

ECOLOGY PARTY

Chairman's Report for the year 1977-78

1. The basic philosophy of the Ecology Party has, by definition, always made sense to its members, but a year ago our institutional shortcomings were plainly to be seen. That is now changing, rapidly. We are still attempting what looks impossible, the creation of a Party quite outside the existing political spectrum. What sustains us is the imperative of gathering ecological catastrophe, and the conspicuously inadequate response of other parties. And we are at last coming out of the wilderness.
2. The catalogue of problems and disasters has continued to grow: widening doubts about the risk to health of substances and processes in common use, the acceleration in unemployment, the polarisation of the energy debate as a consequence of the manner in which the Windscale Enquiry was handled, Amoco Cadiz and the Spanish gas explosion. There are some signs that governments are responding to the lessons we must draw. The atmospheric hazards of aerosol fluorocarbons have passed from being a sneered-at doom-mongers' scare to a cause for stringent legislation in some countries in less than four years. Unemployment is recognised as structural, and the contribution of micro-processes to unparalleled automation has begun to cause alarm. The European Economic Community, for all its commitment to growth, is assuming a more responsible environmental role than its member nations display.
3. It is noticeable, too, that many more people are talking publicly, not just about resources and pollution, craft industries and renewable forms of energy, but about a crisis of values, the fragility of civilisation, the imminence of inescapable choices about individual and collective goals. Books and articles roll from the presses too fast to be read, the theme is seeping into professional and industrial conferences, the bishops assembled at Canterbury responded warmly to Barbara Ward's challenge (and were ticked off by that citadel of obscurantism, 'The Daily Telegraph')
4. Yet the momentum of the political system and the values which underlie it is still toward growth and the associated irresponsibility in the care of the planet. In part this must be because our task has only just begun of presenting an unconventional explanation of contemporary ills, and a perception of an alternative future, to a people intellectually numbed by the present system, but by no means sure that it can justify itself much longer. It is also because the old momentum is extraordinarily strong, as witness the Bonn Summit, where yet again the fallacy of relying on the tools which brought us into crisis to bring us out of it went unchallenged.
5. The more this occurs, the more obvious it becomes that the ecological analysis is breaking the bounds of existing ideologies and of the coalitions which constitute our political parties. That provides, of course the rationale of the Ecology Party. Events continually give it more substance.
6. We have grown into the name, which, when chosen in 1975, was decidedly adventurous, even though it felt right. The meaning had already spilt over from the biological concept into the philosophy of human systems and our treatment of the ecosystem. Now it is coming to mean the set of values which infuse a lifestyle, and its distinctive

political ideology Not everyone who accepts our purposes yet accepts the name, but when lawyers talk of pollution as 'ecological delinquency', the 'Guardian' headlines the German 'green' movement 'Ecology Party', and no electorally-succinct alternative name has materialised, we can feel increasingly certain of its rightness

7. Similarly, our independence gains force One cannot propose from within the played-out fabric of existing political parties that an entire civilisation divert course from impending catastrophe Their ecology groups have made little impact Some argue that this historically unprecedented step (in achievement - there have always been prophets of collapse) is impossible anyway, or necessitates a socialist revolution We have argued with increasing conviction that a revolution of the traditionally-championed kind seems unlikely to forestall the slide into anarchy and authoritarianism which must follow economic and ecological disintegration, and that an attempt to change direction through the political process, however imperfect, must be made by anyone who retains some faith in the human ability to co-operate for survival
8. The labours of party building remain immense, the achievement of our vision still depends on a tantalising mix of survivalist necessity and tenuous political chance Yet my hope expressed last year, that 1977-78 would mark a significant stage in developing the Party has not been disappointed It is opportune here to thank and congratulate everyone - NEC colleagues, branches and members at large - who have committed time, thought and effort I hope that this report will enthuse them and rouse the dormant
9. Externally, the first sign of a new mood was the substantial response to our letter in 'The Times' which took up a distinguished correspondent's plea for effectively, an ecology party (A similar letter in a local paper led to the formation of a branch in Norwich) Then, in March, the Council of Europe invited me to a Symposium in Strasbourg on the response of existing parties to new ideas and social developments, and the threat to democracy of an inadequate response The ecology movement figured prominently in the debate, and my statement of our particular perspective received a rueful admission of its validity from the established politicians Later, a favourable reference to ECO in 'The Financial Times' elicited our first two direct approaches from such quarters
10. In local elections in May, Leeds fielded our largest yet block of candidates; we beat Labour in St. John's Wood in London, two candidates in Bath each achieved 17% and our defeats of the National Front were noticed in 'The Guardian' In a rural bye-election in Worcestershire we emerged with 34% as a credible alternative to the Conservatives
11. Such results, together with our probing of their General Election policy, are no doubt the reason why the Liberal Party has put out tentative feelers Our reaction requires complex judgement and must be flexible We must avoid the compromised position the Liberals themselves hold as a result of the Lib-Lab pact, but should we eschew the possibility of local agreements not to oppose each other electorally, or the chance to influence their policy? So far the NEC has reached consensus to support local intentions to confront the Liberal candidates in the General Election, but it is clear from conversations with senior Liberals that in the quickening battle for the soul of the Liberal Party, the ecology movement and, if it plays its hand sensitively the Ecology Party have much to gain

