



FOOD AND ENERGY SECURITY: LOCAL SYSTEMS GLOBAL SOLIDARITY



Alan Simpson MP offers a brilliant analysis of what's wrong with current national and international policies on food and energy and why we must break all the rules

The new political divide

It's the strange nature of our times that's defining a quite different politics. The defining difference now is between those who want to address, with a degree of urgency, the challenges of climate change and the way it is going to rewrite all of the rules that will determine how we live our lives, and those who don't.

And that doesn't cut easily on party lines. We have exactly the same divisions in pretty much all of the parties at the moment; and that requires us to be willing to look at a number of heresies. I wanted to explore some of those heresies, partly to challenge, but also to excite. What I want to put to you is that this is a time when we ought to be

openly advocating the case for breaking all the rules, because the current rules don't work; they are taking us deeper into an accelerating crises, and breaking the rules is a sensible way of saving lives. I think we ought to be giving platforms to that degree of irreverence.

Breaking old rules for new

So the alternative to today's Washington consensus neo-liberal agenda of global free trade is a different basis on which way the world works, and that for me would have to be global rules base for essentially localised sustainability systems.

It is not to turn our backs on internationalism, but to understand that today and tomorrow's internationalism is one of connectedness, of solidarity (that was term that the Archbishop of Canterbury used), the solidarity of witness and a different form of "gift relationship", as I shall explain later.

What we have to be looking for would include a rules base that enshrines the right to produce to meet your own security needs before accepting the need to produce to meet anyone else's needs. It would include a right to hold essential resources in public ownership rather than see them carved up for private gain. There has to be a shift in the way in which we use our fiscal resources for subsidies that promote sustainability. In other words, it is not the eradication of subsidies or the existence of subsidies that's the problem; it's the current use of subsidies to distort and destroy the ecology that we depend upon for tomorrow.

Included within that global rules base must be an absolute, *absolute* rejection of patents on food. We have to take that out, and the *quid pro quo* that goes along with that is to establish the universal farmers rights to save seeds. And then the issues that emerge would be about how we feed the world rather than who owns the food chain. We then have to go on to look internationally at the case for global eco-taxes. There is a need to replace the WTO with a different global organisation, one that's focussed on a sustainable global ecology.

And that would be the interconnectness of a global framework within which we may have the prospects of survival.

Triple crises and their origins

There are three interconnected crises facing us now: the crisis in water security, the crisis in energy security, and the crisis in food security

Mae-Wan Ho said that global food production has been declining over the last four years. But we need to connect those to some of the other pressures that we face in every part of today's global economy. In terms of water, within the 20th Century, global water consumption increased six fold – twice the rate of population growth. There's a fair majority of people who will expect, within reasonable circumstances, to still be alive in 2025. Many will have children of their own by 2025 that they don't have now. But the figures for global water crises suggest that by 2025, in twenty years time, the proportion of people on the planet who will be living in areas of "significant water stress" will rise from 34 percent to 63 percent. In absolute numbers it's a total sum of about six billion people, which is the entirety of today's world population. So we cannot go on using those water resources in the profligate way we have been doing. Water uses tie in to a different form of ecological auditing.

Huge amounts of the water resources have gone into agribusiness, the business of overproduction from the land, in order to produce food surpluses in the industrial world that are then dumped on the developing world in order to undermine the sustainable agricultural base that they themselves ought to be able to rely on. So we are squandering water in order to destroy the viable economies of both the North and South.

The same is true in relation to energy. If we were to do an energy audit of where we are now, what we would find is that within our own country, we know that in today's power stations, 70 percent of the energy **is** dissipated as waste. We pump huge amounts of water back into the atmosphere through cooling towers in order to just generate the energy that we have.

Globally we have a massive misuse of subsidies. Subsidies in the wrong direction that have gone primarily into sustaining the production of coal, oil and gas. £235 billion a year globally is going into the energy subsidies and into energy systems that actually accelerate the crises.

So it isn't that we're short of money, we have huge resources of money, but we are using them to accelerate the crisis rather than the reverse it. And I'm genuinely excited about the possibilities of reversing it.

