



HISTORY & POLICY

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Rekindle Blitz spirit to combat climate change says historian

Wartime rationing policies should be revived in order to stave off catastrophic climate change, argues a new *History & Policy* paper published today.

Historian Dr Mark Roodhouse, of the University of York, calls for individual carbon rationing modelled on the experience of the two World Wars, and warns that ‘green taxes’ will not achieve the dramatic reduction in consumption that is needed.

Dr Roodhouse shows how the current debate about proposals for increased air taxes and individual, tradable, carbon allowances echoes the debates over rationing policies during and after the First and Second World Wars. Using these past lessons, he argues that consumers should be given an equal ration of carbon points, which can be bought, sold or traded, to spend on fuel, gas and electricity.

Dr Roodhouse said:

“The use of taxes alone to control consumption was rejected in the World Wars, and they would not achieve the quick, dramatic cut in carbon consumption that we need now to avert environmental disaster. Tradable carbon rations would have a real impact if the public could be persuaded that they are necessary, temporary and fair. The Blitz spirit still plays an important role in popular memory and could be rekindled to rally public support for carbon rationing as one of the necessary measures to combat climate change.”

Dr Roodhouse shows how, just as they do now, politicians and economists in the past debated whether rationing was really necessary or if taxation and other measures could achieve the same ends. They concluded that rationing was the only way to achieve swift and dramatic

cuts in consumption without feeding inflation or causing social unrest. Tradable rations were not a feature of the wartime schemes because officials wrongly believed they would have undermined the moral basis for rationing: equality of sacrifice.

Dr Roodhouse argues that tradable carbon rations would improve on this system, preventing the creation of black markets in unused coupons that criminalise normally law-abiding citizens. He sets out eight points that policymakers need to convince the public on in order to win the argument for carbon rationing:

1. the risk of catastrophic climate change is serious and increasing in severity,
2. climate change poses a grave threat to British society and will have a direct and dramatic impact on our way of life if unchecked,
3. catastrophic climate change can be prevented if the government takes, immediate action, implementing a strategy to reduce carbon emissions,
4. a carbon rationing scheme is central to this strategy and without it the strategy will fail,
5. the scheme is a temporary measure during the transition from a high-carbon economy to a low-carbon economy and will eventually be removed,
6. ration levels are fair,
7. the system is administered transparently and fairly, and
8. evaders are few in number, likely to be detected and liable to stiff penalties if found guilty.

Notes to Editors

1. Mark Roodhouse's paper, *Rationing returns: a solution to global warming?*, is available on the History & Policy website at <http://www.historyandpolicy.org/archive/policy-paper-54.html>.
2. Dr Roodhouse lectures in 20th century British history at the University of York and is working on his first book, *Black Market Morality*, which examines evasion of consumer rationing and price control schemes during the 1940s and early 1950s.
3. The Department of History at the University of York combines exciting and original research with the best traditions of stimulating and innovative teaching. Widely accepted as one of the foremost centres of historical research and practice in the UK, the Department numbers some thirty professional academic staff and approximately

800 undergraduate and graduate students. The Department is rated 'Excellent' in teaching and received a '5A' rating in the last Research Assessment Exercise.

4. *History & Policy* is an independent initiative working for better public policy through an understanding of history, see www.historyandpolicy.org for further details. *History & Policy* is funded with a charitable grant from the Philanthropic Collaborative.
5. The initiative was founded by historians at the Universities of Cambridge and London and is based in the Centre for Contemporary British History, at the Institute of Historical Research, University of London.

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