

PROGRESSIVE ALLIANCE – REVISITED

GREEN HOUSE THINK-TANK

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In July last year we published ‘The Green Case for a Progressive Pact’

http://www.greenhousethinktank.org/uploads/4/8/3/2/48324387/green_house_progressive_alliance_july_2016.pdf

Now, following the general election results and looking ahead, we are revisiting these issues.

Contributions from Rupert Read, Victor Anderson, Neal Lawson, Jonathan Essex and Sara Parkin.

THE ‘PROGRESSIVE ALLIANCE’ RE-ASSESSED, POST-GENERAL ELECTION: A FAILED STRATEGY

Rupert Read

Summary:

This set of General Election results, so far as g/Green voices in British politics is concerned, have been very poor.

Green House published a report, in which I was an author, in favour of the ‘Progressive Alliance’ (PA) concept, last year. A major process of reflection upon that concept is now called for - and, I argue, a process of retrenchment, among the would-be partners in the alliance. *This* is an initial effort to begin such reflection.

We have to accept – *especially* those of us, like myself, who were enthusiastic backers of the concept – that the ‘progressive alliance’, while it might have helped slightly to take down Prime Minister Theresa May’s ambition for a new overall majority, massively shot the Green Party in the foot.

Together with an unwise general effort on the part of the Green Party to paint itself in policy-terms as centring its identity on being Left/progressive, the PA. has taken Greens further and further from their core ‘ecologicistic’ identity, and from seriousness about the limits to growth; it has given many Green voters the sense that they might as well vote Labour; it has undercut Green potential appeal to small-c conservatives.

It may even, through funneling votes to a Labour Party that remains wedded to FPTP, and is now close to contention for government on its own, have made it *less* likely that proportional representation will be achieved in this country: a disastrously counter-productive outcome.

And the P.A. met of course with almost total rejection from other parties, a rejection likely to become permanent, now that Greens have become weakened much further. For why would Labour have any interest whatsoever in a p.a. with the Green Party, now that that Party is now so tiny? And why would Labour go for proportional representation (PR) now, now that the current first past the post voting system (FPTP) has worked so well to funnel voters (including very notably hundreds of thousands of Greens) into voting for Labour?

Yes, it is of course true – and encouraging – that many more than voted Green on June 8 *wanted* to vote for Green. But they felt the Green Party had given them ‘permission’ to vote for others (mainly, Labour). And there is little prospect of them returning to the Green Party unless (senior) Greens give them a real reason to.

My response is: Greens need to return to Green fundamentals. Post-growth ecologism, which sets the Green Party apart equally from ALL the other parties.

This is *incompatible* with the primary self-identification as ‘Left’/‘progressive’ that propelled the progressive alliance.

Moreover, there is in any case now no credible stance that the Green Party could take up in any imagined progressive alliance negotiations – because the squeeze on the Green Party has left it with no 2nd places, and the Green Party is now nowhere ahead of Labour.

The progressive alliance strategy is comprehensively dead, unworkable. Instead, Greens need to be *g/Green*. And perhaps, through being so, to find a way of succeeding in roughly the manner that UKIP did. For UKIP transformed British politics, while only gaining a relatively small number of elected Parliamentarians.

Green House published a report, in which I was a prominent author, in favour of the ‘Progressive Alliance’ concept, last year:

http://www.greenhousethinktank.org/uploads/4/8/3/2/48324387/green_house_progressive_alliance_july_2016.pdf

A year on, and it is clear that we live in interesting times: in some ways, too interesting. This election may have gone relatively well for Corbyn – but we must be honest enough to accept that it has gone pretty disastrously wrong for g/Greens. Ecology was virtually entirely absent from the election campaign. The Conservatives, now governing once again, ‘won’ (sic) the election with a manifesto promising less than zero, eco-wise. Labour, the main beneficiaries of the election, promised “faster economic growth” as the linchpin of their manifesto: an idea directly contrary to Green House’s *raison d’être*. Meanwhile, the Green Party saw its vote-share more than halved, failed to make any gains, and lost its second-places.

This election has been the worst setback for the Green Party since the post-1989 meltdown – which means that for the vast majority of members of that Party it has been the worst ever / in living memory.

I was a strong backer of Caroline Lucas’s Progressive Alliance bid, throughout the last two years. I (still) believe it was a noble idea, worth attempting. However, I believe that we in Green House, and most of all in fact *all* those who have been the PA concept’s backers (this document is among other things a massive ‘mea culpa’, and I hope that others will engage in the same soul-searching) have a deep responsibility to examine critically what has happened at this election. For the progressive alliance concept has proven to have two calamitous consequences:

- 1) **It proved impossible to pursue the ‘Progressive Alliance’ concept without the Green Party giving up its highly-distinct ecologistic Green identity** and without falling into *a vapid embrace of ‘progressivism’ and an outdated embrace of being ‘Left’*.¹ The former is dangerous because as g/Greens we actually have deep *concerns* about the idea of ‘progress’: it is the ideology of ‘progress’ that actually fuels the growthism and reckless technophilia that we are, above all, fighting. Only if the standard vision of progress is *replaced* by a thoroughly revamped vision, of ‘real progress’, is the concept of ‘progressive alliance’ acceptable. But that message has been swamped, marginalised: growthism and technophilia are hegemonic, and virtually no-one has understood that g/Greens *don’t believe* in progress if progress means (as it means for Labour, and virtually everyone) endless economic growth and endless industrial expansionism, endlessly rising ‘living standards’, endlessly more tech.

When we greens – including Caroline Lucas – continue to speak of the alleged need for an economic ‘stimulus’ (!), we have failed disastrously to distinguish an ecologistic, post-growth vision at all from Labour et al. Furthermore, the term ‘progressive’ is so vapid that it can apparently include even someone like Molly Scott Cato’s opponent in Bristol West – an anti-Corbyn, pro-Trident, not-pro-PR Blairite. The term ‘progressive’ has, in general parlance, in fact come to include the entire Labour Party – quite contrary to our initial intentions, when people

¹ See my warning, which went unheeded, about how crucial it would be to maintain thoroughly a distinctive Green identity, in a progressive alliance, here: http://www.greenhousethinktank.org/uploads/4/8/3/2/48324387/green_house_progressive_alliance_july_2016.pdf, especially at p.7-8. But even I didn’t see clearly just how impossibly difficult this would prove to be, even if it were tried (which it wasn’t, not enough).

such as Caroline and myself spoke of a ‘bottom-up’ progressive alliance. This is highly dangerous – including, crucially, for the Green Party and its prospects.

