

# Sussex Research

## How do radical climate movements negotiate their environmental and their social agendas? A study of debates within the Camp for Climate Action (UK)

Raphael Schlembach

### Publication date

01-05-2011

### Licence

This work is made available under the **Copyright not evaluated** licence and should only be used in accordance with that licence. For more information on the specific terms, consult the repository record for this item.

### Citation for this work (American Psychological Association 7th edition)

Schlembach, R. (2011). *How do radical climate movements negotiate their environmental and their social agendas? A study of debates within the Camp for Climate Action (UK)* (Version 1). University of Sussex. <https://hdl.handle.net/10779/uos.23408795.v1>

### Published in

Critical Social Policy

### Link to external publisher version

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0261018310395922>

### Copyright and reuse:

This work was downloaded from Sussex Research Open (SRO). This document is made available in line with publisher policy and may differ from the published version. Please cite the published version where possible. Copyright and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners unless otherwise stated. For more information on this work, SRO or to report an issue, you can contact the repository administrators at [sro@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:sro@sussex.ac.uk). Discover more of the University's research at <https://sussex.figshare.com/>

# How do radical climate movements negotiate their environmental and their social agendas? A study of debates within the Camp for Climate Action (UK)<sup>1</sup>

Raphael Schlembach (author's final draft)

## *Abstract*

This is a case study of the Camp for Climate Action, which has held several high-profile protest events in the UK since its inception in 2006. It analyses the Camp as a contested space where different emphases on environmental and social priorities have to be negotiated by its activists. The article considers areas of contestation where concerns over climate change meet questions of social justice. These are structured around tangible issues of campaigning, such as opposition to new coal-fired power stations or to the third runway at Heathrow airport, some of which have put the Camp at odds with labour movement and class struggle activists. While some demand a drastic shift away from current levels of consumption, others question the discriminatory effects of self-imposed austerity politics. On a more abstract level, the article considers debates on the need for government solutions to the environmental crisis and their possible impacts on social equality. The article is structured around movement-internal debates and makes use of interviews, extensive fieldwork notes and continuous participant observation over the course of four years.

**Key words:** activism, climate change, coal, aviation, state

## **Introduction**

Questions of climate change and social justice are inseparable. This is evidenced through much of the academic literature, for example on North-South climate negotiations (Parks and Roberts, 2010) or environmental justice (Byrne, 2002), and also recognised by activists, as expressed for example through the social movement forum at the United Nations' climate talks in Copenhagen (Klimaforum, 2010). Nonetheless, for environmental campaign groups, difficulties can still arise when inserting a social dimension into their green political agenda. This becomes an even more pertinent question when looking at some of the new, and more radical, environmental protest groups. This article investigates the British climate action movement, and particularly the Camp for Climate Action (UK). There are two distinct features of this 'network of activists' that distinguish it from more established green protest organisations. First, its roots lie in grassroots, anti-capitalist activism combining social justice and anarchist perspectives. Second, it takes issue not with nature, the environment or pollution but with the climate. There is thus an epistemological shift that has arisen with the advent of climate change as the dominant frame of environmental protest, with legitimisation of activism resulting partly from the close observance of official sources of climate science. It is essentially within this framework that new perspectives are being formed and tested in debates over justice, democracy, nature and humanity.

Few academic studies have so far made attempts to identify the distinct characteristics of the new climate action groups, as opposed to previous environmental collective action (for example Engel-Di Mauro, 2010; Saunders, 2008). Where direct action in the UK has been of interest, it has usually taken the form of studying – just as this article – the Camp for Climate Action. The Camp has been noted for its utopian outlook with its focus on showcasing 'sustainable living' at its annual gatherings

---

<sup>1</sup> The author would like to acknowledge the constructive criticism provided by anonymous reviewers and to thank Andy Lockhart and Andrew Bowman for their invaluable ideas and input.

(Skrimshire, 2008); it has been analysed as a moment of green protest success in terms of knowledge transfer between activist generations and its resonance with the broad public (Plows, 2008); and its political arena has been interpreted as a 'heterotopia' where different political visions meet and clash (Saunders and Price, 2008). This is surprisingly little, considering the relative wealth of research about earlier green protest cycles, especially direct action environmentalists in the UK (e.g. Doherty, 1999; 2002: 154-182; Doherty et al., 2003; 2007; Plows, 2003; Plows et al., 2004; Seel, et al. 2000). The Camp for Climate Action could be seen as part of a network of activists who advocate direct action against what they describe as the 'root causes of climate change'. Its methods and radicalism make it unlike more mainstream organisations that are concerned about climate change, such as NGOs and campaign coalitions, but it can also be regarded as a home to a new generation of activists that do not necessarily share the history and ideals of previous green protesters. Skrimshire is right when he states that a look at the Camp for Climate Action as the "most confrontational of a new wave of 'climate action' groups" is most revealing for an analysis of contemporary environmentalism, representing a "significant shift in emphases on the function of activism in civil society" (Skrimshire, 2008: 14). While he focuses on the attempted synergy between 'small action' models of sustainability and confrontational collective action, consideration not only of its methods and tactics, but of its politics and strategy, allows for a highly informative scrutiny of its apparent combination of social and environmental agendas. It depicts radical climate activism as a dynamic political contest that is played out at the intersection of red and green issues, often with a distinct black (anarchist) tint.

This article makes use of in-depth interviews with organisers and participants of the Camp for Climate Action, as well as continuous participant observation since the group's first protest event in 2006. A look at some of the debates that arose during the Camp's campaigns, for example those against new coal and airport expansion, reveals the difficulty of maintaining a radical focus on social justice when acting for an urgent and dramatic reduction in the use of fossil fuels.

