

A greener country outside the EU?

Green issues have so far not had a high profile in the EU in/out debate. The official Green Party line is that the UK should stay in as the EU provides better environmental protection than the UK would, and it is only the EU big stick that makes us toe the line. Other environmental campaigners use a similar argument. According to these people, we owe whatever environmental standards we have to a bunch of Brussels bureaucrats and left to ourselves we would not bother. A curious argument which flies in the face of all the evidence.

England had its first clean air act in the 13th century, and this was followed by others, notably in the 19th century when the use of coal increased dramatically. And in the 1950s and 1960s, other acts followed. Since the 1970s, being a member of the EEC, the UK has adopted whatever standards the EU/EEC has directed. It has not been a case of the UK being forced to do something it would not otherwise do. What has happened in the past two decades is that research has shown the potential health dangers of many particulates not previously considered dangerous, and the understanding of climate change drivers has forced a reassessment of the use of fossil fuels. This has been while the UK has been a member of the EU so naturally it has been the EU's responsibility for establishing environmental standards. It would have been pointless and irrelevant for the UK to duplicate this process. To say that the UK would not implement environmental policies in the absence of the EU is just, well, bonkers.

One never mentioned fact about EU climate change policy is that each member state is given a target reduction in CO₂ emissions, and can be fined if it fails to reach that target. Yet the source of most of these CO₂ emissions is the country's

population which consumes power for heating, cooking, driving, traveling even on public transport, sitting in traffic jams, etc. In fact, almost every human activity in a modern consumer society involves the consumption of power, most of which in the UK is generated by fossil fuels (and is likely to remain so for at least another 40 years until better technologies are available). But another strand of EU policy is the free movement of people, and the UK has around 3 million immigrants from other EU countries. These all undertake the usual consumer activities which produce CO2 emissions which makes it harder and harder for the UK to meet its targets which were based on lower population levels. And the Government's own projections anticipate another 3 million EU immigrants over the next decade.

It's a topsy-turvy world when the UK is condemned to ever harder-to-meet emission level targets whilst not being allowed by the same central authority to take prudent steps to limit the number of agents that produce them. The counterpart is that it is easier for the EU countries with net emigration to meet their environmental targets!

Then there is water quality in the environment – our rivers and seas. According to those hypnotised by EU propaganda, any standards we have are due entirely to the Brussels bureaucrats. Without Brussels, our rivers would be dead and our bathing waters a sewer. Yet there was major UK legislation on these issues long before Brussels decided it was their province to establish standards – what about the Water Act of 1973, the Control of Pollution Act 1974, and the establishment of river authorities and river boards before this? The transformation of the Thames into a thriving wildlife habitat owes nothing to the EU. All that Brussels has done is to assume responsibility for what the standard should be, while avoiding any responsibility for actually finding the money to fund them. And of course, its free movement of people policy ensures that there are more sources

of pollution in the UK every year.

I have heard people argue on the television and radio that without the EU there would never have been any schemes to protect the countryside, schemes such the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, the Farm Woodland Scheme, the Hedgerow Incentive Scheme, nor any of the regional schemes which subsidise activities in remote rural areas. **The irony is that these schemes only exist because the UK argued for them.** The UK has historically had much greater concern for the preservation of the countryside than EEC countries whose main preoccupation was agricultural production for production's sake – the more one produced, the more subsidy one got. **All the current EU countryside environmental schemes have their origins in UK policy goals and schemes.** And even the EU regional schemes are merely developments of UK schemes of the 60s and 70s. This is not to argue any great virtue on the part of the UK – it was indeed a mix of policy preferences and budget practicalities. Under the Common Agricultural Policy, the UK being a food importer paid a large amount into the EEC/EU budget but got very little in return. Getting the EEC to adopt environmental and regional programmes was one way of getting some of this money back. Essentially, this budgetary imbalance still exists, because of the importance of the agricultural budget.

But all this is just a part of the **fundamental irreconcilability of the preservation of the environment with EU policy on free movement of people.** If a country is large, spatially, in relation to its population, then uncontrolled immigration might have minimal impact for some time (though not for ever). For a spatially small country like the UK with an existing relatively high population density, a high rate of immigration has a disastrous impact. This is especially so when most immigrants go to all already densely populated regions. There might be space in the Scottish Highlands or the Welsh hills but there is no work nor infrastructure there

to attract the migrants. The main environmental impact of this immigration is firstly demand for housing, which impacts on an already tight housing market. Three million migrants need housing, even more houses have to be built, towns and villages expand, new towns are developed, and we have the suburbanisation of the countryside. And it does not end there. Every barn in the countryside becomes a developer's dream because planning permission rules are relaxed to meet the exigencies of the housing market.

The necessary huge increase in house building is one impact. Another is the increase in traffic and congestion, leading to calls for more roads, wider roads, more motorways etc. These developments all require space, something even politicians cannot conjure out of a hat. So we lose more countryside.

I have a house and a garden. It is sufficient to accommodate my family and any visitors I care to invite. Imagine the chaos and decline in the quality of life if I had to take in anyone who cares to turn up on my doorstep! But that is what is happening. Living abroad I see the changes from mass immigration more starkly when I visit periodically than people living in the UK who have had the changes creep up insidiously. It is much more serious than people realise.

I haven't even mentioned the impact of mass immigration on health, education and other public services ...

This point of view has nothing to do with racism or xenophobia. I don't believe that British is best, or the average Briton is necessarily superior to a foreigner. Not at all. But I do believe that the British have a right to preserve their culture and quality of life, and the countryside is a key part of that. And villages and towns for that matter. Their character is being destroyed by development.

The EU is not the only source of immigrants, and it is true

that successive UK governments have done little over the years to restrict immigration from other regions of the world. There has been no overall population policy. **Governments have regarded a larger population as a goal in itself as it increases the size of the tax base. No one in government is concerned about the preservation of the countryside, protecting it from urban and suburban creep.** Those of us who do care are just the hoi-polloi. The Establishment, and the large corporations that buy power from it through political donations and the bribery of individuals, never face the same problems as the rest of us. With their money and connections they can buy themselves the privacy, the large estates, the services they want (made cheaper by immigration), the holidays abroad etc. They don't even see the degraded countryside as they speed along the motorways on their way to their secluded, private country houses or their overseas villas via the airport. *Their* lives are extremely satisfactory.

This referendum is not just about trying to preserve our environment from crushing population levels, it is also about trying to wrest back control from the rich and the powerful. It is the people against the privileged.

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