



# A RATIONAL APPROACH TO LIFE ?

## Oxford Ecology Movement

The Environmental Movement in Britain has had a political face for quite a while now. The Ecology Party, formed in the Midlands, has a number of local councillors around the country and recently caused something of a stir with the announcement of its plan to field 50 candidates in the upcoming General Election - thus ensuring TV time in the form of party political broadcasts. This has also resulted in the national press taking the party rather more seriously, so perhaps its effects are already being felt.

The Ecology Party exists to provide what could be seen as an environmental alternative to the established parties with policies aimed at helping humanity in general live in harmony with the world rather than helping prop up outdated industrial-capitalist enterprises. With its aims of decentralisation and self-sufficiency in many aspects of life, its policies certainly run in a very different direction from those of the parties that run Britain and most of the world today.

### WHY OXFORD ?

It is the idea of decentralisation that brought the Oxford Ecology Movement into existence. The Ecology Party is a country-wide movement and joining it involves joining the central body which then links local members. The OEM decided instead to form a separate group and to concentrate on building up a local movement working on local as well as national issues. This policy has proved remarkably successful, and the OEM is as big, or bigger, than any of the Ecology Party branches. While it exists as a separate entity it still gains strength from the existence of the national party, and the aims and manifestoes of the two are very similar. The OEM first came into the public eye in the autumn with a series of well-attended public meetings which raised a lot of issues and also produced a fair amount of criticism. Now with the publication of a revised manifesto they are once more provoking comment and speculation.

Perhaps the first and most important task is for the movement to actually communicate with the public at large. For better or worse, the environment movement as a whole has a somewhat trendy image, and this barrier must be broken if the party is to gain any substantial number of votes in an election. While the OEM admit this, they claim, probably rightly, that only by working as they are and going out to the public can they hope to broaden the movement. To sit and wait until the man on the 501 bus realises that the environment is damaged beyond repair would be to wait too long. They

also have no wish to alienate supporters by adopting an artificial 'suit and tie' image that is inappropriate to such ideals. There are groups such as the Socialist Environment Resources Association (SERA) that already work for much the same aims inside the current political set-up.

### "AND WILL IT TAKE AWAY MY COLOUR TV?"

In the long term, however, it would seem that the OEM with its shift to smaller businesses, operatively run, its reduction in international trade, and its emphasis on personal and small group control of all aspects of life must come into conflict with 'socialist' ideas that are current in Britain. Self-sufficiency has been condemned as isolationist and the shift from nationalised industries has been seen as encouraging rampant capitalism. The first criticism is largely invalid when one considers that a large fraction of Britain's trade is either with such totalitarian regimes as Argentina or South Africa, or is a neo-colonialist relic of the days of Empire. Many Third World countries are still in a situation where they are economically obliged to grow cash crops such as cocoa beans to suit the luxurious tastes of Europe rather than grow food crops for their malnourished populations. An ending of such a trade would be vastly beneficial to them in the long term. The introduction of such policies might also help convince Third World countries to take conservationist ideas seriously, something they are unlikely to do while the West can be seen wasting food and energy in every possible way.

The shift from large to small-scale is already happening. One of the chief benefits of modern technology should be the freeing of the workforce from the mindlessness of the production line and the scaling down of industry in this fashion should bring in worker control simply and easily. The aim is always to produce a political climate in which these changes could be fostered rather than by introducing a series of enforcing measures.

### WHAT ABOUT THE LABOUR PARTY ?

In Oxford of course, conflict with what is still termed (for reasons that seem unclear) 'socialism' is rather more imminent. As you should be aware, Oxford is an extremely marginal seat and a small swing away from Evan Luard, the Labour M.P., would result in Tory John Patten being your next representative. Since it is popularly

assumed that the OEM would take more votes from Labour than Conservative, it is widely claimed that voting for the OEM could merely be aiding the Conservative cause.

In answer to this the OEM raise several points. Firstly Luard, who incidentally not noted for his popularity, is hardly a good environmentalist, which is after all what it's all about. While he was active in promoting the Government's signing of the Endangered Species Convention, the Government's overall record in this field is appalling; and he is very much in favour of Nuclear Power, a position he shares with his Tory rival. From this point of view in fact, the two are fairly similar, and when one has to vote for someone with whom one profoundly disagrees merely to stop someone marginally worse being elected, then perhaps it's time to stop, think, and vote environmental. The OEM is obviously very much against a Thatcher government but sees the election as a case where it is necessary to lose a few battles to win the war.

Any alternative to the two-and-a-bit party insanity that is trying to run the society in which we live must be at least closely considered. (Before I get crucified for this statement I'd like to say that the NF is no alternative to anything). Certainly the established parties are taking what they see as a threat very seriously indeed. You can expect a sizeable environmental gloss on an awful lot of pre-election publicity this year, but if you're thinking of believing it, remember their past records and think about why it's there.

In the long, or hopefully short, term the Ecology Movement will act as a pressure group. To be effective even as this, however, it still needs votes, so unless you're really into four (more) years of propping up a decaying system, think hard about voting GREEN. We don't need nuclear power, we don't need to continue to exploit the Third World, we don't need the inequalities inherent in the current system, but we do need to think about the world as a living system and not just a pile of resource to be used and wasted.

The OEM is going to fight the next election and their candidate is Anthony Cheke. Their manifesto is available from E.O.A. or direct from 6 Glebe Street, where any further information can also be obtained.

Chris Church





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### ECOLOGICAL POLITICS and the EXISTING PARTY STRUCTURE

**IF YOU BELIEVE** that a proper respect and understanding of the environment and of people's real needs is fundamental to any political structure in the future, then you are faced, at present, with a difficult dilemma. How best can this objective be approached? The means must involve both an effective method of increasing public awareness of the real urgency of the problems, and also a means of putting this understanding into practice politically.

