

Will the new bury the old?

A party in power for too long: the government brazenly corrupt and incompetent. Its power-crazed Prime Minister has left it in tatters. It lives with the sense of impending electoral meltdown. The shiny young opposition leader looks good but dodges explaining how he would do things better...

This sick and tired government proudly boasts of a massive and audacious expansion of the transport infrastructure, since it's "good for the economy." Of course, the figures are rubbish, and the environmental impacts are disastrous and self-evident. The fingerprints of growth-mad capitalist lobby groups are smudged all over the relevant White Papers.

Meanwhile a small but growing band of die-hard eco-protesters, fresh from other (partial) victories, is squaring up for a big fight in the South of England, where a "flagship" part of the overall expansion plan is being planned. It has new tactics, new blood, confidence and energy. Accused of being single-issue, it has a good critique of not just the expansion scheme but a broader critique of senseless consumption. Not all its supporters necessarily endorse this broader critique. It is (tacitly) supported by a coalition of locals and big Green NGOs. No-one knows if the big NGOs will hold their nerve if the State shows its teeth...

The more realistic among the eco-protestors suspect that the immediate battle is already lost. Instead, they hope to win the war; they hope to raise the financial and political cost of the government's plans. They hope to force it to relent, and move away from the underlying assumptions of 'growth' and 'personal freedom to travel' at the cost of the wider social good.

Newbury 1996 or Heathrow 2007? You tell me.

What's different

- Everyone's older and wiser. Except those of us who aren't.
- The stakes are immeasurably higher; India and China didn't give a toss about Britain's road building schemes. If we plant runways like we used to plant bypasses, they will laugh- and emit- all the way to the apocalypse.
- This is, allegedly, a Labour government. That may have implications for union support. Of course, union support was just so decisive last time around...
- Locals tend to be against airports in a way that was far more complicated in the anti-roads struggle (bypasses promised less noise and air pollution). Though this is offset (hah hah) by the Jobs For Honest Working Men and Women argument. Toss me a coin already...
- Ten years ago MI5 and Special Branch were looking for something to do after the fun and games of counter-insurgency warfare in Northern Ireland had diminished. They tried to groom eco-protesters as terrorists, and the new excuse for their fat salaries. It didn't really fly (hah hah). Now that everyone's proudly fighting the Global War on Terror, the mud from that allegation might stick a little better. They sure have a whole bunch of nastier laws and toys to use...

Who will win?

Who can say? Will it feel like we win when we lose? As the man said, "all history repeats itself- first time as tragedy, second time as farce."

Further Reading

On Newbury- "Battle for the Trees"

On Aviation and the UK

On the stakes being higher

On non-violent direct action

On aviation

On where to spend your summer holidays

www.godhaven.org.uk/pubgh.html

www.foe.co.uk/resource/reports/aviation_tyndall_summary.pdf

http://pubs.giss.nasa.gov/abstracts/2007/Hansen_etal_2.html

www.seedsforchange.org.uk

www.planestupid.com

www.climatecamp.org.uk