

THE GREEN PARTY / COMHAONTAS GLAS



Green Perspective '92

INTRODUCTION

Green politics is not simply a matter of protecting the environment. The environmental policies put forward by other parties can only deal with symptoms such as pollution. A new, radical approach is necessary to deal with the root causes of the potential catastrophe which is facing the planet.

Over the years human beings have set themselves up to dominate and exploit the Earth. But our whole future is vitally dependent on the environment. We depend upon a network of links with the rest of creation. Green politics acknowledges the reality and importance of that web of life.

The policies of traditional Left, Right and Centre have been abject failures. They promise unlimited growth, a technological 'fix' for all our problems, and universal affluence. But this materialistic approach is the fundamental problem. We can no longer ignore the spiritual dimension in the interests of selfish consumerism.

There is a strong link between our economic and ecological problems: both are due to the excesses of the system of industrialism. The system of large-scale, industrial factory organisation has helped to despoil the planet of its mineral and energy resources, is at the root of widespread pollution and ecological destruction, has caused us to feel we are not at home in the world, has led to the widespread regimentation of social life, and currently threatens the Earth with destruction. While we condemn the excesses of industrialism as a "wrong turn" in human development we do not condemn technology itself — merely inappropriate technology and its wasteful and dehumanising use.

We are therefore fundamentally opposed to the following: growth economics; consumerism; the worship of technique; and the state of mind which holds work, regardless of its quality in practice or product, to be an end in itself. Growth economics values growth in the quantity of goods produced over growth in the quality of life: consumerism places "having" over being; the unthinking worship of technology means that no thought is given to the bad effects of technological development; and the "work ethic" in the negative forms it takes in our society means that, for example, a nine-to-five job helping to produce nerve gas is valued more highly than the unpaid work of a child-minder. Clearly there is something wrong with a society which has its values in such a mess. Only a society organised according to spiritual rather than material values can offer a real alternative.

We live in a society where the values of quantitative, material growth hold sway over the values of qualitative, personal growth. We want a basic change of direction: away from consumerist values towards a society where the values of nurturing, caring, sharing, simplicity and respect for nature are foremost.

We interpret Green philosophy by means of the following seven principles which are at the root of all our policies: —

1. The impact of society on the environment should not be ecologically disruptive.
2. Conservation of resources is vital to a sustainable society.
3. All political, social and economic decisions should be taken at the lowest effective level.
4. Society should be guided by self-reliance and co-operation at all levels.
5. As caretakers of the Earth, we have the responsibility to pass it on in a fit and healthy state.
6. The need for world peace overrides national and commercial interests.
7. The poverty of two-thirds of the world's family demands a redistribution of the world's resources.

ENVIRONMENT

There is now widespread recognition of the major global environmental problems, such as deforestation, the Greenhouse Effect, the depletion of the ozone layer, and acid rain.

In Ireland, problems of air, soil and water pollution have become more severe. Examples are refuse, fossil fuel emissions, car exhausts, toxic waste, and in agriculture synthetic fertilisers, pesticides, and slurry.

The Green Party believes that we must reverse the 'throwaway society'. We must reduce the amount of resources wasted, we must create a reuse concept, and we must create a demand for recycled products. Factories must be opened to make use of sorted waste, and with this demand created we must then sort our waste.

Pollution will be lessened by a return to small-scale, labour-intensive, organic farming; the establishment of small-scale, local, non-toxic industries; and a much greater reliance on bicycles and public transport. The transport of all but the most urgent materials would be by railway, canal or sea. Getting rid of most road haulage would put an end to a great deal of pollution. There would also be a return to the use of natural, locally-found raw materials in industry.

In the short term we call for:

- The strengthening of the Environmental Protection Agency.
- An immediate ban on all dangerous and untested pesticides.
- The release of all pollution reports by state bodies and public access to the associated files.
- The display of all emergency disaster plans.
- An embargo on new toxic industries and the immediate closure of existing chronically polluting plants.
- The ending of all grants and subsidies being paid to those found polluting the environment.
- An end to the dumping of toxic waste. We insist that all hazardous materials be detoxified before disposal at the expense of the originator.

