

Politics Without Politicians – Or Politics Despite Politicians?

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Introduction

In the United States there is increasing attention to so-called ‘second generation’ environmentalism – looking for ways to secure beneficial outcomes without command and control regulation. This Conference seeks new ways to achieve environmental outcomes that involve society, government at State, local and Federal levels, and business.

There are many comparative studies of the relative effectiveness of voluntary, statutory and mixed systems in Europe, North America and elsewhere. Whether led by regulation or followed by regulation, approaches also vary in their objectives – for example specifying environmental results to be achieved in terms of ecosystem function or quality, of emission levels or pollutant concentrations, or technologies or practices to be used.

I am not going to consider these issues here – instead I want to consider the politics that lies behind these new approaches. In particular I will focus on what has in the UK been called ‘unpolitics’ⁱ or ‘new politics’ⁱⁱ and draw on the experience I had as Programme Director of Greenpeace UK (1992 – 6) and Strategic Adviser to Greenpeace International (1997 – 8)ⁱⁱⁱ. I will begin by looking at what ‘unpolitics’ is, and then at why we still need to involve politics and politicians in achieving environmental protection. I will end by briefly considering the case of George Bush and climate.

Unpolitics and New Politics

These terms refer to politics-without-politicians. Such politics achieves outcomes without recourse to formal politics but where there is still a form of give and take, and some negotiated or transactional process.

Such politics are far from being entirely new. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for example, non-conformist English church goers organised sugar boycotts to oppose the slave trade. (Many traders were also Members of Parliament). One result was the Anti-Slavery Act of 1833, another was that people still eat less sugar in SW England than in other (less Methodist) parts of England today.

However this type of politics has become more prominent over the last decade or so. It became increasingly widespread in Europe in the 1990s and also provided additional evidence to those questioning the role of the nation state, and the continuing decline in public participation in formal politics.

In 1992 I began work for Greenpeace UK with a brief to re-evaluate the organisations’ strategy in the light of changing external realities which had been noticed by the Board of Greenpeace.

I noted in 1993 that^{iv} ‘In the UK real political dialogue is increasingly via NGOs [Non Governmental Organisations] with businesses, or via NGOs and Government, or between customers and companies, or between NGOs, rather than via political parties’. ‘Real’ dialogue not just in the sense that it could lead to resolutions and involved genuine exchange of views but also because it dealt with issues which formal, conventional politics marginalised or ignored.

How Electoral Politics Makes Governments Less Environmentally Intelligent And Responsive

Using a combination of television, psephology and campaign planning, British and American politicians now run elections on a dwindling number of 'key' issues. These are calculated as those most likely to swing key voters and determine the outcome of elections.

Political Parties therefore tend to ignore many issues of concern to the public in the course of an election. These issues may be public issues but they are not political ones. Politicians do not focus on these non-political issues for political purposes – hence they remain largely ignorant of them. So for example in the mid-1990s subjects such as genetic engineering of food and electromagnetic radiation were public issues but not political issues in the UK.

In Government of course, public issues have to be 'dealt with'. Yet even then, these 'non-political' issues are mostly treated as difficulties that can only be contained or avoided, as with natural disasters or major accidents. The general political response of New Labour, Republicans, Democrats and Conservatives is to regard public opposition to nuclear power or GM foods as something that needs to be dealt with but which is, essentially, irrational and perverse. To this extent Britain and the United States share a common characteristic.

At the specific-level this means that politicians are ill-prepared to deal with issues such as BSE (mad cow disease), or the public reaction to GMOs (genetically modified organisms). Governments and individual politicians are repeatedly 'surprised' by issues that to them seem to 'appear from nowhere'^v.

Genetically modified crops is one example. When in 1998/9 Monsanto spectacularly failed to persuade the European public that GM food was good for it^{vi}, they were following in the footsteps of many European governments. Tony Blair and his colleagues saw (and still see) genetic engineering as a shiny new technology synonymous with modernity and deserving effectively unqualified support. The public see it differently – as a risk worth taking only where the need is demonstrated.

Obsolete Political Thinking

The Anglo political classes still deal in the old politics of old economics. Our politicians recognize the creation and distribution of wealth as political issues but not the creation and distribution of risk – these they try to treat with 'science', as technical issues.

Their political ideology, such as it is, generally makes all the assumptions of old economics, in which, for example, natural capital is not valued at all, and environmental damage counts positively in the national account of Gross National Product^{vii}. Thus even if they do consider 'environment', their political DNA doesn't know how to deal with it.

In the UK at least, the mis-use of science undermines trust in government, in science and in the political process. I argued in 1996 that 'great efforts are made to place numbers on what can be measured while purely arbitrary judgements are made about why things are right or wrong. Where things cannot be measured at all – for example the risks of releasing genetically modified organisms into the environment – the risks are often said to be zero^{viii}'. Other cases in point have included BSE and nuclear radiation. While this continues, it is hard for innovative policy mechanisms to gain much public support if they rely on 'science' used in this way.

In continental Europe there is greater understanding that risk rather than money is the basis of a new politics. German sociologist Ulrich Beck, author of the seminal *Risk Society*^{ix}, proposed in 1992 that in a society whose basic material needs are generally more than satisfied, the creation and distribution of risks becomes the principal locus of political controversy.

If the political classes are unsighted on specifics, they are also drifting progressively further away from much of the population on the big picture. ‘Globalisation’ is the handle for one such issue – which is not globalisation in any strict or narrow sense but a raft of linked concerns about the assumptions and direction of economic policy and the nature of development and decision-making in modern society.

Because the origins of such concerns are fundamental and diffuse, they go largely un-noticed except where an event drives them to the surface in some news-worthy way. Meetings enable people to express their feelings – those of the World Trade Organisation provide one example; those of the the World Economic Forum at Davos, are another. The economic and political order is on show at these events. The collapse of attempts to create a Multilateral Agreement on Investment was largely due to a lack of political will to confront such feeling.

Rather than dealing with this failure of the democratic process, politicians have tended to withdraw into their bunkers. Set-piece meetings on controversial topics are replaced by more obscure processes. Elections are fought on ever-narrower agendas, and fewer people vote.

At the same time, it has become an article of faith amongst most politicians that governments should do less and business should do more. The political classes retreat from doing, into notions of facilitation.

