



THE POLITICAL VISIONARY : CAROLINE LUCAS

Caroline Lucas is Green Party MEP for South-East England, Vice-President of the RSPCA and Stop the War Coalition, a National Council member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and a Director of the International Forum on Globalization. She has worked as a Policy Adviser for Oxfam, and has published widely on globalisation and environment issues.

# LOW-CARBON FUTURE

No more compromise: I say we need Greens in governments NOW!

**F**ORTY YEARS FROM now, society is unrecognisable. The consequences of global climate change and sweeping democratisation and localisation have changed almost every aspect of our lives, from where and how we live and work to the food we eat and the way we spend our leisure time.

It's 2046, and a Green Party government has been re-elected in the UK – joining those in power across much of the EU. The Prime Minister gives her acceptance speech in the capital, Birmingham. (The seat of government moved north a few years back, to an area in need of urban regeneration, after rising sea levels repeatedly breached the Thames barrier, flooding much of Westminster and rendering it unsafe.)

The UN's revised turn-of-the-century call for an 80% cut in global greenhouse-gas emissions by 2050 was met five years ago, thanks largely to the sharp escalation in fossil-fuel prices as peak oil took hold in 2012. This fuel crisis drove sweeping improvements in energy conservation, renewable generation, and the free transfer of technology to the developing world as eco-aid administered by a reformed, democratic UN (which celebrated its centenary last year).

Our communities are safer: we live in well-designed, insulated, warm homes, eat more locally grown, organic food, enjoy greater security, are healthier and live longer. Few of us drive a car any more: since oil prices escalated most of us have

switched to trams and trains, creating the cash to drive the UK's biggest single investment in public transport infrastructure.

PERHAPS THIS IS naive in its unbridled optimism. Perhaps we'll miss our CO<sub>2</sub>-reduction targets, forgotten in a world of conflict over ever scarcer dwindling reserves of oil. The UN could stagnate further, in the face of increasingly unilateralist US and UK governments – China and India could retreat into war over economic dominance of a region racked by starvation and disease as its rich get richer and its poor poorer.

The future is in our hands. It is becoming increasingly clear that the next forty years will be the most crucial period in the history of humankind. In climate change we face our biggest ever challenge to life as we know it: the decisions we make over the next forty years might determine the very survival of our species. Now is a critical moment to reflect on the lessons of the last forty years.

Forty years ago there was no green movement in the UK – let alone internationally – that we would recognise today. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) had been formed eight years earlier, and WWF in 1961, but Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and even the Green Party wouldn't emerge for another few years.

The political context was hostile to environmentalism, and even revolutionary voices like Rachel Carson's were drowned out of mainstream

public discourse – but the steady flow of new information about the impact of our lives on the world around us led thousands to change their lives, take direct environmental action, explore new technologies and social models and join like-minded people. Over the years, *Resurgence* has told many of their stories.

But the nascent green movement in the UK and US, and later, internationally, was depoliticised from the start. Campaigns to alleviate poverty, stop war, save endangered species or build sustainable communities flourished outside the realms of electoral democracy. As non-governmental organisations (NGOs) shaped particular campaigns, they sought, and sometimes won, support from existing political parties (who were naturally suspicious of any attempt by Greens to win power themselves).

Green parties began contesting elections in the 1970s (the Australian Green Party was the first, in 1972, with the UK Greens' predecessor People in 1974). However, without the explicit support of the NGOs and the wider green movement, and often vilified as advocates of 'hair-shirt asceticism', they failed to make much electoral mark until 1981, when nine members entered the Belgian parliament and – with even greater fanfare – two years later when twenty-eight members of *Die Grünen* were elected to the German Bundestag.

I confess I remember these events only dimly. In the early 1980s, I was graduating from poetry to the peace