

Green Politics and the Left



December 2015



Green House is a think tank founded in 2011. It aims to lead the development of green thinking in the UK.

Politics, they say, is the art of the possible. But the possible is not fixed. What we believe is possible depends on our knowledge and beliefs about the world. Ideas can change the world, and Green House is about challenging the ideas that have created the world we live in now, and offering positive alternatives.

The problems we face are systemic, and so the changes we need to make are complex and interconnected. Many of the critical analyses and policy prescriptions that will be part of the new paradigm are already out there. Our aim is to communicate them more clearly, and more widely.

We will publish a series of reports and briefings on different subjects. We do not intend to have a party line, but rather to stimulate debate and discussion.

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Front cover image

The **sprig of rosemary** is an image created by Ross Birrell to celebrate the Putney Debates held in London in 1647. It was commissioned by the UK Parliament to celebrate one of the key moments in British democratic history. The Levellers placed a sprig of rosemary in their caps to identify one another. The artist also says the image speaks to the notion of the '[democracy yet to come](#)'. Published under the Open Parliament Licence v3.0.

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Dedication

This publication is dedicated to the memory of Michael Meacher MP. He was a conscientious, thoughtful and committed parliamentarian who remained true to his radical principles even in ministerial office. His help and counsel as a member of Green House's Advisory Group will be sorely missed.

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Introduction

The nineteenth century Chancellor of Imperial Germany, Count Otto von Bismarck, suggested that 'politics is the art of the possible, the attainable - the art of the next best'. For Greens today, politics has to be more than 'the next best'. Clearly, political goals have to be attainable but what is often considered attainable, or possible, has for the last thirty or so years certainly not been either of the best or even the next best. The election of Jeremy Corbyn to the leadership of the labour party is a genuinely significant event. The Labour Party has never had a leader who has galvanized 'the Left' and challenged the cosy accommodations of the Labour establishment in the way he has. As Glen O'Hara has written in the *New Statesman*, he is a leader 'without historical precedent'. But his challenge extends beyond Labour to all those political groups, organizations and parties that oppose continuing inequality, climate change and the dominance of 'Capital'. For those of us who are Greens he offers an opportunity - an opportunity to articulate and promote a progressive politics that is distinctly different from that of a Corbynite Labour Party and one which is more suited to successfully addressing the complex and interconnected problems of a 21st century post capitalist future.

The ravages of neoliberalism and the social, economic and cultural vandalism that has been experienced all over world since the financial crash of 2007-2008 has devastated many people's lives while a bunker mentality has hardened among those political and economic elites who believe any change of political course, any change to what is possible or attainable, is a dangerous challenge to the system that has served them so well and needs to be crushed. The cost of neoliberalism has been immense: democratic processes have been emasculated, environmental degradation has deepened and public disgust at corporate greed has become even more widespread. However, these elites have engaged in cynical ideological and political manoeuvring in order to further entrench their power and hegemony. As the title of Philip Mirowski intriguing study of the financial meltdown indicates, their watchword is *Never Let a Good Crisis Go to Waste* (Verso, 2013).

Nevertheless, the crisis has also seen the reemergence of an oppositional politics that looks beyond protesting and surviving to practically and ideologically fashioning an alternative political and economic system to the one that has so completely failed. For this new radical politics, 'the art of the next best' is quite simply not good enough. No point tinkering with a system that cannot be reformed or redeemed. No point hankering after the golden past of social democracy that was never actually that golden or a state socialism that betrayed the hopes and dreams of so many. No point chanting 'growth, growth and more growth' to ward off future economic evils.

No point shying away from the knee-jerk accusations of the 'impossibilism' of a ecologically conscious and socially just politics because what we have today is the true impossibilism ... and impossibilism writ large. Quite simply, capitalist business-as-usual isn't working and it's time to do something about it. We must not let the crisis go to waste. We need to make serious economic and ecologically systemic changes so that such a crisis cannot occur again. Indeed, we must go further. We must transform the way we live our lives, work, create wealth and relate to one another. We must create another world.

In his lecture, 'How we Live and How we Might Live', the nineteenth century libertarian socialist, artist and poet William Morris articulated four claims to a decent life: a healthy body; an active mind in sympathy with the past, the present and the future; an occupation for a healthy body and an active mind; and finally, a beautiful world to live in. This is a much better basis for understanding and creating a twenty first century progressive politics than that of the art of the possible which simply means more of the same, more austerity, more authoritarianism, more inequality, more environmental destruction.

The independent think tank Green House wants the world to change and is helping to change it by promoting ideas and policies that will create a decent life, invigorate genuine public debate and help to do politics differently. The success of the SNP, the election of Jeremy Corbyn to the leadership of the Labour Party, and the growing support for the Green Party are testimony to this general desire for real change, for a different world, for a world which is now waiting to be born. The seven contributions to this short book explore the dynamics of why such a change is necessary, what it should be and how it can and hopefully will come about. Ecologism, Socialism, Democracy and Republicanism are all parts of this mix. Not everyone will agree with the authors here but democracy, and especially a Green democracy, is about deliberation, participation and informed debate. Let the debate begin. Please make your contribution by going to [Green House's comments page](#).

The Forward March of the Greens Halted?: A Green response to the rise of Jeremy Corbyn

Rupert Read

The unlikely rise of Jeremy Corbyn to the leadership of Labour, and with a stunning majority to boot, is an exciting and heartening event for anyone who wants to see a fairer Britain and a more meaningful political debate. That means: it is heartening not just for Labour-supporters. Most of us in the Green Party, in the g/Green movement, and 'progressives' more generally are delighted by this turns of events, too.

Many congratulations to Corbyn — and to Labour, for finding their soul again.

Why has Jeremy Corbyn proven so extraordinarily popular as an insurgent figure in Labour? I think that a large part of the answer can be put negatively: for years - for a generation - Labour activists have had little to enthuse them in their leaders. They have been uninspired by control-freakery, by an embrace of neoliberalism, by a perceived lack of authenticity. Along comes Corbyn - the real deal. A humble man who has passionate beliefs and doesn't compromise them. To Labour, to many in the country, it's a revelation!

But it's nothing new to those of us who belong to the Green Party. We are inspired in this way every day by our top Parliamentary figures...

Take Caroline Lucas, a one-woman Opposition who puts Labour in the shade, by far the most active Parliamentarian in the country, and repeatedly the winner of awards for her Parliamentary activism, plus she takes non-violent direct action and goes to court and wins too! Or Jenny Jones, our indefatigable one-woman representation in the House of Lords. Or Molly Scott Cato, our inspiring new MEP. Or Cllr Sian Berry, our exciting London Mayoral candidate...

My point is: being represented by inspiring, authentic, brilliant elected figures is simply what we expect, in the Green Party. It has become such a rarity in Labour, since the vanishing of the Tony Benns of this world, that Corbyn appears to Labourites a startling revelation. But he's just 'business-as-usual' (albeit in a good way), from the perspective of Greens.

As I shall detail below: He's business-as-usual, too (and not in such a good way), in terms of the hegemonic 'wisdom' (sic.) across the 'grey' parties, that, in spite of our breaching planetary limits, we have to go on growing the economy... Corbyn places increased economic growth front and centre in his plans for Labour policy and Britain.

Here's an example: airport-expansion. The one area of transport where it is widely accepted that decarbonization is not realistic, and we are just going to have to reduce it, if we are actually serious about our climate targets (and so about the survival of human civilization) is of course air travel. So this is a vital test-case, to determine whether one actually has meaningful environmental credentials. So, what is Corbyn's position on airport-expansion, and in particular on expansion of runway-provision in the London area, where the debate in Britain is focussed? The answer is that he wants to build [a new runway at Gatwick](#). So, on this litmus test, Corbyn fails. He has, one is driven reluctantly to conclude, no serious joined-up green perspective. His determination to 'grow' the economy means that, like it or not, he will willingly blow our targets for climate-safety out.

Nothing could be more out-of-date. Corbyn sometimes talks a good greenish talk on energy and climate, but none of that means a thing if you are still driving forward the engine that will sweep nature away and commodify ecology to death: growthism.

In this crucial regard, we in Green House naturally therefore have a very big reservation about Corbyn and McDonnell. Their answer to Osborne, their alternative to 'austerity', is: faster growth. But any speeding up of growth makes it ever harder for Britain to reduce its material throughput at the speed necessary to [prevent climate-catastrophe](#). In fact, being 'against austerity' is ambiguous as Sandy Irvine and I discussed in *The Ecologist*. There is one fundamental way in which being 'anti-austerity' is absolutely right. It is **dead wrong**, unjust and basically an economic failure even in its own terms. We Greens are firmly set against the [cruel regime of cuts](#). We are certainly 'anti-austerity' but more growth and faster-growth is not the answer to anything.

The present article addresses, in this context, how exactly those of a post-growth disposition, which is fundamental to Green House, should relate to the rise of Corbyn.

Politics is usually thought of as, in essence, a 'Right' v. 'Left' affair. What does this mean? Basically, it means capital vs. labour. There are however three big things wrong with this idea:

- 1 Capital v. Labour, Right v. Left, is, to be sure, an important political spectrum. On that spectrum, most g/Greens nowadays

tend to see ourselves as on the left. Corporations and the rich have gobbled up far too much wealth; the scales need a serious re-balancing. BUT, this spectrum is only one political spectrum. There are others that are also of [great significance](#) . An additional, neglected political spectrum that I'd particularly like to draw your attention to is: centralization v localization. On that spectrum, we Greens tend to find ourselves no more sympathetic to the 'left' than to the 'right'.

- 2 There is an even more fundamental problem with boiling politics down into a struggle of capital vs. labour. It leaves out something more basic, on which both of these 'factors of production' depend: land. The Earth. Ecology. That is ultimately why the ideology of choice for the Green Party is not socialism, nor conservatism, nor liberalism. It is [ecologism](#). Only when ecology is placed front and centre is there a politics fit for the 21st century, the century in which the prime question becomes how we will reconcile ourselves to the planetary limits that as a species [we are breaching](#). And this means that the most fundamental political spectrum of all now is: grey vs green. Growthist, non-ecological thinking (sic.), vs. the post-growth ecologist alternative...
- 3 The struggle between right and left is a struggle over how much of the spoils of economic growth should accrue to capital and how much to labour. Seen from the Left, it is (to be blunt) the effort of labour to get itself a larger chunk of what capitalists will accumulate and hoard for themselves if given half a chance. Karl Polanyi, in his important work *The Great Transformation*, shows however that we cannot understand our world adequately, let alone build a better one, if we allow labour thus to be commodified. The pursuit of a higher price for one's labour concedes that labour is a commodity. But what Polanyi argued so brilliantly is that labour, money and land are all of them [fictitious commodities](#). They are not real commodities: for real commodities respond to the laws of supply and demand. Real commodities are arguably [not too horribly deformed](#) by being treated as commodities. Land, labour-power and money by contrast are fundamentally not things suitable for such commodification: they are life itself. 'They' are us. We need to understand that there are [nothing but fictitious commodities](#). If we can do that we can move beyond market compartmentalization altogether, and put commodification into reverse

Let me expand on this third point, by going briefly through the cases of land, labour and money in policy-terms, from a Green point of view.

The Green Party favours the introduction of a **Land-Value Tax (LVT)**. **LVT** is designed to realize the truth that land is not a genuine commodity. LVT would deal with the absurd 'propertarian' culture of contemporary Britain - and our dangerous levels of financial speculation in land - by returning to the public the escalation of land-value that is not brought about by any action of the owner of that land, but rather by other changes in society, often due to public investment (e.g. by the opening of a new tube station).

The Green Party advocates a **Citizens Income (CI)**. Now, provided that **CI** is set at a sufficiently-decent level so that the poorest do not lose out - and (contrary to misinformed media reports during the last General Election campaign) the Green Party would ensure that this is so - this revolutionary policy-instrument points the way toward a less overworked 'leisure society'. It abolishes wage-slavery, as well as the poverty- and unemployment- traps. It provides a permanent safety net for all, including the 'precarariat'. A Citizens Income is likely furthermore to become even more necessary than it already is as we enter a future in which there is a greater drive for automation - and thus less and less work to go around. While Labour pins its hopes on the 'Living Wage', a labourist idea that continues to treat labour as a commodity (and simply seeks for it a better price), the visionary Green solution that is **CI** points toward a future in which we are treated by the state and indeed by employers more as citizens than as labourers. And in which we can realize the leisure society.

