

## Conference Speech – Islington, London 27 March 2010

by Richard J Deboo

*Speech delivered to the Animals Count Spring Conference, in Islington (where I will be standing in the General Election), 27 March 2010.*

Today would have been the birthday of my mother-in-law Jennifer Kennedy, but who tragically died just before Christmas last year. Throughout her life she was a tireless defender of the rights of those who were browbeaten and downtrodden by our deliberately skewed and corrupt society; and as she was also a strongly loyal member of the Welsh community I think it is a fitting tribute to her on this day to open my speech with some fine words of a great Welshman, the poet and activist Raymond Williams, who said, "to be truly radical is to make hope possible, rather than despair convincing".

And following on from yet another recession, a Labour-inspired recession on this occasion to go with previous Conservative-driven collapses in the economy, and following on from the dreadful failure of the Copenhagen Summit – the "last chance" to save the environment we were told – people now need to be given hope.

And so the task is set for us. We must make hope possible. We must be truly radical. Some may be concerned or worry about that, but they should not. For you see, to be truly radical we need do only one small thing – to tell the truth... To tell the truth about how so many of the ills that plague our human society have their roots in the way that we treat animals; to tell the truth about the reality of those animals' lives under our exploitation and how it is intolerable to allow it to continue; and to tell the truth about the profound significance of protecting our environment to secure a future for everyone.

And you know, it is remarkable to consider how much less daunting the challenge appears, and how much more possible and visible hope becomes, when you know that you have the truth on your side.

But still, let no-one doubt the measure of what is asked of us. There will be hostility to our proposals, there will be opposition to our call for change, there will be derision indeed in some quarters for our daring to even ask for what we want. And what do we want?

We want nothing less than to change an entire system. We know that a mere tinkering around the edges – as suggested by our major political parties – will not do; there is more, much more that we must do.

And so we make the call to **rethink** a whole philosophy that currently satisfies only a few at the expense of the many, and to **redirect** resources to those who need them most not those who already have most and need more least of all, and we make the call to **reward** those whose contributions are currently unheralded, hidden and ignored, those who, for example, work in the caring, sharing professions, providing vital services to the powerless, the vulnerable and the dispossessed, and not to give even more reward to those whose work is socially useless and who flatter their own genius by conjuring ever more complex but utterly pointless and unnecessary financial structures that strain and burden the world with yet more debt.

So we make the call ... for real, radical change.

And there is no good reason why we should not. We have nothing to lose ourselves by telling the truth but

everything to gain for those who need someone, anyone, to be honest on their behalf about what we are doing to them. I talk, of course, about the animals in our world, whether imprisoned in our farms and laboratories, or hemmed in, confined into ever smaller and ever more damaged habitats in the wild ... wherever they are, they deserve someone to dare to be truly radical and to tell the truth on their behalf. Not because they have no voice of their own; they have a voice and they do use it when we cause them fear and suffering, but too many in our society have made themselves wilfully deaf to their cry of anguish, their scream of pain. Let us therefore raise our voice for them and make ourselves heard.

Some will say to us, "no, don't, it is not time", "the world is not ready to hear what you have to say", "don't do it, you are asking for too much" ... but the world is never ready for radical change, we could spend an eternity on the sidelines, as bystanders, idling away our years, patiently tapping our foot as we wait for the right moment before we step out and ask meekly, "is it okay now?"

No, we must be stronger than that. We should not shrink from nor shirk our responsibility to tell the truth now. It seems difficult, almost impossible even, but that is no reason at all not to do it. In fact, it is exactly the reason why we should do it. And history shows us why.

It may seem obvious and simple to us now, as though the whole world was in easy agreement with her, but when Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst stepped forward to challenge the outrageous misogyny of her age, that brutally exploited the female half of this country's population, she was met with profound antagonism, hounded by her own Government, harassed by the forces of law and order, her liberty constantly under threat. Her call for change was a difficult call that was vehemently resisted by the powerful, but she made the call anyway. And she was right.

It may seem obvious and simple to us now, as though the whole world was stood behind her in fulsome support, but when Mrs Rosa Parks got on the bus in Montgomery, Alabama on 1 December 1955 and refused to give up her seat when told to but stayed sitting down where she was not supposed to, she was under the immense burden of legalised oppression, found herself under arrest and surrounded on all sides by open hostility. But she did what she did anyway. And she was right.

It may seem obvious and simple to us now, as though the whole world already knew that he would be a hero of our times, but when a young man, the Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jr. supported Rosa Parks in calling for an end to segregation, to put aside racial discrimination for all time, he was met with hysterical, intense and too often violent opposition. Millions of people hated everything he stood for and they hated him. His was not an easy journey, but he made the journey anyway. And he was right.

We are fortunate, then, that we can raise ourselves up onto the shoulders of these giants who were there before us, and be carried forward by their hard-won victories; we do not face the same dangers that confronted them, and we can learn from the message that they gave to the world – a message that says that the truth will out and the truth will win.

