

CBI business optimism

Surveys of opinion can be unreliable. In July 2016 the CBI survey showed a dreadful minus 47, compared to a minus 4 in January 2016. At the time I thought it an odd reading predicting a downturn we would not experience, as time proved to be the case. Today's survey shows a surge to plus 15 for this January, implying good growth to come. It's a great turn round in sentiment from ultra pessimism last summer.

More reliable order book figures show plus 15 this January, compared to plus 5 last January. This is a better indicator of more growth to come. Why are some forecasters still expecting a big slowdown?

New Year brings new hope for poor Chinese

The cold winter wind rattled the window frames of Xu Haicheng's warm, cozy home. Inside sat an unlikely pair surrounded by receipts and papers.

Xu's house guest was President Xi Jinping, and Xi was helping the farmer with his household budget.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, for the past five years has made it an annual tradition to visit real Chinese before the Lunar New Year. On Monday and Tuesday, he was in Zhangbei County in the northern province of Hebei.

This is not the first year that Xi's New Year inspection tours have taken him to the front line of China's war against poverty.

He visited Gansu Province and Beijing in 2013, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region in 2014, Shaanxi Province in 2015 and Jiangxi Province in 2016.

Last year he also visited the provinces of Qinghai and Anhui, as well as Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, which are home to a high number of people living in poverty.

Just 200 kilometers north of Beijing, Zhangbei has been classed as a deprived county since 2013, but thanks to a major poverty-alleviation program it is receiving support, including measures to promote profitable agricultural products and emerging industries such as solar power.

Xu explained to the president that his family has 30 mu (2 ha) of land, upon which he grows potatoes, beets and oats.

The president picked up the man's budget.

"I can see that three mu of land produced 2,000 jin (1,000 kilograms) of potatoes, which you sold for two yuan (0.29 U.S. dollars) a jin. On 15 mu of land, however, you grow other crops that only sell for half a yuan a jin," said Xi, before adding, "That is a big price difference."

According to county officials, Zhangbei grows 20 percent of the nation's potatoes, and locals are keen to use more of their land to grow the lucrative tuber.

"You should develop industries and expand their scale according to market demand," Xi suggested.

Next Xi busied himself with some number crunching as he compared Xu's household income and expenses.

"You received a grain grant of over 2,500 yuan, another grant of 306 yuan for reforesting land, and another for grassland protection for 1,140 yuan," Xi said. "Added to the money you make from farming, this means you earned 43,000 yuan."

"You spent 12,700 yuan on farming and another 29,000 yuan on various household expenses. This comes to 42,000 yuan, yes?" Xi asked.

Xu explained that he had to spend most of his income on his wife's medical treatment and tuition fees for his second daughter, who is studying Traditional Chinese Medicine, and the tuition costs him 18,000 yuan a year.

Xu's daughter told the president that she was also a recipient of a student bursary and was granted 1,500 yuan every semester.

Xi looked confused, "You earned 43,000 yuan but spent 42,000 yuan on farming, health care and education. How did you cover your day-to-day expenses?"

The farmers who also chatted with Xi at Xu's house explained that families in the village had limited outgoings.

"We grow our own food and make linseed oil by ourselves," one villager said. "I spent 600 yuan at most on coal for heating," said another.

The conversations gave the president pause for thought.

He said medical insurance for serious diseases must work well in rural areas, as families can easily slip back into poverty due to the financial burden of ill health.

Moreover, he added, all rural children should be covered by the national education policy that guarantees them nine years of free, compulsory schooling, and access to additional financial assistance.

During his tour, Xi also listened to local Party cadres who briefed him on measures they had implemented under the poverty-alleviation program, such as

solar power and infrastructure projects, and training schemes for farmers.

Xi reminded the officials that they must take the lead in the fight against poverty.

The key to building an all-round moderately prosperous society by 2020 will be implementation, Xi noted.

Following the commitment that China will eliminate poverty by 2020, huge strides in poverty reduction have been achieved.

Over the past four years, the country has lifted 60 million people out of poverty. Moreover, government spending on poverty hit a record high in 2016, exceeding 100 billion yuan for the first time.

The central budget allocated 66.7 billion yuan for poverty reduction this year, up 43.4 percent year on year, while provincial governments' allocations rose more than 50 percent, topping 40 billion yuan.

In late 2016, China issued a poverty alleviation plan for 2016 to 2020, promising to help over 56 million people who live in the country's poorest villages and counties.

