

Let Alok Sharma as chairman and deal maker fly to meetings, but how many others?

The establishment elite that perform the rites and fashion the weapons of the war on carbon are in danger of slipping into the bad practices of some past priesthoods. The officials and grandees tell us they need to fly around the world to conferences like COP 26 to spread the word. I can see the case for the chairman of the global conference to meet key players face to face in their own settings to try to do a deal, but the case for others is by no means clear. Too many fly around the world to tell others not to fly but to holiday near to home and to communicate on Zoom or Teams. When challenged about their own lifestyles which seem detached from Mission Net Zero they reply that it is fine because they are “offsetting” all the carbon their flights, chauffeured cars, air conditioned hotels and meat banquets generate. In other words they use taxpayers money to grant aid activities like tree planting or renewable power installation to claim a carbon offset.

As one of leading advocates of net Zero, Bill Gates helpfully explains in his book “I own big houses and fly in private planes- in fact I took one to Paris for the climate change conference – so who am I to lecture anyone on the environment?” “It’s true that my carbon footprint is absurdly high. .. In 2020 I started buying sustainable jet fuel and will fully offset my family’s aviation missions in 2021. For our non aviation emissions I am buying offsets through a company that runs a facility that removes carbon dioxide from the air”. At least Bill Gates uses his own money to offset that carbon footprint and grasps that others might see it differently.

I am disappointed that COP26 is not a virtual conference. The combination of the messaging on jet travel and the wish of many governments to restrict jet travel to stop the spread of covid would seem to make a strong case for a virtual meeting. There will be critics who will not be easily assuaged by knowledge of carbon offsets. There will also be plenty of examination of the nature of those carbon offsets to see if they are genuine and not being miscounted.

The efforts to place a price on carbon are creating inflation in various green investments as well as the more useful boosting of investment in things like trees and renewable power. They are also leading governments into seizing another new way of taxing us, by placing carbon taxes and carbon border taxes on items we need.

Governments need to explain how they will tax non fossil fuels in the world they want where they lose most of the tax on oil and gas. They also need to set out where all the electrical power is coming up from to fuel the electrical revolution.