Likewise, the latter, ‘Leftism’, is dangerous because for g/Greens [other political spectra](#) are more important than the vague, outdated, hegemonic Left vs Right spectrum. *If we accept an equation of progressive alliance with leftism, then we are sidelining [the absolute centrality of ecology](#), and accepting the debate on Labour’s terms, [on ‘Corbynite’ terms](#). This is catastrophic for ecologism, and post-growth.* Furthermore it then becomes easy for Labour, especially where they have a decent candidate, to make the case that g/Greens simply ought to vote Labour. *This is what has happened at this election*, across virtually the whole country. Voters felt that the Green Party was giving them permission to vote Labour in droves; Greens have also of course come under terrible pressure to endorse Labour or to withdraw candidacies; and so forth.

‘Leftism’ and ‘Progressivism’ alike have no concept of limits to growth. They basically involve an appeal to voters that they (voters) will have more stuff, endlessly. This is untenable for g/Greens, and contradicts Green House’s *raison d’être*. What the Green Party badly needs is to articulate a post-growth future seriously, so that it becomes imaginable to people.² Green House plans to offer some draft such articulation at the present time. But let us be clear: outside a few isolated voices (such as former MP Alan Simpson) Labour has no interest in post-growth. None. And thus there is no interest in Labour, in reality, in facing up to climate reality, as per Green House’s report and project on this:

http://www.greenhousethinktank.org/uploads/4/8/3/2/48324387/intro_final.pdf .

Furthermore, the pro-‘progressive alliance’ positioning has had a further, dangerous and *counter-productive* effect, an effect that was broadly foreseeable unless Greens insisted on their distinctiveness throughout and rebuffed crude common understandings of Green as part of ‘the Left’: the Green Party’s *appeal to Conservative voters has been reduced*. [This is avoidable](#) (if Greens ditch the PA) and of course highly regrettable, given that Greens have huge potential to appeal to green-leaning small-c conservatives, as opposed to the neoliberals who rule the contemporary Conservative Party. The reduction of Green appeal to c/Conservatives also, paradoxically, may *reduce* the likelihood of the Conservatives being defeated: for, in order for them to be defeated and actually turfed out of Number 10, they probably have to lose votes (surprise surprise). They are less likely to lose votes to Greens (or Lib Dems) if Greens (or Lib Dems) are not in any position to attract small-c conservative voters who have been betrayed by their neoliberal party – i.e. if those voters see these Parties as linked quasi-umbilically to Labour.

By throwing their lot in with the PA, Greens have basically said to Conservative voters: “Don’t even think about voting for us. We don’t even really want your votes. We *define* ourselves by not being you”. Outside certain metropolitan bubbles, this is a disastrous message, both in terms of Green (or Lib Dem, similarly) appeal (which ought not to be defined by the Left-Right spectrum, which is nowadays to a considerable extent [eclipsed by the Green-Grey / Post-](#)

² Thanks to Paul de Hoest for this important point.

[Growth/Growth spectrum](#)) and in terms of actually practically beating Conservatives (who will not be beaten unless 'we' win some of their votes).

- 2) **The other parties refused to engage with the progressive alliance bid at all.** Barring some limited moves by (a couple of local parties in) the Lib Dems, there was no take-up of the Green offer over the past two years/months, nor any positive reciprocation of Greens' extraordinary (excessive?) generosity in standing down in seat after seat to try to reduce May's majority. In particular, there was literally zero take-up of the idea by Labour. Labour proved itself utterly incapable of transcending its tribal history. Perhaps this isn't at all surprising – Jeremy Corbyn calls the Labour Party itself the 'real' progressive alliance; John McDonnell, while he has been helpful to Green House in the past, is strictly tribal when it comes to the Green party: in conversation, he urges Greens interested in a progressive alliance to (surprise surprise) join Labour.

Labour were privately offered, a month out from General Election day, a remarkable deal in which Greens would stand aside in a further 12 seats (beyond those that they had already committed to standing aside in), if Labour would only stand aside in the Isle of Wight, a key Green target because it was a seat in which Greens are growing and in which Greens came ahead of Labour and Lib Dems in 2015. This unprecedented offer was spurned by Labour. The Green Party tried really hard to co-operate with Labour. Labour emphatically, absolutely refused. It is that simple: Labour has zero interest in being part of any progressive alliance arrangement – and will have less than zero now, having been strengthened unexpectedly at the election. In 'game theory', the rational strategy among potentially hostile potential allies is widely understood to be 'Tit for tat'. You start off by doing something generous. If you get some reciprocal generosity in return, then you go further down the path of generosity. But if you get rebuffed, if you get treated with hostility or with contempt, then you stop being generous; you ensure that the other learns that you are not a dupe.

The leading political demographer Pat Dade put the 'Tit for tat' point to me like this, in email correspondence about the matter at hand:

"Teddy Roosevelt encapsulated this in his famous meme, "Talk softly...and carry a big stick". The big stick doesn't have to be something to beat others with, which is how this is often interpreted. The big stick can be something the 'other guy' thinks he needs – the stick he can use to win – which is what he really wants. Your stick is a means to his end – from his point of view. Insight: You wouldn't be at the table with him if he didn't think you had a big stick. Now ask yourself – did Labour ever think the Green Party had a big stick? Looking at their reactions to the Progressive Alliance the answer is a resounding 'NO'. It was a fantasy that if the Green Party does something ethical then it will be reciprocated in kind by Labour. It was a self-delusion to think a 'power-player' would do anything other than try to control any move presented to them. The Labour Party in 2017 treated the Green Party in the same way the Conservative Party treated their coalition partners the Lib Dems, in 2015."

Greens have been (predictably, according to Dade) taken for fools by Labour. Greens have been treated with contempt. It would be absurd, under these circumstances, for the Green Party to go

on the same way. (The definition of insanity: keeping on doing the same thing, in hope of different results.) Labour need to understand that there are real negative consequences to their actions, their tribalism. Unless they spontaneously change their tune (very very unlikely), then the Progressive Alliance needs to be rescinded. It ends here. Then maybe by 2022-3, they (Labour) might even be ready to actually consider the idea seriously... (A *sine qua non* for Greens to take it seriously then will need to be: their embrace of PR. Greens must not ever make the mistake again of entering into arrangements with Parties who are not categorically pro-PR.)

Together, these two arguments that I have made make a very powerful case for abandoning the progressive alliance experiment.

The PA experiment was a noble effort, in my opinion at least. It was noble to try to play politics differently, and to try to get the awful anti-green May government out. And it has of course had some upsides: such as presumably helping in some of the seats that Labour gained from the Conservatives (more on this below). But the bigger picture, of [a Labour Party committed explicitly to faster economic growth](#) (including HS2, airport expansion, road-building, coal-mining, Trident-renewal, nuclear power and much much more) Labour, as surely as the Conservatives, will in due course 'lead' us all into eco-perdition), crucially against PR, and so forth, remains stubbornly intact. And in any case Labour has simply stayed as utterly tribal as ever. The experiment of the Progressive Alliance, we must be honest enough to admit, has on balance failed. It has in fact *backfired* against Greens, disastrously.

