An end to zombie politics [1]

Written by **Miles Saltiel** [2] | Tuesday 16 April 2013

When economists speak of ?zombie banks? or ?zombie companies?, they mean outfits so overwhelmed by debt that they cannot turn to the future. So too the current generation of UK politicians, with a zombie coalition and a zombie opposition. The poor beggars are weighed down not just by debt but also by duff ideas from the past, just like the man down the hole who hasn?t worked out that first he needs to stop digging.

Eventually, however, debt gets paid off or (more likely) inflated away. At least as important, moreover, new ideas emerge. This is the first of a series of blogs drawing attention to straws in the wind along these lines: ideas on the turn and their policy implications. Now for opinion-formers and policy-makers to recognise these changes in the intellectual climate for what they are and to get up the gumption to turn from ?keep digging? to reform and resolution.

When Tony Blair signed up for Kyoto, it was a cost-free policy for the UK as it coincided with the ?dash for gas? which he inherited. But our adherence to Kyoto targets isn?t cost-free any more. Now we are subsidising wind-farms, solar energy etc so that the UK average energy bill has risen by 18% for this reason alone.

On 8 February, Ed Hawkins of the University of Reading posted a graph, subsequently globally anthologised, drawing attention to the mismatch between climate change models and some seventeen years without measurable climate warming. To be fair, the meaning of the graph is contested, with diehard proponents of classical ?Anthropogenic Global Warming? (AGW) spluttering that it is premature to make much of the statistical meaning of the recent figures; or that the warming is taking place under the sea where we can?t measure it.

This is weak stuff: contrary to the campaigners the science turns out to be far from settled; indeed by the tests climate practitioners have set themselves their predictions are falling apart. Honest scientists are now revisiting their theories and models.

So let the Prime Minister launch a Royal Commission to revisit the evidence, modelling and consequent policy. The composition of such a Commission would have to be carefully chosen to ensure balance. The public interest needs statisticians and scientists from outside the hermetic world of ?climate science? to challenge insiders robustly and in full view. Also in the interests of transparency, the DPP should seize data such as papers from the Climate Research Unit of the University of East Anglia for examination by forensic statisticians. The Commission should be given ample time to get it right - five years at least.

Over the period of its review the Government should suspend surcharges on energy bills, subsidies to energy suppliers or technologies, and generally the obligations of the Secretary of State for Energy under the Climate Change Act (2008).

We may expect the Liberal Democrats to object, but they may not want to stand in the way of a good-faith re-examination of the evidence. If they do, they have handed the Tories a priceless wedge issue for 2015.

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