The withdrawal of the State from delivering results that started in the Reagan-Thatcher era is still fashionable. (Though rather to the surprise of most British politicians, it seems in the UK that the public now clearly wants more intervention, higher taxes and better public services. See for example the results of the 7 June election and in particular the increased vote for the Liberal Democrats, who proposed higher tax and spending).

For many politicians the idea that they should not intervene has its roots in failed attempts to control economies, to ‘buck the market’ and to defend currencies against global currency flows and speculation. As a result they have reached a state of mind where they no longer feel responsible for controlling anything. This is now a significant difficulty in delivering environmental results because as I argue below, politicians are still needed to set standards and limits.

Corporations, finding themselves in the firing line, also retreat into bunkers. Quite literally so in the case of companies trying to hide their internet servers and IT equipment from potential anarchistic protest. A number have recently taken over a Royal Air Force command bunker in Kent, under 300 feet of concrete, rock and steel, complete with Faraday Cages against pulses of electromagnetic radiation. While this will probably stop bricks as well as 1 kiloton nuclear warheads, it will do nothing to safeguard brands against consumer action.

The Brent Spar

As well as simple protests, frustrated public feeling and values have sometimes expressed themselves through instrumental campaigns which have achieved major results: politics-without-politicians in action.

The example I know best is the Brent Spar campaign of 1995. In this case Shell, at that time the worlds’ fifth largest company, was forced to reverse its plans for sea-dumping of the oldest oil installation from the European North Sea, following an intense three month campaign by Greenpeace. I detail what happened in the book *The Turning of the Spar*, which can be obtained free from Greenpeace UK^x.

That decision surprised everyone concerned and the ramifications were enormous. Within Shell it triggered a major decision-making overhaul and a cultural change that took many years (and still continues). Shell began to see itself as an oil company in transition to becoming an energy company. This is undoubtedly one reason why in 2001 Shell now stands out as the multinational oil company most supportive of government action to cap and cut fossil fuel emissions (see below). Shell supports the Kyoto Protocol while Exxon (Esso in the UK) helped persuade President G W Bush to reject it. Shell has also invested substantially in renewable energies – in 1997 the commentator Fred Pearce wrote in *New Scientist* magazine^{xi} ‘Anybody who believes that Shell’s recent announcement of a \$550m investment in photovoltaics is unconnected to the Brent Spar fracas is being very naïve’.

That certainly was politics without politicians in the leading role. Moreover it went against government desires. The UK Government fully backed Shell’s plans to dump the Spar, wanting to utilise a loophole carefully written into the obscure Oslo and Paris Commission (OSPAR) rules (covering the NE Atlantic) that would allow sea disposal of old oil installations. Its chief motivation appears to have been to minimise tax breaks that otherwise would have resulted from the costlier on-shore options such as scrapping, re-use and recycling.

Once Greenpeace occupied the redundant storage facility, the UK Government sat back and let Shell deal with it. Eventually, and amidst uproar, Shell’s International Board heeded consumer boycotts run throughout Europe and reversed the plan, with the Spar under tow and within miles of its Atlantic dump site. The *Daily Mail*, by far the most important newspaper for the then Conservative Government of John Major, ran a front page headline ‘Shell U-Turn Sinks Major’. The Prime Minister and his colleagues were furious and vented their anger on the media, who in turn tried to blame Greenpeace. Meanwhile other European politicians who had not originally objected to (or probably even been aware of) the UK-Shell plan, but who had taken the opportunity to call for the scheme to be abandoned during the long campaign, were able to bask in reflected glory.

Subsequently Greenpeace was able to get the loophole closed at OSPAR meetings. Thus politics followed consumer pressure, NGO campaigning and a business decision. In the end Shell was more concerned about its reputation in Europe than its relations with the UK Government. This was politics despite politicians – they were still around but were reduced to a role of sweeping up and regulating what was decided by other means.

At the level of ‘environmental issues’ the Brent Spar appears to be about marine pollution but in truth it was about corporate responsibility. Journalist Simon Barnes wrote in *The Times* that it involved ‘a handful of good-hearted chaps on a lilo^{xiii} taking on the entire Western economy and with it, the biggest piece of litter in the world’. It was, he suggested ‘a small but perfectly formed victory for sanity, for people against machines and moguls’. In that sense the Spar incident was a lightning rod for anger at corporate behaviour, which had accumulated over many years. Here, finally, in one dramatic polarity, was proof of the corporate low-standards which many had so long suspected. They also found they had the means to do something about it, in the shape of a boycott.

At a Cambridge management seminar shortly afterwards a CEO told me “It’s simply a very big piece of packaging. We’re planning on the basis that sooner or later we’ll have to take everything back. Either the governments will regulate for it or the consumers will demand it”.

Many people saw the Spar episode as evidence that the inaccessible forces of globalisation and corporate hegemony could somehow be brought to book by non governmental organisations, even if governments themselves had sold out to big business. The UK newspaper *The Independent* wrote on 21 June 1995 that ‘Shell’s loss is democracy’s gain ...

anyone who feared that globalisation would give international companies carte blanche to act as they please should be cheered by what has happened’.

However incidents or opportunities like the ‘Spar don’t come along often. Even if there seem to be a lot of occasions where consumer and NGO action has resulted in successful politics-without-politicians, I haven’t met anyone in either business or campaigning organisations who see it as an effective replacement of democratic government.

What it does illustrate however is the failure of democracy, and in particular the failure of political system to use democracy to address major environmental problems.

Global Governance

Internationally, the rise of ‘unpolitics’ illustrates the crisis of ‘global governance’. Wolfgang Reinicke, formerly of the World Bank and now of the Brookings Institution, has written of ‘Governing Without Governments^{xiii}’. Reinicke points out^{xiv} that governments find their sovereignty threatened both by globalisation and inter-dependence.

When consumers, NGOs and businesses interact and determine outcomes, they can also threaten the sovereignty of governments (such as with the Brent Spar or rejection of GMOs). NGOs increasingly develop and execute global campaigns as technologies such as the internet make the global local.

Some constitutionalists get excited about ‘unpolitics’ but it seems to me that to the extent that it does infringe on the role of governments it is largely a beneficial. It corrects the unresponsiveness and sometimes wilful ignorance of the political system towards environmental and other issues that are of genuine concern to the public but which are not needed as electoral assets.