Greens need to be able to engage in sufficiently full and deep critique of Labour, without reservation. Yes, Labour would be better in the short-run for most people; that is partly why we wanted the PA in the first place. But in the medium-long run, Labour could even be *worse* than the Conservatives: for they (Labour) are determined to grow the economy as rapidly as possible, with deficit financing, and to ensure that as many of us as possible live beyond our means for as long as possible. In the context of the limits to growth, g/Green criticism of Labour is *just as profound* as our criticism of the Conservatives, possibly in the medium-long run even more so. We must engage fully in that robust criticism, and position ourselves as the only sane alternative to this growthist madness.

But engaging in such entirely robust criticism, and not aligning ourselves with either of the old parties, is *incompatible* with the PA p.a. programme.

Finally, and decisively: after these bad results, Greens have no constituency second places. *None* (in any seat where the major parties stand). That means that a progressive alliance *cannot* work electorally. If the Green Party goes in for it again, they will be simply engaging in a complete act of self-sacrifice. They would then be allowing a situation in which there will be calls for Greens to stand aside *everywhere* (save for Brighton Pavilion, which now looks pretty safe next time, even without a PA and even given boundary changes). That is not an electoral strategy! Greens need instead to find a way forward that works for the Green Party. Because Greens now once again have no second places, that way *cannot* be the PA

Some will say that, everything I have written above notwithstanding, still the Green Party may have helped prevent Theresa May from achieving an overall majority. Is that not worth it? But at this point the advocate of the PA faces a dilemma. If it is true that the PA helped prevent May from being a majority-PM, then logically it is also true that the p.a. helped Labour achieve an unexpectedly strong result without making any commitment to electoral reform, such that Labour is now closer than it would otherwise have been to assembling an overall majority on its own under FPTP. In other words, *the progressive alliance, such as it was has helped Labour not to have to change its policy to one of backing electoral reform. It has perpetuated FPTP.* For just ask yourself this simple counter-factual: is it more likely that Labour would now be actively considering PR, if it had not moved forward (with the aid of the PA) on June 8th? The answer, obviously, is yes. So, a horrible irony: *by supporting the PA (unilaterally) Greens have made it less likely that Labour will change its policy to embrace electoral reform.*

This is a tragic, disastrous result. Greens have inadvertently set the cause of electoral reform in this country *back*. That mistake must not be repeated.

What then is the alternative to the PA? Greens are going to need to do some rebuilding, intellectual/ideological, as well as practical. Greens need to work to get people to understand that you cannot simply corral Green politics into some crude Left or progressive umbrella. [Ecologism is a whole different approach to politics](#). There is a huge task of 'political education' implicit here. Green House hopes to play an important part in that.

Thus my central *political* strategy recommendation is for the Green Party to can the progressive alliance and instead to focus on setting out how, in the main, Greens are neither left nor right nor centre but out in front, ahead of their time: but how that time might finally be approaching, as the limits to growth start to crunch in. Greens need to re-assert the identity of their Party as *Green*.

Take as an example the Party's messaging during this General Election campaign on health. That messaging consisted almost exclusively in trying to claim that we were more Left-wing than Labour on treating the NHS as a truly public service. That message worked in the days of Miliband; whereas, *whether or not* the message is true, *it is absolutely hopeless in the era of a socialist leader like Corbyn*. What Greens should be doing, instead, is putting their prime focus upon the way that only the Green Party has a joined-up, green approach to health: only Green policies tackle the *causes* of ill-health. That is a common-sense, financially-sound approach with very wide appeal *including to c/Conservative voters*. The same approach applies across the whole field of politics. Greens need to be genuinely Green, not aim, hopelessly, to be lefter-than-thou.

To conclude. Clearly, we live in febrile, *exciting* times. Will the tide flow further in Labour's favour? Or: might it be able to reverse, and flow in the *Greens'* favour? One thing is for sure, such reversibility of fortune cannot favour the Greens unless they are clearly distinct from Labour. This is the main message that g/Greens are likely to draw from Jeremy Gilbert's striking analysis of the general election, here: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/uk/jeremy-gilbert/epochal-election->

[welcome-to-era-of-platform-politics](#) . If Greens keep desperately seeking to remain under the PA banner, then a switch from Labour to Greens wouldn't be *reversing* anything, and so plainly would not occur.

In sum: the game has changed with this election. The Progressive Alliance is now an irrelevance, at least for Greens; PR is probably irrelevant for some time to come too, off Labour's agenda (if it was ever anywhere on it).

Greens need once again to contemplate the difficult march to change and power on their own. And perhaps learn from the extraordinary achievement of UKIP – who appear likely to have changed this country forever (with the EU referendum), without ever winning a large number of Parliamentary seats.

It really will not do for Greens to bask in reflected glory from the 'success' of the 'progressive' (sic) Parties – Labour, the Lib Dems (!), Plaid – on June 8. *Greens* did not succeed, outside of Brighton Pavilion – *on the contrary*. If Greens go on talking about being 'progressives' all the time, then they merely fuel the idea that there is no harm in voting for parties *other than theirs*. The Progressive Alliance has set g/Greens back a couple of years, maybe much more.

Our living planet literally does not have time for Greens to make the same mistake again.

Thus my 2 core recommendations:

- * An end to the 'Progressive Alliance' delusion;
- * A return to the Green Party's core identity, as ecological – only this can give voters a significant enough *reason* to prefer Greens to Labour, and only this can enable Greens to appeal across the board. To be not left, nor right, nor centre, but out in front: the Party of the future.

PROGRESSIVE ALLIANCE – NEXT TIME

Victor Anderson

Many Greens are writing off the Progressive Alliance campaign in the general election as a failure and even a disaster. This seems to me to be wrong –

- The Green Party, for the first time ever, played a key role in determining the outcome of a UK national election. By giving support (momentum in fact) to the 'Progressive Alliance' idea early on in the campaign, and showing it was serious by actually standing down candidates, the Green Party helped to break people out of thinking the election result was a foregone conclusion, and helped to create something with a sense of being much more broad-based and widely acceptable than simply a pro-Corbyn campaign.
- As a result, the Green Party has helped to prevent a hard Brexit and stop unjust Tory policies for the economy and public services in their tracks. For anyone indifferent between the

Tories and Labour this is of no concern, but it makes a real difference to the lives of millions of people.

- In terms of the self-interest of the Green Party, we should note two things. One is the goodwill towards the Party which now exists amongst many Labour and Lib Dem supporters. The other is seeing off two very specific threats to the Green Party presented by the Tories through the voting system. Brexit will halve the number of elected full-time Green politicians in England & Wales, because MEPs are elected by PR. The election result even makes it possible now that Brexit may never happen. More definitely, the Tory policy of electing the London Assembly by First Past the Post would have cut out Greens (Lib Dems too), and their policy of getting rid of second-choice votes (Supplementary Vote) in mayoral elections would have made it very hard for Greens (and again Lib Dems) to run effective mayoral campaigns. The Green Party would have been left, outside of local government and Northern Ireland, with one seat in the House of Lords.

