

Philosophical Basis Updates

Background Paper

1. Summary of Proposals

Our Philosophical Basis and Core Values have not been updated for many years. This motion is to update them to reflect current scientific understanding of the climate and biodiversity crises - as reflected in Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (ipbes) reports - as well as changes to our own policies.

The key themes are:

- The climate and biodiversity crises now warrant a state of emergency
- Change is required at speed and at scale
- Our economic ideology must reflect this state of emergency
- The role of work must reflect changes to economic ideology

The reasoning behind the specific changes are detailed below - these primarily include changes to our own policies since the Philosophical Basis and Core Values were last revised.

2. A State of Emergency

Changes to CV2 (previously 9), PB102, and PB305 are essentially:

- to recognise "that human influence has already warmed the atmosphere, ocean, and land causing widespread and rapid changes affecting many weather and climate extremes in every region across the globe"
- to recognise "that the great majority of indicators of biodiversity and ecosystem health are showing rapid decline due to multiple human drivers"

These changes strengthen the previous wording around "threatening the environment" and recognises biodiversity as well as climate impacts.

These are supported by our own Climate Emergency Policy: "We face a climate emergency. Earth's climate is already changing at unprecedented speed, exemplified by higher temperatures, rising sea levels, ocean acidification and more frequent and severe floods, droughts, and storms." (CC011)

Wording on climate change is informed by the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report that states "It is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land. Widespread and rapid changes in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere and biosphere have

occurred." and "Human-induced climate change is already affecting many weather and climate extremes in every region across the globe. Evidence of observed changes in extremes such as heatwaves, heavy precipitation, droughts, and tropical cyclones, and, in particular, their attribution to human influence, has strengthened since AR5." (https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGI_Headline_Statements.pdf)

Wording on biodiversity is informed by the ipbes Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, which states "Nature across most of the globe has now been significantly altered by multiple human drivers, with the great majority of indicators of ecosystems and biodiversity showing rapid decline." (https://ipbes.net/sites/default/files/inline/files/ipbes_global_assessment_report_summary_for_policymakers.pdf)

3. The Scale and Speed of Change Required

The speech of the Secretary-General of the United Nations can hardly be bettered as a statement of the urgency of the situation (<https://www.independent.co.uk/climate-change/news/antonio-guterres-climate-lying-governments-b2051271.html>)

- "We are on a fast track to climate disaster; major cities under water, unprecedented heat waves, terrifying storms, widespread water shortages, the extinction of a million species of plants and animals, This is not fiction or exaggeration, it is what science tells us will result from our current energy policies."

He also described governments' responses as

- "A litany of broken climate promises. A file of shame cataloguing empty pledges."

The scale of the challenge of climate change have been extensively documented in the IPCC 6th Assessment Report Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/>, with many stated with high confidence including:

- Global warming, reaching 1.5°C in the near-term, would cause unavoidable increases in multiple climate hazards and present multiple risks to ecosystems and humans (very high confidence). The level of risk will depend on concurrent near-term trends in vulnerability, exposure, level of socioeconomic development and adaptation (high confidence). Near-term actions that limit global warming to close to 1.5°C would substantially reduce projected losses and damages related to climate change in human systems and ecosystems, compared to higher warming levels, but cannot eliminate them all (very high confidence).
- Near-term warming and increased frequency, severity and duration of extreme events will place many terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems at high or very high risks of biodiversity loss (medium to very high confidence, depending on ecosystem).

- Climate change impacts and risks are becoming increasingly complex and more difficult to manage. Multiple climate hazards will occur simultaneously, and multiple climatic and non-climatic risks will interact, resulting in compounding overall risk and risks cascading across sectors and regions. Some responses to climate change result in new impacts and risks. (high confidence).

Amplifying these worries, the report also states:

- Non-linearities can result from abrupt climate changes, tipping points or thresholds in responses.

“Climate change is not on pause. Once the global economy begins to recover from the pandemic, emissions are expected to return to higher levels. Saving lives and livelihoods requires urgent action to address both the pandemic and the climate emergency” (<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/climate-change/>).

