

# THE REAL MANIFESTOS

## What Labour and the Tories Are Really Planning for Our Environment

### Summary

This briefing looks behind the General Election rhetoric and bland party manifestoes, and scrutinises the Parties' actual records and what they are really planning.

Below is the Friends of the Earth (FOE) analysis of Labour and Conservative statements and records. These are the *Real Manifesto "promises"* - what the Parties would say if they were honest with the voters. Following each is the *FOE rationale* behind the promise, giving the reasoning by which we determined each real manifesto promise.

This briefing covers Labour and Conservative policies only. Friends of the Earth has congratulated the Liberal Democrats for showing the other two major parties how to put environmental concerns at the heart of an election manifesto. We have therefore not included them in this analysis. FOE is, however, concerned that the sustainability message is taken on board by the whole Lib Dem party. There are some very disappointing Lib Dem councils and candidates, who support controversial roads, new incinerators and GM trial sites - all of which go against their manifesto commitments.

### Corporate Behaviour and Globalisation

#### LABOUR

**Real Manifesto Promise:** *"We will leave it to directors to decide how much reporting is required on their companies' behaviour and impacts on society and the environment."*

**FOE Rationale:** The Government's company law review (final consultation paper) said that companies should report on environmental and social impacts, but proposed to leave it to directors to judge which impacts were relevant. But directors may well benefit from company activities which damage the environment and exploit local communities. Social and environmental reporting should be mandatory, not optional.

**Real Manifesto Promise:** *"We will waffle on about increasing corporate accountability to stakeholders. But in the end, we will put profits for shareholders before the interests of consumers, employees and local communities".*

**FOE Rationale:** The company law review has rejected 'a pluralist' model which would have obliged directors to take stakeholder interests into account. The review has gone on for four years, and the final report isn't out yet. There is unlikely to be a Companies Bill before the 2002-3 session.

**Real Manifesto Promise:** *"Everyone will have a 'stakeholder pension' - with low charges and low ethical standards too".*

**FOE Rationale:** Low charges mean limited management. Ethical pensions tend to need more management. Labour haven't addressed this issue yet, and their Guide to Pensions (DSS web-site) doesn't even mention ethical options.

**Real Manifesto Promise:** *"We will sacrifice our commitment to wildlife protection and back the building of a massive container port at Dibden Bay."*

**FOE Rationale:** On the one hand, Labour introduced strengthened legal protection for wildlife, in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act. The major green piece of legislation in this Parliament. On the other hand, that protection is frequently sacrificed in the interests of business, as in the case Associated British Ports. The Dibden Bay scheme would cause damage to the New Forest National Park, an Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a Special Protection Area (SPA) and an Special Area of Conservation (SAC), all to build a port that is not really needed.

**Real Manifesto Promise:** *"We put free trade before fair trade."*

**FOE Rationale:** Tony Blair welcomed the election of President Bush by saying that he would be a 'friend to free trade'. The Government has generally supported attempts to give further powers to a failing World Trade Organisation (WTO). Ministers such as Clare Short have attacked development and environment groups for daring to criticise the WTO and other international economic institutions.

The European Union is driving the push for a new trade round in the WTO. The UK is one of the Governments driving this agenda within the EU. Many developing countries remain opposed to a new round and can be expected to do so at least until the Qatar Ministerial in November this year. In other words, the EU and the UK are playing a very high-risk game to serve their own economic interests

**Real Manifesto Promise:** *"We will let the public sector carry on destroying the world's forests"*

**FOE Rationale:** Labour has made welcome progress on a sustainable timber purchasing policy for Government Departments. But this does not yet cover the public sector as a whole. The public sector buys a lot of dodgy timber. Only a fraction of its purchases are certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (the only reliable guarantee that timber has come from a sustainable source). Only 3 per cent of local councils, for example, have timber policies that specify FSC certification. Most don't have timber purchasing policies. Many even believe that they can't specify FSC because it would be against WTO rules.

The result is continued loss of the World's biodiversity as well as loss of homes and rights for forest-dependent people.

**Real Manifesto Promise:** *"We will continue to let big business get away with greenwash."*

**FOE Rationale:** Labour said it would legislate if industry failed to abide by the (non-binding) Green Claims Code that it introduced. Industry has failed to abide by the Code (see for example FOE's research into claims made in the sale of garden furniture).