It is remarkable for example, that the UK Government of John Major thought it could sanction dumping the Brent Spar in the ocean while lecturing the public not to drop litter in the street. It was equally remarkable that Tony Blair’s government thought that its project of being a friend to business gave it a mandate to dismiss public concerns over the potential risks of GM foods, even after BSE and its human forms. In its own way it is even more concerning that the US political system could put in office a President so completely unaware of the realities of climate change.

Corporations have taken power from governments. Of course many politicians have given it up willingly, hoping that some ‘magic of the market’ will provide the solution to difficult problems. Environment however is unlikely to be one of them because it concerns public goods and deals with problems which are ultimately global.

As Americans search for new ways to improve on the command and control approach to environmental protection, it is therefore worth bearing in mind some reasons why we still need politics, democracy and politicians – alongside the participation of consumers, citizens, business and NGOs. For purely practical reasons including the fundamental need to set standards and limits and ensure comprehensive participation, there is in effect, an irreducible role for government.

Conditions For An Effective Tripartite Approach – Setting Standards

I would like to touch on three examples – concerning forests, fish and pollution of the atmosphere by fluorocarbons – where NGOs have worked with businesses because government and inter-government processes were failing to deliver the best possible environmental protection. In each case however it is not a question of government-bad, non-government-good but of failures arising from systems where government was hostaged to business interests in a way that led to environmental damage.

Take forests and fish. The FSC, the Forest Stewardship Council, and the MSC, the Marine Stewardship Council are both praiseworthy initiatives of WWF.^{xv} They are two of the more promising explicit attempts at positive global ‘unpolitics’. Both bring together businesses as stakeholders with a common interest in maintaining a living resource. Their success has yet to be evaluated but they are undoubtedly making progress. (See for example www.fscus.org). There seem to be several features that are important:

- There is a clear need for action: inter governmental attempts to maintain fish stocks and to protect ancient forests are demonstrable failures (indeed in Europe it became accepted wisdom among politicians, at least in private, that the fishing problem could only ‘solve itself’ by the industry effectively collapsing).
- They captured enough of the players and the overall resource, to create a willingness to participate among NGOs and other backers. It is in the interest of players to join the open network that these organisations create. (In the case of the MSC the Anglo-Dutch multinational Unilever is the major backer and the worlds biggest trader in frozen fish). Even so, the FSC is plagued by rival standards systems set up by less environmentally minded parts of the timber industry.
- They set standards and they have subsequently succeeded in getting all three sectors – NGO, commercial and governments – to accept these, albeit incompletely.
- In WWF they had a brand which acted as a trustee of the public good. It is hard to imagine any company or indeed a government achieving such a level of trust (see below).
- They intend to produce labelled products with full trace-ability in the market place. It provides agency (a feeling of control) to consumers. The FSC is already relatively successful in this.

Greenpeace campaigns have worked synergistically with both the MSC and the FSC. In Europe Greenpeace opposed industrial (reduction) fishing, and MSC members left the trade. Greenpeace campaigned against British Columbian clear cuts of ancient forest and big companies such as Macmillan Bloedel made FSC standards their own. Without the FSC it is hard to see how these timber companies would have been able to make the necessary u-turn: it gave them the marketing foundation for a new business case. In the USA, Home Depot has adopted such an approach following campaign pressure.

It seems unlikely however that the micro-economics of the MSC will be sufficient to protect fish stocks worldwide. What it seems more likely to do is to achieve labelling and perhaps a premium price for well-managed stocks. But unless the practices are outlawed by regulation and enforcement, ‘pirate fishing’ and poor management will still supply the rest of the market with fish, which may also command an ever higher price as stocks dwindle. This may be the case for example with much tuna and ocean-caught salmon. The dynamics of the market are

very unlikely to protect the resource, even with mechanisms such as the MSC, and bad and good fish are likely to command a high price.

Nor may it prevent unscrupulous fishers benefiting from the management practices of others. The only complete solution will require government regulation as well as such tripartite NGO-business-consumer mechanisms. This free-rider effect also applies of course to voluntary schemes such as the greenhouse emission reductions won from companies by the Environmental Defense Fund – the company gets PR benefits, a good feeling in the workforce and among stakeholders, and it makes efficiency gains. But environmentally everyone benefits including the competitors who continued to pollute.

Of course the same problem arises between nations, hence the anger at the attempted withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol in March 2001 by the United States.

Whether established between nations or between companies, standards need to be enforceable and universal, embracing all parties if they are to be environmentally effective. It is hard to see how to achieve this without politics, government and law.

Developments such as the FSC and MSC are to be welcomed and hopefully built on and expanded. Commodities such as coffee, discussed elsewhere in this meeting, also offer many of the same possibilities and difficulties. However the Stewardship Council model will be far more difficult to apply in more complex economic cases such as energy, and probably for non-renewable resources in general.

My third example involves HFCs, or hydro-fluorocarbons. These are PIGGs or Potent Industrial Greenhouse Gases^{xvi} made by the same chemical industry players who sold CFCs (chloro-fluorocarbons) and put forward by them as substitutes.

In 1992 Greenpeace developed alternative ‘greenfreeze’^{xvii} technologies – based on the more or less benign and cheap hydrocarbons such as propane. Most nations have taken up the technology. It is for example dominant in Europe where there have been a million accident-free fridge years of operation. (Each fridge contains about the same charge as a cigarette lighter). Yet the United States chemicals industry succeeds in using supposed safety concerns over hydrocarbon flammability to keep out the technology – this in a country so enthusiastic about gasoline.

Greenfreeze is highly efficient and used by all major European refrigeration manufacturers and is in production on a large scale in countries such as China. Yet unless regulation follows, this environmentally-better technology cannot penetrate the US market. Thus in this case, an NGO-business-consumer campaign succeeded in doing what the Montreal Protocol had failed to do - come up with a way of replacing fluorocarbons earlier than the chemical industry said was possible. But it could not prevent the US being at once a free-rider on the process and continuing with pollution at the same time.

It is clearly in the public interest to use greenfreeze technology but not in the commercial interests of some chemical companies. In these circumstances governments should act to outlaw HFC technology, and the HFC industry should not be allowed to capture policy making as it has at present.

