

ecology party

57 Hamilton Terrace, London NW8 25/10/83

Dear James,

I'm writing to you to seek your involvement in a project that the Ecology Party has dreamed up, namely an "Alternative Economic Summit" to be held in London at the same time as the "official" Summit next year. I enclose the relevant papers.

I'm sorry to spring this on you! I had lunch with Harford Thomas yesterday and he was encouraging enough to make me think we might be on to a winner - but we have to move fast.

There seem to me to be a range of options:

- 1) that the AES become part of Turning Point's series of conferences for next year. It would obviously be of a rather different nature, but not, I would suggest, incompatible with what Turning Point has been doing;
- 2) that Turning Point be one of several organisations represented on the Steering Committee;
- 3) that you and Alison might like to become involved as individuals on the Steering Committee.

If you will allow me to say this, I think some sort of participation from yourself would be of the utmost importance in such a project. As you well know, there has been very little work done on this whole area in the UK; your contribution still stands as the most valuable. I know that you hate to be lured away from Ironbridge, but I hope you will not mind my asking you to make an exception in this particular instance!

I believe that if, between us, we could set up an 'inner core', the rest of the Steering Committee would come together very quickly and without too much difficulty. I would clearly defer to your judgement as to who should comprise this inner core - they should obviously be people of sufficient clout to get the rest to feel that they couldn't afford to be left out! Possible names:

John Elkington, Max Nicholson, George McRobie, Christian Schumacher, Harford Thomas, yourselves and me. David Fleming is also very interested in getting involved - and may indeed be prepared to take on a coordinating role if he sees the Steering Committee to be properly and professionally brought together.

I realise that this leaves most of the difficult questions unasked, let alone answered! My feeling is that if you two, personally, are enthusiastic, then between us we can pull together anything we like. Excuse such flagrant optimism, but I do think this could be very big.

Because there is such urgency, I'd like to ring you this weekend to see what your initial reaction is. Were it to be positive, I'd like to start approaching individuals/organisations as soon as possible.

Are you by any chance coming down to London, for Petra Kelly's lecture on the 5th? If not, at any stage before the 26th?

The 26th would obviously be an excellent time for people to get together - or even the 27th. I would happily lay on a working supper for people, or lunch on Sunday.

I much look forward to talking to you about this. Sorry about the rather breathless nature of this letter: there seems to be so much going on at the moment!

Best wishes,

Jonathon

[The following is one of three Ecology Party papers enclosed with the letter]

Ecology Party Paper 15/10/83

PROPOSAL FOR A 1984 ALTERNATIVE ECONOMIC SUMMIT

I: INTRODUCTION

Once a year, the leaders of the seven most powerful capitalist nations in the world (the USA, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Italy and the UK) gather together to discuss current and future trends in the world economy. Their deliberations have become increasingly constrained by the reality of the so called 'recession'. Little new thinking is possible; 'solutions' are invariably of the 'more of the same' variety; alternative strategies are discounted. As a result, these Economic Summits have acquired their own unique aura of arcane ritual and profound irrelevance. Many have commented on this but have been unable to do anything about it.

It is no coincidence that at the very same time as the 'summit' of conventional economics seems to have less and less to offer, so the groundswell of alternative or 'green' economics has begun to acquire a new cogency and authority. To challenge the complacent orthodoxies of growth economics was once considered absurdly heretical; not to do so now is positively antidiluvian.

II: THE CHALLENGE

The reason for this is simple: as the alternative achieve increasing credibility, the protagonists of the status quo compound their own incredibility by their refusal or their inability to confront 10 fundamental challenges:

1. that specific increases in output in any economy no longer necessarily create corresponding increases in employment;
2. that in an age of permanently high unemployment, it is neither efficient nor equitable to attempt to distribute a nation's wealth predominantly through the labour market;
3. that our present standard of living can only be maintained at the expense of denying the basic necessities of life to millions in the Third World;
4. that our present standard of living can only be maintained through the continuing exploitation and degradation of the biosphere;
5. that the social, environmental and spiritual costs of pursuing a policy of permanent industrial expansionism already outweigh the advantages to be derived from it;

6. that 'GNP', 'productivity', 'progress' and many other notional concepts of contemporary economics are incapable of evaluating or expressing real wealth or people's real standards of living;
7. that neither laissez-faire market economics nor state-dominated socialism is capable of defining the appropriate balance between individual freedom and collective responsibility;
8. that to think in terms of 'jobs at all costs' is quite inadequate, in as much as all work should be fulfilling both to the individual and to the community, and should not be destructive of the environment;
9. that the international banking system is on the verge of collapse;
10. that centralised top-down government spending, particularly as regards the use of funds from North Sea Oil, has failed to create sustainable patterns of employment or to promote those structural changes in the economy that are so overdue.

III: THE CHANGING PARADIGM

So overwhelming do these problems now appear that most politicians are inevitably constrained to continue to seek their 'solutions' within the framework of conventional industrial economics. And yet, tragically, in so doing, they both exacerbate the problems and undermine the unique opportunity we still have to find sustainable alternatives.

Such reprehensible narrow-mindedness has ensured that the distinctive combination of progressive radicalism and natural wisdom contained within green economics has been dogmatically excluded from the debate. As far as most politicians and economists are concerned, ecology continues to be thought of as the exclusive domain of those who have enough money and leisure to worry about the planet as well as themselves. Amidst the expedient turmoil of a 5-year Parliament, 'saving the planet' has become an optional extra.

In this particular respect, traditional values and beliefs serve very little useful purpose, inasmuch as they are now preventing us from honestly confronting our problems. Over the last few years report after report, expert after expert, has turned conventional economics on its head. Things have now come full circle: it is only through sustainable economic activity that we can maintain our real quality of life; and it is only through accepting this challenge now that we can preserve our democratic rights and freedoms.

The pursuit of contemporary industrial economics constitutes the greatest single threat to human rights today, in this and every other

country. As the gaps inevitably widen between North and South, between expectation and fulfilment, between finite resources and infinite demands, between economic 'necessity' and fundamental ethical ideals of cooperation, solidarity and common humanity, so the tendency towards repressive responses and quasi-totalitarian government is strengthened.

Little wonder that conventional economics is now in disarray. Little wonder that the next Economic Summit in London in 1984 will contribute little or nothing to the wellbeing of the planet or its people.

IV; THE ALTERNATIVE

Hence the need for an Alternative Economic Summit: -

1. to counter the determinist 'inevitability' of today's industrial politics;
2. to establish the principles of sustainable, ecological, economics;
3. to articulate specific proposals of immediate relevance, particularly as regards the creation of opportunities for good, fulfilling work;
4. to affirm solidarity and identify specific areas of cooperation between the peoples of North and South;
5. to re-assert the primacy of harmonious interaction between ourselves and the biosphere as the source of all sustainable wealth;
6. to help redefine the language of contemporary economics.

The need for such an event is surely self-evident. Both the long-term and the short-term consequences of it could be of tremendous significance. The human resources are there; the will is there. We now need to set up an appropriate organizational structure to carry the project through from now until the time of the Summit next year.

Jonathon Porritt 15/10/83
(On behalf of AES Working Party).