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## **The British state and the environment: New Labour's ecological modernisation strategy [1]**

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**Abstract:** The environment and the pursuit of sustainable development were held as central aspects of New Labour's 'joined up' approach to public policy. The way in which environmental concerns have been included within the overarching New Labour 'project' has been by adopting an ecological modernisation approach to environmental policy, a central aspect of which is that the pursuit of improvements in environmental quality and sustainable development are not achieved at the cost of disrupting the government's efforts to sustain continued economic growth and investment. That is, New Labour's ecological modernisation project is concerned more with sustaining the British economy (specifically international competitiveness) than achieving a sustainable metabolism between that economy and its environmental inputs, outputs and ecological context.

**Keywords:** ecological modernisation; New Labour; economic growth; sustainable development; public policy.

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## 1 Introduction

On coming to power in the UK in 1997, the Labour Party promised much in terms of heralding a change in environmental policy. Its rebranding as 'New Labour' during the mid-1990s signified a shift in general approach, emphasising innovation, forward-thinking, encapsulated in 'modernisation' as its key ideological motif, as well as operating as an attempt to distance itself from previous Labour administrations. Through its stress on 'joined up' government as part of this approach, New Labour sought to present itself as having a more integrated, coherent and comprehensive understanding of the challenges presented by environmental change. For example, in the run up to the election in 1997, the Labour Party made statements which were interpreted by commentators that its environmental policies would be significantly different to those of the outgoing government. Consequently, expectations about New Labour's performance in environmental terms were considerable. Many believed that the Labour government elected in 1997 would deliver significant shifts in key areas of policy affecting environmental performance.

In addition, the government had seemed to start to understand the necessity of integrating environmental questions in the core business of government. Thus Tony Blair, shortly after the election, proclaimed that governments should "make the process of government green. The environment must ... be integrated in to all our decisions, regardless of sector. They must be in at the start, not bolted on later" [2]. Within New Labour discourse, environmental concerns were thus regarded as a classic instance of what they termed the need for 'joined up' government [2]. The government implemented a number of institutional reorganisations when in office in line with these claims. Most notable were the creation of the 'superministry' Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR), and a cross-departmental Sustainable Development Unit (SDU) designed to look at how far all departments' practices are in line with overall objectives in this regard [2]. In other words, at least rhetorically, there was an understanding of the interconnections between environmental policies and other aspects of government policy, and the need to think about government strategy as a whole in terms of its environmental consequences. But, fairly quickly, such optimism has subsided. As outlined by Michael Jacobs, General Secretary of the Fabian Society and a well-known writer on environmental politics, in a Fabian pamphlet, "it is evident that New Labour is not comfortable with the environment as a political issue" [3]. New Labour, and Blair in particular, saw environmentalists as opposed to modernisation, and opposed to the aspirations of those whom Labour were seeking to court electorally, whilst many representing remaining 'old' Labour values saw environmentalists as representing middle class privilege.

More damning is the judgement of environmental groups such as Friends of the Earth, which have accused the New Labour government of producing 'more green smoke than the Wizard of Oz'. For example, on transport, FoE in a press statement in December 2002 claimed that despite promising to cut traffic levels in 1997, the Government has done precious little to achieve this. The cost of motoring has fallen under Labour, whilst the cost of using buses and trains has risen. The Government abandoned the fuel price escalator following protests from motoring groups. Labour has offered only lukewarm support to the few local authorities that have introduced congestion charging. Billions of pounds of road-widening schemes were announced – even though the Government stated in its 1998 Transport White Paper "people know we cannot build our way out of

congestion with new roads". The Government has admitted that road congestion is unlikely to improve by the end of the decade. Since Labour came to power in 1997, road traffic is estimated to have grown by 7%. There has been inadequate funding for transport alternatives to the car [4].