The financial crisis of 2007 to the present day has brought rudely to public attention the absurdity of a monetary system that allows money to be **created privately as debt**, and that treats money as a commodity to be produced and traded like any other (and that is what the modern 'financialization' that landed us in the crisis was: an attempt to make oodles of money simply off money, to treat money as itself the ultimate thing to buy and sell, to 'make'). Money is necessary in a complex large-scale society: it is the means by which we conduct our economic affairs. **Money is a 'commons'**: its creation should be for public benefit, both in terms of its volume and in terms of the profit (the '**seignourage**') it yields. That is why Greens believe in **Monetary Reform (MR)**: the state (more accurately, the public, nationally and also locally) taking back (and taking away from the commercial banks) the power to create money as well as the **profit from its creation**.

When one understands these three points, one can understand how Greens tend to see the rise of Corbyn. Corbynmania represents a revolt against the machine-politics and hollowing-out of Labour, against the inauthenticity of what that Party has become. In that sense, it is hugely welcome. Like the 'Green Surge', it is a demonstration of the hunger at this time for truth, **for a big change in politics-as-usual**, for radical solutions to the problems that face us all. Furthermore, in terms of the

conventional 'left v. right' political spectrum, most Greens welcome a turn to the Left, for the reasons I gave under (1), above. We too want to see a joined-up railway system back in public hands; an end to the [cruel austerity cuts](#), a restoration of the kinds of rates of tax on the rich that we had in the 80s (if income tax at 60% for those on the highest incomes was not too high for Thatcher, then for goodness sake it shouldn't be too high for Britain today, [and more besides](#)).

BUT in terms of the other, neglected political spectrums (such as centralization vs localization); in terms of putting ecology front and centre; in terms of dropping the fantasy of [endless economic growth](#) and replacing it with the sanity of [one-planet living](#) ... in all these terms, Corbyn is not Green. In his out-of-date espousal of [economic growth](#), of [coal-mining](#) when what we have to do with most fossil fuel is to [#leaveitintheground](#), and simply in his labourism. He is Labour: and that's just fine; indeed, that's as it should be...

For it's great to see the Labour Party crown as its new leader someone who is actually Labour. Actually Left. It makes things in British politics rather clearer than they have been ever since the arrival of 'New Labour' on the scene. It also makes it simpler to see where the Greens stand:

- 1 We are broadly 'Left' (and thus more sympathetic with Corbyn than with his lacklustre leadership rivals) BUT we are also determinedly and radically decentralist, in favour of a long-term project of economic and [political relocation](#).
- 2 We think it the merest sanity to take the deepest possible care of our one and only planetary home, the Earth, and [we regard this requirement](#) as more basic even than the 'left vs right' fight. There can be no social justice without a sound foundation to our collective life, a foundation in ecology.
- 3 Given this, then continued economic growth at this time is simply irresponsible, and [is neither desirable](#) nor in any case [necessary](#). Rather than trying to commodify ever more of our world - whether it be ecology, human activity or finance that is being commodified - we badly need to supersede the taking of land, labour and finance as commodities:
 - (i) **LVT** is a key instrument to this end, so far as land is concerned: it profoundly disincentivises the commodification of land.
 - (ii) **CI**, unlike the Minimum Wage or even the Living Wage, fundamentally de-commodifies human 'labour'

- (iii) **MR** understands (and creates) money correctly as a commons, not as a commodity that private banks can create and do as they please with.

These three signature Green policies are key - in fact, absolutely central - examples of what our time needs. They are Green policies; not Labour policies, not even Corbyn policies. Where Corbyn edges towards them (e.g. in his 'People's QE' policy, in relation to money), that is welcome: but ultimately there needs to be a strong voice in British politics that is ecologicistic. That backs policies such as these because of a joined-up ecologicist vision, not a productivist socialist vision with green edges.

In 1978, Eric Hobsbawm famously penned his prophetic pamphlet, '[The forward march of Labour halted?](#)'. Is the Green Party's progress now in danger of being halted, ironically, by the accession to the Labour leadership of a man who Hobsbawm would have been thrilled to see take the reins of that Party? If all that British politics were was a battle of 'left vs right', then perhaps we would be in danger of this. But I have set out here why politics, and the Green Party, are SO much more than that: There is more to politics than left and right. There's also green and grey. And also decentralist and centralist. There's a set of political spectrums; and only on one of them are g/Greens and Corbyn close to one another. So long as we are and remain in this sense Greens, I don't see the (splendid, extraordinary) rise of Jeremy Corbyn stopping us.

With ecological crisis gradually pressing in upon us all ever-tighter, it is - both sad and happy to say - hard to see the forward march of the Green Party being halted. For Corbyn doesn't as yet show signs of breaking with the Labour status quo on the great issue of our time: ecology.

And what about on political pluralism: another great test of whether the new Labour leader is actually going to break with tradition. Is Corbyn going to go for PR? Is he really going to contemplate pacts with other Parties, such as Greens and Nats, as Caroline Lucas and myself [have been urging](#)? His background, coming as he does from the 'hard Left', doesn't encourage complete optimism on that front... but on the other hand Corbyn is promising to bring greater democracy to the Labour Party, and he seems authentic about allowing others to share his power: so might this generosity extend beyond the boundary of the Labour tribe too? Is he really going to be able to tame the tribal instincts of many in 'Old Labour' who feel that their moment has now come? Can he break out to really feed the kind of pluralist politics which Green House advocates? Green House think the time is ripe for 'progressives' in this country to think together about how to supplant

the hegemony of neoliberalism: will Corbyn be willing to think outside the Labour box in this way?

These are the kinds of questions that now come to the fore.

Can Corbyn Avoid a Return to the Eighties?

Victor Anderson

The Corbyn phenomenon both excites and worries me. Excites me because it marks the public return of the Labour Left after a long period in which it has been effectively silenced. This means that issues which had been taken off the mainstream political agenda by Thatcherism and Blairism are now firmly back: above all, the UK's extreme social injustice and economic inequality. And Corbyn is also exciting because his leadership campaign enthused many radical people who have been outside of party politics, providing a focus for their efforts which is more solid than one-off single-issue demonstrations and petition-signing.

At the same time, the rise of 'Corbynism' worries me. I was a member of the Labour Party for most of the 1980s, and what is happening now gives me the feeling 'I've seen this film before'. The 80s was the time when Thatcherism reigned supreme, largely because Labour was bitterly internally divided. Corbyn faces now not only a hostile press and Tory Party, but also the hostility of most Labour MPs. The success of his political project depends entirely on this **not** being a return to the 80s.

How can it be avoided, when there are so many parallels? My hopes are not so much with the Labour Left part of Corbyn's movement but with the independent radicals who have joined him – in a situation, compared to the early 80s, where the Greens provide a far stronger challenge and with Trotskyism far weaker than it was then. So I want to offer the Corbynistas some constructive suggestions, and then to say what I think the implications are for green politics.

The Corbynistas should reject an overemphasis on the centralised state. The Corbyn programme is ambiguous on this question, but it is noticeable that its many critics have nevertheless practically all sought to paint him as being about traditional centralised state socialism. This is not an attractive proposition: it is essential to make clear that when Corbyn talks about public ownership, it is of a far more decentralised and democratic kind than nationalisation has generally been in the past. Labour needs to renew its traditions of municipal and co-operative socialism. This issue has already been considered, for example, by Compass and other groups which have brought out proposals for the future of the railways ('[All on Board](#)', 2014).

Corbynistas should work cross-party. The Bennite movement of the early 80s put far too much emphasis on winning battles inside the

structures of the Labour Party – forgetting that they weren't taking people outside the party with them. That internal focus also created a politics of 'caucuses within caucuses', in which small well-organised (often Trotskyist) groups tried to dominate and impose their slogans, policies, and candidates. Being cross-party requires a politics which is far more open, involving, and creative. This is much more the natural politics of the independent radicals who have joined Corbyn, who are far more familiar with Facebook and Twitter than with Trotsky's Transitional Programme. Working on a much more open and cross-party basis in turn has to imply support for constitutional reform, including some form of proportional representation for local councils and the House of Commons.

Corbynism should have a realistic but big strategic focus: the defeat of neoliberalism. There is little sign that capitalism is about to collapse, and currently little clarity about what would replace it if it did. It is misleading, and leading people into pretty certain defeat, to talk about the overthrow of capitalism in the next few decades, and at the same time it is also inadequate to think solely in party terms, as though the defeat of the Tories at the next election would be a sufficient change. There is, however, an ambitious and radical, but achievable, long-run objective which falls short of overthrowing capitalism but goes beyond beating the Tories – the defeat of the neoliberal version of capitalism. This would gather far more support than an all-out assault on capitalism would, partly because large sections of business also have an interest in seeing a more regulated and stable set-up. Of course this couldn't possibly be achieved simply within the UK on its own, but the UK could play a useful part in this major transition.

I have discussed this in more detail in *The Fall of Neoliberalism* below.

Corbynism needs to communicate. Jeremy Corbyn clearly and rightly hates most of the British press. This is perfectly understandable, particularly given their ridiculous coverage of news about him, with even *The Times* getting into the gutter with the *Mail* and *Sun*. However that makes the need to communicate his ideas and values all the stronger. Two early steps he has taken as leader do not inspire confidence. The appointment of Seamus Milne, who has argued in his columns in 'The Guardian' for a form of politics which is both authoritarian and (in foreign policy) naive, as Director of Strategy and Communications, is a bad sign. So is Corbyn's famous failure to sing the National Anthem. Personally I find its words offensive – but I'm not trying to become Prime Minister. Jeremy Corbyn is.

Corbynism needs the challenge of a strong green movement. The Corbyn movement's politics are still fluid and undefined, and of course a broad diverse base of support was essential to get him his 60% of the vote in the Labour leadership contest. However it is fair to say that a large part of Corbynista politics has a traditional Labour

emphasis on economic growth to solve problems including poverty, unemployment, and the state of the public services. This is very problematic because increasingly in practice the proceeds of growth are just going to those at the top of the income and wealth scale, and the costs of growth are becoming increasingly more widespread. The success of Corbynism in responding to the current situation - and not simply repeating the slogans of the early 80s or 1945 or 1917 - depends on it being challenged by, and really listening to, a strong green movement and its criticisms of 'growthism'.

What does all this imply for the Green Party? The Green Party needs a balance between applauding some aspects of Corbynism, such as its attack on economic injustice (and it has clearly done this), and on the other hand not getting so close to Corbyn that it loses a sense of its own identity and purpose, and as a result fails to prioritise ecological issues and to attract the support of those environmentalist and ex-Liberal voters who do not identify themselves with 'the Left'. Greens need a balance between working on a cross-party basis on some issues, especially on constitutional reform - but at the same time maintaining our own independent stance.

Where will all this lead? My pessimistic guess is that Corbynism is probably not going to succeed. The forces against it, including in the media and the Parliamentary Labour Party, as well as of course in the financial markets and amongst big business, are enormously powerful and will fight to maintain their positions. The Corbynistas will struggle even just to get a hearing for their arguments. There is likely to be a strong self-defeating tendency to focus excessively within the structures of the Labour Party and also on demonstrations and in-group social media activities which preach to the converted and generally don't do much to persuade the general public. Opposition from Labour MPs will make it attractive to try for their deselection and replacement, but this will create a public impression of a divided party unfit to govern. The most likely consequence eventually would be a fall in Labour's opinion poll ratings, a coup within the Labour Party, and a restored middle-of-the-road Labour Party, probably this time more Blue Labour than Blairite. For details of Blue Labour see Ian Geary's and Adrian Pabst's *Blue Labour: forging a new politics* (I B Taurus, 2015).

But none of that is inevitable. The success of Corbynism is going to depend on developing a strategy and movement to overcome these problems and avoid a return to the eighties. And that depends on being willing to open out, work cross-party, back constitutional reform, and take notice of what is being said by the ever-more-necessary green movement. For Greens, the situation also requires willingness to work cross-party. But above all it means continuing to speak up on the key ecological and other issues the Corbyn movement left to itself will ignore or play down.

Democratizing the Media

John Blewitt¹

The three political surges that have recently changed the nature of British politics have one common factor. They have all been driven, in large part, by young people who, disaffected with the flatulent complacency of professional politicians and their media machines, have decided to do something about it². They have renewed politics by bringing it onto the streets, by broadening discussion and debate, and by using as their principal platform alternative digital media environments that rarely engage with the corporate mainstream except in a most critical manner.

