the Centre for Policy Alternatives, 38% of Vancouverites fail to achieve the wage level deemed necessary to eke out a semi-decent living.

Basic economic stresses are not the only problem, however. For example, according to Professor James White’s study of loneliness, Canadians who live in dense compacted areas like ‘world-class’ Vancouver have one third fewer “close” friends than rural residents and almost half of those interviewed declared that other people are not to be trusted.

All along the Skytrain routes (which began in 1985), high-rise developments have mushroomed, many of them basically little boxes with a bit of a view (shades of the Newcastle-Gateshead Quayside!). It was supposed to take people out of their cars but, with a fast growing population, the monorails will be filled to capacity and the roads will be choked as well.

Immigration ensures that 30,000 newcomers – many of them rich Chinese – are pouring Vancouver each year, with an additional 30,000 coming from other provinces, 20% of whom are also foreign-born. Immigrants, half of whom are functionally illiterate in both English and French, must run on this treadmill at an even faster pace for a longer time. Ironically, it has been immigrant-driven population growth that has inflated the very housing costs which force them into a lifestyle of chronic workaholicism. The rising cost of living has also driven married women into the workforce. Far from being real liberation, it is the equality of the same treadmill.

Overall, Vancouver has almost three times too many people to be sustainable, and had an ecological footprint 25 times its size. Urban streams are threatened with toxic runoffs, valley soils are overloaded with nutrients from intensive agriculture and septic systems leading to the contamination of the aquifer and rural waterways. 90% of the Fraser River fish revealed at least one pathological abnormality, according to one study.

Soon the bubble will burst, and, as usual, it will be the ordinary people at the bottom who will be left holding the bag. In a ‘post-carbon’ Canada, viable cities will probably not exceed 20,000 people. Today’s vast urban feed lots that have popped up like tumours in the Age of Exuberance will come to resemble mausoleums and ghost towns.

Claims that life in Vancouver is better than life in Sydney (no 7 in the recent ‘world class’ list) or, for that matter, Newcastle, are like telling an inmate in a correctional facility that he has the best cell in the joint. There is an alternative to “growth management”. It is growth “control”. Instead of endlessly attempting to accommodate growth, you “cap” it.

It has been done. Okotoks (Alberta), Qualicum Beach (British Columbia) and Noosa (Queensland) have all set limits to their population levels. Just as an elevator has a carrying capacity then so does a city. One day Vancouver City council will have to do what is now unthinkable. It will have to hang out a “No Vacancy” sign. The sooner the better. Before everyone is living like canned sardines.

Meanwhile, Newcastle City Council has its sights set on growth and more of it, as fast as possible.

# Don't bury carbon

**M**any organisations, from national government to local councils, including some radical groups on the Left, now argue that Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) is a vital part of any sustainable future. So there is much talk of 'clean coal'. This, it is claimed, provides the way to escape the threats from both global warming (i.e. CO<sub>2</sub> emissions) and peak oil (i.e. a switch to a more abundant fuel source). It is a bandwagon on which local councils are ready to jump

CCS is different to all other climate change mitigation strategies. It is not about stopping unsustainable activities or doing things differently (solar systems, nuclear power etc.). It is about continuing doing the same things i.e. mining and burning fossil fuel, especially coal, but with some (possible) amelioration of some (and only some) side-effects.

However it is, at best, an irrelevance, given time scales involved, but also a diversion from real issues and, at the worst, may bring many more problems than it solves. Even some sections of the business-as-usual brigade can see the limitations of CCS. It is "a fix for climate change that is at best uncertain and at worst unworkable... (it) create(s) a false sense of security while depriving potentially cheaper methods of cutting emissions of cash an attention – all for the sake of placating the coal lobby" according that arch establishment organ, *The Economist* (05/03/2009). Indeed those with a vested interest in coal industry are quite blatant that they want our money before they will change their destructive ways. "If they fund it, we will fit it", said Paul Golby of E.ON (quoted in *The Guardian*, 17/03/2009).

## Mindset

Vested interests apart, technofixes like CCS can gain a momentum of their own. University and industry researchers as well as politicians and civil servants all begin to nail their colours to its mast. Many schemes like CCS can indeed look good on paper. Unfortunately, the idea takes root that theoretical speculation can readily be translated into viable practice. Lots of people believe there is no limit to human ingenuity and that any technical or logistical barriers can simply be overridden. Only Luddites, they believe, can doubt that breakthroughs lie just round the corner and that beautiful plans will be realised on the ground,

on time, within budget and in full working order.

CCS enthusiasts tend to see the Earth as a mere object that can be rejigged just to serve human wants. The same worldview drives those who advocate geo-engineering. They have almost religious faith in the capacity to monitor, record and predict. Many people also respond to the word 'clean' as in 'clean coal'. But clean activities can be just as unsustainable as dirty ones (e.g. 'clear-cutting', 'vacuum cleaner' fishing techniques, HEP, soil erosion, aquifer depletion...)

There is an even wider constituency. Just as kids often love new toys, many grown-ups, veritable 'kidults', love new gadgets. They thrill to words like innovation, frontiers of science, cutting edge technology, science city, 'world class', 'international leadership' ...

Yet the solution to the ecological threat, not just global warming, is a mass of rather mundane actions. Often it will mean stopping this or that activity which many people will see as restrictive. The CCS lobby can appeal to such people, fooling them that they can continue to have their cakes and eat them.

So schemes like CCS can build up a momentum, regardless of real world considerations. Indeed many Leftists may have an additional, almost psychological bond to coal mining given the history of the miners' unions (some were quite right-wing actually but that's another story).

## Lack of potential

Actually there are many arguments against what, in reality, just another false technological fix. Like all technofixes, CCS reduces issues that are primarily economic, social and especially cultural to ones of technique, i.e. the mechanics of how we might capture and best store carbon. But the Earth's problems are essentially not engineering problems. They are ones of unsustainable goals and lifestyles. The benefits of even the most appropriate technology will be cancelled out in a society committed to more growth.

The problems of our unviable social order are many-headed. They require comprehensive solutions, not one-dimensional pseudo-answers. Indeed CCS is the equivalent of the catalytic converter as a fix for 'mad car disease'. This 'end-of-pipe' remedy didn't cure the illness (too many cars) and it actually made some problems worse (extra energy consumption plus new forms of pollution). CCS is another example of a tendency to jump out of frying pans ... into fires or, more precisely, keep one foot in both.

[continued on page 5]

# Bury a bad idea

### CO2 tunnel vision

CCS is actually but a part of the whole carbon con. To be sure, excess CO2 emissions are deadly serious. But there are other greenhouse gases which CCS does not address and from which it detracts attention. It also draws awareness, effort and resources away from the equally urgent need to protect carbon 'sinks' (as opposed to the capping of sources). Worse still, it ignores the fact that modern lifestyles will still be doomed even if global warming turns out to be nothing more than a figment of overheated imaginations.

Thus CCS seeks to maintain a way of living that is destroying biodiversity, devastating old growth forests, eroding soils, exhausting underground water aquifers, draining wetlands, wiping out coral reefs, polluting air, water and soil, burying productive land under sterile brick, concrete and tarmac, and rapidly depleting several key minerals ... and still not creating a just and fulfilling society for all its citizens.

The very activity it does address, coal mining and burning, is a prime cause of several such ailments. Even if CCS were to function perfectly, the coal industry would still be destroying regions like Appalachia (mountaintop removal, water pollution, subsidence, etc.). Miners would still be regularly dying or being maimed in pits around the world (look at accident rate in China, for example). The transportation of coal would still be consuming large quantities of increasingly expensive oil.

However the trump card played by the CCS lobby is the alleged abundance of coal. Coal is indeed more widespread than other fossil fuels but it does not occur everywhere like, say, sunshine. 90% of the global coal production comes from only 6 countries. Some of them, such as the USA show signs of increasing maturity (and, therefore, a coming peak, followed by downhill). However, there is a greater uncertainty about the recoverable reserves and coal production may yield a global maximum somewhere between 2030 and 2060.

But this statistic of remaining amount of coal still leaves begging the critical question of not quantity but *quality*. It is likely that the peak of high grade coal is much closer so, even if it were to work perfectly, CCS is at best a rather stop-gap measure, whilst still encouraging society to keep destroying more of the Earth for coal.