Sticking to environmental policy narrowly construed, two policy areas are explored to illustrate the disappointment and some of its political features: transport and genetically modified foods. However, before proceeding to our case studies, it is necessary briefly to outline the main tenets of ecological modernisation, which highlights some of the reasons why it represents an attractive way in which environmental concerns can be integrated into the overarching 'modernisation' project of New Labour, but also helps to explain the inherent limits of New Labour's environmental commitment.

## **2 Outline of ecological modernisation**

Ecological modernisation, like sustainable development to which it is related (but ought not be conflated), means different things to different people. For some it represents an analysis of current and future environmental policy and politics [5], for others it denotes a new form of cultural politics representing the greening of modernity [6], or a rounding out of Beck's [7] theory of 'risk society' and reflexive modernisation, an essentially positive approach to dealing with environmental problems. For critics it is the objectionable and contradictory attempt to 'green capitalism' [8], or a deradicalisation of sustainable development [9]. According to Young [10], "ecological modernisation is about reconceptualising the relationship between the environment and the economy in the industrialised democracies", the implications of which can vary from minimalist interpretations which imply the 'greening of business as usual' to more wide-ranging changes in state, economy and society [11,12].

The basic tenet of ecological modernisation is that the zero-sum character of environment-economic trade-offs is more apparent than real. Ecological modernisation challenges the idea that improvements in environmental quality or the protection of nature are necessarily inimical to economic welfare, the fundamental position which dominated the early response to the 'environmental crisis' in the 1960s and 1970s. In this earlier debate the green position was that a 'steady-state economy', in conjunction with zero-population growth, was the only economy-ecology relationship which could ensure long-term sustainability [13–15]. In opposition to this idea, ecological modernisation suggests that economic competitiveness and growth are not incompatible with environmental protection. Indeed, on some versions of the ecological modernisation thesis, "environmental protection [is] a ... potential source for future growth" [5]. Future economic prospects increasingly depend on achieving and maintaining high standards of environmental protection. Key to this is separating economic growth from rising energy and material inputs [16,17].

In general terms, then, ecological modernisation can be viewed as an account of how existing political and economic institutions have, through innovative changes, responded to public and environmental movement pressure for governments to 'do something' about environmental problems. Equally, ecological modernisation also relates to how industrial interests (specific sectors, such as energy or chemical, or specific corporations, such as BP) have responded to the increasing environmental regulatory regimes in the western

world, and taken what opportunities there are in meeting or exceeding these environmental standards, while at the same time effecting cost savings and/or improving their competitive market position.

Whilst the process of modernisation of the economy (capitalist industrialism) has caused environmental problems, the solution to them lies in the direction of more or better modernisation, not, as the early green movement and many radical environmental groups still hold, in radically altering or indeed rejecting modernisation. That is, what is required to cope with contemporary and future environmental problems is a suitably ecologically enlightened or rational evolution of modernisation; that is, 'ecological modernisation'. As Buttel [18] notes: "An ecological modernisation perspective hypothesises that while the most challenging environmental problems of this century and the next have (or will have) been caused by modernisation and industrialisation, their solutions must necessarily lie in more – rather than less – modernisation and 'superindustrialisation'". As Hajer put it, ecological modernisation is "basically a modernist and technocratic approach to the environment that suggests that there is a techno-institutional fix for the present problems" [6], which fits extremely well with the managerial, technocratic and technological, supply-side focus preferred by New Labour and its 'third way' approach to modernising public policy and the core business of government.

### **3 Origins of ecological modernisation theory**

Ecological modernisation for Weale is understood both as a legitimating ideology within certain liberal states' response to environmental problems, and as a new departure in environmental policy principles [5], whilst for others it has the status of a fully-fledged social theory [19]. As an approach to environmental policy analysis, ecological modernisation can be viewed as a descriptive-explanatory account, marking a new environmental policy discourse from within the existing institutions of the liberal state; a form of institutional learning. Its emergence and strength as an ideology lie mainly in its capacity to render the imperative for economic growth compatible with the imperative to protect environmental quality. The evolution of this perspective has been described by Potier [20]: "By the mid-1970s it had become clear that it is both environmentally and economically sound to anticipate the possible negative effects of an activity such as an industrial plant and to design it in such a way as to prevent pollution before it occurs".

