



GREEN LEFT NEWS

VESTAS

Vestas is a Danish based multi national company which had one factory in the UK, on the Isle of Wight, this was England's only manufacturer of large scale wind turbines. This summer, just as Labour environment minister Miliband was announcing his belief in the importance of combatting climate change, Vestas announced the closure of its IoW plant. Many of the workers struck and with support from several organisations including the Campaign for Climate change, Climate camp, AWL, IoW trades Council and (a little belatedly) the Green Party, a group of Vestas workers occupied the factory in a last ditch attempt to keep it open. Probably their most important supporters were the RMT, who recruited Vestas workers, sent down organisers and helped with legal costs. The Greens managed statements of support and some London Greens took down the London Region and the GPTU banners to demos in support. Sadly the court granted Vestas an injunction and the occupiers were expelled by bailiffs. The Government sat on its hands as it has done throughout, it makes fine sounding speeches about environmentalism and its recognition of global climate crisis but actions speak louder than words, it prefers to promote war to defend oil supplies and financially cushion fat cat bankers, whilst allowing a vital industry too be destroyed.

I think that if there had been much more public support, including much greater Green Party support, things could have turned out otherwise. The struggle for Vestas and the struggle for a socially just environmentally sound society (aka Eco socialism) is not over. More solidarity actions for Vestas will be taking place on at go to <http://savevestas.wordpress.com/> for details and remember to support the Vestas emergency motion at GP conference.

Pete Murry (Green Left Treasurer and Secretary of Green Party Trade Union Group)



COMMODIFICATION OR LIBERATION

Current conflicts in education policy can be traced back to the 70s and 80s when the post-war consensus on the welfare state began to break down. Norman Tebbit cited the 'poisoned legacy of the 1960s' and stated: 'British society must regain a sense of order. Order reinforced by punishment of violent criminals. Order in our streets. Order in schools and order in the home.' An anonymous civil servant at the Department of Education was quoted as saying, "The working class must, once again, be taught to know its place." This was the 'moral' and authoritarian aspect of the Thatcherite project, which carried on under New Labour but the other aspect is the introduction of market ideology and processes into schools.

TENSIONS AND CONTRADICTIONS

Claus Offe (Contradictions of the Welfare State, 1984) suggests that there is a tension between the welfare state, which generates wider values and a range of alternatives, and capitalism's need to universalise the commodity form. The welfare state is more stable and long-term than capitalism but relies on capitalism for its funding. The capitalist system needs the welfare state to provide the conditions for its development and to deal with potential sources of discontent, but at the same time the values of the welfare state can be subversive of capitalist values.

The New Right sought to re-establish traditional moral authority over the working class and at the same time set out to remove the subversive potential of the welfare state by introducing market values and processes. The latter policy was aided by working class disenchantment with the welfare state's inability to meet rising expectations and frustration at its unresponsive bureaucratic methods.

Although health, welfare provision and social services also come under attack the major battleground was education. The initial target was the left-wing Inner London Education Authority, which in an illustration of the welfare state's ability to generate alternatives, had begun to address issues of racial, gender and class inequality. The New right's attack soon widened to a general assault on local education authorities and local democratic control of schools. The ILEA's abolition served as a warning to other LEAs to toe the line.

Continued overleaf

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MULTI-PRONGED COMMODIFICATION

CONTENT OF THE CURRICULUM – The Conservative government, critical of schools' curriculum freedom and what Scruton called a 'diet of anti-racist mathematics, anti-imperialist history, anti-sexist English, Peace Studies, World Studies and the like', introduced a National Curriculum, setting out in detail what schools should teach. Under Blair this was extended to actual lessons through the Literacy and Numeracy Hours. Although schools theoretically have the freedom to teach additional subjects, the curriculum is so crowded as to leave no time to do so, particularly in areas when pupils need lots of extra input, including booster classes, to achieve the targets.

PROCESS – This content is reinforced by a system of testing, targets and league tables, which pitches schools against each other and subjects 'under-performing' schools to pressure from Ofsted and possible closure or transformation into academies if they fail to meet targets. This serves to discipline teachers and shift the blame for inequality from the structure of society on to schools.

MARKETISATION – Financial management was devolved from LEAs to individual schools, which changed the role of headteacher from educationalist to business manager. Many services hitherto provided by the LEA: school meals, cleaning, grounds maintenance, major building works, IT networks; are now provided by private contractors who take a share of the tax-payer provided education funding in profits.

