

REPORT OF THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE of the ECOLOGY PARTY, 1978, in BIRMINGHAM

The weekend of the 8, 9 and 10 of September, 1978, was a turning point for the Ecology Party. This Annual Conference suddenly grew into proof of our maturity as a sane, sensible, nation-wide Party capable of advancing to fulfil the needs of the people in a future Government.

First you don't see it, now you do! Difficulties had been overcome. Organiser Ron Andrews had been taken ill, but efficient Mike Benfield (Coventry) had, with Margaret Andrews and helpers, performed miracles of organisation to ensure a smooth-running week-end. A hundred and one people arrived at University House, Birmingham to take part in the A.G.M., two debates and a seminar. The hall was full. Devon's ECO banner - which had been carried proudly through London at the anti-Windscale demo - was decorating the platform, together with a bean plant in a pot from the Chairman's garden instead of flowers. Books, badges and pens were sold from a stall outside the hall. There was a full programme.

The outgoing N E C had its final meeting on the Friday evening, whilst other luckier members got to know one another in the bar. At nine o'clock on Saturday morning Jonathan Tyler, the Chairman, welcomed everyone officially to the Conference and to the first session - the A.G.M. It was quickly decided to allow non-member observers to stay. Arrangements were made for the N E C elections to take place on Sunday. Reports were presented by the Chairman, the National Secretary (Sally Willington), the Treasurer (Peter Sizer), the Membership Secretary (John Davenport) and the Newsletter Editor (Howard Hoptrough). David Fleming reported on the production of Party literature during the year.

There were three resolutions to deal with: the first, to alter the Aims of the Party as set out in the Constitution, was lost. The second, to change three paragraphs of the 'Manifesto' on child allowances, maternity grants and abortion, was defeated, carried and 'laid on the table' (in that order). The third, which was to propose that a Committee be set up to revise Chapter 10 of the 'Manifesto' on Land, and to make proposals, was accepted. It was suggested that other similar working groups should be started on different subjects. (This has now been done. Anyone interested should get in touch with Jeremy Faull (Cornwall)).

The Branch Reports were interesting. A spokes person for each gave an account of activities, fund raising, publicity, local elections and plans for the General Election. Ten branches reported, and the number and range of activities that emerged were encouraging and useful. David Taylor gave a separate report for the whole of the South West Region (at that time, the only Region organised). They had (then) five branches, and had held their own Conference at Bristol and issued their own Regional Newsletters.

The first of the debates, on Saturday afternoon, was on 'Employment', and was introduced by Teddy Goldsmith. He based his talk on what he had already published on the subject in the 'New Ecologist'. He spoke of population and machines, and of the situation in other countries. There was no moderate solution to a radical problem, so we should have to reverse the trends. There would be more people out of the labour market, more people would be self-employed, and the importance of G.N.P. would be reduced. We must restore non-market natural systems to replace the 'cash-economy'. There followed a lively and serious discussion till tea-time. This was controlled by Ron Andrew's little coloured lights - consisting of green, amber and flashing red, the latter indicating you should stop. Someone who didn't like this technological gadgetry thought the Red Indian system was preferable, where you may speak for as long as you can stand on only one leg! We agreed that change was inevitable, but the questions were on how to achieve the change-over to the Sustainable Society of the Post-

Industrial Age Farming, where capital in-puts had deliberately replaced labour, seemed to be a good example. However, the employment of more people in agriculture would not greatly ease the problems in inner cities. We do have an over-large population. There would have to be flexibility to change jobs. There would be deploying. The quality rather than the standard of living would become important. With a given level of resources and income there could perhaps be a sharing out for basic necessities first; perhaps a National Income Scheme

Shorter hours would be worked, but there could be greater work satisfaction. The line between 'job' and 'free-time' would become blurred. Things that take time, like caring for other people and craft occupations, would prosper. Barter might partly replace wages. Self-employment would be encouraged. Meanwhile, taxes would be increased on energy resources and transport. Perhaps we should phase out 'useless' products in favour of 'vital goods' and 'durable goods'. There would be a lot of new educating to do. The regional basis and small communities would help. There is a need for urgency, as times are changing fast. It was decided we should produce some policy documents, and possibly hold a policy conference this year.

