

STOP HINKLEY EXPANSION

BRITISH ENERGY CO THE AFTERMATH

Criticism of the privatisation continues with investors failing to make the profit they had expected. The share price dropped from 105p to 94p on the first day of trading, then to 91p, and by August it had risen to just 101p. It was claimed that the prospectus which described the company did not adequately inform potential investors of the risks and liabilities involved. On 9th July a decision had been made by British Energy that Hinkley B and Hunterston must stop generating while faults were investigated, but this was not disclosed until an hour after the public share offer had closed the following day. Problems continued throughout July as four other faults were found in Hinkley B reactors, further reducing confidence in the company. The taxpayers also have reason to complain. Although the "book value" before privatisation was £3.526 billion, it was sold for £1.4 billion plus £700 million of debts loaded on to British Energy. The uncertain liabilities - costs of waste disposal and decommissioning - remain a concern both for the company and the public, as liabilities could revert back to the taxpayer. British Energy may not be able to generate enough money to pay for reprocessing, make payments into the fund set up to cover costs arising after the reactors stop functioning, plus provide shareholder dividends. The Government has promised a dividend costing £96 million in the first year, although the workforce predict a much lower profit.

Newsletter

September 96

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NEXT MEETING
8.00 PM
30th NOVEMBER
ALL WELCOME

Please call Hester
for venue details.



COLA, the Consortium of Opposing Local Authorities, with Friends of the Earth, are requesting the European Commission to investigate whether British Energy will illegally benefit from state subsidy. They question the scale of liabilities, whether the company can meet them and how much taxpayers have lost through privatisation. British Energy promise to ensure that there are sufficient investments to provide for future liabilities. Although the nuclear industry is supposed to cover its own costs, they may be hoping the Government can allow them to subsidise nuclear costs from non-nuclear generation.

THE FUTURE MAY BE GAS

British Energy plans to build gas-fired power stations at Heysham, on the site of Sizewell C and one next to the Bradwell reactor in Essex. Although this would create jobs and produce electricity without the problems of nuclear generation, there will be local

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opposition to the building of any more industrial plants in areas of outstanding natural beauty like Sizewell and Bradwell. And the sense in using a valuable fuel like gas to generate electricity is questionable when there are other ways to produce and conserve our electricity supplies. The need to develop this type of power generation would seem to be financial. Would we want a gas generator here?

HINKLEY EMISSIONS CAMPAIGN

It seems that low level radioactive waste has started coming from Trawsfynydd for incineration at Hinkley B, as a start to the decommissioning of that reactor. When Nuclear Electric found there would be resistance to their application to burn the rubbish there, they applied for authorisation to transport it to Hinkley, and permission was granted on 11th November 1995. Waste oil already comes from Oldbury and Berkley and even with this addition to the amount of radioactive feedstock the level of emissions from the incinerator is well below what they are authorised to release. However, Nuclear Electric put in an application and started negotiations with the pollution inspectorate about substantially increasing the amount of radioactive waste incinerated at Hinkley. The new limits would "accommodate the eventual decommissioning of Hinkley A and other Magnox reactors", but the application was dropped last year on the understanding that "it will be picked up by the new company in due course".

The Hinkley Emissions Campaign, which began when permission was given to transport waste from Wales, has been making it clear to Nuclear Electric, both directly in correspondence with Hinkley management and through articles and letters in the press, that people will resist any application to increase emissions. When pressed on their plans for the Hinkley incinerator, Nuclear Electric management stated that there were no plans to receive wastes from other sites. However, Hinkley has been mentioned as a regional incinerator, and the problem of disposal of radioactive waste is becoming more urgent as the Magnox reactors approach the end of their working lives.

Through the Campaign the public aired their concern that even the current level of radioactive emissions from Hinkley could be prejudicial to health. Dr Chris Busby, of the Low Level Radiation Campaign, is researching the incidence of cancer near nuclear stations, but he is finding it difficult to obtain figures from the Cancer Registries.