### Mind the gap.

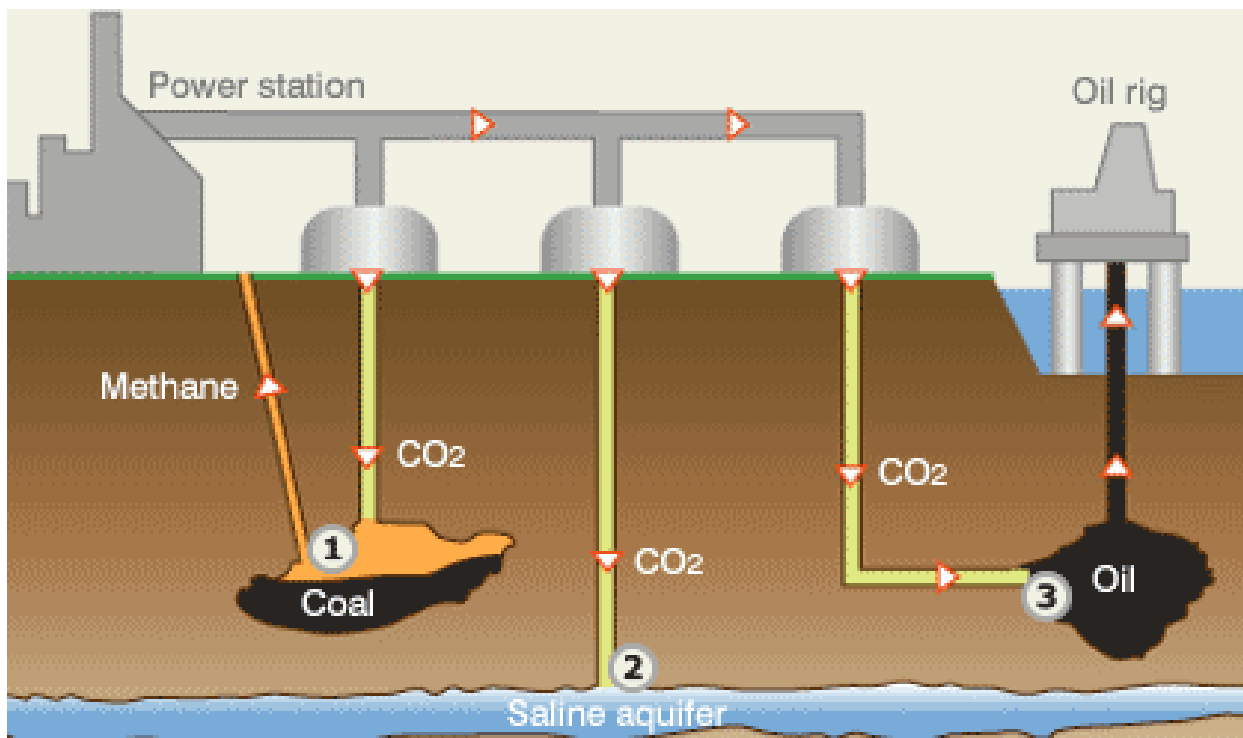
The CCS lobby has another card. Supporters argue that CCS provides a breathing space, creating time for the development of longer term alternatives. This is false since the deployment of large-scale CCS will itself take too long and its cost will eat into the budget for those alternatives. Currently feasible applications are only being used with 'stationary' carbon sources. The IPCC predicts that, by 2050, only 20-40% of fossil fuel emissions will be feasible for capture. There is little chance of the technology, i.e. an integrated, reliable and commercially viable system, being ready for deployment within the next ten years. It is imperative that we make the greatest possible carbon cuts before then.

Electricity produced using CCS technology still has a much higher carbon footprint than electricity produced from renewable sources as not all of the CO2 emitted from the power station is captured. The energy costs of CCS operation at power plants, refineries and cement works will add extra emissions so total percentage capture will be less. In reality, new power plants like Kingsnorth in Kent will be emitting CO2 with no CCS in place and they are sited far from likely repositories in North Sea.

This 'solution' cannot, then, be implemented fast enough at big enough scale to make a difference in any useful time scale, the so-called 'rate and magnitude' barrier (a telling argument against the nuclear option too).

So, in 2008, the UK Government was talking of a commercial start for CCS in about 2020, with target of some 300,000 tonnes p.a. Yet Drax alone produces 20,000,000 tonnes a year! (66 times more). The IEA, for example, says that world will need more than 200 power plants fully equipped with CCS by 2030 if GW to be limited to 3 degrees C.

CCS supporters often refer to the enormous Sleipner Project (1996) in North Sea which removes CO2 to make gas suitable for domestic and commercial burning but that burning still releases CO2. But to capture just the CO2 from single large coal plants would require 10 Sleipner size projects. The MIT predicts that CCS won't be operating on any significant commercial scale until 2030. Even Shell suggests that it will not be in widespread use until 2050. At present there is little commercial interest. So it is even less likely to develop at necessary speed even if feasible.



## Pipe dream

Worse CCS would require a huge pipeline system (with massive costs and impacts). Vaclav Smil estimates that capture of just 25% of coal plant emissions would need system of pipelines twice size of current oil industry capacity. The fact remains that even if it does work at acceptable cost, it is still usually better to try to reduce pollution by reducing inputs into a system rather than trying to capture diffuse outputs at end of the system.

Though ecological costs are the real price, in the short term financial outlays do matter. McKinsey (2008) notes that “the total CCS expense would be at least 30% higher than that of new power plants (for the same scale plants), and possibly much more”. According to the International Energy Agency, CCS installation will require active financing from governments if it is to be deployed on a large-scale. [So too would renewable energy systems, of course, but the issue is what offers a better overall bet in the long run]

Then there are insurance costs over a very long period of time. Who will pick up that bill? The nuclear power industry dumps it on the public. Perhaps CCS will require that too if insurance companies suspect that it could be a liability for them.

Meanwhile there is the problem of opportunity costs. Though it would be wonderful if every alternative avenue could be explored, in the real world that seldom happens. One thing so hogs time, energy, money, enthusiasm and brainpower that other options languish (thus nuclear power investment crippled photovoltaic research until the space programme came along).

We should never forget as well “Pascal’s Wager”. If global warming and peak oil turn out to be illusory, the measures advocated by Greens (radical conservation effort, investment in renewables, action against deforestation etc.) are all worthwhile for many other reasons: not so CCS.

## Safety

The case against CCS does not depend upon any safety hazards it may pose. To be fair they are not comparable to, say, coal mining itself or nuclear power. Yet there are still some risks. There will always be the danger of accidental leakage during capture and transportation as well as from sequestered CO<sub>2</sub>. If that happened, it would mean there were limited or no carbon savings, while still saddling society with the additional costs. CO<sub>2</sub> leaching would potentially degrade the quality of groundwater and have a potentially lethal effects on plants and subsoil animals.

If a leak were to cause a sudden release of captured CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere, it would amount to a toxic hazard at a local level. Indeed one natural occurrence at Lake Nyos, Cameroons, 1700 people died as did some 3500 cows plus every animal and bird within 25 km radius.

So the risks cannot be totally discounted. Indeed the safety hazard increases when ‘A’ grade reservoirs for sequestration are used up. Technological momentum would create demands to start use of ‘B’ then ‘C’ grade reservoirs and so on, each step bringing greater risks. Too much faith is being placed in the capacity of scientists and technologists to pull solutions out of the magical hats. We should not forget the wise words of Paul Ehrlich and John Holdren: “technological rabbits tend to have large appetites and leave noxious droppings”

Overall the attempt to use more coal a bit more ‘cleanly’ is like shovelling coal into furnace of a runaway train heading for ruin. Actually, the real challenge is to stop thinking in terms of shortage of supply, focussing instead on the ‘longage’ of demand, in other words conservation (doing less) and efficiency (doing what we would then do better) in context of a move to a steady-state economy, the real alternative.

Carbon capture and storage is irrelevant in terms of that fundamental and urgent task. It is like digging yourself deeper into an ever more dangerous hole when the best thing is to stop digging and climb out of the hole.

**Follow-up articles will look at ‘gas fracking’, biofuels, and the claims of the nuclear industry to be the real sustainable energy alternative.**

## It Might Rain Forever

*The weather here has been as strange as it can be*

*And now there’s flooding from the rising of the sea*

*All the world’s governments are failing to agree*

*Why it looks like it will rain until September*

*Wind, wave and solar power we should all accept*

*Cause going nuclear is something we’ll regret*

*Safe waste disposal isn’t sorted out as yet*

*And we don’t want to be glowing just like embers*

*This global warming is the topic of debate*

*Everybody looks the other way*

*But you know people unless problems are addressed*

*The weather will get weirder every day*

*It really matters now what action we all take*

*Just talking endlessly is a great big mistake*

*We need to reduce carbon footprints at a pace*

*If future generations are to prosper*

Based on the tune by Carol King; revised words by Val Duncan

## Twittering on?

The ‘progressive’ blogosphere is awash with comment about the cutbacks. Yet a much deeper and, in the long run, much more damaging swathe of cuts is routinely ignored.

For example:

<http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/nature/on-a-wing-and-a-prayer-british-birds-under-threat-2158530.html>;

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-13796479>;

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-13094597>;

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2010/feb/18/primates-extinction-red-list>;

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-11434109>.



# Ragged Thinker?

**THE NORTH EAST LABOUR SOCIETY** held a very well-attended meeting in June about the socialist writer Robert Tressell (real name Robert Croker). He is most famous for his novel *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (RTP), first published 1910. It has even been suggested that this novel, a filleted version of which circulated widely during World War 2, helped, it has been claimed, to produce the Labour landslide at the 1945 General Election.

