

PHILOSOPHICAL BASIS OF THE GREEN PARTY

Green Politics:

"Only after the last tree has been cut down,
Only after the last river has been poisoned,
Only after the last fish has been caught,
Only then will you find that money cannot be eaten."

Like all creatures, humankind depends upon a healthy natural environment for its survival. Yet it is human activity, more than anything else, which is threatening the environment and, ultimately, threatening the future of life on Earth as we currently know it.

Conventional political and economic policies are destroying the very foundations of the wellbeing of humans and other animals. Our culture is in the grip of a value system and a way of understanding the world which is fundamentally flawed.

Since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, society has expected continual increases in material affluence for the people of the world, and has therefore relentlessly pursued the goal of economic growth. Some nations, such as our own, have indeed become very rich and yet within them there is still abject poverty. Meanwhile, the poor nations of the world are becoming poorer as wealth continues to be transferred to the rich nations from the poor ones.

We cannot go on indefinitely exploiting and wasting the natural resources of a finite world. If humans continue to promote policies which require the unlimited consumption of raw materials, it will lead not to more riches, even for the few, but poverty for all.

The pursuit of economic growth as a force driving over-exploitation of the Earth must cease to be an automatic aim of human societies. We should instead aim to develop sustainable economies, which improve well-being focused on human values rather than consumerism. Traditional measures of economic activity, such as GDP, should be replaced by new indicators that measure progress towards this aim.

Traditional politics divides humans from nature and the individual from society. The rejection of this way of seeing the world is fundamental to Green philosophy. Rather than set them against each other, the Green Party seeks healthy interdependence of individual, nature and society.

As human beings, we all have the potential to live co-operatively and harmoniously with each other, and with reverence and respect for the complex web of life of which we are a part. Yet it has become increasingly obvious that this potential cannot be realised while basic human needs remain largely unmet.

By basic needs we mean not only the physiological needs of food, water, air, shelter and sleep, but also psychological needs. These include the need for love, respect, autonomy, security, and meaningful activity within our communities.

The fact that many people's basic needs are not met has far reaching consequences. This is expressed as anxiety, insecurity, and aggressive behaviour towards others, and exploitation of their environment. These personal factors give rise to and are then perpetuated by, social institutions which actively encourage oppression, pollution, resource depletion, poverty and military conflict.

The Green Party therefore places both personal and political change at the heart of its response to the ecological crisis and is committed to creating a society in which individuals, through their ability to satisfy their basic needs more fully, are then able better to contribute to future sustainability. This principle is reflected in the radical Green agenda both for changes in values and lifestyles, and for reformed social, economic and political structures.

The Green Party values the diversity of ways in which people relate to each other and the natural environment. It seeks a balance between a number of different processes which contribute to human well-being, rather than stressing one at the expense of all others. It refuses to treat any single value, whether freedom, wealth or equality, as a supreme criterion of political success. In an ecological society a wide range of lifestyle choices will be promoted as individuals and communities seek to establish the most appropriate means of implementing sustainability.

Humans in the Environment:

The human species is a latecomer to the biosphere. Our survival depends upon the continued survival of all the ecosystems which evolved before us. The Green Party therefore sees humanity as necessarily a dependent part of the natural environment. When human activity threatens the environment around us, that activity threatens our future survival. Political objectives should accept our dependence, not seek to transgress it. We do not believe that any other species is expendable.

Conventional politics has established human domination of the exploitable environment as the basis of human power and the basis for hierarchies of wealth. Conventional politics ignores the environment's complexity and full potential value.

The Green Party promotes policies which respect it, based on the following key principles:

Ecological Politics:

Each organism is dependent on other species and on the physical world for its survival. Whereas human value judgements normally focus on human needs, value ultimately lies in the well-being of the whole ecosystem. Western society has seen nature as valuable only in so far as it is useful to humans. Where human "development" has irreparably damaged the ecosystem, species have been driven to extinction, and the land is as useless for human purposes as it is for other species.

Interdependence:

The Green Party recognises that humankind depends on its environment for its welfare, and conversely that human activities have a critical impact on environmental processes, with serious implications for the welfare and survival of other species. Therefore the proper relationship between humanity and its environment should be

one of interdependence within it, not control over it. Like all forms of life, we take from others and give back in return. We should ensure that human activities contribute to, rather than destroy, the richness of life.

