

going local

institutions such as the hospital, starting with a sustainable laundry business. The second project is a renewable energy company, starting with installations on the hospital roof.

This is fascinating because it combines two elements: the new co-operatives that employ local people, and the ability to redirect the spending power of the local hospital to launch them and underpin them.

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The key point is that a project such as this requires no new money. It does require a re-interpretation of the idea of 'best value' in UK procurement, but the Social Value Bill seems to provide that.

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● **David Boyle** is a fellow of the New Economics Foundation and the author of *The Human Element: Ten New Rules to Kickstart our Failing Organisations* (Earthscan, 2011 – see www.david-boyle.co.uk). The views expressed are personal.

earth rights

Imposed technocratic 'solutions' to climate change are not the answer, says Martin Stott

why I can't love nuclear



A year has passed since the meltdown of the Fukushima Daichi nuclear power complex after the earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan. Globally, reaction has been mixed, with some countries reaffirming their intention to get out of civil nuclear power, others reviewing the implications, and others deciding that given the particular circumstances there are few, if any, lessons to be learned.

The reaction of some leading commentators in the environmental movement has been very striking, George Monbiot's article in *The Guardian* on 21 March 2011, just 13 days after the tsunami which triggered the multiple meltdowns – 'Why Fukushima made me stop worrying and love nuclear power'¹ – stands as an example. Monbiot is not alone. Stuart (*Whole Earth Catalog*) Brand, James Lovelock and Mark Lynas have also piled in. The riffs are slightly different, but the tune is essentially the same: in the context of a rapidly warming planet, nuclear power is a far better way to generate electricity than coal, gas or oil – because it is low carbon, unlike fossil fuels; is more reliable than renewables; and, some argue, is cheaper.

Monbiot in particular has become a forceful advocate of integral fast reactors (IFRs) as the Holy Grail of both the nuclear industry and sustainable energy production.

Civil nuclear power generation has a long track record, and, as long as you don't look too closely at the costs, it is not all bad. It provides most of the electrical generation capacity in France, for example. But it is not low carbon, let alone zero carbon. The whole nuclear fuel cycle, from mining, refining and transportation onwards, produces substantial quantities of carbon emissions. The power stations themselves are hardly models of low-carbon infrastructure. This is important because the 'environmental' argument for nuclear power is that it is a major weapon in the fight against climate change.

There are a number of other arguments against nuclear power – the costs (the taxpayer subsidies over the past few decades are quite mind-boggling,

and the decommissioning and waste storage costs to be faced in the future are even more so), the risks of terrorism (it is frequently overlooked that 'Flight 93', brought down by its passengers in a field in Pennsylvania on 11 September 2001, was aimed at Three Mile Island), the threat of proliferation, the extreme difficulty of storing or safely managing in the long term the high-level nuclear wastes produced, the threats to human health, and its sheer unreliability (the 3.1% increase in UK greenhouse gas emissions in 2010 recently reported by Department of Energy and Climate Change was in large part due to the newest and most 'reliable' British nuclear reactor, Sizewell B, being out of commission for six months).

All of these arguments can be rehearsed in some detail, but this article focuses on the debate from the perspective of nuclear power's possible contribution to tackling climate change and what that will mean for future generations.

In his *Guardian* article Monbiot asserted that 'the environmental movement... has done more harm to the planet's living systems than climate change deniers have ever achieved. As a result of shutting down its nuclear programme in response to green demands, Germany will produce an extra 300 million tonnes of carbon dioxide between now and 2020.'

His solution is the promotion of IFRs, advocated by retired American sea captain Tom Blees in his self-published book *Prescription for the Planet*.² Despite advocacy by Blees and Monbiot, there are a number of problems with IFRs – the same problems discussed 35 years ago at the Windscale Inquiry.

First, they don't work well, as the prototype fast breeder reactor at Dounreay amply demonstrated. Secondly, attempting to develop them costs a fortune – British taxpayers blew £4 billion between 1955 and 2005 with nothing to show for it. Thirdly, like a number of other nuclear technologies such as nuclear fusion (another financial 'black hole'), the official position is that getting the technology to work (forget about commercialising it) is 'just round the corner' – just as it has been for the last 40 years. Essentially this is a plea to the renewables industry to wait, while the nuclear industry gets its act together.

Meanwhile in Germany, renewables capacity is expanding at a rate of the equivalent of a new nuclear reactor every year. Perhaps the money proposed for investment in IFRs could more usefully go into expanding the renewable sector, or into research on developing technologies for electricity storage – which would have a hugely beneficial impact on renewables.

Global climate change is arguably the most pressing social, political and environmental issue we face over the next 100 years, as Lynas' book *Six Degrees* graphically demonstrates. However,

perspective has been lost in the search for solutions. In his new book, *The God Species*,³ Lynas asserts: 'Global warming is not about over consumption, morality, ideology or capitalism. It is largely the result of human beings generating energy by burning hydrocarbons and coal.' It is this perspective that leads him to call for a 'new environmentalism', one that is 'happy with capitalism' and nuclear power.