We are not willing to accept the concepts of 'acceptable risks' or 'safe levels of exposure' in dealing with the effects of pollution and health hazards on people. We look for the implementation of the 'precautionary principle'. In other words, 'If you're not sure about the consequences, don't dump or pump.'

The quality of life is being eroded in most Irish cities and towns. Dublin has been particularly badly hit in this regard. The Green Party is seeking the following changes on the way towards positive urban conservation and urban renewal:

- The inner cities must be re-populated.
- Land and property speculation must be eradicated.
- Planning must aim to retain the character of local environments through the retention of what is worthwhile in the old buildings and streets, while at the same time encouraging integration in the designing of new buildings.
- The interests of local communities must no longer be ignored in the creation of development plans for our cities.

We propose that imaginative use be made of existing country houses of architectural and historical value through employment schemes focussed on renovating them as community centres, art and craft

centres, educational and residential centres, etc., under community control. The potential of restored country houses as hotels and as sources of income from tourists is great and should be fully exploited. Planning laws regarding the construction of private houses in the countryside should be much more stringent and rigorously enforced. Architects have the responsibility to provide designs in accordance with the Irish native tradition.

THE ECONOMY AND TAXATION

We need to replace the emphasis on economic growth with an emphasis on growth in the quality of life. There needs to be an equilibrium between the environment and human activities. Job creation should emphasise urban regeneration, re-cycling, socially-useful products, and alternative energy. Goods should be made to last and materials should be re-cycable. There should be restrictions on advertising.

We propose central planning only where planning cannot feasibly take place at a lower level. We favour de-centralisation and the encouragement of the re-population of the countryside, with the re-establishment of a balance between rural and urban communities.

Goods should be produced locally wherever possible. People should be encouraged to be more self-sufficient: they should be enabled to have access to the means of production. Alternative trading systems should be developed to enable people to exchange skills.

Work would on the whole take place in smaller units. This can be done through government encouragement and tax incentives for small family businesses, individual enterprises, and co-operatives.

Workers, consumers, suppliers and the community should be involved in the management of companies. Profit-sharing schemes should be encouraged. Trade unions should be involved in productive organisation and give greater weight to environmental concerns.

Credit should be under democratic control, not under the control of a private banking system whose sole purpose is to make private profit. We support the credit union system and are opposed to exorbitant rates of interest. Lending and taxation policies should favour environment-friendly companies and long-term investment.

We will work to transform the European Community into a more ecological entity and reverse the concentration on free trade, competition, multi-national companies, and centralising industry in the European heartland. We support cultural co-operation and freedom of movement and favour international legislation on human rights and the environment.

There should be a significant write-down of the debts of Third World countries, varying according to past capital flight, purchases of military equipment, and luxury consumption by the elites. The losses should be made up from bank reserves and from arms-exporting countries. Third World countries must take action to improve their terms of trade.

Instead of the present social welfare system, we propose the introduction of a guaranteed basic income to all citizens, without means test or work requirement. This would remove the poverty trap whereby people can become poorer by taking up work. It would encourage the development of part-time work and small enterprises, and new ways of doing unpleasant work. It would relieve the pressure for harmful forms of industrialisation to create jobs. It would enable parents to stay at home when they wished and would allow people to take up educational opportunities.

Work should be organised so as to cut working hours and increase free time for existing workers, while allowing extra workers to be taken on. Free time should enable greater human fulfilment in terms of physical, aesthetic and intellectual culture, and the enhancement of community and family life.

There should be a shift in taxation away from income tax, which discourages work and labour-intensive industries, through the introduction of a land tax, based on the rental value of all urban and rural land, apart from areas of ecological sensitivity; failure to pay land tax should not result in a small farmer losing his/her property but the tax would be a charge against the property and would be paid on the sale of the property or the death of the owner. There should also be a shift away from VAT through the introduction of a tax on fossil fuels, based on making them as expensive as energy produced from renewable sources. Capital acquisitions tax would be replaced by a tax which would allow people to leave the property they had earned to legatees while the property which they had inherited would be returned to the community.

WOMEN AND SOCIETY

Only in a society in which 'feminine' values are given their full role will it be possible for ecological values to exist. We condemn the subtle and overt forms which sexism takes and we call for the liberation of Irish men and women from the fetters of patriarchal society.

