

## Riding the Wave...2009

Here we were at 'The Wave'. It was half past twelve on a Saturday when we set off on our mission; a mission to tackle Climate Change and let the MPs hear our voices. We were all here gathered in Grosvenor Square marching slowly towards Parliament, all fifty thousand of us. Rhoda and I held the big 'Envision' banner appropriately blue and waving in the wind. It blended in amongst the sea of blue; blue clothes, blue faces and hands cheering and dancing as we progressed. The mood was cheery and everyone was determined for the cause, even amongst the light rain and grey skies overhead.

The facts had been announced, without us taking action now, the stability of our climate as we know it could potentially be beyond our control. Severe and rapid changes could wreak havoc for billions of people. Stern had spoken; if we act later it could cost us from five to as much as twenty percent of our global economy, if we act now it would only cost us one percent. This had made politicians listen to the warning more attentively. However, the problem in reality is far greater than an economic and human one; we could see huge changes in soil types, this could affect our water table, our ability to grow crops and feed ourselves as well as the many animals that inhabit the Earth. Millions more people worldwide could be dying of starvation, malnutrition which would leave them susceptible to disease and dehydration. Many more people could be displaced and left as 'Climate refugees' due to desert expansion and severe weather events such as the Boxing Day Tsunami in the Indian Ocean we witnessed in 2001 and Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005. Many species on the brink of extinction could be wiped out and far more endangered. This is just some of the few issues we, and the generations to come could be facing in the future. What sort of Earth are we leaving for them?

Lifestyle choices have to be considered and changes made. The biggest polluters in business and industry have to be curbed and must find greener alternatives. The signs are clear; our current indulgences are unsustainable. Human-kind as a whole has to control our wastage before the repercussions fall heavy on us!

After the march and a few practiced dance moves to 'push the button of the World... don't hold back!' we headed to City Hall. It was time to hear Ed Miliband, the secretary for the Department of Energy and the Environment, voice his opinions on what decisions must be taken, and to hear him defend himself eloquently, humbly and what we hope is honestly against the interrogation by various NGO's and Charities about what the British government is doing to tackle Climate Change. It was obvious they wanted serious change, no more unfulfilled promises, but policies and action that will meet the scale of the problem and for Britain to lead the way forward.

A casually-dressed Ed admitted that the government must do more to make aware the health effects of Global Warming and said he would like to arrive at a deal whereby the biggest contributors could lower their greenhouse emissions by twenty to thirty percent. Forty would be ideal to keep us below the fatal two degree temperature increase but this is likely to be unattainable. He hoped the EU as a collective would set an example on what cuts must be taken, especially since we

contribute fifteen percent of global emissions. He assured us that the relevant funds would be allocated to help less economically developed countries such as Bangladesh and Burkina Faso from the disastrous effect Climate Change could have on them. He said that governments needed to make a plan in Copenhagen that would be accomplished and that there must not be another flawed treaty such as the Kyoto Protocol. He suggested the possibility of carbon budgets for local councils as well as government, which could be quite controversial. However they may be a well needed contribution in the fight against Climate Change.

The UK Youth Climate Coalition questioned Ed on what was doing to include young people in the decision-making process, especially since we would be the ones feeling the wrath of Climate Change if appropriate action is not taken now. They called for representation and Ed admitted that the voice of the youth must be integrated more. In the spirit of change Ed said he intended to open a youth board in the Department. This would be an exciting but well deserved development, creating our own ability for direct contribution!

A member from the Vegan society questioned why the government did not display on the website, the input of meat consumption on greenhouse emissions. He stated livestock emissions were greater than that of transport. Ed highlighted that this was not a reality most people were aware of or would easily accept and that the public needed to be more convinced of the challenge ahead. He admitted that agriculture should have to reduce their emissions and also assured us that some changes would be made to their website including facts regarding farming cattle.

A member of Unicef Youth made it known that six hundred million people in Africa are likely to face malnutrition and almost two billion worldwide could face water shortages. She questioned Mr. Miliband on what was being done to limit power station emissions since they have the largest carbon footprint. In turn he agreed reductions must be made and severe weather events could cause displacement leading to millions of 'Climate refugees'. Another member of the audience suggested that steps must be taken to decarbonise the British economy by 2030 in order to make a real difference.

A representative from Cumbria spoke on the effects the changes have already had on their home region and what could happen in London. A Tibetan campaigner spoke of their contaminated and abused water resources despite the fact they currently have 40% of the world's water. This huge resource could rapidly reduce and it is a clear warning of the warming, their ecosystems are already degenerating. It is obvious Climate Change is a worldwide problem affecting millions and yet billions more could be affected if we don't open our eyes and act fast!

Ed said there was need for a legal framework on Climate Change and battled accusations that the government wasn't doing enough to preserve rather than adapt. A member of Greenpeace asked what the government were doing to prevent bankers investing our money in unsustainable projects and playing Russian Roulette with our children's future? One of the dilemmas was clear. We as consumers are highly unaware of our carbon footprint because of our detachment from the manufacturing processes of the product. There is a possibility our goods could one

day be labelled with the amount of carbon it takes to produce so that we can make a more conscious choice in our shopping decisions.

There are many questions that need to be answered. Are hydro-buses and hydro-cars going to be an alternative in our public transport and car manufacturing? How do we get other countries on board and encourage public mobilisation in reducing global greenhouse emissions? We have to recognise we have come far but must acknowledge we still have a very long way to go. We must keep up the pressure to instigate change. The catastrophic predictions are just a warning for us now, but let us not make it a reality. The problems and solutions are complex but if we all pull together we can achieve!

By Asia Williams