

Bristol IWW EUC – The Industrial Workers’ Climate Plan:
A Great Green Charter

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If you go to one demonstration and then go home, that’s something, but the people in power can live with that. What they can’t live with is sustained pressure that keeps building, organisations that keep doing things, people that keep learning lessons from the last time and doing it better the next time.

(Noam Chomsky)

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An ecology movement that once seemed jaded is budding and blossoming beautifully. The fantastic efforts of the school strikes’ movement and groups like Extinction Rebellion, Earth Strike and the Green Anti-Capitalist Front have forced green issues back into mainstream public debate. This achievement has been marked by declarations that there is a ‘climate emergency’, first by the Welsh and Scottish governments and then, fittingly on 1st May, by the UK Parliament. A fortnight earlier, the University of Bristol had become the first UK university to declare a climate emergency. So successful have these campaigns been that there is now a broad consensus that *something* must be done. It is essential to build on this achievement and keep up the momentum. We urgently need to continue the conversation about what do to now.

Alongside the general strikes for climate action in September 2019, Earth Strike is therefore proposing that a Great Green Charter would be a powerful rallying document for the environmental crisis of the Twenty-First Century. The nineteenth-century movement called Chartism inspired the idea of a Great Green Charter. The Chartists drew up clear and agreed points which they pursued with a mix of political, economic and cultural approaches. Chartism became the largest reform movement of its time, taken up by thousands of ordinary people across the United Kingdom. The Chartists were successful, in as much as most of the points listed on ‘The People’s Charter’ were eventually attained, and even exceeded. While this was not within the years of Chartism, and achieved only after great struggle, the Chartists defined the terms of political reform for the decades to come.

Moving forward some 170 years, in the wake of the 2008 Financial Crisis we saw the meteoric rise and, then the fizzling away of Occupy and similar movements. Occupy was a promising mass movement that identified the wealthiest 1% as the cause of the Crisis, called for radical change and was global in its reach and impact.

Positively, Occupy organised across borders, recognised the urgency of the Financial Crisis as a threat to social well-being but also as an opportunity for change. It started to ask far-reaching questions, seeing causal links between the neo-Liberal capitalist system and economic insecurity, social injustice and environmental degradation. By 2012, however, Occupy was largely a spent force, with only the occasional mobilisation organised under the Occupy banner in the years that followed. One of the problems was that, while Occupy was broadly opposed to the existing political and financial ‘establishment’, for many it wasn’t clear what it stood *for* and seemed to lack practical strategies for change to sustain it over the longer term. To be effective, supporters of the latest new green upsurge must avoid these shortcomings, since humanity cannot fail to respond to the current climate emergency.

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We have nothing but general principle to unite us – and the moment specific propositions are named, we become a rope of sand.

(Radical John Disney on the political reform movement of the early 1800s)

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There are many obstacles to change. Movements for political reform and social justice have often found that appealing to the consciences of political leaders and heads of business can be disempowering if not strengthened by other forms of social pressure. Across the world, concerned people and activists have marched in millions, written letters, spent time in police cells and prison and even set fire to themselves, sewn up their mouths and gone on hunger strike to force the political authorities and the media to listen to their demands for social justice. Too often, the response from the political and economic ‘establishment’, and its media, is to try to ignore, insult, ridicule, repress, mis-represent or co-opt its critics. Unfortunately, despite some success in single-issue campaigns, the ecological movement has failed in the past to make enough progress, even though it is now at least fifty years old.

The difficulty that environmental activists face is in part due to the problem of what critics have termed ‘carbon lock-in’. In the current system our economy has long been heavily dependent upon the high consumption of fossil fuels. As cited in the Centre for Alternative Technology’s excellent report *Zero Carbon Britain: Making it Happen*, this is ‘perpetuated by technical and institutional co-evolution’, so there are significant vested interests in keeping things as they are. ‘Lock-in’ means that most of us in ‘developed’ countries are caught up in, and to an extent dependent upon, an unsustainable consumer economy. This makes it difficult for ordinary people, even those who are sympathetic to ecological issues, not to drive, to find

work that is environmentally sustainable or to afford environmentally friendly products. Fossil-fuel and nuclear industries receive substantial subsidies. Transport infrastructure, for example, is based around the use of private cars as the normal means to travel. In this context, efficient and environmentally friendly options such as public transport and organic farming are penalised. Such options are perceived to be more 'expensive' because the explicit costs on tickets and price tags are higher, yet the 'external' economic costs of climate change and pollution are mostly hidden. So, obstacles to change are systemic. Yet in a climate emergency we cannot wait for those who are entrenched representatives of such a system to be persuaded, voted out or overthrown to introduce the necessary and far-reaching transformation to an economy that meets essential human needs by sustainable means.