The Woking miracle

I have to confess that I never, ever in my life thought that I would say that a revolution of any sort would have begun in Woking! I'm sorry if anyone reading this is from Woking. It just has never been a place that's stirred my loins, in thinking that's where revolutions could happen, but it has! And within the next couple of years Woking will be going off the National grid because it generates more energy than it needs. It is currently generating 135 percent of its energy needs from renewable and sustainable sources. They include hydrogen fuel cell technology, which also happens, to provide a by-product of pure water. Something like one hundred thousand gallons of pure water a year as a by-product. And this is going back into the depleted water resources, back into the local economy.

What Woking also discovered is that not only are our national power stations massively inefficient in the way they work, but that the national grid is massively inefficient. For every pound's worth of electricity that Woking was putting into the grid, it was costing them pretty much £20 to get it back because of a whole series of leaks in the generation system, the distribution system and various taxes at different stages. So they found that it was much better for them to have bought and installed the wiring system for the whole of Woking. They have reclaimed the ownership of their local energy system and they invite people to sign up to energy services contracts, not energy consumption contracts, but *energy services contracts* in which some of you are actually having solar roofs installed as part of the contract because the system generates wealth as well as generating warmth and well-being. They have cut the energy costs to the fuel-poor. This government's target is 10 percent of income. Woking have cut them to 6 percent of the income of the poor and this has all been done and it's not just on a local scale, somewhere tucked away beyond some serious consideration.

National governments have lost the plot

What's happening now in London is that London did a global search of whom to appoint as their climate change co-ordinator and they pinched the guy from Woking. His remit is to make London energy self sufficient within a decade. Now that is not messing around, this is a really serious consensus of how we can generate our energy needs from and with renewable sources within a decade without destroying the prospects for the future. And not content with doing that, London is already in discussions with twenty-five other global cities that are saying, actually we're giving up on national governments because they've lost the plot. We're going to do it ourselves. We will try and have this as a globalized initiative in which we share the resources of our know-how on a "gift relationship" basis so that we can all survive.

So the scale upon which this can take place is awesome if only we are to understand it and to engage it. The only people who don't want to do that by and large are the majority who are occupants of this place (the House of Commons) but there are honourable exceptions and I say those exceptions are across different parties. But the momentum for that change will come, and is already coming from outside, and that is phenomenally exciting, absolutely astonishing. So that's where, I think, we need to be heading, and I'll just point out that neither Woking nor London nor any of the other global cities who are in this, none of them are making an assumption that there is a single part of the energy components that will be nuclear. So all of this can go and run in a quite different way. And it ties in to the food agenda.

The slow food movement

I went to a fascinating conference last November in Turin. It was convened by the Italian slow food movement, which had brought together five thousand representatives of food communities in 132 different countries, many of whom didn't have passports; they didn't even have ID documents. But they were looking at how they could share their knowledge of sustainable food production in ways that offered common ground for long term viable futures. And I have to say that in some ways the most exciting of the discussions was one between farmers from Afghanistan and Columbia who were talking not about problems of drugs production, but about the production of raisins in Afghanistan and savannah fruits in Columbia as a basis of earning a living, feeding their families, producing goods that other people needed that were non-destructive of other peoples futures. Now all of this was going on in defiance of the WTO negotiations, and I think we have to come out here as advocates of that defiance.

I suggest we can tie our ropes together in a different way from the one that is being driven through the

WTO. I said this to those who are part of the Make Poverty History campaign, that if we genuinely believe that all that's needed is to free the Southern Hemisphere to get into more genuinely free trade competition with the North, and then remove the barriers, you ought to look at some of the work that people like Caroline Lucas has done about the ecological consequences of large distance goods distribution and the sheer volume of fossil fuels that are consumed in the process of shipping goods from one side of the planet to the other.

