

---

## Speech for the Secretary of State for Education and Skills

### “Resource Wars: a post climate change world”

22<sup>nd</sup> May 2007

---

I'm delighted to be here: SERA is an important organisation which epitomises the great campaigning tradition at the heart of the Labour Party.

In the Eighties, climate change was so low on the political radar, that when Margaret Thatcher's Chief Scientific Adviser warned her about the threat of global warming, she was said to have replied, “Are you seriously telling me I should worry about the weather?”

Today, thanks in part to the tremendous work of SERA, the environment is a mainstream political issue which crops up increasingly on the doorstep and is certain to be fiercely debated at the next general election.

Since the industrial revolution, through the advances of rising prosperity, scientific discovery and social progress, carbon emissions have been our silent companion. For every one step forward as a society, climate change threatens to pull us two steps back.

We have virtually eradicated polio and smallpox – the worst diseases of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century; but now, 150,000 people die every year from hurricanes, forest fires and floods. Life expectancy in Britain has almost doubled in the last century, but the earth has warmed by 0.7 degrees.

As Sir Nicholas Stern's excellent report pointed out, it will be the poorest countries who have done least to contribute to climate change who will suffer the worst effects, as impoverished parts of central Africa become devastated by crop shortages; whilst countries like Bangladesh face the prospect of losing their major cities to floods.

There is a window of opportunity in which we can halt climate change with a reasonable level of investment but, if we miss this chance, the cost could increase twenty fold.

Although the scientific evidence of climate change is indisputable and its acceptance widespread, "business as usual" still characterises the approach of a large part of the developed world.

It's almost as if we are so used to living in a world where things keep improving that we can't possibly conceive of a planet that deteriorates; that we misguidedly regard our civilisation as so robust and secure that it must be indestructible; or that we have developed such arrogance that we simply don't care if ours is the last generation to inhabit earth securely.

Yet a glance at the history books tells us that civilisations have collapsed, and frequently for environmental reasons, and the fall out can be fierce.

So we should be concerned: for, if the wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century were about three "E"s: Empires, Ethnicity and Economics, then the wars of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century could well be about a new three "E"s: Extremism, Energy and the Environment.

People could be fighting for their very existence and some "Resource Wars" are already occurring. As Margaret Beckett has pointed out, the growth of the Sahara Desert is exacerbating the bloody, murderous conflict in the Sudan, causing mass migrations to occur.

It is still possible to prevent climate change becoming irreversible.

In the 80s, when it became obvious that a huge hole was growing in the middle of the ozone layer, SERA and the Labour Party worked hard to persuade business and Governments that the CFCs<sup>1</sup> which caused this should be banned. We succeeded in our mission and, because their use has been severely restricted, today the ozone layer is no longer shrinking.

That was in Opposition, as the party of Government, our assault upon climate change has accelerated.

During the first term, we introduced the Climate Change Levy: a courageous political decision which attracted ferocious opposition from business and the Tories, even though it was designed to be revenue neutral. I was Industry Minister at the time and the criticism was fierce.

We've consistently pushed for emissions trading in Europe: ensuring that carbon reduction is not just seen as an environmental goal, but a business imperative.

---

<sup>1</sup> Chlorofluoro compounds

And we've achieved the trick of decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation. Since 1997, the economy has grown by 22% whilst greenhouse gas emissions have fallen by 15%.

We are well ahead of our Kyoto targets and have gone further, setting the ambitious target to cut 60% of carbon emissions by 2050. The Climate Change Bill will enshrine this goal in statute.

No other nation has played such a vital role in advancing international action on this issue. We've led the debate in Europe and achieved a genuine breakthrough at the G8 in Gleneagles, resulting in the first ever acknowledgement a) that climate change was happening; and b) that it was caused by human activity. Gleneagles also, crucially, drew the major emerging economies of China and India into the dialogue.

With targets in place, the focus must now shift to activism, participation and responsibility: with everyone doing their bit – from teenagers to pensioners - with individuals, communities and nations all working together at a local, national and global level.

