

Is there a climate for change?

Last year Friends of the Earth achieved the remarkable success of getting two-thirds of MPs to back its Early Day Motion calling for a climate change bill; 130,000 people wrote to their MP in support of the campaign. The Government responded to this pressure by publishing a draft bill.

Our Parliament may soon pass the world's first law obliging a national government to make specified carbon emissions cuts. This would enable campaigners abroad to put pressure on their governments to follow Britain's example.

Public opinion supports this struggle. A recent BBC poll of 21 diverse nations found that in over half of these countries over two-thirds of people consider it necessary to take major steps very soon to cut climate change. In all but two nations a substantial majority favoured poorer countries limiting their emissions in return for financial and technological help from wealthy nations.

It is the poorer nations which are currently suffering, and will suffer most severely from climate change in the future. This was shown by the recent floods in Africa, and those which killed at least 1,100 people and displaced a massive 19 million from their homes in south Asia this summer. Developing nations lack the infrastructure and resources to limit the devastation caused by severe weather events, such as England's floods this summer. The impoverished will suffer most as world food output falls, and rising seas flood many great cities, as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predicts.

A recent Institute for Public Policy Research study considered how to avoid a temperature rise of more than 2°C, which practically all governments and climate scientists regard as vital. This would require global emissions to peak as soon as 2010-2013, and fall annually by 4-5% by 2015-20. Other research has obtained similar results.

Therefore the Government's proposed target in the Climate Change Bill of a 60% cut by 2050 is not only inadequate, as the Environmental Audit Committee has underlined, but lacks a mechanism to ensure that the cuts take effect soon enough. Friends of the Earth has therefore proposed annual cuts of at least 3% and reports by an independent expert body to check that reductions are on

Friends of the Earth activist Tim Root calls on Labour Party members to help win a pathbreaking Climate Change Act!

course, as recommended by the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee. The draft bill also omits international aviation and shipping from the calculation of Britain's emissions.

Five-sixths of Britons believe global warming is currently happening, while four-fifths believe it will almost certainly accelerate over the next few decades. People want to do their bit to help. However the derisory amount the Government has allocated to its Low Carbon Buildings Programme has frustrated many who applied for grants to install renewables in their homes.

The Government should introduce a feed-in tariff to pay a premium price for electricity which householders add to the national grid. Such a tariff has led to Germany generating 200 times more solar electricity and ten times more wind electricity (despite having less wind) than Britain. It also helped create 250,000 jobs in the German renewables industry. Such measures could surmount political obstacles with less difficulty if a strong Climate Change Act were introduced. The

Government would know that it would suffer acute political embarrassment if it failed to hit the legally binding targets, and would have a strong incentive to implement the necessary projects.

The Government's environmental record shows we could well lose many votes to the Tories or Lib Dems unless we improve. Green taxes have fallen from 3.6% of national income in 1999 to 2.7% now. The Government is cutting funding for the railways, which will lead to large fare increases. The disappointing pre-budget report contained no incentives for energy conservation, but did emphasise again the vast amounts devoted to building more roads, which will soon become congested.

The Government's aspirations to international leadership on climate change will appear completely hollow unless the bill is improved. Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, Christian Aid and many other organisations will be mobilising large numbers of supporters to try to strengthen the bill, chiefly by targeting Labour backbenchers. I hope Labour will demonstrate that it is the greenest of the parties. Please help your local Friends of the Earth group with this campaign!

●For more information visit www.foe.co.uk/campaigns/climate/press_for_change/email_mp/index.html. Tim Root is the author of *Love, Empowerment and Social Justice: Personal Relationships and Citizen Action* (Open Gate Press, 2005). Contact him via www.timroot.net, tim@timroot.net.

World Development Movement members protest at Labour Party Conference, 2007.

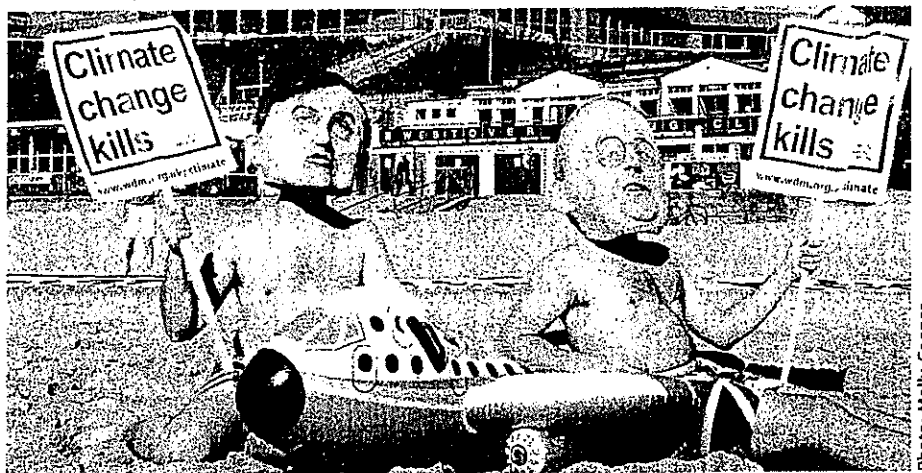


Photo: Molly Cooper