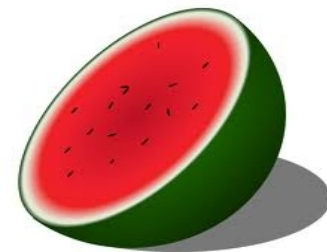


# THE WATERMELON



## Newsletter of Green Left

November/December 2011 SPECIAL

thewatermelon.wordpress.com – twitter.com/GreenLeftUK

# SUPPORTING PUBLIC SECTOR PENSIONS

*Jon Duveen - Secretary  
Cambridgeshire NUT*

**The pensions strike on 30<sup>th</sup> November promises to be very well supported.**

Almost all of the unions in the public sector have supported the action called by the TUC, often with very large majorities for the strike. Clearly the call by the four unions, NUT, ATL, UCU and PCS, to call a strike over pensions on June 30<sup>th</sup> to ensure that the issue of pensions was taken into the trade union movement was correct. The coalition of over 15 unions building for the November 30<sup>th</sup> strike shows the extent of the support for action against the Tory led Government's attack on our pensions.

In many areas of the country the preparation for the strike has been in the hands of local strike committees of the unions taking action. This has given the local union structures a vitality and purpose that they have been missing for a while and that we need to capitalise on in developing this campaign.

How then can the campaign be



**ALL  
OUT  
N30**

with those on strike on the day. We need to look at what strategy should we argue that the local unions should be taking into their national unions. Clearly we need to have a national focus, which needs to involve strike action. Calls for indefinite strike action or general strikes are not what the mass of the strikers are looking for at the moment, even if subjectively we might think this is the answer. We need to look for action that will take the movement forward rather than confront supporters with an ultimatic slogan. Suggestions of a rolling series of strikes building up month by month or of a regular series of strikes each week are the sort of ideas we need to discuss. Other areas we need to discuss are how to involve the members in the campaign in a more organised way. One way might be for the national unions to call a national work to rule and for the local union groups to discuss exactly how this will be carried out locally.

While pensions may be the focus of the action at the moment we do need to make sure that the other

developed after 30<sup>th</sup> November strike? This is the debate we have to engage in

attacks from the Tory-led Government are responded to. The development of local strike committees gives us a forum to discuss how to respond to these attacks. One area that we could look at is the attack on youth employment, especially as the Governments proposal on pensions will lead to greater youth unemployment.

The strike on November 30<sup>th</sup> presents us with many opportunities to develop a campaign against the Tory-led attacks and to develop links with other forces engaged in action against these attacks.



**Inside this edition of  
The Watermelon  
Spirit of Equality - page 2**

**A Green Industrial Revolution:  
Towards an Alternative Industrial  
Strategy – page 4**

**A Party of Workers, not just for  
Workers page – page 8**

**Of Muddy Carrots and Optimum  
Population – page 8**

**Join Green Left – page 9**

# SPIRIT OF EQUALITY

Peter Robbins

Very few books have inspired the formation of groups of political activists to spring up over the world but one unlikely example is *The Spirit Level*. Written by two professors of epidemiology, Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson, the book has been quoted in a huge number of recent debates on subjects as diverse as the London riots, bank bonus bonanzas, the rise in mental health problems, and the current financial crisis, and it has driven a coach and horses through mendacious arguments that any viable economic system needs massive levels of inequality to function.

Using uncontested data compiled by government agencies, *The Spirit Level* demonstrates that inequality is not simply an expression of an unjust society, it shows that there is also a direct correlation between high levels of inequality and a huge range of social ills and that, although those with the smallest incomes suffer most in unequal countries, everyone, including wealthy members of such societies, are negatively affected.

*The Spirit Level* was published in March 2009 and the London Equality Group (LEG) was formed soon after. We now have 200 members and there are similar groups in every region of Britain and in eleven other countries dedicated to the single issue of reducing wealth inequality. LEG may be just one example of the way that agencies for change are themselves changing since the corruption of the electoral system by big money.

