

A Political Agenda – Part Two

A nation's health and progress 'forwards' requires investments of many types; investment in every citizen's development, in any direction chosen by them, which if they are fully bought in as stakeholders to the nation's vision, will in many cases be aligned with the overall direction of travel, and in other cases, will enhance the cultural breadth possibly into areas which have not been fully explored; investment in start-up and developing businesses and industries to focus on long-term economic goals, largely through community enterprise; investment in public services to provide basic needs and rights, and also contribute fully to individual, community and national well-being, again focused on term-term goals; investment in all other key areas which the vision addresses through mission strategies for agendas in, for example, natural ecosystem evolution, arts and entertainments, sport, etc, and finally, investment in national infrastructure which underpins all other activities and provides efficient and coordinated systems and processes to enable a free 'flow of success' in all other areas. National infrastructure includes obvious things such as:

- transport of people, goods and services, internally and externally
- digital infrastructure
- utilities infrastructure (heat, water, power, communications)
- 'built' infrastructure
- public service infrastructure (health, education, government community services)

Coordinated and joined-up thinking, planning, development and execution of infrastructure requires 'blinkers off' mission strategies in their own right, with the same common underpinning foundations as discussed previously.

Business and Industry: Research, Design, Development and Manufacturing

In the first part of this essay, the links across broad areas of society coordinating activities to generate mission strategies (based on a thirty year rolling vision) for the nation's direction of travel, hinted at prime contributors in a leading manner for the development and activation of these strategies. In a modern industrial sense (taking an expansive view of the meaning of 'industry' as being one of the primary generators of wealth and economic value for the funding of the whole nation's citizenship, infrastructure and well-being) these leading contributors will obviously be those who have the greatest level of knowledge, foresight and vision within the particular fields of the mission strategies being developed. An extremely close and coherent relationship between existing industry and business, academia (in relevant areas such as science and technology), government, both national and local, and economists, capable of taking a blinkers-off approach to strategic mission planning and activation, so as to ensure that narrow industrial needs do not obliterate mission strategies, objectives and activations in other areas, such as natural ecosystem evolutionary strategies, is required.

The cohesion of the relationships between these areas outlined above, should be designed and permanent, in a manner which produces the most effective pursuit and attainment of comprehensive mission strategies in areas where their ongoing cooperation on a broad front, supports the whole notion of a thirty year rolling vision, with the evolution of mission strategies as appropriate.

All of these relationships, in execution, require a mindset which reflects community enterprise in its fullest sense, and broad stakeholder-ism and needs to be operated in an open manner visible to all citizens. An example of how this might work, using an existing set of foundations, is perhaps the birth and development of an electric vehicle industry (encompassing research, design, development and manufacturing) fully sited in the home nation (providing a broad range of contributive employment) with outward investment as appropriate, built on the existing knowledge within the nation of vehicle development, leveraging from perhaps the motorcycle industry, which itself was rebirthed, electric motors and battery technology, again leveraged off existing manufacturers in other sectors, and academia, where such specialist knowledge might exist, and other contributing technologies and process expertise, across the nation, and where these skills or knowledge are missing, implementing a strategy of importing knowledge (alongside foreign expertise in the immediate term) so as to determinedly develop in-nation skills and expertise to enable self-reliance in the medium term, and provide another strongly-founded area for a nation's citizens to grow their careers and lives around, if they so choose.

Further Education

Linked strongly to the previous section, is the whole concept of how important further education is to a nation's well-being in all sorts of ways – economically, socially (individually and collectively), as has been pointed out, a major player in developing mission strategies in all areas, and providing an excellent route for the ongoing development of stakeholder-ism within every citizen. This requires a system of further (and higher) education which continuously contributes to personal development as required by each citizen. Both academic (and other areas of skills and vocational developmental) programmes need to be available to give every citizen every opportunity to develop in ways which suits their needs and intent, and also define how funding is implemented both for an individual and for wider research and development activities, recognising the vital part that these play in mission strategy development and activation. Coherent and consistent funding is vital from government, industry and business, and individual 'investment' is also an integral part of the model, but it must be coherent and consistent, not piecemeal, which would result in academia having to go out and sell itself continuously, in order to put together funding for the immediate and medium term. This needs careful leadership so as to retain at all times, a cutting-edge environment within academia, and minimise 'cosiness'.

Individual access to higher and further education for every citizen should not be limited by their ability to pay, not should it be limited to 'once and once only'. Just as an aside, it may be appropriate that during working life, credits are earned by citizens which they can cash in at a point which they choose, to contribute towards additional time spent in higher or further education, beyond their first attendance.

Science and Technology

This is surely, in the modern age, an absolutely critical part of any nation's agenda, in particular one which sets out a rolling thirty year vision for direction of travel. Science and technology can and does play a very important role in well-being, both collectively and individually, and also provides a

very solid foundation for a very broad exploration of areas which provide huge interest and growth opportunities for citizens and community enterprises.

