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Vote for justice

UK political parties and the 2010 general election

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Vote for Justice: UK political parties and the 2010 general election

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About the World Development Movement

The World Development Movement (WDM) campaigns for a world without poverty and injustice. We work in solidarity with activists around the world to tackle the causes of poverty. We research and promote positive alternatives which put the rights of poor communities before the interest of big business. WDM is a democratic membership organisation of individuals and local groups. Please contact WDM for membership information.

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1. Introduction

This report is a guide to the policies of UK political parties ahead of the UK general election to be held on 6 May 2010. It seeks to give a guide to the policies of Labour, Conservatives, Liberal Democrats, Greens, Scottish National Party (SNP) and Plaid Cymru in key areas relating to international justice: trade justice; more and better aid; making the economy work for poor people and repaying our climate debt.

Where relevant, in Labour's, the SNP's and Plaid Cymru's case the report is based on the policies implemented in office as well as publicly stated policy positions. In all other cases it is based on publicly stated policy positions. Obviously parties are not homogenous; individual candidates may have differing views and emphasis to the agreed positions of the parties.

Political parties are good at using language that people want to hear. For example, none of the parties say that they want trade to be 'unfair'. In each section below we have set out

briefly what WDM wants and why, before analysing each party's policy against this.

Against each of the issues we have given the parties a score. Putting these together gives an overall rating out of 10 for each party on international development issues below. These scores are intended as a quick guide to WDM's analysis of where parties stand on international development issues, but are best understood by reading the whole of this report.

Labour: 5 / 10

Conservatives: 3 / 10

Liberal Democrats: 6 / 10

Greens: 8 / 10

Plaid Cymru and the SNP do not have as much detail on their policies on international development. We have therefore not given them an overall score, but do analyse their policies where they exist.

WDM does not advise people on who to vote for. But we hope all those wanting justice for the world's poor will find this report useful in making their choice.

2. Trade justice

2.1 The issue

For the past thirty years imposition of free trade across much of the developing world has hindered economic growth and increased poverty and inequality. In contrast, those countries which have been most able to resist have managed to cut poverty and increase employment.

Latin America and Africa in particular liberalised trade in the 1980s and 1990s due to pressure from the IMF, World Bank and WTO. In return they saw economies stagnate and poverty increase. In contrast, countries which have regulated trade have seen economies grow and poverty fall, such as China, Malaysia and Vietnam in recent years and Japan, the US, Germany and UK further back in history.¹

2.2 The policies

Since 1997, the **Labour** government has supported the EU and WTO pushing for freer and less fair trade in developing countries. It has a “long-standing commitment to free trade”.² The UK has remained one of the strongest advocates for freer trade in developing countries under the Doha round of international trade negotiations,³ which would result in deregulation of the economies of developing countries.⁴

The Labour government has supported the EU’s Economic Partnership Agreements,⁵ which require the poorest countries in the world to open up their markets, without any new trade commitments from the EU in return. The UK has also supported the EU in its push for new free trade deals with other developing countries.

In their manifesto Labour say they will “press for a fair World Trade Organisation deal, with no enforced liberalisation for poor countries”.⁶ However, enforced liberalisation lies at the heart of any current World Trade Organisation deal.

Labour score: 0.25

The **Conservatives** say they “continually make the case for free, open” trade”.⁷ They are keen for there to be a conclusion to the Doha round of international trade talks,⁸ presumably along the lines of the current push for opening markets in developing countries, rather than new approaches of recognising the need for governments to be able to regulate.

Conservative score: 0

Liberal Democrats also support freer trade and the current unfair round of world trade negotiations. When challenged to say that they will allow “developing countries to retain control over their economies” and not to “force through deregulation and liberalisation which would undermine development objectives” they refuse to do so. They argue that: “Liberalisation of markets is in the long term interests of developing countries, but this should be managed by developing countries (supported by the EU) in a sustainable, long term process.”⁹