The second debate, before the super vegetarian ecological supper prepared for us by the Birmingham members of Friends of the Earth, was on 'Energy'. The speaker was Peter Bunyard, farmer, writer and teacher on nuclear energy costs (a far cry from his days at Harvard as 'Keeper of the Cockroaches'!) He remarked that if the land could be farmed by computer it would not be properly taken care of. The sun provides more energy than we need in a day. By year 2000 North Sea Oil and gas would decline. The replacement would be coal, but the labour of digging it would become more difficult. Turning coal into gas and liquid fuel to replace petroleum would be expensive. On nuclear power, fast breeders are not all they are cracked up to be, although meant to recoup their high costs in the long run. Uranium supplies will become more difficult to obtain, and hence much more expensive. There are technical difficulties, and such energy could only be cheap while uranium is cheap - hence the race to get it going as the 'Saviour of the Industrial Age'. Some people envisaged our present society continuing indefinitely, but this was not possible, so other means of power from energy resources must be found. The cost of wave-power was still huge. Wind power had problems on a large scale. Smaller schemes of alternative energy resources combined with a more rational use of 'conventional' energy would be a solution. If we want a Stable Society and reasonable comfort we will have to alter our life styles. In answer to questions Peter explained that uranium needs 'enrichment' to get from 235 to 238 into plutonium. Fusion, as yet, seemed too costly. It was obvious we should have to cut down 'need', but to what point? We could use fuel more efficiently. It was thought that France had a system of a 'fuse-tax' - after a certain amount of energy is used your 'fuse' blows, and you pay tax on any further amount used. Where is the research into using less energy in new ways?

The evening's Guest Speaker was Tom Burke, Director of Friends of the Earth, who gave his own views on the way things were going. Imagination has run dry. Who or what will now take us forward and make the 'aggressive step'? The environmental movement's task is to be part of the 'cutting edge' of change. The fading view of a limitless world full of vacant spaces and the massive consumption of the Throwaway Society, with crisis following upon crisis, has shaken people's confidence. There is already widespread doubt. Time is right for a New Idea, a new model of Wealth. This would be knowledge of know-how, growing some of your own food, being able to make your own electricity, owning lasting goods. The new poverty would be having to rely on central supplies. The idea of a 'sense of place' would replace 'growth is good'. To provide satisfaction of best human needs we should give real services, for real people, in a real world. Go out and do it, as actions always speak louder than words. There were many different approaches to combat looming catastrophe for our civilisation, and we should all work together. Discussion produced some argument as to whether Ecology is broader than environmentalism, and if actions can or should replace

words. It was pointed out that change could take place by persuading with words and that words had great power. The anti-political attitude of many young people was discussed. The structure of local government and its influence on central government did not help matters. Asked if F O E would support the Ecology Party at an election Tom said they had a ground rule that F O E does not support any political party. They ask questions at elections. Certainly F O E would circulate Ecology Party literature. But he stuck to his point that the Ecology Party is only a part of a wider movement in his opinion, and strength was in diversity. We might unite eventually, but it was not yet the right time.

Some people sat up very late re-arguing the day's business, or swapping political experiences. Others retired to do their homework for the following day, and all too soon it was 9.30 a.m. on Sunday and the 'Philosophy and Values' debate was ably launched by Jonathon Porritt. He warned against 'going into reverse' and nostalgia. There were good lessons to be learnt from the past, but our business was forwards. The critical nature of Ecology gives us the chance to come up with new values. We should recess under four headings: Technology, the Individual, Democracy and Secular versus Spiritual values. Under the last there was hope because of our capacity for forming a re-constructive message. This provoked much thought from a world view to thoughts on abandoning the Wheel and the role of women. Jeremy Faull (Cornwall) agreed that an ethical basis was needed, and suggested his own - 'We inherit this earth and it is our moral duty to pass it on at least in no worse state'. The Chairman reminded us of the New Zealand Values Party's version of this: 'We do not inherit the earth, we borrow it from our children'.