This is an example of where the ‘market’ as reflected in consumer action on environmental preferences is imperfect, because the non-HFC choice is not offered in the USA. Even if it was however, the desirable end point is to eliminate PIGGs because they contribute to the crisis posed by climate change, and their uses are mostly frivolous or easily substituted. In that sense the market is of limited use because it sets no objective. It is a dynamic tool which can speed innovation and unlock creativity, and sometimes, improve efficiency but the market

is environmentally blind. It was once said that the free-market is the operation of economics without the intervention of human intelligence, and its relation to environmental objectives is a case in point.

The Need For Limits

As much as it requires common and rising standards, effective environmental protection relies upon the setting of limits. Without standards and limits, pursuing corporate eco-efficiency and standards such as ISO 1400 or EMAS - creates benefits only at an institutional level, and there is no guarantee that these improvements will add up to create a net public gain. Thus it is in both the public and corporate interest to have standards, limits and efficiency.

We need limits because of basic ecological realities arising from the finite resources of the planet. Human ingenuity may know few bounds but the carbon, nitrogen and hydrological cycles do, as well as biological diversity and living resources.

However efficiently you burn oil, it will add to global warming because there is already too much carbon in the atmosphere. However efficiently you fillet, cook and eat a fish, you can over-fish an ocean if you catch too many of them.

Tackling the issue of 'how much is too much', is the next great challenge in trying to reach anything that resembles 'sustainable development' and is, par excellence, a political activity.

I find it hard to imagine how companies, which are machines for business, are going to solve the problem of creating and selling too much of their own product or service. They are unlikely to be in a position to say how much is enough.

Here we need governance, negotiation, participation, accountability, the ability to deal with questions of equity. Behind the current furore over the Kyoto Protocol and its shortcomings, lies the bigger more difficult issue of how to keep most carbon in the ground (specifically, to keep around 95% of the resource in the ground). This is because in order to protect ecosystems and the human lives that rely upon them, we need to achieve the objective set out in the Framework Convention on Climate Change. This is to limit climate change to a scale and rate to which ecosystems can adapt naturally. This requires that we need to meet rates of change around 0.1C/decade and a 1.0C total rise, certainly not above 0.2.C/decade and 2.0C total rise^{xviii}. These 'environmental limits' were identified in 1990 by the United Nations Advisory Group on Greenhouse Gases (UN AGGG). It is a relatively simple piece of 'carbon arithmetic' to take these limits convert them into carbon levels in the atmosphere, and from that, to see what amounts of carbon can be released in a budget. In Greenpeace we called this the 'carbon logic'. The result is simple enough – to avoid serious ecosystem breakdown we need to phase out fossil fuels within a very few decades, and we can afford to burn only 5% of estimated global resources around 25% of known oil, gas and coal reserves.

The logic is, as the political dictum has it, 'when in a hole – first stop digging'. In other words end exploration. Politically this has proved a hot potato and a prospect too daunting for governments to confront. A chapter on the carbon logic was drafted for the 1995 Second Assessment Report of the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) for example but later abandoned because China disliked the focus that it might create on coal reserves. Heinz Rothermund of Shell repeated Greenpeace's question in 1997 'in how far is it sensible to explore for and develop new hydrocarbon reserves, given that the atmosphere may not be able to cope with the greenhouse gases that will emanate from the utilisation of carbon reserves already discovered' ?^{xix}

Resolving the issue of carbon politics will require political and diplomatic skills just as great as those required in that other great stockpile problem, nuclear weapons. Rather than trying to disguise the true scale of the task ahead of them, governments might find it easier to achieve common action if they started by discussing the end game – conversion from a fossil fuel economy.

It is tempting to avoid any form of difficult negotiation by hoping that technological or economic innovation will provide sideways solutions which step outside the problem. For example transformation, in other words the ending of one industry and the start of another.

Dematerialisation, the conversion of products to services and the growth of the ‘Network Economy’ all offer the possibility of much greater value for less environmental impact. Fossil fuels may be completely replaced with renewable forms of energy. A postal service which uses paper carried in vehicles may be replaced by an electronic system.

Yet new industries are not necessarily benign. The semiconductor industry mostly involves highly toxic metals. At Monsanto Bob Shapiro’s vision for genetic engineering was apparently one of ‘eco-efficiency’ – more GM, less pesticides. But he overlooked the politics of creating new risks and imposing them on people who did not see the need and who didn’t think much of the supposed benefit.

The Need For Standards To Rise

Standards also need to converge upwards. Wherever a country allows low environmental standards –wherever ‘nature’ is valued as free or cheaper than elsewhere in the world – then the environment is subsidising the costs of production. In practice, other things being equal, production will move to the place where nature is valued least, just like manual industries exploiting child labour.

Economies do not exist as one global entity or as independent entities – they are coupled. We can call this the leaky bucket problem: no matter how much environmental standards may be tightened at one end of the world, if there are low standards elsewhere then achieving ‘sustainable development’ is impossible, and environmental performance simply leaks away. Traditionally companies have acted together to make this worse. Trade associations have been the bastions of conservatism and lobbyists for the Lowest Common Denominator. Now that needs to be reversed.

Similarly, some supporters of ‘free trade’ have tried to lower standards. Instead they should be raising them.

Unless ancient forest in Latin America is valued as highly as it is in the European Alps, and until a company by a Siberian river has to meet the same emission standards as does one on the Rhine, business and trade will undermine sustainability. Companies now need to work together and with governments to set and enforce the Highest Common Denominator as the standard.

The social licence for global capitalism or rather anything approaching global free trade, is conditional, and not yet fulfilled.

Public Goods, Trust And Posing Effective Choices

Businesses should not try to partition, allocate or own public goods. That is a unique role for government. Businesses will never be trusted in this task as their function is, quite

reasonably, to create private wealth. They are simply unsuited to acting as agents of the public as a whole.

The ‘Brent Spar Scale^{xx}’ illustrates one reason why businesses are not trusted by the public. The corporate focus is most often on environmental performance in terms of legal compliance, or competition and competence (output failures and relative failures). The public interest however is much more concerned with issues such as gross acts and deception. In the case of the ‘Spar, Greenpeace said “it’s gross” and Shell replied “but it’s legal”. Both were arguably true but Shell’s response missed the point. Legal compliance has been devalued because industrial lobbying has successfully rendered most laws very easy to comply with. That is what happens when the regulatory process becomes too business-friendly.