Measuring the result solely by the Green Party's number of votes is a shallow and misleading approach. But it does make a difference, as does the cut in Short money for work in Parliament which has been one of the consequences. Greens achieved no second places in any constituencies, weakening the Party's position for the next election.

However we cannot assume that the fall in the Green Party vote was solely due to the 'Progressive Alliance' campaign. As the campaign developed, there was a clear 'presidential' focus on the two candidates for Prime Minister. This was largely Theresa May's choice, because she thought she could easily beat Labour if it was identified strongly with Corbyn. For the media and general public, this made the election easier to grasp, clearing away the complexities, including clearing away the Green Party's distinctive arguments and even the Brexit arguments that the election was initially supposed to be all about.

Also it is crucial that the policy differences between Corbyn-Labour and the Green Party were far more difficult to articulate than with Blair or Brown versions of Labour. It is true that there were differences over Brexit, but those received little attention. The distinctiveness of the Green Party's environment-centred policies did not get much of a hearing either. There was a lot more going on in the election than the question of Progressive Alliance.

My conclusion is not that there was no problem. The costs and benefits, sacrifices and rewards, of Progressive Alliance were shared out very unfairly. Labour held and gained seats, the Green Party lost votes. This doesn't mean that a Progressive Alliance at the next election – which could be held at any time from November 2017 to June 2022 – is necessarily a bad idea. But it has to be negotiated and organised differently, and can of course be organised more thoughtfully and in less of a hurry than it was this summer.

In thinking this through, we should start by acknowledging that this time round there really was no Progressive Alliance. There was a campaign in favour of one, some local agreements, some unilateral decisions to stand down, and also some anti-Tory and anti-hard-Brexit tactical voting campaigns.

The best situation next time would be a nationally-agreed Alliance to elect a broad-based alternative to the Tory Government, in which Labour committed to either stand down some of its own candidates, or to constitutional reforms which the Greens would benefit from (e.g. PR for the House of Lords). This is what I think Labour should be challenged to agree to, even though it is contrary to the party tribalism shared by most of the Labour Party, and certainly by the people around Corbyn. I am not optimistic that we will get that.

There is another possible focus. This is pressure on the people and organisations campaigning for Progressive Alliance and tactical voting, to urge them to give a fair share of support to the Green Party in return for Green support for those campaigns, including the support given by selectively standing down candidates. This would need to include pressing for those campaigns to urge a Green vote in non-marginal seats and in local government, and making part of their campaigns the advocacy of constitutional reform (again e.g. PR for the House of Lords). A fairer society – a fairer politics.

Currently we do not know who will be running those campaigns and websites, except for Compass. But this view could still be put forward in a general way in debate about the next election, with also a more specific version containing proposals to be put to Compass.

There is something else to do if we are concerned with the future of green politics. This is to shift some more attention towards the state of the planet. Labour politicians often have noble aims about social justice, but within a limited context. They are not good at looking at the big picture. The big picture, as any intelligent alien looking at Earth could tell you very quickly, is one of a warming planet with increasingly unstable weather, in the early stages of a mass extinction period with deteriorating ecosystems, and rapidly multiplying numbers of people, livestock, cars, buildings, etc, etc.

Unless the Green Party can shift some of the public, media, and political attention to that larger context, turning it from a perception of scientists and intelligent aliens to being just the common-sense understanding of how things currently obviously are, it will be trapped into doing not much more than supporting one or other of the existing political options on offer. The choice between those existing options really does matter. But waking up to the big picture matters too.

PROGRESSIVE ALLIANCE AND THE GREEN PARTY

Neal Lawson

The general election brought mixed results for the Green Party. For the country the result was better than could have been expected. The Tories lost ground and with it the prospects for hard Brexit and austerity. The Green Party, through the Progressive Alliance (PA), played a big part in this. But the Party saw its vote share drop. Hence a real feeling of ambivalence about the result. The country needs a thriving, confident and influential Green Party. So the next few months of debate really matter. Here I want to set out the achievements of the Party, the role of the PA and ideas about future strategy.

First though a bit of context. I'm a member of the Labour Party and chair of Compass, the good society pressure group. Compass has been greatly influenced by the Greens. We started out as a

Labour-orientated group but the involvement of Caroline Lucas and other Greens made us change our constitution so that anyone could join us if they shared our good society values. Many Greens have and it has made us a much richer organisation. Today we have members of all progressive parties and none that share our good society goals of much greater equality, democracy and sustainability. This pluralism has made us so much stronger.

After Brexit and Trump the idea of a progressive alliance, which we had been quietly pushing, took off. And in a defensive environment, where everyone presumed politics was all about stopping a Tory landslide and the hardest possible Brexit, the idea of the PA took off again when the snap election was called.

Like the Green Party, Compass wasn't ready for the election. We presumed we had until 2020 to build relationships, ideas and organisation for a project that felt to us more cultural than electoral. We had to decide quickly whether to sit the election out or do what we could to minimise the threat of the regressive alliance in the shape of the Tories and UKIP. As an ideas and campaigning organisation we had never been involved with electoral politics. We had to learn fast.

The rest you know. Theresa May was stopped in her tracks. Her slender majority with the DUP reduces the chances of a hard Brexit and destroys the possibilities of further draconian right wing legislation. It is the Tories that are now in crisis – hanging on until something or someone turns up. This is a better outcome than anyone could have expected when the election was called on 18th April.

The Greens were instrumental in this huge political turn around. By putting the common good before party interest in some seats you did two things: you had a major impact on stopping the Tory juggernaut and you showed what a plural and mature form of politics looks like. It may not feel like it, but the country owes you a huge debt and a tremendous amount of goodwill now exists out there towards the party.

But the pluralism and big hearts of the Green Party were not the only factor in the result. Much to everyone's surprise, even his, Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour offer struck a real chord. Labour appealed to the young as never before and Momentum helped unprecedented numbers campaign effectively for the Party. The offer and the organisation combined with the fear of a Tory landslide to produce a remarkable vote share for Labour. By securing wins in unlikely places such as Canterbury and Kensington Labour has held the Tories back and put itself within shouting distance of power.

The downside of course was the effect on the Green Party vote and hope in seats such as Bristol West evaporating. First Past the Post piled up votes for the two main parties in a way few saw coming. I don't think anyone understands it yet – but social media seems to be allowing the re-aggregation of support around Labour and the Tories just when we thought we were in the era of multi-party politics. At one level it looks like a return to the two party politics of the past. But below the surface things can and will keep shifting. In a networked society loyalties can move far and fast and are unlikely to stick. Just as people move from one platform to the next in the rest of their lives,

from Instagram to WhatsApp, so the surges in politics to and from the SNP, the Lib Dems, the Greens, Brexit and now Labour will continue to ebb and flow. One in five electors said they planned to vote tactically last June according to a study from the Electoral Reform Society³. And 68% of votes didn't count. Both the volatility of our politics and the unfairness of the voting system are for all to see. In this world no party owns the voters – there is no 'our vote' to be won or lost. For the Greens and everyone – this is both a curse and a blessing.