Groups were formed under various headings to 'discuss and report back'. The group that chose to sit in the sunlit garden to debate looked very philosophical! The 'Individual and Community' group decided that each community must be organic and work out matters for itself. The 'Democracy' group decided that the individual was hotly contended. The 'Education' group had looked at the 'Manifesto' and thought the section on Education could be greatly extended as it is such an important subject, and we must get it right. Alternative forms of Education need looking into. The 'Technology' group could not agree about the micro chips role and possible benefits if used sensibly. Peter Bunyard owns a horse and tractor. While using the horse for farm work is satisfying, it is slow. The tractor is faster and enables him to have more time in which to do something else. The 'Race' group said that people should organise communities as they wish; they may dislike each other, but the 'scape goat' image must go. If common interest - such as gardening - can unite people, then the Stable Society; may do so. The group on 'Women' came to no conclusions. It was thought that the Ecology Party had no clear policy on family and population stabilisation. Assumptions about sex roles should be re-examined and a Working Party set up. The 'General Philosophy' group ranged from Marxism, through religion into objectivity, and ended up in musical analogy. In summing up David Taylor detected recurrent themes of responsibility, democracy with self-discipline, and the Link idea, which was a definition of Ecology - that man is part of nature. This, in political terms, is a revolutionary statement. The uniting theme was responsibility, and the unsung theme of the whole conference was Identity and Human Needs in Society (Groups were asked to send in written notes).

The final session included the results of the N E C elections, a discussion on party literature, administration and General Election strategy. The Chairman thanked David Fleming for his work on the literature. The draft of 'The Reckoning' pamphlet was discussed and points raised were noted. It was agreed to print it with corrections. The discussion document 'After Affluence' in second-draft form was also considered. There was a vote against its immediate publication. It was thought members should have until the end of October to look at the few copies available and pass them round. The N E C would then take the decision on publication.

Excitement was generated by Keith Rushworth's (Leeds) suggestion to go for fifty candidates in the General Election. This would entitle us to one 5 (five) minute TV and radio spot. Keith thought the lost deposits would be well worth the gained publicity. We would need £7,500, and could canvass for donations. Tony Whittaker thought the Euro elections would also attract media attention, and they might be easier to handle as there would be fewer candidates (81). It was agreed that we should stand as a single group with the Europe Green Movement. We must combat the argument that a vote for the Ecology Party is a wasted vote. Keith said he was putting all he had (bar his house) into the General Election, and suggested the slogan 'Let's go with ECO!'

The Conference was wound up by the Chairman, Jonathan Tyler. He thanked everyone, and said that with fifty outstanding candidates we would be out of the wilderness and on the way! A remarkable week-end! The Prime Minister had decided, after all the fuss and expectation, not to have a General Election the day before we met. Yet now we could see that this gave us the possibility of the time we needed to get ourselves together as a Party. After all, we might not get another opportunity for four years. Two individuals stood out: Mr. Turner, a Birmingham member, 90 years old and there with us at the Conference; and one Jack Gosling, living in a remote part of Scotland, whom the Chairman met by chance and who produced his Ecology Party membership card. He represents all our 'cut-off' members who are not in a Branch yet. He is the person the Newsletter must be written for. Someone remarked they had seen more true Socialist attitudes at our Conference than they had seen in a long time - he had now joined the Ecology Party.

We had been so busy that the bean plant had wilted, and needed to be revived with some water. Where next year? How can we reduce the cost of Conference, and yet accommodate many more people as our membership shoots up? Who will take on the job of organising it? Shouldn't we be planning for Conference 1980 already? If you did not come this year you missed a good thing. There is nothing like a meeting of like-minded people to generate a feeling of solidarity. Wear your ECO badge with pride! Recruit new members! Spread the word! Indeed, let's go with ECO!!

The cause is just, the need is great
So join us for a Steady State!

We could do with a Party song. Any suggestions, please?

SALLY WILLINGTON

ECO CONFERENCE - The Technology discussion

A group of about ten of us formed the technology discussion group in the 'Values and Philosophy' session. One of the intentions behind the session was to explore and identify - if possible - a common philosophical 'core' underpinning ecological ideas.

The subject of our group was announced as: 'Technology and its impact on all value systems'. I think that was too deep a question for us to tackle.

The influence that technology has on all value systems, including the one(s) that the environmental movement is trying to express, is all-pervasive. We struggle to define what sort of technology we thought was desirable, given the value system which we hoped we had in common.

I think the value systems that we were implicitly assuming were different.

