



THOUGHTS ON THE POST-KYOTO CONTEXT

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Is there an alternative to the UN style, state nations led approach? What can be the contribution of initiatives like the Live Earth concerts and is there a possibility to develop on environment some sort of international public opinion/ international political movement with a political but also entrepreneurial agenda?

Averting major disruption of the climate system is the biggest collective challenge governments, businesses and citizens have ever faced in peacetime. Unlike a war of survival, as in 1939-45, it presents collective action problems on a huge scale. In war, nation-states can mobilise against a clear and present danger and can usually count on strong common response from citizens and the private sector. In the case of climate disruption, the danger is neither clear enough yet nor immediate for most nations, businesses or individuals. We need a mass mobilisation of effort in advance of the greatest risk, and if we succeed we will never know the exact nature of the threats we have avoided. Moreover, we will have to make significant changes in consumption and production, many of which will be unwelcome to important interests, and we have to do it rapidly. We need to act in the face of inevitable uncertainty about the impacts that climate disruption could have.

The nature of the threat and the problems inherent in organising a response mean that there is a huge collective action issue. So many established interests are potentially damaged, or at least inconvenienced, that achieving consensus is tough. There is a temptation to deny the mounting evidence of risk and impact, or to bet that technological fixes can save the day with little or no changes required to consumption and economic growth. Fears over economic competitiveness mean that states and businesses are reluctant to make serious unilateral changes.

There is also a paradox at work relating to democracy. There is no doubt that democracy, or at least an open society, is strongly associated with progress in cleaning up and protecting the environment. Ecological policy is strongest where it is based on a free flow of information, research results, debate and experimentation. Authoritarian states are bad at environmental policy and bad at international collaboration. So progress in ecologically sustainable development is closely related to the quality of democracy and open politics around the world. But that does not mean the democracies are necessarily well equipped to handle climate change. Democracy is associated with the conditions for exposing ecological damage and crimes, and with genuine advances in environmental protection. But it has so far only had to handle what the British policy analyst Tom Burke calls the 'easy politics of the environment' - protection of specific places and species, control of specific pollutants and sectors, and so on. Burke notes that the 'hard politics of sustainability' in the new century is another matter again. The challenge of climate change is that it arises from massively diffuse pollution, the unwanted side-effects of mass consumption patterns and globalised production systems. Democracy in the affluent world is tightly coupled to these patterns and systems: it is

based on the competition to support more consumption and more growth. Its very success has created strongly entrenched commercial and electoral interests whose comfort is put at risk by radical action to cut emissions so that we can try to stabilise the climate. Hence the success of the democracies in putting climate disruption on the policy agenda, and their failure to date to do anything truly serious about implementing change.

So the democracies are faced with a deep challenge, and authoritarian states are unlikely to act until and unless they are forced to do so by unignorable ecological problems and accompanying public unrest. All that means that no-one can rely on cooperation simply at the nation-state level to do the job. Under the circumstances, the Kyoto framework is a near-miracle of collaboration for global public goods, but it is plainly inadequate and would be even if the USA were involved. Deeper and faster change is needed, and it is very hard to see it coming from the collective action of national governments unless conditions worsen significantly in the near term. So other sources of pressure and progress are needed, first to improve and extend the Kyoto process and second to develop a richer set of international systems linking states, businesses and local governments/civil society organisations.

One is action and lobbying from the business world. Although many businesses have an interest in resisting change, there are plenty who have much to lose from a world of climate disruption (eg insurers and shippers) and who have much to gain (eg renewable energy providers). The key task here is to re-frame the climate crisis as a paradigm shift in investment and innovation. Consider the 20-year upheaval from the late 1970s as organisations worldwide faced up to, adopted and then exploited information technologies. At the time there was major resistance and doubt about the costs, risks and gains from the 'silicon revolution', but companies and governments embraced it and ploughed colossal sums into it. The scale of the challenge from climate change is even greater but the mindset required to meet it in business is not different in kind from that demanded by the ICT revolutions we have been through in the past 30 years, and which no-one in business would regard as a waste of resources or a threat to competitiveness. Already there are encouraging signs that major companies - such as Marks&Spencer in the UK - are rethinking business models and investment strategies in the light of climate change. The more that big players break ranks from the conservatism of sectoral associations and demonstrate commitment, the more others will be encouraged, and the more politicians will be emboldened to strengthen policies on climate, such as the EU's emissions trading scheme, a flawed innovation for sure but an enormously important experiment and signal of intent and potential to the rest of the world.

Then there is civil society, from which nearly all the pressure and foresight on climate issues have come over the past two decades. The Green movement has done the world a service by generating what the US environmentalist Paul Hawken in his latest book calls 'blessed unrest' about the state of the planet. The challenge for the Green NGOs now is not only to maintain pressure on governments and businesses, having made important breakthroughs in both domains. It is also, and crucially, to mobilise mass public demand for action from governments and companies, so that climate leaders in both are encouraged and laggards see the benefits in catching up. So far, Green movements have not been able to achieve the mobilisation needed. Live Earth was impressive as a spectacle, no doubt, but it lacked the popular mobilisation and pressure that accompanied Live Aid and the Make Poverty History initiative. Moreover, the celebrities

involved were massively compromised by their energy-intensive lifestyles and extremely recent and shallow conversion to the climate cause. Whether anyone would have been energised into climate action by Live Earth is doubtful, although I would love to be proved wrong about this.

More promising is the harnessing by established and new NGOs of personal and community concern in neighbourhood-level action, amplified by contact 'horizontally' across countries and around the world via the Internet. At this level people can feel that they are making a real contribution, and with global connectedness to other micro-level networks they can feel also that they are part of a much greater initiative. Already villages in the UK, cities and states in the USA, towns and cities around the EU and in Al Gore's global city network are showing how action below the level of the state to cut CO2 emissions can overcome some of the problems for nation-states outlined above. Much of this action is propelled by frustration at the lack of leadership and responsibility displayed at national level. And if these emergent initiatives can grow in influence and reach, and provide experiments in (for example) contraction and convergence, or in use of tradable carbon allowances, then they too can put pressure on national governments to show real leadership, and they will also send signals to business about the rise of markets for low-carbon living services and products.

All this is the soil from which a post-Kyoto deal can grow. Kyoto and its successor are necessary but by no means sufficient, and need to be complemented by what is now emerging - a vast set of local, regional and trans-national initiatives for emissions reduction and low-carbon living. We need clear and neat international frameworks for emission targets, contraction and convergence and carbon counting, for sure; but we also need the messy, experimental Great Improvisation that is beginning in business and civil society. Can these be brought together? Here is one idea. Why see nation-states as the key level of ratification and legitimation? What if NGOs and businesses and local governments developed a People's Kyoto, a declaration of intent at every level to cut emissions in the next 20 years so that we would be on course for an 80% global average cut from present levels by 2050? Already many US cities and states have taken up a similar challenge from Seattle to adopt Kyoto targets despite the US federal government's rejection of the Protocol. If national governments are laggards in innovation, they need to be out-competed by parallel frameworks, which in turn could spur them to take up the leadership role they need to embrace.

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