Wealth inequality in this country is now reaching the levels not seen since the early part of the twentieth century. Yet, while David Cameron, Ed Milliband, and Nick Clegg rail

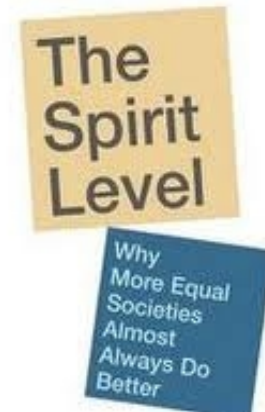
against inequality and extol the virtues of *TSL*, their economic policies are making Britain an even more unequal society.

Almost all human progress, since we ceased being hunter gatherers, has been measured in efforts by ordinary people to regain property, or the use of property, that was taken away from them in violent acts of larceny by the war lords and kings whose nefarious antics fill our history books. Fairness is buried deeply in our culture. The storylines of our fairy tales, sitcoms and Hollywood blockbusters chime with our need to see injustice rectified.

Equality has been written into many national constitutions in the last couple of centuries but why is it that achieving equality has had to be fought for every inch of the way? Thousands have been imprisoned, beaten vilified and killed in the battle for universal suffrage, and the ending of discrimination on the grounds of gender, sexual orientation, race and age.

Despite progress being made in these areas, why is it that the yawning gulf between the obscenely rich and the desperately poor, globally and within countries, is as great as ever? The wealth of the world's richest 1000 people is over three times greater than the combined wealth of the poorest half of the world's population...some three and a half billion people. The trend is repeated domestically. The wealth of Britain's 1000 richest people increased by almost one third in 2010, the year before the last Sunday Times Rich List was published. This was a year of austerity for the rest of us and most wages were frozen or failed to increase at the same rate as inflation. The same pattern is repeated all over the developed world with very few exceptions.

The main reason we come across any arguments in favour of inequality is that most of the media is controlled or influenced by enormously wealthy people. We are told that, in order to achieve a



thriving economy, most of us need to be threatened with unemployment if we ask for higher incomes, while the rich have to be bribed with huge remuneration pots before they will work at all. Chicken gutters, scaffold erectors, pipe fitters, teachers, bus drivers and any other workers on whom we depend for everything should be satisfied if they get only a modest income for life but no one would dream of running a vinyl tile business or playing football in the premier league unless they receive tens of millions.

Of course most of the mega-rich have never seen the inside of a factory and think that 'hard work' constitutes barking orders at people and attending business meetings. If they haven't inherited all their money, publications such as The Sunday Times and Forbes rich lists show that any additions to their fortunes have usually been made by investing family money originally acquired through luck, theft, force of arms, usury, betrayal or corruption.

As we choke on the dust of the collapsing edifices of the financial system, it now becomes clear that inequality is at the core of the crisis. Rich people may spend fortunes on yachts, caviar, jewellery, enormous houses, watches and cars, but they don't justify the investment for producing the billions of shirts, Shreddies and toilet rolls that everyone else would buy if the money were shared out. The crisis was postponed for a decade or so while loans were distributed to like confetti to anyone, or any country, that wanted them, but now the In

**“In 2011 Tax Justice Network estimated that the total money stashed in world’s tax havens has reached a staggering \$11.5 trillion.”**

loans have been called in. No money in the pockets of ordinary people – no demand – no investment – no profits – no capitalism!

The maintenance of our iniquitous system is also to blame for malign effect of the rich on our political structures: ownership of the news media, the bankrolling of political parties, the influence of ‘pro-business’ lobbyists and think tanks, the corruption of politicians, and dumbing-down of society caused by use of the old boy network based on private schools.

Of course, the rich do have the money which governments could use to revive the economy but most of it, they tell us, is beyond their jurisdiction. In 2011 Tax Justice Network estimated that the total money stashed in world’s tax havens has reached a staggering \$11.5 trillion.

Now that the neo-liberal economic model has been tested to destruction to our cost, and not to the cost of the rich who forced the doctrine upon us, the economic argument in favour of vast wealth differentiation has vanished. But the power of the rich is so deeply entrenched that these barriers are not going to be easy to remove.