"I care most about the poor," Xi said in his New Year speech on the last day of 2016. His words have resonated with millions of Chinese, who like Xu, will start the new year with renewed hope that their lives are on course to improve.

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[Green Party urges Theresa May: put climate change on the agenda with Trump](#)



25 January 2017

***Caroline Lucas: Trump is signalling his intent to put rocket boosters behind the fossil fuel industry**

Theresa May is being urged to raise the issue of climate change with President Donald Trump when she meets with him later this week. In a letter [1] sent to the Prime Ministers, politicians from the Green Party urged the Prime Minister to 'seek firm assurances that he [Trump] will not withdraw from the Paris Agreement, and that he will remain committed to domestic climate legislation, such as the Clean Power Plan'.

The call to Theresa May comes after President Trump signed two executive orders yesterday aiming to push ahead with major pipeline projects in the US [2]. Both the Dakota and Keystone pipelines are regarded as extremely damaging by environmentalists and climate-scientists [3].

The United States is responsible for 15% of global carbon emissions – and their actions are crucial in shaping international climate policy. Donald Trump has previously cast doubt on climate science [4]– and has consistently called for policies designed to fast-track the burning of fossil fuels.

Caroline Lucas, the co-leader of the Green Party, said:

“Donald Trump’s first few days as President have revealed his contempt for environmental protection. By pushing ahead with the Dakota and Keystone pipelines he is signalling his intent to put rocket boosters behind the fossil fuel industry. Theresa May has a duty to make a stand – and to demand assurances from President Trump that he will not abandon the Paris climate change agreement. Failing to bring up climate change with President Trump would be a dereliction of duty from Theresa May, and we urge her to put this global challenge at the top of her agenda for their meeting.”

[1] Full letter to Theresa May:

Dear Theresa,

We are writing concerning your visit to the United States tomorrow to visit President Trump.

As you will know, President Trump and senior members of his new team have systematically cast doubt on climate science, whilst supporting polluting energy sources and downplaying the need for the transition to a low-carbon economy. As a clear statement of his intentions, at the moment of his inauguration, all mentions of climate change were removed from the Whitehouse website – instead, there appeared a raft of policies designed to fast-track the burning of fossil fuels.

With 2016 now confirmed as the hottest year on record, and the world heading for 4 degrees warming by the end of the century, there has never been a more dangerous time for the scaling back of climate action anywhere in the world. The United States is responsible for 15% of global emissions and its leadership is vital in setting the path to a zero-carbon future.

Given the urgency of the climate crisis, and the importance of the United

States in global efforts to tackle it, we are writing to ask you to raise climate change with President Trump when you see him on Friday. More specifically, we are asking to you seek firm assurances that he will not withdraw from the Paris Agreement, and that he will remain committed to domestic climate legislation, such as the Clean Power Plan, that form an important part of US international commitments.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,
Jonathan Bartley, co-leader

Caroline Lucas MP, co-leader

Amelia Womack, deputy leader

Keith Taylor MEP, South-East

Molly Scott Cato MEP, South-West

Jean Lambert MEP, London

Sian Berry, London Assembly Member

Caroline Russell, London Assembly Member

Andrew Cooper, Energy spokesperson

[2] <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/01/24/politics/trump-keystone-xl-dakota-access-pipelines-executive-actions/>

[3] <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/jan/24/keystone-dakota-access-pipeline-executive-order>

[4] <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2016/jun/03/hillary-clinton/yes-donald-trump-did-call-climate-change-chinese-h/>

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[Arbitrary cap on the number of children the Government will support](#)

is not only cruel, but is bad policy – Debbie Abrahams

Debbie

Abrahams MP, Labour's Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary, commenting on the Government's two child limit on tax credits, said:

"An arbitrary cap on the number of children that the Government will support is not only cruel, but is bad policy.

As 90 per cent of lone parents are female, it is a further example of how these six years of wasted austerity have been borne on the backs of low income mothers.

"Of equal concern is the lack of detail surrounding the so-called 'rape clause'. Should the burden of proof be placed upon survivors of rape by the Department for Work and Pensions, this would constitute a wholly unacceptable extension of the Department's remit into deeply sensitive areas of women's lives.

"People would be right to feel little confidence in the Government's competence when approaching this highly sensitive issue. More so when viewed in the context of the punitive DWP culture fostered by this government.

"The sum of these deeply concerning questions, which hang over the policy as a whole, suggests that the only solution can be to scrap this policy once and for all. I urge the Prime Minister to do so before it takes effect."

Ends