



GAP in the News

May 2019 Edition

The Future is Green!

This edition features an interview with original GAP Founder, Ronnie Lee. And so what's news? Well our Animal Rights Policy Working Group are busy preparing a new motion for the Green Party 'Spring' Conference (now scheduled for June) and several GP members attended the Grow Green event on 11 April. This report is from Will Gildea of The Vegan Society.

Grow Green 2019

Farmers, policymakers and academics descended on the British Library in droves for a conversation on the future of British farming. The one-day *Grow Green* conference saw 200 delegates discuss the scale of the climate emergency, how farming is key to the solution and how policy can support sustainable plant-strong farming. Dr Helen Harwatt of Harvard University launched a [fresh report](#) entitled *Eating Away at Climate Change with Negative Emissions*. It details a vision of a plant-based UK farming system that would reduce emissions and even achieve negative emissions by reforesting a portion of land currently used for animal agriculture.

The UN's Marcela Villarreal explained in another keynote talk how producing more pulses can help fix a "seriously flawed" food system. And the final keynote talk saw the Green Party's Natalie Bennett call for more fruit and veg production to help hit climate goals and health targets. The day's five panels included one on policy changes and another featuring three farmers who have moved away from animal farming and towards more sustainable practices. (See *next article*.) There was amicable discussion, much agreement and some real solutions offered to the challenges we face together.

Sanctuary, not slaughter by Diana Newson, GP AR PWG

In 2017 a vegetarian farmer, Jay Wilde from Bradley Nook Farm in Ashbourne, Derbyshire, decided to give up producing organic beef. However he didn't send his last herd to the abattoir but to Hillside Animal Sanctuary instead. Jay was told by relatives that he was "absolutely insane" not to slaughter the cattle, worth £40,000, but he said he was relieved not to be farming animals any more, something he'd always found upsetting. He said cattle have good memories and form relationships. Other studies reveal complex social interaction when they're kept in natural groups and not slaughtered at a young age. Jay now plans to grow organic vegetables to cater for the flourishing vegan market and has kept 10 of the animals "as pets". Here is a link to a film of the story: [Farmer Story](#)



Jonathan Bartley in the Vegan Society's Vegan Food in Public Sector campaign

GREEN PARTY CORE VALUE 5

Our actions should take account of the well-being of other nations, other species and future generations. We should not pursue our well-being to the detriment of theirs.

Animal Liberation

Interview with Ronnie Lee

Ed: You are a bit of a legend in animal rights, Ronnie, you even have your own Wiki page! How much of the content on that page is true?

RL: It's all pretty accurate, apart from the "Valerie's" story section, which is mostly untrue. It's also not up to date since it doesn't mention my current vegan activism.

Ed: Many readers will not realise that without you Greens for Animal Protection may not exist. How did GAP come about?

RL: For many years I'd been a supporter of the Green Party because of its good policies on animal protection, the environment and social justice, before actually joining in 2009. In 2011 I became more active in the Party and joined the animal-rights email list, but I soon began to feel that more needed to be done to raise the profile of animal protection within the Party, to improve the Party's animal-protection policies and to promote the Green Party to the animal-protection community. Therefore early in 2014 I set up Greens for Animal Protection to do those things.

Ed: Tell us about the defining moment when everything changed for you, i.e. the triggers for you first becoming vegetarian and then vegan.

RL: There were really two defining moments. I went vegetarian at the age of 18 in 1969. My sister's boyfriend, whom she later married, had been a vegetarian for several years and I was curious as to why he was. He said it was because humans could survive perfectly well without eating meat and fish so he felt it was wrong that animals should be killed to feed us. He was a very good athlete so I was aware that being a vegetarian hadn't done him any harm. I was a big meat-eater at the time but what he said played on my conscience, so after a very short time I became vegetarian myself. A little over two years later I bought a copy of the Vegetarian Society's magazine and read an article in it about veganism. This made me aware of the slaughter and suffering of animals caused by the egg and dairy industries and I immediately vowed to become vegan, which I did within a couple of weeks.



Ed: What was it like being a vegan in those days and what did you eat?

RL: It was a lot more difficult than these days for several reasons. Firstly, products weren't required to show a list of ingredients and there was animal fat in a lot of things, such as bread and even peanut butter, that now contain vegetable oil instead. Secondly, there were very few vegan versions of meat and dairy products and those that existed weren't very palatable. Thirdly, it was very difficult to eat out as a vegan because eating places offered little or nothing that didn't contain animal products. I was still living with my parents when I became vegan and the arrangement for my meals would be that my mum would cook the vegetables and I would make my own vegan savoury to go with them from basic ingredients such as lentils or chickpeas. When out and about I would mainly survive on plain crisps, peanuts and fruit.