The new "gift relationship"

What really hacks me off is that we are now a net importer in this country of parsnips. And I say that as someone, who, as a child, bore a grudge against my father for the one thing he was good at, which was producing endless supplies of sodding parsnips. The notion that Britain has to be a net importer of parsnips just seemed to me to be completely barking mad. But what we can do is to touch base with sustainability, the notion of taking out and putting back into the land in ways that conserve and hand on. And this is the point I want to finish on, the gift relationship.

As a child and then as a student, I grew up with a very specific understanding of what the gift relationship was. A sociologist called Richard Titmuss defined it, and it was enshrined in the blood transfusion service in the UK, one of the most wonderful gifts to any generation that Britain could have come up with. The beauty of the blood transfusion service is that when you go in and you fill in the form and you have your thumb tested and you give your donation, no one lying on the beds ever says "Can you tell me how much I've got in my account? What's the rate of interest? Is it a high risk account?"

We never assume that we are making those contributions into our own personal, private accounts. We do so as a gift to others in the assumption that if anything happens to ourselves, to our children, to our neighbours, there will always be enough in that common pot to meet our crises needs. And so no money changes hands, no interest ever gets paid. It is a gift of solidarity from one person to another, from one generation to another. And that is what has to underpin the thinking of an international symbol of survival for us through the 21st century.

The problem in the developing world is the affordability of being part of an ecological agenda. China is saying that within a decade they're promising to increase the rate of car ownership such that every family with one child will have a car. It will raise their car ownership from 33 per thousand to 333 per thousand. Multiply that by the numbers of families in China and you have an increase in car production and car emissions that will threaten to act as an ecological tsunami to virtually all other emissions gains that the world seeks to make. In order to do this they're trying to increase their production base and the energy requirements needed to sustain it and that is based at the moment on a commitment in China to build 500 new coal power stations. Now this is dragging everyone in directions that will be disastrous. But if they're not going to do that they have to pick up the demands that were first made when I first got into this House by the then Chinese environment minister. She came here at a time when we were starting to talk about our national commitment to remove or replace the ozone damaging fridges containing CFCs and HFCs and replace them with non-ozone damaging fridges. She listens to this and said this is fascinating, within a decade you'll probably do it, you'll probably remove maybe 20 million ozone-damaging fridges and replace them with 20 million non-damaging fridges and that's great. But in the same decade in India, Indian families will assume the right to acquire fridges themselves. There will be 200 million fridges acquired in India during the same period. Now history tells us that the fridges in India will be all the craft technology you've banned or abandoned and dumped on us as aid in bilateral

agreements that “gift” us poisonous development.

Indian families have no desire to poison the environment. What they want is the same ecologically responsible programme as you. If that’s the case the Indian family that aspires to have a fridge has to be able to afford a non-contaminating fridge and that means you have to gift the technology, you have to *gift it*. If the *quid pro quo* is that we agree in return not to overload the basis of your own economy by just dumping our capacity to produce things in vast quantities on your society then fine, have that as a protectionist barrier. But allows us to be part of an agenda that reaps legitimate aspirations of our own families without destroying the aspirations and survival prospects of yours. So that is where I think the gift relationship will come in. None of it is deliverable within a free trade agenda. I think we have to find a way to be willing to stand up and say that. The advisors around Downing Street fail to hear this. They insist that there is a separate agenda, I think largely driven by Washington that they still have a remit to deliver on. It is why coming back to the food issue that as a society we may have rejected the right of the producers of GM crops to be able to dump them into our food supply chain.

But at the European level, every time there is a crop approval permission that is sought the UK has voted to approve every one despite the fact that as a society we have rejected them and despite the fact that at a European level other countries have sought to protect themselves and us by asserting the right to a national veto. Britain alone is pushing the case for the removal of a right to national vetoes to refuse to endorse GM crops. So this mandate hasn’t come from Parliament. Peter (Ainsworth MP) and I haven’t been asked about this, the public hadn’t been asked about this. It has come from a set of corporate lobbyists who have freewheeling agreements to go into Downing Street and to write the ministerial script. And that’s why I think that the challenge that has to come is a reclaiming of the agenda, away from that sense of corporate greed in the short terms and in favour of something that will allow us all to survive in the long term.

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