

Act to save the planet – while we still can

TIME is running out to save the planet. We all know that the Earth is threatened with irreversible damage from greenhouse gases. But a remedy is at hand. And it won't be found on the agenda of the forthcoming G8 summit. With the campaign over, it is now more imperative than ever that the new Government embraces some radical new thinking, and acts on it. Fast.

The new Prime Minister must do what numerous MPs have already done – support the control of global climate policy by the principle of contraction and convergence (C&C). As the all-party Commons environment committee put it: "The Government must provide leadership on climate change this year, at the G8 and during the European Union presidency, by committing itself to C&C as the framework within which future agreements to tackle climate change are negotiated."

Before the election ministers talked openly of climate trends as being absolutely terrifying. It doesn't have to be so, if we embark on C&C now. The secretariat to the United Nations climate change convention says it is "inevitably required" to achieve the convention's aim – safe and stable greenhouse gas concentration in the atmosphere.

C&C has four simple steps: An agreed safe upper limit on the greenhouse concentrations; a



The next government will have no time to waste in tackling climate change, writes **Aubrey Meyer**

planned, shrinking global target in fossil fuel consumption linked to that limit; an international agreement to share this budget based on equal shares per head of population; that international entitlements arising from these limits are tradable between high and low emitters per capita.

It is a simpler formula, but with tougher effects, than the complicated and feeble Kyoto agreement which has already been sabotaged by the US. With all political parties committed to cross-party action after the election, the Global Commons Institute has been asking all parliamentary candidates to support the findings of the Commons environment committee.

C&C was in the manifestos of the Greens and the Liberal Democrats and in the last

Parliament was supported by about 200 Labour MPs, Plaid Cymru, the Scottish Nationalists, the Church of England, the Corporation of London, the Environment Agency and the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution as well as numerous other organisations.

C&C has been the position of the Africa Group of Nations to the UN climate negotiations since 1997. Over the past two terms Tony Blair has been more vocal on the dangers of climate change than just about any serving politician. Yet there has been no Government endorsement of C&C. Yet, in the middle of the election campaign, Tony Blair's chief Whitehall climate adviser, Henry Derwent, told the Brussels Climate Change Conference: "We must accept the future may not be like the past and repeat a target and

trading approach."

This comment seems designed to further appease a reluctant President George Bush for the G8, to be chaired by Britain. If Bush gets his way and stalls the process, forget about "making poverty history"; the G8 is fruitless because climate change can make history of us all within a generation or so.

We don't have to accept the inevitable. We can take affirmative action on the C&C rationale instead. And this time the Government has God on its side. The Archbishop of Canterbury has said that "anyone who thinks that C&C is utopian, simply hasn't looked honestly at the alternatives".

Taking the C&C route will make a credible leader of our Prime Minister and the new Government. Unlike the election campaign, it should be put to the fore of the Government's action plan for the next term. The Government must be ready to swing behind, and get other countries to swing behind, a co-ordinated plan when the United Nations Convention on Climate Change (UNCCC) meets in Canada this December. In the meantime, write and encourage all your successful MPs to back the C&C programme and call on the Government to do the same.

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