



Newsletter

June 1996

NUCLEAR PRIVATISATION AT ANY COST?

Following the review of the nuclear industry, the Government decided that part of it could be sold off, if the risky and expensive part remained in the public sector - the Magnox reactors, waste disposal and decommissioning.

British Energy is being advertised for sale with a campaign costing £5 million, and will go on the market mid July. Investors will be offered the seven AGR reactors, including Hinkley B, and the PWR at Sizewell. It may be sold for less than the £2.9 billion it cost to build Sizewell, and there are additional sweeteners to promote the sale. The Government pledged a £96 million dividend for investors in the first year, although the directors seem to doubt whether the profits will cover this. Some of the costs of nuclear liabilities such as cleaning up and waste disposal are not being taken on by the private sector, and responsibility for third party insurance liability is limited. This is despite Government denials that taxpayers would be left paying nuclear bills.

SAFETY IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR?

Concern has been expressed both for the public and the workers in the industry. Safety standards could drop in order to maximise output of reactors, keep them going longer and cut corners on safety, unless the industry is rigorously regulated by the NII.

CONTACT Hester Watson,
Tavens, High Street, Carhampton
Minehead tel. 01643 821768

The top City law firm, Clifford Chance, has warned the Government that cuts in manpower could compromise safety. Leaked documents show that nuclear inspectors are increasingly concerned about loss of skills in the industry, and its ability to cope with emergencies. There is a growing number of claims from past and present employees suffering from radiation related cancers.

THE WORKERS VIEW

SHE received an anonymous report, stating that it represented the views of a broad spectrum of staff, covering all skill levels at Hinkley A and B stations, expressing their fears about the privatisation process. The Hinkley A, Magnox, reactor and Hinkley B, AGR design, have been run as a combined site for 20 years, and cannot be split while continuing to operate without huge capital costs. The site split programme has currently run up a budget of over £10 million, and this will probably double. Cross site contracts drawn up by lawyers have put the site in almost total chaos with the workforce utterly confused, demoralised and demotivated. They

Collection *Laka* foundation

www.laka.org
Digitized 2019

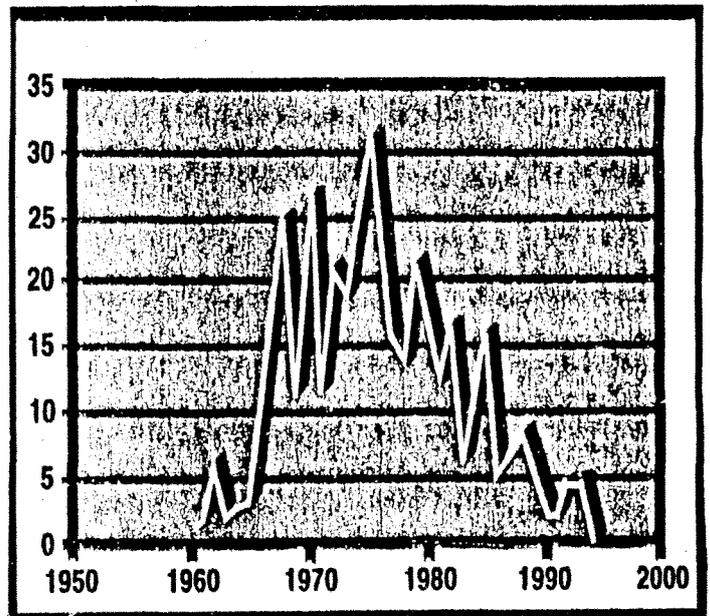
feel that nuclear safety is playing second fiddle to commercial interests. Operational rules and limits of plant performance are tested to the extreme in preference to shutting down the plant. The NII who regulate the industry seem to be constrained from acting over any issue which may hinder the process of privatisation. Nuclear Electric has reduced 'controllable costs' by encouraging its most experienced staff to leave. Those left are being subjected to intolerable mental and physical stresses due to the increasing workload, commercial pressures, and concern about having to deal with an emergency situation. They are being threatened by reminders of the dire consequences of passing on to members of the public any information which may adversely effect the market value of Nuclear Electric. To make a profit, British Energy will have to increase its output of 660 mW units to 700 mW.

REACTOR FAULTS - COVER UP?

On the day the Government was due to unveil the price and details of the sell-off, the NII admitted damaged fuel pins had been found in Hunterston B and Hinkley B. Four other AGRs are also being investigated. Scientists within British Energy, although fearful for their jobs, wrote to the Guardian saying the problem was worse than has been disclosed and the numbers of fuel pins failing in an accident would be many times greater than the safety case allowed for. The question is whether the reactors can continue to be run at full load because the British Energy has warned that its ability to keep stations running is fundamental to its finances. In the prospectus for the sale

the problem is merely mentioned as a subject for an inquiry.