The urgency of the challenges of climate change lead us to propose changes to a number of Green Party Principles in order to:

- remove any wording which suggests that we have many years, as in PB301.
- add emphasis on the need for speedy action, in PB302 and PB412

In order to stress that only democratic processes can achieve these urgent changes, modifications are proposed to PB302, while recognition that these changes are equitable and sustainable is embedded in PB412 and PB413.

We must also recognise that the ability of using social media to precisely target political messages at segments of society has changed political campaigning. These techniques have been used to drive wedges between groups of people but they can also be used to bring people together. We propose changes to CV10 to open up the use of any and all actions, not just using social media, to gain support, as long as they are non-violent.

4. Economic Ideology

We are proposing changes as follows:

PB103 – we clarify the ideology that we believe is at the root of harmful economic practices.

PB104 – we add that individual affluence does not lead to well-being, particularly in an unequal society.

PB106 – we strengthen our commitment to transforming our economic system

PB411 – we strengthen the message that “wealth” in life is more than money and that economic growth causes harm to “wealth” when interpreted as “well-being”

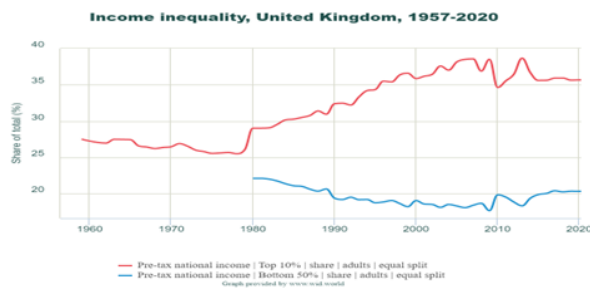
PB421 – we add the idea of common physical and digital infrastructure as a facilitator for conservation of resources

Simon Kuznets developed the idea of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 1937 as a measure of economic production. He warned against its use as a measure of well-being, “The welfare of a nation can scarcely be inferred from a measurement of national income” [Kuznets, 1934] and also warned more broadly about economic growth, “Distinctions must be kept in mind between quantity and quality of growth, between its cost and return, and between the short and long term. Goals for more growth should specify more growth of what and for what” [Kuznets, 1962]. Despite this, the drive for economic growth and measuring it using GDP has become the primary approach of Western governments since WW2. Growth in GDP is equated with a healthy economy and is furthermore assumed to offer unquestioned benefits to society. The media, along with financial commentators, perpetuates the view that growth is good with low growth referred to as “stagnation”, “deterioration”, “contraction”, “shrinking” or, for example: “economic growth grinds to a halt” [*Financial Times*, May 2022].

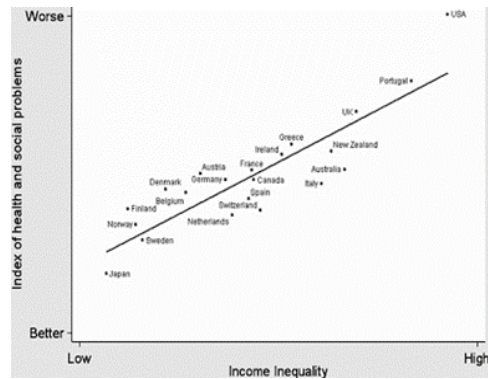
It has been shown that, beyond a certain income, economic growth does not lead to improved well-being. This is known as the Easterlin Paradox, after Richard Easterlin, whose research since 1974 has continued to support this. For example, in his paper in 2012 called “*Happiness, Growth, and Public Policy*” his conclusions were “If society’s goal is to increase people’s feelings of well-being, economic growth in itself will not do the job. Full employment and a generous and comprehensive social safety net do increase happiness.” The latter part of this statement points towards how well-being can be increased and aligns with Green Party policy [eg EC730 Universal Basic Income and HE201: “To devise new economic models using quality of life and health indicators as the target variables to be optimised Policies to achieve these targets will be integrated into overall economic strategy”].

From an environmental standpoint, indefinite economic growth does not make sense on a finite planet, assuming that the use of natural resources remains coupled to economic growth. Jason Hickel makes a strong argument that decoupling is not happening - or certainly not fast enough given the urgency of tackling the climate emergency [Hickel, *Less is More*, 2020]. The May 2022 IPCC report observes that global net anthropogenic emissions continue to rise (+54% in the period 1990-2019).

