

The PM must continue his reform of net zero policies

My latest Conservative Home article

The Prime Minister made a little headway with Conservative opinion when he announced a new realism concerning the road to net zero. Former Conservative voters who are telling pollsters they will abstain or vote Reform took some interest in what he had to say. They agreed that it makes sense to get our own oil and gas out of the North Sea instead of importing more. It brings us better paid jobs, lots of tax revenue and lowers world CO₂ output. They agreed we should not ban new diesel and petrol cars in 2030. They are expecting more in this same sensible vein and are impatient for future developments.

The world background is so different from the world implied by UK policy. Most forecasts expect oil and gas output and use to continue to increase this decade. Most anticipate further large increases in CO₂ output this decade from China and for many years from India. As a result we are still some way off peak CO₂ output for the world. Many UK people who buy into the idea of curbing world carbon output do not see the point in the UK cutting back further on its own high energy using activities if we simply import what is needed from countries like China. They carry on burning coal oil and gas to make the things for us. If the UK did more for itself the amount of world carbon dioxide output would fall a little as we would save all the transport CO₂ to bring in the goods from abroad, and would often have more fuel efficient processes than the leading exporters. It would also help if we grew more of our own food instead of using subsidies to stop home production.

The UK has allowed itself to get hung up on wonky carbon accounting. If we import all the wood we need to burn in the Drax power station apparently that is green, but if we started producing our own sustainable timber to burn there would be a CO₂ attribution. What about all the extra CO₂ bringing the wood all the way across the Atlantic causes? Shouldn't we account for that? If we close down our coal burning blast furnaces and import our steel we have cut our CO₂ but world CO₂ will go up. In the meantime we have lost the jobs and the tax revenues making our own steel brings, and have weakened our ability to make things from steel including vital defence items. The Prime Minister is good at detail so he needs to challenge these absurdities in official policy formation.

There needs to be a big rethink on the idea that we can get everyone to net zero by regulating, lecturing and fining companies. It's a crazy world where our energy companies are fined because not enough people are prepared to have a "free" smart meter in their homes. The government needs to ask why people do not want them and trust them instead of wasting so much tax money on trying to get them adopted. It is bizarre that car companies making and selling vehicles here will be fined if they sell too many diesel and petrol cars at a time when electric cars are unpopular with the general public. Again the issue is ,how can electric cars be made affordable and attractive to customers? The government keeps on recommending heat pumps to be faced with tiny demand compared to the popular gas boilers.

They need to work on their affordability, their practicality and their running costs. They also need to let the industry catch up. I would like a good one for my flat but there is nothing on offer that could be installed in my block. It is strange that there are windfall taxes on those who dare to meet our demand for oil and gas, and now there are also windfall taxes on renewables if they are too profitable. The aim is always to end up with ever dearer and less competitive energy

The government also needs to lead thinking on the pace of change and the order of putting in the investments it does help pay for or regulates. If someone goes out and buys an electric vehicle today when they plug it in to recharge the electricity companies will doubtless have to burn some more gas to supply the power as they normally use all the available renewables for existing demand. How does that help us on the road to net zero.? If too many people got an electric car or heat pump there will not be enough grid and street cable capacity to supply their needs. When will the grid catch up? When will more investors be able to connect new wind or solar farms to the grid, where there is a long queue? Shouldn't we put in the infrastructure first?

If someone scraps an older petrol car and buys a new electric vehicle how long does it take to offset all the extra CO₂ generated by making the one and scrapping the other? If the driver does a normal mileage many years pass where the impact is more CO₂ from the change, not less. This is aggravated all the time the recharging electricity may have to come from fossil fuels.

Taxing carbon is said to be the market based solution to these dilemmas. What our regime does is hasten the end of high energy using industries in the UK, speeding more imports and thus boosting not reducing world CO₂ output. The UK has especially high energy prices given the taxes and market regulation, which is wonderful news for our competitors who take a more pragmatic approach to energy pricing. The UK has lost a lot of capacity in aluminium, glass, petrochemicals, fertilisers, steel, ceramics and other similar industries as a result of our lop sided approach to making and using these products. We consume them avidly but moralise about how we must not make them here. Last week saw the sad news that our remaining blast furnaces are under threat of closure. The Opposition scarecely stirred over it. Surely this matters? We used to battle long and hard to invest in and keep a variety of large domestic steel plants as a crucial part of our industrial base.

Meanwhile the government allows very large number of migrants in to undertake mainly low paid work. Given the importance of national CO₂ accounting to the system why do we not reduce this? Every new person coming in creates extra demand for CO₂ for all the homes, products and jobs they need. Following a low wage model is bad for many reasons as well as the environmental impact. We should aim for a higher real wage higher productivity economy. Better energy efficiency should be part of the greater emphasis on investment in good machine and computing power to do more of the tasks. If we invite in an additional 600,000 workers every year as we did last year that requires huge outpourings of CO₂ to build the homes, hospitals, roads, sewage works, power stations, schools and the rest they will need, and to run them. We then need bigger cuts in CO₂ elsewhere in energy using activities to hit targets.