At the same time, in the 1980s there developed a sizeable market for 'green' or 'environmentally-friendly' products and services [21], which in turn stimulated a number of new methods of production and new products. Finally there was greater public pressure for governments to tackle environmental problems [5,22], as well as the legitimacy of government being increasingly tied up with providing environmental protection [5,23]. The congruence of these two factors, one from the demand and the other from the supply-side, represents the context within which ecological modernisation developed. To use economic terminology, one could say that ecological modernisation represents an 'equilibrium' policy position: a point at which supply (of ecologically-friendly goods and services) and demand (for those goods and greater levels of environmental quality) meet. Thus it acts as an institutional (and ideological) compromise between dominant economic interests and imperatives, and specific ecological interests (non-radical and partial), and as Weale [5] suggests, a compromise between the economic

imperative for capital accumulation, economic globalisation and political legitimacy. This is demonstrated by Weale's [5] analysis of it as a policy approach to pollution control, originating in a critical rejection of early 'command and control' policy approaches. Ecological modernisation as an ideology is largely constituted by government programs and policy styles and traditions, particularly those of Germany, The Netherlands, Sweden, and the European Union environmental programs, particularly the *Fourth Environmental Action Programme* [5]. Thus, one can say that the origins of ecological modernisation lie in the environmental discourse of policy elites. Ecological modernisation theory is associated with the work of Huber in the 1980s, in which he stressed how technological developments would facilitate the emergence of an ecological stage in industrial development: "the dirty and ugly industrial caterpillar will transform into an ecological butterfly" [24]. Mol's view of ecological modernisation is as an empirical phenomenon: "Ecological modernisation can thus be interpreted as the reflexive (institutional) reorganisation of industrial society in its attempt to overcome the ecological crisis" [24]. Thus there are descriptive and prescriptive uses and character of ecological modernisation. That is, between:

- interpretations of ecological modernisation, which see it as offering a valid analytical/explanatory account or framework for actual changes in environmental policy and interactions between the economy and ecology in western societies
- more prescriptive or normative/ideological accounts, which suggest ecological modernisation as the most appropriate sustainable model or pattern that such societies ought to follow (or that the green movement ought to champion).

In our view, focusing on ecological modernisation's descriptive and prescriptive aspects, we identify and interpret it as primarily a boundary setting organisational phenomenon, in which certain things, processes, actors, principles, etc., are 'organised in' and others 'organised out'. In this way, ecological modernisation is interpreted as marking both what is 'possible', in terms of realising certain ecological goals, as well as serving as a standard (both normative with 'real world' examples) of what is also 'desirable', within the institutional structures (especially those of the state, the economy and of culture) and taken for granted comforts and lifestyles enjoyed within contemporary western societies. In short, ecological modernisation both in general and in particular when adopted by the British state under New Labour, explicitly works 'with the grain' of prevailing economic imperatives of economic globalisation and the pursuit of domestic economic growth within that context, a central part of which also includes not challenging or compromising the continued production, distribution and consumption of a wide variety and quantity of material goods and services that constitute the 'good life' in western high consumption societies. In all of the literature on the subject, ecological modernisation operates by identifying certain institutional, political, economic, and ideological actors and processes, which are deemed both possible and desirable, from others which are (by corollary) deemed impossible/radical and undesirable. A key aspect of distinguishing possible from impossible options and courses of action in terms of the environment, from the point of view of ecological modernisation is the economic feasibility of any environmental option (policy, technological or political innovation). Economic feasibility here is strictly understood in terms of continued orthodox economic growth, profitability and international competitiveness. This economic core and narrative of ecological modernisation, central to its incorporation into the ideological discourse of New Labour

of 'modernisation', can be understood through an examination of the environmental Kuznets curve hypothesis to which we turn next.