Many concerned people have, consciously or unconsciously, adopted the anarchist approach. They have eschewed conventional politics, and set up alternative projects on their own, making themselves as independent as possible of the existing economic structure. Their attitude to conventional elections can be summed up in the slogan printed and distributed by *Peace News* at the election of October 1974: "Don't vote, it only encourages them."

We have a lot of sympathy with such feelings. We too find the attitudes and aims of the established political groupings barren and corrupt. However, we believe that anarchism cannot stimulate sufficient popular action quickly enough to overturn either the prevailing massive assault on the earth and on human sensibilities, or the deadening apathy that accompanies it.

We strongly encourage all individual initiative that is based in ecological understanding and brings meaning into the lives of those participating. What we don't believe is that example alone is enough—even if the experiences of these examples are publicised by their practitioners. Only the converted and the very inquisitive read the pamphlets and broadsheets of the alternative culture. The great majority of people are conditioned to learning what goes on from television and the 'straight' press. The same people see politics in terms of elections where Labour and Conservatives, with occasional light relief from Liberals, Nationalists and the NF, fight it out, generally via the personalities of their party leaders. Our belief is that this miasma must be penetrated, and the cycle broken, if any real progress is to be made in changing national priorities from endless growth to ecological stability.

### Three Approaches

There are essentially three approaches to achieving aims through the electoral system: *pressurising* all political groupings from outside, *penetrating* chosen ones from the inside, and *opposing* the existing parties directly at elections. All three approaches have their merits, and we are not here going to argue for one method against the others, but rather to explain why we have felt it necessary to add a direct alternative at elections to the many groups and individuals working hard already on the first two approaches.

Pressure groups work most effectively with single issues that do not involve the central dogma of the major political parties. Thus abortion law reform (and its reverse), or changes in, say, the gaming laws, can be brought about whichever major party is in power. Certain environmental measures are similarly susceptible to non-party pressure (e.g. some pollution control, saving whales, minor alternative energy projects, nature reserves), but the ecologists' major planks are the cessation of growth, abandonment of technologies likely to cause serious damage to the earth (e.g. nuclear power, chemical agriculture), and decentralisation of power, and these strike at the root of the philosophy that is the mainstay of both of the Conservative and, implicitly, the Labour Party. Ecologically-minded people working within the existing political parties, including the Liberals, are faced with the problem of turning the soul of these parties to whence it sprang: conservative once meant 'tending to conserve'—but tell that to the CBI; the socialist ideal is "from each according to his faculties, to each according to his needs"—but tell that to the T & GWU.

While in no way wishing to discourage the efforts of those working within existing parties, we believe they face a major contradiction, which in the long run *may* result in a fundamental change in their party, but is more likely, given the vested interests in the *status quo*, to end up with their being bought off with half-measures, or their finally giving up the struggle in that direction. What we intend to offer is a credible and honest alternative that will provide at the same time a candidate for whom ecologists can vote without the usual "They're all dreadful, but we'd better vote for X because she's marginally less appalling than the others", and, in a marginal constituency, provide ecologists who prefer working within their parties with greater leverage to alter the direction of those parties. The threat of a lost seat is more likely to spur the ordinary politician to reconsider his or her views (or at least his or her public image) than a minority of the local party members occasionally making a fuss.

### Tactical Defeat

As things stand in Oxford it is natural that supporters of the sitting member (or at least, his party) should feel that an ecologist candidate is a threat—the loss of

any seat might precipitate a Conservative government. To those ecologists in the Labour Party with such feelings we would ask the following question: is it in power or in opposition that the Labour Party will move more quickly to ecologically sane policies? We submit that in power the Labour Party can't see the wood for the trees it is chopping down, and that only in opposition will there be any hope of sufficient detachment to grasp the necessity of ecological thinking. In a tricky campaign, a tactical defeat may be valuable: unwanted heads may roll. Better to endure in the short term the disadvantages of a Conservative Government, if the prospect for sanity in the long term is thereby drastically improved.

To ecological activists within the Conservative Party we would like to say that our view of society in which individual responsibility and small-scale enterprise are an essential part is not inimical to the spirit, as opposed to the actual practice, of conservatism. However the conflict between the private interests of the financial backbone of the party, and the good of the public whom it needs for support, makes the prospect of internal change unlikely unless votes are lost to other candidates offering the advantages of conservative ideals without the shadow of multinationals looming behind them. Under its present leadership a Conservative government is likely to be dangerously unecological in its attempts to 'revive' the corpse of growth, and it may prove to be very hard to work within the party without a conflict of conscience.

In recent years the Liberal Party's main function (if not its intent) has been to be a source of policies to be plundered by the ruling party whenever it seems expedient or appropriate. The only important policy not so adopted is proportional representation, for the obvious reason that it would prevent the two large parties from winning a majority of seats on a minority vote. The present trends suggest that the public are looking for new ways of expressing their disenchantment with the ruling parties. Originally (1950s and 60s) the answer was to vote for the Liberals, and now, *faute de mieux*, has slipped back in the direction of square one (apart from those who have turned to the NF). To return to significance the Liberals must have credible *future* policies, not rely on past hopes. Will this happen while the party is still dominated by Lord Byers of Rio Tinto Zinc?

To sum up, we believe there is a very important part to be played by an independent and diverse ecological movement in the shaping of British politics. Not only will this offer the public the possibility of direct representation in Parliament and on councils, but will also, by taking votes, spur ecologically-minded activists in existing parties to persuade those bodies that the only sane future lies in adopting and implementing ecological policies.

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