

## **Margaret Beckett Speech to SERA Fringe:**

### **Climate Change: The Road to 2050**

#### **Introduction**

Thank you to SERA for setting up tonight's meeting - and to all their work with my Ministerial colleagues across government on environmental issues. It is very important, and helpful, to have an environmental group affiliated to the party and working with Ministers and MPs. No other political party has a group like SERA, and it makes a real difference.

Climate change is a huge issue globally and nationally, and is as much and more a political as a policy challenge. Unless we all play our part in our different ways in shifting the politics of climate change, we will not succeed in tackling the challenges it poses.

New Zealand is an ally and supporter. But they are a good example of why none of this is easy. In their recent election they beat off opponents who wanted to leave the Kyoto Protocol – by a margin of a mere 1%. It is not easy for them to convince their electorate of what needs to be done. And this is true among all who are allies on this issue.

#### **1. International Leadership**

Let me begin by telling you bluntly something not all of you may want to hear. You should be proud of this Party's and this government's record on this issue. Let me tell you what everybody else tells me at every international conference that I attend – which is that no other country, and no other leader, has done more than the UK and Tony Blair, to try and accelerate international action on climate change. It must be two to three years ago that Tony told me that he wanted action on climate change to be one of the top priorities of our G8 Presidency.

He had to overcome huge opposition and faced continual discouragement in doing so. He chose to do what very few politicians are willing to do which is to stick his neck out on an issue where success was extremely

unlikely and failure almost certain. And he succeeded in for the first time ever forcing climate change onto the agenda of Heads of government.

He also succeeded in persuading the leaders of five of the world's major emerging economies to come and take part in discussions on this issue. And I can tell you that they faced plenty of discouragement at the idea of doing so.

And as I am being blunt let me say this. Part of the difficulty of getting political momentum on this issue is the gulf of expectation and understanding that exists between those who think it is a simple matter to get global agreement and those who actually have to try to get it. I read a little while ago the transcript of an interview with the BBC correspondent Roger Harrabin who has a wealth of experience in this area.

It was just after some helpful little soul had leaked an early draft of a potential Summit text. In the interview another correspondent, I think a science correspondent, was pontificating about how weak the text was, how pathetic the scale of ambition, how a text like this would be a complete waste of time. And Roger Harrabin said that he had just been in the States discussing these issues with other experienced players, and that not only had the American government never signed up to words and phrases such as those used in the draft, but that everyone he had met in America told him there wasn't a hope in hell of him doing so. He said in terms that if Tony Blair could get the Americans to sign up to such a draft text, it would be a diplomatic triumph.

In fact the final Gleneagles text was a lot stronger than that, but as is the way of our world by then Roger was no longer calling it a diplomatic triumph.

And the G8 Summit did not produce only text. It reached agreement to a package of actions, including a commitment by the World Bank to incentivise investment in low carbon options.

And of course the Summit was only one event. We have tried throughout the year to create real political momentum by involving a great range of stakeholders in a rich variety of ways.

In January at the Davos World Economic Forum, Tony was asked to make a keynote speech on climate change which was a major part of the Forum's discussions. And he hosted a breakfast with the Chief Executives of 30 or so companies who are world players each in a different sector of the global marketplace and invited them to raise this issue in their sectors and feed back in a report to be placed before leaders at the Summit.

In February, the most senior scientific voices came together in Exeter to update and to compare notes on the latest of the science.

In March we hosted a meeting of energy and environment ministers drawn from some 20 countries who are significant and growing energy users – a conference which drew in financial and industry interests and was addressed both by Gordon Brown and a senior member of the Chinese govt.

One of the successes of the Summit itself was to get agreement to an ongoing dialogue about the approach to tackling climate change in the future, beyond the commitment of the Kyoto Protocol. And following a further meeting of world business leaders in October, the Prime Minister will attend the first meeting of that informal dialogue in three or four weeks time. All of this will feed into the first meeting of the parties of the Kyoto Protocol in Montreal in December for which the meeting in Canada was preparation.

So far I have talked exclusively about the global scene because classically climate change is a global problem which no country can resolve alone although the contribution that each country makes is the substance of domestic policy dialogue and decision.

No doubt many of you will have much comment on that domestic record, and that is both fair and necessary. But I want to finish my brief remarks with one further observation on what you can best do to help us change the politics of climate change, to have an effect like the Make Poverty History campaign. In New York 10 days ago, a journalist asked Bob Geldof to name and shame the people who had failed to do enough to Make Poverty History. His answer was – it is all of us. The shame is ours. The name is the world.

To get governments to move on this issue we need to move their electorates. We can do our best to identify and push what is needed. And you can and will continue to push us. The final pressure point is of course on governments to make the changes they need.

But it is not only governments who were pressed to act. The Make Poverty History campaign involved a huge and rich variety of stakeholders of every kind and at every level. And that is what we need to do with climate change.

So let me share with you another uncomfortable truth.

It is the job of campaigners to set goals ahead of what government can achieve. But if the goals you set are too far ahead of what can be achieved at that point, and if you totally underplay or perhaps misunderstand what can be achieved and how, there is a huge risk not only that you discredit yourselves by seeming completely out of touch with the political realities, but that you undermine rather than support the efforts of those who are fighting on the same side.

Some months ago at a meeting with green groups a young woman demanded that I and other politicians tell the people what they must do to tackle climate change. And I said to her – well we will, but actually you're the people who can do that better than we can. They trust you, and they don't trust us – not least because you tell them not to.

So help us build that political momentum. Come up with more ideas like the one that brought us a UK led agreement to pilot a clean coal power station in China. Because of course climate change was high on the agenda of our EU-China Summit, and our EU-India Summit, just as it will be at our EU-Russia Summit, and just as we want it to be throughout this Parliament and the lifetime of this government.

It is not just about targets. It is not just about new or existing technologies. It is about mobilising human endeavour and using every tool at our disposal to tackle one of the biggest problems the human race has ever faced. And by the way forget about tackling it without America.

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