Sometimes, however, when there is a substantial proportion of a population in sympathy with demands for social justice, it is possible to wrench power in a more positive direction. We need practical and imaginative strategies to tackle the multiple causes of environmental degradation at all social levels. Even if we do one day have a political set-up that enables more progressive attitudes, linking greater commitment to social justice with environmental justice, there will still be a need for critical involvement across society. The good news is that we are not starting on the road to a more sustainable economy from scratch. Independent organisations, such as the Centre for Alternative Technology, Transition Network, the New Economics Foundation and many others, have developed expertise in finding practical strategies for creative change. Today, we urgently need to scale up from the efforts of isolated individuals and households to concerted action leading to the collective implementation of such change. The climate crisis needs to be tackled at all levels and from all angles. We need the mass participation of a growing constituency of citizens on an ongoing basis to build alternative organisations and infrastructure. This is what initiatives such as Earth Strike could potentially achieve.

The tricky thing is to formulate succinct smart points for the Great Green Charter that are attainable yet ambitious enough to make an impact. Such initiatives need to be concise and easy to understand. There are many great suggestions among the two hundred ideas that were put forward in the 2017 *People's Manifesto for Wildlife*. But the Chartists packed their punch into points that could legibly be printed on a postcard. There are several other principles that should be born in mind.

First, support will be most likely if demands can be put forward that have inclusive and diverse community benefit. Action against planned obsolescence, for example, could reduce consumption of energy and resources while improving people's quality of life by producing durable, reliable and beautifully designed goods. In this respect, it is important not to make particular working-class constituencies bear the brunt of ecological transition by sacrificing the well-being of their communities for the sake of transitions that benefit all of society. Internationally, workers such as coal miners and loggers need to be agents and beneficiaries not scapegoats during the process of transition. Ecological change needs to be considered in a planetary context, fostering international solidarity and keeping in mind the longstanding green objective to 'act local, think global'.

We should be making transitional demands to suit the needs of the Twenty-First Century. Ideally, we need to set aims that are achievable and once achieved, shift the ground of possibility so that further change can take place. A shorter working week and a basic income scheme, for example, could have profound social consequences, leading to greater material security, enhancing positive life choices by freeing time for personal development and increasing the scope for mutual aid and participatory democracy.

In all cases the points on the Charter should be provisional and dynamic. It is essential that strategies for change are evidence based. It is important to be aware of unintended consequences for any action. The Jevons paradox, suggests for example, that greater energy efficiency can lead to greater demand. Reductions in commuting time and energy by home working need to be set against the possibility of increased consumption of fuel required to heat domestic residences.

The Great Green Charter's points should build human interactions that take place outside of the dynamic of infinite economic growth on a finite planet. Capitalism is failing to secure a sustainable future. Several of the scenarios put forward in the famous *Limits to Growth* report of 1972 have been borne out by subsequent history (although climate change was not emphasised). Twenty years later, in 1992, the high-profile Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro raised the challenge to protect the global environment on the world stage. Again, expansive capitalism failed to rise to the challenge. The so-called free market fails to cost externalities and makes its profits at the expense of the living world. We need to focus the economy on meeting core human needs such as health, education, food and housing.

Education and increasing awareness must underpin all of the points of the Great Green Charter. The psychologist Howard Gardner included 'naturalistic intelligence' among his famous categories of multiple human intelligences. Society's relationship with the natural environment should be a core part of any new educational curriculum. This should include understanding the natural world through science and the humanities in the classroom but also experiential learning with the natural world from early years onwards. Coming generations will care for the environment if they know and love the natural world through direct encounters and discovery. We are all learners on a journey.

Finally, the points of the Great Green Charter should be based on the premise that it will not, of course, be possible to win over everybody at once. It is based on the idea that if those that are sympathetic take coordinated action in unison, this will shift the grounds of what is possible and start to deliver the changes we want to see. The emphasis here is beyond symbolic days of action. The Charter seeks to promote action embedded in effective community initiatives that reframe the context for the ecological debate and to take practical action to bring about an ecologically robust and resilient future society. They are based on principles of social solidarity and mutual aid. We should not be begging for changes; we should, and can, implement them.

The Great Green Charter offers eight broad areas of impact, with some suggestions for the kind of transformational 'wins' that would make a genuine

difference in combatting climate change, while improving the quality of life for ordinary people. We look forward to seeing them refined and actioned.

Care for the Planet

- Rewilding: Scale-up a gigantic, cross-border people's planting programme of appropriate trees and shrubs.
- Expansion of nature reserves in key habitats for the protection of biodiversity.
- Ensure a decent standard of living for all, without recourse to exploitation of vulnerable wild non-human species, by equitable and effective distribution of goods and services.
- Increases in green, living spaces everywhere, transforming the built environment to grow more food, absorb carbon dioxide and improve mental health.

Internationalism

- Form disaster-support networks for resilience, based on principle of mutual aid.
- Pre-emptive work to mitigate future crisis situations.
- Relocate and disaster-proof communities that are most at risk, ensuring homes, livelihoods and social connections are maintained with minimal dislocation.
- We cannot afford a global economy based upon unsustainable extraction and depletion, ultimately leading to mass poverty. We need to activate workers' power to bring about steady-state, regenerative economy to ensure a decent standard of living for all.
- In many states, armed forces are the largest single consumers of fossil-fuels. In a world of resource shortages, environmental destruction and competition for land they increasingly imperial humanity's future rather than offering 'security'. Confronting this situation is not unrealistic idealism but an urgent matter of survival for millions. A reduction in nationalist rivalry would empower ordinary people to unite across borders. The greater the decrease in global military spending, the greater the potential to realise a gigantic peace dividend to benefit all and to protect resources for future generations.

