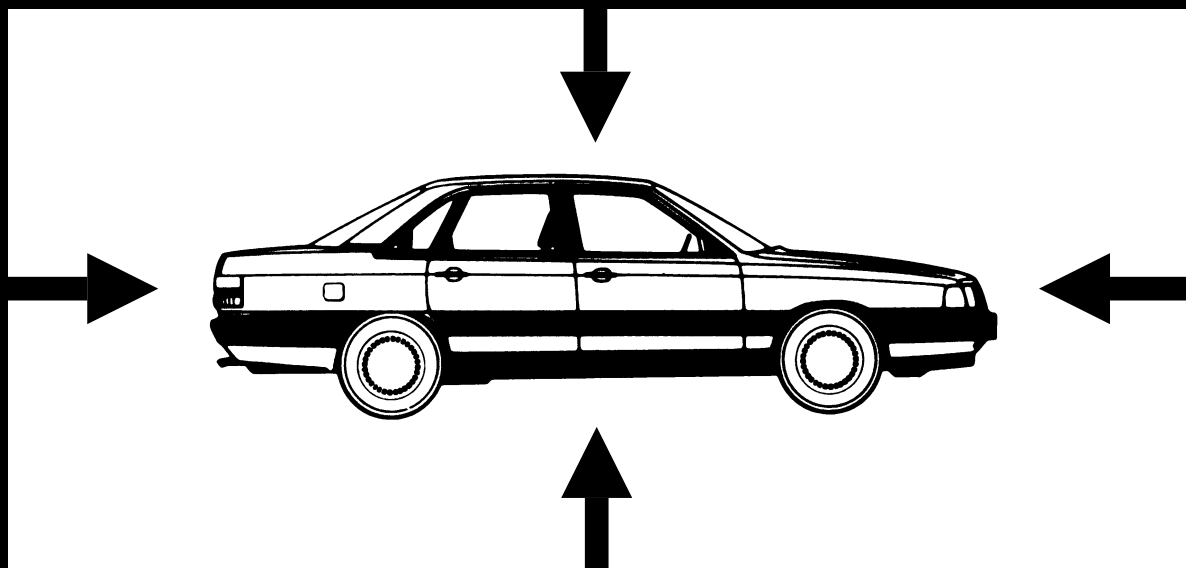


THE ATTACK ON THE MOTOR CAR



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FOR LIFE, LIBERTY AND PROPERTY

THE ATTACK ON THE MOTOR CAR

SEAN GABB

INTRODUCTION

Early in 1991, Peter Paterson wrote:

If I had to make a prediction as to which of today's lawful and customary activities would be regarded as anti-social and undesirable in 30 years' time, I would choose private motoring.¹

This might have seemed an unusual claim. There is almost nothing in the modern world so ubiquitous as the motor car. In 1989, at the peak of the last economic cycle, there were 24,196,000 licensed motor vehicles in the United Kingdom, of which 19,720,000 were cars.² Though not yet so universal as in the United States, car ownership in this country is widely spread. 65 per cent of households have at least the regular use of a car. 62 percent of eligible British adults — and 78 per cent of British men — have driving licences.³

Speaking generally, in 1989, the world contained 555 million motor vehicles, or 423 million cars — up from 53 million cars in 1950.⁴ Again in 1989, worldwide car production was more than 35 million, or more than one per second.⁵

The car is at once a gigantic branch of the world's trade and industry and a way of life. In this country alone, it is estimated that one family in eight depends for its livelihood in some way on the motor and related industries.⁶ To eliminate the car, or even seriously to confine its future growth, would mark at least as great a revolution as did its rise.

And yet, Mr Paterson was not at the time making an idle prediction. And three years' later, dislike of the car — if not yet calls for its abolition — is moving fast onto the agenda of each of the three main British parties. Futuristic scenarios, in which the car has long since been banned, are fast becoming commonplace in the newspapers.⁷

If we anatomise the anti-car movement, we shall see that it divides under a number of headings. These are by no means either mutually exclusive or closely allied. It is possible for one person to belong to many or all of the main factions in the movement. It is equally possible for him to belong to one only and to ignore or even despise all the others. This being said, we proceed in turn to the divisions, of which it is useful to make three: the nimbies ("Not in My Back Yard"), the greens, and the health activists.

THE NIMBIES

As said, nearly two thirds of British households have regular access to a car. The figure is far higher in many rural areas — especially in those areas where the upper middle classes have their weekend or retirement homes. Those who own cars, though, cannot automatically be expected to approve of cars that are owned by others. More cars need more roads. These must often be built through open countryside. In the south of England, this will almost inevitably interfere with

somebody's enjoyment of his property, or with the view from his property, or with his enjoyment of some other local amenity. Therefore the ferocious opposition to the building of new roads in rural and semi-rural areas — often from car owners.