Liberal Democrats score: 0

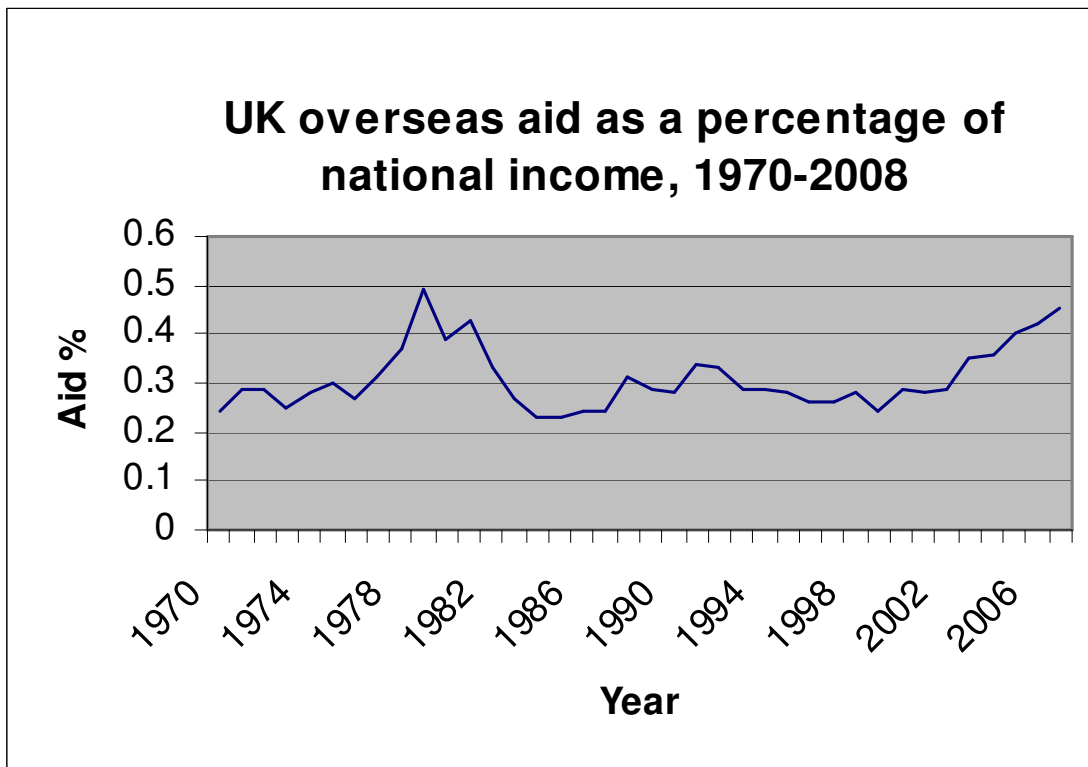
The **Greens** are distinct calling for “fair trade not free trade” and for committing to push for reform of aggressive EU trade policies. The Greens would support developing countries to have greater say in managing their own trade policies, and that “International agreements on the environment, labour conditions and health must take precedence over any international rules on trade.”¹⁰

Greens score: 1

Plaid Cymru also recognise that the current international free trade system is not working, saying: “The people of Europe are becoming more aware of the injustices of the international trade system and are consciously choosing to use Fair Trade products.”¹¹ However, they do not say what changes to the international trading system they would push to happen.

Plaid Cymru score: 0.5

3. More and better aid



3.1 The issue: More aid

The world is unjust and unequal. One of the ways of tackling this inequality is through the giving of overseas aid. When WDM was founded in 1970, the UK government committed to spend 0.7 per cent of national income on overseas aid. WDM has always campaigned for this target to be met; unfortunately it never has.

3.2 The policies: More aid

Labour, the Conservatives, Liberal Democrats, SNP, Plaid Cymru and Greens all support spending 0.7 per cent of UK income on aid by 2013, with the Greens saying they would spend 1 per cent within ten years. However, saying and doing are very different things. The UK government first committed to the 0.7 per cent target in 1970, but the closest it has ever got was under Labour in 1979. After falling throughout the 1980s and 1990s, UK aid has been rising under Labour in recent years.

All parties score: 1

3.3 The issue: Better aid

Aid though is not just about the amount of money being given. Aid can be used to pursue other aims than tackling poverty such as winning business for companies, opening up markets to companies, as a tool of foreign policy or pushing certain ideologies. For instance, during the cold war much 'aid' was used to get countries to support one side or the other.

In 1994 WDM won a landmark court case when it proved that 'aid' for building the Pergau dam in Malaysia under the Conservative government had been given to win contracts for British companies, including arms deals, rather than for tackling poverty. Subsequently when the Labour government was elected in 1997 they committed to not tying aid to UK companies, and in 2002 passed an Act of Parliament to make tied aid illegal. Labour also created the Department for International Development to separate aid from the Foreign Office.