Housing and the build environment

- Programme of sustainable housing with retrofitting of existing stock.
- Demand a reinstatement of the obligation to ensure that all new homes are carbon zero.
- Promote affordable low-impact housing for all.
- Survey of all existing agricultural and industrial production to assess its ability for sustainable production and if economic arrangements are able to produce enough to meet the needs of the area.

- Following this transitional process, the essentials for all individuals to live a dignified life must be delivered; food, clothing, energy, housing should be provided on a basis of decarbonised, sustainable production and not profit.

Health care and social wellbeing

- Sustainable healthcare within a transformed healthcare environment.
- Medical centres to be better integrated with transportation systems.
- Introduce Universal Basic Income Scheme to abolish absolute poverty and economic precarity so that people are not forced to take on environmentally destructive jobs and to commute each day. Changing patterns of work to a four-day week or less would free-up time for social governance based on participatory democracy.
- Design thinking against planned obsolescence; not-for profit research and development to design durable, repairable products with standardised and recyclable parts and with open-source patents.
- Reinvigoration of public libraries as free community resource centres for accessible equipment to borrow and share, thereby reducing cost of living without increasing carbon footprint.
- Pension and other public investment schemes must divest from fossil fuel and other environmentally and socially harmful industries.

Food and agriculture

- Localised and sustainable food and resource production, based on principles of food sovereignty; for social need not profit.
- Rapid transition from animal-based to plant-based vegetarian and vegan food production, with effective networks of distribution of surpluses to end global food poverty.
- Community food stores and local projects, such as collective growing projects and mutual-aid kitchens to provide excellent nutrition for all.
- Massive reduction of single-use packaging, with a systematic rethink to design-out landfill waste.
- Expand systems of high-yield, low-impact food production such as permaculture and vertical farming. Address soil depletion, due to erosion and excessive use of fossil-fuel based chemical fertilisers and end application of ecologically damaging insecticides and herbicides.
- Seasonal and local food to reduce need for long distance transportation and refrigeration. Cultivate much more diverse types and varieties of crops.

Transportation

- Democratic and accountable public transport governance, administering a genuinely integrated mass-transit system incorporating trains, coaches, buses and bikes.
- Accessible, integrated timetabling for local, regional and international travel by land and sea. Longer holidays for slower transport options!

- Immediately end subsidies for fossil-fuel based transportation so that bikes are tax exempt, not aviation fuel. End expansion of existing airports immediately.
- Transfer subsidies above directly into cheap or free public transport for maximum inclusion and social benefit, helping to reduce and abolish the fatal impact of air pollution due to gridlock by energy inefficient single and double occupant vehicles.
- Since transportation is the greatest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the UK, it needs to be tackled from both the production side with a faster switch to electric vehicles and biofuels from agricultural waste, and the demand side, for example reducing commuter traffic by switching computer-based work to local hubs and car-pooling. Work towards ending 'lock-in'; dependence upon unsustainable travel options due to geographical isolation, especially in rural and suburban areas.
- Promote initiatives for a new age of sail, exploiting advances in design and back-up mechanisms for periods of low windspeed.

Renewable Community Energy

- Renewable community energy: e.g. A green aid along the lines of Live Aid, but with a difference. Rather than a one-off spectacular event, we can collectively organise an ongoing programme of cultural events devolved across the UK, showcasing regional performers, creative artists and others who can share skills to raise funds for community benefit. Funds, expertise and materials would be linked to specific projects, to be used, for example, to retrofit and add energy generating capacity to social housing, hospitals, care homes and community buildings.
- Cancel fracking and implement workers' plans for transition to renewable energy programmes .

Education and Information

- A restructuring of our education system is needed. Rather than priming students to be consumers and producers, teaching and learning should develop knowledge and skills that nurture social awareness and prioritise sustainability. Emphasise approaches that meet social needs and integrate problem solving for social problems. Younger people be equipped with skills to support local sustainable industries.
- Consensus building and a respect for deliberation will enable young people to best participate in the organisational structures of their community.
- Holistic lifelong learning to develop all of people's multiple intelligences, enabling socially and ecologically aware beings rather than a narrow skillset for individualistic advancement in capitalist enterprises. Encourage the application of critical thinking skills for creating the broadest benefit, rather than maximising the profit for a few.
- Teaching the history of diverse cultures and perspectives creates respect for others.
- Raise ecological awareness by supporting demands to integrate education about climate change and the ecological crisis in the national curriculum;

- Develop and promote alternative media alongside engaging in mainstream and social media. Democracy and accountability in public information. Availability of accessible, reliable, evidence-based information, mitigating the extreme bias that reflects the vested interests of advertisers and commercial interests.