The tax and social welfare systems give low status to the at-home housewife and mother. At the same time, there should be a community-funded joint parent/child-minder regulated child-care service for pre-school children and an after-school minding service.

We must ensure equality of opportunity at all levels in education. Equal pay legislation must be strengthened. Work needs to be restructured more in line with women's needs by promoting a shorter working day and encouraging men to take on family responsibilities.

We are opposed to sexist advertising and the pornography industry.

Adequate counselling and therapy must be available to victims of rape. Rape victims should be allowed to appear as prosecutors in court.

Sex education and contraception should be fully available. New medical technologies which commodify human beings should be opposed. Childbirth and pregnancy should be de-medicalised.

HEALTH

The emphasis of health policy should be on the prevention of disease, rather than its treatment. Health education in the fields of alcohol and drug abuse, occupational health, and nutrition is particularly necessary. There should be a ban on the advertising of alcohol and tobacco. We are opposed to the MMDS microwave system.

There should be an emphasis on personal responsibility for health and the development of alternative therapies. There should be more emphasis on local clinics than on large hospitals.

EDUCATION

Considerable organisational freedom would be given to students, teachers, and schools to develop new approaches to curriculum. School entry age should be adjusted to the degree of maturity of each student. Pre-school education will be properly funded and recognised.

Recognition and support will be given to local initiatives to establish schools or learning schemes. Village and small-scale schools will be encouraged to re-open. Schools will be invited to extend their educational horizons beyond their four walls, providing services to all learners, of whatever age. There should be smaller classes, at the cost of the number of class hours involving tuition. Special education should be integrated into the ordinary systems wherever possible.

Third level education must become more flexible and accessible to all. We favour the deconstruction of professional elites and the return of commerce and science to their proper roles as socially and environmentally responsible arts.

AGRICULTURE

The traditional family farm is declining and the countryside is suffering from pollution through fertilisers and pesticides.

We advocate the abolition of the CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) and its replacement by a system of grants to small and medium sized farms for producing high quality food by ecologically sound methods. Demand would once again determine what is to be produced. Such a system would cost only a fraction of what the CAP is costing.

Organic and bio-dynamic methods of farming should be actively promoted. From the points of view of farmer, consumer and environment, a large degree of self-sufficiency at local level is essential.

Livestock numbers should be limited to what the individual farm unit can itself support. The State should provide credit and training to landless people who wish to enter agriculture.

FOOD

Irish dietary advice should support the marketing of foods that naturally grow in Ireland without intensive farming techniques and that can be purchased in a fresh state free from potentially harmful preservatives. This discourages the unnecessary use of additives in food production and biocides added during farming and growing.

Irradiated and genetically engineered foods are totally opposed to these principles. The long-term effects of distorting the original chemical structure of foods are unknown.

LANGUAGE

We affirm the right of every person in Ireland to avail of facilities for learning the Irish language. We believe that everyone wishing to live his/her life through the Irish language or to use it to any degree should be enabled to do so, especially in the domains of public administration, broadcasting and education.

We support the use of Esperanto as an easily-learned, ideologically neutral and cost-effective means of communication.

HOUSING

We support home ownership and the purchase of council houses by sitting tenants. Where possible, old property should be renovated rather than knocked down in the interests of speculators. Building land should be made available at agricultural prices.

Agricultural land itself should not be used for building except where approved by the community. Planning restrictions should be revised to allow people to work from home, subject to neighbour approval. Energy-conscious house designs and building material should be promoted.

ENERGY

We seek carbon and energy taxes, with exemptions for most renewable sources of energy. This would place a huge emphasis on energy conservation, such as insulation and passive solar heating design in buildings, on efficient appliances and on efficient conversion techniques such as co-generation of power with space heating and district heating.

These taxes would also favour a shift from energy-intensive to labour-intensive industry, a shift towards renewables such as wind power, hydro, wave power and biofuels (vegetable oil, forestry, certain forms of waste etc.). Cleaner fuels such as natural gas would be preferred to coal, etc.