However, aid can also be used in other ways to benefit companies. Since the early 1980s, the IMF and World Bank, supported by aid donors including the UK, have attached economic conditions to the aid they gave. These conditions have promoted free markets and policies such as privatisation, trade liberalisation and deregulation, often benefiting companies as a result.

In contrast, developing countries which have followed such conditions the most, particularly in Africa and Latin America, have seen economies stagnate and even decline, and poverty increase. It is those countries which have been most able to resist liberalisation, such as China, India, Malaysia and Vietnam, which have had the most economic success and seen poverty fall the most.

3.4 The policies: Better aid

In 2005, following WDM's campaign, **Labour** committed to not attaching economic conditions such as privatisation and trade liberalisation to the aid it gives. The Labour government also says that it has pushed for conditions such as privatisation, liberalisation and deregulation not to be attached to IMF and World Bank loans. However, the IMF and World Bank have not changed their policy, and the UK is the largest donor to the World Bank. Furthermore, in 2009 the Labour government weakened its policy to not attaching 'privatisation and trade liberalisation' rather than the more encompassing "economic conditions".

Following WDM's campaign on water privatisation, the Labour government committed to not using aid for public relations programmes to push privatisation, such as in Tanzania where under Labour UK aid money paid for a pop song to promote water privatisation. They further committed to allocate aid money for supporting public-public partnerships to support successful public water operators from sharing their skills with those who have been less successful.

Labour score: 0.75

The **Conservatives** say that "private sector led growth and wealth creation" is "the only path to prosperity".¹² They would seek to get greater private provision of public services, such as education, in developing countries. This support for privatisation and liberalisation is matched with an absence of any commitment to not attaching economic conditions to UK aid. Furthermore, they support the IMF and World Bank as "the main emergency vehicles of assistance to developing countries during the downturn".¹³ The Conservatives propose creating a new 'Stabilisation and Reconstruction Force,' which could potentially divert aid funds into military operations in developing countries, while counting that money towards their targets for development assistance.

Conservative score: 0

Despite being specifically challenged to do so, the **Liberal Democrats** refuse to commit to not attaching economic policy conditions to aid. However, they do not appear to have as much zeal as the Conservatives for liberalisation and privatisation.¹⁴

Liberal Democrats score: 0.25

The **Green** party says that: "The recent history of economic conditionality applied to aid flows, particularly under the so-called Washington Consensus and post-Washington Consensus, has been disastrous, in some cases decimating infant industries and public services."¹⁵ They say that aid "should be locally designed and managed; should be subject to local oversight and scrutiny; and should be specific to local communities and environments".¹⁶

Green score: 1

4. Making the economy work for poor people

4.1 The issue: A new international financial system

In 1944 when the IMF and World Bank were created John Maynard Keynes, representing the UK, argued that an international financial institution should be created to ensure stability in the world financial system. He argued that crashes and recessions, particularly the Wall Street Crash and great depression, were in part caused by imbalances in debt and trade. He proposed a new institution to prevent countries from running large trade surpluses or deficits, and so ensuring a more stable financial system.

The US, as the world's major surplus country at the time, refused. Instead the IMF was created to bail out countries with large deficits once the crash had occurred, whilst completely ignoring countries in surplus. Rather than preventing crises, a system was set up to deal with crises once they happened. In 2006, WDM published its *'Out of time'* report, arguing that the IMF needed to be replaced by a new institution along the lines first proposed by Keynes.¹⁷ This would help prevent recurring debt crises' in developing countries, as well as provide greater economic stability for the whole world.

In reality, the financial crises and recessions which have swept the world since 2008 are a direct result of the huge financial imbalances between countries as well as the deregulated financial system.

4.2 The policies: A new international financial system

As Chancellor, Gordon Brown was for many years the chair of the IMF's main policy making committee. However, he did not push or question the need for major reform in how the IMF works to prevent financial crises'. Since the recent financial crisis began in 2008, the **Labour** government has not pushed for major reform. The Labour government does say

"emerging markets and developing countries" should have a "greater voice and greater representation" in the Bretton Woods institutions.¹⁸ However, it has not offered to reduce the UK's voice and representation to help achieve this.