Tressell's novel certainly captures the misery endured by ordinary working people of his time (which is why they are called "ragged trousered"). But he also recognises that they swallow the dominant ideology of the time and accept that it is only normal that the rich sponge off their work (hence "philanthropists").

Scion of a wealthy family, Tressell ended up a skilled interior decorator by trade. Initially he was no socialist but circumstances led him later to join the Social Democratic Federation, Britain's first avowedly Marxist group. Not surprisingly then, the narrative of the RTP keep returning to the theme that workers (by hand or brain) are exploited by the capitalist class.

It also echoes the common socialist belief, so vividly expressed in *The Communist Manifesto*, that capitalism had created such powerful 'productive forces' that a world of universal affluence would be possible once capitalist relations of production had been removed.

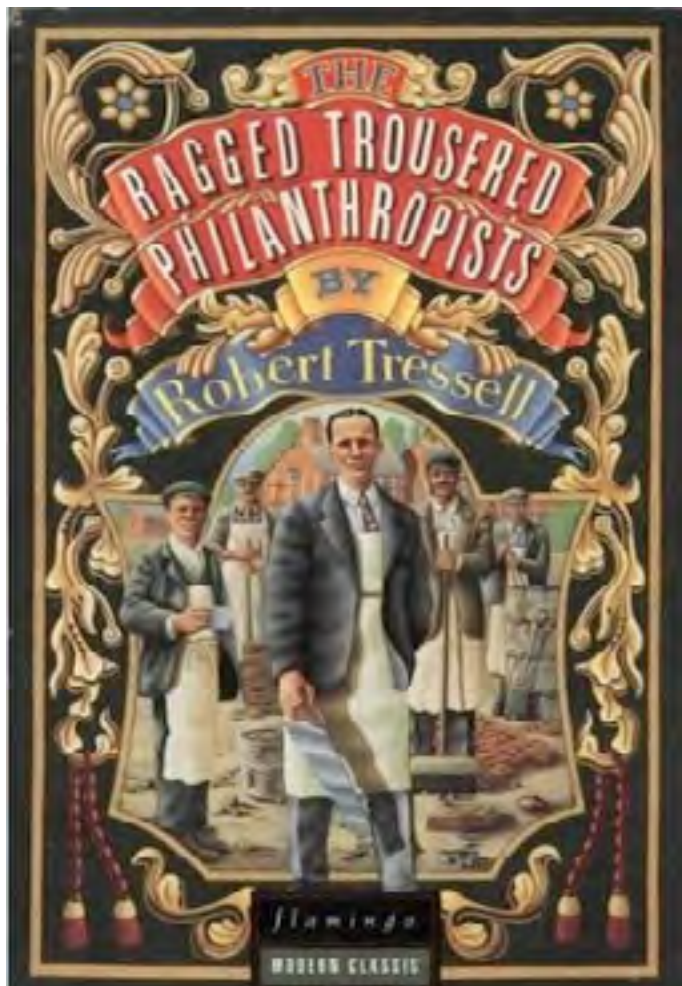
Such ideas are set forth largely in debates between the story's hero, Frank Owen, a painter like Tressell himself, and his fellow workers, as they move from one decorating job to another. At the heart of the narrative are two set-piece speeches. The first is a lecture by Owen during a lunch break. Later, another is delivered by a fellow worker in the group who turns out to share Owen's views, this intervention at the annual 'Beano' being perhaps the highlight of the story.

There is much humour in the novel, not unlike that of Dickens or of seaside postcards. But RTP does not shy away from the tragedies of some of its characters nor the frustration of Owen himself who often wins the arguments but still fails to convert his fellow workers. Such resistance in reality to socialist arguments has indeed been recently confirmed by Martin Pugh's new history of the Labour Party which shows how it often made faster progress amongst better heeled groups.

A number of political issues are posed by the novel. There is, for example, the quite unsustainable cornucopianism. Tressell depicts a future utopia in which the (unlimited) population takes (unlimited) amounts of whatever it wants for free from giant warehouses. There is also a naive faith in the potential of state ownership and planning, not foreseeing the problems of inefficiency and waste indicted by 'revisionist' left-wing economists such as Oscar Lange and Ota Sik. Stalinist terror made such problems worse but there are intrinsic difficulties with all large-scale state 'dirigisme' which early socialists did not foresee.

Like so many people on the Left, then and now, Tressell essentially blames each and every problem on capitalism. Yet many social and environmental problems predate capitalism and have no direct connection to it nor indeed any particular form of economy. Basically classless societies still exterminated many non-human species while what are (or should be) socially beneficial activities like education, health and social care can all be unsustainable in their impacts.

Most of all – and here is a major flaw in socialist thinking – Tressell seems unaware of the dynamic that is sometimes called the 'tyranny of commonplace decisions', in other words the



overall harm that stems from a myriad of micro-decisions that ordinary people make each and every day, with no ill intended but whose cumulative effect nevertheless is unsustainably damaging to society and environment alike.

Tressell also treats the state as a mere creature of private capitalists. Yet public bureaucracies can have distinct interests of their own and pursue bad goals quite independently of capitalist profiteering, most visibly in the case of town planning and architecture. Similarly, activities like teaching and medical practice have also suffered when certain bad ideas have taken hold, ones with little connection to economics per se.

The likelihood that vested interests might block by fair means or foul the legislative programme envisaged by Tressell is something that is seemingly just wished away. Yet experiences like the overthrow of radical President Allende in Chile teach otherwise.

Lastly Tressell defines politics in terms of education work, largely lecture-based meetings about the evils of capitalism and need for socialist transformation. This will build the vote to get socialist MPs elected. The route to the new world is thus via Parliamentary legislation. Such a political strategy does not make connections to the actual struggles being waged in the by the people he wants to convert (e.g. trade union activity).

In other words there is no sense of a 'transitional politics' that might link the two, connecting the big vision with the more limited struggles in the here and now. Nor does this "blackboard socialism" envisage how people might be changed through the experience of struggle over those very same problems, rather than being brought to enlightenment by the political equivalent of preaching.

Both *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* and Tressell's own life and times will interest any politically minded person. The novel reflects the Left's traditional ignorance of ecological realities but it really is still well worth reading.

# “We didn’t know then what we know now”

One constant in both private conversations and public meetings about the human prospect is the readiness of so many to trot out the argument that in the past there was almost total unawareness of the unsustainable damage being done to the Earth’s life-support systems and therefore the long-term well-being of people themselves.

Businesses tell this tale to excuse past inaction to mend their destructive ways as well as justify their routine opposition down the decades to vital protection measures. Leftists tell the same story to justify the failure of virtually every variant of socialism to face that most fundamental of all issues, ecological sustainability. Ordinary citizens similarly excuse their own failure to green their lifestyles in the past on the grounds that they simply didn’t know what was happening.

Yet this argument totally distorts the actual historical record. In reality, there have been many voices warning about the dangerous journey on which humanity had collectively embarked. Consider the following:

*“What now remains compared to what then existed is like the skeleton of a sick man, all the fat and soft earth having wasted way - Mountains which have nothing but food for bees - had trees not very long ago. [The land] was enriched by the yearly rains, which were not lost to it as now, by flowing from the bare land into the sea; but the soil was deep, and therein received the water, and kept in the loamy earth - feeding springs and streams running everywhere. Now only abandoned shrines remain to show where the springs once flowed.”*

So the writer portrays rampant deforestation, soil erosion, and the loss of water supplies, all conditions evident around the world today. But the place is Greece in the 4th century BC, the writer Plato. A hundred or so years before him, Herodotus had observed that “mans stalks across the landscape and deserts follow in his footsteps”. In the second century BC, concern about human destruction of wildlife had led to what seems to have been the first concerted protection measures under the (Buddhist) Maurya Empire in southern Asia.

From the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Era, similar voices can be heard. Berber historian-scholar Ibn Khaldoun (1332–1406) voiced environmental concerns, noting the threat from population growth. There was St Francis of Assisi, who anticipated the rise of a sensibility that showed greater respect



“No-one was aware what was happening to the Earth”

for other lifeforms, something long evident in certain tribal societies. There was also the Englishman John Evelyn from the Late Stuart period, who denounced pollution. In the late 18th century, Thomas Malthus showed how humankind was just as subject to environmental limits as any other species, though his reputation had to endure vicious attacks from many quarters, not least Karl Marx.

As the Industrial Revolution took hold, individuals such as William Wordsworth in England and George Catlin and Henry Thoreau in the USA denounced its environmental – and social – effects. George Marsh had spelled out in detail ecological constraints on human activity, especially in his *Man and Nature* (1864). Indeed, he had warned farmers in the USA about their practices as early as 1847. [To be fair, Marx had spotted the threat from the loss of soil nutrients]

John Stuart Mill had advocated a ‘steady-state economy’ in the same year that paeon to economic growth and across-the-board technological development, *The Communist Manifesto*, was published (1848). The fact that geology would set constraints on resource availability had been highlighted by economists such as Stanley Jevons (1835-1882). He especially drew attention to the paradox of efficiency, namely the savings tend to be converted into spending elsewhere, cancelling out any good that had been achieved, a lesson still not learned by most proponents of so-called ‘sustainable development’.