So given all that, what next for the Party?

Of course, I would say this wouldn't I, but for all the reasons stated above, participating in and endorsing the idea of a progressive alliance was the right thing for the Party to do. Non-tribalism now paves the only way to create a non-tribal politics in which Greens are fairly represented. The road will be long to achieve this goal – but it is the only path the Greens can go down.

The rise in support for PR in Labour, even given the 'one more heave' mentality of some, is because Labour people increasingly know it is the right thing to do, and building networks and alliances is the only way to win elections and sustain a radical government. Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) are passing pro-PR resolutions and the number of Labour MPs backing PR is at an all-time high. Some CLPs, such as Richmond, have passed motions saying the local party should be able to decide not to stand a candidate where it cannot win. Old opponents of PR are changing their minds. The unions are opening up to it. Labour might embrace PR not through electoral necessity but it is possibly more likely through the recognition that a new plural politics is the only way to really transform society. The Greens have a key role in showing the way.

Of course the PA could have been handled better. Compass could and possibly should have taken a more partisan role to help the Greens in some seats. The Green Party itself need not have stood down in some constituencies and could have done so in others with better effect, for example in Southampton Test, which Labour lost by a few dozen votes. With a few more wins from the 60-odd constituencies in which the progressive vote was bigger than the Tory vote, Jeremy Corbyn would be Prime Minister and Caroline Lucas, in a PA Government, could have been Secretary of State for Transport or some other high-level post. We could have been banning fracking and re-nationalising the railways if the PA had worked even more effectively.

Of course Labour's response to the PA is hugely frustrating. The national leadership have little sense of fairness or solidarity when it comes to tactical voting or candidates generously standing aside. But turning around the Labour juggernaut on pluralism was always going to be a long and difficult task. Class and tribalism are burned deep into Labour's psyche. But things are changing – albeit slowly. Labour has to be won over to PR and pluralism. Many Labour MPs know they owe their seat to the Greens. Momentum has a spirit of openness and pluralism that challenges the old tribalism.

³ <https://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/latest-news-and-research/publications/the-2017-general-election-report/>

This is the door we need to push at, not to join them in their tribalism, but keep on doing the right thing in the right way.

The Greens have many attributes. Caroline Lucas and Jonathan Bartley are impressive party leaders. Other politicians such as Molly Scott Cato, Sian Berry and Amelia Womack are real assets. But a strategy of believing that the unique success of Caroline in the unique seat of Brighton Pavilion can be repeated elsewhere is setting a benchmark of success that FPTP makes it very difficult to meet. Especially against a revived Labour Party that is appealing to many party members, let alone supporters. So what should the Party do?

As I've written before [here](#), the Greens can learn a lot from the influencing strategy of UKIP while totally rejecting its policies. UKIP changed the country but never relied or focused on winning at Westminster. This suggests three areas to think about.

First, electoral strategy. Votes and electoral pressure are the currency of politics but there was only ever a limited influence you can exert in this way. Support for UKIP was big enough and dense enough to threaten Tory and Labour seats in ways the Greens cannot. So target one or two constituencies and one or two councils. Or maybe better still, focus on mayoral votes, police commissioners – and anywhere there is PR. Dig deep in the right places, in the cosmopolitan cities where sustainability, cultural and democratic issues are going to be more commonly held. Build on the good result in South Belfast and start organising now. This pits you against Labour – but that is okay – they will be seats where only a progressive party can win and the Tories are a long way behind. In so doing you can force Labour onto your terrain.

In the seats where there is little or no chance of exerting electoral influence, the party will have more time to focus on the second element of the strategy – campaigning. My advice would be to pick one national issue on each of the environment, equality and democracy – where you, and only you, can make the headway. The Green Party has to 'weaponise' climate change. Rising water levels and falling air standards, the mass movement of people because of climate change, increases in food and energy prices – these issues and more, as you know, have raced up the political agenda and need to be capitalised on. Maybe the Party should make more of the Green New Deal. Whatever the issues it needs national and sustained effort. Every Party and member pulling behind the right issue. You must focus.

In terms of democracy the Green Party should be leading the fight for PR for the Commons, for local government and a second chamber. First Past the Post no longer delivers strong and stable government. With support for PR in Labour rising – we all have to help run an overwhelming campaign for change.

The third and final element of the strategy is the most exciting. In terms of equality the party could run a campaign on the case for a basic income and tie that in with a shorter working week. Such policies could be massively popular and support for both is rising. But again you must focus.

It is the role of the Greens to prefigure the future both in terms of policy and political culture. Yes the Party manifesto was good and you practice internal democracy. But, in all fairness, you are hardly setting the world alight in terms of an exciting vision of the good society and coherent policy agenda that gets us there. Joining up work insecurity, basic income, a shorter working week etc., into a popular and compelling narrative should not be impossible. Owning the future in this way will appeal to many voters. Again this is what UKIP did so well around insecurity but that told the story through the lens of immigration and the EU. But they did it relentlessly. The Greens need their own story and then should stick with it.

And despite the fact that you are better than the rest, the Party hardly looks like the 21st century organisation. You employ a clunky form of democracy when you should be making participation deeper and more responsive. The fact that it takes so long to change policy, in a digital age, holds the Party and its leadership back. Learn from the likes of Podemos in Spain and The Alternative in Denmark and transform the thing you can most easily – yourselves and your Party.

The trick is to get the balance between electoral politics, campaigning and prefiguring right. If the party spent a third of its time and resources on each then that would feel about right.

Of course, it is not just about what the party does. It is also up to people like me and others to help run successful campaigns for PR in Labour and to boost the pluralists and the environmentalists. And it is up to Compass to think hard about how any PA in the future could ensure fairer outcomes.

You are amazing people in what can be an amazing Party. You are blessed with strong leadership. You believe the right things and have passion for them. Build on all these strengths. Your job, under FPTP, is to lead by example – which is a role that is as joyous as it is frustrating. It means you must not conflate being in office with being in power. It is about the right change being made. Neither Farage nor Gandhi held high office – but they made change happen. If you can only win so many votes because of the injustice of the voting system – then focus on winning hearts and minds.

The Party has a choice – to go into tighter and tighter circles of tribalism or be the pluralist change you wish to see in the world. While it felt bad, the 2017 was the second best result in vote share the party has ever had in a general election. Build on it. The future of progressive politics relies so much on you.