Labour score: 0.25

The **Liberal Democrats** have proposed reform of the banking system in the UK including a full disclosure regime for traders, crucially increasing the transparency of financial markets.¹⁹ However, they have made no proposals for wider reform of the international financial system and the IMF. They call simply for the IMF to be more transparent, and to publish "more of its decisions and background papers".²⁰ The Liberal Democrats also say they support giving "developing countries a greater say in global governance" through reform of the IMF and World Bank.²¹

Liberal Democrats score: 0.25

The **Conservatives** fully support the IMF in its current form, arguing for the "IMF and World Bank to be the main emergency vehicles of assistance to developing countries during the downturn".²² They do agree that "the legitimacy of the Bank and Fund" should be strengthened "by giving developing countries a greater say in decision making".²³

Conservative score: 0.25

The **Green** party does recognise the need for widespread reform of the international financial system, calling for the IMF "to limit surpluses in member countries' foreign payment, as well as deficits".²⁴ The Green party is more specific on how representation of developing countries should be increased, saying that a majority share of the vote on IMF and World Bank decisions should always reside "with the majority of the world's people and countries, in other words the developing countries. No country should have an effective right of veto on any decisions".²⁵

Green score: 1

4.3 The issue: Taxing speculation

WDM has also long supported a tax on international financial transactions. This would help limit the amount of speculative financial dealing in items such as currency, property, shares, food and oil, which causes booms and busts in markets across the world. The Asian Financial Crisis in 1997/98 which devastated Thailand and Indonesia was caused by speculators putting huge amounts of money into the Asian economies and then pulling it out. Similar processes were seen in the US and UK related to property. Global food and oil prices increased massively from 2006 to 2008, due in part to trading by speculators.

A tax on financial transactions would also raise money which could be spent on development aid and/or tackling climate change.

4.4 The policies: Taxing speculation

Having opposed such a tax for many years, the **Labour** government made positive sounds in recent months for some kind of transaction tax, with Gordon Brown and Alistair Darling indicating support for it.²⁶ However, they have insisted it must be global and would not introduce it unilaterally in the UK or EU. Furthermore, in their manifesto they seem to be moving towards a levy on banks profits rather than a tax on transactions which could limit damaging speculation. Furthermore, Labour do not say how the money from any global banking tax should be spent.²⁷

Labour score: 0.25

The **Liberal Democrats** say they would work with other countries to find new sources of funds for developing countries, and specifically support a financial transactions tax.²⁸ They would also introduce a levy on bank profits, which would not limit damaging speculation, and the revenue for which would not specifically be used for tackling poverty or climate change.

Liberal Democrats score: 0.75

The **Green** party support a tax on financial transactions but argue that this would work

best with wide international agreement but however they state there is also scope to act unilaterally by introducing a tax on sterling foreign exchange transactions.²⁹

Green score: 0.5

Plaid Cymru says foreign exchange transactions should be taxed. This would limit damaging speculation in currencies, but not impact damaging speculation in shares and commodities such as food and oil. They do not say how the revenue from such a tax should be spent.³⁰

Plaid Cymru score: 0.5

The **Conservatives** oppose a tax on transactions. They say they would introduce a levy on banks,³¹ but this would do nothing to limit speculation. The proceeds would be spent on giving a tax break to some married couples in the UK, not on tackling poverty or climate change.

Conservative score: 0

4.5 The issue: Cleaning up the banks

One result of the financial crisis is that UK taxpayers now own substantial stakes in many banks. WDM has been calling on the government to 'clean up the banks' by preventing them from investing in projects which hinder development and human rights. For instance, since the Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) was nationalised, it has provided funds to Tullow Oil, which is involved in oil extraction on the border between the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda, where 30,000 people have already been displaced by conflict.

4.6 The policies: Cleaning up the banks

The **Labour** government had refused to set any guidelines for what nationalised banks should and should not invest in. However, following WDM's campaign it has now agreed some social, environmental and ethical standards for nationalised banks to keep to. However, these are weak and still a long way from truly cleaning up the banks.

It has committed to create a Green Investment Bank to help pay for a low carbon economy in the UK.³² However this would be separate from nationalised banks and not prevent them from undermining its work by investing in fossil fuel projects.

Labour score: 0.25

The **Liberal Democrats** have said that they would “require mandatory carbon reporting on investments for all businesses and banks and an end to public money going into unconventional fuels such as tar sands”.³³ However, they do not specify other ethical and social criteria nationalised banks should keep to.