Nor can businesses pose the right choices or construct the complex dialogues needed to make big society-wide choices. At present, and despite NGOs, the internet and the rest of the media, only governments and the public discussions which they can engender, are truly suitable devices for constructive dialogue on big and difficult issues, such as development of society. It is a sad fact that few politicians have much appetite for such work.

Like the electoral system, the market often throws up relevant but very poor choices. A classic example is public transport.

The market tends to pose a constant choice between comfortable, convenient damaging, private transport, and uncomfortable, less reliable, inconvenient public transport. It never poses the choice between a whole transport system which prioritises public transit, and a system which gives priority to private means.

So the consumer-citizen is trapped into making small decisions each of which incrementally undermines the public system and reinforces the private one, even if she or he would rather have the good public transport option. The trouble is, that choice is never posed.

Back in 1977 economist Fred Hirsch called this ‘the tyranny of small choices’^{xxi}, and it is another compelling reason why politics and government is needed to make effective choices about the environment and in particular, public goods such as quiet, dark skies, clean air, tranquillity, wild birds, natural ecosystems, the atmosphere, rivers, seas and soil, as well as common public investments such as transport infrastructure.

The G W Bush Effect: Separate Development ?

Much has been written about the decision by US President George W Bush to renounce the Kyoto Protocol of the Climate Convention, in March of this year.

Many observers quickly stated that the Bush Administration grossly underestimated the international reaction and that America now needs to find a way back into global arena. Many negotiators naturally wanted America back in the talks as soon as possible. I and others have argued^{xxii} that rather than compromise with the United States, the rest of the world (in reality Europe and a number of other industrialised nations) should go ahead without Mr Bush. With the support of Russia and a few others, Europe could ratify Kyoto and bring it into force. However that is not what concerns me here.

The most likely, or perhaps optimistic course of events seems to me to be that the exigencies of climate change itself (for example more storms such as Hurricane Alison which recently hit Texas and Louisiana), coupled with diplomatic, corporate and scientific pressure, will eventually put the USA on a parallel track to the Kyoto nations. After that, a new Protocol or entirely new legal instrument may enable the USA to rejoin without loss of face.

It is certainly true that by effectively declaring environmental war on the rest of the world, G W Bush has made climate into an acute moral and personal issue rather than just an obscure technical and scientific one. In one sense he certainly re-politicised the issue.

In my view the Protocol is not the important issue. It is the fundamentals that are important. The objective should be to set America on a different course, not particularly to make the President recant on Kyoto.

The Protocol itself is of course a highly imperfect instrument – a peculiar mixture of measures, most of which were bolted onto the basic timetables and commitments of industrialised nations in order to appease the United States under its previous Administration. However the efficacy or elegance of the Protocol, while one ostensible excuse of the Presidency for not ratifying it, is also not the most important point.

There are three more significant factors. The first is whether the United States is internationally selfish – whether it is willing to act in the global interest through common negotiation – or whether it will put its own interests above all others, to the point where it trades lives in poorer nations for US comforts. The second is whether it accepts responsibility in line with its pollution of the planet. Third, whether the US is on a separate development course to the rest of the industrialised world, in which it extends reliance on fossil fuels as long as possible, rather than recognizing that fossil fuels need to be phased out as soon as possible.

The President has stated that capping carbon dioxide would be bad for the American economy and that was why he rejected Kyoto. His subsequent Energy Plan sought to inject more fossil fuel into the economy. This gives the clear impression that America is indeed on a course to a ‘dinosaur future’, run on fossil fuels.

I find that few Americans realise how old fashioned and extreme the Bush position appears in Europe and many other nations. A detractor from within her own Party once said of the former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher that she was “on an escalator to outer space”. Many Europeans are left wondering where G W Bush is taking America.

Scientifically the Bush rejection appears primitive – reflected in the May 2001 statements by 17 National Academies of sciences from around the world, and in June, the US’s own National Academy of Science.

Politically it appears perverse because it is heading towards, not away from fossil fuels. Compare it for example with these statements from 1997 and 1998 in the UK. The Energy Minister John Battle said in 1998 “We’ve got to start moving away from hydrocarbon energy generation and start to look at alternatives”^{xxiii}. Matthew Taylor MP, spokesman for the Liberal democrats said in the UK in 1997: “if governments are serious about decreasing global warming and pollution they have got to think about alternative sources of fuel and stop planning future oil development”. Battle also said “We want to see a shift from fossil fuel generation to renewable energy sources”^{xxiv}.

More recently Tony Blair, UK Prime Minister has spoken about a hydrogen economy. Other European nations are more ‘advanced’ in this sense than the UK. Denmark for example has a fossil fuel phase out plan.

No serious European politician or business person treats the Kyoto Protocol as the end game on climate. John Battle in 1998: “the Kyoto targets are not enough. If we are to meet the ultimate objective of the climate convention, and avoid dangerous man-made climate change, then we need to stabilise global emissions at half the current level ... so our aim must be to greatly reduce our use of fossil fuels, indeed eventually to phase them out”^{xxv}. Battle was

speaking to a wind energy conference. Although Britain still makes a lot of money from oil production, the message is clear – the reliance on oil has to be ended.

In this context, the Bush position is almost incomprehensible. Business people as well as politicians see responding to climate change by eliminating greenhouse gas emissions as necessary, inevitable and urgent. Here is Adair Turner, former Secretary General of the Confederation of British Industry in a book *Just Capital: the Liberal Economy*^{xxvi} published in 2001. ‘The failure of America to deal responsibly with climate change issues is concerning in environmental terms and bizarre in geopolitical: it is harming the world environment and increasing American reliance on oil imports from the world’s most unstable region for fear of economic consequences which are hugely exaggerated’.

Turner, like many others in Europe, rejects American insistence that the developing world must participate in the first round of legally binding action on climate gases before it will make a real commitment. Many Europeans see this as both ignorant and disingenuous because countries like China are already achieving reductions bigger than that which Kyoto would require from the USA, and because they are required by the Convention to try to reduce emissions. But it is simply bad politics – unrealistic and unjust – to demand that those who have least and who are least responsible must act with or before those who are richest and the biggest polluters.

