

# The green Opposition MPs are like Remain

Listening again to the tired and repetitious high level arguments of the Opposition MPs advocating faster progress to net zero whatever the cost, I am reminded of the years of their lectures on the dangers of Brexit . On both topics they are sure they are right. They despise anyone who questions their beliefs or suggests amendments to their position. They arrogantly dismiss opponents as too stupid to have a worthwhile view, or too badly informed to take seriously. They do not even want to hear an alternative way of meeting their high level aim which presumably is a better quality of life for the many, whilst tackling flood or drought risk proportionately.

They proceed by making a series of very gloomy forecasts for us all unless their policy is followed. They refuse to analyse why their forecasts have often been wrong in the past, and ignore or explain away repeated errors in their forecasts as new data emerges. Above all they ignore the views of many voters. When challenged on the gap between what they think and what a lot of voters think, they say the political elite has a duty to act and needs to teach the public to accept the actions.

They get plenty of help from traditional media. There is an accepted framework to the green debate. The science is settled. Global warming of more than 2 degrees is coming unless we adopt early net zero. That will flood low lying cities, cause water shortages and forest fires and melt the poles. CO<sub>2</sub> aided by methane rather than water vapour is the main culprit. Pricing carbon is part of the answer. People must be taxed, priced or regulated out of plane travel, off meat and dairy, out of diesel and petrol cars and away from fossil fuel heating.

One of the reasons a lot of voters say they broadly agree with this yet do nothing to change their own lifestyles is the perception of double standards. If the great powers actually thought this was a life and death matter wouldn't China and Germany be closing their coal power stations now? Wouldn't the EU cancel the Nord stream 2 Pipeline and fund a green alternative to Russian gas? Wouldn't all the experts behind the COP 26 climate conference ban all those jet flights to it and go virtual?

Above all they fail to deal with the fundamental dilemma faced by China and emerging economies. They need fossil fuels to achieve higher living standards, but their incremental demand tips the world over the top on these carbon accounts. Does the advanced world have the right to stop fossil fuel growth in large populated developing countries? Is there anyway the advanced countries can help them leapfrog to low carbon economies? So far the use of oil, gas and coal in countries like China and India is rising remorselessly up for billions of people.

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## 5 months out of the EU single market – progress so far

I have had a couple of emails from Remain voters asking what benefits we have seen from our exit from the EU, as they are still unhappy about the decision taken in a referendum and reinforced by two General elections. After five and a half months it is still early days but so far it looks as if we will have a good first year out.

The main benefit of Brexit is we are now a self governing country that can make our own decisions, change our own laws, and run our own budgets. If in the future government did badly we can rid of it at the next election and change the laws and policies which were wrong. A General election here could not change a single EU law, tax or budget decision when we were members.

We have already seen early evidence of the advantage in our decision not to join the EU vaccine policy but to pioneer a new vaccine here in the UK with government support and orders to back it. This resulted in an earlier roll out of vaccinations for all here and the offer of a crucial low cost treatment to the rest of the world. We are busily creating a new and enlarged vaccine production capability in the UK. Spending on the NHS has gone up by more than £350 m a week. We will now start to save larger sums on EU levies as we are no longer liable for new contributions to the EU growing budgets.

The UK has as promised rolled over the trade agreements we shared with the EU with a number of other countries, and is now well advanced on a new round of trade deals with countries that do not have such arrangements with the EU. This year will be our first outside the EU and its single market. According to international bodies the UK should see its fastest growth rate for many years at 7%, ahead of the EU average. Contrary to Remain predictions sterling has been strengthening since we left, house prices have been rising and employment is still at high levels despite the pandemic damage. It is a matter of regret that the EU wishes to damage its exports to us by placing barriers in the way of trade. Fortunately many other countries see this as an opportunity and are keen to sell to us and understand that means they should also be willing to buy more from us. One of the big gains from Brexit will be growing and making more for ourselves, to cut the food miles and create more better paid jobs at home. The latest trade figures show a welcome cut in our trade deficit with the EU thanks to a fall in imports to the UK. We are buying home produced or cheaper and better from the rest of the world.

We live in an age of governments wishing to pursue national resilience. The USA has awoken to the way China has used free access to western markets whilst continuing to protect and control its own to gain a stronghold over crucial technologies, essential raw materials and important manufactures. The USA has embarked on a crash course of regaining the initiative in technology,

onshoring more production and securing its position in a range of things from rare earths to semiconductors and from batteries to 5G communications. The UK too can now do something similar. Our industrial and agricultural base in many crucial areas like steel, electricity production, shipbuilding and temperate foodstuffs was hollowed out by EU competition. In control of our own state aids, public procurement and competition policies we can now set about rebuilding.

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## The EU is grossly over represented at the G7

If the U.K. thought it should send both the Prime Minister and the Speaker to represent it at the G7 the other states would object that the U.K. was over represented. If the mighty USA sent both the President and the Majority leader of the Senate that too would have seemed silly or unfair. Yet if you look at the photos of the meeting of the G7 you see nine people present. Sure enough the EU had sent not one but two Presidents, the President of the Council and the President of the Commission.