#### **4 Ecological modernisation and the Environmental Kuznets Curve**

The central claim of all interpretations of ecological modernisation converges on the notion that environmental protection is either a precondition for economic growth, or is compatible with it. In this way, ecological modernisation promises to overcome the long-standing opposition between economic growth (as conventionally understood, in terms of increases in formally paid employment in the cash economy, money income – both national and disposal personal income – increased trade and export of goods and services) and environmental protection (understood as improvements in air, water quality and decreasing levels of pollution). In this way, the ecological modernisation thesis is similar in form, and is related to the Environmental Kuznets Curve (EKC) hypothesis. However, it is rather surprising that to date there has been hardly any work which looks at the EKC basis and evidence for the ecological modernisation thesis, as an empirically observable and verifiable phenomenon. The EKC hypothesis states that "beyond a certain level of income some aspects of environmental quality improve further with economic growth" [25]. This is a view which is consistent with the overall claim of the ecological modernisation thesis that stimulating conventional economic growth (although with different technological and other innovative means) ought to remain the main focus of state policy, which should aim to integrate the ecological preconditions/resources and negative externalities (via appropriately designed environmental policies) into economic policy (with a preference for market rather than state-based solutions). This economic character of ecological modernisation is central in rendering it compatible with Chancellor Gordon Brown's neo-classical, growth-oriented approach to the prudent management of the national economy within a competitive global market.

A clear exposition of the EKC thesis is given by Panayotou, who concludes his econometric comparative study by pointing out that the EKC thesis, "... suggests that as the development process picks up, when a certain level of income per capita is reached, economic growth turns from an enemy of the environment into a friend ... If economic growth is good for the environment, then policies that stimulate growth such as trade liberalisation, economic restructuring and price reform ought to be good for the environment" [26]. This view of the relationship between economic growth and environmental quality, particularly the focus on trade liberalisation, of course fits very well within the almost messianic zeal for economic globalisation one finds at the heart of New Labour discourse. A more nuanced (though still heavily pro-trade liberalisation) view on the EKC, which is more in keeping with the political and policy focus of ecological modernisation, is given by Cole [27], who points out that: "... although there is evidence that developed countries have 'grown out of' some pollution problems, it is important to stress that this is by no means an automatic process ... there is nothing inevitable about the relationship between per capita income and environmental quality, as encapsulated in the EKC fitted to historical data. Pollution levels have fallen only in response to investment and policy initiatives".

The central focus of the EKC is thus the relationship between the national economy and (specific aspects of) local environmental quality (as opposed to resource depletion per se, for example), and the 'mainstreaming' of environmental considerations into state

economic policy making and corporate decision making. Whether couched in terms of international competitiveness in the rapidly expanding environmental technology sector, the cost savings of adopting less resource and energy intensive production processes, or the fact that introducing and implementing stringent environmental standards need not drastically reduce economic growth, income and employment, the basic message of ecological modernisation is that there is no necessary opposition between economic growth as conventionally understood (GNP measures, trade, employment etc.) and environmental protection and improvement, as indicated by the EKC analysis. Having briefly outlined the main tenets of ecological modernisation, we turn now to two policy areas, transport and GM foods, as case-studies to highlight both how New Labour's approach to these areas demonstrates its commitment to an 'ecological modernisation' strategy and also as a result of the latter, the inherent limits and contradictions both of New Labour's environmental strategy, and of ecological modernisation as an approach more generally.

## **5 Transport**

As Jordan suggests, transport could be taken as a test case both of the novelty of 'Third Way' politics and of its environmental commitments [2]. For the former, it represents a classic balancing of rights and responsibilities characteristic of Third Way rhetoric. For the latter, "there is no better example of the need for better inter-departmental coordination than transport policy" [2]. Labour came into office in a context of significant problems concerning transport (road congestion, roads protests, chronic problems in the rail network, in particular) and a set of policies designed to deal with these problems. Many of these policies formed a significant part of environmentalists' optimism concerning the incoming government. They aimed to reduce car use, reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from transport, and increase use and provision of public transport. These would not only meet New Labour's environmental commitments, but were also dealt with in the context of their approach to 'social exclusion', and were simultaneously seen crucial to an overhaul of the UK economy's infrastructure. These set of diverse imperatives collectively mean New Labour's transport strategy can be interpreted as an ecological modernisation project.