Football fans scream when their team doesn’t entice good players with yet more hundreds of thousands per game, fashionistas drool over dresses which only a millionaire could afford, and we can’t get enough of mega-rich film stars at every trip to the cinema. These relatively few rich people in the public eye help to draw a veil over the self awarding industrial magnates, wild City speculators

and the scions of despots and thieves who make up the bulk of the mega-rich population but they help to strengthen the argument that it doesn’t matter if they are stupendously rich while I am moderately poor because I wouldn’t be better off if the rich disappeared. The rich establishment has reinforced this idea by giving the impression that there is ‘always room at the top’. You too could win ten million on the lottery or launch a best-selling scent after appearing on *Big Brother*.

The rich have been so successful in their propaganda that it has become the norm to judge our social status by how near it is to the mega-rich and that is, of course, measured by the amount they own. Consumerism, and its attendant criminal level of wastage, would take over any respect for generosity, honesty and the struggle for justice if it wasn’t so stupidly insatiable and unsustainable.

But while a somewhat star-struck proportion of us could be cajoled into believing that we need the rich, a massive confusion and resentment is building up in the rest of the population.

*The Spirit Level* shows how these feelings express themselves in very many aspects of our society. By analysing data from the least equal to the most equal developed countries and US states the book shows a clear pattern emerging. Inequality is linked to seemingly unconnected problems such as high teenage pregnancy rates, higher prison populations, much higher rates of mental illness, lower social mobility, lower achievement in technical innovation, mistrust between people and of governments, drug abuse, homicide, poor educational achievement, shorter life spans, obesity and low rates of child well being.

A lot of parallel academic work has demonstrated that the low self esteem that follows from struggling

for social status, the resentment caused by news of ill-deserved riches, and the fight to protect your wealth from the bear-pit of daily competition, changes the body’s hormonal chemistry. This, in turn leads to anti-social behaviour, ill health and massive anxiety. And although the poor, as usual, get the shitty end of the stick, everyone in an unequal society, including the rich, suffers. The rich in the US live shorter lives and are much more likely to be victims of crime, than rich people in Sweden. The cost to the state of dealing with the corruption of society that inequality brings is vast.

So, *The Spirit Level*, is an extremely dangerous book. While battling unsuccessfully to throw doubt on the raw data in the book, one extreme libertarian critic had to admit that if the findings of TSL are true, his whole philosophy would collapse.

If you haven’t read *The Spirit Level* yet, go and buy a copy. It will change your whole view of society and will provide you with the necessary ammunition to justify the need for equality not only on the grounds of common decency or to establish a fair system for distributing resources but also because our lives and those of our children cannot be sustained without it.

For more information go to the website of the trust set up by the authors [www.equalitytrust.org](http://www.equalitytrust.org) and then join one of the support groups wherever you live.

*Peter Robbins is an independent ecosocialist and the author of Stolen Fruit: The Tropical Commodities Disaster*



# A GREEN INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION: TOWARDS AN ALTERNATIVE INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

***“It is right and necessary that all men should have work to do which shall be worth doing, and be of itself pleasant to do; and which should be done under such conditions as would make it neither over-wearisome or over-anxious. Turn that claim about as I may...I cannot find that it is an exorbitant claim; yet...if Society would or could admit it, the face of the world would be changed.”***

**William Morris**

A green/ecosocialist industrial strategy has to have aims and objectives quite different from the crude imperative to capital accumulation that is currently the sole driver of economic activity in our society. It must recognise not only the inherent instability, injustice and unsustainability of the capitalist mode of production, but the limits to our ecosystem; that the biosphere on which we depend is finite, closed and constrained by the laws of thermodynamics.

We therefore should have five key aims in developing our industrial strategy:

- The assurance of meaningful employment and a life of dignity and modest comfort for all.
- The development of a low carbon society, with a sustainable low carbon industrial base.
- Freedom from a reliance on endless growth in the production of commodities.
- Industrial production based on social needs rather than the maximisation of profit.
- Democratic control in and of the workplace.