**As individuals, we are responsible for almost half of all carbon emissions.**

SERA plays a vital role in transforming attitudes and encouraging activism: demonstrably improving our environment; bringing about a change in behaviour by campaigning locally.

Environmental issues are one of the few things which encourage people to get active within their community and engaged with their local political party. As we face our biggest electoral challenge in a generation, this grassroots activism and community campaigning will be crucial, helping us to re-enthuse and rejuvenate our party, bringing new members in.

We need to recognise that 21<sup>st</sup> Century voters will not be persuaded by 19<sup>th</sup> Century campaigns. We should stimulate the new renaissance in activism, with SERA to the fore.

Linking up environmental responsibility with social respectability could prove a powerful catalyst in the fight against climate change.

“Keeping up with the Jones's” is a peculiarly British phenomenon. Solar panels, recycling containers, “bags for life” – these should become “must have accessories” for everyone. For all the weapons in our national

armour, it may well be that the best way to encourage direct action is to make people “green with envy”.

This can have a positive effect further up the chain. Demanding consumers can compel businesses to change behaviour. In the same way that Government had to decouple economic growth from rising emissions in order to properly tackle climate change, businesses will only really get involved when they link environmental responsibility with increased customers and improved profits.

More and more customers **are** now challenging business behaviour: from telling the newsagent we don't need a plastic bag; to checking a company's environmental performance in their annual accounts; or forcing a company to bring about changes in its methods or design.

Why does a TV use as much energy on standby as it does when it's operating? Why do phone chargers use energy when they're not even recharging? Surely if modern technology is capable of developing new gadgets, it can develop them in a way which minimises their carbon footprint.

As well as ensuring that there are social incentives around environmental responsibility, it has to make financial sense as well.

Fitting a wind turbine or solar panel should be cheaper and easier. Yesterday, Ruth Kelly published the Planning White Paper, setting out a number of ways to make it easier for householders to reduce their fuel bills and carbon footprint by installing small scale renewable technologies such as solar panels.

Selling energy back into the national grid should also be hassle free. We have to ensure that a carbon neutral home is a realistic prospect for every householder.

Since 2000, we've put £1.2 billion into “Warm Front” helping more than a million people improve their home insulation. We're also investing £80 million a year into the carbon trust. And the Energy Efficiency Commitment requires energy suppliers to help promote household energy efficiency.

Amongst the many ways in which Government can make a difference are sustainable housing; improved public transport – getting people out of their cars and on to the buses; and the use of greener energy.

When I was Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, I launched the energy review to help us grapple with the simultaneous challenges of climate change, as well as dwindling gas supplies, rising oil prices and ageing nuclear plants.

This review gave us the opportunity of looking afresh at our nation's power supplies and reducing our dependence on fossil fuels, massively increasing the amount of electricity we get from renewables by 2020.

Given the challenges, there is bound to be a mix of energy sources and nuclear could play a vital role. I know that this is an emotive subject and there are complex considerations – not least about cost and waste – but achieving our carbon reduction targets means we **must** explore this option.

Many of the answers to tomorrow's climate change questions are likely to be found in today's scientific laboratories. Britain has been responsible for some of the greatest scientific and technological discoveries in mankind's history. Today, there is no more altruistic or noble cause to which we could apply our scientific genius than climate change.

We've doubled science spending since 1997 and there are now exciting developments taking place in areas such as clean coal technology and carbon capture and storage.

Once oil and gas stocks decline, Britain has a unique opportunity to create a new use for the continental shelf. We must make sure that we are ahead of the world in developing the technical and regulatory know how to exploit this resource. We should press ahead quickly with the competition for a demonstration project that the Chancellor announced in the Budget.

We should ensure that the UK is a market leader in emerging renewable technology like offshore wind and wave power: extracting a maximum advantage from our wet and windy weather.

As Education Secretary, I have tried to ensure that our schools are at the forefront of the fight against climate change.

Children are amongst the most environmentally-aware. Educating them about the potential impact of their own decisions is as important as the pressure they put on their parents not to buy a gas guzzling car.