INSTEAD LET'S OPT FOR A PR PACT –

But not lose sight of what is required for a Green Future

Jonathan Essex

There never was a Progressive Alliance in 2017 – or was there? There was no agreement between Labour and the Liberal Democrats and no inclusion of Proportional Representation (PR) in all the so-called ‘Progressive Alliance’ parties’ manifestos either. The condition to proceed with the notion of the Progressive Alliance (PA), *if and only if*, there was this commitment across the alliance to an even unspecified system of Proportional Representation (PR) was the Green Party’s mandated position, voted on by members at the Spring Conference in 2017. This condition was never met. However, in reality, the continued momentum of the ‘idea’ of a progressive alliance, both before and after the calling of the General Election, helped to allow a campaigning message of a progressive alliance to proceed. This was used by Labour, in particular, to successfully target many voters who had previously voted Green, or for that matter Lib Dem or UKIP

In actual fact the idea as to whether or not *the country* wished to proceed with a Progressive Alliance had perhaps been at least partially decided much earlier. The PA idea came initially from Caroline Lucas and received support from the soft left think Compass but was rejected by Tim Farron, Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell although there was some localised support among the three parties. As many commentators astutely note elections are not just won in the short election period itself, but in the way in which the arguments are framed and presented in the run-up for months (or even years) beforehand. In the same way, the (notion that ‘progressives’ needed to vote tactically to save Britain from another five years of Tory government was something that exercised the minds of some in politics who saw parliament as the primary focus of political activity but this did not extend across the population as a whole and certainly not to the activists in Momentum.

Additionally, the Labour party’s second leadership campaign in particular helped to raise the profile, authority and popularity of Jeremy Corbyn while Theresa May’s ‘safe pair of hands’ served to assure Tory activists and Brexit supporters that Brexit was ‘safe in Tory hands’.

Simultaneously, prolonged discussions about the Progressive Alliance, including within and by the Green Party, had similarly focused the electoral choice in the eyes of the public as between the Conservatives and Labour. The Lib Dems had not yet recovered from the trauma of believing they had actually been partners, rather than supplicants, of the Tories in government. This framing was a new one for the Green Party, contrasting strongly with the ‘vote for what you believe in’ type campaign messages that have previously dominated since the party’s establishment.

Some thought this would be counterbalanced by the Brexit vote. While UKIP’s vote collapsed, in both the 2017 local and general election votes, many expected Brexit to provide a reason to vote tactically for the Lib Dems or Greens who supported Remain. For the Greens, actually Remain **and Reform**. But can you vote tactically for two reasons *at the same time*; to beat the Conservatives and for a different short-term outcome to reconsider Brexit? I would argue against this. Once the decision to suggest the electorate vote tactically had been confirmed, the vote share for UKIP, Lib

Dems and Green was likely to fall away. This prevented the Green party from communicating distinctive Green political messages during the campaign, particularly on climate change, localization, post growth, Citizens Income and so on. There is also the argument that in many ways Labour and the Lib Dems did not have particularly progressive policies as is evident in their position on nuclear weapons and the need for continuing economic growth.

The notion that you should vote Green to change politics and economics is quite different from the arguments put in 2017 that you should *not* vote Green because the short-term damage of a Conservative government trumps the need to continue to push to Green politics in the UK, *at this particular moment in time*. This rubs against the idea that the time for sufficient action on climate change, social justice, one planet living, trident weapons is *now*. Which should you do: the least worst thing now, or the best for our future? Do we have to make that choice? But that was not the choice made by the decision making body within the Green Party: its conference, as noted above. It did however become a strong message, used by many during the election.

One voter asked me in a local council by-election four months after the General Election, *“Is this an election where we can vote for what we believe in again, not vote tactically?”* The combination of the long-discussed notion of the *need* for a Progressive Alliance since the 2015 ‘vote for what you believe in’ general election, meant that the idea of tactical voting increasingly had the ring of political desperation. And many voters did switch their political allegiance perhaps out of tactical consideration but also perhaps because Labour, during the campaign, offered a modest renewal of social democracy that many voters, especially young voters, ‘could believe in’. This consolidated Jeremy Corbyn's position as Labour leader, energized the labour movement and proved to be disastrous for the Green Party whose policies are truly and genuinely radical. Of course, irrespective of the overall outcome of the General Election many seats up and down the country did not change parties but some quite miraculously did, like Kensington and Canterbury, which the Tories had represented for decades, or in Canterbury's case for about a century.

So, for me the question of a progressive alliance should be reviewed, and redirected. In the general election it was used to shift voting back towards a tactical two-horse race. Instead of focusing on policy coherence there is a need to focus on PR. In the general election, by focusing on those areas of policy congruence between the ‘progressive’ parties, the distinctiveness of the green message was, lost. Instead a focus on PR is clearly important, but it was not an issue that brought people to the polls; housing, work, cuts, wages, defence, the economy and EU were. An electoral pact for proportional representation - a one-off agreement to secure a long-term change that makes politics fairer - is still important, but this should not be at the expense of weakening the Green Party's public image as a radically green alternative to either the Libs Dems or Labour.

But such an agreement on PR cannot be implemented now. It is – was – not a silver bullet that replaces the need to campaign and fight for all that we greens stand for. And nor should it be. To get green ideas implemented we must espouse them, not just our values that are common or similar to other political parties (such as implicit in the notion of the progressive alliance): global social justice, environmental limits, zero-carbon action, biodiversity and localisation – all creating different, post-

growth economics. In contrast to the capture of swing voters by progressive alliance tactics and presidential style campaigning, this election also showed that this core green platform is increasingly strongly supported, even in the UK's First Past the Post elections. The Green's core vote is for longer-term, more intrinsic values and altruistic changes rather than the more short term more instrumental payback of 'what's-in-it-for-me' politics. The fact is this held up to around twice the Green Party's 2010 general election result. So although the Green Party is continuing to gain political ground, the backing of Remain and the Progressive Alliance in 2016 and 2017 did not deliver the outcomes that many had hoped for.

Meanwhile climate change, as clearly demonstrated by the recent hurricanes in the Caribbean and flooding in South Asia, is increasingly framing our possible future choices alongside environmental limits which are increasingly acting as real barriers to economic growth: such as in terms of land, food and resource constraints as well as through carbon budgets and other policy controls. This is driving political choices to being framed within one future scenario in which the rich continue to prosper and are expelling more and more people from benefitting from our 'economy'. Saskia Sassen describes this in her stark global tour of *expulsions* in 2015. The increased power of tech-giants through automation, robotisation and big data (think Uber and Airbnb), and the disempowerment and insecurity of austerity politics, the gig economy and marketised acceleration of the cost of living (house and rent prices) all add to this polarisation.