The official government uses the policy wish to get to net zero to override common sense in its advice to Ministers and in the decisions of quangos. This come to suppress other important policy aims like increasing real wages, cutting poverty and promoting prosperity. It is time for a further re think, starting by getting rid of some of those so called net zero policies which mean more world CO 2 and fewer UK jobs.

[The Home Secretary](#)

It would have been better if the Home Secretary and Prime Minister had agreed both the policy and the way to explain it. As I understand it the policy was heavily influenced by Downing Street who ruled out the amendment many of us wanted to the Immigration Act to ensure the small boats can be stopped without ECHR override. The Home Secretary was more sympathetic, understanding the need to be sure she could deliver what is after all the Prime Minister's promise, to stop the small boats.

The Prime Minister now needs to hope the courts are kind to him this week when we hear the result of the further UK appeal against his policy. There still remains open the possibility of someone trying to use the European Court of Human Rights as well, which is why it would have been better to have made the legislation ECHR court proof. If the purpose of the law is not clearly enough set out for the Supreme Court in the UK then obviously amended law should be able to fix that. They should put through a simple amendment as quickly as possible.

Let us hope a Cabinet of people the PM feels happy with can deliver the five pledges the Prime Minister has made. He also needs to make sure the Cabinet has a wide enough range of views so the debate is worth having and the conclusions more to the liking of the audience outside.

I think it wrong to appoint David Cameron to the Lords and Cabinet. We need a Foreign Secretary in the Commons and one who is a strong believer in Brexit UK developing her role in the world, taking advantage of our new Brexit freedoms.

[Shakespeare's plays 400 years on have messages for us](#)

400 years ago the First Folio of Shakespeare's plays was published. The well off could buy a copy of this most important and impressive volume for £1 from

a bookshop in St Paul's Churchyard.

The First Folio published versions of 18 plays that had been published individually, and another 18 that had never been published. Two of his actor friends put this together, with patrons and the assistance of those who owned the copyrights. It is one of the great works of publishing, ranking alongside the bible in English for the influence it had on our language and history. In more modern editions it has become a worldwide fount of great stories, memorable characters and superb writing. So many of our common phrases can be traced back to Shakespeare's lines.

Shakespeare's work has been important in my life. One of the best things in my education was the first year of my English A level studies. We were told to read widely for that year, leaving the set texts for the second . We had to write an essay every week on a different Shakespeare play for a period. It was a revelation. The plays showed what literary genius could achieve as I struggled to improve my writing style. If you want to write well, read well.

I have been to see many productions of plays from his repertoire. Some have impressed and some have undermined the brilliance of the writing with crude impositions by the Director. One of the most extraordinary was a production of Henry VIII in the Church at Stratford. They acted in the spaces between the pews promenade style. The costumes were lifelike based on famous portraits of the characters. You felt you were so close to one of England's most fearsome Kings and his courtiers. Theatre can bring the past to life.

Shakespeare has a lot to say about the gaining and exercising of political power. The power crazed Macbeth murders his way to the crown egged on by his demonic wife. We are asked if the devil can speak true and reminded that false face must hide what false heart doth know. The fool in Lear is full of good advice. You should let go thy hold when a great wheel runs down a hill lest it break your neck by continuing to follow it. Many MPs move away from powerful figures when they are on the downward slope. He tells Lear he should not have been old until he was wise, surveying the damage that the succession to his throne has brought on Lear himself.

Most cutting of all was John of Gaunt's criticism of Richard II. "That England that was wont to conquer others, hath made a shameful conquest of itself". How many Brexiteers with no wish to conquer others felt the second half of that shaft, that the UK had surrendered powers foolishly. Giving away his kingdom to daughters who were meant to be allies proved disastrous for Lear.

The history plays are so well written that they have had considerable influence on how history sees the late medieval civil wars and the personalities of the Kings and their main rivals. What shines through it for me is the hero, England. "This scepter'd isle...this other Eden...this fortress made by Nature for herself...This happy breed of men.. This earth, this realm, this England". Whatever bad, weak and ill advised Kings might do to their country its underlying strengths, its rich landscape and farms, its freedom loving people, its sense of right somehow survive and carry it through to a better future.

Some of that future arrived in Shakespeare's day as London thrived and expanded and as English culture lived through a golden era of plays, poems, music and paintings. The way Henry V cast off the wayward pursuits of his youth gives us a shining example of great kingship, improved by having the common touch from his tavern experiences. The Merry Wives of Windsor is a wonderful romp which shows how the middle classes could puncture the unacceptable demands of a knight of the realm claiming to be close to the court, trying to exploit his status.