One of the problems that became quickly apparent was that despite the attempts to portray their policies as conflict-free, favouring everyone, conflicts within government surfaced rapidly. John Prescott, whose commitment in this area was relatively strong, was ostensibly in charge of transport policy. However, conflicts between Prescott and Blair surfaced early on, with the Prime Minister concerned that the agreed policies would alienate sections of the electorate on which the New Labour project was held to depend. Whilst this section was perhaps most ubiquitously known as 'Middle England', coming a close second has been the phrase 'Mondeo man', revealing much about the consumerist assumptions of Labour's electoral strategy [2,28]. Blair explicitly associated the policy shifts involved in the New Labour project with a tale about the voters Labour needed to woo being defined by a man he met during the 1992 election campaign who was cleaning his Ford Sierra (this later became a Mondeo following the shift in models by Ford). The position of the Sierra/Mondeo in this tale was much more than symbolising a particular category of voters – Mondeo man was assumed to vote as a car driver. This

then had obvious problems for Labour's transport and environmental policy. According to Jordan, "Much to his (Prescott's) annoyance, Blair has intervened on more than one occasion to pacify the anxious car drivers of Middle England, personified by the archetypal 'Mondeo Man' who bore him to power in 1997" [2]. These contradictions were exemplified in equivocations in government policy over road building, congestion charging and fuel taxes, among others.

Contradictions were also magnified in the government's response to the fuel protests of September–November 2000 [29]. The government response during the crisis revealed that for them the central purpose of high fuel taxes was to support general levels of government spending rather than to promote fuel economy improvements or emission abatement (they focused on the cuts to public services, particularly the health service, which they claimed would be threatened if fuel duty were to be cut). But their later response, in the budget following the protests (in spring 2001) also showed (largely in part due to the astuteness and creativity of Gordon Brown as Chancellor) that they could articulate environmental concerns into the tax structure, as differentials between regular fuels and the newly introduced ultra-low sulphur fuels were accentuated, as were differences between car tax levels between large and small-engined cars. Nevertheless, the principal effect of these budgetary concerns was to respond to the need to appease 'Mondeo man' whose political preferences were judged to have been expressed in the fuel protests, leading to environmental groups, such as Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace, accusing New Labour of giving in to the roads lobby. As a consequence, whilst transport policy has been noticeably different to that of the Conservatives, with increased spending on public transport (much of it late in the day, in the spending review announcements by Gordon Brown in July 2000), re-regulation of the privatised rail industry, and legislation facilitating congestion charging in city centres, it has been significantly less ambitious and aggressively pursued than even John Prescott would have wanted. Key legislation facilitating the full creation of a Strategic Rail Authority and other measures were greatly delayed. The generalised commitment to reduce car use has not been followed up with specific targets against which to judge progress in this regard. This was more or less accepted in the government's interim report on its 10-year transport plan in December 2002, with infrastructure spending going increasingly towards road building. As Toynbee and Walker conclude regarding their measures to 'green' urban transport: "some local action, some good ideas but no overall sense of direction and scant willingness to offend motorists" [30].

## **6 Genetically modified foods**

Another issue area where environmental concerns were prevalent when New Labour came into office concerned genetically modified (GM) crops and food. The issue has a different structure to the transport debate in that the environmental implications of GM are much more heavily contested in this area. It is thus rather more complicated to make evaluative claims concerning the 'strength' or otherwise of environmental policy in this field. Nevertheless, what is still clear in this case is that to the extent that the promotion and development of GM crops can be considered an 'anti-ecological' measure, New Labour can be regarded as resisting the incorporation of an environmental agenda into its policies. And here, the central obstacle is the overall economic strategy adopted by the state under New Labour. This is especially clear in that many of the concerns about GM



foods were widespread amongst electoral constituencies where New Labour hoped to secure support. Thus economic strategy overrode specific possible electoral threats in this case. At the very least, an articulation of GM as environmentally benign by the government was rendered necessary by its economic strategy. A number of concerns about GM crops and food had been raised from the mid-1990s onwards. The most commonly expressed concerned health questions about the consumption of GM foods (especially salient in the wake of the moral panic over BSE). But environmental concerns regarding possible impacts on biodiversity, the viability of organic farming methods, and so on, played some role in public concerns also, as did worries about the concentration of corporate power over the food chain.

