

CANDIDATE

At the members meeting on 18th October Anthony Cheke was^x ~~was~~ selected to be OEM's candidate for the election. It was generally agreed that he would be a low-key candidate and that other members would share the burden of speaking at meetings, canvassing, kissing babies, etc normally carried solely by the candidate. However, being low-key does not mean insignificant or inactive; OEM will be very active during the election campaign. Low-key means that the focus will be on OEM and its policies rather than on the candidate as an individual. For this reason it is felt desirable that other members as well as the candidate should speak publicly on behalf of OEM.

A REPLY TO RODNEY CURTIS

Many OEM members will have received a letter from Rodney Curtis. For the benefit of those members who did not receive a copy it is reproduced below after OEM's reply. As a postscript to his letter Rodney announced that he had resigned from OEM and joined the Ecology Party (EP). As this letter contains a number of inaccuracies and is asking other members to withdraw their support a reply is necessary. Many members were not present at the meeting of 18th October and so are not aware of the facts and of the opinion of the majority of members present at that meeting. The meeting of Monday 30th October approved the following reply:

At the General Meeting of 17th August Gordon read a letter received from Jonathan Tyler, Chairman of the Ecology Party, which expressed concern that the failure of the OEM to unite with the EP could be construed by outside observers to be a split in the environmental movement which could be damaging to candidates. He offered to visit the OEM to discuss our differences. The meeting ~~agreed~~ discussed the reasons why OEM was founded as a separate local organisation. One of the key principles of the OEM is decentralisation of decision making to the lowest possible local level. It was generally felt that to join a national party would go against this principle and that the OEM should remain independent. Nevertheless an invitation to speak to us was extended to Jonathan Tyler. No reply to this invitation was received.

The General Meeting of 18th October was called with one item of business, this being the election of our candidate and his/her role. Without any prior notice Rodney raised the question of us becoming a branch of the EP. He revealed that he had written to Jonathan Tyler, in a private capacity, without consulting other members. He did not have a copy of the letter available. The pros and cons of joining the EP were discussed at length. Suggested advantages in joining included the fact that ecology is of national and international concern so national organisations are appropriate. The EP is nationally known as a political organisation whereas OEM could be confused with local pressure groups. If OEM joined it could be a progressive left wing of the party and change it from within. Reasons for not joining the EP included disagreements by some members with the statements in the EP manifesto. Some members expressed concern at the existence of the totalitarian Survival Party which has been formed by EP members. This party wants to introduce and pursue ecological policies by undemocratic means. Some EP members may have some sympathy with their former colleagues. We do not have enough information on the EP at present to know the range of opinions among their members on this issue.

The EP's predecessor, the People Party was accused of being racist when it put up candidates, because of its population policy. The EP is now trying to move away from its past. However it is very strongly opposed by influential environmental journalists. This opposition would be likely to apply to us unless we could maintain our identity within the party and be seen as a force to change it. In practice, working to get ideas accepted by a national organisation is difficult which is one of the reasons for our principle of decentralisation. We would not have any control over what the media says about the EP. Affiliation would be unlikely to increase our membership. Local participation in OEM is more likely if OEM remains distinctively local. Through our public meetings and posters our name is now known and a change at this stage would be confusing.

Following this discussion it was proposed that the matter of affiliation of OEM to the EP is best deferred until after the next General Election. This proposal was carried by 10 votes for to 1 against. It was agreed that Jonathan Tyler, who is regarded as having a progressive influence on the EP, should be informed of the decision but that the invitation for him to come and speak to us at any convenient date should stand. The meeting noted that the matter of affiliation could be raised again at any future meeting. Anthony Cheke who was elected as our candidate at the meeting is opposed to us joining the EP. He would need to know far more about the EP before considering being a candidate for them. If the OEM decided at a later date to join the EP and he was not satisfied he would resign. To change both the name of OEM and the candidate close to an election would be very damaging.

Four members of the OEM committee belong to the Political Ecology Research Group. There is nothing sinister or even particularly surprising about this whatever Rodney's views. Most of the committee and probably at least half of the membership belong to other environmental and political groups which is to be expected, at least in a recently formed organisation. There is nothing in the Constitution to prevent members from belonging to other groups. In fact various members of OEM do belong to the Labour, Liberal and Ecology Parties as well as to groups such as Conservation Society and Friends of the Earth. Committee members were elected democratically at a well attended General Meeting on 17th August.

The question of PERG only arose at the meeting of 18th October because Peter Taylor, while being opposed to us affiliating to the EP, put forward a personal argument in favour. Because a high proportion of the Oxford PERG members belong to the OEM there is some possibility of confusion which would be detrimental to PERG which is a strictly non-party political organisation. If OEM was part of the EP there would be no possibility of confusion.

There are differences of opinion within the OEM as to why we are putting up a candidate at the General Election, what will be the role of OEM after the election and in the long run what is the best way of achieving the kind of society we envisage in the manifesto. A considerable amount of time has been spent discussing these issues but nobody is half-hearted in their commitment to contest the next General Election. Rodney sees a significant number of ecological MPs being elected in future who will bring about the changes we would like to see from the top down. Other members are not convinced that this will work as ecological MPs could be as likely as others to become corrupted by the system. At the same time we need to encourage change from the grass-roots, for example working as cooperatives, making schools more democratic or communities getting together to improve their environment.