### **Climate Camp's roots**

In 2006, the first Camp for Climate Action was set up as a week-long protest based just miles from the coal-fired power station Drax, in Yorkshire. Starting a series of high-profile protests against the 'root causes' of climate change by direct action campaigners, the Camp had not come from nowhere. Its roots were certainly recognisable in earlier environmental direct action movements – especially those that maintained permanent protest sites during the 1990s to halt the government's road building programme. Many participants had also been involved in the anti-car Reclaim the Streets demonstrations, organised free parties against the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, or been involved with alter-globalisation activism such as the 1999 Carnival against Capitalism in the City of London. There were strong overlaps with the Earth First! activist scene, which had been engaged with continuous small acts of eco-protest, blockades and sabotage, often with a local focus (see for example Wall, 1999; Seel and Plows, 2000; Doherty, Plows and Wall, 2007).

However, as activists stressed repeatedly in interviews, none of these campaigns had been about single issues. They were united in a feeling of belonging to a broader, and global, anti-capitalist social movement. The more immediate precursor to the first Camp for Climate Action illustrates and supports that point. A lot of the impetus had come from the now defunct Dissent! Network, which was formed at a London Anarchist Bookfair with the aim of bringing together individuals prepared to physically and strategically disrupt – and possibly shut down – the 2005 summit meeting of G8 leaders

in the Scottish golf resort of Gleneagles. Dissent! was clearly anarchist in ethos and had adopted the anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian People's Global Action (PGA) hallmarks, which were popular with the radical fringes of the alter-globalisation movement at the time (see Harvie et al., 2005). Its biggest success was deemed to be the establishment of a base camp for several thousand international activists near Stirling in rural Scotland. Dubbed the 'Horizon Eco-Village', it provided camping and meeting space, food and sanitation, and medical and legal support (Starhawk, 2005). Its political vision was set in response to a claim by the G8 leaders that they would pay for offsetting the carbon emissions generated by their meeting. Horizon attempted to demonstrate that a really sustainable, carbon neutral future could only be achieved through massive political and social change.

The first Camp for Climate Action followed in the footsteps of the eco-village in Stirling. In fact, it modelled itself in many ways on Horizon, adopting its decision-making structures and its logistical set-up. It was supposed to be more than a base for direct action protest, however. The Camp's organisers wanted to break out of a cycle of counter-summits as a protest form that had made little inroads since the large-scale demonstrations and riots in Seattle and Genoa (Interview 1, Drax Climate Camp, 2006). British activists had experience of travelling to Prague, Gothenburg, Evian and other similar mass events, yet felt that 'summit-hopping' had its limits. Rather than protesting at the summit meetings and conferences of organisations such as the G8, the World Trade Organisation or the International Monetary Fund – at the risk of being drawn into *their* agenda – the Camp for Climate Action wanted to act on its own terms and in a place of its own choosing.

Nonetheless, this was not to prevent action on a mass scale. The original principles of the Camp reflect a sense of activism that needed to make national, if not global impact, achievable only as part of a larger movement:

1. Climate change is already happening and its effects will be catastrophic if we don't act now.
2. New technology and market-based solutions are not enough to address the problem - tackling climate change will require radical social change.
3. There is a need to work together in our communities to come up with solutions. We cannot rely on business and government to bring about the radical changes that are needed.

As a group, or network of activists, with its immediate history in the anti-capitalist movement, such aims and principles thus indicate a social, rather than purely environmental, agenda. They set out a strategy to build an oppositional force for social change. The Camp saw its role in fostering and promoting horizontal, bottom-up solutions to the climate crisis with a recognition that government and corporate solutions would lead to more domination, exploitation and inequality. This grassroots focus made the Camp for Climate Action essentially participatory and self-organised. The ethos of a vast majority of campers who were spoken to during the fieldwork research was anti-capitalist, challenging economic growth and consumerism, and anarchist (Field Notes, Drax, 2006). On the final day of the protest, one interviewee stressed that:

The Camp embraced direct action, rather than lobbying. We wanted to challenge empty democratic processes of mainstream society, including the government, parliament, the police, the corporate media etc. We were not about asking permission for acting on climate change. (Interview 2, Drax Climate Camp, 2006).

For others, the importance of the Camp also lay in its ‘radical social change’ approach to climate change. They juxtaposed it to an ‘individual lifestyle change’ approach that they saw as characterising the mainstream environmental movement. In conversations, at the Camp and during national organising meetings, activists made repeated derogatory references to ‘solutions’ to the climate crisis that did not go beyond ‘changing your light bulb’. In contrast, they argued for the significance of collective action, power and intelligence. The anarchistic methods and politics of the Camp were thus seen by many participants as, directly or indirectly, a challenge to both the traditional Left and the green movement. They, it was argued, had not sufficiently made the link between human exploitation in a society structured by class and the environmental exploitation at the heart of the climate crisis (Field Notes, Drax, 2006). For many of its activists, the Camp for Climate Action was a new force that recognised that climate change was not just an environmental but social issue.

Despite strategic principles that aimed for broad and radical notions of social change, the Camp nonetheless had tactical ideas of what was achievable in the short-term. Participants all highlighted practical goals – such as an impact on the discourse on aviation, stopping the programme for a new round of coal-fired power stations, delegitimising nuclear power and biofuels – alongside social objectives relating to equality, social justice and democracy. The Camp for Climate Action quickly grew in popularity both with journalists writing for the national newspapers and with environmental campaigners whose politicisation had been more a result of exposure to reporting about climate change than involvement in alter-globalisation or anti-capitalist activism. This was seemingly a success of what one interviewee called “an attempt to break through the apathy on climate change, to make symbolic impacts and pulling people with us” (Interview 3, Drax Climate Camp, 2006). The second Camp in 2007, within a short distance of Heathrow Airport, drew about three times the number of participants.