A blind eye to greenwash means that consumers may continue to be hoodwinked by false green claims.

## **CONSERVATIVES**

**Real Manifesto Promise:** *"We will help businesses to cover up the impact of their activities on the environment and communities. We will promote Victorian values in business by rolling back environmental and social regulations."*

**FOE Rationale:** The Conservatives' Ministry of Silly Regulation site and the business pages of their pre-manifesto both advocate minimising regulation on business. "As global trading becomes easier and business much more mobile, there could not be a worse time to be increasing the burdens on business. Businesses will not stand still to be over-regulated and over-taxed. They will simply leave countries that do not create

an attractive environment in which to trade. So the next Conservative government will champion lower taxes, less regulation and greater flexibility. Such a policy is economically right and it is morally right, for low taxes can help to support a free society and strong communities, the essential underpinnings of an enterprise economy.”

## Chemicals and Pollution

### LABOUR

**Real Manifesto Promise:** *“We don’t care about the continued use of chemicals which build-up in people’s bodies.”*

**FOE Rationale:** The European Union is currently discussing regulation of chemicals in household products. Countries like Sweden want much tougher regulation, but the UK has resisted this push. Inside the UK Government, the DTI has repeatedly overturned DETR plans for tackling this issue. We will all be exposed to health risks associated with this type of exposure. These risks include increases in testicular cancer, prostate cancer, falling sperm counts and girls reaching puberty earlier.

**Real Manifesto Promise:** *“We won’t cut pollution in our heartlands, where Britain’s factories pump out most pollution.”*

**FOE Rationale:** FOE research recently revealed that two-thirds of all cancer-causing chemicals released to our environment every year come from factories sited in communities in the top 10 per cent most deprived areas in the country. Almost all these areas are in Labour-held constituencies. The new research backs up earlier findings which showed that in 1996 there were 662 large polluting factories in areas with average household incomes of £15,000 a year and only 5 in areas with average income is £30,000 or more. In response to this earlier research John Prescott said in a Fabian Society speech that *“We should never lose sight of the fact that it is the poor who suffer most from pollution”*. Yet the Labour Government has failed to set a target to reduce this pollution.

Labour’s Social Exclusion agenda has only made passing reference to pollution problems faced by

the poorest communities. Labour has no plans to set targets for industry to improve their performance. Failing to tackle pollution in the poorest areas of the country will leave them as unattractive areas for investment, as well as leaving the health of these people under threat.

### CONSERVATIVES

**Real Manifesto Promise:** *“We will oppose any action to regulate the chemicals industry.”*

**FOE Rationale:** The Conservatives voted against all positive amendments to the Pollution Prevention & Control Bill. During the passage of the Bill, the Opposition made it clear they were more interested in the vested interests of the chemical industry than of public health.

## Food and Farming

### LABOUR

**Real Manifesto Promise:** *“We will give GM crops the commercial green light in 2003.”*

**FOE Rationale:** The Government has failed to halt the rush to GM commercialisation, despite acknowledged gaps in data on the long-term impact on biodiversity. All marketing applications since the start of the farm-scale trials have been approved.

Approval of commercial crops would mean widespread GM contamination and choice of GM free food would be removed. It is inevitable that cross pollination between GM crops and neighbouring non GM crops will take place.

**Real Manifesto Promise:** *“We won’t make GM companies liable for any damage they cause.”*

**FOE Rationale:** The Government has opposed moves to make GM companies strictly liable for any loss or damage their products may cause (for example the Bill promoted by Alan Simpson MP). It has relied instead on a EU proposed Environmental Liability Directive, which will not become law for at least five years’ time and which as drafted would currently fail to make biotech companies strictly liable. Farmers, retailers and food manufacturers would be

exposed to litigation if the harm or damage was caused and the environment would be unprotected. Environment Minister Michael Meacher told the Select Committee on Agriculture that current UK provision is the common law, but FOE legal opinion on liability shows that this will not properly protect farmers or beekeepers.