If ecological policies are ever to be put into effect it is essential for them to be publicly acceptable. One role for OEM is to educate the general public, to promote discussion of environmental issues, to demystify these issues and to make people aware that environmental and other problems concern us all. These ideas can be put across in an election when the voters are examining what is being said by the parties who are standing. In a marginal constituency the major parties are going to be worried by the unknown impact of an ecology candidate. If they take note

they take note of what we are saying and of the views of those environmentalists working within their parties, and adopt some of our policies then we will have achieved something.

The OEM has many aims which can be compatible. Different members can have different views and still work together. It is unfortunate that Rodney, a valuable founder member, has felt the need to resign in order to join the EP. Other members of OEM do not feel that membership of the EP and OEM are incompatible. In the past, by discussing our differences some kind of consensus has been arrived at. ~~Let's~~ Lets hope that we can continue in this way.

RODNEY'S LETTER

Dear Members:

I am writing this letter to inform you of the circumstances surrounding the October 18th meeting. On Oct. 10 I had written a letter to Jonathan Tyler of the EP expressing my concern about the division in our group as to its aims and whether he would be prepared to assist us in solving them. I mentioned that a move to become a branch of the EP might be a solution for those of us who are firmly committed to a political approach and are being held back by those who are half-hearted in their commitment to such an approach.

At the Oct. 18 meeting (to nominate a candidate) I told the meeting about my letter and a subsequent telephone conversation with Jonathan Tyler. I suggested that we might consider him coming to talk to us as soon as possible (before my invitation he had previously been invited formally by the OEM - see minutes). I also suggested that the OEM had served its local purpose and in democratic tradition we should unite with others for a common or shared purpose - a concept that has been included in Draft No 2 of the Manifesto and was formally approved.

I stated that any candidate nominated must consider that the OEM might possibly choose to become a branch of the EP. This was business not on the meetings agenda but was obviously relevant to any nomination (in fact the nominee, Anthony Cheke said he would not stand under those circumstances).

Without notifying all our members of an item of business that concerns us all, Gordon Thompson proposed that the invitation to Jonathan Tyler should stand but that it be deferred until after the election. The proposal was voted on and carried.

I would like to express my disgust at this Machiavellian turn of events. The steam rolling of an honest suggestion that is crucially important in this unconstitutional, undemocratic fashion is alarming and disappointing coupled as it ~~is~~ was by an hysterical chorus of malicious, infantile innuendoes and near slander of the EP. These outpourings all came from those members of the OEM who curiously enough are all members of PERG a supposedly non-political group funded by the Rwn tree Trust.

I thank Penny Newsome for pointing out this dominance at the meeting (one third of the meeting). Peter Taylor (PERG) hastily implored Penny to retract this statement but she refused and reiterated it.

I will not stand by and let the general ecological movement be discredited by such negative, biased and sinister behaviour as shown by our PERG members. I am therefore taking the unusual step of asking you as individuals to withdraw your support from OEM.

Furthermore I suggest that any members still interested in supporting ecology in politics throw their weight behind the EP (a democratically constituted party that already has won seats on county, district and parish councils) and will field 50 candidates in the next election.

Those of you interested in joining the EP can contact me or write direct to the EP, 121 Selly Park Road, Birmingham 21.

COMMITTEE AND SPEAKERS

Colleen Gorman, our Treasurer, has resigned and the committee has coopted John Murrell and appointed him as Treasurer. There are also vacancies on the committee for one or more people to do P.R. and make posters. Volunteers to help with the PR please contact any member of the committee. While on the subject of our public image would anyone like to speak at a public meeting? The committee feels that as many members as possible should speak at our public meetings. Its quite easy really and those of us who have already spoken will give you any help you may need. Volunteers please!

MEMBERS MEETINGS

These meetings are normally held fortnightly in the Haldane Room of Wolfson College. We often have guests along to these meetings. Early in October John Lucas, an Oxford don, came along and sparked off a very interesting discussion about participatory democracy. At future meetings it is hoped to have guests from the Ecology Party and the Green Alliance. It has also been suggested that some meetings should be about specific topics such as land nationalisation or education. Members will be informed of any guests or special meeting through the usual channels.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

On Tuesday 21st November there will be a meeting at the East Oxford Community Centre to which members of other local environmental and cooperative groups will be invited. If you know of a group who ought to be invited please contact Steve Larkin. Please come along yourself as well and help with the usual jobs, talking, tea making, etc.

OXFORD ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP

On 23rd October the University OEG organised a meeting of prospective Parliamentary candidates to discuss environmental policies. OEM's newly elected PPC, Anthony Cheke, the Conservative and Liberal PPCs and the Labour MP shared the platform. The meeting went well for OEM and it was reported in the Oxford Mail and the Oxford Times. Also the student magazine, Isis published an interview with Anthony in the issue dated 16 Nov.

Austria

Most people have probably heard the good news from Austria. In the recent referendum the government lost, albeit by a narrow margin, the vote to start-up Austria's only nuclear power station at Zwentdorf. This proves that most Austrians don't want nuclear power. I wonder what such a referendum in this country would show?

DIARY

Monday	13th November	Members meeting, 8.00, Wolfson
Tuesday	21st November	Public meeting with local environmental groups, 8.00, East Oxford Community Centre
Monday	4th December	Members meeting, Wolfson
Monday	18th December	Members meeting, Wolfson

Alan Francis 12.11.78