A number of commentators have noted how the rabid attacks on Jeremy Corbyn and his supporters indicate that, as a force for political freedom and democracy, most of Britain's established press and broadcasting media has little to offer. The editors of the independent media site [Media Lens](#) has called the attacks on Corbyn 'near fascist' and most recently in an article in the *London Review Books*, '[Corbyn in the Media](#)', Paul Myerscough concisely articulated the disappointment of many readers with the hostile coverage of the Corbyn campaign and his subsequent leadership in *The Guardian* and *The Observer*. This surprised some people but the surprise is possibly misplaced. The Guardian's independence from corporate ownership has enabled it to publish modest critical pieces of investigative journalism, most notably regarding the disclosures of Edward Snowden and the Wikileaks controversies which included alarming revelations about corporate participation (Google, Microsoft, Apple, YouTube, Skype, Facebook and Yahoo) in America's covert online surveillance system, PRISM. But it is a title still predominantly dependent financially on corporate advertising and the political favours of Britain's professional political elites. Its radical stature is only secure if it stays firmly enfolded within, what Owen Jones discusses in his book, *The Establishment* (Allen Lane, 2014). It is, to quote Lewis Carroll via the filmmaker Chris Marker, basically 'a grin without a cat' - a mere simulacra of radicalism without the substance behind it.

However, *The Guardian* is decreasing in importance as is the rest of the fourth estate. Newspaper circulations have been in decline now for many years with *The Independent* and *The Guardian* barely able to keep their financial heads above water. Even *The Daily Mail* and *The Sun* have seen a significant declines from a daily circulation of respectively 2,353,915 and 3,557,336 in January 2000 to 1,609,003 and 1,800,233 in September 2015³. *The Daily Telegraph* has seen sales reduce by more than half in the same period from just over one

million in 2000 to 480,873 fifteen years later. *The Guardian* mirrors this decline selling a daily average of 401,560 copies in January 2000 and 166,977 in September 2015 with *The Independent* registering a relentless decline from 222,106 in 2000 to 58,002 in September 2015 although the sale of 'I', or *Independent-lite*, was much larger at 277,498 but now is in steady decline. Of course, if views of newspaper websites are taken into account then some editors can still assure themselves that their titles are still worthy of the paper they are printed on. According to an article in [MediaWeek](#) by Arif Durrani, *The Daily Mail* (16%) and *The Guardian* (14%) have the highest online readerships.

It is clear though, as Myerscough argues, that the press still has an important agenda setting role and still help shape our dominant political culture and in this, the BBC has an important complementary and reinforcing function. Many of its top journalists and presenters share the value set of many of their colleagues in the print media - Andrew Neil is at heart still basically a Murdoch hit man and the BBC's **Newsnight** presenter and former economics editor, Evan Davis, keeps very quiet about his past involvement with the Institute of Fiscal Studies when it devised Mrs Thatcher's infamous poll tax. The biggest beast of them all, Jeremy Paxman has now left the Beeb to breathe the freer air of the corporate owned media and was 'outed' as a potential Conservative Party candidate for the London Mayoralty. Recent studies by Cardiff University also show how the BBC journalists consistently invite authorities from the political Right to comment on events but these studies actually reveal nothing new. **The Glasgow Media Studies Group** published a considerable amount of research in the 1970s and 1980s - *Bad News, More Bad News*, etc. - documenting the BBC's systemic bias against the labour movement and virtually anything beyond a narrow centre right consensus. Indeed, this establishment bias is in the BBC's DNA. It defines the 'due impartiality' its news and current affairs coverage has to, by law, articulate. Its ideological path was set ninety years during the General Strike of 1926 when John Reith stated in a memo:

since the BBC was a national institution, and since the Government in this crisis was acting for the people, apart from any Emergency Powers or clause in our Licence, the BBC was for the government in the crisis too.

Some years later, another BBC Director General, Sir Charles Curran, stated clearly that the BBC was indeed biased - biased 'in favour of Parliamentary democracy'. This bias helps explain the corporation's status as a (still) revered national institution as well as its craven political nature. Today's BBC's executives, senior managers and trustees' frequently express fears that the corporation could be broken up or its licence fee cut further or perhaps even abolished. Maybe this wouldn't be such a bad thing? There is, after all, already a high level

revolving door linking the private corporate world with the public BBC. In an article posted on the independent media site **Open Democracy** at the time of the scandal over expenses and shamelessly high redundancy packages for top BBC staff, Dan Hind noted that a number of trustees had strong links [with the financial sector](#), others sat on the board of BP, were closely associated with EDF, Northern Ireland Electricity and the private security industry. Far from being the fount of 'objectivity, experience and expertise' required to oversee a genuine public broadcaster the entrepreneurs, bankers and corporate executives on the BBC board of trustees simply brought to it the commercial values and political perspectives of free market neo-liberals.

Democracy's needs

Political democracy requires a free, open and accessible media. Freedom of speech and assembly are important liberal freedoms but Britain's press and broadcasting media are not free - are not free from corporate economic power, ideological pressure from established political and corporate elites and are consequently not free to express a wide variety of views, values, opinions and ideas essential to the maintenance and enhancement of a healthy democracy. This goes beyond the cheap sensationalism that was at the root of the phone hacking scandal and the concerns of the Leveson Inquiry and even the rather inadequate coverage of the Green Party in the 2014 European Election which stimulated a **38Degrees** petition that garnered nearly over 87,000 signatures. It also goes way beyond the Party's questionable coverage during the 2015 General Election, that veered from the curious to the condescending to the mocking. Undoubtedly, the Greens' own unsatisfactory media operation and presentation skills contributed to the Party's steady loss of support among the wider electorate from 11% in January to 3.8% in May. Nevertheless, many of the Green Party's policies remained quite popular with the electorate. Its mock boy band election video notched up nearly a million hits on YouTube, nearly matching its eventual vote on 7th May, and its use of digital posters was more successful than that of any of the major parties. It appears that the majority of those making up the three recent political surges (SNP, Green, Corbyn) are relatively immune - rather than inured like the survivors from an older radical generation - to the ravings of *The Daily Mail*, *The Telegraph* or the you-know-it-makes-sense hypocrisy of *The Guardian's* Blairite commentators or the BBC. The young are the least likely to read a newspaper, or even know what one is, let alone listen to Radio Four's **Today** programme or watch the **News at Ten** or **Dispatches** on Channel Four. [The average age](#) of a *Telegraph* reader is 61, a *Mail* reader 58, a *Guardian* reader 45 and an *Independent* reader 43 with the *I* clocking in with an average reader age of 50. Audiences of BBC One, BBC Two, ITV and BBC News, as

Ofcom media surveys have revealed, tend to be older than average and, according to the BBC's own qualitative surveys the majority tend to be quite satisfied with the coverage and reporting they watch. This demographic is more likely to vote than the younger demographic and more likely to vote Conservative than Green or Labour.

However, the mediascape is exceptionally diverse, fragmented and fractured with almost a countless number of digital and TV channels some of which are online only with one or two predominantly orientated towards news and current affairs and certainly **Russia Today (RT)** and **Al Jazeera** (English) operate according to rather different values to the BBC, Channel Four and ITN. Interestingly, [RT's largest European audience](#) is in the UK with 120,000 viewers in 2013 and around 1.4m subscribers to its YouTube channel although only 1% of these viewers tend to watch the political videos. By contrast the Al Jazeera English channel had 305,000 UK viewers in the second quarter of 2015 ([BARB](#)). Younger people tend to be heavy users of social media and many of those interested in politics and alternative democratic practices go to independent news sites such as [Counterpunch](#), [Media Lens](#), [News Hub](#), [Open Democracy](#), [Huffington Post](#), [Corporate Watch](#) and the websites of campaigning NGOs. The Right have their own heavy online presence too comprising of numerous well funded think tanks, social media networks, blog and news sites. [Guido Fawkes](#) is probably the most well known. In addition, there have been many warnings about the dangers of seeing the Internet generally, and social media in particular, as a saviour of freedom and democracy. Critical 'new' media theorists have shown that where social media is concerned much of our usage, our immaterial digital labour, turns us into marketized commodities. If you are not paying for something you are undoubtedly a product.

Social media commoditizes its audiences delivering its prepackaged users to advertisers and other commercial organizations. Social media usage also tends to be tribal with like minded people attracting other like minded people. Governments and corporations monitor your every click, every purchase, every tweet and as Lawrence Lessig wrote in *The Future of Ideas: the fate of the commons in a connected world* (Vintage, 2002) what is special about the Internet is the way it mixes freedom with control at different layers with 'code' enabling or restricting the things we think of as human rights - speech, privacy, the rights of access. Thus, the digital divide is not just about skills, access, the ability or willingness to pay but is profoundly political. It is about whether corporations will allow public bodies, groups and individuals, whose role and purpose is not defined by private profit, to make available digital content to everyone. Access to democracy, to learning, to political and other debates, to information ecologies, to urban sociality, can no longer be compartmentalized into the digital and physical. The key concern is whether this access to learning,

democracy, sociality, and so on, is open to further privatization, whether public space will disappear completely and whether a marketized economy will soon create a fully marketized society and politics. If the public sphere is further privatized it will cease to be public in any meaningful sense. Instead, it becomes, to use Althusser's formulation, 'an ideological state apparatus' where the distinction between that state and the corporate world is increasingly difficult to find. Green House recognizes the need for change, reform, and innovation in our current mediascape both at a national and transnational European level. It is an essential democratic need and requirement. So, what is to be done?

Green voices in the media

The first issue that needs to be addressed is the perennial problem all non establishment groups have faced for decades; namely, how to frame an argument so as to have a presence in the mainstream media. Always difficult at the best of times because of the corporate ownership structure and concomitant conservative, sometimes reactionary, ideological proclivities of many newspapers and broadcast news operations, placing a piece in *The Times* or *The Guardian* or appearing on the BBC is still very important. Publishing in the mainstream signals that the writer and the issue has that elusive ability to be taken seriously and as such can lead to other journalistic opportunities and hopefully wide reader engagement.

The second major issue relates to the value, reach and growing significance of what until recently has been termed 'alternative media' - that is, digital independent news centres, online journals and discussion forums, social media sites, internet radio, still and moving image archives, repositories and 'TV' channels. Although sometimes easier to publish in these or undertake work for the parent bodies, often NGOs or campaign groups who run them, earning a living as an independent green or radical journalist is desperately hard. Although the editorial values informing these sites may be more sympathetic and fully focused on initiating radical debate, facilitating the free flow of information, motivating behavioural and policy changes, but there are other problems which may only be resolved as alternative media matures and perhaps becomes the new mainstream. For this to occur, a new business model supportive of green investigative journalism must be developed. Lessons can probably be learnt for organizations such as the [Bureau of Investigative Journalism](#) and [Exaro](#) which have developed viable funding streams, have seen their stories taken up particularly through social media and have made a political impact. Stories about corporate and political malfeasance have gone some way to counteract the power of the immensely influential [£2bn lobbying industry](#) although the latter's influence on government remains

exceptionally strong. Quality journalists, writers, bloggers and other communicators ought, and often need, to be paid for their work and are often not or paid a pittance.

A third issue relates to media form and reminds us of Marshal McLuhan's famous phrase - 'the medium is the message'. When arguments, messaging and commentary are increasingly dominated by the ephemeral albeit arresting cell phone images or a series of 140 character hash-tagged tweets, green journalists working predominantly in the alternative media environment still need a broadly engaged public that is both media literate and capable of engaging with long-form argument. Not everything can or should be reduced to an eight second soundbite or submerged in the compressed babble of the Twittersphere. In any case, the majority of the top Twitter trend topics are about entertainment and celebrities. Only 3% tend to be about politics and the majority of those retweeted are done by activists and journalists. It should be remembered too that Twitter is a profit orientated company and as such generally stratifies retweets, profiles and tends to favour its advertising and other commercial clients. As the media theorist Christian Fuchs writes, if Twitter is a public sphere then it is a manufactured and pseudo one. The cultural noise of our image soaked mediascape is sometimes deafening as this media space, to quote McLuhan again, is predominantly 'acoustic' i.e. it comes in and from all directions and where signifiers are increasingly emptied of meaning.