Diversity:

The diversity of species living on this planet is a manifestation of its ecological complexity. This diversity sustains and strengthens all ecosystems so that they are able to withstand shocks to their functioning, such as earthquake or disease. The Green Party recognises the limits of humanity's powers to observe and understand natural processes and therefore recognises the necessity for protecting biodiversity for its own sake. The maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity is demonstrably beneficial to all life on earth, not just humans.

Sustainability:

The central integrating principle underlying all Green Party policies is that all human activities must be indefinitely sustainable. They must neither use resources faster than they can be replaced, nor create effects or products which cannot be assimilated indefinitely by the environment. It is no longer valid to follow conventional short-term political planning practices. The long-term consequences of any activity must always be considered and ideally any planned action must either be in a form that can be continued indefinitely or will lead to a situation which can be indefinitely sustained.

Humans in Society:

Implementing the policies which will create an ecological society will necessarily take many years. It will require a great deal of social change if we are to accommodate the massive environmental changes facing us. We can, nevertheless, identify a number of principles upon which a truly sustainable society will be based.

Democracy:

A healthy society is based on voluntary co-operation between equal individuals in a democratic society. Those decisions that establish a secure basis for such co-operation need to be taken by society as a whole through the democratic processes, but other issues should be left to individuals and communities to decide for themselves. An ecological society will be made up of self-governing communities of a variety of sizes which will regulate their own social and economic activities. Nothing should be decided at a higher level if it can be decided at a lower one. But the Green Party accepts that regional and national governments will continue to have an important role

Equality:

The legitimate interests of all people are of equal value. The Green Party rejects all forms of discrimination whether based on race, colour, sex, religion, national origin, social origin or any other prejudice. We accept the need for social institutions to protect the interests of the powerless against the powerful.

Human Rights:

The fundamental, inalienable rights of each individual in a democratic society must be set out in a written constitution. The Green Party promotes the implementation of policies which protect human rights and rejects all forms of exploitation for any purpose whatsoever. Individual human rights include the freedom to combine with others in common endeavours in representative institutions such as trade unions and community groups. The Green Party believes that human rights can only ultimately be protected by the watchful activity of such organisations within society.

Rights of Future Generations:

The suffering of future generations as a result of global warming caused by current generations makes it crucial that their rights are recognised and championed by organisations within society today.

Minorities:

Majority rule is insufficient as the basis for resolving conflicts. The Green Party promotes non-violent solutions to conflict situations. The interests of the minority and of future generations must be included in non-violent processes of conflict resolution in order to achieve lasting settlements.

Internationalism:

It is the proper role of government to be concerned with the well-being of its citizens, but this should not be pursued to the detriment of other nations or future generations.

Basic Material Security for All Society should guarantee access to basic material security for all and should provide a wide range of opportunities for personal fulfilment in both a material and non-material sense. If hardship is even a possibility, a sense of insecurity will prevent individuals from acting in accordance with ecological constraints. A guarantee of security will not ensure voluntary ecological behaviour, but it is a necessary precondition.

Characteristics of a Sustainable Society:

Freedom:

The Green Party affirms the importance of individual freedom and self expression. We believe people should be free to make their own decisions on matters which do not adversely affect others. Its importance lies in valuing the opportunity people have to make their own decisions, accept responsibility for them and develop in their own way.

Our commitment to freedom necessarily requires certain restrictions. Firstly, wealth and power are often used to curtail the freedoms of the poor and powerless. The protection of legitimate freedom therefore requires restrictions on oppressive activities.

Secondly, individual freedom should not be exercised where that freedom depends on the exploitation or harm to any person or group in society, or to the environment. Where the exercise of such freedoms harms others the Green Party believes it is legitimate that those rights should be curtailed.

Thirdly, individual freedom includes the freedom to combine with others in common endeavours in such a way that decision-making powers are delegated to representative institutions such as trade unions, community groups and governments.

Wealth:

The Green Party recognises that our wealth must be more broadly defined than simply including payment of money. We benefit as a nation from the wealth of natural resources around us such as clean air, rainfall, energy from the sun and the planet's biodiversity. Our society also depends upon the unpaid work provided by carers and volunteers.

We reject the view that wealth can be measured solely in monetary units, a view which allows its adherents to think it consists primarily of the results of human labour. This error has caused successive governments to pursue objectives which appear to increase the nation's wealth while in fact they reduce it. Symbols of wealth, like money, reinforce the error and dominate political decision making. Economic growth is a poor guide to human welfare.

New economic ideas, institutions and organisations are needed to reduce our dependence on such symbols. Economic policy should be directed not to maximising the forms of wealth that can be measured in monetary terms, but to ensuring that the needs of all are met.

