

The manifestos for the general election need a new agenda. For the past 30 years power and money have been the main business of politics: who has the power, who has how much money, which party can manipulate the growth economy to produce the highest material standard of living.

For much of the time they were miracle years. Never before had we got so much richer so fast. But in the last few years the economic growth engine has run out of steam. Can we get it going again? Not at the same pace, certainly. So we have to look to a very different future.

That is why we think the agenda of politics must change. Many politicians would agree. But political parties suffer from institutional lag. They fall behind the pace of events. They fall back on old dogma. Yesterday's dogma is irrelevant today, and still more so for tomorrow.

The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to suggest some necessary new directions for political thinking.

We do not speak only for ourselves. Indeed, we have been encouraged to write this paper in the knowledge that we are drawing on the research, the insights, and the thinking of many people. In all the industrialised countries the old orthodoxies of growth economics are being questioned, the frustrations of the modern world are being

analysed, and new approaches to more satisfying ways of life are being explored.

We think it urgent to get this new thinking into the mainstream of political debate. We are not taking sides between one party and another. We think whatever government is elected could and should incorporate some of the ideas set out here into its programme.

We think it urgent because we shall need the maximum amount of time to adjust. The longer we delay, the more abrupt and painful the transition will be. North Sea oil might see us through to the middle 1980s on a business-as-usual programme, but that would merely put off the day when we are forced to come to terms with the constraints of scarce and costly energy and scarce and costly raw materials on the old style growth economy. In any case it is now clear that none of the policies so far proposed for using North Sea oil will help us to avoid high unemployment.

In short, we think it wise to assume that Britain—the first industrial nation—may have reached the end of an era. Many people sense that something like this is happening. They are beginning to ask: What kind of post-industrial society do we want?

by HARFORD THOMAS and JAMES ROBERTSON

## An alternatives agenda for party politics

THERE SEEM to be two main choices. Britain could aim to become a super-industrial society dominated by big science, big technology and the so-called knowledge and service industries. This would mean giving top priority to such things as nuclear power, automation, behavioural psychology, genetic engineering and space colonisation.

The goal would be super-growth. The means would be the use of science to relax existing energy limits, productivity limits, social, psychological and physiological limits, and the geographical limits of planet Earth itself. Influential opinion-formers in North America and Europe have been propagating this vision of post-industrial society for some years.

But many people dislike it. For one thing, it would tend to create a small technocratic elite and a majority of second-class citizens in a permanently divided society. For another, it would tend to create a small group of rich super-industrialised countries and a majority of less developed countries in a permanently divided world.

### Super-growth or priority for people

The other choice is for a post-industrial society which gives pride of place to people, to the quality of their lives, and to their scope for self-development. By contrast with the industrial revolution, which led to great material advance, the post-industrial revolution would be expected to raise the level of social and personal life. Whereas the industrial age concentrated mainly on economic growth, the post-industrial age would concentrate mainly on human growth.

The transition to this more humane, more caring kind of post-industrial society would require a change of direction — not an acceleration — of today's main trends. For example, we would aim for greater self-sufficiency, not even greater specialisation; greater self-reliance, not even greater dependence on big organisations and big technologies; decentralisation, not even more centralisation; "small is beautiful", not "big is best".

This would not mean going back to pre-industrial conditions, nor to exploitation by irresponsible private power. Local solutions might open up in all sorts of different ways it would mean helping people to develop their potential, to exercise greater control over their lives, and to take more responsibility for themselves and those around them.

They would be encouraged to participate more fully in decisions affecting themselves, their firms, their neighbours, and their environment. They would be encouraged to make themselves less vulnerably dependent on Big Brother.

So which of these two versions of post-industrial society is it to be? And what do the parties think?

### New styles for work and leisure

The conventional economic policies of Right and Left can no longer produce enough jobs. A business-as-usual approach could mean several million unemployed people in Britain, wasting their lives, in ten or fifteen years. Freshness of vision and new ideas will be needed, not only to create more jobs but also to change accepted patterns of work.

