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The move away from an energy system and an economy dominated by fossil fuels to one powered by clean energy is arguably the country's biggest challenge in 100 years, comparable in scale to the industrial revolution. The world is changing, and we must either shape the future or be shaped by it. A modern, progressive response to this challenge has three elements: an active, enlightened and enabling state; a green industrial strategy; and the ambition to secure the active involvement of the widest range of people in building a new economy.

In December 2015 nearly every country in the world came together in Paris to agree to limit global warming to well below 2C. It has set us firmly on a path towards climate safety, with profound implications for the economy, politics and society. With the world's two biggest polluters, the USA and China, signed up to the deal, there is now no question that we can turn back. Nor should we want to.

The implications of climate change for the world's poorest countries have already become apparent. Thanks to rising sea levels, a number of small island states including the Marshall Islands and Micronesia already face the very real possibility of extinction. Water and food shortages have becoming an increasingly important factor in global conflict, with loss of life and displacement of people becoming more common.

But in the UK too the implications of climate change are becoming increasingly clear. For the second time in recent years floods have devastated large swathes of the country, putting homes and businesses under water. Events that used to be once in a lifetime have become much more common. Flood risk projections produced for government conclude that a global temperature rise of 2C will increase the annual damages caused by flooding in the UK by 50 per cent. The Committee on Climate Change also estimate that global warming of 4C or more would mean as many as one million more homes flooded.

With the UK's towns and cities still high carbon emitters (London broke its annual air pollution limits in the first week of 2016), the implications for health and life expectancy are stark. Public Health England estimates 29,000 deaths a year in the UK are caused by air pollution. Studies have also found an association with respiratory diseases, low birthweight and impaired lung development in children, especially in inner cities.

Tackling climate change then is a question of social justice, both for some of the poorest in the UK and overseas. The left cannot afford to stand like King Canute at the shore, waiting for the tide to turn back. But nor too should we pretend that managing this transition is easy. The move away from an energy system and an economy dominated by fossil fuels to one powered by clean energy is arguably the country's biggest challenge in 100 years, comparable in scale to the industrial revolution.

With so many jobs reliant on oil and gas, particularly in the north east of Scotland and north east of England, the consequences of this shift on whole communities are huge. The UK's last deep coal mine closed in 2015, and the government has promised to close the remaining coal fired power stations by 2025. Meanwhile reserves in the North Sea have become harder to exploit and in the last year alone 65,000 jobs were lost.

There is even more at stake than this. The Paris agreement sets us on an irreversible path to a low carbon future. But as the governor of the Bank of England set out in September 2015, the UK is heavily invested in fossil fuels. As the world moves towards a low carbon future, pensions, savings, and the financial system as a whole are extremely vulnerable without a managed transition.

It is understandable then that amongst the public there exists huge public concern, both about the consequences of failing to tackle climate change, and the consequences of doing so. This concern has been heightened by the way in which low carbon policies have been funded, until now, almost entirely through a levy on energy bills. This regressive funding model has left the poorest households paying six times as much for the transition to clean energy compared to the wealthiest, according to IPPR research.

On the political right, climate sceptics and advocates of limited government have united to try to halt investment in clean energy and wider efforts to tackle climate change. They appear to have won this case with the government in relation to onshore wind farms and state investment in this low cost form of energy has ceased entirely.

Meanwhile, the government has slashed solar investment just at the moment when it stood on the cusp of becoming economically competitive, able to survive without government subsidy. This decision cost the industry 1500 jobs overnight, putting at risk up to 18,000 more – half of all jobs in the solar industry – according to the government's own impact assessment. In 2015 the chancellor cancelled £1bn planned investment in carbon capture and storage (CCS), a technology that has the potential to be able to bury carbon emissions underground, with two sites that were due to be developed with private money now no longer able to go ahead. The prime minister recently downplayed the prospect of investment in the

Swansea Bay Tidal Lagoon. Over the next five years the country will lose at least 1 gigawatt of renewable energy generation, equivalent to the energy needed to power 660,000 homes. All this, has led Bloomberg analysts to declare that renewable investment is about to 'drop off a cliff'.

In taking this approach the government has drawn criticism from a range of voices, including from the CBI who recently highlighted the need for stability and clear government leadership, as the constant chopping and changing in energy policy deters potential investment. Former US vice president Al Gore also contrasted the UK's historic leadership on climate change with its current policies and urged the government to change course.

With a government bound by a powerful combination of political and economic forces, the left's response becomes critical. Just as in the 1960s Britain was changed profoundly by the 'white heat of technology', the country is changing again. In 1963 Harold Wilson warned, "it is no good trying to comfort ourselves with the thought that automation need not happen here; that it is going to create so many problems that we should perhaps put our heads in the sand and let it pass by." The choice, he went on, was between "the blind imposition of technological advance" and the "conscious, planned, purposive use of scientific progress". Harold Wilson's four Labour governments were catalysts for the technological and social change the country demanded over half a century ago. Now, as then, the world is changing and we must shape the future, or be shaped by it.

A modern, progressive response to this challenge has three elements: an active, enlightened and enabling state, a green industrial strategy, and the ambition to secure the active involvement of the widest range of people in building a new economy.

An active, investing state

A progressive government could unleash the potential of an active enabling state, prepared to invest in the technology of the future: solar, wind, tidal, CCS and battery technology. Much of this technology is new, and prohibitively expensive to private investors without government backing. But as we have seen in relation to solar power in recent years, the preparedness of governments to invest has helped to unlock private capital and costs have fallen dramatically.