Ed: You spent some considerable time in prison for your beliefs; tell us about how you ended up in prison and what it was like being inside.

RL: I actually served three prison sentences. The longest was a 10-year sentence, of which I served 6 years 8 months, but I spent a total of about 9 years in prison altogether. I coped with prison quite well, since I just concentrated on reading, studying and keeping fit. Food for vegans wasn't that great at first but it improved a lot during my time in prison. I was one of the founders of the Animal Liberation Front and all my prison sentences were for taking direct action against animal abuse, such as damaging boats used for seal hunting and vehicles used to transport animals to laboratories.

Ed: What film(s) would you recommend to people who still eat animals, including fish?

RL: There are a lot of films exposing the suffering and slaughter of animals for food, with *Earthlings* and *Land of Hope and Glory* being two of the most effective.

Animal Liberation

Interview with Ronnie Lee (cont.)

Ed: How do you feel about the development of the animal-rights movement in the last couple of years?

RL: There certainly has been a big increase in veganism over the past couple of years, and I would say most people becoming vegan have done so out of concern for animals. I'd like to see a lot more vegans becoming active campaigners for veganism and animal protection though, rather than just being passive non-consumers of animal products.

Ed: Do you think there are any animal charities or similar organisations who are not helping the animal-rights movement?

RL: Organisations that are welfarist do not help the cause of animal rights. By welfarist I mean that they seek to improve the conditions of animals oppressed by humans without challenging that oppression itself.

The RSPCA, with their Freedom Foods scheme, is an example of that. Compassion in World Farming could also be accused of welfarism for just wanting improvement in the treatment of farmed animals rather than advocating veganism.

Ed: Understood, although I think Compassion has achieved a lot for animals over the years and they have good education programmes. Many of their core team are now vegan. What activities are you involved in these days?

RL: My main activity these days is as Coordinator of my local Wyre Forest Vegans group. I think a network of active vegan groups – I'd like to see one in every town and city – is really important for the spread of veganism and I'm trying to create a group that not only is effective in our own area but can also act as an example to others. Last year we organised or took part in more than 120 events, most of them vegan outreach. I'm also involved in my local Transition and Friends of the Earth groups, since I feel it's vital to protect the environment in order to protect the wildlife living in it.

Ed: Do you regret anything you have done in the past?

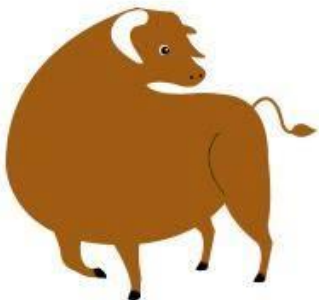
RL: In terms of campaigning for animal liberation, not really, although I do regret mistakes I made that led to me being arrested! If I had my time again, though, I would seriously consider campaigning for veganism in my younger life rather than being involved in the ALF and other animal-rights activities, which you'll see the reason for in my answer to the next question.

Ed: What one action do you think will make the biggest difference to helping animals?

RL: I would say vegan education, which we need much more of, because there's little doubt that educating people to become vegan results in more animals being spared from slaughter and suffering than any other type of action and because vegan education challenges speciesism, which lies at the very root of the oppression of other animals by humans. I'd like to see a network of active local vegan groups getting out in their own communities to spread the vegan message.



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...every day of the year

GAP Greens for Animal Protection NEWSLETTER

Animal Liberation

Interview with Ronnie Lee (cont.)

Ed: Is there a question that I have not asked that you would have liked me to ask?

RL: As this is an interview for the GAP newsletter, perhaps “What do you see as the role of the Green Party with regard to animal protection? I think politics is vitally important to achieving proper protection for animals. I feel it would be very naïve to think we can educate everybody to become vegan and treat animals properly, so we’ll still need legislation to outlaw the use of animals for food and other forms of animal abuse. To achieve this we need the right sort of government in power and I think the Green Party is by far the best option for this. The Green Party does have to improve, though, in terms of strengthening its existing animal protection policies, making animal protection, including the implementation of veganism, one of its highest priorities, and adopting opposition to speciesism as one of its fundamental principles in the same way as it opposes racism, sexism and other forms of oppression and discrimination. And of course GAP has an important role to play in improving the Party in these three ways. We also need to consider how we are to create a situation where the Green Party can eventually form a government, and that means doing our best to get electoral reform so we have a transferable-vote system that won’t discourage people from voting Green out of fear that such a vote would “let the Tories in”, as is the case currently under first-past-the-post.

Ed: Thank you so much for taking part in this interview and all that you do for animals.

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