

Degrowth and the British Labour Party.

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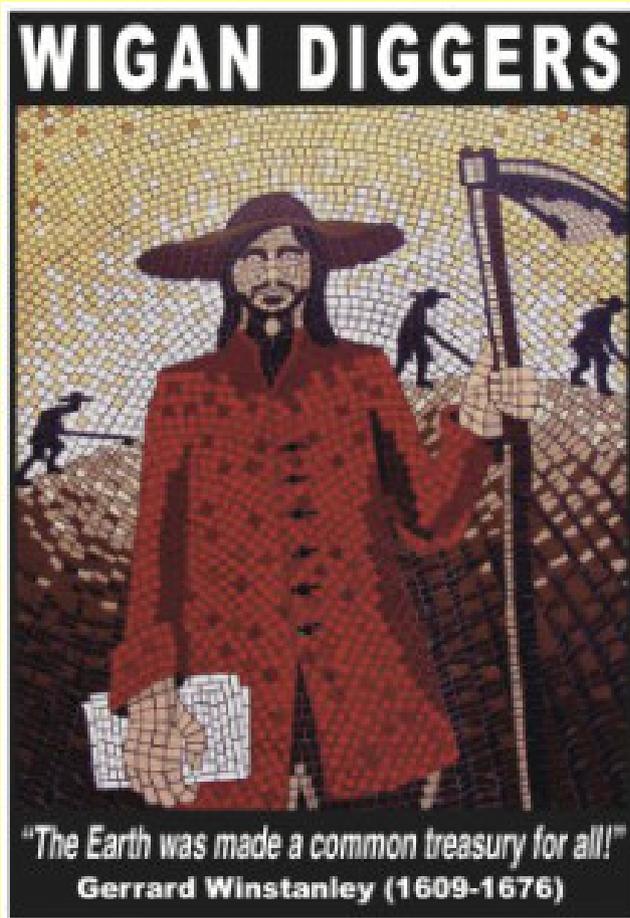
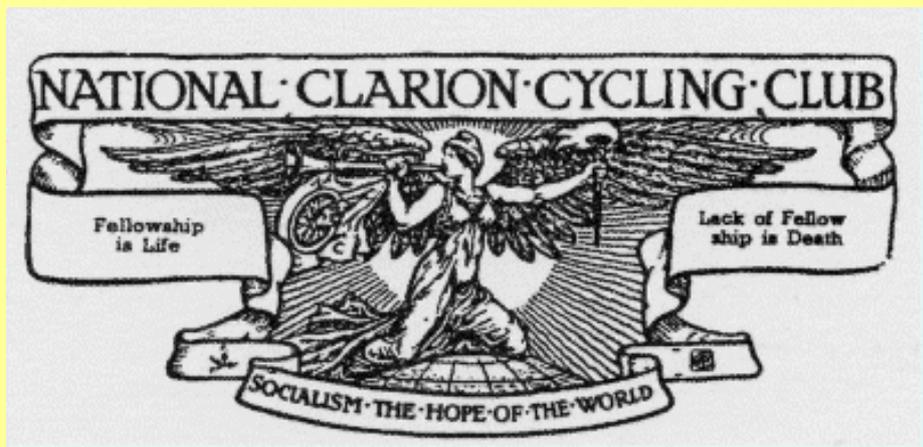
The British Labour Party

- Little space for smaller parties under First Past the Post system.
- Upsurge in mass membership and radicalism.
- Potential government.

But

- Does it offer an opening for degrowth thinking and policy?

The **Clarion** Club:
socialism, cycling,
culture, rural-urban links.



Winstanley and the **Diggers**,
remembered every year in
Wigan, near Manchester.

Chartism: more than a petition.

“... Sunday Schools, Land
Company branches, co-operative
societies, mechanics' institutes
and other bodies

“When a new political labour
movement arose, four decades
after the end of Chartism, it arose
from these “non-political” forms of
labour organization... Dorothy
Thompson ()

The almost hidden traditions of British socialism

- Ideas that we can now recognise as part of the degrowth family are part of the history and traditions, of the Labour Party and British radicalism and socialism.
- *Movements and revolts*: Peasants, Levellers, Ranters, Diggers, Chartists, Co-operators, Clarion Club (England); Crofters (Scotland).
- *Organic intellectuals*: Winstanley, Cobbett, Morris, Blatchford, Williams.

The alternative tradition

“In Britain, identifiably, there is a precarious but persistent rural-intellectual radicalism: genuinely and actively hostile to industrialism and capitalism; attached to country ways and feelings, the literature and the lore.”

“... we must push the ... attention, back to the natural economy, the organic society, from which the critical values are drawn.”

Raymond Williams (1973)

The dominant tradition

“... socialism, from around the middle of the nineteenth century, began to distinguish itself from a whole body of associated and overlapping movements, there was a tendency to make a quite different emphasis: to say that the central problem of modern society was poverty, and the solution to poverty was production, and more production.”

Williams, 1982.

New openings?



- Involvement of leading Labour MPs in Parliamentary Limits to Growth Group .
- John McDonnell's speech to IPPR acknowledged the Limits to Growth and the existential risk of climate change.
- Some Labour-led local governments emphasise localism and use of local wealth and financial flows, instead of globalised finance and inward investment.
- Statements from labour influencers that acknowledge elements of the degrowth proposition.
- Significant involvement of trade unionists in the fossil fuel divestment and anti-fracking campaigns.
- Backing by many Labour MPs for fossil fuel divestment.



**One swallow
doesn't make a
summer.**

However, this isn't a resolved change of direction. Overall Labour policy development still relies, at best, on a “green growth” logic, with an emphasis on better technology and investment in the green economy.

Why is degrowth so difficult for Labour?

Jobs: “Growth that will deliver much needed jobs.”

Poverty and deprivation: “We need growth to lift people out of poverty and deprivation.”

Technological fix: “We can deal with the problems of growth by investing in smart technology.”

Squaring the circle: “Growth is consistent with environmental protection: sustainable development.”

Class: “The green movement is a middle class one that does not represent the interests of the working class.”

“And the environment”: Nature is seen as separate, secondary to human life, society and economy.

We can't isolate ourselves: “We live in a global world and we have to compete to survive.”

Conclusions (1)

- Growthism is not going away any time soon.
- Degrowthers have to work creatively with those who still adhere to it but might be open to the paradigm shift. In the UK that includes many Labour Party members and supporters.

But how?

Conclusions (2)

- Understand the emotional and mental investment in the growth idea.
- Use intellectual and emotional judo: turn what's seen as positive against it. e.g. growth destroys jobs, globalisation → re-localisation, growth → inequalities, rebound wipes out efficiency gains.
- Show how scalable, degrowth-consistent approaches deliver social good. e.g. capture of local financial flows.
- But don't be defensive: with good humour, ridicule the implausibility of “growth”.



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