10 key objectives can be identified to begin to implement those aims:

- To reduce greenhouse gasses (CO<sub>2</sub>, methane and nitrous oxide) emissions by at least 80% within twenty years.

- To increase electricity production by at least 80% within twenty years.
- To retrofit thermal efficiency equipment and materials in all existing homes, public buildings and commercial premises within twenty years.
- To replace or totally refurbish 20% of existing homes and 50% of public and commercial buildings within twenty years.
- To increase the use of public transport by 250% within ten years.
- To reduce real unemployment levels to a maximum of 2.5% within four years.
- To create at least one million new jobs directly concerned with infrastructural reconstruction over four years.
- To abolish income differentials between men and women within enterprises within five years.
- To reduce income differentials within enterprises to a maximum of 10:1 within five years and then progressively to a maximum of 5:1 within a further ten years.
- To ensure that tertiary education and training/retraining is freely available to all within five years.

## Priority industrial sectors

The massive infrastructural investment and reconstruction programme called for in the *Green New Deal* and *One Million Climate Jobs* pamphlets will require us to prioritise the rapid development of three key sectors; energy generation and transmission, transport and construction. This is for three reasons:

First, because electricity generation and transmission, the heating and cooling of buildings and transport between them account for 83% of the 673 million tonnes of greenhouse gasses (CO<sub>2</sub>e) emitted in Britain annually. If we are to reduce emissions as rapidly and drastically as we need to then these sectors are clearly of the

highest priority.

Second, because these three sectors provide the fundamental underpinnings of all other productive sectors and the essential foundations for the overall infrastructural and social renewal that is vital to our society.

Third, because a major programme of public investment and employment in these sectors will not only lead to major regeneration in other key industrial sectors but also, if properly funded, lead to rapid growth in R&D in socially useful technology.

## Energy

Around 400 terawatt hours (TWh) of electricity is currently generated in Britain every year, and its production annually generates around 420 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e.

Even though the huge energy conservation programme proposed by the authors of both the *Green New Deal* and *One Million Climate Jobs* is (along with a radical overhaul of transport) the quickest and most effective way to drastically reduce demand for energy, over the next few years we will have to actually increase the amount of electricity generated in order to provide a substitute for the coal, oil and natural gas currently used in space and water heating and for the kerosene, diesel and petrol used for transport. We will also face additional demand for electricity as we modernise and decarbonise a range of critical industrial processes, such as iron and steel production.

Because we must achieve this while simultaneously reducing the level of CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions across the board without the use of current nuclear technology we will have to hugely expand our electricity generation capacity using zero

carbon technologies based on wind, sun and water. We have to develop an integrated approach, one which the Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT) calls 'powering-down' (reducing energy wastage) and 'powering-up' (deploying renewable energies).

It will also be necessary to completely re-jig how we distribute electricity. There is an urgent need to renew and extend the carrying capacity of the National Grid, both to take advantage of the development of very large offshore wind farms by developing a completely new high voltage direct current (DC) network to complement our present AC system and to adapt the National Grid to deal with distributed energy sources, such as CHP and microgeneration technologies.

It is estimated that it is possible to reduce our energy demands by over 55% through the energy-efficiency retrofitting of homes, offices and industrial premises, and by improving transport systems through changes in technology and use. However, even after such a large decrease, electricity demand will still roughly double compared to current the level because of the need for partial electrification in the transport and heat sectors. If this is to be carbon neutral the need for the dramatic expansion of electricity generation from renewable sources is even more urgent. CAT proposes a mix of zero carbon generation technologies which will be able to produce 842 TWh, which the authors of One Million Climate Jobs estimate will create 425,000 jobs.

However, there are a number of problems to be resolved before this generation capacity is put in place and those jobs created. The most important of these are the lack of production capacity, the shortage of skilled workers and the lack of any strategic programme of research and development.