The battle for Twyford Down is a good instance of such opposition. The Department of Transport first decided in the early 1970s to build a motorway from Winchester to Southampton, to pass round the Wessex hills. The middle class objectors had nothing against a motorway in itself — only to one that would inconvenience them.⁸ They fought through the 1970s not to stop the motorway from being built, but to stop it from being built through their own outskirt of Winchester. By 1980, they thought they had succeeded, and only regrouped when they learned that the motorway would deviate by just a few miles and pass through Twyford Down.

Another instance was the local campaign against the East London River Crossing. Shooter's Hill is a middle class suburb of south London, quiet except for the main road over the hill. Since there are no railway stations within walking distance, and any walking at all must be done up and down very steep hills, there is a very high level of car ownership in the area. These car owners were horrified to learn that a motorway was to be built right past their homes, and they organised to stop the project. Unlike the Twyford Down campaigners, they had no places of great natural beauty with which to strengthen their argument. And so they invented one.

Oxleas Wood for generations had been a local rubbish dump, filled with broken glass and burned out cars. The motorway would go straight through it. After an army of local volunteers had removed the most obvious rubbish, it was suddenly proclaimed the last prehistoric wood in London, and therefore worth saving. The rest is too recent to need describing.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with trying to protect one's legitimate interests. Roads are an eyesore. They are noisy. They are dirty. They tend to lower the value of properties in their immediate area. It is no argument against the nimbies that they would have done their best to stop both the Industrial Revolution and the building of the railways. These developments, though of general benefit, were often promoted with a callous disregard for the property rights of many individuals; and had the authorities not taken the side of the big interest groups, the developments would still have taken place — if sometimes at a higher price in the short term.

Even where the nimbies are not confining their efforts to the protection of legitimate interests, they are not by themselves a serious threat to progress. They are not against cars — or against more cars, or even new roads to drive them on, if

these can somehow be kept out of sight and mind. Otherwise, they are often open to various forms of bribery. Tunnels and deep cuttings can often conceal the *appearance* of roads — which, rather than the roads themselves, is all that is objected to.

This being said, they do become dangerous enemies of our industrial civilisation so far as they prepare the way for — and sometimes support the activities of — the next group in the anti-car coalition.

THE GREENS

In a sense, most of the British population is green. We buy aerosols without CFCs, and washing powder without phosphates. Almost everything in the shops is designed, somewhere, somehow, to be “environmentally friendly”. It is fashionable to respond to a vaguely green rhetoric; and since it is generally thought nicer to look from one’s window over trees and fields than over roads full of cars, the nimbies make full use of it. To quote Rebecca Lush, writing from a place called Pitchpond Cottage in Warsash,

[t]he Department of Transport’s nightmarish and insane roads programme will destroy 800 Scheduled Ancient Monuments, 160 Sites of Special Scientific Interest, 12 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, two National Parks and 30 National Trust properties, not to mention thousands of people’s homes.⁹

As for the nimbies, roads are objectionable so far as they lead to the destruction of pretty places.

And pretty places, it should be said, include city centres. Undeniably, these are at present made horrible by the continual rumble and smell of traffic. There is disagreement as to what kind of heavy traffic most disfigures the cities. Some most dislike traffic that moves so fast that crossing roads becomes dangerous. Others most dislike perpetual traffic jams that bring all movement — including of the emergency services — to at best a crawl barely faster than walking.¹⁰

Deep ecology

But this alone is superficial greenery. A desire to preserve one’s own area from building — or even other areas of natural beauty — is not incompatible with appreciating the benefits of industrial civilisation. The real greens are fundamentally opposed to modernity. They see it as an unnecessary and often dangerous development, which must be radically curbed, where not reversed. And they see the car as one of the most obvious and deplorable symptoms. Already, the roads needed for it are estimated to cover an area “3 times the size of Berkshire” in the United Kingdom alone.¹¹ It is also claimed to be the world’s greatest polluter:

Some 20 per cent of all steel, 10 per cent of aluminium, 60 per cent of natural rubber, and up to 60 per cent of oil production goes towards the automobile — and car fuel accounts for only 10-20 per cent of the total energy needed to put a car on the road. The rest is turned into noise, heat and pollution.

More troublingly, no car manufacturer has really come to grips with the most serious potential environmental effect of the car — CO₂. Carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas, is emitted primarily when fuel is burnt. Cars are responsible for almost a quarter of total world

emissions and, assuming demand doubles in the next generation, disaster would seem to beckon.¹²

“Disaster” here is seen as threatening the human race. Obviously, though, it only beckons, and for “the next generation”. For the “deep greens”, this is not the sole — or even the main — concern. For them, any threat to humanity is incidental. Their concern is for the whole planet.