From a well-being point of view, there are both immediate and long term issues. The long term issue relates directly to the climate emergency – if not adequately addressed, this will lead to poor well-being for all in society. The immediate issue is that our UK society, whilst affluent when measured in GDP, also has high inequality. Higher inequality in a society correlates with lower well-being [Wilkinson and Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*, 2009 and *The Inner Level: How More Equal Societies Reduce Stress, Restore Sanity and Improve Everyone’s Well-being*, 2019].



Source: World Inequality Database www.wid.world



Source: Wilkinson & Pickett, *The Spirit Level* (2009)

A report by the World Economic Forum in 2018 supports this with the “*key finding that relatively strong GDP growth cannot in and of itself be relied on to generate inclusive socioeconomic progress and broad-based improvement in living standards.*” [WEF, *The Inclusive Development Index 2018 – Summary and Data Highlights*].

The Philosophical Basis of the Green Party is rooted in challenging the paradigm of economic growth measured by GDP. The addition in PB104 of the reference to material affluence not correlating with well-being may give us a helpful angle from which to approach this challenge. The importance of individual physical and mental well-being has increasing salience in UK society, particularly since the Covid 19 pandemic. Linking this with the development of a new economic approach may help the idea to gain traction.

In conventional economic evaluations, future benefits are heavily discounted (given less weight than immediate benefits). This means that the well-being of future generations is given very low priority. Caroline Lucas, MP, is a lead proponent for the introduction of a Well-being of Future Generations Act, similar to the one adopted by Wales in 2015, where it has inspired tangible action [www.futuregenerations.wales/get-inspired].

In PB106, we suggest the removal of the phrase “sustainable economies” in favour of promoting more “ambitious and equitable plans”. With time running out to address the climate emergency, we believe that the idea of sustainability is no longer strong enough. We need to transform our economic system in a way which not only reduces harm to the environment but actively regenerates it and in a way which reduces inequality, leading to a better society not only for those in poverty but for all. In a more equal society, levels of stress, anxiety and mistrust fall for everyone [Wilkinson & Pickett]. Visions for a new kind of economics have been developed by economists such as Professor Tim Jackson in *Post Growth - Life After Capitalism*, 2021 and Kate Raworth in *Doughnut Economics*, 2017. In the Green Party, we can draw upon this work to shape our own vision for a new kind of economy. In EC111, we acknowledge that “*major changes are required ... to dismantle the political, cultural and economic power structures which presently work against the green objectives*”.

In PB421, we include the idea that common physical and digital infrastructure can facilitate the conservation of resources. This is backed up by EC1010 “*Our general presumption is to encourage the green value of greater sharing and to make it more difficult to obtain patents and similar forms of protection than at present*”. Other policies such as our commitment to public transport support this [eg TR230 Bringing rail transport back into public ownership]. This fits with an overall

economic shift away from the prioritisation of profit over people and planet. Current policy in the Land Use Chapter also supports the principle of land as commons: "Land, the primary source of all real wealth, is common heritage" LD200.

5. Work

The changes to PB460, PB462, and PB463 are essentially:

- to frame "making a contribution to the common good" as part of a healthy and balanced life, as opposed to a "natural desire" that is challenging and unnecessary to substantiate.
- to recognise that work (in terms of waged labour) is not the only way to contribute to the common good, in recognition that other forms of unpaid labour and effort are also legitimate.
- to replace the right to work with the right to access the social and material means necessary to live a flourishing life, and explicitly recognise that work (waged labour) should not be the only way to access the means to enable a flourishing life.
- to update the conception of a balanced life as one that includes "time for both work and leisure" to one that includes "time for self-development, respect, fulfilment and the opportunity to contribute to the common good as well as time for relaxation, replenishment and enjoyment", again in recognition that work is not the only way to contribute to the common good and that should not be the only way to access the means to enable a flourishing life.

These changes are to align the Philosophical Basis with our current economics policy, namely that "Every citizen would receive an unconditional Universal Basic Income to secure their basic social security" (EC721) and "there will be no requirement to be either working or actively seeking work" (EC730). Universal Basic Income "will further enhance opportunities for individual participation in the third sector" (EC621) and "will allow many more people to participate in cultural creation" (EC1011).