Green journalists need to know what, where and how to communicate their stories, to whom and in what form or forms. As the liberal philosopher John Dewey noted in his *The Public and its Problems* (Henry Holt & Co, 1927) communication is an art: 'the function of art has always been to break through the crust of conventionalized and routine consciousness' (p.183). This professional challenge is further amplified when the issues discussed cut across national, linguistic and cultural boundaries which is evidently the case with social and environmental justice, political freedom, climate change, economic austerity, poverty and the iniquities of corporate power. Communicating actively and effectively across frontiers is essential if a national and indeed trans-European public sphere and democratically informed civil society are to emerge in any meaningful sense. There are positive signs that this is indeed developing. The *Green European Journal* and *Ecosprinter* are a start and the campaigns against TTIP have stimulated the growth of a digitally networked and relatively unified set of campaign groups and issue publics. The answers and responses to these challenges will be found both in the logic and the practice of not only what green journalists do but also in how the rest of us content users and producers can become truly engaged citizens interested and active in the political realm. There have already been moments when such political engagement has become highly significant - the 'Arab

Spring', the Greek austerity/debt crisis, the Occupy movement, the UK General Election - but these moments must be followed by many others if a new democratic media culture and public sphere is to develop.

Reform and revolution

There are a number of media reforms that are needed to create a genuine media plurality in the UK. These could include:

- 1 The creation of a [public digital space](#) or commons subsuming that of the BBC and including those produced by libraries, museum and other institutions which must be, as Tony Ageh has argued, 'equally accessible by everyone, universally equivalent and unconditional. It must be dialogic, open and protective of the rights of all participants and contributors. It must be available at all times and in all locations, it must expect contributions from every member of our society and it must respect privacy. It must operate only in the best interests of the people that it serves; absent of overtly political or commercial interests. And it must endure'.
- 2 A system of public commissioning of independent investigative journalism funded from tax revenues, industry levies and a reformed licence fee on established corporate media companies. Dan Hind, author of *The Return of the Public* (Verso, 2010), argues that such a scheme could transform the mediascape by engaging the public directly in the commissioning of investigative journalism as well as supporting forms of 'citizen journalism' which produce some remarkable stories but because of their politically sensitive nature may fail to get the wide audience they deserve⁴. Hind writes, 'the aim of a revived politics is [to make power permeable to truth](#). (...) Once we create the means to connect free inquiry with social engagement - once we open up the possibility of aligning general opinion with an accurate account of the world - then the possibilities multiply'.
- 3 The encouragement and support of local community media provision to enhance local democracy and media plurality geographically as well as politically. **The Media Trust's** and the **Community Channel's Do Something Brilliant Campaign** has facilitated the development of a range of community voices encouraging diversity and empowerment. Such projects need to be extended and developed further.

- 4 Ownership and control of national and local print media should be more tightly regulated by Ofcom and no company or individual should be allowed to own more than 20% of the commercial media market. Any publisher with more than a 15% market share should be subject to a public interest test which would include a critical approach to the potentially negative democratic impacts of cross media ownership.
- 5 The public's communication rights including access to information and services, privacy and freedom of information, should be protected from state and corporate control and surveillance. The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act should be replaced by a law that ensures that free expression categorically ruling out the blanket and now virtually routine blanket surveillance of British citizens. This should not be compromised by dubious claims of necessity and national security. As Tory Prime Minister William Pitt remarked, 'necessity is the plea for every infringement of human freedom. It is the argument of tyrants; it is the creed of slaves'.
- 6 Following the calls from the **Media Reform Coalition** there should be full transparency, in and clear restrictions on, the undue influence of the lobbying industry of Westminster and the devolved governments. The Coalition's [Manifesto for Media Reform](#) states,

Clandestine lobbying should then be outlawed and a fund established to allow civil society groups to carry out research in the public interest. There should be restrictions on the ways that politicians, former civil servants and media executives move effortlessly and influentially between different parts of the industry, making a complete mockery of the regulatory process.

Conclusion

If a progressive pluralist alliance, or counter-hegemonic bloc, of left leaning groups is going to renew British democracy and work towards creating a national as well as a trans European public sphere, it is essential to safeguard the digital commons and democratize the current mediascape. This must serve to undermine the residual ideological importance of the print dinosaurs of the Establishment's news industry, fundamentally reforming media law and regulation and emasculate the power of the corporate media. The three recent political surges, and especially the unlikely rise of Jeremy Corbyn to the leadership of the Labour Party, suggests that there is already an alternative and effective media sphere but it needs nurturing, developing and expanding. There seems to be a genuine popular

desire for not just a new style of doing politics but it will not occur without a free and vibrant public sphere, a politically and culturally diverse mediascape guaranteeing freedom of expression. A moment soon passes and entrenched habits and institutions often die hard. As the author of the recent Compass paper, [The Osborne Supremacy](#), Ken Spours, has written,

A major battleground will be how the new digital age can be increasingly occupied by an open, progressive, public and sharing logic that is currently dominated by transnational platform companies such as Uber, Google and Facebook.

Having said that, it is important to remember political activists are not the same as the 'ordinary voter'. A Facebook user is not the same as someone who regularly reads **Open Democracy**, **News Hub** or the *London Review of Books* - on or offline. There is a world to win certainly but given the doubts about whether the 2015 election was [the social media election](#) some expected it to be, the new world has probably not yet replaced the old. So, Greens and other progressives have two worlds to win and change - the media world and the political world. They need clear messages, arguments and explanations to communicate and they need to communicate to the whole citizenry, the 'silent majority', that is still largely uninterested in politics, and most probably, politically illiterate, ill informed and ignorant. [A survey](#) published in the '*I*' three months before the May General Election revealed that 57% of respondents did not know what a General Election is, 59% could not name the Prime Minister and 69% stated they had not interested in politics. As [Simon Kaye has written](#), this should come as no surprise and has been substantiated by a number of more rigorous academic studies. Political ignorance is a significant characteristic of most western electorates and the question inevitably arises as to the culpability, perhaps even complicity, of our commercialized media environment and our growing media use in this. Social media is essentially tribal. Ignorant voters can be easily be misled, may be impressive by factually incorrect assertions and they may rely on sources of political information that hardly bare scrutiny. Greens know this better than anyone. Political ignorance fuels political apathy and enables governments and corporations to circumscribe the democratic process. As John Dewey wrote, the answer to the problems of democracy is more democracy - responsive, direct and participatory. A truly free media operating in a vibrant but unified public sphere is key to making this happen.

Why Greens are Republicans

Anne Chapman⁵

My argument here is not that there is, or should be, some 'Green' version of the politics of the American Republican party, nor does it have anything to do with whether we should or should not have a monarchy, though I think it should be abolished for the sake of the Royal Family. Rather, I will argue that Green politics is essentially republican in that at its heart is a concern for the shared public world, the *res publica*.

The dominant discourses that inform public policy, liberalism and utilitarianism, are concerned with people: liberals are concerned about the rights and liberties of individual people, particularly with respect to the state (though in a perversion of liberal justifications for the autonomy of the individual, companies are treated in economic matters as if they were individual people); utilitarianism is about net benefits or costs to people - measured using a single metric, of welfare, or money - resulting from particular courses of action. The existence of a shared public world – a world that is created by humans, that structures our relationships, that in part makes us who we are - is not acknowledged by these theories. Although socialism recognises that humans are conditioned by social and economic relations, in practice the political left has primarily been concerned with the distribution of goods between people, and the relative powers of different classes in society, not with the public world that we all share.

Where Green politics differs from classical republicanism is the conception of the public realm it is concerned with. For Greens the essential shared public realm is the natural environment. The starting point of politics for Greens is that we are part of the earth and that our current way of life is disrupting the systems of the earth, despoiling nature, destroying other life on earth, and ultimately threatening the extinction of human life. For Greens activities of people which affect the environment, whether it is driving a car or heating your home, are therefore of public concern, they are no mere private matter, but the stuff of politics.

As the earth is shared between all humanity, Greens are essentially internationalists. This marks Greens out from conservatives: the latter are often, like Greens, concerned about their local environments and the protection and conservation of local places and preservation of local communities. However, for Greens this love of the local as it is can be over-ridden by the changes that need to be made to those local places for the sake of the global environment. This comes out most clearly in arguments over wind power: those against want to preserve

their local landscapes, those for think that the aesthetic impacts of wind turbines are a small price to pay to reduce our carbon emissions and hence our contribution to global warming and climate change, which in the long term is the greatest threat to those places. Or they may even love the sight of turbines on the hills, because they symbolise hope that we can switch to renewable energy and stop using fossil fuels, and thus change our ways to live in harmony with nature.

Greens' concern for the world means that technology is political, in a way that it is not for other political traditions. Technology is world building: it is how we make the material aspects of the world we inhabit as well as the resulting artefacts that are put to use. There are strands within socialism - such as the Guild Socialism of the early twentieth century - which have been critical of capitalist industrialisation and argued for control of industry by the workers, and in some cases a return to more artisanal methods of production. This strand is today best represented by the co-operative movement, but it has lost out in terms of influence to the trade union movement, with its calls for better wages and working conditions, but not actual control of industry by workers. Socialism generally has embraced industrialisation, as enabling material prosperity. The issue has been who owns and controls the machines, not the machines themselves, and there has been little awareness of the impacts of that material prosperity on the environment.

For Greens the critical thing about technology is that it mediates the impact our activities have on the earth. There is a clear consensus for and against particular technologies amongst Greens: anti nuclear, pro wind and solar; anti the car, pro the train and the bike; anti GM, pro organic agriculture. In other political parties there is generally no consensus view on these issues. Greens also emphasize that technology affects the nature and amount of work that needs to be done by people. The Green ideal is not for machines to do all the work, freeing humans from the need to labour, but for each person to have creative and rewarding work which makes a contribution to the common good, as part of a healthy, balanced life.

Green politics revives many of the themes of classical republicanism in its concern for individual liberty and the virtues of citizenship. The virtues applauded by Greens are, of course, shaped by their conception of the public sphere. The good Green citizen minimises their consumption of energy and resources: they recycle waste, ride a bike, eat organic and locally produced food; but they are also engaged in their local communities and politically active. The virtues of citizenship are not about patriotism, loyalty or respecting authority.

Republicanism shares with liberalism a concern for individual liberty, but that liberty is rather differently conceived: as non-domination rather than as non-interference; as having a status as an independent person

not subject to the arbitrary will of anyone else. It is not, as in liberalism, primarily a matter of being able to exercise one's individual rights and liberties without interference. One may have individual rights and liberties but not be a free, independent person if those rights and liberties may arbitrarily be taken away. Conversely, one's status as an independent person is not compromised by restrictions to one's particular rights and liberties if one has freely consented to those restrictions. Free, independent persons are citizens of the republic and together share responsibility for the public realm, there being no higher authority over them that bears this responsibility.

In classical republicanism only a small proportion of the population were considered to have the independence required to be citizens. The economic independence that went with the ownership of land was often a key criterion. Ownership of a certain amount of land is now untenable as a criterion for citizenship. Rather, we give political rights and responsibilities to those who have the capacity to reason and think independently and make decisions for themselves - so we do not give the vote to children.

Green politics values individual freedom and self expression. However, it recognises that individuals are part of society. Our ability to reason and think independently depends on others to develop and maintain it. We do not come into the world as independent, reasoning adults but as helpless infants, totally dependent on the care of others, and throughout our lives, during shorter or longer periods of sickness, disability or frailty we may need to be taken care of by others. Those able to do everyday tasks for themselves still need others to correct their moral and intellectual errors and to prevent them from becoming victims of their own fantasies. Our ability to reason always depends on our engagement with others in reasoning. The important thing is not self-creation as lauded by liberals, but being accountable for one's conclusions, or one's endorsement of others conclusions; of taking responsibility and being responsible for one's actions and for the world.

Thus while the political agent in liberalism is the self-created autonomous individual, and in socialism the working class (with the inherent danger of the subjugation of the individual to the needs and demands of that class, or the state), for Greens the political agent is the individual in community. Society should be based on voluntary co-operation between equal individuals, but where possible issues should be left to individuals or local communities to decide. And one of the rights of individuals is to combine with others in common endeavours.

Greens today are often seen to be on the left of the political spectrum, because tackling climate change and inequality requires an active state, not the minimalist one favoured by neo-liberalism. However, at its heart Green politics is republican more than it is socialist.