Despite this broadening of the campaign to include many younger and new activists the Camp’s principles remained as before. However, its relative success also brought differences out into the open (Saunders and Price, 2009). While most political disagreements are solved and debated informally, many horizontal activist groups in the UK, including the Camp for Climate Action, also commit to particular ways of ‘consensus decision-making’ that aim to take into account the diversity of opinions and ideas present in heterogeneous grassroots movements (see Graeber, 2004; Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006; The Seeds for Change Collective, 2007). As a way to address differences and contestations, the Camp explicitly sought to reintroduce a political space where these questions could be discussed. The organising process thus included spaces for self-reflection where strategy was reviewed and made. In multiple meetings before and during the Camps, activists engaged with questions of past achievements, criticisms they received, or their relationship to other campaign groups. The tradition of direct action politics in anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist movements was evoked repeatedly, and juxtaposed with more tangible medium-term aims (Field Notes, National Gatherings, 2006-2010).

The following sections of this article give an indication on how different environmental and social agendas were discussed and negotiated within this contested political arena of the Camp for Climate Action. Examples of climate action campaigns against coal and aviation are provided to explore issues of solidarity with workers in key industries, ideas of anti-consumerism and economic growth, and the role of the state as a vector for social change.

### **Climate action and coal**

Some of the Camp's most high-profile actions have come in opposition to the burning of coal. In 2006, it pitched its tents within sight of the UK's largest electricity generator, Drax coal-fired power station. In 2008, it picked Kingsnorth coal-fired power station as its target. And in 2009, it organised a mass action to shut down the Radcliffe-on-Soar coal power plant near Nottingham. There were also smaller actions carried out by Camp participants. In 2008, 29 people hijacked a train carrying coal to Drax by bringing it to a controlled halt and emptying it of its contents. In 2009, 114 people were pre-emptively arrested by Nottingham police for allegedly conspiring to shut down Radcliffe. In the same year, campaigners also organised a bike tour of UK mining villages and sites for proposed open cast mines.

Drax is one of three coal power stations in Megawatt Valley, Yorkshire. The rationale argued by the Camp for Climate Action for pitching its tents here was primarily related to size. It claimed that Drax was the single largest emitter of carbon dioxide in the UK, with 20.8 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per year, providing 7% of the national energy needs. In the Camp's words "this is more than a quarter of the total CO<sub>2</sub> emitted by all Britain's motorists" (Camp for Climate Action, 2006). Opposition to the burning of coal was the second reason cited for protesting at Drax: "Coal is the dirtiest way to make electricity, and yet half of Britain's electricity comes from coal" (Camp for Climate Action, 2006). Thirdly, the use of fossil fuels as a source of energy generation was not seen in isolation, but considered as a result of a short-sighted corporate and government agenda: "Drax is a large part of a system which has to change – a system where profit and power are valued over sustainability and co-operation. By challenging it, we challenge our whole way of life" (Camp for Climate Action, 2006). Some participants were adamant that the 2006 Camp would be misunderstood if described as a protest against coal. One interviewee pointed to a number of direct actions against other carbon emitting industries that were launched from the camp base, such as a blockade of Hartlepool nuclear power station: "No, going to Drax wasn't about coal. It was symbolic to target the biggest emitter of CO<sub>2</sub>. There were actions against nuclear power too" (Interview, Manchester national gathering, 2007).

In 2007, in line with European Union commitments, the UK government put in place a policy agenda that would see carbon emissions cut by 80% by 2050, which became legally binding with the Climate Change Act 2008 (see Anderson et al., 2008 for a critical evaluation). In the energy sector this included direction for a commercial demonstration of carbon capture and storage (CCS) technology at a coal-fired power station, with a view to the renewal of its coal power plant stock equipped with the technology (see Drake, 2009). While business and economic pressures were key obstacles in this development (Chalmers et al., 2009), climate campaigners also made the case for political and technological challenges to 'new coal'. Responding to an application by energy company E.ON to replace its existing plant at Kingsnorth on the Hoo in Kent with a new CCS-fitted power station, a Camp for Climate Action was set up here in 2008. The language that the Camp adopted had moved on somewhat from previous years, seeking to discredit the possibility of carbon capture and storage as a 'techno-fix' that was both unachievable and undesirable. Such rhetoric created an overlap of aims with NGOs, such as Greenpeace and Christian Aid, which had been campaigning against 'new coal' and Kingsnorth. However, this is not to say that the Camp's message became any less radical. Facing criticism that the Camp had turned to lobbying rather than direct action, one of the organisers wrote:

The NGOs are calling for no new coal without carbon capture and storage and as an alternative to coal fired electricity generation investment in renewables and

efficiency. The climate camp is attempting to catalyse a grassroots challenge to the growth economy and if it sticks to previous trends will call for a reduction in demand and relocalisation within the context of a global struggle against the fossil fuel industry (Paul M, 2008).

Publicly however, the grassroots activists never managed to open up debates about the structural and systemic changes it advocated. The sympathetic media made sure that such difficult and fundamental questions did not leave the camp site, choosing instead to describe the event as 'science seminar-cum-festival'. The more sensationally minded press focused its attention on the regular standoffs between campers and police officers which led to accusations of police harassment of peaceful protesters through blanket searches, confiscation of everyday-use items and sleep deprivation. One participant recalled:

As in previous years, the camp got the mainstream media talking about the role that carbon emissions play in manmade climate change. However, outlets overwhelmingly portrayed this as a protest against emissions at Kingsnorth in isolation, rather than the structural need of capital to expand, degrading the environment in the process. One deviation from this was when the Kent News quoted camper Anya Patterson as saying "If we are serious about fighting climate change, we have to tackle the root causes, and those are greed and a commitment to relentless economic growth." Similarly, the non-hierarchical decision-making process was largely ignored, with the BBC merely describing it as 'exhaustive' and 'somewhat baffling' (Ford, 2008).