In return countries who have invested early have reaped the benefits of exporting that technology overseas, with the help of a skilled workforce at the vanguard of designing the clean energy system of the future. It is this loss that is the real, long-term damage of the government's decision to cancel investment in CCS, which would have made the UK the first to develop what could be a cutting edge technology.

The way in which this investment is funded will be critical in building a broad public consensus about the future. While currently clean energy schemes are funded almost entirely by energy bill payers, a new settlement, which draws on a combination of central government spending, lending and private capital is essential.

A green industrial strategy

Alongside this the UK needs an industrial strategy to address the reality that many communities in some of the poorest parts of the country stand to lose from the move away from fossil fuels. It must recognise the debt we owe to communities who, through dangerous, difficult and dirty work, powered the industrial revolution. They gave us not just the prosperity but the global influence that allowed us to go to Paris and negotiate that historic agree-

ment to limit global warming to no more than 2C. Just as young people from Wigan and Barnsley powered the jobs of the past, so too could they power the jobs of the future.

The need for an industrial strategy is clear. The jobs that currently exist in energy are often highly skilled, long term and labour intensive. Many of the new jobs that Britain has managed to create in clean energy are shorter term and lower pay. As the local council in Aberdeen, a city badly hit by job losses in the North Sea, has recognised, funding and strategy is needed to reverse this trend and create new, good quality jobs in areas like research and development. It will mean, as the Aberdeen city deal implicitly recognises, ending the deadening debate about state or market. Because in reality a just transition will only ever be realised with the energy and investment of both public and private capital, directed in our common interests.

For too long the debate about energy and climate change has been oppositional in another way too, pitting jobs and growth against progress on global warming, and pitting the poorest in the UK against the poorest overseas. Politicians, commentators, campaigners are too often divided and the public are invited to pick a side. Now that the Paris agreement has signalled that the move to clean energy is inevitable, universal and irreversible, it is surely clear that this debate is a dead end.

People power

The question is not whether the jobs of the future will be created, but who will create them, in the areas where they are needed, to power us through the next century. But this is not something that can be left to governments to undertake on their own. It needs people at its heart. Already, it is becoming clear that communities are taking action where government won't. From a village in Balcombe to council tenants on an estate in Hackney, there are amazing exam-

ples of communities becoming reliant on solar, creating jobs and cutting bills in the process. The knock on social effect is bigger too, strengthening communities, building confidence and creating a growing awareness of, and support for, tackling global warming.

Not every person or community wants to set up their own energy company. But Labour councils around the country have been involved in providing people with a range of ways to get involved, from the support Plymouth has given to a community energy company, allowing people to buy shares in their local scheme, to Nottingham which has set up its own Robin Hood energy company. Increasingly as government withdraws its financial and political support, Labour councils are at the forefront of what the leader of Manchester has called "a clean energy revolution". Ahead of the landmark Paris summit, 60 Labour councils pledged to go carbon free by 2050 and they will work together as part of a Labour initiative to cut the UK's carbon footprint by 10 per cent, covering almost every major town and city in the UK.

The climate change debate has too often paralysed us into inaction. Characterised by worst case scenarios, it can seem too vast and too difficult a challenge to take on. The approach taken by community groups and councils, to work incrementally towards a different, ambitious future is one the left must adopt in coming years. So too, is it a new model of how the state should act in this century, working through and with people, not for them. While national governments will continue to play an important role, increasingly action on climate change is being taken by federal leaders across the world, like the c40 group whose mayors include the mayors of New York, Paris and Rio. As the UK moves towards an increasingly federal system the role of the mayors of county and city regions, such as Greater Manchester and London will become more important.

With Labour out of power at a national level, this regional leadership will be essential in the coming years to ensure that the UK continues to make progress towards climate safety. The challenge posed by climate change can only be solved by core Labour values: the pursuit of social justice, internationalism, solidarity, an active, enabling and empowering state, and a belief that we achieve more through our common endeavour than we achieve alone. It will take all of our talents to tackle global warming. A combination of global ambition and national vision, powered by people, will give us an energy system fit for the challenge of this century.

EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE: ENVIRONMENT

Decoupling economic growth from the exhaustion of our natural resources and the degrading of the environment will be one of most crucial challenges of future decades. This is true not only for economic reasons, but also for reasons of social justice and therefore is paramount to the survival of modern social democracy.

Already today, we see poor and socially disadvantaged groups in our society suffering the most from extreme weather conditions, biodiversity loss and changing climatic conditions. Health issues caused by air pollution, relocation and even displacement due to unbearable living circumstances are becoming growing problems, especially in urban areas.

The responses to this challenge will not just lie in new, innovative, climate friendly technologies, but also in an increased awareness of our shared resources and environment. The Paris agreement of December 2015 laid the foundation for this transformation. National, European and global policies now need to add the substance.

Enabling everyone, especially the socially disadvantaged, to afford clean energy will be one of European social democracy's most important tasks. The protection of people's health and living environment by improving air quality and reducing the consequences of climate change will be another. This gives climate action and environmental protection a new social dimension in a world that faces a growing population and emerging economies that need energy and natural resources to secure higher living standards.

Europe will need to stay at the forefront of intelligent technological developments and be a reliable and trustworthy partner in international climate action. It is our duty as social democrats to connect the principles of social equality and social rights with sustainable development goals.

We are on track, but not there yet.

Jo Leinen