World Nuclear Reactor Construction Starts, 1960-1995 (in gigaWatts)



HINKLEY EMISSIONS

As the likelihood of more reactors recedes, the waste question comes nearer. Permission has been granted to ship waste from Trawsfydd to Hinkley for incineration, probably starting soon after privatisation. In future they may want to send stuff from other places too, so we will be looking out for applications for authorisation to do this, as well as to increase radioactive emissions. The incinerators are part of the soon to be private Hinkley B, and lots of money must be spent dealing with waste and decommissioning.

Although there is a filter in the incinerator which burns radioactive waste at present, supposedly making it safe, only particulates are caught;

gases go through. The scientific challenge to the argument that the level of radioactive matter put into the air and sea is not harmful has been gaining publicity, and the campaign against emissions continues.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF CHERNOBYL

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE IN VIENNA - more than 700 politicians and scientists considered the legacy and lessons of Chernobyl. Many experts doubt whether the 15 similar reactors in Russia are safe, despite improvements made. The estimated cost of upgrading them to Western safety standards is US\$ 150 - 200 million per unit, which will have to come from Western industrialised countries. Aid is also needed to ease the suffering in radiation contaminated areas.

The World Health Organisation declared their view that huge rises in cancer rates among children and emergency workers are linked to radiation exposure, having examined 119,000 of these workers and compared rates of thyroid cancer in children before and after the accident. Deaths and illnesses linked to fallout in the Ukraine, Belarus and Russian Federation are increasing and this is likely to continue in coming years. There is also concern about the level of fear and stress related conditions in the region. An international research centre is to be set up at Kiev (Ukraine) to study the consequences of the Chernobyl accident. Responding to the health needs, economic hardship and environmental impact of the disaster is taking up enormous portions

of the national budgets in these countries, and the UN Secretary General is calling for greater assistance from the international community.

MOSCOW NUCLEAR SUMMIT

Leaders of the seven leading industrial nations called for the early closure of the remaining two reactors at Chernobyl, and pledged financial support which so far has not been forthcoming.

EASTERN EUROPEAN SAFETY WORRIES

A leaked report by the US Department of Energy concludes that 10 nuclear reactors in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe have faults which could cause a major accident.

FRANCE - Authorities have distributed iodine pills to 400,000 people living near nuclear power plants.

SIZEWELL B

When this was officially opened on 25th March by the President of the Board of Trade, he was greeted by local dignitaries and anti-nuclear campaigners. Shut down Sizewell campaigners report that more and more people are realising the dangers to the public of nuclear power. They are pressing the NII to release details of the necessary improvements that must be made to the weakened concrete and defective boiler welds in Sizewell A, which could keep that reactor closed for months, costing millions to the nuclear industry.

RENEWABLE ENERGY GROWTH

According to the Worldwatch Institute wind power generating capacity rose by 22% last year, particularly in Germany and India. Around 2% of the UK electricity supply is generated from renewable energy sources. The cost of photovoltaic cells has dropped by 50% in the last decade.

EASE - Energy Alternatives for a Sustainable Europe

A new campaign has been launched to promote the implementation of safe and sustainable energy developments in Eastern and Western Europe.

SHE NEWS

Following Crispin's retirement and feedback from members that they would like the campaign to continue, I have offered to take his place. I was immediately aware of Hinkley's existence when I moved to the Minehead area in April 1986. The local response to the Chernobyl accident was organised by the Roadwater Peace Group which I was involved with until it stopped its activities. Since then I have been in the Minehead Greenpeace Group and a member of SHE. In Addition to the immediate dangers posed by nuclear industries throughout the world, I am concerned for future generations. The authorities have tried throwing nuclear waste in the sea, dumping it in the ground and now they want to burn it, making it less in bulk but still there. While Hinkley A and B continue, either making electricity or incinerating waste I feel that we should know what is going on there.

Hester Watson

SHE - FUTURE ROLE

There would seem to be lots of people with ideas and experience on the SHE contact list and any contributions or suggestions that you would like to make regarding the campaign or the newsletter would be very welcome. When you write in can we assume that letters can be printed in the newsletter unless they are obviously not intended for that?

POLICY STATEMENT

At the last meeting the committee agreed that SHE would continue to press for the closure of Hinkley A; monitor and publicise the activities of the nuclear industry, in order to protect the public from pollution that could be harmful to health; oppose any lowering of safety standards which may result from privatisation; promote renewable sources of energy.

Next Meeting - Tuesday 3rd
September, at Judith's. tel 01278
732681

ECO SOUNDINGS

CAP DE LA HAQUE, the French version of Sellafield in Normandy, bears many similarities to the English re-processing plant, including a cluster of childhood leukaemia cases. According to a current report 25 cases were identified between 1978-1992. Within 10 kilometres of the plant there were three times the number expected. The cases are clustered downwind of the works where the dust fallout from aerial emissions might have occurred. As with Dounreay and Sellafield, there was no conclusive evidence of a link but round every site that uses plutonium there seems to be a cancer cluster.

The Guardian 19.6.96