

Bristol Dissent! Briefing

INFORMATION FOR ACTION

Myths of the G8 - Sustainable Development

What Big Brother Won't Tell You

Buried in the recent rush of important news of who was a celebrity and needed getting out of here, you may have missed a series of reports that show that our earth is being destroyed at an ever frightening rate: "Worst sea bird breeding season" (BBC), or "The polluted planet: Alarm as global study finds one-third of amphibians face extinction" (Independent), or "Hundreds of bird species going the way of the dodo" (Guardian).

If you think worrying about the natural world is for hippy-tree-huggers, then consider that for every one barrel of oil discovered, we are consuming three - this while the UK's use of oil and gas is being projected to rise each year until at least 2030. Thanks to global warming, broad areas of Antarctica now are now forming turf where there were once ice-sheets and glaciers. Scary stuff.

By whatever measure you choose to take, the world of globalisation and capitalism is just not sustainable. To blind us to this reality, the politicians have invented the concept of sustainable development' in their words, "A higher quality of life for all people is the goal of sustainable development." (G7 1995 Meeting). The problem with this lofty statement is that, for all people on the planet to achieve the living standards of the US, it would require three planets worth of resources - how is this possible with the rat-race in full flow?

Blair to the Rescue!

Thankfully Tony Blair and his band of merry men are on hand to save the day; "To become more resource efficient we need to accelerate the decoupling of resource use and growth in GDP." In plain English, Tony and his cronies are saying that we need to get rich without using stuff (oil, timber, gas, metals etc.) How is this economic magic going to work? Nobody seems to be sure. Tony recently remarked, "If we were to put forward as a solution to climate change something which would involve drastic cuts in economic growth or standards of living, it would not matter how justified it was, it simply would not be agreed to." Translation - I know

there is no such thing as sustainability within the current system, but I can't tell you that. George Bush's plans for sustainable development? Tax cuts for the rich. Drilling for oil in the Alaska wildlife refuge and war without end.

Here's a final pearl of wisdom from the government; "It is a simple fact that, as we become more efficient at producing things we will get wealthier. And as we get wealthier we are able to produce and consume more goods and services. In the longer term therefore it is only by finding new, less wasteful ways of meeting our needs that we can move to a



sustainable path." However being 'less' wasteful is not the same as being 'sustainable'. 'Less' means not as much as before. 'Sustainable' is a cycle that can be kept going forever while development' (in this context) means economic growth, growth that can be kept going forever? In the words of Professor Richard Heinberg, an expert on resource use and human ecology, "Beyond a certain point nature does not negotiate. If all else fails, there is always famine and disease to take care of it."

Reject their deceit. Their Babylon must fall.

Alternatives to the G8: Life in Balance

Not every life on this planet needs to be reduced to dollar bills. If we reject the notion that profit is God, we can build a world that works with nature rather than smashes it into submission. First we need to reject the notion of capitalism. We are trained to see money as trade as wealth - an inseparable trinity. This is a lie. To say there can be no wealth or trade without money is to say there can be no time without hours. With this in mind, here are some inspirational examples of life getting back into balance:

Co-operative Action

Acting together is the opposite of capitalism. We can see this idea in action in many places. Born here in the UK in 1844, the co-operative movement has grown to mean some 750 million people work for organizations that are owned and controlled by them, and not by international capital markets, shareholders or a wealthy family dynasty. Bristol has some 90 co-operatives doing everything from food production to IT support. Some coops are run less as a company and more along the lines of a club, for example the Stroud based Catalyst Food Coop works to provide its members with fairtrade and organic produce. See <http://www.avoncda.coop/> for more info on these.

The Navdanya Organisation

Dr. Vandana Shiva, an Indian Physicist, has been championing the idea of 'freedom zones': "It lead her to help found the organization Navdanya, [translation 'nine seeds' meaning 'ecological balance'] which forms seed banks and trains Indian farmers to produce traditional crops without chemical pesticides or fertilizers. To date, she says, about 100,000 farmers have returned to traditional, organic farming methods in villages now dubbed 'freedom zones'. Navdanya has opened an organic market in New Delhi to sell the produce." (This quote is from an article at <http://www.mindfully.org>, plus you can find lots of good information at <http://www.vshiva.net/> and <http://www.navdanya.org>.

Bristol has a permaculture group, see <http://www.bristolfoe.org.uk/bpg/>

Buena Vista Fossil Fuel Club

Cuba is famous for laid-back funky music, rum and socialism. It may soon be famous for showing the way on sustainable farming methods. When the USSR mutated into Ru\$\$ia and replaced one set of authoritarian rule for another, it stopped the cheap supply of oil to both Cuba and North Korea. While people in North Korea starve, Cuba looked towards autonomous self-management rather than militarism and the results have been pretty spectacular. Outside of capitalism, Cuba is successfully making the transition to a more sustainable society: "The World Bank has reported that Cuba is leading nearly every other developing nation in human development performance. Because Cuba's agricultural model goes against the grain of orthodox economic thought, the World Bank has called Cuba the 'anti-model'... This despite that fact that the Cuban model flies in the face of the neoliberal reforms prescribed by both the World Bank and the IMF." (This is from the article 'Drawing Lessons from Experience Part 2' by Dale Allen Pfeiffer which can be found at <http://www.copvcia.com/free/ww3/>. In addition Bristol has a Peak Oil email group, see <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/bristolpeakoilers>)