A sustainable society can be prosperous, but it cannot have continually rising affluence. We accept that there is a limit to the wealth each person can receive, and this is true no matter how much or how little work needs to be done to produce that wealth. Some redistribution of income will be required. What wealth there is must be shared in such a way that everyone has a guarantee of economic security. Otherwise people will not heed ecological restraints in their daily lives.

Conservation:

Under the present system, economic growth is supported by unlimited consumption of both renewable and non-renewable resources. However, in a finite world there is not an infinite supply of natural resources. The Green Party recognises limits to growth. Limits to growth are likely to be imposed primarily by resource depletion and the ever-increasing costs of pollution. Furthermore, land also is in limited supply. An expanding world population demands expanding food supplies. Irresponsible land use planning, degradation of land through human activity and changes in land quality and availability due to climate change, mean that land must be managed in such a way as to ensure sustainable human development and safeguard biodiversity'

Conservation of land and natural resources will be very important in order to protect the natural environment from pollution and degradation. The Green Party believes that technologies which promote reuse and recycling of materials and products should be given priority over the production of goods from newly generated resources. We believe our towns and cities should be structured in such a way as to maximise resource conservation.

Progress and Technology:

We value the processes of researching and developing new technologies. However, they should not be considered self-evidently desirable, nor should lifestyles based on more complex technologies be considered necessarily superior to lifestyles based on simpler ones. All too often the expression 'You can't stop progress' is used to express despair, and aptly describes a society which knows it is regressing but has not found the means to stop.

Technology, like other aspects of human culture, needs to be used selectively and within limits. The path of technological development is not a given, but a choice made by society. We should choose to develop technologies that are inherently beneficial to the common good.

Empowerment:

Power is simply our ability to be effective, but it takes different forms. 'Power over' is dysfunctional, succeeds only at the expense of others and should be limited and contained. 'Power to', or empowerment, is our potential to co-operate and take control over our own lives. Organisations which have based themselves on empowerment have found that they are as successful, if not more, at achieving their aims, and have delivered considerable social and environmental benefits.

However, 'power over' remains the dominant force in our hierarchical, competitive society. We have to engage with it, but we do so only in order to transform it. This requires changes in law, culture and economics.

The Green Party does not believe there is an automatic moral obligation on all people to obey their governments. It seeks to maximise the extent to which obedience to laws is based on consent and minimise the need for conformity through deterrence. We believe there are occasions when individuals and groups in society may openly, and peacefully, protest at an unjust law or practice through civil disobedience.

We seek a society in which people are empowered and involved in making the decisions which affect them. We reject the hierarchical structure of leaders and followers, and, instead advocate participatory politics.

Property:

The Green Party believes that, since human well-being depends on the use of land and its physical resources, property laws should be designed to ensure that all have access to the things they need. All those who have a stake in property should have a real say in how it is managed. Common goods need to be accountably managed by the community that depends on them.

Property laws should permit neither states nor individuals to treat their property in whatever way they choose. Instead they should aim to ensure that all people, where they wish it, have their needs met through access to the land and its resources, while maintaining its quality for future generations. Property laws should therefore impose duties on owners as well as granting rights.

Work:

The Green Party recognises that work plays a central part in a healthy and balanced life. People have a natural desire to make a contribution to the common good.

We therefore oppose the view of work which treats it as an unfortunate necessity to be performed by machines whenever possible and we oppose the reduction of people's working lives to a series of simple, repetitive activities. Labour-saving devices may be valuable in some circumstances, but not all. We believe that access to creative, rewarding work is a fundamental human right. We also oppose the view that hard work is to be praised for its own sake. A healthy life is a balanced one, including time for both work and leisure.

The quality of work is as important as the quantity. As working practices adapt to new technologies, there is an increasing divide between the work that needs to be done and the paid employment which provides incomes. The Green Party believes that employment policies should aim to match the work which needs to be done with the abilities of people.

Strategy:

We do not believe that there is only one way to change society, or that we have all the answers. We seek to be part of a wider green movement that works for these principles through a variety of means. We generally support those who use reasonable and non-violent forms of direct action to further just aims.

Our beliefs will bring us into conflict with those committed to material affluence, the accumulation of power and the unsustainable exploitation of the Earth. We are always ready to negotiate with those who oppose us, and seek fair settlements that respect their needs for security, self esteem and freedom of choice.

We will even work with those who disagree with us where sufficient common ground can be found to do so. However, we do not seek power at any price, and will withdraw our support if we are asked to make irreversible or fundamental compromises.

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