

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.