Under the unelected Lord Adonis, enthusiastically supported by Blair, a series of attempts to remove schools from LEA control have culminated in the academies programme. This is based on the belief that market ideology is more effective than welfare state ideology and that capitalist sponsors will be able to 'turn round' failing schools. Although the sponsors make no direct 'profit' from the schools, they open up a potential new field to marketisation, achieve good PR and the possibility of a knighthood or a place in the House of Lords. The programme is now extended to any new or rebuilt schools – LEAs don't get the money unless they agree to them being academy schools. Academy and Trust schools are therefore funded for building and running costs by the taxpayer but controlled by the sponsor who appoints governors and has an inbuilt majority on the governing body. As with hospitals a further dimension is provided by PFI (Private Finance Initiative) where a private company is paid a fee by the local authority over 25 years for a new building and its maintenance.



COMPETITION

Academies in modern futuristic buildings obviously pose a threat to other local schools and initially had additional 'freedoms' such as greater flexibility in the curriculum incorporating the 'expertise' of their religious or private sponsors, control over their own admissions system, not having to following nationally agreed conditions of service of teachers, and exception from the Freedom of Information Act. Under Brown some of these freedoms have been reined back via conditions set under each school's funding agreement with the government, so for example they now have to adhere to the locally agreed admissions arrangements. Many of the freedoms remain and the incoming Conservative government has pledged to accelerate the programme, 'restore the freedoms' and extend the programme into primary schools. Meanwhile academies permanently exclude more pupils than similar community schools and recruit fewer free school meal pupils than the schools they replace.

GREEN PARTY POLICY

The Green Party is the only political party with the beginnings of a critique of this process. Our policies on revising (or abolishing?) the National Curriculum, ending SAT tests and league tables, and opposition to academies all challenge the commodification of education. However we need to develop an alternative vision for education. Chitty (1986) provides a starting point when he suggests, "No education system can by itself produce a democratic society, but it can be personally and collectively egalitarian and liberating only when it seeks to help youngsters understand from the start that the existing social and economic arrangements were not ordained by God and can therefore be changed by human activity and struggle."

CAMPAIGNING POINTS

Meanwhile we are faced with practical issues at a local level. I suggest our strategy should include:

1. NO NEW ACADEMIES OR TRUST SCHOOLS instead support the funding of new community schools: OUR TAXES – OUR SCHOOLS
2. REASSIMILATION OF ACADEMIES AND TRUST SCHOOLS – support campaigns for them to operate under the same conditions as local community schools so they can be easily converted: RECLAIM OUR SCHOOLS
3. NO EXTENSION OF ACADEMIES – oppose Conservative plans for extending academies to primary sector, acceleration of the programme and restoration of the 'freedoms'.
4. ABOLISH THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM, TESTING, TARGET AND LEAGUE TABLES – remove these essential elements of commodification and liberate teachers and pupils.

Martin Francis (Brent Green Party - London)

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NUCLEAR DELUSIONS: POWER & SECURITY

'ENVIRONMENTALIST' SUPPORT FOR NUCLEAR POWER TO COMBAT GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE IS A DELUSION, PARALLEL TO THE DELUSION OF INTERNATIONAL SECURITY THROUGH NUCLEAR WEAPONS.

Tony Benn's voluminous diaries are undoubtedly a valuable resource for informed comment on nuclear policies. Benn was Labour Minister of Technology in 1966, Minister of Power in 1969, and Energy Minister from 1975 to 1979. Writing about the closure of the Dounreay nuclear plant in Scotland, Tony Benn's diary on Friday 5 June 1998 recorded: 'Nuclear power is finished and I'm glad I saw it; I saw it late, but I'm glad I saw it in time.'

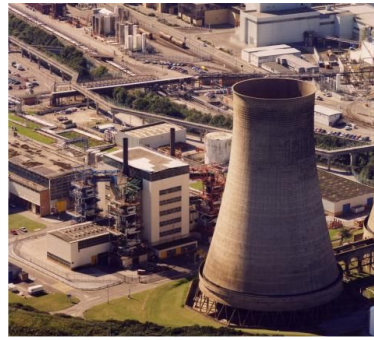
With hindsight, we may add wryly 'better late than never' - as Benn's erstwhile colleagues in the New Labour Government commit the UK to a new generation of nuclear power stations, and renewal of the Trident nuclear missile system. Tory policy is not significantly different.

