

Sunak heads for the gutter as Packham takes the lea...

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I watched two people talk about climate change on television yesterday. One was Rishi Sunak. The other was Chris Packham. One of them told the truth. The other talked nonsense that was far from the truth in almost every way possible. Packham was described by Sunak as an extremist, albeit not my name. The reality is that Sunak is far more dangerous.

Let me leave Packham aside for a moment. I have already posted my reactions to what Sunak was saying, as he said it, which I put on Twitter. Reading those comments you might sense my anger, because I have little doubt that I, like Chris Packham, am an extremist as Rishi Sunak would define it. My anger was not, however, just about climate change.

I was angry that the British prime minister announced a whole new change in policy outside Parliament, which went into recess the day before. The indifference that he showed for the democratic process should, in my opinion, be sufficient for him to be treated as being in contempt of parliament, like his predecessor. Whilst claiming that he was starting a new form of politics (without offering anything of substance to justify that), what he made clear was that parliament would be sidelined. Of course, I was angry about that.

I was also angry at his contempt for the businesses whose plans he disrupted. This has been a consistent failing on the part of the Tories. Cameron and Osborne virtually blew apart the solar panel industry with their policy changes. Now Sunak is undermining the move to electric vehicles by delaying the requirement that only they be sold by 2030, and by failing to invest in the infrastructure that they require. Simultaneously, he pretends that there is a cost problem with heat pumps when the reality with regards to heat pumps is twofold. One is that the government needs to invest to create the capacity to build enough of them, which capacity does not exist at present. The other is that it needs to take control of the national grid to build the capacity to transmit all the electricity that will be required for this green transition to take place. So far it has given no indication of an appetite to do so, which will be absolutely disastrous in the long-term.

I was also angry about his use of the right-wing trope that suggests that because the UK only produces 1% of global emissions anything we do is a little consequence. In a world where leadership is required, that is irrelevant. Given the fact that there is only one planet, the comment is crass. And given the fact that we have more opportunity than most to do this transition because of the capacity that we have to generate electricity from wind, sun and tides, we have the duty to lead. But, as ever with a cowardly politician, Sunak wishes to put himself at the back of the pack.

And then I was angry about the claims on climate change. The suggestion that he made that we are so far ahead of the pack that we can let things slip a bit and still achieve net zero by 2050 is just wrong. The Climate Change Committee has made it clear that this is what they think. Lord Deben, who chaired that committee and who as Tory MP John Gummer served in Margaret Thatcher's cabinet, made that abundantly clear in Chris Packham's programme. He rubbished the idea that the government is on target. As he made clear, the exact opposite is the case. I am quite sure that Sunak knows that, but he made these changes anyway.

Finally, I was angry that Sunak claimed that what he was saying was not political. I can only presume that he thinks that those watching him are stupid, because the only explanation for what he did was political. The explanation for them comes down to just one word, which is Uxbridge. Sunak thinks that backtracking on green commitments will help the Tories at the next election, and that is precisely why he is making these disastrous decisions. There is nothing more to them in the most base politics. His only motive is fear. His indifference to the long term is absolute.

Then, I should mention that I am, of course, angry with Labour. They have already said they will not reverse the policy on heat pumps.

So, why was Chris Packham so good when Rishi Sunak failed so miserably? The answer comes down to honesty. Packham honestly declared his uncertainty as to whether he thinks it might be acceptable for him to now break the law to achieve the change that is required to manage the transition that our planet must go through when the law is so very obviously now set against that goal. He was candid. His uncertainty was apparent. His agony was clear.

Unlike Sunak, Packham came across as an honest man trying to address a known fact. That he did not answer his own question was quite acceptable as a conclusion. His uncertainty was in itself a sufficient answer at this moment.

Sunak rather bizarrely said that he was launching a new sort of politics with his speech. He didn't. He just played to the gutter. In contrast, Packham went high. Both will get abuse for what they did. Only one of them is on the right side of history.