Engineering and manufacturing industries are going to be at the core of delivering the equipment, techno-

logy and transport needed to the fulfill programme outlined above. However, over the last 30 years, the British economy has been increasingly dominated by the finance and service sectors, at the expense of manufacturing. Today manufacturing accounts for only about 12% of GDP.

Given that the conditions in the seas around Britain are among the best in the world for the production of wind and wave generated electricity, it is absurd to the point of criminality that there is very little wind or wave turbine manufacturing capability located in Britain. But even though the manufacturing and engineering sector (particularly at its 'heavy' end) has been significantly eroded and starved of resources for R&D for much apart from military related production, it has the potential to develop the production capacity and skilled workforce that will be needed - even with its much reduced capacity the UK manufacturing sector is still the world's sixth largest by output and directly employs over three million people - if there is the political will and sufficient funding.

For example, the reinvention of the steel industry will need to be at the heart of a sustainable and socially useful engineering and manufacturing sector. While the steel making process currently generates vast amounts of CO<sub>2</sub>, research is currently taking place with the aim of more than halving the CO<sub>2</sub> generated. To rapidly scale up this work to an industrial scale will require major R&D resources and process re-engineering on a vast scale, and if we are to develop a sustainable industrial base similar R&D and re-investment programmes are likely to be needed in many other areas of manufacturing, such as glass and chemical engineering. Investment on such a level will require direct public funding and such funding will require levels of democratic public accountability that can only be guaranteed by public ownership.

The development of such a manufacturing base, along with that re-

quired to design and build a whole new electricity distribution system, would, as well as giving us a sustainable zero carbon electricity supply, at a very conservative estimate generate at least 450,000 permanent new jobs in manufacturing and civil and electrical engineering.

## Transport

Transport accounts for 24% of domestic CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions and while, since 1990, emissions from other sectors have gone down (by modest amounts) those from transport have gone up by 11%.

There are three ways in which the issue of lowering these emissions can be addressed; first, through better land use planning and redesigning the urban environment, so that less transportation is needed. Second, by a progressive move from oil to (renewably generated) electricity as the major transport fuel. Third, a major shift in the balance between transport modes from cars to public transport. All three have major implications for our industrial strategy.

Road transport generates around 90 per cent of all domestic transport emissions, with car travel accounting for just over half and heavy goods vehicle and light van traffic accounting for just under a third. While cars, vans and taxis account for over six times as many passenger miles as public transport (buses, coaches, rail and light rail) they generate thirteen times the emissions. It is therefore clearly essential to undertake a massive development of public transport capacity and quality in order to enable a rapid shift from cars to buses, trams and trains.

Around 450,000 people are currently employed directly or indirectly by the 'sustainable transport sector' (public transport plus bicycles). This figure could be increased to around 800,000 if the modal shift recommended by CAT were adopted. This would see the share of train travel double, from

7% of miles travelled to 14%, coaches increase their share from under 1% to 10%, local buses and trams increase from just below 4% to 5%, while cars, vans and taxis would decline from 80% to 54% (with most vehicles being fully or partly, directly or indirectly, electrically powered). It could see transport CO<sub>2</sub> emissions reduce from the current level of 174 million tonnes p.a. to around 35 million tonnes.

In order to meet the needs of a socially and environmentally sustainable public transport system that meets the needs and aspirations of most ordinary people, it will be necessary to completely reorient and rejig the existing motor vehicle industry. There will be two main drivers to this process; first, the need to move from petrol and diesel powered technologies to emerging electricity based ones and second, the need to run down car and van production and expand bus, coach and light and heavy rail vehicle production. Such a radical shift in resources and direction is inconceivable without direct public intervention, both in terms of investment and direction - in other words, public ownership.

In addition, it is inconceivable that the current shambolic and fragmented provision of public transport could be reorganised and dramatically expanded on the basis of the current pattern of ownership. There is complete consensus on the left that the railway system must be brought back into full public ownership, but public ownership of bus and coach services, whether on a municipal, regional or national basis - or, most probably, a combination of the three - is also vital. A publicly owned and democratically controlled public transport system would not only be able to integrate its various transport modes into a seamless service but would be able to experiment with new and potentially more environmentally benign transport solutions.