A huge and at the time well-known battle over ‘resource development’ (the damming of Hetch Hetchy valley near the famous Yosemite National Park) had been led by Scottish naturalist John Muir in the 1900s. In 1913, William Hornaday published *Our Vanishing Wildlife*, in response to the near destruction of American buffalo and other assaults on biodiversity.

Inside the socialist movement (very broadly defined), there were prescient individuals who saw what most of their comrades failed to see: that humans were unsustainably abusing the rest of the nature and that the blowback would be ruinous. Marx has been mentioned, though his insights should not be exaggerated. But there were others such as John Ruskin, William Morris, Edward Carpenter, Russel Wallace and that difficult-to-classify gadfly George Orwell. In the new Soviet Union, there were dissident voices like scientist Aleksandr Bogdanov who argued that it was necessary to “integrate production with natural laws and limits”. Of course, Stalin soon murderously put pay to such thoughts, as Mao was to do in China.

## Moreness, not enoughness

However study of popular socialist writers of then (and now), such as those published in the influential Left Book Club like Emile Burns and John Strachey, reveal zero understanding of the place of people in the ecological web. After all Marx’s soul brother Friedrich Engels had taught that “the productive power at mankind’s disposal is immeasurable” and that “we are forever secure from the fear of overpopulation”.

The 1930s heard more green voices. The American dustbowl disaster had affected millions. It was widely published through

studies like *Deserts on the March* by Paul Sears (1935). The general unsustainability of increasingly industrialised agriculture was pointed out by numerous individuals such as Rudolf Steiner (Germany), Masanobu Fukuoka (Japan), Lady Eve Balfour (UK) and F. H. King (USA).

Straight after World War 2, from the pens of Fairfield Osborn, William Vogt, Samuel Ordway, Baker Brownell, Aldo Leopold and Frank Fraser Darling came a stream of publications which indicted the destructive course on which human society, capitalist and communist, was embarked.

Libertarian socialist Murray Bookchin was warning of chemicals in food by the early 50s. During the same decade, a number of mass circulation US newspapers featured articles on carbon dioxide build-up and likely global warming. Indeed the Swedish scientist Svante Arrhenius had discussed the link back in the 1890s so, here too, there were no grounds for claiming ignorance.

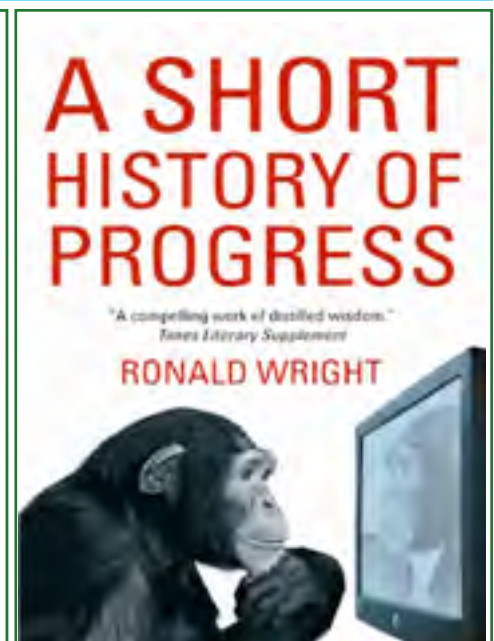
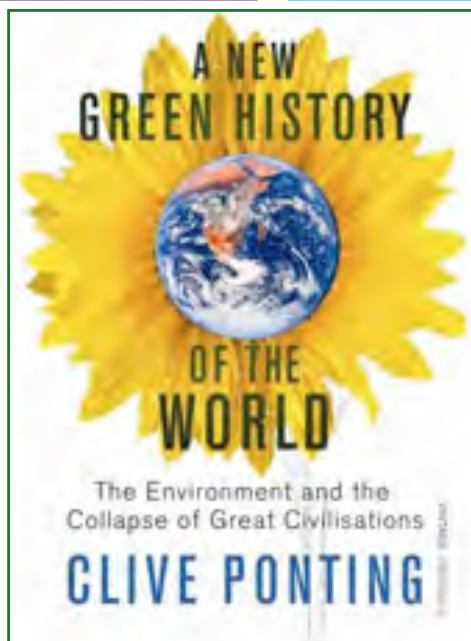
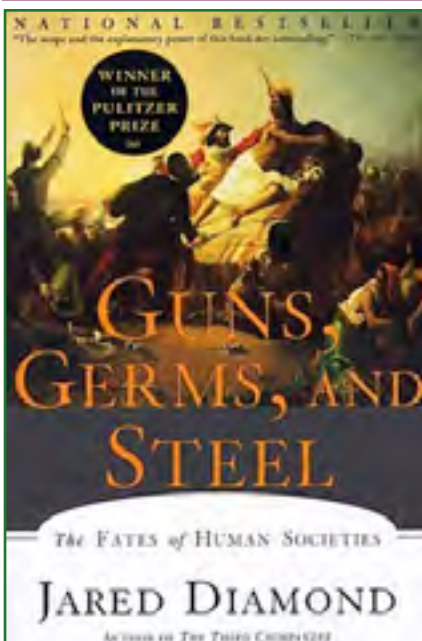
So there were many efforts to ring alarm bells, long before landmark events like the 1972 *Only One Earth* conference held in Stockholm or all the furore over the (in)famous *Limits to Growth* Report in that same year (revealingly, it was denounced by Left and Right). The really interesting question is, of course, is why so many, across all parts of the political spectrum, were unable and/or unwilling to hear them, let alone take due action.

Given that most politicians and pundits – in accord with large sections of the public at large – still see things in terms of renewed economic growth, eco-myopia would still seem a widespread disability.

**A really green history –  
some suggestions for further reading:**



**The Count of Industrialism:  
a Portrait in Oil**



Boydson, S. (1989). *Western Civilisation in Biological Perspective*. Clarendon.

Brosimmer, F. (2002). *Ecocide*. Pluto Press.

Crosby, A. (1986). *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe*. CUP.

**Diamond, J. (1998). *Guns, Germs and Steel*. Vintage.**

Hughes, J. Donald (2002). *An Environmental History of the World: Humankind's Changing Role in the Community of Life* Routledge.

**Ponting, C. (2007). *A Green History of the World*. Vintage.**

McNeil, J. (2000). *Something New Under the Sun*. Penguin

McNeill, J. R. And W. McNeill (2003). *The Human Web: A Birds-Eye View Of World History*. W.W. Norton.

Shepard, P. (1998). *Coming Home to the Pleistocene*. Island Pr.

Worster, D., ed. (1989) *The Ends of the Earth: Perspectives on Modern Environmental History*. CUP.

**Wright, R. (2005). *A Short History of Progress*. Canongate.**

For George Orwell's 'greenery', see:

Ehrenfeld, D. *Beginning Again*. OUP. [Pages 8-28.]

# Q&A

This is a regular series featuring questions that both opponents and simply curious members of the public raise about the Green Party, its values and policies.

**This round** (thanks for Alison Whalley for the question):

*1. What is the Green Party's perspective on the population issue? Is the green perspective so pro-Earth that it is actually anti-human!!*

The simplest way to deal with such questions is to go straight to the heart of the matter: **numbers do count**. We Greens insist that it does make a difference whether the population is stable or continues to rise. In the latter case, every current environmental problem and most social and economic ones will be made worse by the pressure caused by simply more people.

Such a stance has long been part of the Green Party's analysis, though the policy about population targets was removed some years ago. Actually the founding of the Party's forerunner, the People Party, was, somewhat ironically, stimulated by an interview with Paul Ehrlich published in *Playboy* (sic!) where the great ecologist warned of the threat from too many people.

The impact of human numbers can be explained in different ways, of course. A very simple one from our region is footpath erosion on Hadrian's Wall where the pressure of just too many feet has necessitated the closure of several sections of the national footpath. Another little example of how numbers count is the limits set on, say, building users by fire regulations or the capacity of lifts.

Of course, societies and their environments differ greatly from the carrying capacity of one building, lift or, for that matter, lifeboat, though such examples do illuminate how, beyond a certain point, numbers really matter. Just how many can be sustained becomes a much more complicated matter but the basic dynamic remains the same: limits and blowback from 'overshooting' those limits. Every addition to any population in any country necessarily means more demands in terms of not just food but also shelter, health care, education, transportation, job creation, energy, water supply, sewage disposal...

All carry ecological penalties and, beyond a certain point, threaten human well-being because of those unsustainable costs. But life is about more than mere survival. For example, individuals often equate higher living standards with more personal physical space but that too is subject to basic geo-physical limitations on supply. Here again, more people means more likelihood of ecological 'overshoot' and therefore human suffering.



## Numbers Count!

Population growth (domestic increase + net immigration) interacts with per capita consumption and the impact of technologies used to deliver the products and services thus consumed. But the 'p' factor is decisive, necessarily multiplying the effects of the other two factors.