The available jobs could be shared around more widely by reducing overtime, by

increasing holidays, by giving sabbaticals, by work-sharing, by reducing the length of the working week, by encouraging earlier retirement, and by making it easier for people to work in part-time rather than full-time jobs. More jobs could be created by encouraging many more people to start small firms and small farms.

Again, more jobs could be created by giving priority to energy conservation and by developing small scale renewable energy technologies instead of building more big centralised power stations. Another way of saving jobs would be to encourage firms not to sack their redundant workers but to switch them to socially useful work, as the Lucas show-stewards have proposed.

These are just a few examples of the kind of job-saving and job-creating measures which the next Government will almost certainly be compelled to take. In spite of such measures, however, there may still be too few jobs to go around. How, therefore, could unemployment itself be made useful and rewarding?

It is worth remembering that a vast amount of unpaid work of an essential kind — looking after the family at home and doing services for neighbours — has traditionally been done by women, while the men have gone out to work at paid jobs. Men and women have now begun to share the two kinds of work (and the unemployment) more equally.

That trend will — and should — continue. It could result in our giving useful unpaid work as much esteem as we give to paid work in a job. This would obviously be helpful in a situation of high unemployment.

For that to happen, though, it may be necessary for people doing useful unpaid work to be provided with a money income in some other way. This possibility should be seriously considered. Here are two:

The first is a simple extension of present practice and could be introduced at once. Unemployed people who want to do unpaid voluntary work could be encouraged to do so for an indefinite time without losing their unemployment pay. It seems absurd to press these people to compete for scarce paid jobs.

### The social wage — and paid extras

The second possibility is more far-reaching. Could everyone be paid an adequate money income in the form of a social wage, and allowed to top this up with extra income from paid work if they so wish? This would transform the unemployment problem and a great deal else as well. If, because of such measures as these to deal with high unemployment, it became the usual thing for adults of working age to spend more of their time productively at home and in the local community and less in factories and offices, the effects could be profound.

Patterns of family life might change, as it became easier to look after children and old people at home. Local communities might become more vital. The burden on the education, health and social services might be eased. Thus a fresh approach to unemployment might open up solutions to other problems too.

Today's big cities are a legacy from the industrial revolution. When manufacturing industry attracted the great majority of the working population away from agriculture, the city took over from the countryside as the place where most people lived. One aspect of post-industrial change, already apparent, is a comparable move from the manufacturing into the service industries. As this continues,

and as many people also begin to spend more working time around their homes and neighbourhoods, the pattern of city and country life will probably change again.

A big increase in small (often part-time) farming and small rural industry may occur. This could be encouraged by wider use of small-scale, advanced technologies. It would open up many new opportunities for rural employment. It would call in question existing policies which stack the cards in favour of agribusiness.

It would also call in question planning regulations which zone land for residential, or industrial, or agricultural use only. These rigid divisions stop the growth of natural mixed communities of houses, shops, pubs, small factories, small-holdings, schools, hospitals, and so on.

The present regulations can also prevent the use of small-scale alternative technologies, e.g. for producing methane gas from sewage.

### Softening the rigidities of planning

Which of the parties will be the first to think seriously about the possibility of large scale rural resettlement, and about the policy changes it would imply?

A new approach to the future of the cities is also needed, especially the inner cities, where rigid zoning can prevent human-scale development. Here we think special emphasis could be given to what has been called the "ruralisation" (or "villagisation") of the cities, making them more humane and convivial places to live and work in, as well as economically viable.

Small local businesses and co-operatives, the community enterprises; self-help housing; small urban farms; neighbourhood action to create a new park or playground — many kinds of personal and local do-it-yourself (DIY) initiatives are possible and there are many successful examples.