## Construction

The design, construction, maintenance, refurbishment and management of our built environment is central to the achievement of a low carbon society. 27% of UK emissions arise from energy use in the home, while the heating, cooling and powering of non-domestic buildings accounts for an additional 17%.

A nation-wide, street by street programme to retrofit all existing homes is needed, not just to minimise energy use by draught proofing and insulating, but also, wherever possible, to install high renewable energy sources, such as solar thermal heating, ground source heat pumps, micro CHP and (perhaps) photovoltaic generators. It has been estimated that such a programme (accompanied by a switchover to renewably generated electricity for heating) would reduce greenhouse emissions generated by heating homes from 80 to 24 million tonnes, an overall cut of 70%, while creating at least 200,000 jobs.

There are a total of 22.5 million houses and flats in England and Wales, 21.6 million of which are occupied. If houses last for an average of one hundred years, that means that it will be necessary to replace or radically refurbish 225,000 homes a year, just to maintain the current housing stock. However, not all houses are where they are currently needed, demographic changes are increasingly requiring changes in the housing type mix and over the course of the national refit programme some existing housing will prove to have such low potential to meet increasingly demanding building regulations, that in practice the number of houses requiring replacement or radically refurbishment will be more like 300,000 a year. In addition, there are almost two million households on council housing waiting lists. In order to clear those waiting lists over a twenty year period, an additional 100,000 homes a year will need to be built, giving a total

new build/total refurbishment target of 400,000 homes a year. In addition, it is likely that due to the needs of rising standards and changing use patterns, 50% of non-domestic buildings will need to be replaced or totally refurbished over twenty years.

In order to undertake the huge building, rebuilding and refurbishment programme that is required it will be necessary for the industry to be able to offer proper training and jobs that offer security and a worthwhile career path. It will be necessary to disseminate and put into practice on a national scale those examples of good practice and innovative technology that can be found, both in Britain and (more frequently) elsewhere in Europe and further afield. And it will be necessary to develop, fund and implement a plan of action both nationally and locally that is democratically accountable to the people whose daily lives will be affected by it.

None of that will be possible in the industry as it currently exists. It will be necessary to radically reorganise it and introduce a large measure of social enterprise in a range of forms, from the revival of local authority and housing association DLOs to the establishment of community based environmental refurbishment co-operatives and the development of publicly owned regional and national specialist civil engineering and non-domestic construction undertakings.

## Research and Development

The lack of properly funded long term industrial R&D in Britain is an ongoing scandal. At the moment, there are seven academic scientific Research Councils in Britain, which between them spend around £3 billion annually. However, unlike many other countries we have no proper Industrial Research Council.

A new body, a Low Carbon Technology Research Council, needs to be established. It would need to be funded at the same sort of level as that of the EPSRC and the other

big research councils - at least £450m to £500m a year.

## **Employment, training and redeployment**

The programme of infrastructural investment outlined above would lead to a rapid expansion in key industrial sectors and a huge increase in available jobs - indeed, is likely to lead to local labour shortages and more generalised skill shortages in some sectors. At the same time, there would clearly have to be a run-down in other areas, leading to job losses and a consequent need to provide opportunities for redeployment or alternative employment.

It is clear that any plans for major industrial restructuring would have to deal with the real and legitimate concerns of those workers whose current livelihoods might be adversely affected by them. Therefore, an iron clad commitment to guaranteed alternative employment, retraining and rehousing if necessary for all affected workers with no loss of wages is essential.

In order to meet the twin challenges of skills shortages within rapidly growing industrial sectors and the urgent need to retrain workers redeployed from declining sectors, it will be necessary to completely overhaul the provision and organisation of industrial training and education. We have to break down the division between 'brain work' and 'hand work, and part of how we do that is to break down the division between 'vocational' and 'non vocational' education. One contribution to doing that would be to guarantee free access to appropriate tertiary level education and training for all. Another would be the establishment of a mandatory training levy on all employers to fund a reinvigorated apprenticeship/traineeship system in all sectors.