A brilliant explanation can be found here:

Harte, J. (2007). 'Human population as a dynamic factor in environmental degradation'. Posted at <http://www.meteor.iastate.edu/classes/mt404/Papers/Harte-PopEnv07.pdf>

A good exploration of this dynamic, linked to the core concept of ecological footprint analysis, can be found @: <http://www.progressivesforimmigrationreform.org/2010/03/05/from-big-to-bigger-how-mass-immigration-and-population-growth-have-exacerbated-americas-ecological-footprint/>

See also:

<http://www.postcarbon.org/Reader/PCReader-Ryerson-Population.pdf>

For a case study of one interaction, that of population growth and urban sprawl, see:

<http://www.cis.org/articles/2003/SprawlPaper.pdf>

There is a good interactive animation @

<http://www.numbersusa.com/change/immigration/numbers/>

It is not just a matter of ecological sustainability. There are many purely social costs too. An increase in the size of an electorate (numbers again!) necessarily decreases the 'political weight' of each individual voter. Congestion, reduced privacy and less personal liberty are all likely concomitants of greater numbers. Robinson Crusoe could do much as he liked on his island: that is not the case on crowded islands like Singapore.

More people will lead to fewer 'non-people', with most other forms of life are destroyed or driven out. In California, human numbers surged by nearly 50 percent from 1970 to 1990. They grew another 14 percent in the 1990s. Already at 38-39 million, California's population is projected to balloon to 60 million by 2050. Unless immigration is substantially lowered, it won't crest even there.

Not surprisingly, California has more wildlife in jeopardy than any other state in the USA. More than 800 species are now in peril – including half of all mammals and one-third of all birds. Of these 800 species, 134 are threatened or endangered, facing imminent extinction without urgent action.

### Human race

On 11.30 a.m. June 24th, the total world population was estimated at 6,926,837,502 by the US Census. (For a compendium of key figures, see: <http://www.worldometers.info/>). It is likely to be an under-estimate since many births go unreported in poor countries. But the rate of increase seems to be edging upwards again in countries like Britain. The world's population is now projected to surge past 9 billion before 2050 and then reach 10.1 billion by 2100, if current fertility rates continue at expected levels, according to the very latest UN figures.

Many people also wrongly see it as purely a matter to do with comparatively poor countries. Yet the USA has one of the fastest growing populations. That of our crowded island is also growing. The population of the UK is set to increase by 4.4 million to 65 million by 2016, according to new projections.

That said, 6 countries in what used to be called the 'Third World' account for 50% of the global increase: India, China, Pakistan, Nigeria, Bangladesh and Indonesia. Each year, China, for

example, must find room and resources for eight million more people even though its population is growing by only a little more than a half of one percent annually.

Clearly many factors are at work: child mortality rates, increased longevity, the availability of contraception, migration patterns, religious influences, male machismo, economic circumstances, perhaps even the influence of celebrities & media culture. The Earth, however, only 'knows' impacts of human choices. As American song writer Paul Simon once wrote; "The planet groans, every time it registers another birth" (*Born at the Right Time*).

### Communicating numbers

Perhaps the most difficult challenge when debating population matters is the communication of what such figures actually mean. Many people seem to not grasp the maths of growth. They often seem to confuse as well a fall in the rate of growth with an absolute decrease. It is certainly difficult to explain the matter quickly in verbal debate.

It may be better to refer people to some of the key writings of this aspect of the population question. Particularly useful are those by American physics professor Al Bartlett (see the video @ <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-5051121482067161853#>). He argues that the use of doubling time is the best way to make an impact on listeners and readers).

Numbers might also communicated by comparisons with familiar spatial areas or units of time. Over the next minute, for example, there will be 150+ people added to the total world population. Every day, the net increase in human numbers will be enough to more than fill a city the size of Aberdeen. Each year there is the equivalent of another Germany of mouths to feed, clothe, house...

America's population alone increased by 2.6 million people in 2009. That is similar to adding a city the size of Chicago to the national population every year. The country's population is growing by one person every 14 seconds (the average one consuming more than his or her weight in products each day),

The significance of human numbers also becomes clearer by looking at a current 'trouble spot' and the role of population structure and growth there. For example, the recent conflicts in countries like Egypt owe much to the huge number of young people there and the inability of the local economy to absorb them. [In 1994, Egypt had 60 million people, now it has 85 million, a 42% increase in 16 years. The UNFPA projects 130 million by 2050.]

The nearby Gaza Strip has the 7th highest population growth rate in the world at 3.2% [How long will it take to double? We'll return to the maths later.] Will that growth make the solution of the 'Palestinian Problem' (or, if you prefer, the 'Israeli Problem') easier or harder? Remember that, as of 2011, Israel's population is set to double in roughly 46 years.

### Misconceptions

It is important to challenge the many misunderstandings on the matter. Evasion of the issue of overpopulation is encouraged, for example, by the complacent idea of a so-called 'demographic transition' in which growth magically levels off. In other words, affluence is the best contraceptive. Yet one can readily point to rich people who are right 'breeders'. The current TV series *The Kennedys* provides one example as does our own royal family. Some of the biggest family sizes today are to be found amongst the richest classes of the Middle East (the Bin Ladens, for instance). The great post-war baby boom took place at a time of

World Population:	6,892,319,000
Annual increase:	83,315,475
Monthly increase	6,942,956
Weekly increase	1,602,221
Daily increase	228,262
Hourly increase	9,511
By each minute	159
By each second	2.6

Source: Population Reference Bureau ([www.prb.org](http://www.prb.org))

unprecedented prosperity.

Furthermore, the straw that is now breaking the Earth's back is the huge new middle class in India, China and Brazil which combine large families and large appetites (see [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2008/02/19/can\\_the\\_world\\_afford\\_a\\_middle\\_class](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2008/02/19/can_the_world_afford_a_middle_class)). At the same time, immigrants into rich countries tend to parent even larger numbers of children than they would have done back 'home' but at higher levels of per capita consumptions so the combined impact is greater in the short-term (which is all that now matters, given the time left to avert ecological ruination).

Then there are those who say that they can 'afford' more children. Yet often there is a confusion of personal economic wealth (i.e. monetary tokens that create claims to resources) with the ecological wherewithal (i.e. the real 'wealth of nations, which can only decline if too many demands are made on it, no matter how much money may be held).

Similarly the argument that an extra child is an 'extra pair of hands' (to work, to beg...) confuses immediate income (from an extra worker in the field etc) with the real long-term source of that income (fertile soil etc, which, again, will decline in quantity and quality too many extra 'hands' work it).

### All share?

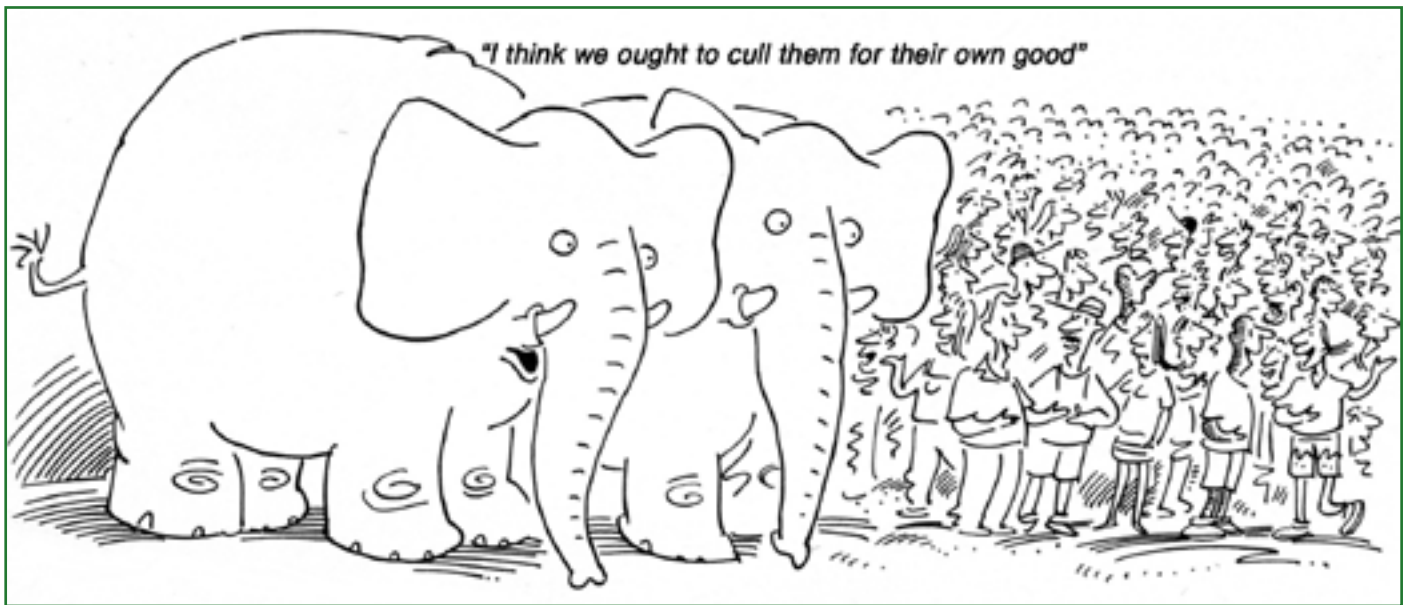
Then there is the very popular illusion that a redistribution of resources will solve the problem. The world is indeed a very unfair place, with the comparative few hogging most of the world's resources to themselves. To some extent, the proposed solution – redistribution of land, food and other resources – can buy vital breathing space, natural justice considerations apart.