Green Party policy statements have long opposed nuclear power [EN105] and nuclear weapons [RPD02.2]. The anti-nuclear stance is a key reason many of us joined the Green Party. So I am deeply dismayed, and disappointed, to read Mark Lynas' article supporting nuclear power in the current edition of Green World [65]. Lynas had requested the chance to explain his position, after feature articles in a previous Green World [63] highlighted the extra risks of high burnup spent nuclear fuel; the historical link between nuclear power and nuclear weapons; health dangers of radiation and the transport hazards of nuclear materials.

Nuclear power to combat global climate change is a delusion. Lynas' argument is that the benefits of nuclear power far outweigh the risks (my italics). He asserts that unless the Green Party comes round to his view we risk marginalising ourselves and looking outdated in the energy debate. Lynas contends that rejecting nuclear power in an age of global warming is illogical and arises from an unscientific approach to risk. This claim is simply untrue. It's akin to the sort of scientific sophistry peddled by the climate change deniers. Professor Chris Busby has written [GW63] 'those advocating a nuclear future should educate themselves before they enter this scientific arena'.

Lynas' article avoids any mention of the horrendous cost implications of more nuclear power - not least at public expense long after the private companies have taken their profits and vanished. He understates the genetic and health risks of low radiation doses. The unsolved problem of nuclear waste is side-stepped: he claims radioactivity will be insignificant 'within less than a thousand years' - conveniently forgetting that the half-life of the highly radiotoxic plutonium - 239 fuel is 24,100 years. He concedes that nuclear proliferation is 'a major strategic challenge for humanity', then brushes this problem aside.

Twinned with the nuclear power delusion is the parallel delusion of support for nuclear weapons as a rational and realistic basis for international security. The historic links between nuclear power and nuclear weapons date back to the first Magnox nuclear reactor opened at Calder Hall in 1956. It was heralded as the first civil nuclear power station, but had been developed from the atomic bomb programme, and its primary purpose was military: to produce material for more nuclear weapons.



Careful analysis of these nuclear delusions of power and security is central to formulating an ecosocialist approach. Democratic accountability and access to information are key elements. They are early casualties in the nuclear story. It is fascinating, and shocking, to turn to again to Tony Benn's diaries. On Monday 14 March 1977, Benn recorded: "John Hill (Chair of UK Atomic Energy Authority) came in to talk about Windscale. I asked 'What are the real hazards there?' and he told me something extraordinary. 'Well, there's activity everywhere you dig on that site. Whenever we had a spill we just covered it up. In 1957 one of the reactors caught fire and we simply poured in 300,000 tons of water which went right through the plant and into the ground.' " Next year, on Friday 9 June 1978, after a visit to Windscale, Benn confided to his diary: 'Nobody can truthfully say that this whole project can be handed over to future generations to look after safely when they've no idea whether future generations will be faced with invasion, earthquakes, floods ... It is a tremendously risky thing to do, and the duration of the risk, 10,000 or 15,000 years, is enormous.'

We can be sure nuclear accidents are still happening, and news never reaches us via the media. The desperate promotion of nuclear power as a solution, or even partial solution, to the climate change crisis is driven opportunistically by the nuclear industry. It is unfortunate that some environmentalists have been seduced by their specious arguments. The timescale alone for a nuclear programme is far too long. Renewable energy sources are the only answer. Not the feeble hesitating measures so far, but a truly determined effort by government. Failure to support the Vestas workers is a defining demonstration of the absence of serious commitment to renewable energy by New Labour. Nuclear power stations are potentially highly dangerous centralized sources of energy in a game of power politics. Nuclear power is not carbon neutral.

Nuclear weapons are useless against a security threat from terrorism. The use of nuclear weapons in any conceivable circumstances would be an insane act. There exists a capitalist agenda around nuclear weapons which is rooted in hypocrisy. We plan to extend our nuclear power programme, while denying some countries the option. We retain and enhance our nuclear weapons, which are deemed essential for our security, but not keeping our side of the non-proliferation agreement.

The Green Party must continue to reject these nuclear delusions.

Malcolm Bailey is Green Left regional representative in the Eastern Region. He was Senior Radiation Physicist at the Royal London Hospital for many years, and is Green Party parliamentary candidate for Mid Bedfordshire.