Though it has many roots, deep ecology has been claimed as the creation of Arne Naess, a former Professor of Philosophy at Oslo University. He preaches that there is an “intrinsic value” to all forms of life, regardless of how useful these may be to humanity.

Mosquitoes and musk-oxen have rights. So do trees, rivers, mountains, entire ecosystems. Humans have no business satisfying ‘vital needs’ — but there are too many of us and we are interfering too much. Shallow ecology seeks short-term technical fixes to improve the lot of humans — and humans alone. Deep ecology, by contrast, wants a whole new way of thinking and a new economic system.¹³

Various ignored and laughed at before then, Professor Naess became famous in the 1970s when taken up as a guru of the New Age Movement. They go very well together. The New Agers are avowed anti-rationalists. They regard the Enlightenment as a great wrong-turning, and its notion of the universe as a machine, there to be tuned to human needs, as an abomination. They see ecology far less as a scientific hypothesis than as a religious imperative. To quote Robinson Jeffers, an American ecologist:

I believe that the Universe is one being, all its parts are expressions of the same energy, and they are all in communication with each other, therefore parts of one organic whole. This whole is in all parts so beautiful, and is felt by me to be so intensely in earnest, that I am compelled to love it, and to think of it as divine. It seems to me that this whole alone is worthy of the deeper sort of love; and that there is peace, freedom in turning one’s affections towards this one God, rather than inwards on one’s self, or on humanity, or on human imaginations and abstractions — the world of spirits. I think that it is out privilege and felicity to love God for his beauty, without claiming or expecting love from him. We are not important to him, but he to us. I think that one may contribute (ever so slightly) to the beauty of things by making one’s own life and environment beautify, so far as one’s power reaches.¹⁴

Mr Jeffers is not alone. The various New Age religions — chief among them being the cult of Gaia — are increasingly a gathering point for Western religious sensibilities, for too long now suppressed by the timid secularism and conformity of the traditional faiths. For Tony Grist, a former Anglican priest, his new faith

‘channels the wisdom of a time before a Bronze Age cavalry swept across Europe and turned peaceful farmlands into a military playground’.¹⁵

The religious are joined by former Marxists, disoriented by the collapse of their ideology, but still driven by some internal need to hate modernity. According to John Seymour,

‘I was brought up an old-fashioned Marxist and used to think we could save the environment by rational argument. Now, after everything that’s happened to com-

munism as the environment, I think we need faith.’
Faith in what? ‘It doesn’t matter, any faith.’¹⁶

Not surprisingly, the deep ecologists have little fondness for humanity or any individual life form. The militants among them, who have gathered loosely together into the Earth First! movement, are disarmingly honest about what they want. One of its co-founders, David Foreman, who occasionally writes under the pseudonym Ms Anthropy, has considered enforced sterilisation as a possible answer to the perceived problem of excessive human numbers. Some of his followers have welcomed the AIDS epidemic as an alternative answer.¹⁷ Others have opposed the giving of foreign aid to Ethiopia for the same reasons.¹⁸

Earth First! and Elfs

It would be easy to laugh at a group with such bizarre views — were it not so active a menace. Formed in the American south west during the early 1980s, the early members of Earth First! are said to have howled and gone about on four legs to emphasize their kinship with animals.¹⁹ Their proclaimed mission, though, was rather more practical. Where others had spoken or at best demonstrated, they would take action. They would defend nature by “ecotage” — or ecological sabotage.

Writing in the Earth First! journal, Dave Foreman ... exhorted his readers to sabotage hydro-electric dams, lumber mills and nuclear power plants to halt what he characterised as the destructive march of modern technology. Supporters of Earth First! see themselves as the new warrior class. ‘Earth First! are warriors. And if you aren’t a warrior, then I suggest you find another group’, Mr Foreman would say at public meetings.²⁰

Some of his British followers have tried to present a more respectable image:

At a gathering of the group held in April [1992], after much debate on whether they should even call themselves Earth First!, the assembly issued a statement saying they neither condemned nor condoned people ‘who may feel moved to damage property’, adding that such actions are the ‘sole responsibility’ of the individuals involved and that Earth First! itself followed ‘strict principles of non-violence’ when confronting destruction of the environment.²¹

There is, however, a more radical fringe movement within Earth First! — a fringe beyond the fringe. Calling themselves Earth Liberation Fronters (Elfs), its members believe in taking direct action. In their magazines and other occasional publications, they discuss ways of building condom and seed bombs, and general ways of causing damage to property. One writes:

A good way of fucking up diesel engines is to put zinc filings into it (sic). If you can’t find those use water or sugar. Dismantling the sump is a good tactic; it really tears up the engine.²²

The deep greens have a wide agenda. It ranges from saving the rainforests and the people who live in them, to stopping the trade in furs, to shutting down the nuclear industry, and much, much more. But they are most famous so far for their opposition to new roads. This is a tactical issue over which they can easily reach out to the general public. The nimbies, as said, have no inherent dislike of the motor car — only of those that are to be driven on certain new roads. But, as with Twyford Down and Oxleas Wood, they have

been happy enough to join forces with the deep greens. After all, someone must be around to smash up the machinery by night and lie in front of it during the day.

For this reason, much deep green activity in this country has been connected with opposition to the Government’s road building programme. This is seen as bad in itself, and bad so far as it allows more cars to move about at reasonable speeds.

Below, taken from the British press during 1992 and 1993, is a selective chronology of incidents connected with protests against cars or roads or both. Most incidents were a part of Earth First!’s “carmageddon” campaign:

- 7 Dec 93: Some 200 protesters attempting to prevent the building of the M11 link road held an 8 hour battle with police in Wanstead, 20 people were arrested and 10 injured.
- 18 Oct 93: Seven environmentalists were arrested attempting to sabotage work on the M11-East London link road.
- 13 Sept 93: Earth First! activists squatted in two empty houses in Wanstead, east London, which were due to be demolished to make way for the link road connecting the A102(M) to the A12 and the M11. A court order will be required for their eviction.
- 23 Aug 93: Earth First! activists occupied three Tarmac offices in Wolverhampton; four people were arrested.
- 11 Aug 93: A judge issued a warrant for the arrest of Twyford Down campaigner John Spencer aka Mike Hamblett after he failed to appear in court to answer charges of contempt.
- 23 Jul 93: Seven people were gaoled for 28 days for contempt of court after they broke a court order ordering them to not to invade the site of the M3 extension at Twyford Down. They included Jason Torrance a leader of Earth First! in Britain. Five others are being sought.
- 12 Jul 93: 16 environmentalists were arrested in Newcastle-upon-Tyne while demonstrating against a proposed road building programme.
- 07 Jul 93: The government announced that it was abandoning plans for the East London River Crossing which would have resulted in the cutting of part of the 8,000 year old Oxleas Wood. The wood had been the scene of a growing environmental protest.
- 04 Jul 93: 27 people were arrested as hundreds of protesters invaded the site of the M3 motorway extension at Twyford Down, Hampshire.
- 16 Jun 93: Earth First! and other environmentalist activists disrupted the annual meeting of Tarmac in protest at its role in the M3 motorway extension over Twyford Down.
- 04 Jun 93: It was reported that 8 people have been arrested over
- 23 Oct 92: Animal rights activists protested at the International Motor Show against the use of animals by General Motors in crash tests.

- 10 Aug 92: Earth First! militants stormed the site of a road building programme in Hockley in protest at the road's cutting through Twyford Down. They locked themselves to trucks and held up work for one hour.
- 25 Jun 92: Earth First! activists blocked the newly opened Brighton bypass for an hour in a protest against road building.
- 29 May 92: 13 people were arrested as Earth First! militants attempted to cut through the banks of the River Itchen to flood the site of a road building programme.
- 22 May 92: The "Earth Liberation Front" in an effort to prevent the building of a road through Twyford Down blocked drainage pipes hoping to flood the site.
- 18 Apr 92: In a newspaper interview, an unnamed leader of the British Earth First! branch predicted that it would be only a matter of time before explosives were used in Britain against tropical timber importers and road builders.
- 22 Mar 92: Earth First! sympathisers were responsible for damaging site equipment at the Twyford Down motorway extension.
- 21 Mar 92: Six people were arrested during an Earth First! demonstration against a motorway extension being built at Twyford Down in Hampshire.
- 15 Feb 92: Six Earth First! militants were arrested during protests against a motorway extension in Hampshire.

THE HEALTH ACTIVISTS

In itself, none of this gives any great reason for concern. The nimbies and the greens are at best a nuisance. They have made loud noises. They have slowed or even halted some road developments. But the overall expansion of car ownership, and the building of new roads, have continued almost regardless.

In very recent years, however, these groups have been joined by one other, whose immense power against even the most entrenched and well-funded commercial interests cannot be exaggerated. The car and all that surrounds it has come into the sights of the various health activist groups. These cannot be bought off, except at the price of damaging and repeated concessions. They cannot easily be denounced as cranks or fanatics or self-interested hypocrites. Their joining the anti-car campaign is perhaps the most significant threat to the long-term viability of the motor trade and the car civilisation since the Middle East War of 1973. It may be still more significant.