However, within the Camp's boundaries more fundamental discussions were had (Field Notes, Kingsnorth, 2008), sparked by the intervention of a former National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) official, Dave Douglass. As an anarchist Douglass clearly felt some affinity to the stated political principles of the Camp that demonstrated an anti-business and anti-government stance. Yet, with his background in the 1984-85 miners' strike against pit closures, Douglass launched a series of polemics against what he perceived as a middle-class environmental agenda that neglected organised labour. A special four-page edition of the Journal of the National Union of Mineworkers titled 'The Climate Camp and the Miners', which was handed out at the Kingsnorth protest, quotes a Camp spokeswoman as briefing the national media with "There is no place for coal in Britain's energy supply" (The Miner, 2008). It accuses the climate campaigners of opposing 'clean coal' and of treating the issue "as if coal was an entirely socially inanimate object" (The Miner, 2008). By trying to wrestle debate away from a focus on the environmental impact of the burning of coal towards recognition of its place in society, the NUM sought to bring back discussion of workplace issues, industry and community.

Douglass went further than that by putting forward his perception of a class-divide in climate change politics: "The shrill middle class instruction that there was no place for coal in Britain's energy supply came as a slap down, and as a warning to keep our place and be quiet" (Douglass, 2008). Such language was reminiscent of the political conflict that the NUM was engaged in during the 1970s and 1980s, yet seemed somewhat anachronistic in the light of the climate change debate. With the general contraction of the coal mining industry and the decline of political power resting with the NUM since the 1984-85 strikes, Douglass could not refer to the support of a large industrial workforce and union organisation, but had to echo the wider perception, prevalent in media reports of the 'climate campers', that concerns about climate change are the privilege of the relatively affluent:

Does it not occur to you that, while you sit in your climate camp tents, with your self imposed sparse living and deprivation, there are 1.6 billion people around the world living in real poverty, without even the luxury of a tent. They want to enjoy the same living standards as the rest of us and deserve that, at the very least (The Miner, 2008).

While some campers objected to such an antagonistic defence of clean coal technology through the NUM at the camp, others welcomed the social realism that was introduced by it. One observer noted:

At the time I was relieved that, against the fluffy anti-capitalism of much of the camp's official discourse, Douglass introduced the perspective of those who may not have 'somewhere else' to go, locked into jobs and communities that a politics of exodus cannot easily address. [The Camp's] model of protest camp and sustainable community gleaned from the post-Seattle summit protests can seem too abstracted from everyday life to break the general perception that climate change exists 'out there', to be dealt with by super-heroes such as Al Gore [...]. The intervention by Douglass was a dose of messy actuality (Cunningham, 2009).

It was a debate that the Camp for Climate Action did not shy away from either. As a sign of its commitment to working class and community politics it invited former NUM president and socialist Arthur Scargill to address the climate activists at Kingsnorth. After the Kingsnorth protest, trade unionists and campers met again – this time on the NUM's accord – at a Newcastle conference, sponsored by the NUM, the Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers' Union (RMT) and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), entitled 'Class, Climate Change and Clean Coal – the Climate Campers and the Unions'. The exchanges and discussions at the conference were described by one attendee as "a clash of cultures between a traditional 'mass worker' form of trade unionism and a diffuse network of activists whose politics ranged from pale green reformism to red and black anti-capitalism" (Cunningham, 2009). Rapprochement was made, nonetheless, through the shared opposition to opencast mining. However, as the NUM was perceived by climate activists as a union in decline, some called for a more sustained engagement with coal workers organised in the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) and Unite construction workers (Field Notes, Kingsnorth, 2008).

While climate activists were unmoved from their opposition to (opencast) coal mining, they did however emphasise their commitment to class-based politics through the concept of a 'just transition'. This notion sees the transition to low-carbon industry achieved through dialogue with employees and promotes a model of change that is worker-led. While this commitment exists in principle, so far it has not been able to significantly influence the Camp's actions or protests. One rare and successful example of collaboration between climate activists and workers were the dialogues and protests around the Vestas dispute on the Isle of White. Vestas Blades UK made production workers at their wind turbine blade factory redundant in 2009. Trade unionists, climate campaigners and workers here formed an alliance of sorts, beginning an occupation of the factory and staging protests outside. The group 'Workers Climate Action', which sprung from within the Camp for Climate Action, was instrumental in this. They leafleted workers on a daily basis after their redundancies were announced, and managed to strike a tone that balanced environmental and worker's rights arguments (Field Notes, Vestas, 2009). Despite the ultimate failure to get workers reinstated, they received nationwide support and some employees have since been engaged in climate activism.

This collaboration, however, remains unique, partly because of Vestas' production of renewable energy components. To date, there has not been a protest against coal or new coal that has involved the industry's workers.

### **Climate action and aviation**

Where the questioning of 'clean coal' brought class onto the agenda of climate campaigns, opposition to airport expansion, and to a third runway for Heathrow airport in particular, raised questions of economic and social growth. In 2007, the second Camp for Climate Action chose at its target the aviation industry and airport expansion, exemplified by the plans for a third runway at Heathrow Airport. The Camp occupied a field belonging to Imperial College London less than a mile from the airport boundary. Significantly the land was earmarked for the construction of the third runway, together with the nearby village of Sipson which is due for destruction under the construction plans. Apart from the impact that the airport's extension would have on the local community, campaigners also opposed growth of the aviation industry on the grounds of greenhouse gas emissions. They raised the question of how emissions from projected industry growth would be accounted for in the UK's carbon reduction agenda (see Bows and Anderson, 2007). While the UK's reduction target is set by the commitment to reduce emissions by 80% by 2050, international transport is currently omitted from the calculations (Anderson et al., 2008). The argument thus appeared a straightforward technical one.