12. The exchanges with the Liberals coincided with another development, at first disturbing, but now seen to hold exciting potential. A group of people invited the best-known figures in the environmental pressure groups and 'alternative' ventures to support the manifesto of a new party to contest the European Parliamentary Election in June 1979. That the Ecology Party was not initially involved reflects our continuing trials in achieving visibility (of which more below), and the reluctance of some in the movement at large to recognise our particular contribution to its advance.
13. However, the goodwill we showed, and our strong presence at the inaugural meeting, deflected the possibility of a rival party. Instead, the Green Alliance - as it is now called - will challenge all candidates in the General Election to endorse policies that are virtually identical to ours. From this we stand to gain publicity we cannot yet win in our own right. The (likely?) event of a few endorsements will give impetus to the formation of a British wing to the nine-nation 'green alliance' that seems probable and increasingly attractive politically in the first European election. The Ecology Party, with its record and its European contacts, intends to be the catalyst, but first we must consolidate our position by creditable achievements in the General Election.
14. Elections are the most hazardous of situations for tactical judgements to go awry, and it is not surprising that argument has raged in the NEC over our plans. The objectives of spreading knowledge of our policies and enthusing local branches with experience of what we exist to do (important if the result is inconclusive and a still more contentious election follows) could, by diffusing effort, to some extent conflict with achieving scores that demonstrably lift us out of the lunatic-fringe league. Such scores would overcome scepticism about a minor party's chances of breaking the two-party logjam, but they require skilful, concentrated campaigns.
15. Now that postponement of the election and quickening interest in ECO have enabled and encouraged us to raise our sights to the 50 candidates required for an entitlement to television time, two things matter. First, that every member throws in every possible resource, for when the mood is favourable and the election debate likely to be sterile without our contribution, it is crucial that we seize the moment. Second, we must all recognise that even if we fail to achieve a spectacular result this time, this need in no way depress morale provided the other objectives are well met, and the foundation is laid for subsequent growth.
16. Finally, to turn back to four institutional features of a credible national political party: a clear image of itself and its policies, an organisation, a visible electoral presence and enthusiastic members. We are better placed than ever for the last two. The number of members has doubled in the last six months to over 600, with much improved rates of retention and of joining by enquirers. That is significant, not just because it expresses widening acceptance of our policies, but also because it affords at last an opportunity to break the vicious circle of limited funds - low-key campaigns and publicity - near invisibility to potential supporters - few members - limited funds. During the year the NEC improved the internal organisation of the Party, although the establishment of branches and regions has proved to be a slower process than expected. It has become clear that dependence on spare time devotion to the cause - however unstinting, and that it has been - is not enough. The new NEC will almost certainly have to appoint the first paid official if we are to capitalise our opportunities.

17. Definition of a clear self-image and relevant policies have pre-occupied the NEC. The initial results were the two leaflets ('Introduction' and 'Tomorrow's Party') whose quality and content have been favourably received. These were followed by a re-print in new format (The Little Green Book) of the comprehensive 1975-76 Manifesto. Technical difficulties in further amending it remain, as does criticism of its detailed commitments. It may be wise to postpone a decision until the planned array of literature, including a new short manifesto and the outcome of various single topic study groups, has more fully materialised. The policy sessions of Conference gave fresh impetus to this work.
18. Meanwhile, the NEC has published - for internal discussion within the Party - a paper entitled 'After Affluence', which contains a tightly argued and highly topical analysis of the crisis and restatement of our policies. It adds to the 'green' roots of ECO a concern for the implications of a foundering economy, a commitment to values in a world whose parties are either value-less or espouse despicable values, and an optimistic image of post-industrial life.
19. This report is longer than last year's because so much more is happening. I hope you can share the excitement of those suddenly detectable shifts of political stance on which our breakthrough to effective influence depends. We have much to do. We must work for our support; it will not fall into our laps just because our case appears self-evident. The Annual Conference is the chance to exchange experiences, to learn from mistakes, to choose new strategies. This year's Conference marked the end of the painful years of struggling to survive at all and opened Chapter Two, where the adventure really begins.

Jonathan Tyler

National Chairman

Birmingham, September 1978