From anti-smoking to anti-car

The significance of their involvement is briefly put. Hitherto, the alleged environmental effects of the internal combustion engine had threatened nobody in particular. Most people gave as much serious everyday thought to the predictions of gloom as they now give to the prospect that a giant asteroid might collide with the Earth. The health activists know how to frighten people by clearly explaining how they or their near ones are threatened as individuals.

The story of how they became involved is an interesting one.

During the first post-War decade, the medical profession here and in other Western countries noticed a large and sustained increase in the incidence of lung cancer. Looking round for possible causes, the researchers came up with two possible candidates — car exhaust fumes and tobacco smoke. There had in the previous generation been great increases in both the number of cigarettes smoked and in the number of cars and other motor vehicles on the roads. Both exhaust fumes and cigarette smoke contained large numbers of possible carcinogens. There was scope for research in both areas. And yet, almost at once, the medical profession decided that tobacco was the culprit. During the next 40 years, the overwhelming balance of concern in lung cancer prevention campaigns was to be with the amount of cigarette smoking in society. To question, or merely to down-play, the orthodox view of the connection between smoking and lung cancer was to become professionally dangerous for any researcher.

Why? According to Dr Simon P. Wolff of the University College and Middlesex School of Medicine, the dumping of all blame on tobacco had little to do with the intrinsic quality of the research. The influential studies by Doll and Hill he regards as "unconvincing in comparison with earlier papers on the same theme", though these papers had had absolutely no effect on public opinion.²³ He sees the outcome of the early debate over what was to blame for lung cancer as largely the outcome of a commercial struggle. Cigarette smoking was ubiquitous in the early 1950s. The tobacco companies were going through one of their greatest expansions. National governments were heavily dependent on the revenues from tobacco taxation. Even so, the tobacco companies had nothing like the wealth and influence of the vehicle manufacturers and oil companies. These were the giants of the day. According to Dr Wolff,

[t]hey would certainly have had an interest in funding research into the putative link between cigarette smoking and lung cancer, supporting conferences to examine the link, and so on, thus rapidly influencing opinion. Given the relative financial stakes involved, the "blame battle" between the tobacco industry and supporters of motor vehicles was, judging by media accounts at the time, brief and one-sided.²⁴

Today, however, the war against smoking has largely been won. It is prohibited on most public transport and in most public buildings. It is prohibited in many workplaces. Its advertising is circumscribed where not already prohibited. Increases in taxation have made the prices of tobacco products rise almost every year for several decades. There are insistent proposals to make the tobacco companies pay for the alleged ill effects of their products, either through yet heavier taxation or by making them liable at civil law for individual damage. That more than a third of the British population still smokes, and that the British Government remains as heavily dependent as ever on its revenue from the tobacco companies, is perhaps irrelevant. Unless there should be some quite unexpected change in social attitudes, cigarette smoking in this country, and in many others, has been dealt a killing blow.

Now, there is money in the anti-smoking campaigns — money as direct fees for paid advocacy; money as grants for yet more research into the effects of smoking. The anti-smoking movement" says Peter L. Berger,

is no longer a little band of lonely zealots. Rather, the movement is large, well organized, and providing em-

ployment as well as status to sizeable numbers of people. ... [It] is most strongly represented among the most educated segments of the upper middle class (segments sometimes designated as the New Class or the knowledge class — broadly speaking, the intelligentsia). This stratum has a collective interest in government as against the private sector because, compared with other segments of the middle class, it derives more of its income and status from government expenditures and government programs.²⁵

If smoking is indeed in automatic decline, what need is there for an anti-smoking movement. The answer is — very little. The natural response of the campaigners, therefore, has been to seek a new campaign. Here the work of Dr Wolff and others like him comes in very useful. For it is Dr Wolff's belief that smoking is often merely a joint cause of lung cancer.

That smoking cannot be held to blame for all lung cancers is acknowledged implicitly by studies addressing lung cancer risk associated with domestic radon exposure ... and explicitly by the observation that rates of lung cancer are similar between smokers and non-smokers in rural China and are also an order of magnitude less than those in industrialized countries. ... When the debate concerning lung cancer was initiated, it was a question of *either* air pollution *or* tobacco smoking. However, the evidence seems to suggest strongly that it is rather a question of "both/and".²⁶

He concludes:

Certainly, tobacco smoking is a major contributory factor to lung cancer and to other diseases and *should be eradicated from society* [italics added]. However, tobacco has also been skilfully exploited as a smoke-screen which has distracted attention from the air pollution associated with our uncritical (and still increasing) dependence upon motor vehicles.²⁷

How very useful! One can almost imagine the sound of pneumatic drills, as the big guns cemented for so many decades into place are dug out and repositioned against a new enemy. Here follows a sample of the coverage, selected at random from a vast and growing file of cuttings:

Ian Key, "6 hours on M1 like smoking 20 cigarettes", *Today*, 26th July 1990:

Traffic pollution is now so bad that a six-hour motorway trip is as harmful to (sic) smoking 20 cigarettes.