**Real Manifesto Promise:** *“We will leave organic farming to the market”*

**FOE Rationale:** The organic conversion grant allocation is insufficient to meet demand for conversion in this financial year. Total research funding for organics is £2 million; less than is being spent on GM farm scale trial research. UK farmers will be unable to take advantage of the huge increase in demand for organic products and imports will increase.

**Real Manifesto Promise:** *“We will allow thousands of smaller farmers to leave the land.”*

**FOE Rationale:** EU Rural Development Regulations allow the Government to cap payments to large farmers and redirect public money to support smaller farmers for agri-environment schemes. Up to a fifth of Common Agricultural Policy subsidy could be “modulated” in this way, but the UK currently uses only 2.5 per cent of CAP subsidy for this purpose. Agriculture Minister Nick Brown has recently said that CAP payments should be converted into support for sustainable land management, but Labour has made little progress on this in its first term. Meanwhile MAFF is believed to be working on a post Foot and Mouth agricultural strategy which could lead to as many as two thirds of existing farms being closed or amalgamated. Rural economies and services suffer as a result. Fewer people managing the land would probably result in degradation of landscapes and habitats.

**Real Manifesto Promise:** *“We won’t do much about pesticide residues of endocrine disrupting chemicals.”*

**FOE Rationale:** The Government relies on advice from the Advisory Committee on Pesticides, which has repeatedly failed to address the issue of endocrine disrupting pesticides. Although an EU list of endocrine disrupting chemicals has been drawn up clearly identifying the pesticides which are of greatest concern, the Government will rely

on lack of EU agreement to avoid taking action. Vulnerable groups such as the unborn, babies, children and old people will still be exposed to endocrine disrupting chemicals in their food.

## **CONSERVATIVES**

**Real Manifesto Promise:** *“We will allow the commercial growing of GM crops. We don’t care about protection for neighbouring farmers and beekeepers.”*

**FOE Rationale:** The Conservatives have only promised to “reduce risk of contamination of GM-free farmland” not to prevent it.

**Real Manifesto Promise:** *“We will reduce regulation on the meat industry, to cut ‘red tape’. Food safety isn’t so important.”*

**FOE Rationale:** The Tories have promised to “reduce inspections proportionate to the risk”. But the problem of pathogenic contamination of meat will not go away, so we still need a vigorous regime of inspection.

**Real Manifesto Promise:** *“Farmers can carry on using too much pesticide on their land”.*

**FOE Rationale:** The Tories will “keep sprays and fertilisers free from environmentally unsound input taxes”. Instead, they will rely on a voluntary approach to reduce the impact of pesticides on the environment. The record of voluntary agreements in agriculture is very poor, for example the Straw Burning code had to be abandoned and eventually replaced by a statutory ban.

**Real Manifesto Promise:** *“Farming subsidy should go to the biggest and richest farmers”*

**FOE Rationale:** The Tories promise to “fight ceilings which discriminate against British farmers”. They also oppose “any form of modulation or degressivity that unfairly penalises British farmers compared with their European counterparts whose average farm size is often smaller”. In Britain today, the biggest 20 per cent of farmers get 80 per cent of the subsidy, while smaller farmers struggle to remain solvent.

# Energy and Climate

## LABOUR

**Real Manifesto Promise:** *“We will try to implement the proposals contained in our Climate Change Programme, unless they prove unpopular. If so we’ll backtrack but try to do so in a way that confuses the public. In four year’s time we’ll realise that the measures in our Programme aren’t sufficient for us to achieve our 20 per cent CO2 reduction target, at which point, we’ll:*

*a) point out that we’re still meeting our Kyoto obligation*

*b) blame our failure on the Government’s good economic record*

*c) persuade BNFL to extend the lifetimes of some clapped-out nuclear power stations”*

**FOE Rationale:** The Government has said it intends to implement its climate programme. Cambridge Econometrics say the Programme won’t deliver cuts sufficient to meet Labour 1997 election target to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 20 per cent over 1990 levels by 2010.

The Chancellor has already backtracked on the fuel duty escalator with a populist cut in fuel taxes in the last Budget.

The Climate Programme gives the performance of the economy as one reason why the Programme might not meet its target (p.127). The UK has a reputation as a world leader on climate change, which is expected to kill millions of people and cause serious damage to the world economy. If the UK doesn’t meet its own domestic target, this world leadership position would be jeopardised, damaging the chances of global agreements to cut emissions.