We should now begin to work out how a new generation of social entrepreneurs could be encouraged to undertake a multitude of these small projects in every city in the land.

The present situation is not encouraging. The education system fails to provide most people with a good preparation for life, i.e. for work, for unemployment, or for personal growth.

The health service is really

a sickness service. It encourages people to become dependent on treatments and drugs, and fails to develop healthy people or a healthy society.

The social services are chronically overstretched, partly because they themselves stimulate dependence on continually higher benefits and new types of care. The costs of education, health and social services have to be periodically contained by arbitrary and destructive cuts. Bureaucracy (e.g. in education administration) and internal control (e.g. between doctor and hospital workers) are becoming deeply rooted.

Some people argue that the present systems of education, health and social services actually reduce our chances of becoming a more caring, healthy and caring society.

The situation may not be quite as bad as this suggests. But no one denies there are serious problems. Many people doubt the relevance to them of the conventional political debate. Once again, the issues are to do with personal and local initiative, participation and control.

For example, what arrangements would enable parents, pupils, patients, teachers, hospital staff, and the local community as a whole, to participate more fully in the running of local schools and hospitals? How could schools, health centres, hospitals, social service offices (and also other places learning centres) become more active centres of local community life?

What changes in the content of education are needed to help people to take more control and responsibility over their lives? How could practical subjects (e.g. co-operative self-reliance) be brought into the syllabus, to prepare young people for work and the possibility of unemployment? Would education be more relevant to life if more of it took place outside the formal education system? Some people are now talking about life-long education.

Would we not have a healthier and more caring society if more people spent practical subjects in and around their homes and neighbourhoods? This would fit in with the possible changes in patterns of work and family life discussed above.

### More to it than pay and profits

For industry and business generally we need a new set of guiding principles:

• co-operation to replace conflict and confrontation;

• stability, with sustainable and selective growth;

• decentralisation and scaling down of over-large and over-complex organisations;

• participation and involvement of workers in their work.

Better let the machine do them — providing we adjust to a new pattern of employment with different kinds of useful work to do.

The outlook for the unskilled could be bleak. Those with the specialised skills will be in great demand. If left to drift, this could lead to a new brand of class conflict — between a highly paid skilled elite and the low paid unskilled left at the bottom of the heap.

The new communications technology should speed up decentralisation. We do not all have to work in one place when sub-units can be linked by data transmission systems. A scatter of smaller self-managing units should be happier places to work in.

But some dangers will have to be watched. In some fields of activity the new technology may accelerate the pace of change beyond the capacity of the individual, or society, to adjust.

Incessant instant communication can create information overload to a point of unbearable stress. Neurotic withdrawal is a symptom of what has been called "future shock".

The search for economic stability could be frustrated by the destabilising effects of instant global communications on the international monetary system and world trading markets.

Data collection systems could provide the mechanism for Big Brother tyranny, with everyone's personal history on record.

The new technology can enhance people's scope and range of activities, freeing them from drudgery and laborious work. Misused, it could increase their dependence on or put them on the scrap heap. The economic advantage of technology is not the complete answer.

In the longer run the concept of energy accounting should be introduced. Policies, programme and products should be judged on their energy cost. There may have to be penalties or prohibition of some energy expensive products and activities.

The new era will be less energy-demanding than society is today. More closely knit communities will spend less time and energy on travel. The new smaller-scale light industries and services will use less energy. The interaction between energy saving and social experiment should be beneficial.

A sparing use of resources is not just a matter for the UK. There is a world-wide obligation to conserve energy, raw materials, or food.

The Third World, now in the early stages of industrial development, will be increasing its own demands on resources, and rightly so. But this could lead to an explosive power struggle for control of the world's oil and mineral reserves. Over-cropping of the land and over-fishing of the sea could lead to critical food shortages.

The test of political wisdom in this last quarter of the 20th century is to see what is coming before it hits you. We cannot turn our backs on what is happening in the rest of the world.