There was some uneasiness about the way that climate campaigners should tackle the issue of greenhouse gas emissions from aviation, however. The Camp near Heathrow Airport purposefully avoided the evocation of public guilt over leisure flights. Instead, it sought to advance arguments against the unequal distribution of power in society, choosing as the targets of its protests the corporate offices of airport operator BAA and Biggin Hill airport, which is used for private and business flights rather than by holiday-goers. The day of mass action, predicted by the media to involve an attempt at invading runways and departure halls, settled for the less spectacular siege of BAA. The airport's operation was consciously not affected. Thus, the Camp occupied a political arena outside, and in contrast to, the demands for a shift in personal consumer behaviour. It was not individuals who were deemed to be at fault for flying on holidays, but the relentless system of growth and expansion driven by corporate profit-motives. The mainstream response to the threat of climate change that suggests changes in consumption patterns ('change your light bulb') was deemed inadequate. On the other hand, however, the narrative of personal responsibility to reduce one's own carbon emissions ran through the publicity literature, workshops and protests of the Camp. Often, the Camp's message was a moral argument against flying. A prominent banner used during the day of mass action illustrated this with the slogan 'Make Planes History' (Field Notes, Heathrow, 2007). The protest thus lay at the crossroads between a moral denunciation of individual lifestyle choices and a radical critique of power in society. Accordingly, the Camp's website at the time proclaimed: "Yes we need to change light bulbs and stop flying to Spain for the weekend, but we also need to act collectively" (Camp for Climate Action, 2007).

While this approach included attempts to interact with Heathrow workers, it did not achieve a meaningful relationship with air unions. Airport workers were leafleted before and during the Camp, yet climate activists were not able to harness the significant unrest (which had led to infrequent industrial action) within the Heathrow workforce against their employers. An exception was the support that striking workers at logistics company Nippon Express received from climate campers on their picket lines at the

airport (Field Notes, Heathrow, 2007). More significant than the relationship to air unions, however, was that the issue of flying and opposition to the airport industry brought up fears amongst some of the climate activists that the Camp for Climate Action would take a turn towards promoting austerity measures to help avert a climate catastrophe. One participant commented that

[...] the camp put major emphasis on lifestyle change, even though most passers by could tell us that it is impossible to live sustainably in today's society. Compost toilets and grey water systems are not things that the majority of the general public can opt into, so what remained was the demand for them to opt out of other actions, such as flying. (Charsley, 2007).

Yet, the language of 'lifestyle change' was not necessarily at odds with the anti-consumerist and anti-growth message the Camp put out. In fact, it fits well into the strands of green thought that advocate the value of post-material wealth and the 'less is more' thesis (see for example Castells, 2003; Purkis, 2000). In interviews, climate activists all made clear that their anti-growth position is a result of acknowledging the planet's finite resources. However, while in most cases such positions have put 'deep green' thinking into opposition with more reformist strands of environmentalism (Dobson, 2000: 77-86), here it has created conflict between moderate single-issue groups and pro-revolutionary attitudes.

This became most evident where debates touched upon the topic of aviation. While some Camp participants wanted to see a future without planes altogether, the group Plane Stupid was most vocal in calling for an end to short-haul flights. Plane Stupid have mounted blockades of taxiways at Stansted, East Midlands and Aberdeen airports, staged roof-top protests at the House of Commons and the Scottish Parliament and covered Peter Mandelson in green custard. Their decision to occupy the offices of EasyJet drew criticism from other activists however who felt that it was unfairly targeting working class holiday-makers. A Plane Stupid press release argued that "Binge-flying is choking the planet to death. [...] it is totally out of order for Easyjet to be offering artificially cheap flights to destinations easily reachable by the train alternative" (Plane Stupid, 2006). While Plane Stupid activists had a large and visible presence during the Camp for Climate Action at Heathrow airport, other participants saw this as an instance of environmental protest abstracting from any social dimension of climate change: "Yeah, the growth in aviation's an environmental problem. But occupying the offices of EasyJet, for heaven's sake? Is aviation more of a problem when flights are 'cheap', i.e., when poorer people fly?" (Free Association, 2008). They felt that some of the rhetoric used by their fellow climate activists put too much emphasis on 'ethical' lifestyle choices and consumer guilt, disregarding the social aspects of climate change. One activist, after the Kingsnorth camp, wrote for example:

Carbon emissions became a hot topic, but [...] only as 'footprints' to feel guilty about. Indeed, some campers were hoping for this. On the Thursday morning, I had a discussion with an activist about his ambitions for what is being dubbed the 'climate movement'. "To make a lot of people very guilty", he replied. This emphasis on guilt as a precursor for individualistic lifestyle change is perhaps the very opposite of what many original organisers hoped for (Ford, 2008).

During the Heathrow protest, a large banner reading 'Social Change not Lifestyle Change' also made this point clear (Field Notes, Heathrow, 2007). The question of guilt and individual consumption thus remained a divisive one, despite the overt promotion of

sustainable means of living as a key feature of the Camps. Yet, such discussions shifted attention to the introduction of social goals into the green discourse where climate change was seen as a social problem, rather than a purely environmental one.