Yet a different use of available resources (war spending, built-obsolence etc.) does not make the population problem disappear. On-going expansion, be it in human numbers or in per capita consumption, must eat up the benefits from any sharing of wealth.

An even more popular variant is the 'food first' argument. Its influence is aided by the sight of food surpluses being burned and otherwise dumped, simply to maintain market prices or of potential food-producing land being used to grow inessentials like flowers. Others point out that low- or no-meat diets would 'liberate' more food for more mouths.

Such claims wrongly take for granted current levels of food production. In reality, high output agriculture is fast undermining its very foundations. Food supplies are also likely to decline due to climate change, soil erosion and so forth. It is also daft to ignore very real logistical problems of transportation, storage and local dietary preferences.

Sir Crispin Tickell has been estimated that, if everyone became vegetarian and shared food equally, a global population of 6 billion could be sustained. Other research suggests that the UK population would have to fall to 35 million to achieve national self-sufficiency in indigenous food types, avoiding use of biocides



and minimal use of artificial fertiliser.

In any case people do not live by bread alone :decent living standards depend on many resources, not least clean water, things that food production can diminish (leaving aside its effects on wildlife habitat). However calculations of carrying capacity ought to be made on the basis on existing technological capabilities and current lifestyle preferences, not wishful thinking. Like it or not, meat consumption, for example, is rising in many countries, not least China, so estimates about future food supplies have to be made in that context,

### It's That Man Again

Sooner or later in most discussions about human numbers one name will pop up: poor old Thomas Malthus. With it comes the argument that his predictions were all wrong so, ipso facto, other dire warnings about overpopulation are nothing more than crying wolf.

Leaving the common distortions of both the motives of and arguments advanced by Malthus (Karl Marx being a leading mud-slinger), the issue of what happened after his lifetime – the enormous explosion in human numbers, unlimited by any crash – remains. The total population reached 1 billion in around 1804 then, within less than 200 years, it had mushroomed to 6 billion by 1999 and is predicted to reach 7 billion this coming Autumn. Carrying capacity does seem to have been successfully 'stretched'.

In actuality, two unrepeatably things allowed human numbers to balloon. The first might be called **take-over**: the appropriation of the lands and resources of other people (most notably North America and Australasia) and other species, with more and more wildlife habitat put under the plough and so forth. Now there are no new 'empty' continents (back in 1959, Garrett Hardin exploded the fantasy that interstellar migration offered any solutions, a technofix still being touted by the like of Stephen Hawking (for a summary, see: [http://www.dlbrown-inc.com/?page\\_id=50](http://www.dlbrown-inc.com/?page_id=50)).

At the same, a second force temporarily helped humankind to expand carrying capacity levels: **drawdown**. Fundamental was the exploitation of what effectively is the once-and-for-all endowment of cheap fossil fuels. Like other geological resources, these energy sources are finite (as well as unsustainable in terms of side-effects). Their use leaves less for future generations, hence the term drawdown. (Bill Catton explains this here: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4k8cXLsoU\\_g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4k8cXLsoU_g))

So the common fallacy that humankind can simply hop from

one resource to another, when the former runs out, is like a belief that a game of musical chairs goes on forever. In reality those 'chairs' are being removed at a rate likely to overwhelm human ingenuity. There are no technical fixes for lost 'chairs' like fertile soil, potable water, tree-protected hillsides, a stable climate, the services provided by biodiversity, the sheer range of critical minerals now in shortening supply... nor all the enormous quantities of oil and gas we daily consume.

Of course there is always some trade-off between lifestyle options and numbers per se. We can sustain more people of everyone lived in barracks, wore Maoist boiler suits, ate gruel, did back-breaking work without the aid of machines, and did exactly as they were told. But socially that is scarcely a desirable option.

### Elephant in the room

Greens emphasise the significance of human numbers partly because so many others keep silent or actively deny that such numbers count. Thus strategic option number one (sic) of the *NewcastleGateshead Strategy 2030* is "encourage population growth". Several governments now offer economic incentives for more children and/or are encouraging immigration into ecologically vulnerable regions (e.g the 'tinderland' areas of SE Australia). Conversely an increasing number of governments are curbing birth control facilities, a shocking example being the current assault on family planning in the Philippines (its population, now numbers about 100 million and is projected to reach 140 million by 2050, both aggravating most of its problems and making them less easy to solve).

Most of the green lifestyle books and equivalent newspaper columns (e.g. Leo Hickman and Lucy Siegle in the *Guardian* and *Observer*) don't mention human numbers. Nor do initiatives like Transition Town or the Global Action Plan initiative. Yet decisions about parenthood are the most important any adult can make regarding the human prospect and that of a myriad of other species. [See: Hall, C.A.S., et al (1994). 'The environmental consequences of having a baby in the United States'. *Population and Environment*, 15 (6), 1994: 505-524.]

Indeed all sorts of groups deny the significance of human numbers. They include world poverty groups. In 1992, the Women's Environment Network in the UK circulated a pamphlet which talked about the "myths of overpopulation". Some go further. Farida Akher's *Depopulating Bangladesh* even suggests that there is a sinister plot by family planners to depopulate the country (a truly bizarre claim given its population of 164 million,

set to zoom to 220 million in 2050 when a good chunk of it could be permanently underwater).

Since the first Earth Day in 1970, the world population has grown by more than 80%, adding over 3.1 billion more people to the planet. Yet many of the environmental organisations that backed that event have increasingly ducked or denied that numbers count. [For examples, see: <http://www.numbersusa.com/content/resources/publications/issues/environment/environmental-movements-retreat-advocati.html>].

Sometimes there is an almost absurd failure to take human numbers into account. For instance, that rather silly film *The Age of Stupid* has a section on Nigeria in which it discusses the country's problems without a single reference to local population levels. It has one of the highest population growth rates in the world.

Apparently Nigerian women typically say 7 is the ideal family size (men want 10). The country is expected to have more than doubled its numbers to more than 300 million people by 2050. This trend is a recipe for disaster but the film focuses instead on poverty, and pollution by profiteering oil companies. These are all good causes but utter ruination can be the only result if the country's exploding numbers are not curtailed.

There is not just silence on the matter, however. The media often go to the opposite extreme. News of multiple births is treated as a matter of great joy. In 1997, for example, NBC News in the USA dubbed the septuplets born to Mr. and Mrs. McCaughey of Iowa as the 'magnificent seven'. The *Guardian* gave a story about the Turner family of Oxfordshire (13 children) the headline of "the more the merrier". Obituaries of celebrity population boomers normally talk in terms of "lust for life" (the quote is taken from a piece on late actor Anthony Quinn, who fathered his 11th child at the age of 78).

Many organisations, from the 'conservative' wings of religions like Islam and Catholicism to the radical Right (both Italian fascists and German Nazis, for example), have promoted the idea that there is no need for any kind of population policy. Indeed they wanted more births. So too have governments of the 'left', most notably those of Mao and Ceausescu, both violent enemies of family planning.

Generally there has long been a pro-natalist bias in most cultures. This makes it even harder to answer questions on the issue. Yet the challenge cannot be ducked.

### Numbers and other factors

So Greens do put human numbers at the centre of the equation. But they also recognise that it is far from the only problem. A good example is the threat to the protective ozone layer. There, the main danger came from CFC-based technologies, something not directly related to population levels.

The drastic population decrease of non-human species is driven by people pressure. But it is not the only one. Toxic chemicals, 'wall-of-death' fish nets, the animal 'body parts' trade, activities like peat extraction for gardening and a host of other factors play their own malign part in wildlife extermination.

So, then, the Green answer to the question is, yes, human numbers really do count but it is as daft to focus solely on that dimension as it is to ignore or deny it.

*The questions of 'reproductive rights', personal freedom and alleged green misanthropy will be discussed in the next issue. Another debate, that concerning an ageing population and fears of a 'birth dearth' will be addressed later.*

The screenshot shows an email header from Newcastle City Council. The sender is Councillor Nick Forbes, Labour, Westgate Ward. His contact information includes Labour Group Office, Room 254, Civic Centre, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 2BN, with phone number 3191 232 8529 extension 25154, email nick.forbes@newcmfca.gov.uk, and website www.nickforbes.org.uk. The email is addressed to Barry Rowland, Chief Executive. The reference number is NF/DHS and the date is 9th May 2011.

