

Changing people's lives

People's lives are changing a lot. Some of us welcome change when it is for the better, as much of it is. There is plenty of change which is driven by us as consumers. We willingly buy the product or service when it is better than the old or when it allows us to enjoy new experiences.

It is consumers who choose to watch downloaded films rather than BBC programmes, or who use a mobile phone to shop or pay a bill. It is people who choose to spend more of their lives on line and to learn and be informed from the web.

There is another kind of change which is more contentious. That is top down change driven by governments. Governments sometimes presume to know better than we do. They seek to stop us buying some goods and service with higher taxes, regulations or outright bans. They want us to buy or use other goods and services so they subsidise them ,give us tax breaks or supply them free at the point of use.

Some people think this is becoming excessive. They see too many attacks on their traditional way of life or their pleasures. The fire in the grate is to be changed. The roast beef meal may have too large a carbon footprint. The tried and tested diesel car is evil. Offering cash for a transaction is old fashioned. Their electricity meter has to be ripped out and replaced by a meter too smart for users to understand what it is really up to.

The quest to change public services does not always lead to improvements in them. The GP no longer does home visits. A telephone or on line surgery booking service does not always allow a same day appointment. Many public libraries are only open when working people are at work in the week and not open on Sundays. Governments want people to leave the car at home so they make it more and more difficult to use it, whilst many people regard it as the only way to get to work and to get the children to school.

Government needs reforming to get closer to how people lead their lives, and be more understanding of people's aspirations.