For most activists, the answer was to be sought not in technical or individualistic solutions but in a collective response. Indeed, at least since its mobilisation for protests at the UN climate conference in Copenhagen in December 2009 (COP-15), the Camp for Climate Action has increasingly adopted the rhetoric of global climate justice (see Goodman, 2009, for a contextualisation of the term ‘climate justice’). Also, anti-aviation campaigners such as Plane Stupid activists have increasingly focused on the social impact of airport expansion. In their campaign against the third runway at Heathrow, they now collaborate with members of the local community to run a squatted allotment project and, together with activists from Workers Climate Action, have been involved in attempts to revive the local Trades Council (Interview, Heathrow, 2010).

### **Climate action and the state**

The question of what constitutes a green social agenda is interesting with regards to many environmental organisations. Choosing the Camp for Climate Action’s relationship to social policy debates is particularly fruitful due to its radical stance on state actor politics. There are two elements that most obviously characterise many climate campers’ views of state-led policy debates. First, as noted earlier, the Camp’s roots are found in grassroots and anti-authoritarian campaigns, such as those against the Gleneagles G8 summit, Reclaim The Streets and Earth First!, for example. It brings with it, therefore, an – albeit contested – anarchist critique of the state. Second, it attributes dramatic significance and urgency to any action aimed at halting, or slowing down, global warming. This latter point is important for understanding the pragmatism that many climate activists subscribe to, including recourse to government action and lobbying – sometimes against their stated aims. The centrality of the role of the state in debates at the intersection of social and environmental politics has been noted before:

An important factor [in how different types of green movement respond to questions of social policy] is a difference in attitudes to the state between more anarchistic greens and those greens that are prepared to accept a permanent and/or strategic role for the state (Barry and Doherty, 2001: 587).

Barry and Doherty’s (2001) analysis of green ideological frames implies that the more ‘anarchistic’ fractions of the green movement are less inclined to connect their activism to social policy questions, due to an explicit critique of the welfare state:

[...] more anarchistic parts of the movement reject the idea of “social policy” as a central or important aspect of the green political agenda since this implies accepting a legitimate and continuing role for the state, which they see as part of the ecological problem rather than an element in the creation of a more sustainable society (Barry and Doherty, 2001: 597).

Reformist greens, on the other hand, have fewer reservations when it comes to social policy and therefore government: “[...] pragmatic greens adopt an instrumental attitude towards it for strategic purposes (often expressed as the green strategy of ‘marching through the institutions’)” (Barry and Doherty, 2001: 597).

In the case of the Camp for Climate Action, activist debates confirm the centrality of the green attitude to the state in discussions on the relationship between

environmental activism and social policy; yet they appear to contradict Barry and Doherty's conclusions. Indeed the urgency of action on climate change that we find in the discourse on climate change often excludes social considerations on the part of more moderate climate campaigners. With a greater emphasis on scientific evidence that points towards ecological crisis, political argument and social objectives can become sidelined (Schlembach et al., 2010). Instead, state administration and limits to carbon emissions can be considered the 'necessary evil'. Even the heavily politicised space of the Camps for Climate Action, with their firm support for grassroots action, hosted influential voices that advocated government-led solutions. One activist, complaining about the 'liberal hijacking' of the Camp at Heathrow airport recalls a lecture by Mayer Hillman, Senior Fellow Emeritus of the Policy Studies Institute:

Interpreting the camp as a plea to the general public to change their lifestyles he told us that instead, our best efforts should be geared towards lobbying the government, for it is only the state that can save us now. The talk was well received, even when it hit the topic of authoritarianism, stating that we can not risk having elections in which one party will offer higher carbon incentives, so in effect what we want is a suspension of democracy (Charsley, 2007).

Anarchist interventions at the 2008 Camp near Kingsnorth power station attempted to bring this question to the fore and triggered ongoing political debates within the Camp's organising process as to its relationship to 'state-led solutions' to the climate crisis. (Field Notes, Kingsnorth, 2008). An 'Open Letter to the Neighbourhoods' by a group of 'anti-authoritarians and anarchists' (see Saunders and Price, 2009) was circulated and discussed widely amongst the 2,000 odd campers. The letter argued that

[...] we feel that the camp risks losing contact with its anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian roots and appearing as a gathering that lends its support to top-down, state-centred responses to the crisis that climate change and energy depletion pose for capitalism. As a result, even the mass action [to shut down Kingsnorth power station] is now likely to be interpreted as a gesture of support for tightened social control and austerity measures visited upon the population, rather than expressing resistance to the exploitative obsession with economic growth that has precipitated the present crisis.

The letter was essentially a call for the adoption of the PGA Hallmarks – a set of aims and principles that were developed by the international grassroots network 'People's Global Action' which had made an impact on anti-globalisation activism during its heyday in the 1990s:

The letter hit on one of the central problems facing the camp: how to make it 'a welcoming and non-sectarian space' for people new to anarchist ideas, whilst ensuring that career environmentalists like George Monbiot and Mark Lynas (who outraged many by backing the government's nuclear power plans, the former on BBC's Newsnight) don't get an easy ride (Ford, 2008).

The reformist and pragmatic perspective of other camp participants was given a voice by environmental journalist George Monbiot. Speaking in a major plenary session at the camp, he advocated strong government action, on a national and international scale, as the most adequate and realistic response to the climate crisis (Ford, 2008; Field Notes, Kingsnorth, 2008). Writing in *The Guardian* after the Kingsnorth protest, Monbiot drew

a clear dividing line between the social and the environmental agendas of the activists, charging the “anarchist” campers with “diverting from the urgent task” of stopping climate change (Monbiot 2008) by putting politics over facts. For Monbiot, political and social considerations when campaigning against global warming were laudable but unrealistic. Considering the urgency of the matter, with only a handful of years left to avoid reaching dangerous tipping points of carbon concentration in the atmosphere, he argued that “stopping runaway climate change must take precedence over every other aim” (Monbiot 2008). Inevitably, this would have to involve some level of austerity legislation, forced through by governments, however unpopular. Nonetheless, he perceived the perspectives of anti-authoritarian climate campers not as a critique of government legislation pushing through austerity measures dressed up in environmental rhetoric but as a path towards a quasi-Hobbesian state of nature. The state was to be seen as our only protection from big business and, by association, our best hope of seeing through the necessary ninety percent cuts in emissions by 2030.