We demand that the Government takes effective international action to close Sellafield and avert the opening of the THORP reprocessing plant. All discharges of radioactive waste, especially into the Irish Sea, must be stopped immediately. We remain totally opposed to the importation into Ireland of any amount of nuclear generated power.

TRANSPORT

Transport should unite communities, not divide them. Instead of seeking more European finance for motorways we should concentrate on fixing the pot-holes in the roads we already have, and promoting public transport.

The country's railways need to be re-vitalised after years of neglect. We shall upgrade the Sligo, Galway and Limerick lines to provide fast comfortable passenger service and swift, reliable and energy efficient freight transport.

In Dublin we shall bring forward the proposals in the Dublin Transportation Initiative for modern trams, quality bus corridors, cheaper fares and improved pedestrian cycling facilities. Proper traffic management shall also help to unsnarl Dublin's traffic. Public transport fares shall be dramatically reduced to reflect its role in combating air pollution and relieving traffic congestion.

In rural areas the bus service shall be modernised to provide an efficient transport service for all of society. Sprawling suburban housing estates shall be united by Nipper bus services to neighbourhood services.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ireland's neutrality has been eroded over the years through our membership of the European Community and will exist only on paper if the Maastricht Treaty on European Union is implemented. Rather than doing this, we should base our foreign policy on positive neutrality and constructive non-interference. Where interference is deemed necessary, as in the case of human rights abuses, this should be done only through the United Nations. Ireland should become a nuclear-free zone.

NORTHERN IRELAND

The Green Party totally rejects the idea of coercing northern unionists into a United Ireland. Likewise we totally reject the current coercing of northern nationalists into the United Kingdom. We advocate the establishment of a Constitutional Conference to bring about a democratic method of achieving a new Constitution for the region based on the principle of consensus and in particular we recommend the use of the referendum - or multiple choice referendum - to this end.

We reject the use of force by all sides in this conflict. We further call for the withdrawal of the British Army from Northern Ireland and their replacement by a neutral international, and as much as possible non-military, peace-keeping presence.

LAW AND DISCRIMINATION

As a general principle we believe the function of laws to be to protect individuals, animals and the environment from harm. We are opposed to laws that unduly constrain the freedom and autonomy of adult citizens in their private lives. There should be no discrimination on the basis of homosexual preferences or activity in housing, employment or any other areas.

We oppose racism, sexism, ageism and sectarianism and, in particular, discrimination against travellers.

We demand respect for their lifestyle, language and culture and the provision of adequate halting facilities. Irish people cannot consistently condemn racism abroad while continuing to practice it against the travelling community at home.

The Green Party supports the ending of the constitutional ban on divorce and is in favour of legislation to protect the rights of all people involved after divorce.

The Green Party recognises the right of women to travel abroad to avail of services which are legally available in other countries. It recognises the right to provide information and non-directive counselling in regard to abortion. It believes that the right to life of the women must, if there is a conflict, take precedence over the right to life of the foetus.

We believe that humane alternatives to the prison system should be fully explored and that the legal system needs to be made more equally accessible to all strata of society. We call for the repeal of Section 31 of the Broadcasting Act, 1976.

DECENTRALISATION

Centralised systems are inherently undemocratic and produce wrong solutions to local problems. We seek a genuinely decentralised system in which people would have real control of the government of their own lives with an increased self-reliance and self-determination.

Statutory recognition and authority must be granted to properly structured community councils. It is only in such circumstances that ordinary citizens will begin to become the rightful arbiters of their own destiny.

ANIMAL POLICY

We are opposed to the abuse of animals whether in the form of coursing, factory farming, vivisection, or in any other way. The Green Party seeks to end all forms of animal abuse by our support for vegetarianism and alternatives to the drug system of medicine.

POLITICS

Green politics works by consensus wherever possible. We also reject political careerism, clientelism, profiteering and personality cults. Green Party councillors elected to the Oireachtas are required to resign their local authority seat so that another member of the Green Party can be co-opted in their place. After 8 years in the Dáil a Green Party T.D. may not stand at the next general election.

Laws are needed limiting the size and mandating the publication of donations to political parties.

We call for a Freedom of Information Act covering all government and public bodies.

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