Policy V. Politics

Lucy Ford⁶

I want to reflect upon at 'sustainability policy versus sustainability politics. In particular one of the things I have found as a social scientist reflecting upon the world is that in this current world we live in one of the few ways in which 'we' can intervene in the world of politics - though we have a certain amount of democratic structures/ representative politics for sure - is through influencing policy, for example government policy or international institutional policy. Policy has become slightly divorced from politics. As a social scientist I am very interested in power, social power, how knowledge is constructed, who makes the rules, how are they created and maintained. The sustainability movement understands sustainability as 'one-planet living'. But it is not just about ecological sustainability on one planet. One of the key elements that sustainability has to incorporate is social justice - it is not just about living within one planet, but it is also about how we live on this planet, how we share this planet, how we ensure that all have access to the limited resources available on this planet.

The way I see the world at the moment, is that we have huge concentrations of power - political and economic power concentrated within nation-states and closely intertwined corporate power operating through capitalist market relations. On the other hand we have people, whose power is allegedly located in civil society; and within civil society, we have many organisations, NGOs and movements through which people act to influence policy and bring about change. However, policy does not just take place in a vacuum. Policy is embedded in the dominant institutional frameworks occupied chiefly by states and corporations. Having worked in the EU I have seen first-hand how policy is often driven by corporate agendas to the detriment of other lobbies. For example, in the case of trade, NGOs have produced volumes of brochures and lobby documents seeking to make trade fairer and greener, but they are not taken seriously. So I think it is really important to remind ourselves that policy is not somehow neutral and operating in a vacuum. It is highly political though it is often depoliticised. So the challenge that I want to present here is to say that we need to re-politicise policy, and the challenge is also to think about how we do that.

The other thing I want to say is that since the end of the Cold War we have had various discourses around the end of ideology - Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (Free Press, 1992) for example. The discourse goes as follows: With the fall of the Communist system, capitalism has triumphed, it's the only game in town, it's the most rational, democratic way of organising society and it is the

pinnacle of modernity and that is the norm. That has been reinforced with the TINA syndrome, There Is No Alternative, which is not a neutral discourse but is a neoliberal capitalist discourse that is being driven by certain elites. And then also within the Green movement broadly there has also been a discourse of arguing that we are somehow beyond right and left. One of the slogans of the green movement, or at least part of it, is 'Beyond Right and Left and Straight Ahead'. Of course, one answer to this would be to emphasize those values, policies and other political practices that attend to the concept of 'Ecologism' as both Rupert Read (see above) and another Green House colleague, [Andrew Dobson](#), suggest. I would argue that ideology matters, political ideologies and philosophies matters. The world is not devoid of ideology and to say that we have reached the end of ideology, that we have reached the end of evolution of ideas and reached a liberal pinnacle, is highly problematic, highly political, and actually highly ideological.

So I would like to challenge the Green Movement to really think about where it sits on the political spectrum. What does it really mean to say we are Left or Right? What does it mean to say that we are beyond Left and Right? Of course political ideology is not completely black or white, there is a large spectrum of persuasions spanning from Left to Right, but broadly speaking we need to know which side of the fence we are on, because if we sit on the fence the world will veer ever more towards the right, because that is the current trajectory. As far as I see it, being on the right means that you want to maintain the status quo you, want to keep the hierarchical elitist social structures that we have at present, running the danger of ending up with some kind of eco-authoritarianism if we are not careful.

So, on the left what do we do? We challenge that there is inequality in the world. We point out that power is not equally distributed. That we want to have some kind of true, radical, ground up re-organisation of society that is made by everybody, that is inclusive and that sustainability is at the heart of that agenda. It has to be, because we are living on this one planet.

So I want to challenge the notion that we are at the end of ideology. We are ideological, which doesn't mean we have to be dogmatic or fundamentalist, but we have expose the ideologies that are presented as common sense - for example 'economic growth or 'there is no alternative.' When do we ever hear on the news that economic growth may not be the way forward? We don't hear that because it is the dominant agenda, the dominant ideology. And this is not to say that it is a conspiracy. It's that there is no space to envisage an alternative. Alternatives are not presented. Of course there are millions of alternatives across the world, people movements on the ground, for example Via Campesina, World Social Forum, Peoples' Global Action, groundswells of movements that are trying to create alternatives ways

of organising society, for example ecovillages and transition movements, that are also trying to re-model social relations - how we make decisions together. Climate Camp is an inspirational example, because it is not just about challenging the acts of crimes against climate at their source, at for example Heathrow, or Kingsnorth power station, but it is also about asking how do we build democratic movements, how do people get together and make decisions, how do we live together based on truly democratic decision-making? We need to re-invigorate our political system and we need to start by re-connecting policy with the movements and not shying away from ideological debate, which at heart is about discovering the core values and principles we wish to live by. People didn't just receive working rights, women didn't just receive the vote - it was a result of movement struggle. Similarly, the sustainability movement is about advocating sustainability and social justice and I challenge you all to find your niche in that movement and get active.

Green House is interested in the question of whether or not the green movement should be seen as part of the Left. It is clearly something that has already generated some discussion and with the Labour itself perhaps struggling to find a new identity it is important that Greens remain mindful of those terms and associations that still retain some currency in public debate. So, I finish with a few questions which you might like to consider and perhaps respond to on Green House's **comments page** on *And the Green Go Marching On ...*:

Does it make any sense to talk about 'the Left' when historically it has taken such a wide variety of forms, e.g. from anarcho-syndicalism to Stalinism?

If we are on the Left, which parts of it should we be aligned with, and why?

Are there other spectrums which coexist with Left/Right and are they more important? Perhaps centralisation versus localism?

If ecological issues are our priority, are there sections of the conservative Right we can usefully be in some sort of strategic alliance with?

The Fall of Neoliberalism

Victor Anderson⁷

Seen in historical context, Western societies such as the UK are exceptional. There is a very high degree of cultural diversity, with religious, ethnic, and sexual minorities all openly forming part of society. There is a low level of loyalty and trust towards political leaders and political institutions. Although economic inequality is extreme, there is very little shared belief in any attempted justification for it.

However, despite all this, society holds together, and in most Western societies there is little organized violent conflict. Nor is there currently any really powerful challenge to the status quo. Those who challenge society as it is are located in a range of minority groupings: Greens, Marxists, religious groups of various sorts, various types of populism. Despite widespread dissatisfaction, for example with austerity policies and the apparent lack of authenticity amongst politicians, there is still no strong ideological adversary, for example of the sort that Communist Parties used to provide.

What holds our societies together? Principally, along with the absence of an attractive and powerful alternative way of organizing things, they are held together by economic transactions, organized through the capitalist market. Society is divided culturally but it is held together economically and financially. In that sense, it works.

Within this context of social cohesion provided by market transactions rather than by political, cultural, or religious agreement or belief, we can however see that there is one political ideology above all which currently stands out as dominant. Belief in it is not what holds society together, but it is nevertheless currently a more powerful set of ideas than any other. It guides government policies, sets the agenda for the mainstream media, and it meshes in very well with the dominance of financial transactions.

This is the ideology of neoliberalism, the subject of this chapter. Sometimes this interlocking set of ideas is talked about as though it is all-powerful and, with the decline of both social-democratic and Marxist ideas, effectively no longer open to challenge. I take a different view. Neoliberalism has very important limitations and weaknesses, and it is essential to understand these if we are to find out where the opportunities are for making social change.

Scope for change has not disappeared, but it now has to be discovered in different places from those where it previously existed,

and it implies movement in a direction which cannot simply be summed up as 'left' or 'progressive'.

My interest is principally in the UK, partly because I live here and am naturally concerned with what these issues mean for UK politics, and also because neoliberalism as a set of ideas derives to a large extent from thoughts which were developed by academics, think-tanks, and politicians in this country. My argument applies elsewhere too, but more to some countries than to others. Although neoliberalism is now an important influence throughout the world, it is far stronger in the UK than it is, for example, in Germany or France.

In this contribution, I will focus mostly on the vulnerability and particular weaknesses of neoliberalism in practice, and what these imply for the scope for social change.

The weakness of neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is the currently dominant ideology. It is stronger within the Conservative Party than anything that could reasonably be described as 'Conservatism', and in fact in many ways is profoundly anti-conservative. Although the Liberal Democrats are now moving away from neoliberalism, it is influential within their thinking too, and helped to shape their contribution to the 2010-15 Coalition. In the Labour Leadership contest, aspects of neoliberalism have been key issues in the battle for the future of the party, and clearly it has been an enormous influence within the Right and Centre of Labour, especially in its thinking about economic policy.

By 'neoliberalism' I mean a set of ideas which gives an extremely high priority to the operation of market forces, seeing the market as providing the principal answer for almost every question in politics, economics, environment, and society. It links philosophically back to a view of human life which prioritizes 'the individual', and forwards in practice to a series of government policies, associated particularly with Reagan and Thatcher, but which have been continued and taken further since their periods in office. Neoliberalism has coherence not only as a set of ideas but also as a deliberate political project.

The weaknesses of neoliberalism derive mainly from its stubborn unwillingness to correct its own errors. It generates what economists describe as 'external costs', and then generally fails to correct or eliminate these, leading to severe instability for the economic system as a whole.

It does this in four main ways, which I will discuss later. However, it is useful at the outset to see the overall pattern. The main areas of limitation and weakness in neoliberalism are as follows:

- 1 Its reliance on the market leaves it vulnerable to externalities, such as the costs it imposes on the climate, ecosystems, and finance.
- 2 Its emphasis on labour and capital mobility, cultural pluralism, and economic inequality clashes with the loyalty most people feel towards different forms of 'social capital'.
- 3 Its standing back from proactive government intervention leaves it failing to engage with the potential of various new technological developments.
- 4 Its relatively weak ideological hold leaves it vulnerable to any failure to deliver to people higher material living standards and 'economic success'. It is therefore particularly resistant to any challenge to the prioritization of economic growth.

The significant scope for social change in the near future derives mainly from these weaknesses in the current governing ideology.

It is ironic that the initial Conservative attack on Corbyn's election as Labour Leader was to allege that he posed a threat to economic and national security, when insecurity in global finance, the global climate, and individual employment and work patterns are major characteristics of the neoliberal policies Conservative politicians themselves promote.

There appears to be currently little evidence that we are approaching the end of capitalism, but good reasons for believing that its neoliberal phase will not last and that a new form of capitalism will take its place. The reforms necessary to bring this about might be described as representing a 'renewal of social democracy' - a point I will return to later.

I want to emphasize that I am not arguing that such a new form of capitalism would provide us with the best type of society possible. In that sense, it is right to view the practical changes I outline here as 'not enough'. My argument is about what is feasible in the next ten years or so, rather than about what is ultimately desirable.

Capitalism doesn't have to be neoliberalism

Capitalism has historically taken a variety of different forms. Neoliberalism has simply helped to create one variety of capitalism:

capitalism has the capacity to move beyond it and take some other form.

A transition of this sort took place during the 1970s. Up to that point, since about 1945, the Western world (and to some extent some other parts of the world too) had lived with a form of capitalism known as the 'Keynesian Welfare State' (KWS). Although there was basically a market economy, there was a political consensus in favour of various forms of government intervention (e.g. regional policy), government ownership (e.g. nationalized railways), welfare benefits (e.g. unemployment benefit), employment and trade union rights, and universal public services (e.g. health services). A willingness to intervene in the economy led to low rates of unemployment, which in turn boosted the bargaining power of labour, with wage rises helping to maintain rising levels of consumption and production.

Neoliberalism emerged as an influential ideology out of a variety of problems with the KWS. Funding government spending through budget deficits proved dangerously inflationary when combined with the 1973 quadrupling of oil prices and the breakdown of the international system of fixed exchange rates. Some government-owned firms, geared towards routine forms of mass production, failed to be flexible enough to adapt to changes in technology and consumer demand. Trade union activism often appeared obstructive and damaging to the economy as a whole. There was a general mood of discontent with excessive bureaucracy and overcentralization.

When neoliberalism 'came to the rescue', it did so on the basis of the following key features: (i) a rejection of Keynesian demand management policies and the priority which Keynesianism had given to full employment; (ii) a desire to reduce the role, size and expenditure of the public sector; and (iii) a wish to expand the scope for market forces to operate, including internally within the remaining public sector and internationally in the global finance system.