Here, it was the more radical climate activists that insisted on the importance of the social question, responding that a “social justice-rooted line of enquiry” would see it as “essential to keep probing the power relationships behind new technologies and green ‘solutions’” (Jasiewicz 2008). It is clear that an anarchist critique of the (welfare) state persists also in the radical part of the climate action movement. For example, the use of taxation on aviation, or population control and carbon rationing, were rejected by many of the participants at the Camp for Climate Action. However, this rejection of state intervention did not come from a fear of putting social welfare over environmental issues. On the contrary, hostility towards policy models for sustainability had their basis precisely in a concern for the social implications of environmental legislation. Anarchist organisers and participants at the Camp for Climate Action repeatedly stressed the importance of a grassroots social justice agenda that should not fall behind the efforts to drastically reduce emissions.

## **Conclusions**

Our first consideration when studying the attitudes of social movement actors towards social, or indeed climate, justice must be their heterogeneity. This is especially so when dealing with grassroots campaign groups and activist networks that lack clearly defined political manifestos or policy documents. Treating the environmental activist space as essentially contested creates a picture of a movement shaped by its debates, discussions and conflicts. The Camp for Climate Action is a case in point. What is more, its foundations in anarchist and anti-capitalist protests give rise to a particular outlook that aims to combine perspectives on climate change with commitment to social justice. In practice, the Camp has not found it easy staying true to both its green and social agendas. Opposition to the fossil fuel industry might lead to conflict with workers and trade unions. In the UK, the question of the use of coal for energy production is given particular weight in this regard due to the devastating effects of Conservative policy on communities and workers in the 1980s. On the other hand, where green criticism is shifted from production to consumption, this might become entangled in single-issue programmes for individual lifestyle changes, devoid of a social content. Opposition to aviation, especially to leisure flights, can easily slip into moralist condemnation not of societal patterns but of individual action, shifting responsibility away from government and business towards holiday-makers taking a break from their everyday lives.

The emerging direct action movement against the root causes of climate change is heterogeneous and fragmented, so that social and environmental agendas can at times contradict. The Camp for Climate Action, too, is a network of activists with diverse

opinions. The emphases on social and environmental aims here are continuously contested, and are being negotiated with the shared objective to reconcile the two. Perhaps most surprisingly, some of the more radical perspectives of climate activists were most open to upholding the significance of a social dimension to environmental protest. Anarchist and anti-authoritarian voices within the Camp for Climate Action considered state authority not so much as a safeguard of welfare and social achievements against the post-material values of environmentalism. Rather, the state was seen as a tool of a single-issue green agenda that would proscribe and implement austerity measures and top-down 'solutions' to the detriment of society's most vulnerable. It seems that such critical and radical positions come closest to achieving a rapprochement of environmental and social agendas within the framework of contemporary social movement politics.

## References

- Anarchist Federation (2008) 'Climate Camp and Us', *Shift Magazine* 7: 21-4.
- Anderson, K., Bows, A. and Mander, S. (2008) 'From Long-Term Targets to Cumulative Emission Pathways: Reframing UK Climate Policy', *Energy Policy* 36(10): 3714-3722.
- Barry, J. And Doherty, B. (2001) 'The Greens and Social Policy: Movements, Politics and Practice?', *Social Policy and Administration* 35(5): 587-601.
- Bows, A. and Anderson, K. (2007) Policy Clash: Can Projected Aviation Growth Be Reconciled with the UK Government's 60% Carbon-Reduction Target?, *Transport Policy* 14(2): 103-110.
- Byrne, J., Martinez, C. and Glover, L. (2002) 'A Brief on Environmental Justice', pp. 3-17 in Byrne, J., Glover, L. and Martinez, C. (eds) *Environmental Justice: Discourses in International Political Economy*, New Brunswick, NJ, and London: Transaction Books.
- Camp for Climate Action (2006) 'Direct Action at the Climate Camp' [<http://web.archive.org/web/20060813140119/www.climatecamp.org.uk/reclaimpower.htm#drax>], accessed May 2010.
- Camp for Climate Action (2007) 'Aims of the Camp for Climate Action' [<http://web.archive.org/web/20070827224047/www.climatecamp.org.uk/aims.php>], accessed May 2010.
- Castells, M. (2003) 'The Greening of the Self: the Environmental Movement', pp. 184-206 in Pepper, D., Webster, F. and Revill, G. (eds) *Environmentalism: Critical Concepts*, Volume III. London: Routledge.
- Chalmers, H., Jakeman, N., Pearson, P. and Gibbens, J. (2009) 'Carbon Capture and Storage Deployment in the UK: What Next after the UK Government's Competition?', *Proceedings of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers, Part A: Journal of Power and Energy* 223(3): 305-319.