In general however, Labour, on coming into office in 1997, was predisposed towards the biotechnology industry. It saw this sector as a leading growth sector, and particularly a leading high-technology sector, which should be encouraged in order to promote the overall growth and competitiveness of the UK economy. Whilst most public attention was on GM crops and food, the bulk of the UK biotechnology sector's interests were in medical and pharmaceutical uses, not involving crop production [31]. Thus there has been a substantial amount of equivocation by the government regarding GM crops. The public tensions over how to treat them have also been reflected in tensions within the government, with Michael Meacher (Secretary of State for the Environment) in particular being noticeably less in favour of GM crops than other ministers, and with the range of advisory bodies and government organs out of which official policy has emerged giving widely differing opinions on appropriate policy [32].

As a consequence of these tensions, their fundamental position is hard to pin down, as is reflected in wildly differing interpretations of the government's position [30,33]. It remains opposed to the US doctrine of 'substantial equivalence'; namely that GM crops and foods should be regarded as substantially equivalent to non-GM products, and thus there is no need for a specific regulatory framework to deal with them. In this, it lies somewhere between the position of the USA and the other EU countries, which in general want a more strict set of regulatory schemes in place than does the UK government [34]. It therefore has in place a moratorium on the commercial sale of GM crops for human consumption until 2003, combined with a set of procedures based on the principle that each individual proposed new crop should be thoroughly tested in field trials before being licensed for sale. Thus Blair could say in a recent speech: "Contrary to the myth that somehow wicked multinationals and politicians have pressed us to be pro-GM, I am fully aware of the potential impact on biodiversity and people's concerns about health. I am neither pro nor anti. I simply say: let us evaluate the technology, test it, and then make a judgment; rather than ban it before we even look at it" [35].

But despite this apparent neutrality and caution, there is nevertheless a general predisposition towards the biotechnology sector, such that in individual controversies the government has tended to take positions favourable to its interests. This can be very clearly seen in Labour's manifesto for the 2001 general election [36]. Since about 2000, one of the main planks of this has come from Clare Short (Secretary of State for Overseas Development), arguing the case for GM foods on the grounds of alleviating world hunger, as part of her general arguments attacking anti-globalisation protestors on the grounds that they aim to stunt Southern 'development'. At times, this rationale for GM technology is connected to environmental policy as part of a putative 'ecological modernisation' New Labour policy framework for the environment. The basic principle

of this is that policies aimed at ecological sustainability and economic competitiveness and growth are compatible rather than mutually exclusive [3]. Here, biotechnology is presented as an 'environmentally friendly' form of economic activity and investment.

The central explanation for the problems environmentalists and others have had in persuading New Labour to reject GM crops and food has been the way in which such technologies have been articulated as part of the overall economic strategy adopted. Biotechnology, along with information technologies, have been understood by New Labour as the central growth sectors to be promoted by the government in order to promote the broader growth and competitiveness of the UK economy. Biotechnology is interpreted as a 'knowledge-based' economic activity, and thus is a perfect example of the type of industry that New Labour in general, and Tony Blair in particular, sees as crucial to Britain, and Europe, in the future. At the same time, the Blair government is aware that whilst Britain is good at scientific invention, primary research and discovery, in comparison to the USA, it does not have the same success in terms of the commercial exploitation of British-based and funded science [37]. This promotion of the 'knowledge economy' and biotechnology's role in it reflects, therefore, the New Labour 'globalisation' story.