This absurdity famously spilled over into a row between these same two Presidents in recent negotiations between the EU and Turkey. The President of the Council who I think is technically the senior bagged the one large official chair for the EU rep, only for there to be very public complaints from the President of the Commission. The EU needs to get its act together and decide in each meeting or negotiation which of its 5 Presidents leads the delegation and sits in the one chair they should be awarded like the countries present.

There is at the G7 a more serious and worrying issue. The EU has five of the nine seats, sending three member state Heads and two Presidents. On an issue like vaccines which is a crucial issue at this summit the EU has run the policy for its member states, so on that issue just one EU rep should engage with four independent countries. If these intimate gatherings of a few leaders of powerful countries are to be valuable they should not be slowed down by the EU giving five versions of what they will do on vaccines.

On issues where member states have some powers but have to work under the legal and policy framework of the EU as in green matters and economic policy it would be helpful if they settled in advance who was in the lead and who could speak for them. There will inevitably be much groupthink and common policy between all 5 so it does not need all 5 present and talking to represent that one viewpoint. Decisions of the G7 are usually by consensus, not vote, but having a majority of the voices could distort the debate and give the EU view an unjustified numerical advantage over the US or U.K. view.

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## How will governments gain popular buy in for their green revolution?

Yesterday I launched a pamphlet through Politeia on the ever topical green revolution. In it I asked one central question that governments seem reluctant to ask. When will government and the private sector produce the products and services that they regard as green which fly off the shelves and figure on people's wish lists?

Today practically all of us accept carbon dioxide is a greenhouse gas which will heat the planet if more is produced and nothing else changes. We also accept that advanced country governments intend to take people on their railway track to net zero as soon as they can. The track will be signed and the trains powered by subsidy, carbon taxes, rules and laws.

Whilst most people tell pollsters they do think the world is warming and something should be done about it, most people do not plan to do anything very much about their own lifestyles anytime soon despite government urging. Most people have no plans to rip out the gas boiler and put in an expensive heat pump. Few want to pay up to get a new electric car, or have done the sums and cannot afford one. Many people still want to fly abroad for a holiday as soon as covid rules allow. Most family diets continue to include dairy and meat products despite the carbon footprint they create.

Three other panellists had their say. They all spoke only about government policy and large companies. None of them would engage with my simple and crucial question about consumer behaviour. One of them told me the policy answer is a much higher carbon price, presumably to price the lower paid out of carbon based goods and services. One proposed a big subsidy for electric cars to get more people to buy them. They all seemed to think the prime duty for the revolution rests with governments, and governments just need to keep sharpening the regulatory controls and fiddling with the taxes and subsidies until carbon based activity is taxed out of the system.

They did not wish to pursue the issue of why Germany, a keen green advocate, plans to continue with coal based electricity generation well into the next decade. They did not comment on the way large quoted companies, told to get out of coal, simply sell their coal assets onto someone less exposed to criticism. They seemed to think banning all new diesel and petrol cars as early as 2030 would work fine. So I ask again, where are the iconic must have products of the Green revolution? Where is the new domestic heating system, the new diet, the new personal transport that has the pulling power of the smartphone, the ipad and the Amazon Prime and Netflix subscription? For this revolution to take off governments need to engage with the public, not just talk to the elites.

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## It was not the picture that caused Magdalen College problems

I have no problem with the postgraduate students at Magdalen College Oxford choosing what pictures to place on their wall. Rotating your pictures or finding one you like better is an enjoyable luxury to have.

The problem came with the way the MCR decided to make or allow this to become a political issue and a matter of national debate. Their explanation of why a picture of the Queen was not suitable gained the approval of some and the condemnation of others. A student common room which needs to allow all its members of whatever view or background to feel valued and respected ended up dividing opinion by being too free with its explanations. Had they said if anyone had bothered to ask they just wanted a change or a different decorative effect there would have been no story. Now monarchists there may feel on edge.

I raise this to frame a wider debate. It is most important our universities themselves are strictly independent of political opinion or intellectual bias. There should not be a collective student view formed by a majority on the role of the Queen and what she symbolises. There should be no College or university view of which democratic parties are worthy of support. There can and should be many different student views of politics, with individuals and issue based societies seeking to make converts and expressing their views as they see fit within the law. The university, the College, or the debating society needs to offer platforms for the main strands of thought and democratic politics so young people can hear for themselves and dispute with believers. The danger is universities become too narrow in a collective view, and no platform people who represent legitimate and often popular positions.

Today there is a feeling amongst populists who favour national democracies and more individual freedoms that universities are hostile to them and unwilling to hear their case. As someone who is not a voter for AFD, Lega, the US Republicans or National Rally, who does not support all their views and who keeps out of expressing individual views on foreign elections, I nonetheless am uneasy if UK universities think representatives of these parties and viewpoints should be excluded from the global debate. A majority of students may well have disliked President Trump and disapproved of some of his views, but they should be willing to hear the case of the supporters of someone who commanded millions of votes in the world's most powerful democracy. Currently in the EU some anti EU parties are front runners in opinion polls. University people need to understand why and to hear the arguments, even if they do stay resolutely in favour of the EU project.

Democracy thrives on lively exchanges of varied viewpoints and on free votes to determine who has made the most successful popular appeal. In an age of

scepticism about a ruling elite of rich business people, powerful officials and a gilded group of establishment politicians Universities need to understand both their aims and why so many people disagree with their consensus.