

How should Conservatives oppose?

I have heard a couple of Shadow Cabinet members on the BBC setting out the Opposition position. They clearly found it difficult. They rightly sounded chastened by the electoral disaster that beset them. They apologised and sounded contrite.

They do however have a vital role to play. In a Parliament where 34% of the voters have such dominant representation and where the third largest party largely agrees with the government, the 121 Conservatives need to provide strong criticism where the government is wrong and a good alternative where its laws and policies will not work.

They need an early agreement amongst themselves as to why their candidates did so badly. They need to apologise for the bad errors that led to the result and move on to the current world. They should not apologise for everything and accept the blame for all the problems Labour will now expose and blame on the previous government.

The three big mistakes I think they should apologise for are the boom/ bust inflationary cycle Bank and Treasury delivered, the huge overrun of migration which they should have controlled and the collapse in public sector productivity 2020 to 2023 which pushed up taxes and worsened services.

In Opposition they should support the government's aims of the U.K. growing faster than the rest of the G7, of providing high quality public services and promoting opportunity for all. Where government does good things that support these aims they should back the government. I will set out in a later blog where they already need to oppose and warn, as early policy announcements will take Labour further from these aims.

Letting people out of prison

Prison is essential for criminals who threaten our safety. Terrorists, murderers and all who attack people violently should be given custodial sentences to protect the rest of us from their attacks. They should serve more than 40% of the sentence before discharge. There should be no early discharge for anyone who might revert to violence on leaving prison.

It is more debatable what to do with offenders who steal. If someone fails to pay the BBC licence fee it should not be a criminal offence. It should be treated as an unpaid invoice. There should be legal redress for the BBC to demand payment, and to send in bailiffs if all else fails.

If a thief stole my car I would like him to have to buy me a replacement. I

have no wish to have to pay for him to stay in prison if he could stay in work and pay compensation out of his wages. Punishments need to fit the crime. If he cannot work and pay then a stay in prison to put him through training to make a more useful contribution to society would be a good idea.

Prison has three purposes. It is used to protect the rest of us from those who would harm us. It is a deterrent to people contemplating a crime, though only if the clear up rate of such crime is suitably high. It is a means of trying to help people change their lives for the better when they come out. It has proved bad at this last.

Prisons need to be drugs free, with a disciplined environment. Overcrowded prisons in old buildings struggle to be effective. Parliament is too ready to create new and additional criminal offences. Most people want the law enforcement system to concentrate on violent offenders, and tackling the big scam gangs who are milking the benefit system, robbing on line commerce and banking and bringing in thousands of illegal migrants.

[The U.K. will not grow faster if we close industries down](#)

Did the Net Zero Secretary get the memo that the government wants us to be the fastest growing G 7 economy? Up he pops to halt new oil and gas development.

Between 1990 and 2021 the U.K. slashed output of energy from 219 million tonnes of oil equivalent to 106 million. The gross value added of energy to our national income and output slumped from 10.4% of our economy to just 2.5%. No wonder our growth rate slowed. Energy production had boosted our tax revenues mightily and raised our productivity. As Labour closes down our oil and gas we will lose jobs, tax revenue and productivity. Jobs in energy have collapsed from 600,000 to 175,000 over 40 years. There was more oil and gas to find and exploit, onshore and off.

Some say the green replacements will offset. Truth is we are replacing home gas and oil with imports, losing all the jobs and tax revenue to abroad. Where we put in more wind turbines and solar panels much is imported, creating jobs in China, not here.

If the government is serious about wanting a higher productivity better paid faster growing economy it should want to expand our oil and gas industries. That will help growth. It would also cut world CO₂ as we shed imported LNG. LNG generates so much more CO₂ to compress, liquefy, transport and re-gassify. Why do all this when you can have local gas down a pipe?

Steel making

The new government says it supports the same policy as the old government for the steel industry.

The main imperative is to cut U.K. CO₂ output. That means shutting down U.K. blast furnaces to make new steel because they need fossil fuel to heat and smelt. We then import the new steel we need. This adds to world CO₂ because of the diesel ships to get it here and maybe from higher CO₂ in the manufacture. This surely is madness.

As a consolation prize the aim is to get recycling plant put in instead. This can be fired by electricity. On a good day 50% of that could come from renewables. On a bad day it would be burning gas and wood that generated the power. Recycled steel can be used as a replacement for some uses. The electric arc furnaces needed require considerably less Labour than blast furnaces so a lot of people lose their jobs with large redundancy costs. It may lead to a bigger benefits bill if there is insufficient alternative work.

It is also bad news for taxpayers as the companies considering putting in a recycling plant will only do so if they receive large taxpayer subsidies. Labour are dangling £2.5 bn of taxpayer cash for electric arcs and blast furnace closures. The industry will probably demand more. The new Minister is sitting down with Port Talbot Unions to see what more can be done for all those facing the sack as the blast furnace closes. I do not expect any change of overall policy.

Why does this government like the last want to stop us making steel? Why do they think it fine to import it with no world CO₂ gain? Why don't they see we need to make more here? Why don't they see you need to be able to make your own steel for national security?

Build more houses?

Labour proposes two main ways of boosting growth. They wish to lift new homes from 200,000 a year to 300,000 a year. They want to double onshore wind, treble solar and quadruple offshore wind investment.

If the government is serious about building 1.5 million homes by 2029 it will need to talk to the banks and the Bank of England about the credit squeeze. The main reason housebuilding has got stuck is the scarcity of mortgages and the high prices of credit.

Homes are very expensive, in part because the government has allowed in so many additional people all needing accommodation. If the government wants to ease housing shortages and curb price rises it needs to stick with the government's changes to eligibility to gain legal entry to the country and to tighten the criteria further.

The government says the main blockage is planning. Local authorities say there are over 1 million available plots for homes with planning permission. The English planning system is based on a five year supply of building land, meaning there should always be available site to lift the build rate when demand is available.

The government's proposed change is just to put a centrally determined house building target into every Council's local Plan by amending the national Planning Policy which guides the planning system. We had such targets until September 2023 when they were removed. When we had them the system did not deliver 300,000 a year.

Presumably this old system will be introduced in any given Council area when they need to revise their current local plan. Councils usually revise every five years so it will take time to get these re introduced.

The U.K. government does not have planning powers outside England. The devolved governments will have their own approach and have not agreed to match England.

The government will only build 1.5 million if they resolve money and credit, demand pressures and the Bank's money squeeze.