Many teachers already actively use the environment as a learning resource in biology, geography or local history. It provides children with a tangible route into understanding an issue; demonstrates to them how everything in their world is closely connected; but also instils a love of nature.

We need to ensure that children continue to relate to their environment as they grow and develop. The science curriculum has always stimulated and harnessed children's natural enthusiasm for the subject. Many teachers also talk about climate change in science or history lessons.

Following the Key Stage 3 Review, sustainable development will be given a much stronger focus in the curriculum. It will be covered as a key concept in the new style geography syllabus. We are also creating a new environmental and land based diploma which will come on stream by 2013.

Some people have also suggested that we might look at introducing a short course GCSE in sustainability, along the lines of our popular citizenship exam, and we should consider the merits of this.

David Miliband and I recently sent Al Gore's film, *An Inconvenient Truth*, to every secondary school in England, to help encourage awareness amongst pupils and teachers.

In the same way that children have the capacity to shame adults into action, so our schools should set an example as environmental beacons within our cities, towns and communities.

We've begun the process of rebuilding and refurbishing every Secondary School in the country. As part of this programme, we will invest £110 million over the next three years to make every new school carbon neutral.

If we succeed, this could result in 2,000 carbon neutral secondary schools, reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 8 million tons over the next decade. Our new schools must be built to last into the next century, but they should be constructed to enable the planet to survive for the centuries beyond.

We must unclog our city roads from the congestion of the school run. The number of cars being used to ferry children back and forth from school has doubled in just twenty years, and the majority of this is for short journeys. I know that modern life is pressured, but our quality of life is precious: replacing the turbo-charged school run with a leisurely school

walk could enrich the parent's day, enhance the pupil's education and improve the environment. It could also fight obesity for everyone!

But parents need a wider, greener range of options available, so they're not reliant on the car. We've placed a new duty on local authorities to promote sustainable and safe travel for all pupils. We're putting £21 million into looking at innovative alternatives to car travel. We're also investing almost £70 million by 2013 to extend the right to free home-school transport for almost 150,000 secondary school pupils.

We have done a lot in the last ten years. But, for all we do at home, we are impotent without movement at a global level. We are in a unique position to lead the international debate, using our strong position in Europe; our links with the US; and our ties across the world through the UN and the Commonwealth.

You could also argue that we have a moral obligation to do so, given that it was the British model of industrialisation which the rest of the world followed.

Within Europe, Britain is at the forefront of the debate. I'm delighted that the Commission has now proposed to include aviation in the Emissions Trading Scheme. Cap and trade must be a central feature of our international policy, looking to create a global carbon trading scheme as part of the post Kyoto settlement.

We should also ensure that our valid attempt to draw the emerging economies of China and India into discussions does not turn into a specious diversion from our own responsibilities in the West. It's a bit rich for the United States to look askance across the Pacific whenever their own commitment to cutting emissions is questioned, and we should use our "special relationship" to ensure that they don't.

2007 will be a crucial year. The Summit in June will be vital, leading to the Gleneagles dialogue in September. The G8 plus five are responsible for 70% of global emissions.

We are also working very closely with the German Presidencies of the EU and G8 in preparation for the UN conference in December, where we must begin the process of securing agreement on elements of a post 2012 framework.

Labour is in transition to a new leadership in mid-term of a third successive term in Government. We face our toughest election challenge where the environment will be a crucial factor.

The key to our success lies in two areas. Firstly, in stimulating the kind of local activism and community campaigning upon which our party was founded.

The second is convincing the people that we are an internationalist party at a time when the enormous problems we face, be it globalisation, demography, energy security as the environment, can only be resolved through multi-lateral agreements.

As David Miliband says, we need to make the EU an Environmental Union. We need to burnish our European credentials because only Labour has the ability to work across international borders to forge the kind of solutions that will be required.

A party of substance capable of helping our country through the dangers and challenges that climate change presents - that must be part of Labour's appeal to the British people now and at the next election.

(2,600 words)