On a global view, the largest lunacy is world expenditure on arms, now running at about £500 million a day. Arms spending draws on scarce materials that ought to be conserved and on high level skills that are too rare to be wasted.

However, in economies heavily committed to the arms industry, disarmament may be blocked because it would aggravate recession and throw people out of jobs — if nothing else can be found for them to do.

The transition into a new era we envisage must include disarmament, and this must mean a firm and socially useful work for the arms industries.

The arms industries are well equipped to take up alternative energy and resource saving programmes and to meet some of the needs of developing countries. They have industrial capacity and skills which could be converted to peaceful purposes. There are immense resources here which could

be switched to the great tasks of world development. This would make economic sense of disarmament.

### More than one place to belong

It follows from our view of the world that we reject inward-looking isolationism. Yet we look for the growth of small communities which will be more self-reliant and in some sense self-sufficient. Is this contradictory? We do not think so.

There is variety in people's sense of belonging. One may feel oneself to be a citizen of the world without weakening one's local loyalties. One can live and work alongside immigrants from other countries without feeling one's own roots threatened.

We can cultivate the idea of multi-level citizenship, with a maximum sense of belonging to a local community, to a local government area, to a region, to a nation state, to a continental community, to a civilisation.

### Firm targets for saving energy

We would reverse the conventional notion of sovereignty that power is distributed downwards from the top (usually by a nation state). We see multi-level citizenship proceeding from the local community upwards, with maximum powers of local decision staying with the people on the spot. The upper reaches of government should concentrate on functions which have to be managed on a large scale.

The same philosophy can apply to business. There can be self-managing groups at shop floor level, but little local units are not fitted to run an international airline, or an oil refinery, or a satellite communications relay.

To give people a more effective say in managing their own lives will call for new institutions. For example:

• We think every local community should have a community forum, as informal as possible, to serve as a centre for local debate and a focus for local opinion and local decision-making;

• more weight should be given to minority opinion — where some of the best ideas come from. The first-past-the-post voting system tends to smother alternative views. There is a need to experiment with new forms of representation.

These are two examples of the kind of creative change that will be needed to meet the present practice of politics. The challenge to politicians will call for fresh qualities of foresight, sympathy, imagination and inventiveness.

### History has a role for the pioneer

Britain is well placed to lead the transition to a post-industrial society. It was the first fully industrialised country, and is now the first to go into industrial decline. It is also among the world leaders in some branches of the new technology. It has a long tradition of dissent, non-conformity, peaceful evolution, and voluntary action which is favourable to social experiment and social change.

In a world groping for valid alternatives, the British experience will have more than local relevance. Britain could have a pioneer role to play.

What remains in question is the will of the political parties to shake off outmoded thinking and get into the debate about the future

## Where do they stand?

WHAT CAN you do about it? There is an opportunity in the run-up to the general election to widen the range of the party political debate. Some people doubt the relevance of conventional politics, but governments cannot be ignored. Individuals, or pressure groups, can make the party manifesto committees take some notice. When the election campaign starts, candidates can be asked where they stand on key points. A selection of key questions for the politicians are these:

### What about...

- sharing out existing jobs?
- shorter hours, a shorter working week, more time at home?
- help for labour intensive industries to create more jobs?
- encouraging unpaid voluntary work — "useful employment"?
- a social wage for all?
- help for small firms, small farms, worker co-ops?
- reviving rural life, resettling the country?
- "villagising" the inner cities, with urban farms, part-time farming?
- local participation in housing, schools, hospitals, leisure services?
- neighbourhood community forums for community affairs?
- education at all ages, "lifetime learning"?
- breaking up big business and big bureaucracy into smaller units?
- democracy at work, with self-managing factory and office groups?
- going slow on North Sea oil, on nuclear power, on the roads?
- linking disarmament to Third World development and switching arms industries to alternative energy programmes?
- a bigger say for alternative views in politics?