The group agreed that technology, as such, is not 'bad' in itself. The question we addressed first was whether one could distinguish between 'science' and

'technology', where 'science' was a worthwhile pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, and 'technology' was something more, which could be either 'good' or 'bad'

Something which was mentioned as being part of 'science', and legitimate as part of man's necessary drive to satisfy his curiosity, was the exploration of space. Some of us felt strongly that we should not restrict in advance the cupboards of knowledge to be opened. Others disagreed, and stated that science and technology, in this age at least, are inextricably tied - the exploration of space was being carried out for technological and nationalistic reasons as well as scientific ones.

The other question we addressed was that of how we separate 'good' technology from 'bad'. Some of us gave examples of things we felt we (and society) couldn't do without - car, telephones and medical equipment. Microcomputers were mentioned as potentially 'good' pieces of technology - as being capable of facilitating the decentralisation of power and replacing the working of the market economy.

Peter Bunyard said that, as someone who ran a smallholding and worked with his brain, that the mixture of physical and mental work was beneficial for him. He gave the example of his horse and his tractor, either of which he can use to plough his fields. He prefers to use the horse, but it takes two weeks to do what the tractor does in half a day. Therefore he sometimes uses the tractor out of economic necessity, because it enables him to do other things with the time saved. The tractor does no harm, it just does the job quicker. But he felt that the enjoyment goes when one gets involved with a large machine.

Two rival scenarios of future use of high technology was discussed. That of Bockchin was of a decentralised society, with a healthy balance between town and country, and where high technology was used in an 'appropriate' way. That of Herman Kahn was of a 'high-energy high-consumption automated society'. We discussed possible criteria for evaluating these scenarios in the context of the question 'What makes technology appropriate, ecologically?'

One possible set of criteria mentioned was that the technology should make the most economical possible use of resources, and be non-polluting. It was objected that that was too mechanistic; one could think of many Kahn like 'Brave New Worlds' that could satisfy these criteria.

Peter Bunyard said that technology should be linked with our reconstructivist viewpoint, and also that the question 'What technology?' probably won't need asking because resource limitations will ultimately make it answer itself, in an ecological correct way.

One set of values put forward are the Biblical ones - that of man as a creation, and as part of nature. Man being made in God's image has, naturally, the attribute of creativity, and so can leave his mark on the world, in the form of technology. But with the Fall, man became alienated from God, and also from nature. Technologies are 'good' which facilitate reconciliation of man with God and with nature.

In the end we could come to no positive formulation of a value system for assessing technology. One of us said 'Factory farming just feels wrong'. But we could not say why!

DAVID KEMBALL-COOK

NEC ELECTION RESULTS AT THE A.G.M., 1978

Because the Party was still not organised into regions - apart from that in the South West - it was agreed at Conference that eight members of the NEC should be directly elected, and that there should be three Provincial members from specified areas of the U.K. elected by members from those particular areas. The results were as follows:

Jonathon Porritt:	71;	David Fleming:	61;	Sally Willington:	60;
Jonathan Tyler:	59;	Edward Goldsmith:	44;	Peter Sizer:	43;
Gundula Dorey	39;	Ron Andrews:	38;	David Pedley	33;
Leslie Spoor:	33;	Andrea Hodgkinson:	32;	Julia Leydon:	20;
Melanie Pulley:	13;	Dean Wayland:	3;		

The later elections for Provincial members resulted in Leslie Spoor, Andrea Hodgkinson and Biff Vernon being elected. These three, plus the first eight noted above, make up the elected members of the NEC. Others are elected county, district and parish councillors, comprising Jeremy Faull (county councillor); John Luck (district councillor); and John Davenport (parish councillor). Howard Hoptrough, as Newsletter editor, has been made a full member of the NEC by co-option.

THE 1978 ANNUAL CONFERENCE - HOW IT HAPPENED

by Sally Willington

As many of you will know, Ron Andrews, the editor of GOOD EARTH, and a member of the NEC, was the organiser for our 1978 Annual Conference. Unfortunately, about a fortnight before the event, he was taken ill, and had to retire from active participation in its preparation. Fortunately, he was well enough to attend the Conference and work the speaker's lights, and record and take part in the proceedings.

