

From Climate Camp to mass movement

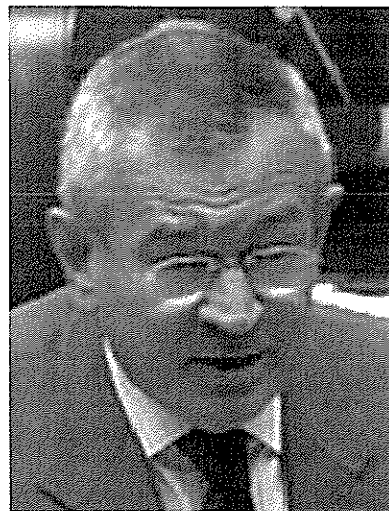
Tim Root on coalition building to stop Kingsnorth

The Kingsnorth Climate Camp gained quite a lot of publicity, although much of it concerned activist versus police manoeuvring, which obscured the key issues. Its supporters' commitment will surely contribute to future breakthroughs. However we will need many more than its 1,500 activists to achieve radical cuts in carbon emissions. We need to point the finger of blame more dramatically at government ministers who are failing to take the action public opinion demands. I completely share the Climate Camp's view that new coal power stations must not be allowed. But this demand does not convey sufficient information to most people, who do not know that coal emits much more CO₂ than other fuels. Therefore the demand itself does not get across the awful harm climate change is already causing, and the urgency of reducing it while we still can.

To do so we need to build a much broader coalition which can thus win stronger public support. Seventy organisations have affiliated to Stop Climate Chaos, including those with many members such as the RSPB, Unison, and Christian Aid. We need to contact these members personally and draw them into campaigns, such as Friends of the Earth's national day of action on renewables on 25th October, the Compassionline.org.uk campaign for a windfall tax on the power companies to cut fuel poverty and boost renewables, or the Transition Towns movement to decarbonise their own town. Some activists wish for a leaderless world, but most people are influenced by those they perceive as authorities on the topic in question. The public - and the media - also pay more attention to attractive public figures, especially those who inspire confidence. Therefore we should strive to gain the support of people such as Stephen Hawking, or religious leaders, who are seen as trustworthy and sincere. We also need to highlight the stories of individual victims, with whom ordinary

people can identify, such as Britons whose homes were flooded last year. A picture is worth a thousand words, so we should show familiar locations devastated by climate change. This underlines that we in the advanced nations are also potential victims. How about a montage of Gordon Brown wading through chest-high water outside Parliament, saying "I wish I'd built more wind farms."

As Labour looks likely to lose the next election, we must consid-



British Energy Minister Malcolm Wicks: approach on carbon capture called 'extremely dangerous' by MPs

er our bargaining power over the parties. In June David Cameron said the Tories would set a limit on power stations' CO₂ emissions. One of the Tories three "core visions", prominent on their website, is to "make Britain safer and greener". This shows that we can push the parties to compete for the environmental vote. We need to ridicule the pathetic complacency of Energy Minister Malcolm Wicks, who said that the challenge "is to bring on clean coal technology and carbon capture storage [CCS]", but refused to set any deadline for its use. The House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee called this approach "extremely dangerous". Wicks was following

the servile example of his civil servant who emailed power company EON to ask if they would allow the government to make CCS compulsory, and then thanked them when they said no. Wicks refuses to help save life on Earth if the pursuit of profit rules otherwise. We should also highlight the opposition of former government chief scientist David King to new coal power stations, his warning that CCS is unproven, and his criticism of government ministers for "working in opposition to what is necessary for the public good".

Our awareness of politicians' cynicism should not make us under-estimate their susceptibility to public opinion. Cameron will have noted that in response to his party's Quality of Life working group report last October, a poll found that nearly two-thirds endorsed its central theme of higher taxes on environmentally damaging activities and lower taxes on income, which only 10% opposed. We need to demand that this policy is balanced by a strong programme of insulation of poor people's homes, and investment in affordable public transport.

It is also vital that we address the international dimension. Many concerned people will not devote their energy to climate change if they feel other countries' negligence will dwarf our efforts. We need an internationally agreed list of demands. What a coup if we could get people such as Oprah Winfrey, Bono, and Desmond Tutu to appear in a brief ad encouraging people all over the world to press their governments on the demands. The scale of our task requires no less ambition.

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