Neoliberalism was not inevitable. It was only one of the options at the time. It is conceivable that the Left might have come up with a version of socialism or social democracy that met the needs of the time and provided a way of fixing the problems with the Keynesian Welfare State. There was a particularly important debate about the fall of the KWS and the coming of the next, 'Post-Fordist', era in the magazine *Marxism Today*. Various proposals were made and campaigned for, but the Right won the battle to determine what came next. In the UK, the decade of the 1970s ended with the election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979.

This history should remind us, however, that 'regimes' of capitalism do not last forever. The KWS came to an end, and the neoliberal period

will at some point come to an end too. This might be with the overthrow of capitalism as a whole, but the analysis I set out here implies that the change will not be quite so dramatic. It will be a change from one form of capitalism to another, probably towards a more sensible way of running things than neoliberalism provides.

Neoliberalism is not Liberalism

Marxists have never liked Liberalism. There have been many good reasons for this - primarily of course the way in which liberalism has functioned as a pro-capitalist ideology - but it has also led to a predisposition amongst Marxists to think the worst of it. When neoliberalism came along, it was easy to view it as the inevitable outcome of the Liberal tradition, and to read back into that tradition the concepts and ideas of neoliberalism.

However the history is not as simple as that. The Liberal tradition is very complex, the word 'liberal' highly ambiguous. In the USA, 'liberal' is usually applied to someone who believes in state intervention in order to create a less unequal society, someone who is left-of-centre in the US political system. In the UK, the New Liberals in the early part of the 20th Century were pioneers in the development of the welfare state, influencing the policies of the Lloyd George Government. They saw the provision of free state education, for example, as expanding liberty, even though at the same time it represented a major extension of the powers of government. There has also been in UK Liberalism a strain of radicalism which has advocated devolution and decentralization, and viewed big corporations with as much suspicion as it has viewed the institutions of big government. Quaker, Methodist, and other influences on Liberalism have historically encouraged a commitment to peace and against consumerism. Liberalism's emphasis on liberty has been an important inspiration for progressive reforms such as the legalization of male homosexuality and abortion.

None of this is neoliberalism. The Liberal tradition has contained so much more. An account of the roots of neoliberalism in the Liberal tradition should therefore be balanced by an attempt to retrieve other elements of liberalism, with the aim of drawing on them as resources for opposing neoliberal ideas.

There is a very specific opportunity for this in the UK currently. A key reason why the Liberal Democrat party was able to enter into a coalition with the Conservatives, and sustain that for five years, was that the ground had already been prepared ideologically amongst the Liberal Democrats, in a development centred on the publication of *The Orange Book*, which included essays by some of those who became LibDem ministers in that Conservative-led government. They described

their position as 'economic liberalism', and then claimed a share of the credit for what they saw as the achievements of free market economics.

The Liberal Democrats' disastrous 2015 general election defeat almost guarantees that they will now move away from neoliberalism, although how far and how fast remains to be determined (and mainly depends on how they respond to Labour's shift to the left).

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that there really is a connection between neoliberalism and the Liberal tradition. The connection comes in the conception of 'liberty' dominant within liberalism. This is, above all, the liberty of 'the individual'. But 'the individual' is a strange abstraction. Everyone is from birth (and even before it) constantly interacting, and bound together with, other people. We all depend on technologies, ideas, language, public services, manufactured goods, flows of food, money, and energy, which we have not ourselves created. We may also depend on friends, lovers, and family. Taking the argument further, we depend on the global environment, the climate, and the other species which play numerous roles in sustaining our lives. None of this is really captured by the notion of the 'individual'.

We might say instead that the quality of being an individual is one important aspect of being a human being. But what neoliberalism does is to take this out of context and promote it as though it is the only significant aspect of our humanity. And, going much further than that, it then presents economic transactions as being by far the most important way to serve the individual's needs. This creates a chain from a particular conception of human beings to particular views about the market economy.

I now want to move on to consider the four main areas of limitation and weakness in the neoliberal version of capitalism, and what each of these implies for a period in which many governments are continuing to use neoliberal ideology to guide their policies and actions.

Neoliberalism undermines security and safety

One of the key concepts for understanding neoliberalism is 'external cost'. An 'external cost' is defined in economics as something which results from economic activity but is neither paid nor compensated for. A classic example is pollution: a factory produces goods, which it receives revenue from selling; at the same time, it pollutes air and water, which it pays nothing for, effectively pushing some of the costs of its production on to the local community and its environment. There can also be 'external benefits' whereby society benefits in a way it

doesn't pay for. Both of these, costs and benefits, are described as forms of 'externality'.

External costs play a key role in neoliberalism. In theory, it has a rule-of-thumb for devising policies to eliminate external costs: 'polluter pays', compensation is provided. The whole sub-discipline of Environmental Economics is based on this line of thought. However, in practice, most neoliberals are happy to maintain external costs in existence on a very large scale, with no compensation or taxation to correct them.

Some of these external costs concern 'social capital', which raises some issues of its own (discussed in the next section). Three other categories of external cost are listed here.

Financial instability. The financial crisis of 2008 was an example of colossal external costs. Each decision-maker in the finance system pursued their own interests, and in that sense generally behaved 'rationally'. The outcome, given weak regulation (which financial institutions and neoliberals had lobbied for), was a general crisis in the finance system, with severe consequences for the rest of the world economy. The penalties applied in response to this have been weak, on nothing like the scale implied by any theory of 'polluter pays'. Nor, despite some limited reforms, has there been any thorough redesign of the global finance system, and so there is no good reason why something like 2008 shouldn't happen all over again.

The implication of this is that neoliberalism cannot provide financial stability and security. It has a tendency to undermine the rest of the economy, generally not sufficiently to bring the whole system down, but certainly enough to be a major source of nuisance and damage, for most businesses and households. Deregulated global finance is dysfunctional for the productive parts of the capitalist economy (it could fairly be described as 'anti-business').

Climate crisis. The other massive dysfunctional economic sector is the fossil fuel industry: oil, coal, and gas. This is steadily bringing crisis and instability of a different sort, through disrupting the global climate system, which is already having awful and expensive consequences throughout much of the world.

Whilst some theoretically consistent neoliberals argue for the problem to be tackled through market-based mechanisms such as emissions trading systems, in practice the most neoliberal governments and political parties are those which are most opposed to intervention to restrain the fossil fuel sector, and some have even resorted to denial of climate science in order to maintain their political positions.

As with the re-regulation of finance, intervention by government is often argued to be 'anti-business'. In fact, most businesses obviously need both a stable financial environment and a stable global climate. In both respects, the rhetoric and ideas of neoliberalism militate against running capitalism in a more sensible way.

Undermining ecosystems. The free use of the air as a dumping ground for carbon pollution is simply the most urgent of the environmental external costs imposed by 'free market' capitalism. The environmental destruction currently taking place is not only a loss from the point of view of anyone who cares about the natural world, it also represents an undermining of many of the basic resources which the capitalist economy depends on in order to survive.

The classic example is overfishing. Each person who fishes - and each giant fishery business - behaves 'rationally', thinking that their own extraction of fish won't make much difference to overall stocks. But the consequence can be, and in some cases has been, catastrophic collapses. Similarly, the destruction of rainforests may seem to make sense hectare by hectare, but the overall consequence is a massive reduction in the capacity of the biosphere to absorb carbon and regulate the water cycle.

Again, although a programme of serious intervention can be presented as 'anti-business', ecosystems are the foundation of the whole economy and most businesses have a vested interest in seeing them maintained, even if they don't want to pay for that themselves. In each of the three ways I have just outlined, the current form of capitalism is showing itself to be under-regulated, an under-regulation which has been encouraged and argued for by the proponents of neoliberal ideology. In that respect, neoliberalism represents a particularly extreme form of capitalism. However it is clear that this under-regulation is against the interests of the capitalist system as a whole. But this is only one of four major areas of weakness.

Neoliberalism versus social capital

Neoliberalism exacerbates tendencies already present within capitalism, but in other versions of capitalism these tendencies are to some extent counteracted, for example through state intervention or strong community or social norms.

However the problem with neoliberalism goes a stage further than this. Neoliberalism is actively undermining the social base for any such counteracting mechanisms. By promoting on the one hand 'the individual' and on the other the global market, it undermines all the

social institutions and connections which stand in between, including the sense of national identity.

This causes ideological problems for parties of the Right. The British Conservative Party, for example, is divided between those who prioritize UK nationhood and those who are happy for UK firms and privatized industries to be taken over by overseas owners. Whilst some see the relaxation of Sunday trading laws as a threat to family and religion, others view it as simply another step in setting the market free.

The free market requires geographical mobility of labour, but past a certain point, that may undermine any sense of community or connectedness to place. The market has an implicit preference for cultural pluralism, because there is more money to be made from a 'postmodern' plurality of styles than from sticking to just one, and yet arguably that also reduces social cohesion and trust.

There are difficult issues here, and balances to be struck, for example between social cohesion and personal self-expression. Yet neoliberalism is not in the business of striking balances: it is in the business of seeking to expand the scope of the market and the opportunities for profit-making. There is a massive social price to be paid for pushing that approach to extremes. It is a price equally alarming from socialist, green, and traditional conservative perspectives.

Traditional conservatives may not, however, be so aware of the scope for developing 'new social capital' through internet and social media connections. Debate has tended to polarize between advocates of 'new' and 'old' forms of 'social capital', when there is benefit in both new networking and old communities, and a need for an analysis and style of politics which puts the two together.

Of particular concern on the Left (but not for traditional conservatives) there is the neoliberal undermining of 'social capital' through increasing inequality. People bring very different levels and types of skill and knowledge into the labour market, with many jobs currently disappearing through technological change. It has been argued that we are on our way to a society in which there are two types of paid jobs – high-skilled creative or organizational jobs, and personal service jobs such as nursing and social work (which are hard to automate), plus a vast mass of unemployment. The social consequences of this would be disastrous, yet left to itself, this is what the free market will produce.

Inequality is also being created through the unequal ownership of assets. As the board game of *Monopoly* illustrates extremely well, it is much easier to make money if you already have property. Land, property, and capital are distributed very unequally, and this tends to

lead - at least in the absence of corrective action by government or trade unions - to increasing inequality in incomes too.

Can a society like this hold together? As with the resources of nature, it is possible to take from the underpinnings of our lives a little bit of 'social capital' and in effect turn it into money, and then a bit more - for a while. We can sell off bits of nationhood, bits of community, bits of family life, bits of shared cultural values. Yet a point comes at which this process is seen to come at a very high price. We are somewhere around that point in Britain now. Yet neoliberalism ploughs on regardless - and will continue to do so until it is stopped.

Neoliberalism stands back from technological possibilities

Advocates of the profit motive are keen to point out its role in stimulating technological development, and there is some truth in this. It is not entirely true, however, because much development has depended on state investment, for example through military, space, health service, university research, and transport infrastructure spending. At the same time, there is a tendency to resist new developments where considerable amounts of investment are already tied up in the old technologies - as for example at the moment with solar energy versus fossil fuels.

However even more significant here is the question of the impacts of new technologies once they are developed. There is a tendency to focus on the need for government intervention to regulate new technologies, such as for example currently in the fields of synthetic biology and genetic engineering. At the same time, there is another side to this, which is the capacity of society to make good use of what does get developed.

A discussion of the positive potential of areas of technology such as 3D printing, the internet of things, imaginative uses of algae and fungi, renewable energy, etc., is way beyond the scope of this pamphlet. All that I want to say about all that here is that neoliberalism deliberately bars itself from making better (fairer, fuller, safer) use of new technologies - its advocates simply dogmatically want to leave everything to the market.

Within the market there is a strong tendency to wait: for example, electric vehicles cannot be sold successfully if there are very few charging points, yet the market will leave the provision of charging points until there is sufficient demand as a result of lots of electric vehicles having been sold. The internet of things is likely to link some things but not other things if it comes under the control of competing corporations.

Again, there are balances to be struck here: regulations can hold back useful developments as well as promoting them, and can prevent harm or increase it. Technologies may turn out to have uses which community groups, creative individuals or profit-seeking firms discover but which politicians and civil servants wouldn't think of. All of this is complex: the problem is that neoliberalism is far too simple. It has become a dogmatic ideology, limiting debate about responses to new technologies at a time when it particularly needs to be opened up.