That is the amount of carbon monoxide a motorist will have inhaled by the time he has driven from London to yorkshire and back on the M1. ...

"Cancer risk from diesel fumes", *The Daily Telegraph*, 26th July 1990:

Diesel fumes which build up on our streets can cause lung cancer, a conference on pollution heard yesterday.

...

Kevin Eason, "Speeding 'adds to pollution' ", *The Times*, 24th August 1992:

Nearly 13 million drivers were warned yesterday that they were polluting the atmosphere by breaking speed limits. ...

Jeremy Laurance, "Scientist links petrol fumes to leukaemia", *The Times*, 9th April 1992 (a long account of Dr Wolff's research²⁸).

Peter Gruner, "Child leukaemia is 'linked with petrol' ", *The Evening Standard*, 4th November 1993 (more about Dr Wolff).

Nick Nuttall, "Rural children 'are at increased risk from leukaemia'", *The Times*, 5th November 1993 (ditto).

Aileen Ballantyne, "Inflamed by fumes", *The Times*, 23rd November 1993:

... When consultants such as Dr Wilson estimate that several thousand people are suffering from a new pollution-related syndrome, it is perhaps time to ask whether the convenience of the car is worth the price in terms of our health. ...

Kevin Eason, "Pollution 'a bigger enemy than smoking'", *The Times*, 12th January 1994:

Air pollution could damage the health of more people than smoking, according to one of Britain's leading doctors. ...

Nick Nuttall, "Benzene levels well over limit in Britain", *The Times*, 3rd February 1994:

Inhabitants of British cities may be inhaling benzene, a cancer-causing chemical, at concentrations of six parts per million, but the Department of the Environment believes it is impractical to reduce this to the recommended one part. ...²⁹

Tony Dawe, "Children at exhaust height are worst hit by traffic fumes", *The Times*, 18th February 1994:

Small children are most at risk from vehicle pollution, a survey carried out for *The Times* has revealed. Levels of carbon monoxide measured at the kerbside are much greater at 2ft 6in, where toddlers on foot or in push chairs inhale it, than at 6ft. ...

Then there is the smog that covered large parts of the country during the early summer of 1994. A combination of still air, unbroken sunshine and traffic fumes was alleged to have caused the worst mass outbreak of asthma ever recorded. Commenting on this, David McKie wrote:

Medical evidence has yet to prove the link between air pollution and the frightening rise in the incidence of asthma, especially among young children. But that is often the way of these things. The links between smoking and lung cancer, or between lead pollution and damage to children, weren't actually *proved* until well after most of the world had concluded they must be there, and governments had begun to work on that basis.³⁰

It ought to be obvious that the car is presently undergoing the same process of demonisation as the cigarette underwent in the 1950s. The cigarette is continually alluded to in this propaganda, partly to supply a precedent for the new campaign, and partly to ease the transition for those activists now yet aware that the war on tobacco is becoming yesterday's news.

It should be noted that no defence is likely to work that relies only on the lack of proved connection between car exhaust fumes and many illnesses. Contrary to Mr McKie, there is still no proven link between smoking and lung cancer or any other serious condition.

THE WAR AGAINST DRIVING

For many, then, the car is an object of hatred. As with cigarettes, there are few willing to call openly for its prohibition.

But there are many who advocate measures that, sternly enforced, will tend to push it to the margins of Western life. Such measures include:

Stricter anti-pollution laws

The Government is being repeatedly urged to cut the amount of benzene released into the air by car exhausts. A final level is recommended of one part per billion. This is to be achieved by encouraging better engine designs, tougher MOT emission tests, and the phasing in of catalytic converters.³¹

There are further proposals to concentrate on particularly dirty vehicles. The authorities are to have the power to monitor passing traffic, and to stop and perhaps even fine the drivers of any vehicles found to be producing more than a permitted maximum of pollutants.³²

Otherwise, the Police are urged to devote still greater resources to enforcing speed limits. According to a group called Earth Resources Research, traffic pollution could be significantly curbed if more drivers could be compelled to drive at or under the legal speed limit on motorways.³³

But there are limits to what may currently be achieved by tightening the laws against pollution. There may come a time when the car can be made so clean that even the deep greens will go looking for something else to attack. This is not, however, a serious prospect at the moment. It is widely accepted that even the best improvements in engine design and the strictest pollution controls will be offset by increases in the number of cars. This for many requires some limitations on the use of cars.