- Charsley, J. (2007) 'Climate Camp Hijacked by a Hardcore of Liberals', *Shift Magazine* 1: 17-9.
- Cunningham, J. (2009) 'A Climatic Disorder? Class, Coal and Climate Change', *Mute*.  
[[http://www.metamute.org/en/content/a\\_climatic\\_disorder\\_class\\_and\\_climate\\_change\\_in\\_newcastle](http://www.metamute.org/en/content/a_climatic_disorder_class_and_climate_change_in_newcastle)], accessed May 2010.
- Dobson, A. (2000) *Green Political Thought*, third edition. London: Routledge.
- Doherty, B. (1999) 'Paving the Way: the Rise of Direct Action and the Changing Character of British Environmentalism', *Political Studies* (47)2: 275-91.
- Doherty, B. (2002) *Ideas and Action in Green Movements*. London: Routledge.
- Doherty, B., Plows, A. and Wall, D. (2003) 'The Preferred Way of Doing Things: the UK Direct Action Movement', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 56(4): 669-86.
- Doherty, B. Plows, A. and Wall, D. (2007) 'Environmental Direct Action in Manchester, Oxford and North Wales: a Protest Event Analysis', *Environmental Politics*, 16(5): 804-24.
- Douglass, D. (2008) 'Interview', *Shift Magazine* 4: pp. 8-11.
- Drake, F. (2009) 'Black gold to Green Gold: Regional Energy Policy and the Rehabilitation of Coal in Response to Climate Change', 41(1): 43-54.
- Engel-Di Mauro, S. (2010) 'On the People's Declaration from Klimaforum09', *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 21(1): 37-40.
- Ford, A. (2008) 'Climate Camp and Class', *Shift Magazine* 4: pp. 4-7.
- Free Association (2008) 'Activists for Austerity', *Freely Associating*.  
[<http://freelyassociating.org/2008/08/activists-for-austerity/>], accessed May 2010.
- Goodman, J. (2009) 'From Global Justice to Climate Justice? Justice Ecology in an Era of Global Warming', *New Political Science* 31(4): 499-514.
- Graeber, D. (2004) *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press.
- Harvie, D., Milburn, K., Trott, B. and Watts, D. (eds) (2005) *Shut Them Down! The G8, Gleneagles 2005 and the Movement of Movements*. Leeds and New York: Dissent! and Autonomedia.
- Jasiewicz, E. (2008) 'Sunday in the camp with George', *The Guardian*.  
[<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/sep/05/greenpolitics.climatechange>], accessed May 2010.
- Klimaforum (2010) 'System Change, Not Climate Change', *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 21(1): 28-36.

- Monbiot, G. (2008) 'Climate change is not anarchy's football', *The Guardian*.  
[<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/aug/22/climatechange.kingsnorthclimatecamp>], accessed May 2010.
- Parks, B. and Roberts, T. (2010) 'Climate Change, Social Theory and Justice', *Theory Culture Society* 27(2-3): 134-166.
- Paul M (2008) 'Power Generation! The Climate Camp at Kingsnorth', *Shift Magazine* 3: 16-9.
- Pickerill, J. and Chatterton, P. (2006) 'Notes towards Autonomous Geographies: Creation, Resistance and Self-Management as Survival Tactics', *Progress in Human Geography* 30(6): 730-46.
- Plane Stupid (2006) 'Climate Activists shut down Easyjet HQ', *Plane Stupid*.  
[<http://www.planestupid.com/blogs/2006/11/6/climate-activists-shut-easyjet-hq>], accessed May 2010.
- Plows, A. (2003) 'Praxis and practise: The "What, How and Why" of the UK environmental direct action movement of the 1990s', *Ph.D. thesis*.  
[<http://www.iol.ie/~mazzoldi/toolsforchange/papers.html#counter>], accessed May 2010.
- Plows, A. (2008) 'Towards an Analysis of the "Success" of UK Green Protests', *British Politics* 3(1): 92-109.
- Plows, A., Wall, D. and Doherty, B. (2004) 'Covert Repertoires: Ecotage in the UK', *Social Movement Studies* 3(2): 199-219.
- Purkis, J. (2000) 'Modern Millenarians? Anticonsumerism, Anarchism and the New Urban Environmentalism', pp. 93-111 in Seel, B., Paterson, M. and Doherty, B. (eds) *Direct Action in British Environmentalism*. London: Routledge.
- Saunders, C. (2008) 'The Stop Climate Chaos Coalition: Climate Change as a Development Issue', *Third World Quarterly* 29(8): 1509-1526.
- Saunders, C. and Price, S. (2009) 'One Person's Eu-topia, Another's Hell: Climate Camp as a Heterotopia', *Environmental Politics* 18(1): 117-122.
- Schlembach, R., Lear, B. and Bowman, A. (2010) 'Knowledge Claims in Climate Movements', conference proceedings, *Alternative Futures and Popular Protest* 15. Manchester: Manchester Metropolitan University.
- Seel, B. and Plows, A. (2000) 'Coming Live and Direct: Strategies of Earth First!', pp. 112-32 in Seel, B., Paterson, M. and Doherty, B. (eds) *Direct Action in British Environmentalism*. London: Routledge.
- Seel, B., Paterson, M. and Doherty, B. (eds) (2000) *Direct Action in British Environmentalism*. London: Routledge.

- Skrimshire, S. (2008) 'Approaching the Tipping Point: Climate Risks, Faith and Political Action', *European Journal of Science and Theology* 4(2): 9-22.
- Starhawk (2005) 'Diary of a Compost Toilet Queen', pp. 185-201 in Harvie, D., Milburn, K., Trott, B. and Watts, D. (eds) *Shut Them Down! The G8, Gleneagles 2005 and the Movement of Movements*. Leeds and New York: Dissent! and Autonomedia.
- The Miner (2008) 'The Climate Camp and the Miners', *Journal of the National Union of Mineworkers*, special edition August 2008.
- The Seeds for Change Collective (2007) 'How to Make Decisions by Consensus', pp. 63-77 in Trapeze Collective (eds) *Do It Yourself: A Handbook for Changing our World*. London: Pluto.
- Wall, D. (1999) *Earth First and the Anti-Roads Movement*. London: Routledge.