The new leader of the council, Nick Forbes, has stated his priorities in a letter to the chief executive (above). There is not enough space here to print all of it, however. But, bearing in the mind, the accolade of 'greenest city' awarded to Newcastle by Forum for the Future (see *Greening Newcastle 3* for a critique), it may be worth reflecting on his missive.

It states that "our (first) priority is to make sure Newcastle is a working city", calling for (undefined) "job creation and economic growth". Priority number 2 is "Decent Neighbourhoods". Here Mr Forbes does mention "high environmental standards" but these are defined largely in terms of litter, dog poo and noise. To be fair, he does talk about "both reducing our carbon footprint and reducing fuel poverty" but only with reference to home insulation and somewhat empty references to 'efficiency'.

Third comes "tackling inequalities". It calls for pay restraint by senior officers, a living wage for low paid staff and a pay commission. It also promises a freeze on council tax, something that is not easy to reconcile with increased activity on the fronts he mentions, including that 'living wage'. Finally there are the usual

noises about making the council organisationally fit for purpose.

Sometimes there is an almost studied vagueness. Thus it is stated that "houses are (to be) built in the City of the type and number that people want". That leaves begging questions of where and of what type. What if, for example, people want low density, car-dependent cul-de-sac sprawl? Elsewhere, Mr Forbes says that his administration will favour "looking into low cost loans" for energy-saving programmes, scarcely a promise of large-scale and rapid action.

He says that "every resident (should have) access to recycling facilities". But the present collection system works badly and often requires conscientious residents to drive long distances to recycling sites like Brunswick. Despite the talk about openness, it is hard to get details of what it is being collected where and what then happens to it. "Parks and open spaces are (to be) well-maintained" but that might just mean the same old sterile acres of bare grass and beds of annual flower plants, not management that priorities sustainability, including wildlife habitat.

Indeed it is the absence of any real grasp of what a sustainable city might be like that is striking about this letter. Of course, it is only a few paragraphs long but some insight might be reasonably expected (for a definition, see *Greening Newcastle 11*).

At it stands, it looks as if the new council will mean more the same old unsustainable development. Already the Environmental Scrutiny Committee has been wound up, subsumed within wider bodies. Sustainability issues now seem liable to be even more marginalised. Perhaps Forum for the Forum should ask for its award to be returned.

# Tyne Green

The feature in the last issue (no 11) on the history of the green movement in the area inevitably had many gaps. We will try to fill these since there are so many people, issues and activities that do deserve to be recorded for posterity and which are currently ignored in most histories of Newcastle and the NE as a whole.

Indeed one gap that certainly does deserve to be filled relates to the wider region. It concerns Geoff Watson who played a key role at the New Age Access project eventually based in Hexham. It was succeeded by the **Northumbrian Energy Workshop**, (1978/9-1989), then NE Energy and offshoots, some of the UK's best renewable energy pioneers, especially in the field of wind energy. Geoff, who later moved to the Isle of Man, recently died. Ventures like the Centre for Alternative Technology in mid-Wales tend to attract the spotlight but thanks to people like Geoff, the NE has played its part in opening doors to a more sustainable world.

## Site of contention

A key issue in the region that helped to stimulate the broad green movement was the construction of the **Cow Green Reservoir** in Upper Teesdale (started 1967). It destroyed about 10% of the rich flora and fauna of the district, especially rare alpine plants like the unique Teesdale violet. Conservationists were able to establish national nature reserve in 1969, the largest in England, with the country's largest juniper wood. The environment's defender included not only local Naturalists Trusts and the CPRE but also cyclists and ramblers' organisations

Yet again the 'jobs first' argument was used to attack conservationists even though the rapid expansion of the chemical industry on Teesside, one that dams like Cow Green (and Kielder, further north) were partly meant to feed, actually went into reverse. Yet again the perspective of predicted shortages, extrapolated from conditions not likely to continue, was used to justify more supply (instead of seeing the situation as 'longage' of demand, with conservation and efficiency as the primary response).

In a letter to *The Times*, (06/07/66) Peter Scott (as chairman of WWF) and Professor Humphrey Hewer (Council for Nature) argued thus: "What [Parliament] must decide is whether, to satisfy the demands of industry for a few years, it is prepared to give such an appalling example to the rest of the world."

## Road hogs

Mention was made in the first feature of the city development plan of the 60s, especially the big motorway plans. Actually it was very close to the 1930's city plan, even down to the location of the new civic centre and what is now Northumbria University. Don Kent has rightly described it as "Albert Speer on Tyne."

At the same time, the impact of pro-car policies on rural areas encouraged an 'ethnic cleansing' of the rural poor who were systematically pushed out by affluent car-borne commuters. The arrival of the latter pushes up rural house prices and does not really help local services like the village shop since such people tend to load up their SUVs from city-sited superstores.

There had been concerted resistance to the 'more roads-more cars' mentality'. The main rail unions combined to create

a pro-rail pressure group Transport 2000 in 1976, chaired by a local RMT representative. They had correctly seen that the growth of car ownership would result in job losses and the closure of railway lines and depots. That organisation is still continuing as the **Campaign for Better Transport** (<http://www.bettertransport.org.uk>) and the local Transport activist's roundtable (<http://www.ne-ctar.org.uk/>)

Though the miner's union had – somewhat unsurprisingly – fought to protect coal mining in the area, it has also backed the anti-nuclear campaign. That action might have been self-interested but it was none the less valuable.

## Class divide?

Mention was made of the work of Tyneside Environmental Concern in poorer parts of Newcastle. It is worth noting that similar efforts were made in other parts of the region. For example, a FoE project in the late 90s, Teesside "Impact", was set up in Grangetown, the 3rd most deprived ward in England. It campaigned on the industrial pollution suffered by the community.

The stereotype of environmentalists being middle class types not interested in the poor is most often voiced by... middle class types in left-wing organisations. They seem to think they can prove their proletarian credentials by slagging off allegedly "elitist" Greens. In actuality, many leaders on the Left, from Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin to Stafford Cripps and Clement Attlee, were hardly horny-handed sons of toil. Indeed, some left-wing groups have had to 'manufacture' worker members by brow-beating student supporters to go off and get blue collar jobs (a policy that was usually disastrous at a personal level and seldom yielded any political fruit).

## Pre-echo

Both the 'Green history' article and that on past Tyneside politics overlooked the Newcastle-born radical **Thomas Spence** (1750-1814), a pioneer of the concept of 'human rights'. In 1771, the proposed enclosure of the Town Moor drove him to develop plans for community land ownership as part of his critique of aristocratic privilege and landlordism.

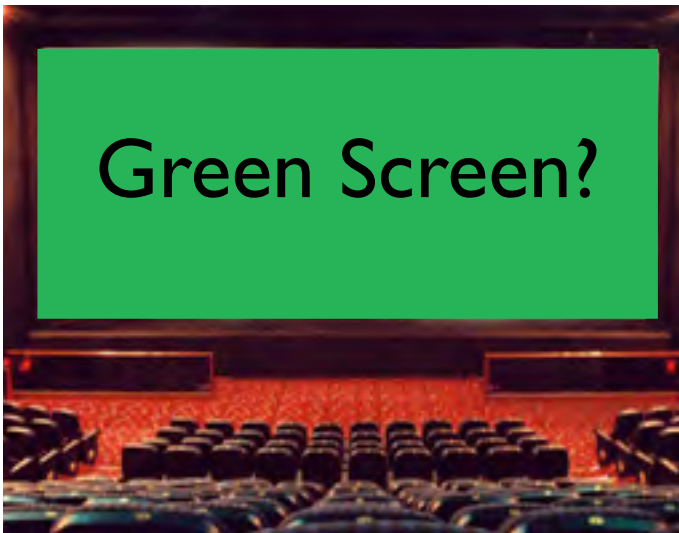
He also advocated a kind of socially guaranteed income for the unemployed. So he might be considered a pre-echo of certain green ideas, especially land value tax and the basic income scheme as well as broader notions of 'social justice'.

## On Your Bike

Many people cycle simply to save money, to improve their fitness or just because they find it fun. Yet cycling does pose an alternative to the unsustainable tyranny of the motor car. So biking groups like **Tyne Bikes** can be counted as part of the progressive history of the area. It might be remembered that, pre-1914, the cycling groups created by the left-wing *Clarion* newspaper, run by Robert Blatchford, combined politics and pleasure. Mention ought to be made of Newcastle **People's Theatre** which also started life in 1911 as another *Clarion* spin-off.

Of course, biking isn't always benevolent. It can threaten pedestrians, for example. In the USA, high-speed mountain biking is being called 'silent death' due to the risk to ordinary hikers. Once again, 'alternative' is not always appropriate.





The 1996 fiction film *Independence Day* starts on the surface of the moon, the dead surface of which, in the final shot of the scene, stands in stark contrast to the blue ball of Planet Earth on the horizon, a veritable oasis of life. An alien fleet is heading that way, its mission: planetary rape and, in passing, the destruction of humanity and any other creatures that get in the way.