Already in some European cities, private motoring is controlled on days when air quality is expected to be bad. Improvements in weather forecasting are making it possible to predict air quality as far as five days in advance. According to Mary Stevens of the National Society for Clean Air, "[t]his will allow you to manage air quality by making car bans practicable."³⁴

The pedestrianising of city centres

This is a natural extension of the above. As said, increases in motor traffic are said to have seriously degraded life in the city centres. One proposed answer is to close these at least to private motor traffic. Cities once again would look as they did before the rise of the motor car. It would be possible again to walk from Trafalgar Square to Charing Cross, or to cross the Mall to Buckingham Palace without having to dodge speeding or crawling traffic. More people would move back into the centres. Damage to historic buildings — such as the Coliseum in Rome, turned by Mussolini into the hub of a gigantic roundabout — would be much diminished.³⁵

Higher taxes on cars and petrol

To some degree, these are already with us. Taxation on both cars and petrol is significantly higher in Europe than in the United States. Even so, the European Commission has for some years been looking at still higher taxes. And just as with cigarettes, the run-up to every British budget day is filled with press releases demanding further increases in petrol excise duty. It is not enough that around 70 per cent of the price of a gallon of petrol is made up of excise duty and VAT. Campaigners lament the falling price of petrol in terms of average earning power:

Remarkable figures provided by statisticians at Shell show that it took the average worker in Britain just over 30 minutes to earn the price of a gallon of petrol in 1964. This year, that time has sunk to below 15 minutes.

In spite of the cost of discovery, shipping, refining and delivery to the pumps, petrol remains one of the cheapest commodities on the market in Britain today.³⁶

Therefore the taxes on it should go up until at last it becomes more expensive in real terms, and fewer people can afford to drive their cars.

Curbs on advertising

The battle over cigarette advertising seems to have been lost. Prohibitions of advertising have had little measurable effect on the consumption of cigarettes, but they give immense pleasure to the anti-tobacco movement. Not surprisingly, there are calls for the legal control of car advertising:

The Government is considering curbs on car advertising featuring speed and performance and the main selling point. ... It wants manufacturers to place more emphasis on safety and it may draw up a code of practice if the industry does not mend its ways voluntarily.³⁷

By now, the parallels with the war against tobacco should not need to be emphasised.

More public transport

Virtually everyone who hates the private car loves public transport. It may be hopeless at the moment — as anyone knows who has every had to rely on it for getting about even the centre of London. But more public money can make it so clean, so quiet, so generally unobtrusive. There is hardly an attack on the motor car published that does not somewhere contain a paean to the railways, or to tram cars, or to some other form of public transport.

There are even proposals that it should be provided not merely subsidised, but free at the point of use.

In 1954 William Keystone, a former railway administrator, argued for a scheme for making rail travel "free" by a system of compulsory weekly contributions, as in National Insurance, from the employed population and from industry.³⁸

Less travel

"Virtually everyone who hates the private car loves public transport". Some greens simply hate transport.

It has been estimated that in 1914 the average Westerner travelled 1,640 miles a year, 1,300 of them by foot. Now the figure is around 16,000 miles a year, of which only about 300 are on foot.³⁹

It seems that people move around too much. Rather than live and work and be entertained where they please, they should go back to a past way of life, where they lived and worked in one place, and the roads were empty.

Yes, there are people around who hate the private car. Any arguments about the pleasure and utility that it has brought to humanity in this century are brushed aside with contempt. So too is the concept of free choice. As John Butter wrote to *The Guardian* some while ago:

I would rather be alive in a healthy world than rejoicing in my unlimited freedom of choice on a dying planet.⁴⁰