## **Funding investment**

There is no doubt that rebuilding our society will be very expensive.

The energy conservation and renewable energy development plan outlined in The Green New Deal has been costed at between £50 billion and £70 billion a year and the additional programme proposed above would add between £40 billion and £60 billion a year to that, so we are talking about finding something like £110 billion, or around 5.5% of GDP.

If National Insurance payments were channeled into a similar national pension and investment fund similar to Norway's *Oljefondet* in Britain, the fund would, over a period of time, provide both the necessary financial underpinning for a new universal Citizens' Pension incorporating existing state and private occupational pension schemes, and the funding for a direct public investment programme. Through this vehicle we could invest in both necessary public works and in an industrial programme, building the new, low carbon manufacturing base that is the vital prerequisite for a socially just and sustainable economy. If a National Pension and Investment Fund was to invest solely in the development and acquisition of industrial enterprises in Britain it would generate the bulk of funding for the desperately needed extensions of public, co-operative and community enterprise that have to be the basis of our green industrial revolution.

## **Democratic planning**

The massive infrastructural and social investment programme sketched out above will require a whole new way of planning what we do and how we do it, at national, regional, local and individual enterprise level. We will need to replace the current failed market mechanisms with a democratic economic planning system that has at its heart a recognition that it is ultimately accountable, not to banks or speculative financial institutions, nor bureaucratic state institutions no matter how benevolent their intentions, but the people whose homes and jobs are involved at a local level and the local institutions

that can be made to be democratically accountable to them. These new planning processes would have to be democratic to a degree not seen before, and input into them would have to be shared at all levels, so that workers' representatives from individual enterprises or representatives of specific localities or communities would have as much say as Ministers or their 'experts'.

## **Democracy in the workplace**

Two principles that lie at the heart of ecosocialist politics are a commitment to genuine grass roots democracy in all areas of our lives and a commitment to subsidiarity - to decision making at the most local possible level. If these principles are to have any real meaning then they have to be applied to the workplace - whether that workplace is in the public or private sector. The process of developing mechanisms for implementing these principles will take some years and will necessarily require much trial and error, but initially at least would involve two key initiatives. First, greatly extending and entrenching the rights of workers to join and be represented by unions of their choice and the legal recognition that the interests and aspirations of an enterprise's work force (and of wider society) carry more weight than those of senior executives and institutional share holders. Second, a huge increase in the the co-operative sector by the strategic use of the National Pension and Investment Fund to transfer ownership and control of enterprises to their workforces.

*Sean Thompson is a member of Green Left*

*(A fuller - and fully referenced - version of this paper is available from [seanthompson@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:seanthompson@blueyonder.co.uk))*

# A PARTY OF WORKERS, NOT JUST FOR WORKERS?

**Peter Allen – Male Convenor  
Green Left**

Party Leader Caroline Lucas, during an interview at our recent Party Conference in Sheffield, recognised that the party needed to broaden its appeal to all communities, acknowledging that the party, on the evidence of those attending conference was 'still predominately white, and that is something that we're very serious about tackling.' Whilst she correctly challenged the stereotype that Green party supporters are all 'middle class muesli eaters' and pointed out that the party had achieved success in poorer areas as well as leafy suburbs and that trade unions were increasingly recognising that the Green Party stood up for public services and workers interests, as evidenced by the immediate commitment of the first Green Party led council in Brighton to introduce a 'living wage' for its lowest paid workers, she recognized that we needed to do more in order to build a stronger and more diverse party.

It was good to see Caroline making these points, to a student newspaper. It was also good to learn at Conference that the membership of Young Greens is growing fast and is now several thousand strong. My real highlight of Conference though was a very well attended fringe meeting on the subject of *Working Class Representation and the Green Party*, organised by Karen Bell from Bristol, with the support of Green Left.