The growth imperative

This contribution started by remarking that current Western – and increasingly, many other - societies are not held together in the sort of way that most societies in history have been. They are not held together by religion or by faith in any ideology or leader or set of institutions, or a shared sense of identity. What holds them together is principally what they deliver economically, in terms of particular market transactions and the levels of consumption available to society as a whole.

This makes our societies vulnerable in a different way to those of the past. This is not vulnerability to religious conversion, ideological challenge, constitutional turmoil, or even military invasion. This is vulnerability to 'economic failure'.

However 'economic success', as currently conceived, may not last for very long. Environmental limits may put a stop to the form that economic growth currently takes (and perhaps put a stop to economic growth of any sort at all). The 'secular stagnation' thesis - the argument that global growth is inexorably slowing down - is plausible, even though the timing is very uncertain.

At the same time, in their drive to keep the majority of the population reasonably contented, governments prioritize economic growth. That is now proving to be a risky approach, because in order to deliver, risks are being taken with the finance system (and in the UK also the housing market), and also with the climate and vital ecosystems. The more determinedly governments try to combat any tendencies towards secular stagnation in order to maintain 'economic success' and their own political legitimacy, the more they are liable to make some of the consequences of neoliberalism even worse.

Their lack of other sources of legitimacy and loyalty means that governments have to place a very high degree of reliance on delivering economic growth (there are of course other reasons for this too, including the drive to maximize profits) . That makes sense for them in

the short run, but it is storing up problems for the future and at some point could prove disastrous - as it is already beginning to be in the case of the climate.

A new lease of life for social democracy?

This chapter has covered a lot of ground, perhaps not with as much detail or depth as some readers would have liked. What I have tried to do is just to outline an overall picture, looking at some key features of politics, economy, and environment and how I think they fit together.

Any adequate politics needs to combine a radical analysis, looking at fundamentals such as the dynamics of capitalism and earth system processes, with a realistic view about where the possibilities are at any particular place and time.

My basic conclusion is that, although capitalism is not about to disappear, the neoliberal version of capitalism is much more vulnerable than it may appear to be. This is not primarily because of its critics but because of its own weaknesses. Neoliberalism has weaknesses which leave it vulnerable to being replaced at some point by a different way of regulating capitalism. None of these weaknesses seem to be essential features of capitalism as such - and in fact were for the most part not features of the form of capitalism which preceded neoliberalism - and therefore they do not point to a rapid shift to a socialist or some other post-capitalist form of society. Capitalism has historically proved very adaptable, and it can adapt again.

This will not satisfy capitalism's critics, and it does not of course imply that the New Capitalism is going to be a better way of organizing society than if the world opted, for example, for some form of green co-operative socialism. The shift away from neoliberalism, but remaining within the boundaries of capitalism, will not be the last word in social change. This is not the end of history.

My focus here is on what is practical in the next ten years or so, without making any claim that this is what is ultimately desirable. However it looks to me like this New Capitalism would in fact bring real benefits in comparison with the neoliberal capitalism of today. It wouldn't be the overthrow of the capitalist system, but it may be the best we can manage at the moment.

What would it look like? The 'New Capitalism' is likely to be more regulated, organized, and cohesive than capitalism is at present - more like the capitalism of the Keynesian Welfare State, but with greater emphasis on global governance to safeguard the climate and other basic environmental resources (e.g. oceans and tropical forests), and much more serious controls over international finance and tax havens,

whilst seeking to rebuild 'social capital' and retain the neoliberal emphasis on small business enterprise. Some of the relevant themes are already evident from the agendas at Davos and debates in the United Nations, for example around the new [Sustainable Development Goals](#).

The top priority in this shift beyond neoliberalism would be to bring the two largest dysfunctional economic sectors - finance and fossil fuels - within some form of international control. This is a priority that should find wide support, ranging from radical anti-capitalists to people running businesses that face risks of disruption from unstable global finance and a destabilizing global climate.

Although the fall of neoliberalism seems to be in sight, capitalism does not necessarily reform itself unaided, even when it is in its own interests to do so. This is because it is a weakly co-ordinated system, with internal competition and rivalries. Other forces are needed to help push and inspire, in order to produce significant change.

What all this points to is a new form of social democracy. Traditionally a distinction is drawn between 'socialism', seen as a social system which would replace capitalism, and 'social democracy', which would incorporate aspects of socialist society within an overall capitalist framework - the National Health Service being a good example.

Social democracy has come to be seen as discredited because the political parties traditionally associated with it, such as Labour, have in recent decades had their policies shaped very much by neoliberalism and have therefore lost their distinctiveness - whilst at the same time their more leftist supporters have generally stuck with an outdated analysis, a bureaucratic conception of social change, and a lack of engagement with the severe problems of economic growth and planetary limits.

The space for an updated social democracy has therefore become narrowed down within the old social-democratic parties. However it may now be returning - not necessarily within those traditional homes and parties, but for example through the SNP, Plaid Cymru, the Greens, and some Liberal Democrats, as well as through social movements and 'single issue' campaigns.

A feasible political project

I want to stress again that this combination of progressive forces within capitalism and a renewed social-democracy is not going to be sufficient to move beyond capitalism and establish a society of equity

and sustainability. However it can move the world in that general direction and away from the disasters of neoliberalism.

Changes in recent decades in the nature of the Labour Party and similar parties (particularly the influence of neoliberalism within them), together with changes in the nature of capitalism (particularly the growing pressures it places on the global environment), imply that the feasible political project needed now cannot be brought about by any single party or movement. The different pieces that are needed are currently held in different parts of the political landscape.

Concern about financial stability is a key priority for many in mainstream business, as well as Left economists.

Concern about climate and ecosystem stability is crucial for greens and the natural science community.

Concern about social cohesion is shared across the political spectrum, including by many supporters of UKIP, the Conservative Party, the churches, and the Blue Labour tendency in the Labour Party.

Concern about economic inequality is traditionally a key priority for Labour and the trade unions, and is also a priority for feminist movements and the 'poverty lobby'.

Concern about technological potentials is widespread amongst futurists and tech communities mostly outside the political process.

Concern about growth and quality of life is a key issue for greens and has also been highlighted by studies of 'wellbeing'.

It is easier said than done to bring all these streams together. It may be that they will influence each other only gradually, although with electoral alliances possibly accelerating the process at some stage. A lot is going to depend on how open and pluralist the Labour Party is prepared to be, and how much Jeremy Corbyn and those around him are willing to work with people in other parties. A lot will also depend on whether the green movement can maintain its distinctive focus on the ecological context, managing to learn from other schools of thought but not simply dissolving itself into some general vague leftism.

The outcome from all this will hopefully be a movement or connected set of movements which is able to home in on the weaknesses of neoliberalism as they become increasingly apparent, and can then help to bring about and shape a process of transition to something much better. History can sometimes move fast.

State, market and democracy in Green politics

Thomas Lines⁸

Greens tend to fight shy of grand, abstract terms, especially in the political sphere. It is probably better that way but it can lead to misunderstandings. It can obscure the extent to which there is a distinctly Green political philosophy; it is also exploited by many journalists, who still feign surprise when Greens talk of anything other than the environment. This reticence is probably born of the primacy in Green minds of what is loosely called 'the planet', without whose good health no one will survive. Alone among political movements, the Greens arose not out of social preferences but scientific knowledge of the physical state of the world. This can conceal a considerable unity of purpose and cohesion in the political analysis it gives rise to, which is also testament to important, but undervalued, intellectual currents beneath it.

This paper looks at those currents and where they place Green ideas in the universe of political thought, particularly in relation to older ideas about socialism. A couple of sections will briefly describe the ideas themselves, which will then be examined in the light of three touchstones of political thinking:

The State v. Market debate

Attitudes to the commons

The Role of money

Green political thought

After forty years of development Green political thought has a distinctive character, although, like any such tradition, it contains various threads. Central to it is an understanding that environmental degradation did not 'just happen' but was occasioned by the demands of the economic system. It is ultimately attributable to those in control of the economy, who put economic production above all other goals. Generally, it is connected with the competitive, profit-seeking economy, and is currently magnified in scale and intensity by the size and power of modern corporations, which are pressed to achieve short-term results regardless of non-economic consequences. This explanation immediately implies some scepticism towards capitalism.

There are strong echoes in Green thinking of socialist themes but with a twist in favour of small, decentralized and human-scale forms, in which production, distribution and political decisions are made as local as possible. Here the heritage of William Morris is apparent. There is a resistance to class-based ideas of politics, and among some Greens to the very concepts of Left and Right. Most Greens also share what some would see as traditionally conservative values of community, even if with a radical edge. Much of this is related to the libertarian socialism which all but disappeared in the era of the Labour movement and Communism but returned with the New Left in the 1960s. There is also a strong anarchist influence on Green activism, in a whole strand which is wary of collectivism, the state and Parliamentary politics as well as the market and its attendant inequalities.

An important concept in Green thinking is the 'commons', which is not frequently found in most of organized socialist politics. But you could say that it is the most socialist concept of all: that land, and all things under it, should belong to everyone, or perhaps to no one, and their use should be decided by a community itself, without anyone holding preponderant power. In England, socialist ideas first developed in reaction to the enclosure of the commons, which removed people from direct responsibility for the land to become agricultural employees, and later to leave the land entirely to work in industry. Greens put much more emphasis than most socialists on issues related to the land, including agriculture, food and, indirectly, international trade.

Seeing the depth of the environmental crisis, Greens consider that they take the future, and future people, most seriously. It is hard to call yourself a believer in society or equality unless you treat your descendants as equals. The fetish among all other parties for economic growth, which is destroying the world on which we rely, tramples on our descendants. Likewise, Greens take a broad view of humanity and understand that it is every bit as important to achieve equality globally as within the nation state.

In a movement which arose in the last third of the 20th century, Green political thinking was also influenced by an element that was born during the Second World War. When there was no parliamentary opposition, a new party was created and won a few by-elections. Called Common Wealth, it stood for a kind of decentralized socialism for the community, without the Labour Party's trade union basis. In Labour's landslide in 1945 this party lost its MPs and soon its *raison d'être*, but it continued as a pressure group for some time. Common Wealth itself drew on older traditions, including those of the Levellers and the Putney Debates after the English Civil War. Its ideas were revived in the 'alternative society' of the late 1960s, from which ground the Ecology or Green Party arose. Some of the party's founders were directly linked to Common Wealth, or inspired by it.

In general, Greens are little obsessed with notions of socialism and conservatism as traditionally understood, but value equality, inclusiveness, environmental limits and biological diversity in themselves. There is a kind of pragmatism which allows, for example, for statist solutions like the denationalization of the railways alongside support for small private businesses. This also accepts that difficult policies like combatting climate change have to be led by the state: civil society will not achieve it on its own, while the market-based measures of carbon trading and carbon offsets have proved inadequate. G.D.H. Cole, the early 20th-century socialist thinker, also saw roles for both the state and private ownership, limited by an economic democracy that would span both industry and the wider society. Cole often used the term 'commonwealth' rather than 'state' or 'society', but this commonwealth should not be perceived a single entity. Rather, it entailed a plurality of commonwealths, which were means to various ends and not ends in themselves⁹.

Greens, socialists and revolutionaries

In their political praxis, Greens are strikingly different from much of the Labour and socialist movements. Because of the defects of capitalism, many Greens believe in some form of social revolution. However - perhaps because the movement arose when universal suffrage and guarantees of human rights already existed, rather than in the wake of the 1789 or 1848 revolutions - they are inclined to operate largely through existing institutions. They may wish to reform them, often profoundly, but not to overthrow them.

Greens try to win by persuasion and prefer consensus to decisions by majority. On the whole they do not make demands but proposals, and try to resolve disputes at all levels through debate and discussion and, where necessary, mediation. They join in specific struggles and are ready passively to face conflict with forces of the state - but only tactically; violent confrontation is never a strategic option. They encourage the formation of citizen groups which will act autonomously, not as instructed by Green politicians or parties. This is part of an active, decentralized democracy, essential to the Green view of society. Greens reject any idea that the end can justify the means, and do not want political changes to create winners and losers. Even those who they might eventually defeat politically will still form part of society, and must be accommodated in it. Of course, that is also true of most modern socialists; but the political background is nevertheless different. Greens consider that behaviour in politics matters in itself: how can anyone credibly call for a better world if they do not live up to its standards themselves?