Semiconductors (in widely-scoped industries, such as digital consumer products, medical devices and equipment, solar photo voltaics, etc) can provide a strong foundation for vertical and horizontal growth industries, alongside other technological areas and areas of scientific exploration, such as space and satellites, including screaming-edge research into areas of pure science (chemistry, biology and physics) which, again with coherence across sectors, can birth new industries and exciting opportunities for personal and career development, for any citizen who chooses to pursue these. A nation's investment in Research and Development is critical and should be measured with targets as appropriate, and strategies to ensure that targets are met, not just left to the vagaries of the unfettered free market. A nation's commitment to new industries based on these types of R&D, needs to be driven by 'blinkers-off' decision-making, and must not enable an industry's growth which would result in 'blinkers-on' damage in other areas.

Energy

An energy industry obviously has to meet the needs of the nation's citizens, businesses, industry and organisations. Much of this represents basic needs of heat and light, and needs to be viewed in this way – as providing basic needs, which constitute, within this agenda, rights – rights which must be paid for of course, but rights non-the-less. This leads to the notion that a model of social ownership for these utility industries seems to be the most appropriate. This is not monolithic nationalisation, and is not free-market privatisation. Within the social enterprise model, it is still possible to have a fairly large number of organisations, perhaps owned on a regional basis by the region's citizens, being able to compete with others if that is deemed appropriate. It does not require a single social enterprise, across the whole nation to deliver for example electricity. It is the ownership model that is important, not the breadth of operation geographically. In terms of generation of electricity, to stay on this theme, 'blinkers-off' thinking is a must, and it should also be recognised that a focus on small-to-medium scale systems is directly aligned with stakeholderism, as well as giving environmentally-aligned projects much more focused attention. It is also necessary to recognise that, on larger scale, a breadth of generating capability might be necessary to ensure supply, but this needs to be tempered with two things; firstly, 'blinkers-off' thinking and strategy, and secondly, a commitment to support wholeheartedly, community-developed and funded projects, which should be seen fully as part of the energy delivery system.

For heating, again a commitment to small-to-medium scale community projects needs to be embedded in the 'blinkers-off' thinking about how to deliver heat as a paid for right to every citizen. Community enterprise here, can again play a vital part in this delivery of warmth. For industrial enterprises which require significant heating capability, or even their own infrastructure, the social enterprise industry should be broad enough in its outlook, to provide expertise and knowledge to these industries in a joined-up coherent way. Again whilst ensuring a 'blinkers-off' approach, a breadth of supply is likely to be important to ensure availability at all necessary times. The social enterprise model can make all of this work.

Water and Waste

If anything, alongside warmth, light and shelter, is a basic need, and a right, again paid for, but a right, it is a clean water supply and an effective waste water disposal system. As such, it is surely the case here also that a social enterprise model is the most appropriate. Once again, it does not require a single national body to deliver water and waste disposal, and in fact, a more localised or regional model might better fit with the notion of community enterprise, and again, whatever these social enterprises look like, they should provide knowledge and expertise to communities who may wish to take a more active role in water supply and waste water management. For example, reed-bed systems on a community scale should be factored in as a part of the responsibilities, at least in a support role, within local communities. The provision of clean drinking water in necessary quantities is a fundamental duty of these enterprises, and it also undoubtedly a duty of these enterprises to ensure that waste water is always dealt with, with a blinkers-off approach.

Transport

Whilst more research is needed here, to fully understand the structure and legal aspects of any specific transport business within the overall transport system, a number of over-riding principles must surely be brought to bear here. The first is to ensure that personal means of non-vehicular transport (ie walking, running and cycling) are fully catered for in a safe and structured environment, with integrated and specifically-designed local, regional and national networks with sufficient investment to make them attractive for use and fully maintained. Secondly, the transport network, again locally, regionally and nationally should be fully integrated with coordination within a locality (of a town or city, for example, or a rural area), geographic area (ie a county, district or region) and across the nation, so that a coherent system exists which gives the transport user, whether it is via public transport (trams, buses, trains, planes), private motorised transport or commercial motorised transport, a clear and easy picture at any time, of how to make as efficient and cost effective journey from A to B. This integrated coordination does not require public ownership of modes of transport such as trains or buses, but it is possible to envisage local bus services (for example) in rural areas, being run as a social community enterprise, and also the rail network to be, firstly owned and operated in terms of infrastructure by the means of a single social enterprise or similar, in the public sphere, and train operations fully coordinated by means of social ownership in a single community enterprise. Investment, which has been lacking certainly in times of nationalisation – things like the railways were easy for governments to under-invest in, especially in times of tight finances - must be driven by the desire to maintain a system of excellence. Lessons from other countries should be researched and learnt – Japan and Germany, for example. The third principle is again related to ‘blinkers-off’ thinking, which must recognise the need to ensure ever-decreasing reliance on fossil fuels for transport as well as other areas of society and the economy. This must be aggressively addressed and driven forwards. The brings about the discussion of the transport network for personal and commercial transportation on the roads. It is perhaps a valid goal to move as much as is possible, and to enhance this capability with infrastructure investment, of bulk freight transport onto the railways, understanding that much may still need to go by road. If private personal vehicles are to remain abundant (and it must be recognised that many people are deeply attached to this means of transport) a swift and targeted move to environmentally-friendly vehicles is essential, not driven exclusively by the market. This ties in with earlier comments about