I will leave the last words to Puck who delighted audiences of Midsummer Night's Dream. Shakespeare's vision of a fairy that could travel round the world in 40 minutes was an exciting fancy. The fastest they could do their early circumnavigations was the pace of a sailing boat, remarkable though those new achievements were in a shrinking world. Puck had in mind the people as well as the politicians when he famously quipped "Lord what fools these mortals be." We need to prove him wrong.

Remembrance

Earlier this week I placed a small cross with a poppy for Wokingham in the Parliamentary garden of remembrance. Today I will lay wreaths at two local Memorial services. It is right that we remember all those who gave their lives in the two great world wars of the last century, and in other recent conflicts.

Born like most people alive today after the wars, I recall how they did shape the lives of every family in the land. My two grandfathers fought as very young men in the trenches of Northern France and Belgium in the first war. My mother and father met through their naval duties in the second war. Both generations had years dominated by death, injury and deprivation all around them. They lost friends and comrades, worried about the bombing of their family homes and accepted the obligations of rationing and black outs.

I felt very privileged to be born into a UK at last at peace, free of ration books and visibly getting more prosperous as the bomb damage was replaced with new shops and homes. I wished to work to keep it that way. I feel a great debt of gratitude that the lives of more recent generations including my own has been spared living under a foreign imposed tyranny of the kind Hitler and Nazi Germany imposed on much of Europe at the peak of his powers.

It is right that we keep a silence and say a thank you to all those who gave their today that we might enjoy a better tomorrow.

Some of the ways to net zero will take us in the wrong direction

I know a few people who write in think it is wrong to be trying to get to net zero as they do not think manmade CO₂ is such a problem. They point to warming periods before man made CO₂ and to the role of sun cycles, water vapour and natural CO₂. More write in to say China and India are greatly increasing their CO₂ output each year this decade when they already account for 37 times as much as the UK. So they ask how can it make sense for the UK to stop more activities that generate CO₂ especially if we then import the goods that help create it?

What I have tried to do in recent years is to point out that some of the practical remedies the advocates of a rapid journey to net zero propose will not help reduce world CO₂. Indeed many of them will increase it. I have also argued that to work this has to be a journey the public willingly undertakes. It cannot all be done by making people buy things and do things they think are worse and dearer than what they do today. I am seeking maximum support for the need to change these damaging policies by arguing in this way. All western governments strongly back the net zero approach.

Today I do a stock take of some of the more obvious policies that can backfire.

1. Keep our own gas in the ground. If we do this we will be importing even more gas, often in liquified form. LNG generates several times the amount of CO₂ than our own gas piped direct to customers. It takes more energy to compress it, to keep it cool, to transport it long distances by sea and to convert it back to gas. It also means the big tax revenues largely pass to the foreign supplier state, not to the UK Treasury. Government has now accepted this advice to change this policy.
2. Get more people to buy electric vehicles by subsidies and rules. If someone does buy an electric vehicle on many days when they plug it in the grid will need to deliver more gas or coal based energy to recharge. Most of the time we are using all the wind and solar we can produce so the extra electricity needed for an electric car requires fossil fuels, delivered in an inefficient way. it is not sensible to regulate or subsidise people into EVs before there is enough renewable energy available to recharge them. The government has dropped its planned ban on new diesel and petrol car sales but more needs to change.
3. Get more people to buy electric cars. If someone buys an EV and scraps an older diesel they will need to do many miles a year in the EV to bring about a fall in CO₂. The manufacture of the new EV generates a lot of CO₂ which would not be generated if you ran the older diesel for longer. We need to account accurately for the impact.
4. Promote more public transport. This does not work as well as they often suppose. Many trains and buses still run on diesel. Much of the electricity used by the electric ones is generated from fossil fuels for trains and buses. It only works well if the train or bus journey

is by an electric vehicle that is supplied from additional renewable electricity and if the journey is one that would otherwise have required direct use of fossil fuel. It also needs a service which attracts sufficient people. Near empty buses increase CO₂ per passenger.

5. Remove your gas boiler and insert a heat pump. There will be a large CO₂ creation to make the heat pump, carry out the installation, add the extra insulation, bigger radiators and the rest. There could then be reliance on substantial amounts of fossil fuel generated electricity to run the system.
6. Close down fossil fuel using plant in steel, ceramics, paper, glass and other energy intensive activities to be replaced by imports. This will mean more CO₂, both from the CO₂ the exporting company creates in its overseas plants and for the transport of heavy and bulky items by sea.

So time to change many policies because they do not deliver net zero and depend on getting people to do things they do not want to do.