Karen's contention, presented challengingly and coherently, was that despite the excellent set of policies which the Green Party had developed, and its obvious commitment to social justice, the party was continuing to alienate many working class voters and failing to attract and retain working class members. Recognising that



the definition of "working class" was itself contentious Karen nevertheless seemed to convince most of the audience that there was a problem for the Green Party in attracting enough support from the poorest and most deprived communities in the country, from which, given its policies, it should be able to draw a large part of its core vote.

In order to address this problem the party first had to recognize and acknowledge it. It then had to make a conscious effort to reach out to working class communities. Meetings should be held in accessible locations, language used should be clear and concise, new members should be encouraged rather than compelled (without explanation!) to 'attune'. Above all local Green Parties should root their day to day activity in working class communities, sharing the concerns of Britain's poor, working with them in practice rather than merely on behalf of them on paper.

*Karen's presentation provoked a lively discussion. Some contributors were anxious that a particular experience in a particular area not be used to make a general conclusion about a failure of the party to embrace and engage with working class but generally the response of the meeting was that Karen had identified and highlighted a real problem, that Green Parties did need to do better at talking with and to (rather than at) working class people and that, in doing so, it would gain wider support and a more diverse membership.*

## OF MUDDY CARROTS AND OPTIMUM POPULATION

**Peter Murry – Green Left  
Treasurer**

Recently I heard, within a few hours, three snippets from radio programs concerning food. Firstly a British farmer complained that he could not produce food without government subsidies because consumers would not pay the prices that he would charge, "They would rather spend money on computers than food" He alleged.

Later the Radio told me that Africans were dying as they trekked across deserts to a UN feeding camp, they had no food. .

Finally another Brit, manager of an electrical goods shop, lamented lack of demand, people felt insecure, so they were spending all their money on food.

This illustrates how complex and contradictory the politics and economics of food have now become. In some parts of the developed world, medical conditions associated with overconsumption of processed foods, such as obesity and diabetes if are epidemic, and paradoxically in some cases are doing most damage amongst poor and minority groups in these societies. When they are able to afford it, some developed world consumers attempt to seek alternatives to mass manufactured food, seeking out alternatives such as organics sometimes via "alternative" outlets such as "farmers'" markets. But whilst a TV producer living in Kensal Green may be able to afford a bunch of organic carrots with real mud on it, poorer consumers on the nearby housing estates may be making do with processed food.

In other parts of the world, industrialised overdevelopment elsewhere, is putting more and more pressure on the availability of agricultural land. Some of this is simply due to the demands of

developed world consumers for fresh (often airfreighted) food and even cut flowers all the year round.

**“Then some rich nations, like Japan and Saudi Arabia which have relatively little agricultural land of their own, are buying up large swathes of land in poorer countries in an attempt to assure their future food supplies.”**

Other nations and corporations are attempting to assure future fuel supplies as well by buying up land to grow crops used for biofuels. Such neo-imperialist tactics compound the pressures being put on agricultural land and the food resources available to the original inhabitants.

More pressure too arises from climate change, changes in ocean temperatures due to emissions from industrialised nations could well be affecting climate cycles, delaying or eliminating rainy seasons. Groups such as African pastoralists and farmers, who may have previously co-existed relatively peaceably, are now increasingly being forced into conflict over scarcer and scarcer amounts of fertile land. Climate wars and population displacements are already happening. Even when the consequences are not so immediately extreme land shortages may be placing strain on the environment as forests are cleared for farms. Some ameliorations, such as introducing agricultural methods similar to permaculture may be feasible in some regions, but so far these are not being introduced on a sufficiently large scale to have a marked effect on these problems. Seen in this light, population pressure on land is, it is true, an



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exacerbating factor, but not the root cause and when pressure groups in the developed world harp on obsessively about this issue, they sound the same note as some reactionary land owners did during

the Irish potato famine, blaming the poor (and perhaps their immorality) for poverty and want and focusing solutions onto the poor rather than onto the rich and inequality which really cause the problem.



■ **Green Left is the Eco-Socialist**

■ **Anti-Capitalist movement within the Green Party**

*Edited and produced by James Youd*