When the Bush letter^{xxvii} was announced, I and others therefore started a small protest of our own in the form of a boycott campaign called Families Against Bush (to be found at www.boycott-bush.org). We set out to create a green list of American companies which oppose the bush line on Kyoto and climate change, and a red list of those who support it. Our message is simply buy the green products, boycott the red ones. The initiative is still tiny but growing. Others, for example Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace, are behind a boycott Exxon campaign – see www.stopesso.com.

Part of the motivation behind these initiatives is to puncture or challenge any American assumption of political and economic ‘invulnerability’.

The struggle with Bush is therefore about something far more significant than what the Kyoto Protocol would actually deliver, and this is not something that can be fixed with new convention text.

If the Bush Administration does not make a fundamental realignment away from fossil fuels, the signal will be that the US sees itself in the same sort of position as South Africa did over apartheid. The long campaign against apartheid, involved a struggle for the abandonment of an attitude, a judgement and a system. There is a clear parallel in this case. I have argued that^{xxviii}: ‘The attitude is selfish, indulgent wastefulness in which all that counts is your own short term economic interests, and the environment, foreigners, our children’s future and the weak are all expendable. The judgement is that America can get away with this. The system is politics paid for and run for the benefit of big and polluting business’.

Another way of looking at it is to say that all the academics in the world could not have produced a neater definition of what is not ‘sustainable development’ than George Bush has with his abandoning of Kyoto. How he did it, why he did it, and who he did it for.

In terms of new politics and unpolitics, the case of Bush v the Rest of the World has a particular resonance. Formal politics have demonstrably broken down, with one of the main players breaking the most basic of rules which is to stand by your commitments. What recourse is left to ordinary people except to use what other levers are available to them. The most obvious of these are of course consumer actions, which at the very least enable people to withdraw their custom from supporters of Bush.

Given the nature of US politics there is of course a great deal of focus on contributions to campaign funds. The issue addressed by Families Against Bush however is not funding but policy on climate. The group is currently investigating the views of dozens of US companies (not simply oil companies).

Some like Coca-Cola for example have taken positive positions on HFCs but not yet on climate as a whole. (Except that Coca Cola Spain evidently supports Kyoto).

To date its main red-listing is Exxon and its main green-listing is Shell. Here are some of their relevant statements regarding Kyoto:

Exxon/Esso

From an ExxonMobil advertisement they placed in the Washington Post on Tuesday April 17:.

“Recent statements by the Bush administration on the Kyoto Protocol, climate change and regulation of CO₂ provide new realism on these serious issues. The Protocol ineffectively addresses the long-term risks of climate change, yet its obligations would impose dramatic economic costs throughout the developed world, particularly the United States. It is essential to move to more practical and politically attainable approaches that recognise the need for affordable energy in our daily lives.

“The inability of governments to reach agreement on the protocol last November in The Hague highlights the protocol's fundamental flaws. Leading the list is the growing recognition that most governments cannot meet the politically chosen targets without resorting to economy-wrecking measures. Fine-tuning the targets and timetables as some recommend, cannot save Kyoto.

“An understanding of Kyoto's problems is important if we are to develop truly effective approaches to managing the risks of climate change:

“Kyoto was too much too soon. Its initial carbon targets would require massive reductions in energy use within a few years, with further substantial reductions to follow. Political goals were set without a sober assessment of economic and technical realities or public toleration of major lifestyle changes. This was reckless given the central role played by energy in all economies.

“It tried to force technological change without a realistic appraisal of the long timeframe needed for new technologies to succeed if the marketplace ad gain worldwide acceptance.

“Kyoto failed to include developing countries in its commitments. Since most energy growth will occur there, the protocol would do little to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions. Yet poorer countries need more energy if they are to provide economic growth and a better life for their people.

“Kyoto required a vast global regulatory regime that would be implemented using untried policies through new and extensive international and national bureaucracies. Negotiations revealed the livelihood of serious unintended consequences from the complex procedures being formulated to manage global carbon emissions.

“Kyoto was fatally politicized. Activists closed off important options (such as hydropower, advanced coal technology, nuclear energy, and carbon sinks) based on ideological

intransigence. Scientifically unfounded scare scenarios were and continue to be promoted in an effort to justify the protocol. The stalemate in The Hague and a new administration in Washington provide an opportunity to develop a sounder approach. Without ignoring the seriousness of the issue, it is time to move beyond Kyoto and to focus on more effective steps to manage the long-term risk of climate change. These include technology research and development, science that addresses fundamental gaps, economically based voluntary actions and an international approach that meets the aspirations of all the world's people".

Shell

Shell's position is in stark contrast to that of Exxon. The Shell website (www.shell.com) carries a speech from 25 April 2001 by

Jeroen van der Veer, Managing Director of Royal Dutch Petroleum Company and Group Managing Director of the Royal Dutch/Shell Group at the Second International Oil Summit, Paris, France. Here are some extracts -

"Almost exactly two years ago to the day, I made a speech in Amsterdam that included the following specific pledge on Kyoto. "Shell welcomes the commitment made at Kyoto to promote the research, development and increased use of new and renewable forms of energy, and to promote policies which limit or reduce emissions of greenhouse gases. We believe it is right to take precautionary steps now to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to begin to plan long-term for greater use of renewable resources."

"Today, I am very proud to be able to repeat that pledge, but I can also go further. Just over two months ago, I spoke at a major conference of industry executives in Houston Texas. At that conference, I argued that the oil industry must keep its eyes on its long-term strategic objectives, including combating the threat of climate change. I underlined the importance of oil companies' action in this area – of working to establish renewables as commercially viable energy alternatives, while at the same time reducing the impact of hydrocarbons in our atmosphere.