the possibilities and great benefits of a home-based electric vehicle industry, born, developed and brought to fruition by strategic mission planning and activation. A hand-in-hand phasing out of the fossil fuel network with the fully coordinated growth of the electric network, and alongside this perhaps, a fuel-cell network, would hugely boost a blinkers-off, joined-up transport capability for the nation. Investment in road infrastructure must surely remain within the government's sphere of operation, coordinated regionally and locally. Payment for road use, in my view, is correctly done via a single annual fee for 'blinkers-off' vehicles, such as electric or fuel-cell vehicles, with a cost-per-journey supplement for 'blinkers-on' vehicles, such as petrol or diesel-powered vehicles. This would both encourage people to migrate to blinkers-off vehicles and bring it home to them the cost beyond economics of driving a blinkers-on vehicle. Finally, looking at the aviation industry, travelling by plane is both a necessity in many cases, but also a blinkers-on mode of travel at present and should therefore be viewed and addressed in terms of minimising its negative impact in all possible ways.

Food Production

Farming, especially in a crowded nation, requires a focus on efficiency and volume of output, to enhance the ability of a country to maximise its self-sufficiency in areas suitable for its climate. However this need for the efficient use of its farming land must also be defined with a blinkers-off approach, taking full stock of its impact on both the environment within which it sits (for example, its use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides, as well as its adaptation to the possibilities of the use of genetically engineered crops), and also its impact on the full availability of space for the wild evolutionary development of other holders of the life module. This focus on blinkers-off food production requires, with the current understanding of farming methodologies, a different approach from that taken broadly today, whilst recognising that many farmers do a good job, within the economics of their businesses, of encouraging and enhancing at least some areas of wildlife within their own environs. Financial pressures on farmers are often extreme due to market pressures from buyers.

In terms of food production post farm gate, each nation must surely recognise the need to coordinate the delivery of food to the market which to a very large degree reflects the need to provide really nutritious and healthy food to its citizens, who in turn should be fully knowledgeable from very early life about which types of foods make up such a diet. This again, depending upon the nation, requires cultural adaptation.

International Development, NGOs and Charities

As a starting point, the full restoration of the investment levels of GDP in International Development at 0.7% is a necessity. The expertise in the field of NGOs must assist fully in driving government policy in this area, and it should not be viewed as a drain on resources. The system which has existed from long ago has been focused on exploitation in many areas, and this includes that of the developing world. It needs to be recognised that paying out a small fee for the right to

exploit is not acceptable, and instead, developing nations must benefit from genuine blinkers-off investment and assistance.

In general, NGOs and charities are to be greatly encouraged in all areas; however it must be fully recognised that in many areas, the work of charities should be replaced by the fully funded work of government, national and local, and communities, to ensure that (just for example) there are no homeless people on the streets. This responsibility for community through government is to ensure that there is resolution for addressing the challenges created by lack of genuine community in the past.

Egalitarianism

In order to ensure that the culture and the society reflect fully the concept of egalitarianism, then perhaps some limits should be placed either constitutionally or within company and organisation law to embed into every organisation in a legally-binding way, rules of governance on ranges of remuneration between the highest paid and lowest paid within the organisation. This may well depend on the type of organisation and company in question, but it can be envisaged that a limit on the range of perhaps 20x to 30x would be appropriate, with no-one sitting outside of that range either at the lower end or the higher end. This would promote a strong degree of financial egalitarianism whilst still allowing pay based on responsibility to a large extent.

Egalitarianism in other areas extends to healthcare, education and housing too, ensuring that there is no elitism built into the system. It has already been outlined that under this agenda, charging for primary and secondary education would be made illegal, resulting in further egalitarian outcomes. Also in this area, it is highly desirable to have known publicly, everyone's incomes. This is probably best done by having made public all tax returns, accessible by a website for anyone to view at any time. There really is no good reason for this not to be done, and lots of reasons for it to be done. This would enhance the egalitarian agenda, and support the idea that the largest differential in remuneration within any organisation should not exceed 20-30x.

Conclusion

The ideas outlined above are the second part of three which, in combination, express thoughts pulled together after reading, research and information gathering, as well as learnings from life experiences and critiquing government direction, process, infrastructure and policy over a number of years. They are obviously not fully expanded as directly implementable plans, but instead are intended to create a skeletal framework upon which detail can be hung. The idea has been, and will be extended in parts one and three, to develop a coherent (ie joined-up) set of components which form a broad agenda based on a 'blinkers-off' analysis of the nation's requirements in the 21st century, and beyond.

It represents, obviously, only one set of ideas and opinions and hopefully will stimulate debate and, equally importantly, actions to generate positive forward momentum. The first and third parts of this essay will cover, in the same manner, more areas of a nation's overall agenda.