NOTES

1. Peter Paterson, "Will they drive us off the road?", *The Daily Mail*, February 12th 1991.
2. Department of Transport, *Transport Statistics Great Britain 1979-89*, HMSO, London, 1990.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Motor Industry of Great Britain, *Automotive Statistics*, Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, London, 1990.
5. Figures supplied by US Motor Vehicles Manufacturers Association.
6. Ian Breach, "The coulds, can and can'ts", *The Guardian*, 27th October 1989.
7. See, for example, Peter Barnard, "Cars reach the end of the road", *The Times*, 24th August 1992.
8. "... no one questions the need for a motorway — or at least an improved road — around Winchester. ...", John Vidal, "Last ditch stand on Cobbett's patch", *The Guardian*, 20th March 1992.
9. Letter, "A Tarmaced World" (sic), *The Ecologist*, Vol. 23, No. 3, May/June 1993, p. 117.
10. See, for example, Julia Wolf, "Prince attacks city 'car culture'", *The Guardian*, 25th July 1993. This reports a speech in Madrid made by the Prince of Wales.
11. Richard Askwith, "The Transport Crisis", *Observer Magazine*, 15th April 1990.
12. John Vidal, "Icons and engines", *The Guardian*, 18th October 1991.
13. Summarised by David Nicholson-Lord, Interview: "Greenest of them all: Arne Naess", *Independent on Sunday*, 31st May 1992.
14. Quoted by Walter Schwartz, "Faith, heresy and the fight for Eden", *The Guardian*, 27th December 1991.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*
17. David Nicholson-Lord, Interview: "Greenest of them all: Arne Naess", *Independent on Sunday*, 31st May 1992.
18. Walter Schwartz, "Anatomy of an eco-anarchist", *The Guardian*, 15th May 1992.
19. David Nicholson-Lord, "Eco-saboteurs rely on Krypton factor", *The Independent*, 5th December 1991.
20. Michael Dynes, "Bulldozers ready to cut through rural life", *The Times*, 28th February 1992.
21. John Vidal, "Sound and fury of the eco-worriers", *The Guardian*, 28th August 1992.
22. John Vidal, "Explode a condom, save the world", *The Guardian*, 10th July 1993.
See also Damian Locke, replying to Mr Vidal's article:
"I am sure that most Elfs abhor violence towards nature, people included. I believe that damage to machinery which is destroying our cultural heritage and our chances of a future is destructive in a positive sense and non-violent."
("Letters", *The Guardian*, 14th July 1993)
See also Tony Maguire and Peter Gruner, "'Green firebomb' group set to attack business", *The Evening Standard*, 20th July 1993:
"The tone of some of the material emerging from the Earth Liberation Front's supporters is more extreme than the Animal Liberation Front. In one leaked note ELF supporters, known as Elves, are told how to make incendiary devices and advised to make sure 'it doesn't get to incinerate anyone who doesn't deserve it'."
23. Simon P. Wolff, "RE: Invited Commentary: How much retro-psychology", Letters to the Editor, *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 1992, vol. 134, pp. 1314-15.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Peter L. Berger, "Environmental Tobacco Smoke: Ideological Issue and Cultural Issue", in Robert D. Tollison (ed.), *Clearing the Air: Perspectives on Environmental Tobacco Smoke*, D.C. Heath and Company, Mass., 1988, pp. 85-86.
26. Wolff, *op. cit.*
27. *Ibid.*
28. A brief bibliography of his relevant works:
"Internal combustion and cancer: Is non-occupational exposure to benzene as a result of motor vehicle usage a causative factor in leukaemia and lymphoma?", *Experientia* (1992) 48: 301-04;
"Child leukaemia: Curies or cars?", *Nature* (1990) 346, 517;
"Benzene on Wheels", *Chemistry & Industry*, 19th July 1993, p. 560.
In his 1992 article (*op. cit.*), Dr Wolff approvingly quotes another writer as calling the outcome of the "blame-battle" as a fact less of medical research than of the sociology of medical science (J. P. Vandembrouke, "Invited comment: How much Retro-psychology?", *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 1991, vol. 133, pp. 426-27). How ironic that the reception of his own work — especially on an alleged link between vehicle exhausts and leukaemia] — has become another fact of this medical sociology.
29. Intercut in this article is a report headed "Passive smoking link to cot deaths"!
30. David McKie, "Wanted: a politician who will finally clear the air", *The Guardian*, 18th July 1994.
31. Nick Nuttall, "Government urged to cut benzene levels", *The Times*, 3rd February 1994.
32. Tony Dawe, "Traffic wardens may gain powers to fine polluters", *The Times*, 21st May 1994.
33. Paul Brown, "Speed limit enforcement urged to cut health and climate risks", *The Guardian*, 24th August 1993.
34. Nick Nuttall, "Forecast on fumes may halt drivers", *The Times*, 18th April 1993.
35. David Black, "Traffic-free cities could help businesses", *The Independent*, 7th August 1990.
36. Kevin Eason, "So you think petrol is dear?", *The Times*, 31st January 1992.
37. Nicholas Wood, "Curbs possible on car adverts", *The Times*, 4th November 1989.
38. Colin Ward, *Freedom to Go: After the Motor Age*, Freedom Press, London, 1991, p. 89.
39. "Teach yourself Ecology", *Third Way*, No. 17 (about June 1993), p. 15.
40. John Butter, "Free and driving to destruction", Letter to the Editor, *The Guardian*, 27th August 1991.