"I believe that events in the United States make it even more imperative that as an industry we remain resolute in our pledge to deliver on actions to control greenhouse gas emissions. Today, Shell companies are tackling climate change in many different ways. We have cut our own greenhouse gas emissions. Globally, we are committed to reducing emissions by 10% in 2002 from 1990 levels. We are planning future projects both upstream and downstream that will help to reduce emissions further. We are developing new lower carbon fuels for our customers, liquid petroleum gas, and hydrogen. Even if Kyoto would be 'so called dead', our Shell reduction policy and targets stay alive with commitment. "

"But let me be clear, the oil and gas industry cannot ignore climate change. For the Royal Dutch/Shell Group, climate change is both an important challenge and a major business opportunity. Nothing has happened in recent weeks to alter that view"

The Shell website also says: "the balance of scientific evidence suggests a link between human activities - especially the burning of fossil fuels - and climate change. There are still tremendous uncertainties, which make it difficult to estimate the size, nature, distribution and speed of any future changes resulting from man's actions. More research is clearly needed to increase understanding of the scientific, social, and economic aspects of the problem."

"... But much is already known about climate systems. At the very least, mankind is carrying out a risky experiment with the planet by raising the levels of greenhouse gases in the

atmosphere to levels far above any seen in the last 150,000 years or more. We do not know whether this will be catastrophic, or whether it might on balance be slightly beneficial. But we do know that it is, in effect, irreversible. It makes sense, therefore, to take prudent precautionary measures now. The emission limits for greenhouse gases set in Kyoto provide the necessary signals to encourage such measures".

Shell Oil in the USA is a member of the USCIB, an organisation which on April 11 sent a letter supporting his anti-Kyoto position to President Bush. (USCIB www.uscib.org attacked the 'Kyoto Protocol's unrealistic targets, timetables and lack of developing country participation.'

There is some doubt about the extent to which the USCIB letter was fully consulted with all the members of USCIB – however in the case of Shell, the speech by of 25 April post-dates the USCIB letter and Shell has confirmed to FAB that “Jeroen van der Veer's speech does indeed reflect the current Shell view^{xxix}”.

FAB concluded from this that ‘on this basis it is clear that Shell has a pro-Kyoto, pro climate action position, also supports precautionary quantitative targets. We are therefore comfortable to advise consumers purchasing petrol or diesel to buy from Shell in preference to ExxonMobil’.

Of course environmentally all use of oil is a bad thing and any choice is necessarily the least-worst option within ‘buying-gas’. To be effective however a boycott has to make explicit choices and whether directly or indirectly to reward the behaviour of companies which comply, or where they share the campaign goal. Companies – not just oil companies - will be added to the green and red lists as their positions become known.

So far for example it does not appear that BP will be added to the green list. Indeed BP’s deteriorating position is interesting if disheartening. Back in 1997 BP CEO Sir John Browne was the green knight of the oil industry, investing in solar power and acknowledging that climate change was real.

Then BP merged with the US firm Amoco and Browne has not spoken out against Bush or in support of Kyoto – indeed he has been pushing for more oil development in Alaska and calls climate science ‘unproven’. In 1997 Browne talked up solar power at Stanford California (see speeches at www.bp.com) . He said ‘I’m convinced we can make solar competitive in supplying peak electricity demand within the next ten years’. On 28 April 2001 a much more negative Browne was in Beijing. He talked about solar panels on BP petrol stations that supply 15% of their electricity. He warned ‘neither solar nor hydrogen are commercially viable’. His silence on Bush and Kyoto, speaks volumes.

Conclusions

Unpolitics or ‘new politics’ play an increasing part in determining important outcomes that effect environmental protection. There is no evidence however that this means the world or particular nations are better off without government action and regulation – indeed most ‘unpolitical’ action results from a failing of conventional politics, democracy and government in dealing with issues of importance to the public. NGOs, businesses and consumers then become involved in determining outcomes in politics without politicians.

In most cases however it is politics despite politicians. They are still present and government and inter-government frameworks are still there but they are supplemented by other activity.

Examples include the Brent Spar, the European rejection of GM foods, and the Marine Stewardship Council and the Forest Stewardship Council.

The 2001 division between the USA and the rest of the world over the rejection of the Kyoto Protocol by George Bush, raises the prospect of an Apartheid-South Africa style positioning for the United States, with consequent ‘unpolitics’ in the shape of boycotts. The groups at www.boycott-bush.org and www.stopesso.org may be seen as small potential precursors of such a campaign.

By working together, for example in the case of the greenfreeze refrigeration technology, businesses, consumers and NGOs can do better than regulatory frameworks and be more creative, faster, and innovative. Sometimes they may also be more efficient.

However for many reasons effective environmental protection still requires the active participation of government, democracy and politics. Examples include the setting of standards and limits, posing choices about complex issues (countering for example, the tyranny of small choices), and establishing objectives. The free market is in itself environmentally blind and objectives cannot flow from the operation of the market. Nor can the market or businesses be expected to allocate or distribute public goods – for that we need politics, democracy and government.

Without limits and standards corporate eco-efficiency does not work for the benefit of companies or others. These need to be universally applied and for that laws are required.

Obstacles to effective government participation may include doctrinaire commitment to exclude government, and politicians own reluctance to act. Most British and American politicians have also yet to grasp the principles of risk politics as opposed to the politics of material wealth, and this makes it hard for them to engage with or deal with issues such as radiation, pesticides, or GM foods. Lastly, the dominance of old economics in political thinking, in which natural capital is not valued and restitution of environmental damage is counted as a positive in GNP, inhibits effective objective setting and regulation.

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ⁱ Rose, C (1993) Beyond the Struggle For Proof, 285 – 298 *Environmental Values*, 2 (4)

ⁱⁱ Marr, A *Ruling Britannia : the failure and future of British democracy* Michael Joseph London 1995

ⁱⁱⁱ I still work for Greenpeace International but only as a consultant. I also work for other NGOs, commercial and government clients.