**Real Manifesto Promise:** *“We will spend five years consulting on the disposal of nuclear waste. Meanwhile, we will maintain our pile of untreated nuclear waste at Sellafield, allow BNFL to import even more nuclear waste and plutonium from around the world, and press our European colleagues to accept US proposals that carbon dioxide savings from nuclear power abroad should be counted toward Kyoto targets.”*

**FOE Rationale:** The Government has already told the nuclear industry that it has a major role to play in combatting climate change. The Government has also said that it intends to issue a series of

consultations on the disposal of nuclear waste, after the General Election.

BNFL already has contracts to import nuclear waste and plutonium.

The UK wants to include nuclear projects in the Kyoto Protocol’s flexible mechanisms. Radioactive nuclear waste is a threat to health for hundreds of thousands of years. The industry has completely failed to find a safe means to dispose of it.

**Real Manifesto Promise:** *“We will encourage the renewable energy industry to invest millions of pounds developing plans for wind farms, but we’ll maintain the rights of middle class protestors not to see any of them from their homes, cars or workplaces. Meanwhile we’ll give permission for scores of gas-fired power stations, regardless of whether they are fitted with more efficient combined heat and power technology”.*

**FOE Rationale:** Labour’s new Utilities Act sets a 10 per cent quota for renewable energy by 2010. But the UK’s land-use planning system does not say where projects will be built. Labour has failed to ensure that the renewables industry has a favourable planning regime and so has allowed sound projects to be blocked by ‘NIMBY’ objections.

Labour has also permitted large and inefficient gas-fired power stations to go ahead, while the development of smaller highly efficient combined heat and power (CHP) stations has been allowed to stall. Guidelines to rectify this were promised a year ago but have failed to appear. Failure to develop sufficient renewable energy sources and CHP will leave significant shortfalls in the UK’s overall climate programme.

## CONSERVATIVES

**Real Manifesto Promise:** *“We will talk about climate change, and pretend to be concerned about it, but oppose any attempts to take effective action”*

**FOE Rationale:** The Tories have promised to abolish Labour’s climate levy - the only effective tax measure designed directly to discourage excessive energy use by business and industry. Instead they favour a complex emissions trading scheme. The Tories’ web pages only talk about meeting Kyoto obligations, not Labour’s more radical 20 per cent CO2 target.

**Real Manifesto Promise:** *“We will revise Labour’s Climate Programme, taking out all reference to transport emissions. When asked whether we’re aware that vehicles emit a quarter of the UK’s carbon dioxide, we’ll talk vaguely about how cleaner cars are now compared to 30 years ago.”*

**FOE Rationale:** The Conservatives ‘Blue-green’ Climate Programme made no mention of transport. Their web page cites ‘air quality’ as a reason for preferring emissions trading to the climate change levy, so they’re clearly confused - or happy to confuse the voter. Transport is responsible for a quarter of UK emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> and is the fastest growing sector. Failure to cut emissions from transport would cripple any attempt to tackle climate change

**Real Manifesto Promise:** *“We will set a target that 30 per cent of UK electricity should be generated from renewable sources by 2030, but we’ll give in if local Tory voters complain about living near wind farms.”*

**FOE Rationale:** The 30 per cent renewable energy target is good but without proper fiscal and planning policies is meaningless. The ‘Blue-Green’ Climate Programme set the target, but when in power the Tories were very weak in promoting renewable projects in the face of local opposition.

## Transport

### LABOUR

**Real Manifesto Promise:** *“We’ve given up on our promise to cut road traffic. So we will build lots of new roads, neglect public transport, and fail to meet our pledge to recreate a publicly controlled, publicly accountable rail industry.”*

**FOE Rationale:** John Prescott said that he would have failed if the number of journeys by road rose in Labour’s first term It did. Labour’s own figures in “Transport 2010” figures show predicted growth of 17 per cent. Meanwhile, no significant move has been made to reverse the disintegration of the rail industry created by privatisation. Plans for new rail expenditure have been concentrated on big projects (East Coast mainline, West Coast mainline, Channel Tunnel Rail Link) at the expense of the rest of the network.

