

The Green Party in Britain: advocates of “green capitalism”

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The Green Party is standing 335 candidates for the May 6 general election, contesting over half the seats in the UK parliament. Costing £167,500 in candidate deposits alone, this is the greatest number of seats the party has ever contested in a general election.

The Green Party already has 126 local councillors on 46 councils across England and Wales, two members of the London Assembly and two members of the European Parliament, including party leader Caroline Lucas.

From its inception, the Green Party has attracted disgruntled elements from within the establishment, together with a layer of former Stalinists and ex-radicals. The party's origins can be traced back to the PEOPLE party, founded by former Conservative activist Tony Whittaker in 1973, an admirer of the American biologist Paul R Ehrlich, who advocated enforced sterilisation as a means of implementing population control. An early recruit was Edward Goldsmith, older brother of the financier Sir James Goldsmith.

PEOPLE published the “Manifesto for a Sustainable Society”, which although amended over the years, and now styled as “Policies for a Sustainable Society”, still forms the core of the Green Party's programme. The document begins by saying, “It is human activity, more than anything else, which is threatening the well-being of the environment on which we depend”.

The Greens today still primarily portray the threat to the environment as one of bad individual “lifestyle choices”. For them it is not capitalism—and its incessant scramble for profits above all other considerations—that is responsible for the degradation of the environment, but “human activity”. This theory of original sin places each individual virtually on a par with the transnational corporations.

After renaming itself the Ecology Party in 1975, the organisation finally adopted the name Green Party in 1985. In 1991, then Green Party spokesman David Icke caused a minor controversy when he announced on television that he was the Son of God. The party achieved its highest general election result in 2005, polling 281,780 votes.

Despite the radical rhetoric accompanying some of their policies, the Greens are a pro-capitalist party whose vision of society is one in which the profit system is not abolished but can be made to function better. The Green Party sees the economic crisis presently threatening the jobs and livelihoods of millions of working people everywhere not as the inevitable product of the private ownership of the banks and factories, but what they call “casino capitalism”. Just as often, however, they ascribe all of the planet's difficulties to a supposed focus on “economic growth”!

They are critical of the neo-liberal economic policies pursued by New Labour over the last 13 years, advancing a number of policies they claim would “promote fairness”. In the party's manifesto, “Fair is worth fighting for”, the Greens say they want to “see the back of rampant inequality” that “begins at birth” in British society. However, they do not advocate any measures that might eradicate the essential source of social inequality.

Their answer to the crisis is a “Green New Deal”, which would limit growth and “localise” the economy in a manner that, if implemented, would represent a horrifying economic and social regression. The Greens see society in Malthusian terms, in which “the scale of economic activity has taken us dangerously beyond what the planet can bear if it is to continue to support flourishing human and other life...”.

Making their argument more explicit still, the sentence continues by asserting that “population growth only makes things worse.”

A return to small-scale production would require far more with regard to population control than the Green Party's calls for “informed debate on a sustainable population”, “free family planning” and reinforced “sex education in schools”. In the UK it would be economically disastrous. On a global scale it would lead to mass starvation worse even than that which already exists. This is particularly the case in parts of the world that have no alternative to the harsh existence advocated by the well-heeled few, for whom it merely implies installing a solar panel, riding a bike occasionally, buying a low emission car and

growing a few vegetables in the back garden.

For the Greens, the development of advanced and globally integrated production does not hold out the prospect of utilising the resources of the planet to eradicate disease, poverty and hunger—once it is set free from the constraints of capitalism and is applied democratically to meet human need. Rather, they regard globalisation as inherently evil, since it threatens to destroy the environment.

Global warming, pollution and other forms of environmental destruction can be addressed only on the basis of an internationally coordinated plan, placing the interests of the world's population before the profit margins of the major corporations.

Even the imposition of “carbon quotas”, the main policy advocated by the Greens to stem global warming and protect the environment, seeks to use the capitalist market! The trading in carbon emissions is itself a means of extracting further surplus value from the working class and to boost the profits of the major energy conglomerates. For example, in Australia, the so-called Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme introduced by the Rudd Labour government in 2009 will strip low and middle income earners of nearly £3.6 billion previously allocated as compensation for higher fuel and energy costs. Instead, the money will be used to cover the bulk of an additional £4.2 billion allocated to the major corporate polluters, bringing the grand total of public funds to be transferred to business through the emissions trading scheme to a staggering £74.6 billion.

The Green Party completely accept the financial parameters of the existing capitalist order. A Green Party government would maintain the same expenditure levels as Labour, including the need to slash the current budget, which they say they would “aim to more than halve” by 2013. To meet this target, their programme advocates a series of “selected cuts” totalling £20 billion in 2010 and rising to £28 billion in 2013. While a Green Party government would introduce higher taxes on those with incomes above £100,000, the right of a tiny minority of the super-rich to possess obscene levels of personal wealth goes unchallenged.

The manifesto calls for the withdrawal of British troops from Afghanistan and calls the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan “counterproductive”. But it makes no criticism of the criminal role played by the Labour government in supporting these illegal wars of aggression alongside the United States.

This begs the question of whether, under different circumstances, the Greens would support a “productive invasion”. One does not have to look far to find an answer. While calling for a reduction in the overall defence budget through abandoning Trident and other “expensive weapons systems”, the Greens stress they will always ensure that “where our forces are committed they are properly equipped”. To this

effect, the Greens would maintain a defence budget of £32 billion.

While the British Greens say they do not favour the use of military force, at least for the present, their sister party in Germany shows what can become of these former pacifists once they are invited to exercise government responsibility. As foreign minister, leading German Green Joschka Fischer played a key role in breaking the post-war taboo against international deployments by the German Army. It was Fischer who justified the participation of the German Army in the Kosovo war with the cynical argument that the legacy of the Holocaust obliged Germany to prevent alleged genocide in the Balkans. The dispatch of German troops to Afghanistan occurred during his term in office.

On the question of immigration, the Greens accept the reactionary framework within which this issue is discussed by the establishment parties and media. They say it is necessary to “balance” the positive contribution that immigrants make to British society against the “unwelcome competition for jobs, pressure on housing and other resources and longer-term pressures on overall population”.

In the section of the manifesto dealing with trade, the Greens advocate a “Robin Hood tax” on international financial transactions, which they say could “help stabilise the financial markets”. The call for some form of “Tobin tax”, advocated by a host of ex-radicals, is merely aimed at restricting and not ending the power of one section of capital—finance capital—as if this could be detached from capitalism as a whole.

The Green Party fully subscribes to the European Union, and a European constitution, although they call for its “fundamental reform”. The Greens claim that the EU is a means for “safeguarding basic rights, peace and security”. That is a lie. It is a mechanism through which the most powerful European corporations and banks can better exploit working people across the entire continent, and so wage trade war against Europe's major rivals. As has recently been demonstrated in the case of Greece, it is above all a tool in the hands of the European powers in forcing through draconian austerity measures on the Greek working class, as a prelude to similar attacks in every country.



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