But such a view of climate change, technology and politics is one which leaves us disempowered. It is a view in which politics and society are increasingly separated, while a vision that unites is vital, yet either insufficient (e.g. still wedded to growth) or completely lacking. A radical alternative future to that, as outlined above, could be called a sunrise scenario: empowering hope. We could all share resources better together and live with lower impacts and more equally. But that option is not on offer by the mainstream political parties today so politics is played within a framework where another future is *not* possible. But what if alongside living with the impacts of our world today, we are still able to work together, to strive and transition away from our polluting impacts and in doing so, create a more positive, and radically different future? What if, while climate change surely accelerates the frequency and severity of disasters, climate apocalypse is not inevitable? That requires hope and a new form of politics and political organisation – sufficient to bring about a socially just and environmentally sustainable enough way of living to become the 'new normal'. That requires a clear, radical, green voice in mainstream institutional politics and beyond. We need to confront the current political system's collusion with corporate power, the presentation of half-truths (or even fake news) and the mantra that what we all need is more of the same. We need to transform politics and society. We need to be ambitious and radical.

That, in essence, was perhaps some of the green hope vested in the Progressive Alliance, but only if it succeeded, only if the parliament could then agree on a system of PR, only if the people assented to such a change in a referendum and if they did then vote in a progressive coalition government. If all that happened then perhaps we could get something done ... in 2030. But that did not happen, and in any case the progressive alliance idea on its own was not good or radical enough in itself. However, we do need proportional representation but that cannot be our starting point. It never

was, and certainly cannot be now. To mainstream green ideas and elect greens to empower different futures we greens must first engage in politics, from locally to globally, in meetings and in campaigning, in creating the alternatives, and challenging injustice and the lock-in of disastrous futures through non-violent direct action. We should not pin our hopes solely on pacts or alliances, or indeed just elections. These, such as whether we have a pact for PR at some future date, are but single strings to our bow, and not the first ones we can deploy now in any case.

Our start as greens must surely still be to act ourselves: to strive to be the change we wish to see in the world. Our position in politics must be to set out ways of living that are sufficiently sustainable, whilst being just, so they are plain to see. And to do this by standing against those in power, not just petitioning, campaigning and standing up to them. This means *being* political must not in the end be dominated by the will of political parties, but (as it was in the 2017 election) reflect the will of the people. We must continue to draw together as only in collective action are we sufficient to tip our culture and economics. That would be an alliance for a future worth fighting for: one for the *Common Good*.

PROGRESSIVE ALLIANCE – REDUX * [redux means revived!]

Sara Parkin

(Thanks to Victor Anderson for several insights in this paper)

Greens are quite rightly licking some rather painful wounds after their brave campaign to organise a Progressive Alliance in the 2017 General Election ended up with their own vote being halved, so Caroline Lucas is still the only Green Party MP, with other no candidate coming second anywhere. If that was not bad enough, the drop in the vote meant Caroline's 'Short money' for work in Parliament is heavily cut too.

Harsh though the consequences have been first time round, however, there are strong arguments for keeping alive the prospect of trying again. As well as some learning about how to do it better next time.

What went well?

- The Green Party, for the first time ever, played a key role in determining the outcome of a UK national election. By giving support (momentum in fact) to the 'Progressive Alliance' idea early in the campaign, and showing it was serious by actually standing down candidates, the Green Party interrupted the assumption that the election result was a foregone conclusion, and did a lot to show that at stake was something more broad-based and widely wanted than simply a pro-Corbyn campaign.
- The role of the Green Party in putting the brakes on a hard Brexit (and maybe even giving courage and energy to the campaign to stay in the EU) should not be underestimated. It has also

been instrumental in stopping in their tracks unjust Tory policies for the economy and public services. This will make a real difference to the lives of millions of people.

- A lot of goodwill towards the Green Party now exists amongst many Labour and Lib Dem supporters and local campaigners, who got entirely the purpose of a Progressive Alliance.
- Not to be underestimated is the likely seeing off of two very specific Tory threats to the Green Party through the voting system. Not only would the Green Party lose its three MEPs if we do leave the EU abruptly or softly, but also the Tory policy on boundary changes would threaten Caroline Lucas's majority. So too would the plan for electing members of the London Assembly by First Past the Post (rather than by a proportional vote as at present) which would have cut out Greens (and the Lib Dems too), and the policy of getting rid of second-choice votes (Supplementary Vote) in mayoral elections, which would have made it very hard for Greens (and again Lib Dems) to run effective mayoral campaigns. A resounding Conservative Party victory in 2017 would have seen the Green Party (outside of local government and Northern Ireland) with one seat in the House of Lords.

So, measuring the result solely by the Green Party number of votes is not the whole story. There is a strong pro-democracy story to be told to the Green Party's credit. And however bitter many members may feel, the danger is that becomes a distraction from thinking clearly about what happened and what the future holds might only make matters worse.

What went wrong?

- The snap 2017 election did not give supporters of the Progressive Alliance enough time to prepare themselves, and others, specifically voters, properly. Labour played a communications blinder, particularly with social media.
- Labour did not want to win this election. This is one of the reasons why Labour did not engage with the Progressive Alliance. The party is playing a longer game and is keen to get properly organised before going for government.
- Theresa May's setting up of the election as a 'presidential' one between herself and Jeremy Corbyn polarised (and simplified) the choice for the media and the public. In effect, we are returned to the two-party system as 80% of the vote went more or less equally to the two big parties
- The assumption was that Labour would join in the Progressive Alliance. It did not. It stood down no candidates, while the Green Party stood down 38, Lib Dems 2, Women's Equality Party 1. Campaigns like More United led to similar outcomes.

What can we learn from the 2017 experience?

- There was a lot going on in this election that was not about the Progressive Alliance – proving the point that election campaigns are marathons, not sprints.
- Remember 2016 and the intervention of big money with military-grade digital analytics and a Libertarian agenda? There is more of that to come.
- Compass, the Labour Party ginger group, campaigned hard for a PA, but did not have agency with the party leadership. Failure to secure that should have led to a pause for thought.

- There was confusion – amongst campaigners and the public – as to purpose of the Progressive Alliance. Was it anti-Tory or was it for electoral reform? In the end, it didn't matter.
- Concern about differentiating Green Party policy is important – but maybe it is more important to be able to illustrate complementarity when talking about an Alliance.
- Fixing a definition of 'progressive' as meaning working towards sustainability rather than as a synonym of 'left-wing' will be important. See: http://www.greenhousethinktank.org/uploads/4/8/3/2/48324387/2016_progressive_politics_what_does_it_mean_final.pdf

Why try again – and how to do better?

- The purpose of the Green Party is to get our ideas into power. It has not ever been easy and, if the Libertarians and their frank anti-sustainability and anti-democratic agenda are anything to go by, it will get harder. Collaborations will be essential.
- Make it clear what any Progressive Alliance would be aiming for – not principles but sustainability writ large, engagingly and unambiguously. What would good look like? Argue everything from that perspective in a practical (here is what we can do now) way. Ask endlessly, 'Why isn't it like that?'
- Start now to prepare for the next General Election. Aim for a nationally-agreed Alliance running on a broad-based anti-extremist ticket on a small number of key sustainability priorities. Take seriously the danger of Libertarians gaining (more) control in the Tories. Labour has embarked on a substantial shift in policy and organisational terms that may start to cause disaffection – especially amongst new young members. So be open, an attractive option and brave.
- Learn from Obama and Saunders and start to build those collaborations and social and other media campaigns as if we really felt the urgency – not a fear campaign, but inspiringly positive. But be clear we are playing for high stakes.