In March, the Government announced £1 billion in new public spending on transport. Environmentally

damaging new roads included the proposed Bexhill and Hastings Western Bypass and Hastings Eastern Bypass, which would damage three SSSI - Pavans Levels, which is also a Ramsay site, Combe Haven and Marline Valley Woods, as well as the High Weald AONB.

### CONSERVATIVES

**Real Manifesto Promise:** *“We will make it even cheaper to use your car rather than public transport, by cutting petrol taxes by more than any figure dreamed up by Gordon Brown.”*

**FOE Rationale:** The Tories promise to “cut fuel tax by 6p a litre across the board as soon as we return to office”. Cheaper petrol makes motoring cheaper and so encourages people to drive further and more frequently. There are no Tory promises to cut public transport fares.

**Real Manifesto Promise:** *“We will build lots more roads.”*

**FOE Rationale:** The Tories have blandly said that they wish to “target congestion”, but also talk about people’s ‘freedom to travel’. Encouraging car use will mean more roads. The Tories cannot hope to score political points off Labour’s damaging road proposals while they continue with policies for a “Great Car Economy”.

*NB: The Tories’ document ‘Common Sense On Transport’ (sic) pledges to expand the roads programme, cut motorway taxes and even allow cars to turn left through red lights!*

## Waste and Recycling

### LABOUR

**Real Manifesto Promise:** *“We will allow dozens of new incinerators to be built around the country.”*

**FOE Rationale:** Last year, Labour published *Waste Strategy 2000*. This was essentially a reaction to new European laws demanding a reduction in the amount of waste we send to landfill. The strategy set a welcome statutory recycling target of 33 per cent for municipal waste, although it did not identify the resources Councils will need to meet this target, The strategy also tacitly endorsed scores of new

incinerators in order to meet the target for 'recovery' of municipal waste (67 per cent including recycling).

Already permission has been given for the development of a number of huge incinerators, such as in Slough (to burn 440,000 tonnes of waste a year) and Maidstone (500,000 tpa) which are way out of proportion with local waste arisings and contravene the proximity principle (that waste should be treated near to where it is produced). The Labour Government has failed to call in these proposals or limit their size to ensure that they don't undermine recycling.

Labour controlled councils around the country (e.g. North East Lincolnshire, Slough, Brighton and Hove) are approving and proposing incinerators before the opportunities for recycling and composting have been fully explored (which *Waste Strategy 2000* demands).

Incineration has enjoyed a number of perverse subsidies under Labour, including subsidies as a supposed form of renewable energy and PFI grants.

## **CONSERVATIVES**

**Real Manifesto Promise:** *"We will make a big fuss about Labour's plans for new incinerators. But we won't give Councils the money they would need to promote recycling instead."*

**FOE Rationale:** The Tories say they will "halt the escalation in the number of incinerators, and instead give resources to local authorities to promote recycling and green behaviour amongst businesses and residents". But where are they going to get these resources from given the stance on tax cuts and low public spending?

What is needed is an increase in the landfill tax, and a refund of the revenue directly to local authorities (as public spending). Would the Tories agree to this? They say they will reform the landfill tax credit scheme to increase councils resources for recycling and composting. This is welcome, as the credit scheme (which they introduced) has failed to divert cash to sustainable waste management. We need to see more details about how they plan to make it work and get money where it's needed.

There is no moratorium on new incinerators in place among local Conservative councils. Many Tory controlled councils across the country have already approved incinerators (e.g. Maidstone in

Kent) or are trying to introduce them (e.g. Kidderminster, Guildford). Under 18 years of Tory government our recycling rate remained pathetically low, at only 7 per cent, nowhere near their own target of 25 per cent by 2000. They failed to fund new recycling services, or drive waste minimisation. Labour have at least set statutory targets for recycling and provided some money to fund them (although targets are too low and funding inadequate).

The Tories want "Every home in the country" to have "recyclables collected separately from other waste". FOE agrees but wants to know if this would be a statutory requirement.

Friends of the Earth welcome Tory plans to act against illegal dumping.

## **End note**

The issues covered in this briefing relate to detailed proposals that Friends of the Earth has long urged politicians to adopt. Further information on all the issues raised is available on the website, by e-mail, or by calling the freephone number.

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