The ideas of a powerful thinker like Marx are bound to percolate through to many Greens, whether they are aware of it or not. But most people in the Green tradition do not share several basic tenets of Marxism, such as the labour theory of value, belief in class struggle or the vision of an ideal society as the main end in itself. Social class is not a strong concept in Green thinking. There is no notion of one class being superior or inferior to any other, even if sympathies tend to lie with the weakest and poorest, such as smallholders or trade unionists in struggle. If there is a general enemy, it is not a class but the economic phenomenon of corporate power. Nevertheless, Greens agree with Marxists that the inherent inequality and alienation in modern capitalist societies needs to be overcome, even if the theories underlying these issues are not much discussed in those terms within the party.

State v. Market v. Democracy

In economic policy there is a conventional polarity of State v. Market, mirrored politically in the opposition of labour and capital, the Labour and Conservative Parties. This ignores the fact that in nearly all schools of economic thought, there are actually three 'factors of production' - the elements from which all commodities that are sold on the market are produced. These are labour, capital and land¹⁰. In the 19th century the land - or at least landowners and farmers - were represented politically in the Conservative Party. Right until Mrs Thatcher's time the 'landed interest' was near the heart of the Conservative coalition, but under neo-liberalism it was swept aside by the interests of urban financial capital. Even regardless of the environmental crisis, it is hardly surprising that a new, radical force should have arisen in defence of the land, the planet we live on.

A similar opposition has sometimes been posited between the market and democracy, for example in a masterly study of Russia's disastrous reforms of the early 1990s. Here, Western institutions intervened on the side of the nascent 'market' against a similarly nascent but very weak democracy (and even applauded when the army under Yeltsin burnt out the elected Russian Parliament in October 1993):

The choice of the ruling elite and its Western allies for an abrupt marketization, privatization, and deregulation led very rapidly – and with full awareness on the part of key Russian participants like Yeltsin and Gaidar - to the abandonment of the democratic road to reform.¹¹

Here, as so often, the forces of capital - as represented in this case by US politicians and the International Monetary Fund - relied on the Russian state to ensure that an order friendly to them was created, for fear of what emerging Russian democratic institutions might otherwise

provide. Within a decade, this led to the genesis of the Putin state, which is based on an alliance between corporate oligarchs and the secret service (FSB), with no more than a transparent façade of democracy in a novel form of state capitalism.

In fact neither of those dichotomies is sufficient. Between them, they indicate that there are actually three alternative principles of economic organization, not the state and the market alone:

Democracy: seen in the decentralized rule of the commons, mutual societies, clubs and co-operatives, and public services under democratic rule;

Authority: the top-down administrative model typical of the state and the corporation;

Exchange: where power is mediated by money and markets.

It is the democratic mode that has generally been overlooked as an economic principle. But the picture is complicated and nuanced, since most economic phenomena stand somewhere between the three vertices of this triangle. Thus, the modern state combines both (1) and (2): it is organized as a vertical hierarchy but is subject to democratic forces, which are real and substantial even if very incomplete. Meanwhile, a 'free' market system, which comes under (3), tends gradually towards the centralized, authoritarian model of (2) as control over capital becomes concentrated in the hands of fewer and ever bigger companies, and more and more assets are owned by a vanishingly small number of hyper-rich individuals.

State v. Commons

Most Greens would push for the Democracy principle, and some set it up in the form of the commons as a universal ideal in itself. Greens might not reject private ownership as such, but they do resist its excessive power. There is nothing new or particularly radical about that: even Tories and businessmen have accepted the idea to some extent in the past. Earlier in the 20th century there was a widespread trend away from the principle of Exchange towards the Democratic one, regardless of which party was in power. For example, during a remarkably similar episode to the crisis of mid-2015, dairy farmers in the 1920s and early 1930s were exploited by large industrial dairies, which forced milk purchasing prices down. The National Government, with a Conservative Minister of Agriculture, resolved this dispute by abandoning the Exchange principle in this area altogether. He replaced commercial supply chains with the Milk Marketing Board, a statutory body run by a board composed of all elements of the sector, but

mostly farmers. It worked well for 60 years and even Mrs Thatcher did not touch it. The present crisis has slowly developed since the MMB was finally abolished, and free wholesale exchange returned, under the Major government in 1994.

In the same era, some important organizations such as the Standard Life insurance company converted voluntarily from corporate to mutual ownership in the 1920s. Standard Life for long thereafter reigned supreme as the life insurance firm with the best financial results - as did the mutuals in that sector in general, as well as large clubs in other sectors which were eventually turned over to private ownership in the 1990s, such as the Automobile Association, the Royal Automobile Club and numerous building societies.

The pioneering socialists of the 19th century wanted the state, as well as the market, to wither away, and power to pass to the people by means of common and co-operative ownership and management. That was equally true in the very different visions of Karl Marx and William Morris. However, in the wider Labour movement, socialism got caught up, naturally enough, with workers' demands for more pay, while in 20th-century practice what is called socialism was always based on the state: it was used as a proxy or agent for the people, perhaps, but it was not the people themselves. In the Attlee government's nationalizations after 1945, many in the Labour Party wanted the mines, railways and so on to be managed by their own workers, arguing that that would be the socialist way. However, Herbert Morrison, a former leader of the London County Council, prevailed with his top-down, managerial model, run by the government.

In 21st-century politics, it is the Greens who work hardest for local self-organization - and are also, in my experience, much keener on realizing the co-operative principle than Labour people have been of late, although that could change with the shift in Labour's membership under Jeremy Corbyn. But in standing up for the 'land', on which all life depends, and not just the workers, it could be argued that Greens are more socialist than Labour's tradition. Although the commons were integral to feudalism, they have always been under attack under capitalism, ever since the first enclosures in 15th-century England. That attack has gone on apace in recent years, extending to the air, rivers in some countries and tropical forests. In the face of this attack, it is the economic principle of Democracy and the Commons which needs to be asserted right now.

Money: do we need it?

Since the banking crash, which was caused by excessive debts, the debate among self-consciously radical people has revolved strongly

around the nature and origin of money, rather than how to reduce the role of money and even avoid reliance on it altogether. However, the more areas of society become de-monetised like the National Health Service, the less need there is for devices like the citizen's income or quantitative easing, and the easier it will be to get away from wage slavery (a term, incidentally, which Greens sometimes use but is rarely heard in Labour circles).

In the past, it was an important socialist goal to do away with money altogether, and with it the 'commodification' of everything. It would not be needed when both the state and the market had withered away. Under their 'War Communism' experiment in 1918-19, the Bolsheviks tried to do this. Later, the USSR consciously reduced the role of money when it created its new institutions in the 1930s. Money's role under central planning was limited and most private markets were heavily repressed as 'speculation'. But in the true Russian political tradition, the Bolsheviks repressed the coordinating role of money and markets politically, rather than stimulating common ownership and democracy as a replacement for it. A mirror image of that then appeared in Yeltsin's time after 1991.

Some of the most toxic political controversies still revolve around where money should be used and where not - for example, over the NHS and student fees. The Tories want money and markets there but most people value universal access, free at the point of use, because of the simplicity and fairness of it. And that is socialism in action: from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs. Intuitively, people in Britain (and probably throughout the world) support it, at least in certain areas of life. But many would be horrified to think of it as socialist, since it has not recently been defended as such in British politics. As public support for neo-liberalism and its money-based doctrines wanes, the case for reducing the role of money in general should be made.

Greens, Socialism and idealistic thinking

It is clear that Green political thinking draws strongly on socialist ideas, and it could be said that in especially prizing democracy but being chary of the centralizing state, Greens hold truer to it than the major 'socialist' traditions which developed during the 20th century. Greens recognize the necessity of state action to ensure fair dealings and counter the 'tragedy of the commons' and 'free rider' problems. Many anarchists have Green leanings, but the formal Green movement - or Green parties - do not espouse anarchism. However, they do remain somewhat guarded about the central state and insist on the dispersal of political power and the decentralization, or localization, of the

economy. Of course, that may in part be a consequence of the limited amount of state power that Greens have actually enjoyed so far.

Going back to the three principles of economic organization, most Greens certainly prefer the first of them, Democracy. That is also in the spirit of socialism, if we accept that philosophy as originally an attempt to extend to the economy the democratization of politics which the English, American and French Revolutions initiated. Basic decisions on economic organization must be subject to free democratic choice, including the possibility of modifying those decisions if the circumstances, or the political majority, changes.

Nevertheless, all three principles have their merits and demerits, and each of them has a role to play in the economy and society. Trouble comes when one of them is pushed as an ideal, to be pursued to the exclusion of the others. During the course of the last century, assiduous programmes of this sort have been pursued for two of them: for (2) - state planning - under Bolshevism, and more recently (3) - market exchange - under neo-liberalism. The present situation is particularly dangerous as neoliberal states are trying to entrench the domination of the Exchange principle and corporate power through international treaties such as the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), Trade in Services Agreement (TiSA), and others.

Many Greens reject idealistic thinking of this sort. Rupert Read admits to being impressed by conservatism's 'scepticism as to "theory", its emphasis on what can actually be done without relying on fantasies of perfect institutions'. Some Greens, however, put forward the commons or co-operation as an alternative ideal; it would sit on the Democracy vertex of this triangle. A related, but not identical, ideal vision is that of the simple 'good life' in traditional communities of a sort which, it is said, have been destroyed by industry, the market and urbanism. The most radical advocates of localization include some people who have witnessed the damage done by the market economy to other people and societies around the world.

However, it is unwise to draw general conclusions from any particular experience. For example, even in Tsarist Russia there was a strong tradition of local communal rule, the village 'mir'. However, it was allied to a brutal tradition of autonomous local justice called 'samosud', as illustrated in this short historical passage¹²:

Because of the number of misfortunes attributed to her, the peasants of Vrachev decided to burn Grushka [known as a sorceress and fortune-teller]. They took their decision during a meeting of the village assembly, which had gathered in Vrachev to divide the property of four peasant brothers.

This illustrates the contradictions that can exist in idealistic thinking of this sort. In some places, autonomous local communities have produced successful, harmonious societies. But in others they have applied different norms with various forms of brutality, which would make most Greens recoil. This example from Russian history should give pause to the advocacy of community and localization as universal ideals. So for my part, I do not support the extension of democracy, or the commons or co-operative ownership, to everything, although they should certainly be greatly extended from their present diminished state. My experience of the USSR in the 1970s and 1980s convinced me of the need to introduce market mechanisms for some purposes there, and I am sure they are required in all modern societies, for the broad reasons that are given by full-blooded advocates of the market system. Likewise, Authority and hierarchies are essential in many organizations too. Democracy and decentralization need to be the general direction of travel; however, not to the complete abandonment of Authority and Exchange.

End Notes

¹ Many thanks to Tom Lines for his informed and thoughtful comments on an early draft.

² Corbyn's £3 supporters tend to be much younger than Labour's new members many of whom are returning after a long absence.

³ Figures based on [Audit Bureau of Circulations](#)

⁴ A case in point is perhaps Eliot Higgins' [Bellingcat](#) news site which has published details about recent military campaigns in Syria and the Ukraine which consistently and persistently fail to get coverage among the mainstream news media.

⁵ I am indebted to my colleagues at Green House, in particular Victor Anderson and John Blewitt, for their assistance with my discussion of socialism

⁶ This is based on a presentation given at the Schumacher Institute Challenge Day entitled 'The Sustainability Movement: Re-think, re-boot, re-new' in Bristol 16th on June 2012.

⁷ I am grateful to Green House colleagues for comments on my original draft.

⁸ I am grateful to other members of Green House for their ideas and encouragement for this paper, and Victor Anderson, John Blewitt and Rupert Read in particular. Any defects in it are entirely the author's responsibility.

⁹ I am indebted to John Blewitt for the information about G.D.H.Cole, and to Rupert Read, Jonathan Essex and Victor Anderson for other points in the last three paragraphs.

¹⁰ I set aside here the debates about whether any of the three should be excluded, or whether a fourth, fifth or even sixth factor should be added, such as enterprise, technology and social capital.

¹¹ Reddaway, P. and Glinski, D. (2001) *The Tragedy of Russia's Reforms: Market Bolshevism against democracy*. Washington: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, p. 56.

¹² Frank, S.F. (1987) Popular Justice, Community and Culture among the Russian Peasantry, 1870-1900. *The Russian Review*, vol. 46, pp.239-65. See also Merridale, C. (2000) *Night of Stone: Death and Memory in Russia*. London: Granta, pp. 43 and 55.