Those who come along with that agenda will be progressive, those that don't won't be. Caroline's leadership will be critical. Not only for the Green Party but for sustainability.

"To strive against the odds on behalf of all life would be humanity at its most noble." E. O. Wilson

TO BE OR NOT TO BE? –

THAT IS THE QUESTION FOR THE GREEN PARTY NOW

Rupert Read

A reply to Anderson, Lawson & Parkin

Green House is in part a political organisation but is not a *party*-political organisation. We exist in part to make British (and global) politics truly greener. Thus it should not be too surprising that, though central to our identity is our post-growth ecologism, as a think tank we nevertheless over the last 24 months endorsed and worked for the idea of broad electoral alliances to stop the ungreenest government ever, and to seek to help bring to power a government that would be green- and Green-influenced. Green House wants to achieve its objectives by any means reasonable – and so absolute fidelity to the Green Party has never been any part of our mission or identity.

But whereas six months ago Green House was pretty-much united behind the principle of seeking a ‘progressive alliance’, that is just not true any longer. Several of us at the core of Green House have been, on balance, bitterly disappointed by the recent General Election campaign, for the reasons outlined in my main contribution to this pamphlet, above.

Having said that, I agree with much of what Victor says in his judicious contribution to this pamphlet. In particular, of course, the efforts toward a ‘progressive alliance’ were not the main reason why Greens went backwards in 2017. The ‘presidential’ campaign, and the upswell of popular opinion in favour of Corbyn and against May, were bigger factors.

BUT my argument is about the factors that Greens had some control over. We had control over whether or not we got identified with Labour. We chose to risk doing so. We suffered the consequences.

AND what one has to imagine, what one needs to picture, is that there really could have been a counter-factual situation in which this election just gone went much better for the Green Party, and thus probably much better for green values and hopes, for the prospects of post-growth ecologism being taken seriously in British politics at long last. What if there were a bold, bright *green* Green Party standing up seriously and consistently against all the mainstream parties, rather than confusing the electorate with mixed messages about who to vote for? What if Greens, no longer seen as Labour hangers-on, became better placed to win votes off the Conservatives? What if (as Neal Lawson suggests) we were to ‘weaponise’ human-triggered climate change as the symptom of a growthist system that needs ending, a growthist system backed to the hilt by Labour as well as by the Conservatives?

Remember a key point made in my contribution above: the dynamic that we now have will never be changed, a ‘reversal’ in fortune that favours the Greens *will never occur*, so long as Greens are perceived as some kind of adjunct to Labour. The only way that these ‘What if’s that I have just listed will have a chance, is if the Progressive Alliance is dropped dead.

The main specific point in the contributions by others above that I wish to comment upon is in relation to Neal Lawson’s often generous and well-written but selective piece. Neal writes, “Compass could and possibly should have judged to take a more partisan role to help the Greens in some seats.” That’s quite an understatement. The brutal reality experienced by Greens at the

General Election was that the **'Progressive Alliance', led by a well-funded effort from Compass, proved to be systematically biased towards Labour**. Consider for instance Compass's video-ads targeted at voters in places like Norwich South. Norwich South was in the General Election campaign the strongest Green prospect in the entire East of England. Yet Compass promoted videos showing the entire Green vote transferring to Labour, to 'keep the Tories out' – in what is, in actuality, a safe Labour seat, as the actual election results dramatically underscored (Labour was returned with a 15k majority --- Greens, heartbreakingly and humiliatingly (and expensively) *lost their deposit*)! In other words: Compass and the so-called 'Progressive Alliance' *wanted* Greens to lose their deposit, in their strongest seat in this entire Region – and totally unnecessarily. Norwich 'Progressive Alliance' canvassers targeted those with Green posters, to switch them to voting Labour - and in fact many of those canvassers *were actually Labour members*. This is underhand.

Or consider Compass's influential 'Vote Smart' system for tactical voting, which had a massive Labourite bias, at Greens' direct expense in the handful of seats where Greens were second to Labour (i.e. runners-up) in 2015. In such seats, 'Vote Smart' repeatedly used language suggesting that the existing MP – [in the case of Bristol West](#), someone who was anti-Corbyn, not pro-PR, and pro-Trident, etc. – is 'progressive' and that there was no need to get rid of them, despite repeated complaints and suggestion of alternative-wordings by Greens.

In other words, the catastrophic reality of the progressive alliance was this: that in the one seat where Greens had a real chance of gaining at this election the 'actually-existing' Progressive Alliance made it LESS likely that Greens could possibly win! If I had ever dreamt that *this* would be the practical result on the ground of the 'Progressive Alliance', then I would never for a moment have embraced it. It is outrageous that Molly Scott Cato (and Natalie Bennett, in Sheffield) had their chances of winning *reduced* by the infrastructure of the so-called 'Progressive Alliance'. It made an utter mockery of the notion of the 'Progressive Alliance' as embodying inter-party co-operation.

In sum: Greens were taken for a massive ride. Greens were considered as expendable, and were expended. Compass et al, judging from Neal's piece, think that this is only the beginning of the PA: I want Greens *to tell them firmly that it is the end of it*.

It is true that the present situation of the Green Party is pretty desperate. And that is bad news for green politics and green values. In this desperate situation, it *might* even be that to bet on another effort to secure a progressive alliance (or at least on renewed efforts to get Labour to back PR) despite the lack of any rational reason to believe that a progressive alliance is securable, is as good a punt as any other.

But that would be a counsel of despair, it seems to me. Rather, given that Neal and Sara in their contributions to this pamphlet give absolutely zero reason to believe that Labour tribalism will end, especially now that Labour have been boosted to seemingly within spitting distance of Number 10, I, along with many other g/Greens, think it is high time we gave up the *fantasy* of being part of a progressive alliance.

We need to go back to green basics.

Our situation may even be existential. Unless the Green Party re-asserts clearly that it has a *raison d'être* besides being comradely environmental cheer-leaders for Corbyn, then I foresee a mass exodus. Why would people bother devoting themselves to working for a Party that doesn't believe in itself?

I hope that this Green House pamphlet will open the debate right up among g/Greens about what is to be done. But I hope we will, in the course of this debate, at least have the courage to learn from our mistakes. As I have done. *Mea culpa*: the 'Progressive Alliance' has helped advance Labour's cause but that has nothing to do with advancing the cause of post-growth, of ecologism, or electoral reform - and may in fact have helped undermine these things. It's time we said goodbye to it. *Not* merely au revoir.