Liberal Democrat score: 0.5

The **Green** party has supported transforming RBS into a ‘Royal Bank of Sustainability’ “ensuring that it and other publicly backed banks help pay for Britain's transition from a high-carbon economy with rising unemployment to a low carbon-society that provides millions of green jobs and better public services”.³⁴ The Green party does not say whether or not nationalised banks should have other social and ethical criteria attached to its lending, but it does support the creation of a green investment bank.

Green score: 0.75

The **Conservatives** have not stated if or how they would seek to align the lending of bailed out banks with public interest criteria; limiting their comments on the matter to a desire to sell on the government’s shares in the banks as quickly as possible, and considering the possibility of selling share offerings in Lloyds and RBS to members of the public at a discount.

Like the Labour party they support a Green Investment Bank separate from the nationalised banks.³⁵

Conservative score: 0.25

4.7 The issue: Cancelling debt

‘Third World Debt’ attracted considerable attention at the turn of the millennium, as people became aware that massive, reckless lending, had created unjust and unpayable debts which prevented scores of countries from developing and allowed rich countries to force liberalisation programmes onto third world nations.

This concern promoted cross-party agreement on ‘debt relief’, from the first Conservative government initiatives in 1987, to the deals struck by the Labour Government at G8 summits in Cologne and Gleneagles. Over \$100 billion of debt has been cancelled as a result, transforming the healthcare, education provision and economic development of many of the poorest countries in the world.

However, the debt cancellation systems are far from perfect. They are too narrowly focussed, both in terms of countries covered and the level of debts regarded as ‘sustainable’, they enshrine creditor control, and they fail to deal with the question of the legitimacy of debts and responsible lending going forward.

The economic crisis has proved how vulnerable many developing countries remain to debt. Some of the poorest countries, that bear no responsibility for creating the current crisis, have been forced to borrow substantial amounts of money once again.

There can be a one-time solution to debt crises by changing the international lending system. In particular we need:

- Support for a Fair and Transparent Arbitration Process to adjudicate on the payability and legitimacy of sovereign debt
- Support for binding standards on UK lending, especially through reform of the ECGD
- A recognition of the concept of co-responsibility and illegitimacy in lending and take steps to deal with historical illegitimate debt
- End policy conditionality in debt relief and new lending (covered above in section 3.4)

4.8 The policies: cancelling debt

All parties supported the law to prohibit vulture fund activity in April 2010.

The **Labour** government has gained international renown for their stance on debt relief, playing a key role in current debt cancellation schemes which have delivered relief to 28 countries. They have also gone beyond the international schemes through UK MDRI which delivers debt relief to most low income countries. They also only currently support least developed countries through grant provision – not loans. However, they support loans for tackling climate change. On the key question of a structural solution to debt, Labour are wedded to the current debt relief processes and do not support an arbitration process, most especially one in a neutral space, and they oppose the concept of auditing or cancelling historical debts on the basis of legitimacy. They believe they do abide by responsible lending criteria but are currently engaged in watering down ethical and environmental standards on the ECGD.

Labour score: 0.75

The **Conservative** party supported initial debt relief initiatives when last in power. They are committed to “accelerating HIPC”, though it is unclear what this means in practice. They will continue, as far as possible, to give aid as grants not loans, and will encourage others to give aid for ‘social objectives’ as grants as well. Long-term they place faith in the development of capital markets in Africa to assist international lending. However, the Conservatives do not show recognition of the problems unregulated capital markets can cause even richer developing countries. They say nothing about an arbitration process or auditing or cancelling illegitimate debts. They support higher environmental standards for the ECGD – banning ECGD support for ‘dirty’ fossil fuel power stations. However, there is no commitment to making this reform wider and applying it to anti-poverty standards.

Conservative score: 0.25

In their manifesto the **Liberal Democrats** say they would “Push for a renewed international effort on debt and support 100 per cent cancellation of the unpayable debts of the world’s poorest countries.”³⁶ In more detail, they support renewing the international effort on debt by giving the new International Financial Authority the quasi-judicial function of assessing the nature and sources of debt and supervising an ‘administration/ bankruptcy’ procedure for sovereign nations that cannot repay all their debt. This is promising, although doesn’t mention the need to audit historical debt and cancel that deemed illegitimate. They also support privatisation of the ECGD, though it remains unclear what impact this would have on lending standards.

