

Global warming, parks, planners and nuclear power

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Although I suspected that Charles was not fully convinced about the causes or the dire consequences of global warming, I was not surprised about his reaction when I told him what I had recently seen in a local northern paper. I thought that I would clarify his position before telling him about what I had read.

‘Charles, I am very concerned about the health of those living in tropical countries as the world gets hotter!’

‘What about the benefit for the poor in this country as winters get milder?’ *he replied with a smile.*

‘But more deaths in summer from the heat as happened in France a couple of years ago?’

‘Both are irrelevant if the gulf stream reverses, as it might well if climate change is real and continues!’ *he countered, ‘That would be a disaster worse than any purely financial crisis, but I raise to illustrate the great uncertainties there are, both with the nature of the change and its net effect on health and agriculture. I have no sympathy with those who cannot see the potential benefits as well as disasters. The overall result of prolonged climate change might well be harmful, but even with the worst possible scenario of a colder Europe in a warmer world at least the alpine ski industry would be happy!’*

‘But you do accept that we should plan and act on the assumption that climate change is happening?’

‘Most certainly yes, Coe!’

‘And that it is likely to have a net adverse impact on the health of the poorest people?’

‘Yes!’

‘And that it is probably at least in part man-made?’

‘I am by no means convinced that this is the principle factor, but when you come to think of it the greater the contribution of things that you cannot influence, the higher proportion of your target you have to attain to achieve the same effect. So drastic action is certainly the order of the day!’

He quickly followed with, ‘There is another reason that I feel so strongly about this. Ever since I was a child I have thought that burning coal was a profligate use of a valuable raw material for many processes of great value to us and future generations. But I suspect you had other reasons for raising the subject so soon after your visit to the north.’

‘Yes it seems to me the government and local authorities are two-faced in their approach to this problem. Recently a woman who had the misfortune to live within the national park boundary tried and passionately wished to do her bit to contribute. She went to the great expense of installing a heat pump and also put a solar panel on the roof which was no more obtrusive than a conservation-type roof light. She was advised retrospective planning permission was necessary and it was refused.’

‘So she appealed?’

‘And she lost, despite the support of her parish council and neighbours!’

I added, ‘As we were looking at the paper, the friend with whom I was staying who lives in a conservation village told me he was advised by the planning officer that he could fit panels so long as they cannot be seen.’

‘The sun has to see them! So that would almost certainly reduce their efficiency if not prevent their erection. But this reflects the planning attitude which is so often one of preservation rather than conservation. Conservation implies conserving the best while encouraging sympathetic contemporary development so facilitating a continuous evolution from the past through the present to the future. The lifestyle and the architecture of the moors and dales should not be frozen in the mid-20th century forever. Except where an archetypical site of one period has survived through the ages, panels should not be hidden, but allowed in prominent places as typical of the needs of our time.’

I agreed, ‘A recent visit to the Austrian Alps and Bavaria would suggest that this is the attitude there without any detriment to an equally beautiful and historic environment.’

‘It has always been the practice of hill people to make the most of the little that they have. Here the local authorities backed by the government inspectorate, are hindering national policy by insisting on preservation in the name of conservation at the same time destroying the tradition of making best use of scarce resources.’

‘And the picture of the house in the paper added insult to injury. It was dominated not by the roof panel but by an intrusive massive electricity pole with extra thick wires and yellow high-visibility collars on the stays which the utility companies

must install with impunity, irrespective of the harm to the environment, at the behest of the European Commission in the name of health and safety.'

'So on the one hand the national park prevents much needed measures to protect the environment in the long term with little short-term detriment, but on the other is forced to despoil it for miniscule benefit in health and safety! A true reflection of the risk-averse times that we live in.'

I had to agree. Charles added, 'Compared with the disaster arising from demand for absolute protection from the real and the mythical dangers of nuclear power, this is but a small

example of the consequences of this culture. The potentially dominant contributor to the solution to the problem of the misuse of fossil fuels has been set back 30 years or more.'

'I think that the majority now accept the need for nuclear energy, Charles.'

'But too late, we have had to sell out to the French!'

Even those unconvinced by extravagant propaganda, must accept there is a problem and a proportionate response involves taking some risk and accepting change in our towns and countryside.

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