In real life, the Earth's life-support systems are already being ravaged and biodiversity destroyed. But the agent is not alien. It is humankind itself that is embarked on a global war against the rest of nature, a conflict in which it too can only be a loser. Indeed, in August 2008, the chief science advisor to the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs warned of the likelihood of runaway global warming and the possible extinction of the human race.

This 'sustainability crunch' is, then, the biggest, most urgent and all pervading issue of our times, it will change everything. Yet, in terms of the total output of the film industry, this long smouldering but now fast burning crisis has been largely ignored—in terms of explicit and direct representation—by movie makers and, even when featured, it is frequently in quite misleading ways. At the same time, film makers have paid little attention to the direct environmental damage done by their activities.

However, there are some honourable exceptions. So if you want some entertainment and want to feed your mind at the same times, here are some suggestions for viewing (documentaries are left out).

The first suggestion may be a surprising one since it is a film often condemned for giving a very sentimental view of nature. Yet Disney's *Bambi* bluntly portrays some aspects of human destructiveness, with the killing of Bambi's mother, vicious hunting dogs and the burning of the forest due to human carelessness with a campfire. It is clearly not all sugar and spice and all things nice. Perhaps fire ecology is less well captured but certain aspects of general ecology are there to be seen, with some excellent artwork from Disney's golden age.

Unlike paeans to consumerism (*Pretty Woman*, *Sex in the City* etc) Peter Weir's *Witness* depicts a non-materialistic lifestyle (the Amish of Pennsylvania). Such settings may, of course, be used more for their 'otherness' than any serious critique of the dominant mode of living. Indeed, deep down, the hero of *Witness* wants to get back to the big bad city. None the less, this police thriller does show, in passing, an agriculture that is far more sustainable than the typical industrialised farm.

George Romero's cycle of horror films uses the genre to take a swipe at consumerism. In *Dawn of the Dead*, the zombies do what they did in life: head straight for the shopping mall.

In a way, *Fight Club* and *American Beauty* both show that all is not well inside the global citadels of affluence. Brand culture and the general emptiness of suburban living are satirised in *Repo Man*. Some British films of the 60s such as *Darling* suggested that a certain emptiness underlay consumerist hedonism.

Several films take up the theme of human technology biting back, an idea with its roots in Greek legend (Icarus, etc) and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Sci-fi and horror both built on this foundation, from *Metropolis* onwards. So re-created dinosaurs run amok in *Jurassic Park* as do robots in *Westworld* and androids in that outstanding film *Blade Runner*. Cars take on a malevolent life on their own in *Christine*. Parallel threats come from human-engineered pandemics such as the virus of *Twelve Monkeys*, super-computers (*Demon Seed* and *Terminator*) and cloning in *Gattaca*. In *Modern Times*, it is the whole factory assembly line system that ensnares humans.

Humans are reduced to numbered drones in *THX 1138* while, in *Matrix*, they are enslaved inside a fake reality created by machines which feed off human energy. In *The Day the Earth Caught Fire*, humans even manage to knock the Earth off its axis by foolish testing of nuclear devices. The black comedy *Dr. Strangelove* showed how easy it was to trigger such a holocaust.

There is the sci-fi sub-genre of post-apocalypse breakdown, often with dollops of horror thrown into the mix. Films like *On the Beach* take nuclear war as the starting point. *Waterworld* portrays how catastrophic climate change has left the world inundated, though the film itself is hopelessly 'wet'. The best one is *Soylent Green* which not only captures general ecological breakdown, including global overwarming but even dares to mention overpopulation as the cause.

Specific assaults on the environment are well captured in several films. Here the western perhaps stands out. Thus the mindless destruction of the buffalo is shown in *Dances with Wolves* (nb: watch the full length version) while *Pale Rider* depicts the blasting away of mountain sides via hydraulic mining. Deforestation is featured in a number of films, perhaps most notably in *The Emerald Forest*. The ecological rape of the Owens Valley in California by overabstraction of local waters is the back story to *Chinatown*. The chemical industry is fingered in *Erin Brocovich*, a film based on real events.

Positive views of 'first peoples' can be seen in several 'revisionist' westerns, though the more effective ones strive for a balanced view, as in the very entertaining 'eastern' *Last of the Mohicans*. It was, however, the great Akira Kurosawa who delivered the most poetic treatment in his *Dersu Uzala*, contrasting a native Siberian with Russian incomers.

In terms of 'national cinemas', Japan might be said to have produced some of the 'greenest' movies. Hayao Miyazaki of Studio Ghibli has also been delivering films with strong ecological themes, not least *Nausicaa* and *Princess Mononoke* (destruction of forests by 'Iron Town', etc). These films often feature Earth spirits that are generally benign, in sharp contrast to the usual Hollywood story of Earth-as-Bad-Bitch (assorted movies when humans are threatened by wild animals & assorted 'natural' disasters). However the latter has produced films like *The Birds* in which it is hinted that human disruption of nature is to blame for the 'aerial assault' Hitchcock so well depicts.

As ever, the Earth certainly has some false friends in the movies too. The tenuous assumptions that underpin *The Day After Tomorrow*, for example, allowed global warming denialists to score some easy points. The junk merchandise that went with *Wall-E* cancelled out any good its message about human vandalism may have done.

# Forthcoming events

Date	Event	Organiser
Wednesday, June 29 19.00 @ Newcastle Arts Centre, Westgate Road (near Central Station metro)	<b>Anti-Cuts meeting with various trade union speakers</b> <a href="https://www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=171959719527027">https://www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=171959719527027</a>	Coalition of Resistance (cornortheast@gmail.com)
Thursday 7 July 2011 18.30 @ Great North Museum, Newcastle	<b>Equality Trust panel</b> (Booking required)	WEA/Co-op Society. Ring 0191 2126100

## Coming Q&A

(See Page 8)

**Please send more questions and, of course, answers to the editor.**

1. How can the Green Party address the mentality of consumerism which prevails in all of us to a greater or lesser extent... Greens included!
2. Should nuclear power play **any** part in the energy needs of the UK?
3. What is the citizen's income? The current government are going to introduce a benefit called universal credit, which will amalgamate several means tested benefits. Is this the same as citizens income? Won't it just encourage scroungers?

**The forthcoming July Newcastle branch meeting (details on front cover) will discuss target wards and our future 'lead' candidate as well as the broader issue of 'paper' candidates**



### Pass the ammo...

The future of adult care in Newcastle still seems under threat, despite the change of council control (see pages 3-4).

For good background material, check out:  
<http://www.social-policy.org.uk/downloads/idow.pdf>

## Branch officers

Current officers and their contact details are listed below. If you know of any opportunities that the local Party might take up or want to raise any other matters, get in touch with Laurence or one of the other officers.

To reduce the number of emails in circulation, please use this newsletter to draw attention to any papers you want to put forward for discussion. Just send your name, email address and the title of the topic and we'll try to give it due publicity.

**Laurence Ellacott**, Branch co-ordinator  
manyellacotts@tiscali.co.uk

**Andrew Gray**, Election Agent  
andrewgray123@virginmedia.com

**John Pearson**, Treasurer  
john.pearson@unn.ac.uk

**Tony Waterston**, Literature and Publicity.  
A.J.R.Waterston@newcastle.ac.uk

**Sandy Irvine**, Newsletter editor and Policy Response  
sandyirvine@blueyonder.co.uk

## Public Meeting

### Life & Politics of T. Dan Smith

Speaker: Chris Foote-Wood

Lit. & Phil., Neville Street

(near Central Station metro)

19.00, Wednesday, July 13th

organised by NE Labour History Society: <http://www.nelh.net/>

Thanks to **Tony Gair** and **Shirley Ford**, members of the *Making Waves* choir, for the song lyrics. Its repertoire is really excellent. The brilliant cartoonist **Dave Haldane** from Morpeth (his credits include *Punch*) supplied many cartoons used in this and other editions of *Greening Newcastle*. Many thanks too to **Dave Elliott** (do check out Dave's books on energy matters), **Don Kent** and **Charlie Hall** for the information they supplied about the 'green' history of Tyneside and the wider region. Full articles about specific people, places & events relevant to this story will be very welcome.

The redoubtable Canadian writer and activist **Tim Murray** (escapee from Vancouver) provided the material for the article on 'smart growth' and so-called world class cities. A number of local green Party members (**Shirley, Anna, Tim** and **Laurence**) contributed to the feature about Chirton House and adult care in general. There are some complicated issues in this whole field. Debate about it as well as other matters like carbon capture and that perennial hot potato, population, can be pursued via the regional email list (contacts are listed @ <http://neengland.greenparty.org.uk/region/northeast/contacts.html>)

Please pass *Greening Newcastle* to any person or organisation you like. They can, in turn, pass it on themselves, provided it is transmitted at all times in its entirety as a PDF file and unchanged. Anyone may quote from our magazine, provided this is done in context and **Newcastle Green Party** is acknowledged as the source of the material.



**This is the issue 12 of a regular publication.**

Send material for the next one directly to Sandy Irvine

(Tel: **0191 2844367** or

Email [sandyirvine@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:sandyirvine@blueyonder.co.uk))