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The New Asian Drama

The Af-Pak war is unwinnable and is partly about fossil-fuels. That means stabilising the region to enable energy companies to lay gas pipelines, primarily to feed India. It is also about the control of central 'Eurasia', preventing Russia, Iran and China taking the place of retreating Western forces.

It is easy to forget that Iran and China are neighbours of Afghanistan and concerned of spillover. The recent disturbances in Xinjiang forced the Chinese leader, Hu Jintao, to abandon the G8 summit to deal with a challenge to Beijing's authority.

Instability is spreading like a virus from the war.

There is also an enduring sub-plot which will help decide the outcome.

The Sub-continental Agenda

In this region, the Anglo-American project since the thirties has involved encouraging religious forces to stoke up rivalries.

The genesis of this came from British colonial policy with its support for the Muslim League, ending up in bloody partition of South Asia in 1947. This left India in the middle, with two halves of something new called 'Pakistan' on either side (West and East Pakistan).

Pakistan is an artificial construct, left as a ticking time-bomb after two centuries of colonial extraction. After six decades, the poisonous rivalry sown in the depression years still determines much of what happens in the region.

The Bengalis in East Pakistan suffered years of new Punjabi colonialism and split away in 1971.

With rebellion in Baluchistan in the seventies, and the stock of the Army at an alltime low after the humiliating defeat in Bangladesh, it was entirely possible to see Pakistan disintegrating into three: a Punjab-Sind rump losing the Baluchis and the North-West Frontier Province.

The centre held after brutally putting down a Baluchi rebellion.

It then lost no time in trying to replace the loss of East Pakistan. The Indians had comprehensively beaten them in a three week war. The Pakistani generals felt an acute vulnerability. Like the Israelis in the 60s, the Pakistanis felt they needed more 'strategic depth'. In this military perspective, it seemed obvious that 'depth' could be carved out by replacing Bangladesh with Afghanistan.

Thus, the Delhi-Islamabad rivalry found a new playground to continue their ludicrous game of one-upmanship.



Tools of the trade

The key agency is the Inter-Services-Intelligence or ISI of Pakistan. They used Saudi resources to organise the original Mujahidden against the Russian Army. They then moved onto the young, fanatics of the Taliban - purpose-built for extending into the Stans (the oil and gas rich Muslim states left by the retreating Russians in 1991).

The other front was of course Kashmir. The ISI, operating as a state within a state, seems to feel it has outgrown the other organs and is bent on pursuing its extreme strategy, even at the risk of dismembering Pakistan itself.

The vicious groups it has sponsored have decided to physically join the badlands of Afghanistan with Kashmir. What separates the two is the SWAT valley and tribal areas. It comes as no surprise that these areas have seen the heaviest fighting in the last few months.

Delhi is equally culpable, garrisoning Kashmir and backing the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan. India prefers to pressure Pakistan to its rear. India wants natural gas to fuel its economic rise but cannot get it from Central Asia because of the war in Afghanistan. It is far more logical for India to obtain its gas from Baluchistan (in Pakistan) and also the enormous gas fields in Iran. Whenever their discussions look like bearing fruit, Washington puts its foot down.

Until there is regime change in Teheran, gas will not flow east to pro-Western states. Had the recent challenge by Mousavi succeeded, it might have been another story.

The soft-underbelly

Watch out for Baluchistan. It holds more copper than Chile and has copper and fossil fuel resources worth upwards of \$65 billion. An element in the Baluchi movement has consistently sought Washington's help in seceding away from Islamabad. The prize would be the use of those resources by US energy companies. The Americans haven't pressed that button yet. However, it is creating the conditions for just such a split. Cross-border attacks from Helmand province is loosening the fabric of Pakistan.

If Afghanistan is really unwinnable and not worth the candle, then 'compensation' could come in two forms: a friendly regime in Teheran, willing to allow the use of its resources and Baluchistan - the new puppet state in South Asia, rich in minerals and gas and perfectly positioned on the Arabian Sea and a safer land base from which to project power into Central and South Asia. In this scenario, Islamabad loses and Pakistan sinks into oblivion. Delhi thinks it gains as it finally sees off its rival. I doubt it would savour this pyrrhic victory for long. The virus of instability would spread east.

We need to stop beefing up the ISI i.e. rein in the awful Saudi regime.

We need to think UN and a regional solution, rather than NATO.

We need to get out. Once and for all.

Farid Bakht - Parliamentary Candidate for the Green Party in Bethnal Green & Bow

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