

David Icke's green enlightenment

New Goals For Old

Former professional footballer, tv presenter and speaker for the Green Party, David Icke talks to Chris Granlund about the role reading played in changing his life.

I left school never having read a single book from cover to cover. I wanted to be a footballer and that was all that mattered to me. I couldn't concentrate on books, all I read were the *Beano* and *Football Monthly*. At home we had the *Mirror* and the *Daily Sketch*, I always used to read the newspapers. We were a Labour household and talked a lot of politics at home.

I was brought up in a council house in Leicester. It was a 50s' housing estate and we moved there in 1954 when I was two. My parents still live there. My father struggled to make ends meet. I remember that on Thursdays my mother and I used to go down to the clock factory where he worked. The wages were paid at about two o'clock and we used to nip round the back where my father would slip out and give us money to buy food for that day. The money just stretched out across the week.

My mother worked in a shoe factory, later she was a school dinner lady and up to her retirement a few months ago she was a hospital cleaner. When I was a kid, my father used to make toys at Christmas. Once he made banjos out of recycled Fray Bentos tins and planks of wood. My mother went out with a pram trying to flog these home-made banjos to raise some money for Christmas and, being the woman she was, she managed to get rid of them.

I left school without any paper qualifications to become a footballer at the age of 15. As a footballer you are so protected from the real world. Everything's done for you, you're not expected to think. I came out of football when my contract was cancelled because I had rheumatoid arthritis. It was like stepping out blinking into the headlights of an oncoming train.

By the time I found a job as a reporter on a small local



newspaper, I had £36 in the world, no income and my mortgage was £56 per week. At the same time I was discovering lots of new things that had previously passed me by. I developed an insatiable desire for knowledge which I still have now more than ever before.

By the mid-70s I had started to read avidly so that by the beginning of the 80s, far from not having read a book from cover to cover, I was reading at least four books a month. I'd finish one and move straight on to the next. It was a question of getting the information, the facts I wanted. I couldn't read a fiction book, fact is more incredible than anything any fiction writer can come up with. I just couldn't read fiction, wouldn't thank you for it.

At that time I read Schumacher's *Small Is Beautiful* which had a tremendous impact on me. In another of his books, *Good Work*, he talks about the perversion of human beings by factory production. It shows how human beings are not treated as individuals with inspiration and creativity.

Another excellent book is *The Cost Of Economic Growth*, it takes apart the present

system, eats it up and spits it out. It was written 23 years ago but even if it were written today it would be ahead of time, a stunning read.

The thing that really put me into overdrive was a Greenpeace leaflet that came through my letter box. On one page it put into context not just the scale of the environmental problem but also the timescale. It imagined the earth to be 46 years of age and it went through history until it got to the industrial revolution beginning 60 seconds ago and I thought, 'my God, we've done it in the blink of an eye'.

I started reading all the books I could find on related subjects. I have read virtually every green book that has come on to the market in the last ten years. Eventually you wake up and it all slots into place. Of course, all that reading has influenced my personal life. My vegetarianism goes back to a book called *Living Without Cruelty*, which is about how farm animals are treated. I got to page six and I've never eaten meat since.

One of the frustrating things about being in the Green Party is that people expect you to be absolutely perfect. One of

the problems I have with my full-time job and working for the greens is not being able to be at home with the family. I've spent five nights at home in the last five weeks. It is desperate.

But you see you're pulled both ways. I've got a boy of 8 and a girl of 15 and I want to spend time with them. But I also know that if I want to do the best for them, I can actually do more if I manage to persuade as many people as I can that we must go in another direction. It's a great dilemma and the balance is certainly not right at the moment. But when people come on to you and ask you to speak, when you feel so passionately about it as I do, then it's very difficult to say no. And it's no use complaining about it because we've got a limited time to do a great deal and you can't turn down the opportunity to spread the word. Traveling's the worst, it takes up so much time, although that's when I get a chance to do some reading.

The more I move down the road of green politics, the more I'm convinced that if the earth is a mile, we are only aware of about half an inch of it. I wasn't brought up in any particular religion and I think that organised religion is its own worst enemy because it is so rigid, imprisoned by tablets of stone. But I do think that the Bible is a wonderful book.

I came across a copy of one of those Gideon's bibles in a hotel in the mid-70s. I was greatly impressed by Jesus Christ. Although I'm not totally convinced that he was everything we are led to believe, he was a brilliant man, some of his lines were real show-stoppers.

Getting interested in green politics is not a religious conversion, I would call it more of an enlightenment. It's like someone coming along and cleaning your spectacles so that you can see through the con of the present system. And I have never been more confident and content, never been more at peace with myself at any time in my life as I have been since I saw the con for what it is.