## 7 Conclusions

The British state under New Labour management is thus highly contradictory regarding the environmental crisis. On the one hand, New Labour wants to make highly positive statements about the environment, as highlighted by Prescott's transport strategy, their attempts to play a leadership role in climate change politics internationally, the establishment of various environmental policy initiatives, task forces, policy reviews, committees, and reports from 'Sustainability Indicators' to the Climate Change Levy, and so on. On the other hand, central elements in New Labour's political-economic strategy undermine attempts to reduce the environmental impact of the British state and society. As Young puts it in his review of the UK's attempts to implement sustainable development, "Where there were conflicts with environmentalists, the neo-pluralist state invariably sided with business" [38]. Or as the Green Party of England and Wales put it rather more forcefully in a recent report on New Labour's environmental record *Far More Spin than Substance*, that it is largely a mixture of "faltering steps forward and great strides in the wrong direction" and goes on to claim that "Blair's environmental commitment is thinner than recycled toilet paper" [39].

One particular contradiction, alluded to above, is worth spelling out in a little more detail, since it goes to the heart of the problems with New Labour's ecological modernisation strategy. Globalisation has also been a key element in New Labour's understanding of the structural situation within which the British state must operate, and thus of the ways in which state economic intervention needs to act to stimulate certain forms of behaviour by firms and workers [28, 40, 41]. But globalisation, or more precisely New Labour's understanding of this complex set of processes, acts as a discourse to shape such state intervention to benefit highly mobile transnational capital. It thus connects closely to Labour's attempt to shape a technology-led pattern of economic growth through the promotion both of information technology firms and of biotechnology firms. Both are understood as leading economic growth sectors, and thus provide a means of improving both the productivity and thus competitiveness of the UK economy, and

specifically of attracting investment from sectors which will then have a high export content, contributing to the UK's trade balance. This is a central explanation of the dynamics of policy making concerning GM agriculture, but also regarding the recent emergence of policies promoting renewable energy, which we have not discussed here [1]. Thus globalisation, and specifically the economic imperative which New Labour understands globalisation to create, helps to explain the fervour with which most within the Labour government have embraced GM technologies, and specific companies in particular such as Monsanto. This is even while there has been widespread public opposition to such technologies, which has caused the companies themselves (notably Monsanto) to modify their commitment to GM technologies.

The relation of the state to global environmental management needs to be analysed in a manner which minimises abstractions about what the state is, and focuses on exploring the concrete patterns through which particular states produce and respond to environmental challenges. Crucial here are the processes, dynamics and constraints faced and (self) imposed on governments and political parties in power in the development of state economic strategies. In the New Labour case, we hope to have shown the importance of this, by highlighting some of the major ecological implications of the specific forms of policy interventions and economic strategies of the UK state since 1997.

Our brief 'environmental audit' of New Labour's 'ecological modernisation' strategy to the environment backs up the assessment of New Labour's environmental performance given by Charles Secrett, Executive Director of Friends of the Earth United Kingdom, who stated that: "Overall, New Labour's excessive caution, pro-business instincts and obsession with presentation have often combined to damage its green reputation. Surrender to the fuel tax protestors, backing for the biotech industry and continuing threats to revive nuclear electricity generation are not the acts of a Party that really wants to 'put the environment at the heart of Government'". [42] This argument has more general implications for those advancing an ecological modernisation perspective. Writers in this vein only very rarely think about the large-scale structural forces which shape the possibility of pursuing ecological modernisation strategies. What is clear in the New Labour case is that the discourse of globalisation means that, on the one hand, it becomes possible to articulate environmental policies in terms of ecological modernisation (as the globalisation discourse produces a preference for technology-led economic strategies to generate inward investment), but at the same time it both severely limits the manner of implementation of such strategies (in the transport case) and skews the very articulation of particular questions as environmental problems in the first place (in the GM case). This deserves investigation in other contexts to see if this pattern is repeated, since if it is, it calls fundamentally into question the premises of ecological modernisation theory.

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