Liberal Democrats: 0.75

The **Green** Party are critical of the conditions attached to debt relief schemes and the limited nature of the schemes. They support going beyond the HIPC scheme to ensure that all foreign debts owed by least developed countries should immediately be written off, as well as those of all other countries which need such support in order to meet their MDG targets, and would press for this internationally. They support foreign assistance to least developed countries being provided only in the form of grants. They also support the more radical solution that all developing countries should limit debt service payments to 10 per cent of export earnings per year immediately and that rich countries should agree to write off the annual transfer of wealth which goes from the developing countries to the North each year. This would bring about some of the more important functions an arbitration scheme might play.

Green score: 1

Plaid Cymru say they will “continue to campaign for the cancellation of developing countries’ unaffordable debts” but have no further detailed information.³⁷

Plaid Cymru score: 0.5

5. Repaying climate debt

5.1 The issue: Cutting emissions

Climate change is already causing the loss of lives and livelihoods across the world. It is estimated that 300,000 people are already dying every year due to climate change.³⁸ Yet it is rich countries like the UK which have and are primarily responsible for climate change. The UK, with less than 1 per cent of the world's population, is responsible for more than 6 per cent of historical carbon dioxide emissions. And the UK continues to emit around 10 tonnes of carbon dioxide per person each year, compared to 4 tonnes in China, 1 tonne in India and 0.3 tonnes in Bangladesh.

5.2 The policies: Cutting emissions

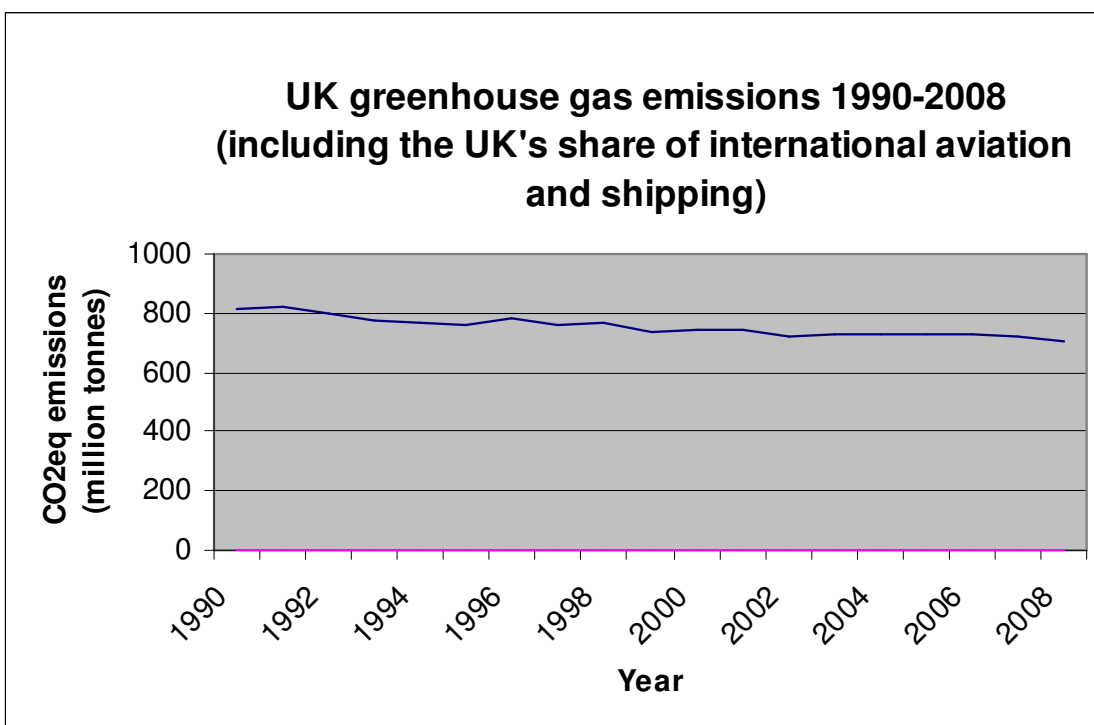
Since **Labour** was elected in 1997, the UK's climate changing emissions have fallen by just 6 per cent; an average of 0.5 per cent a year. This is well short of the rate needed (cuts of at least 5 per cent a year) to prevent catastrophic climate impacts on poor people across the world. For most of the time Labour has been in power emissions have not been falling, and have only done so in recent years with the onset of the recession.

