

Tougher carbon targets

Leading governments are as expected coming up with tougher targets to reduce carbon dioxide output, and are accepting the discipline of setting shorter term intermediate targets on the way to net zero by 2050. This week the German Green party moved in to the lead in the polls for the September 2021 Federal election. They have pledged to increase Germany's target of a 55% cut in CO2 by 2030 to a 70% cut. To achieve this they say they want to phase out all new internal combustion engine vehicles and stop all coal use by 2030. President Biden is talking of halving 2005 levels of CO2 output by 2030 in a major reversal of President Trump's cheap energy policy based on domestic oil, gas and coal.

The question to ask is how will these targets be hit without major changes of consumer behaviour? How will they encourage or incentivise people to change their gas boilers and scrap their diesel and petrol cars? Germany is still reliant on coal and imported Russian gas for industry and homes. Why put in another gas pipeline from Russia if this all has to be displaced? The German motor industry is trying to develop and display electric cars to replace its current successful model ranges, but so far there is no sign of a mass surge in demand on the scale needed given issues over prices, battery life and charge times. Governments are now talking about green hydrogen alternatives to battery electric travel and mains electric heating, but the products based on it are not yet available to purchase. More uncertainty about what technology will prevail puts [people off early adoption.

These carbon warrior governments need to work with the private sector to decide what is feasible. They need to understand this transformation can only go at the fast pace they now want if the cars, heating systems, diets and the other things they want to change appear as products people want to buy at prices they can afford. There has been no need for government to push the mobile phone revolution. Most people wanted one and most embraced the new capabilities of the phone. There was no need for governments to subsidise or regulate to get people to use Google searches or buy on line from Amazon. Their service was readily taken up by people.

The EU talks about the twin revolutions, the green and the digital. The truth is the digital revolution is bottom up, led by willing consumers seeking film and music downloads, wanting social media and welcoming on line shopping. The green revolution is still top down. Without the products that fly off the shelves because they are good and good value it is going to take a lot of law, tax, regulation and subsidy to force the changes the quangos and governments want. The more they do it by law, the more people will come to resent it.

My Question during the Statement on Post Office Court of Appeal Judgment, 27 April 2021

Sir John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Will the Minister understand that there has to be compensation, and urgently, and this compensation has to cover not just the Horizon losses but the legal costs and the loss of business and income that people suffered from the damage to their reputation?

Many MPs, including myself, told past Ministers that this was an accounting scandal—it was not a sudden outbreak of mass criminal activity by good public servants. They deserve better, and this Government must now apologise by making sure they get proper compensation.

The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Mr Paul Scully): Indeed, it is important that the Post Office engages with all the appellants who have had their convictions quashed. As we are getting those answers, we will work to ensure that we can get fair compensation.

The Post Office systems scandal

It has taken many years, much suffering and plenty of legal bills for the Postmasters to get justice over the Horizon scandal. MPs including myself told past Ministers there was no sudden outbreak of mass criminality by Postmasters, but there was a systems and accounting problem created by new computers. This has at last been admitted by the Post Office and the government.

Yesterday in the House the Minister made a statement about how the Post Office and government intend to proceed following the Court decision to quash past convictions for fraud, false accounting and theft by some of the Postmasters. They plan an Inquiry and a compensation scheme. There was widespread anger in the House about what has happened and how long it has taken the Post Office to accept its errors. I stressed to the Minister that they should as a matter of urgency grant compensation to all those falsely accused and many falsely convicted. The compensation should cover the Horizon losses themselves, but also the extensive legal fees to right the wrongs and the lost earnings and business revenue caused by these false actions. People have lost their livelihoods and seen their reputations savaged. The least the Post Office should do is offer generous compensation along with their belated apology.

My Question during the Urgent Question on the Overseas Development Aid Budget, 26 April 2021

Sir John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Is the UK now stopping making overseas aid payments through the EU, given the way it has been spending money on a country such as China, which has \$3.2 trillion in reserves?

Is this not an opportunity for the UK to express its own moral priorities, and secure better value for money by making more of its own direct choices and payments? Can that include being very generous in response to the current Indian crisis?

The Minister for the Middle East and North Africa (Mr James Cleverly): My right hon. Friend makes the important point that, having left the European Union, the United Kingdom can now make its own decisions. In many instances—not in all cases—the positions that we take now are similar to those that we took as members of the European Union.

He will note that we have significantly—almost completely—reduced our aid support to China; the only expenditure now is in support of human rights and open societies. As I said in response to an earlier question, we will be focused very much on how we can support our friends around the world in their times of need.

The questions over Scottish independence

I would like Scotland to stay in the UK and note that a majority of Scottish people in the latest polls wish to. I think all should rest with the agreement in 2014 that that was a legal once in a generation vote. As the Scottish election is dominated by arguments about independence, with the SNP wanting another early referendum on the subject to try to reverse the decision made just a few years ago to remain, it is necessary to look at some of the consequences of a theoretical pro independence vote.

Many SNP people and arguments imply they do not want an independent Scotland. Many seem to want devo max. The official party position is now to want so called independence but to assume they will be admitted to the EU. They do

not have doubts about how feasible that would be, nor do they think through what a negotiation would be like to try to bring that about. Presumably the EU would want Scotland to be a net contributor to the EU budget, a very different relationship to one they have with the UK budgets that have favoured Scotland. They would also presumably expect Scotland to prepare to enter the single currency. That at least would sort out the strange refusal of the SNP to say which currency they would use were they win a referendum, though there would still be the question of what currency they would adopt between leaving the UK and being admitted as full members of the Euro.

In the last referendum many SNP supporters argued they should stay in the pound. It seemed doubly bizarre to want an independent Scotland to have a foreign Central Bank. There would be no reason for the rest of the UK and the Bank of England to go on taking Scotland's economic needs into account when setting rates and banking policy. Scotland would not be represented on the Board or around the Monetary Policy Committee table. They also believed last time that large and rising oil revenues would bail them out. Today the oil price is much lower and the new Scotland is committed to net zero, so they have to plan the demise of their oil industry.

The issue of debts and deficits would loom large. Of course if leaving the UK Scotland should take her fair share of the collective debt. Her budget deficit would be far too high for the Maastricht EU rules. That is an issue they would need to sort out as part of their membership talks with the EU. Meanwhile they would need to satisfy international debt markets about their plans.

I am not one to go in for Project Fear type projections of what might happen to Scottish economic output, jobs and trade were she to leave the UK. I have seen too many of those exercises be too pessimistic without helping the cause of those trying to keep a Union together. It is however important that the rest of the UK makes clear that were Scotland to hold and win a legal referendum to leave the UK we would respect it, and would proceed to negotiate exit. The UK would need to make fair proposals to share the debt, to allow independent migration and citizenship policies, to provide a means of following different trade and foreign policies, and settling issues over defence amongst other matters. Scotland would need to put up an EU external border with England if she got her way and became an EU member. Would Scotland seek to join NATO and be a committed ally of the UK? How quickly would the UK military bases in Scotland be removed? The rest of the UK should not seek to obstruct a departure following a legal referendum, but nor should it allow exit on Scotland's preferred terms. 300 years of Union has created much common working and interwoven institutions so there would be much to unravel.