

# Greenz meanz biz

## Roger Cowe on the launch of the executive guide to friendly capitalism

**J**ONATHON Porritt, probably every executive's favourite green bogeyman, punctured the air of self-congratulation at a green business conference yesterday when he told the audience that British business was still surprisingly resistant to environmental ideas, but would have to change.

"Progress on many issues seems to be incomprehensibly slow", he said, citing the reluctance of British businesses to set specific targets for environmental performance, commit staff and resources, and submit to external audit.

Mr Porritt also warned that voluntary business action was not enough. And his call for government action was surprisingly echoed by environment minister Chris Patten. Mr Patten said that market forces alone were inadequate to produce sustainable development, which he said was now "a reality for all of us".

They were speaking at the launch of an executive guide to environmental action, published by Business in the Environment — a project established by Business in the Community with the encouragement of its president, Prince Charles.

Prince Charles, who makes a brief appearance in an accompanying video which stars John Cleese and Peter Davison, told the audience of over 300 business leaders that it was in their interest to be environmentally responsible. "Safeguarding the environment is an integral part of good business practice", the Prince said, emphasising the main message of the guide and the video.

He called for businesses to publish details of emissions, which would force executives to take an active interest in their environmental position, and to put pressure on suppliers. And he said environmental topics should be taught in business schools. But in a message to pressure groups, he also hoped that they would recognise progress made by businesses and "commit themselves to sustained and serious dialogue with industry at local and national level."

IBM (UK) chairman Tony Cleaver, who has led the Business in the Environment Team and seconded one of his marketing staff to develop the guide, had stressed that senior executives needed to take the initiative and emphasise their commitment to environmental action.

He insisted there was no excuse for businesses not to take action, and many reasons why they should do so.

Mr Cleaver said there were also positive reasons for environmental awareness, such as saving money through energy conservation. But some action would be costly. "High costs cannot be ignored", he suggested, "but they can be justified, and prudent managers will be looking into the future and realising that their competitors are quite likely to be gaining a competitive advantage from environmental responsibility."

But Mr Porritt warned that government involvement was also needed, and must be about more than setting standards. Tax measures to encourage smaller cars and regulations to improve energy efficiency of domestic equipment would be easy measures for the government to take. But it also needed to shape the market, as advocated by the government-commissioned Pearce report.

Mr Porritt finished by paying tribute to those business leaders who had grasped the nettle of environmental action, against the grain of corporate wisdom as expressed by the resolution this week at the Confederation of British Industry conference, which he described as "taking green minimalism to ridiculous extremes."