So, we can embrace hope and we can make hope the core of our message. We do not need to listen to, and in fact we can safely ignore, the doom-laden, scare-mongering lies of a Labour or Conservative administration. History has already decided on their incompetence, their impotence and their irrelevance. We can already see, beyond the narrow, navel-gazing confines of what Labour or Conservatives would decide is good enough, that something more, a global hope for a better future, is being made possible, and

we can share in this. We know that to think smart about what makes most sense for us here in the UK it is wise to look internationally, globally, to see what can be achieved.

When the Party for the Animals was established in The Netherlands and they first began their task of campaigning for election it was not at all obvious that they could gain genuine national prominence and electoral success, but that is what has happened, and in less than a decade they have achieved real political power, real political influence and they are making a difference.

In Bolivia next month, many thousands of delegates will assemble for the World Peoples' Conference on Climate Change, an event that will represent everyone's needs and interests in protecting our shared environment, and it will include the needs and interests of non-human animals.

And the Bolivian president, Evo Morales, has already succeeded in the adoption by the United Nations of an "International Mother Earth Day" and the first drafting of a "Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth", which includes the rights of non-human animals. One simply cannot imagine Brown, Cameron or Clegg showing such leadership as that. Let them, therefore, be only a benchmark for failure, and let them not be a standard for us and let them not represent us. We can do better than them.

And so we will. Our manifesto, our policies, our philosophy, together represent a practical and achievable proposal for a better world, a future in which everyone is entitled to their share, where the abundance created by our economy and the natural fruits of the earth are shared fairly amongst everyone. We call for genuine partnership, collaboration and co-operation between all members of our community, and a genuine recognition and protection of those non-humans in our world whose personhood has been denied – against all scientific and moral evidence – for too long and whose rights therefore should be established in law and fully endorsed by a system of social justice that is all encompassing and all-embracing.

Our manifesto is a commitment to do better than obsess about economic growth at all costs, no matter what the cost to others, to do more than abdicate all responsibility to that perverse abstraction, "the market", which was claimed to be all-knowing and all-seeing but proved to be all wrong, and to demand more of our politicians than to yield and bow to the powerful and the pursuit of profit with no mind to the millions who are crushed underfoot in the race to the top.

Nearly 2,000 years ago a man called Jesus angrily threw out the moneylenders from the Temple, rather aggravated by their pernicious and corrupt influence. And how we may wish now that we had kept up that pressure on them!

Because today, the banks, really, are bankrupt, and the leeching, diseased parasite of free-market economics – that even now has its dark heart pumping the blood of bonuses around its festering form – is a system that is bankrupt too. But we know that the bank of justice is alive and well, and we will draw from its capital and make our call to rethink, redirect and reward, knowing that when we do so we can begin to restore a true sense of community and social togetherness and real hope for everyone.

The call that we make in our manifesto and in our campaign will resonate and echo down through the days, months and years to come, as a demand for a better society, a better world, a better future. This is what will give potency and the force to fight back to those who have feared, those who have lost hope, and it will answer the command of the as yet unborn narrator in Louis MacNeice's great poem, Prayer Before Birth,

who pleads with us:

"... fill me,  
with strength against those who would freeze my  
humanity, would dragoon me into a lethal automaton,  
would make me a cog in a machine, a thing with  
one face, a thing, and against all those  
who would dissipate my entirety"

So yes, we will. We will give people strength. We will be truly radical and we will make hope not only possible but utterly practical and achievable. Because it is time to bring democracy back to the people. We will stand in this election not only because it is our democratic right to do so, but also because it is absolutely right for us to do so. We speak for everyone and democracy must mean that everyone is heard, and so our voice is the voice of all in the community.

That is why we will use our voice in this election. We want to show that democracy is very much alive and kicking in this country, despite all that has happened; and we want to make it crystal clear that the major parties will not be unopposed – we will be there to challenge them; and we want to prove that the dispossessed, the disadvantaged and the downtrodden will have someone who will speak up for them, someone who will be a voice for the unheard, someone who will loudly make the call for justice for all.

Our task is set. To be truly radical, to make hope possible, and to tell the truth. And we will be a bulwark against the tyranny of lies with which we are daily assaulted. Nearly fifty years ago the late poet Adrian Mitchell was moved to fiercely denounce the corruptions and distortions by the politicians of his time when he wrote:

“you put you bombers in, you take your conscience out  
you take the human being and you twist it all about  
so chain my tongue with whisky  
stuff my nose with garlic  
coat my eyes with butter  
stick my legs in plaster  
tell me lies about Vietnam”

Well, half a century later and they're still lying. Our politicians lie about our involvement in illegal wars of aggression, they lie about the criminal use of torture, they even lie about which house they are living in; they lie about having to 'save the banks' with our money, they lie about the real cause of climate change, they lie about the failure of animal experiments, they lie about the abject lack of animal welfare on our farms, they lie about the damage done to human health by meat and dairy foods... they lie.

So we must tell the truth. And we will tell the truth. And we know where this treasure trove of hope, justice and truth is to be found – on the ballot paper, next to Animals Count, X marks the spot! So take every chance to tell everyone – vote for Animals Count: it's a vote for truth, a vote for hope, a vote for justice!

Thank you!