Key to cutting emissions in the UK is stopping coal power. Campaigning by WDM has led to the Labour government putting limits on the building of new dirty coal power stations, although it has not ruled them out completely. New coal power stations can be built in England and Wales, as long as around a quarter of a new plant uses unproven carbon capture and storage technology. Because of separate decisions by companies, it currently looks unlikely that any new dirty coal power stations will be built in the UK, but this is only partly due to decisions by Labour. The **SNP** has introduced the same policy in Scotland.

Labour and SNP score: 0.5

Conservative policy is similar to Labour specifying an emissions limit for any new coal power stations built, which would result in around one-third of a new power plant being carbon capture and storage. The Conservatives propose spending more money than Labour on developing carbon capture and storage technology, and thus put even more faith in it, despite it not yet being proven.³⁹

Conservative score: 0.5



The **Liberal Democrats** would ensure that new coal power stations could only be built if they “use full carbon capture and storage technology”.⁴⁰

Liberal Democrats score: 1

The **Greens** would prevent new dirty coal power stations from being built.⁴¹

Greens score: 1

Plaid Cymru support an emissions limit for new power stations and research into carbon capture and storage.⁴² However, it is not clear whether this limit would be set at a rate to prevent any new dirty coal power station from being built.

Plaid Cymru score: 0.75

5.3 The issue: Climate debt

Our past and present emissions mean the UK owes people in developing countries a climate debt. The UK has to pay compensation to those already suffering from climate change.

However, current money available for tackling climate change in developing countries is small. All of it comes from pre-existing aid commitments. Much of it is being given as loans. The UK and various rich countries are attempting to make the World Bank the main institution for disbursing money, despite its long history of forcing economic conditions on countries and preventing the involvement of local civil society in projects. Developing country governments and campaigners are both calling for climate change money to go through the UN, such as the UN adaptation fund, rather than the World Bank.

5.4 The policies: Climate debt

The **Labour** government has said money for climate change should be additional to aid from 2013 on. However, it contradicts itself by saying that 10 per cent of UK aid can be spent on climate finance from 2013 on;⁴³ WDM calculates that this means there will be no new money for tackling climate change in developing countries until 2017. Furthermore,

all of the money it is currently giving has been diverted from the aid budget. Between 2010-2012 the UK is spending £500 million a year out of the aid budget. At least one-third of this is being disbursed as loans through the World Bank, increasing unjust debts.

The Labour government has said that by 2020 developing countries will need \$100 billion a year to tackle climate change, but it has not said how much the UK would contribute to this. Based on research by the UN, WDM estimates that at least \$400 billion will be needed by 2020.⁴⁴

Labour score: 0.25

The **Conservatives** say the World Bank will “have an important role to play” in delivering climate change money.⁴⁵ They do not say whether they would continue to give loans rather than grants, and whether money would be additional to the aid budget. We therefore assume that climate change money under the Conservatives would never be additional. The Conservatives do not specify any figures for spending money on climate change either between 2010-2012 or 2013-2020. In its manifesto, the Conservative party makes no mention of its policies regarding international climate change negotiations.⁴⁶

Conservative score: 0

In contrast to Labour, the **Liberal Democrats** would make *all* money for tackling climate change additional to aid, although they do not say whether that would happen straight away.⁴⁷ They support developed countries providing \$160 billion a year by 2013-2017, although do not say how much the UK should contribute to this.⁴⁸ The Liberal Democrats do say that funds for tackling climate change should go through the UN rather than the World Bank, but do not specify that loans should not be used. In their manifesto, the Liberal Democrats specifically say the UN Adaptation Fund should be supported.⁴⁹

Liberal Democrats score: 0.75

The **Green party** supports the concept of ecological debt, part of which is our climate debt, saying that “Ecological debt needs to be acknowledged and paid for.” However, they have not stated how the UK’s climate debt should be paid, whether it should be additional to aid, whether it should be grants or loans, and whether it should go through the World Bank.

Green score: 0.25

Plaid Cymru say they will “call for increased resources for the UN Adaptation Fund, to help developing countries adapt to the effects of climate change”.⁵⁰

Plaid Cymru: 0.5

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