Mike Benfield stepped into the breach, aided by Ron's wife Margaret. Mike made an excellent job of the proceedings, and he has submitted an even more excellent report on it, and made several interesting suggestions about the conduct and preparation of succeeding Conferences. Amongst them were: that a Conference Director should be appointed; Conference rules (procedures for voting, submission of motions etc.) should be prepared and circulated beforehand to delegates; there should be a different chairman for each session; the programme should not be changed after its initial publication; all members should be allowed to vote for NEC candidates, thus requiring a postal vote for those unable to attend the Conference, plus a ballot of delegates attending the Conference - candidates' nominations should be submitted three months before the Conference - biographical details and statements by candidates two months before the Conference - and opportunity for candidates to address the Conference before the delegates' ballot; more publicity for the Conference - more contact with the media (perhaps a Press Officer should be appointed); sessions should be more than 60 to 90 minutes,* and 20 to 30 minutes should be allowed for breaks; the Conference should be a three to four day event (i.e. Friday through to Monday)**
A very good job, Mike - many thanks!

* Personally, I think 60 minutes is the absolute maximum for any one session. -

EDITOR

** Members might like to bombard me with views on one or more of the above points

EDITOR

ECO CONFERENCE - Values and Philosophy discussion

'Values and Philosophy' was the somewhat daunting title for the double session on Sunday morning, and Jonathon Porritt's introductory talk opened up some of the less immediately 'political' problems about ecology

It was soon made clear that we would not fall back on one all encompassing notion of an ecological philosophy. The speaker provided an analysis of some of the different models of ecology, ranging from 'Eco Fascists' and 'Post Cataclysm Reconstructionivists' through the various left, right, middle of the road and anarchistic versions, on to the Neo-Luddites and Eco-Pagans, the Schumacherian synthesis, and the humanist, existentialist and evolutionary points of view!

So where might the Ecology Party draw its inspiration? Diversity may be a principle dear to our hearts, but it was clear that we need to be working towards some kind of synthesis. The ecology movement has dramatically extended the meaning of the word 'ecology', and not just politically. For we are part of a broader movement, to which converts will be won not just by a hard-hitting assault on the socio-economic problems of the day, but as much by the call for a change in our values, our entire way of life.

The speaker skated clumsily around the word 'spirituality'. For what has such a word as this to do with our becoming the 'cutting edge of change'? As politicians, do we even dare use it, in an essentially materialistic world, in which man has become a law unto himself, interpreting value and its meaning quantitatively, rather than qualitatively?

Being reminded of the interdependency between values and social conditions, we were all required to examine our own position. The notion of 'personal growth' is a fine one, but how do we blend that with the realistic demands that the politics of ecology place upon us?

The speaker stressed two particular problems. The first was to understand and recognise the importance of the past without becoming nostalgically dependent upon it. The 'back to nature', 'joys of subsistence' image was damaging, and to move away from that required a balanced view of such things as technology, rather than turning ourselves into latter-day Luddites! There is plenty to move forward to, without having to move back anywhere!

Secondly, our visionary, utopian element has to be handled with caution. Impractical panaceas allow us to be dismissed with contemptuous ease, and we would do well to bear in mind the ridicule levelled at the anarchist movement on account of its previous track record. We share many ideals with them: a decentralised society, balanced communities, face to face democracy, self-sufficiency, self-reliance - yet what are such ideals worth if they can only be projected through a haze of utopian rhetoric?

In an unchanging, often unthinking, world, the speaker questioned the likely impact of our call for a more participatory form of democracy. Do people really want to take back control of their own lives? There is good evidence that such a notion is deeply unsettling to many, and we should recognise that even the idea of democracy (real democracy, not the emasculated version we temporarily abide by) needs to be re-interpreted, presented again as the prerequisite for any dignified existence.

To us, the critical nature of the ecology movement is self-apparent - without it, we move no more. For that reason we stress the need for diversity and decentralised democracy. Yet it is an anxious age 'all in pieces, all coherence gone', and it will serve little purpose us becoming just another reflection of this debilitating incoherence. Diversity is fine, but subsumed within the unifying need to propose new political and spiritual priorities.

Such was Jonathon's conclusion - on the surface just another appeal for middle of the road compromise, yet actually asking much more of us. For we are not just members of the Ecology Party, we are a part of a broader ecology movement, and as such we are obligated to think fast and furiously about the values and philosophy that determine the long-term course of any such movement