I couldn't disagree more. In fact, this is a manifestation of climate change extremism, where the ends justify the means and all political debate about societal choices is shut down, justified by the need to address an overriding imperative. Any environmentalism worth fighting for must have equality, justice and the public good at its heart. But electricity generation using nuclear power will give rise to civil society that is authoritarian, security obsessed, militarised, secretive, centralised and controlled by an elite in corporations and governments to ensure order and stability.

Climate change poses a huge set of problems and challenges, but a technocratic 'solution' imposed now on future generations threatens to make the situation in a couple of generations' time far worse. This is the exact opposite of the principles of sustainable development.

Some very important context for this debate has just been published by Oxfam. *A Safe and Just Space for Humanity*, by Kate Raworth, is part of Oxfam's preparation for the Rio+20 conference later this year.⁴ It sets out both the 11 social justice priorities listed by governments (food security, adequate income, clean water and good sanitation, effective healthcare, access to education, decent work, modern energy services, resilience to shocks, gender equality, social equity, and a voice in democratic politics) and the nine 'planetary boundaries' established in 2009 by a group of earth systems scientists in Stockholm, which Lynas in his book seeks to explain and popularise. These are climate change, biodiversity loss, nitrogen and phosphate use, ozone depletion, ocean acidification, freshwater use, changes in land use, particles in the atmosphere, and chemical pollution.

The 'safe and just space for humanity' of Raworth's title is the space between these priorities and boundaries that humanity can thrive in. But of course to achieve this, quite a few people on the planet who are currently well below the 'social justice line' have to rise above it. Will achieving this wreck our chances of limiting and lowering our greenhouse gas emissions? Of course not, but it will involve some small increases in them. Specifically Raworth identifies that: providing enough food for the 13% of the world's people who suffer from hunger means raising the world's supplies by just 1%;

providing electricity for the 19% of the world's people who currently have none would raise global carbon emissions by just 1%; and bringing everybody above the global absolute poverty line of \$1.25 a day would need just 0.2% of global income.

Put another way, half the world's global carbon emissions are produced by just 11% of its people, with the poorest 50% producing just – 11%. 'Excessive resource use by the richest 10% of consumers crowds out much needed resource use by billions of other people,' says Raworth. The Oxfam paper makes what seems a pretty obvious point, that social justice is impossible without 'far greater global equity in the use of natural resources, with the greatest reductions coming from the world's richest consumers'. So global warming *is* about over-consumption, morality, ideology and capitalism.

Lynas is right to plead for good global resource management, but his is an essentially technocratic approach, undertaken without asking, as Raworth does, in whose interests it is operating. For Lynas, Monbiot and others, nuclear power is an important part of this technocratic approach to global resource management, when the problems and their solutions are essentially political in the widest sense. To get everybody on the planet inside Raworth's 'just space' requires a political programme that really does 'afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted'. Are we likely to get there any time soon? Sadly not, if the advocates of a 'new environmentalism' which holds that 'global warming is not about over consumption, morality, ideology or capitalism' get their way.

And just as importantly, the nuclear route closes off the opportunities for generations to come to determine their own destinies by imposing on them technologies that inevitably produce a dystopian future, just to avoid some hard choices now. This has nothing to do with sustainable development or inter-generational equity in any sense that I understand.

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Notes

- 1 See www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/mar/21/pro-nuclear-japan-fukushima
- 2 T. Blees: *Prescription for the Planet*. BookSurge, 2008
- 3 M. Lynas: *The God Species: How the Planet Can Survive the Age of Humans*. Fourth Estate, 2011
- 4 K. Raworth: *A Safe and Just Space for Humanity: Can We Live within the Doughnut?* Oxfam, 2012. <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/a-safe-and-just-space-for-humanity-can-we-live-within-the-doughnut-210490>

Mike Teitz on how Agenda 21 has become a focus for state and local opposition to planning

the tea party confronts planning



It is not news that conservatives in the US tend to be averse to planning, despite the fact that zoning and subdivision control were largely invented by developers and continue to be supported by homeowners who fear loss of property values. However, in recent years this aversion has taken on a new and strident form with the rise of the Tea Party movement.

Although funded by shadowy figures such as the multi-millionaire Koch brothers, there can be little doubt that the Tea Party is also an authentic expression of frustration by older, middle class, white Americans who view the direction of the country as disastrous. Although the movement's political visibility and influence have diminished since its heyday during the presidential election of 2008, it is clearly playing a role in the nomination process for the Republican nomination of a candidate in the coming election, and it remains a powerful force at the state and local level. That is nowhere clearer than in a series of conflicts over local planning in recent years.

At first sight, the Tea Party's opposition to planning has an absurdist ring. Activists linked to the movement have been vehemently denouncing state and local planning initiatives as manifestations of a vast conspiracy to carry out the UN's Agenda 21.

For the many who have forgotten, Agenda 21 is the short name for the Rio Declaration, a non-binding resolution that emerged from the UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992. Although adopted by 178 nations, the declaration, which promoted sustainable development, has scarcely been at the forefront of action over the past 20 years. Nonetheless, Agenda 21 has suddenly emerged as a target for protest, at