^{iv} See (I) op cit

^v This property was cited by trade unionists and politicians interviewed for Greenpeace by pollster Philip Gould in the late 1980s – the environment was ‘different’ from other (economic) issues because it erupted without warning

^{vi} Monsanto took out extensive ‘advocacy’ advertising with the result that the public turned more against GM foods than they had before

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- ^{vii} see for example P Hawken, A B Lovins, L H Lovins, Chapter 3, *Natural Capitalism The Next Industrial Revolution*, pub in the UK by Earthscan – ISBN 1 85383 763 6 2000
- ^{viii} Chris Rose, The Future of Environmental Campaigning, Vol CXLIV No 5467 March 1996, *Royal Society of Arts Journal*
- ^{ix} Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, 1992, London, Sage Publications
- ^x *The Turning of the Spar*, Chris Rose 1998 pub Greenpeace Send an e mail giving your mailing address, asking for a copy to info@uk.greenpeace.org
- ^{xi} Fred Pearce, Dear Greenpeace – Forum, *New Scientist*, November 15 1997
- ^{xii} A lilo is an inflatable, floating mattress of the type used by sunbathers
- ^{xiii} Reinicke, W *Global Public Policy: Governing Without Government*, Brookings Institution (1998)

^{xiv} Reinicke, Wolfgang H Global public policy, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol 76 No 6 1997 – he points out that although the terms interdependence and globalisation are often used interchangeably, they have important differences. The first narrows the distance between nations through greater cross-border economic and financial activity, while the second mostly involves changes within companies, so that their operations are spread globally (for example R and D, and stages of manufacture and sales in different places around the world). Both can reduce national sovereignty.

^{xv} WWF Worldwide Fund for Nature/ World Wildlife Fund – www.panda.org

^{xvi} see Multisectoral Initiative on Potent Industrial Greenhouse Gases MIPIGGS – at www.mipiggs.org

^{xvii} In 1992 CFCs were being phased out but the speed of the phase out was largely determined by what the chemical industry said was feasible. The political authorities running the Montreal Protocol and the governments of countries party to the Protocol simply accepted the word of industrial giants such as Dupont and ICI when they said that the only technical alternatives to CFCs were the ‘softer’ but still ozone-destroying HCFCs, and HFCs which did not destroy ozone but were extremely potent greenhouse gases.

The most important uses of these gases were in refrigeration and chilling. The refrigeration manufacturers were not very interested as the gases are only a tiny part of the cost of a product such as a fridge. Moreover their engineers had trained and grown up using halocarbon type gases and knew very little about alternatives. The companies were of course, producers of these chemicals.

In the spring of 1992 Greenpeace brought together scientists who had extensively researched the use of propane and butane as refrigerants, with an East German company DKK Scharfenstein. The company had been producing refrigerators for 50 years and was the leading household appliance manufacturer in the former East Germany. After reunification, however, it faced severe economic problems and was due to be closed down.

The meeting between the scientists and DKK Scharfenstein resulted in the birth of ‘Greenfreeze’ technology for domestic refrigeration. Greenfreeze refrigerators use hydrocarbons for both the blowing of the insulation foam and the refrigerant and they are entirely free of ozone destroying and global warming chemicals.

Greenpeace successfully campaigned to gather tens of thousands of pre-orders for the yet-to-be-produced new refrigerator from environmentally conscious consumers in Germany. This overwhelming support from the public secured the capital investment needed for the new ‘Greenfreeze’ product, and at the same time, salvaged the company and saved the jobs of its workers.

The major household appliance manufacturers, who had already invested in HFC-134a refrigeration technology as the substitute for CFCs, at first claimed that the ‘Greenfreeze’ concept would not work. However, upon realizing that the first completely -CFC, HCFC and HFC-free refrigerator was about to come on the market, and recognizing the market appeal of a truly environmentally friendly refrigerator, the four biggest producers, Bosch, Siemens, Liebherr and Miele gave up their resistance to the hydrocarbon technology, and introduced their own line of ‘Greenfreeze’ models in the spring of 1993.

The Greenfreeze technology spread rapidly. Hundreds of models of ‘Greenfreeze’ refrigerators are now on sale in Germany, Austria, Denmark, France, Italy, Netherlands, Switzerland, and Britain (including the Iceland ‘Kyoto’ range which makes the explicit link to climate change). All of the major European companies, Bosch, Siemens, Electrolux, Liebherr, Miele, Quelle, Vestfrost, Whirlpool, Bauknecht,

Foron, AEG are marketing Greenfreeze-technology based refrigerators, which has become the European standard rather than HFCs. Production began in China in 1996.

Greenfreeze is technically superior in performance to HFCs (cheaper, more energy efficient and easier to use) but still faces strenuous lobbying by HFC manufacturers such as ICI. Even the UK government relies for policy formulation on advice from companies such as March Consultants, although March has worked for the European Fluorocarbon Committee, a chemical industry lobby group for HFCs ! March often stresses the benefits of HFCs and the problems associated with alternatives, such as hydrocarbons and ammonia.

Even so, Greenfreeze is gradually making more ground in Britain, North America, Argentina, India, Indonesia and Cuba. In Japan the market leader Panasonic has a Greenfreeze prototype but HFCs remain dominant in the USA.

Nevertheless, the pace of and limits market change demonstrates that government regulatory action is also still required. Recently the Danish Government announced measures to eliminate HFCs by 2006. Britain's Minister of the Environment Michael Meacher stated at a meeting with Greenpeace recently: "We don't want to give the point of view that HFC's are there for a long time. The policy of the UK Government is that we want to phase out HFC's as quickly as we can." Currently US-funded lobbying by HFC manufacturers has led to challenges by several countries to the Danish proposals to phase out HFCs.

^{xviii} See Rijsberman, F.J. and R.J. Swart (eds.) (1990), *Targets and Indicators of Climate Change*, Stockholm Environment Institute.

^{xix} 1997 Celebrity Lecture for the Institute of Petroleum at Strathclyde University 20 May 1997, Heinz Rothermund, Managing Director of Shell UK Exploration and Production

^{xx} See slides

^{xxi} Fred Hirsch, *Social Limits to Growth*, Routledge and Keagan Paul 1997

^{xxii} See for example Bush changes the climate, Greenpeace Business June/July 2001 [Greenpeace UK info@uk.greenpeace.org]

^{xxiii} Reuters Brussels 4 February 1998

^{xxiv} House of Commons Adjournment Debate April 22 1998

^{xxv} Speech to Wind Energy association Conference 2 September 1998

^{xxvi} Adair Turner *Just Capital: the Liberal Economy* pub MacMillan, London 2001 ISBN 0 333 90071

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^{xxvii} March 13, 2001 Letter from the President to Senators Hagel, Helms, Craig, and Roberts

^{xxviii} see xxii op cit

^{xxix} Andy Corrigan, Shell UK External Relations, e mail to FAB