

Just more talking the talk

By JOHN de BUEGER

GREAT news. Fresh from her triumphs fixing everything else, Helen Clark's new mission is saving the planet. Cynics won't be alone in suspecting that the only thing she is really trying to save is her own backside.

Her Green conversion on the eve of the Labour Party conference is a sick joke. On her watch, emissions have soared 21% above the 1990 Kyoto benchmark, and New Zealand is the world's eighth worst per capita polluter.

According to Ann Smith of Landcare Research, our emissions are rising faster than almost anywhere else. Worse still, with commodity-based exports sporting the world's highest CO₂ content per dollar of value, we are utterly dependent on cheap oil.

Contrast this record with Britain's first woman PM, Margaret Thatcher, who got a real science degree, not a ticket in doublespeak (political science), and really did do something to reduce CO₂ emissions.

She shut the coal mines down, pushed for North Sea gas, and ensured that process was in place to build the nuclear power plants that provide Britain with about 20% of its electricity.

Few thanks she may have got for it, but as a politician of integrity she stuck to her guns. Mainly due to her initiatives, British per-capita emissions are below Kyoto 1990.

Democratically-elected governments can't physically change per-capita CO₂ emissions. Their role is to set the ground rules so that things trend in the right direction — even when the electorate doesn't want to

know. Helen Clark is a scheming, manipulative populist whose priorities seem to be: staying in power, advancing the cause of the lesbian sisterhood, and opening up cans of worms on historical police sex abuse.

If she had any real integrity, like Mrs T or Jeanette Fitzsimons, she would have put some plausible policy framework in place and refused to trade Labour's doomed carbon tax. She has always just talked the talk.

The main reason for our soaring emissions is because neither this Government, nor the last, had an energy policy. This, coupled with a refusal to fix the Resource Management Act, has prevented the construction of further big hydro stations (like Project Aqua) and encouraged coal by default.

Ignoring the second tunnel at Manapouri — required because the hole under the hill was too small — no major hydro has been built since the Clyde High Dam fiasco 20 years ago.

Rob Muldoon may have screwed up by rejecting a low dam, but that is no reason to shun hydro forever. Wind and hydro win hands-down long-term, compared to fossil-fuelled plants because their cost of "fuel" is zero forever.

It took Clark years to change the oil and gas tax regime to lure exploration companies back to drill for gas, though in fairness to her, it was Muldoon who was responsible for squandering Maui gas by the ridiculous decision to opt for methanol-

synfuel petrol, instead of national CNG and LNG. (As big a no-brainer as the current farce, a \$1 billion waterfront white elephant instead of a \$320 million Eden Park upgrade).

Failure to set sensible ground rules, like fuel efficiency or exhaust emission standards, has resulted in mass importation of gas-guzzling SUVs — again, most during Clark's watch.

In the early 1990s, we were planting around 80,000 hectares a year of pine trees on marginal hill country. Now, as a direct result of Labour's

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credit from small forestry owners, such planting has virtually ceased.

Last year, New Zealand crossed over into deforestation mode — in other words, more forests were cut down than planted.

Back in the 1950s, New Zealand was clean and green. Electricity came from hydro plants; dousing the countryside with 2,4,5,T and DDT hadn't started, and dirty dairying had not been encouraged in such inappropriate regions as the Canterbury Plains.

Since then, apart from installing a few wind turbines, this country has done little more than trade on a "clean, green" lie, propped up with a load of anti-nuclear tripe from the likes of David Lange and, yet again, Helen Clark.

New Zealand has arguably the world's best wind resource. Perhaps here I should declare an interest in being a sunrise investor in our only home-grown turbine

manufacturer — but only because I am convinced of their value. Jeanette Fitzsimons might want to return us to rustic peasantry and carrot soup, but she also put her money where her mouth is and bought some shares.)

Until recently, little more than talk has been forthcoming from Labour to help this new hi-tech industry with export potential.

With such a record, who can seriously believe that Clark can lead such an unwilling country to ecological nirvana?

There is one urgent thing she could do though during the time she has left. That is to pick up the phone and give Fonterra boss, Henry van der Heyden, a stiff lecture about the "food-miles" debacle.

If Fonterra does not strongly refute false British claims about our butter wrecking the planet due to cargo transport emissions — when Britain's own agricultural practices make them worse — then all our exports will be in jeopardy, not just Anchor butter.

Van der Heyden should be leading the charge to re-design butter wrappers trumpeting the efficiency of our farmers, and why British customers are doing their bit for the planet by buying Anchor.

Faced with such a dismal performance from our political and commercial leaders, concerned citizens must wonder what they can do besides replacing incandescent light bulbs and ditching the SUV.

It is clear the world is soon going to start restricting carbon emissions — and fortunes will be made trading carbon-credit futures. Buying some cheaply now sounds a much better proposition than a distant coastal property.