Although the filter on the Wellman incinerator is said to prevent 99.5% of the particles from going into the atmosphere, the Emissions Campaign would like to know what is being released and will be pressing for an answer to that question. It is recognised by the radiological protection authorities that "any exposure to radiation may carry some risk", and the nuclear industry must limit exposure of public and workers to an acceptable level. A legal challenge is being considered as to whether the nuclear industry is justified in exposing people to radiation, even if it does not exceed the Government's limits. Irish

campaigners took the issue to the European Commission but were not successful in stopping the incineration. When the Government reviewed its policy for radioactive waste management, alongside the 1994 review of nuclear power, volume reduction was seen as a useful way to reduce cost; at £1000 per cubic metre to dump waste at Drigg. Incineration of combustible items reduces the volume by 70, some of the waste being dispersed into the atmosphere and the rest is compacted then sent to Drigg. Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food officials also want to test background radiation levels near nuclear sites by testing garden produce.

NUCLEAR WASTE

Both here and abroad, nuclear industries are under pressure to present acceptable plans for dealing with waste. If it emits below a critical number of discharges per second, it can go in the dustbin. More active low level waste is discharged into the sea or air, incinerated or sent to the dump at Drigg near Sellafield. The strategy for dealing with intermediate level waste and high level waste which generates a lot of heat has yet to be agreed and these are accumulating in stores near Sellafield and elsewhere. Cumbria seems to be their planned destination as so much goes there already.

THE NIREX DUMP When they disclosed the plan to construct concrete chambers 600m underground to contain barrels of waste it was not popular in Cumbria. NIREX then applied to build a "rock characterisation facility", to investigate the possibility of building this dump

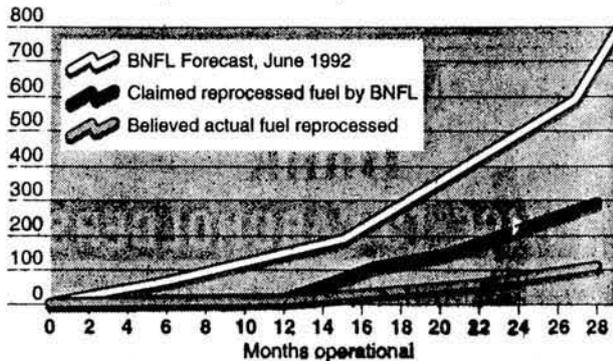
near Sellafield and the public inquiry on this is due to report this autumn. They have been asked to consider why this site has been proposed when it infringes international criteria for suitability. The complex rock geology in the area and the existence of the sandstone aquifer above makes it hard for scientists to predict how soon radioactive substances leaking into water would reach people, and whether it would in the future be pumped up for human consumption. Sellafield is also on a fault zone and an earthquake in 1865 caused many springs to come to the surface.

THORP The future of the new reprocessing facility at Sellafield is still uncertain. Two years ago the Government decided it should go ahead despite the objections and doubts about its financial success. It cost £2.8 billion and BNFL produced figures to show that it would make £500 million profit by processing 7,000 tonnes of spent fuel in ten years. The income would come from payments made, particularly by Japan, to have the fuel split into re-usable uranium and plutonium plus high level waste. 5,000 tonnes of spent fuel, much coming from Japan and Germany during the last fifteen years, is awaiting reprocessing. CORE, Cumbrians Opposed to a Radioactive Environment, have been monitoring the production figures and pressing BNFL for a statement on its progress. The reluctant reply is that over a ton of plutonium has been separated - which would be contained in just 100 tonnes of spent fuel. The commissioning process for the plant has not been completed during the first two years as planned, but the company is still saying it can get back on target, although this had to be extended by two years. It may be necessary to

increase discharges in order to make the process fast enough.

Nuclear fuel reprocessing

Metric tonnes of spent nuclear fuel reprocessed



WHAT USE? THORP was built to separate uranium and plutonium from the waste in fuel from AGR and PWR reactor cores. The plutonium was to be used in fast breeder reactors but these are no longer going ahead, so it can only be useful for Trident missiles; which may be discontinued due to the International Court of Justice decision that their use may be illegal. There is plenty of uranium and the process just increases the amount of high level waste which has nowhere to go unless NIREX get permission to build the underground dump near Sellafield.

SHE and the other anti-nuclear organisations have put forward a strategy for decommissioning and nuclear waste management. Waste needs to be safely stored, not dispersed or dumped, so that it can be monitored and action taken if something goes wrong.

RADIATION AND HEALTH

GREENHAM -CND have discovered documents relating to an accident in 1958 when an American plane released contamination that has caused a cancer cluster in the area. The danger to people working or living there was

concealed, and those studying the high levels of uranium and radiation linked illnesses were not informed of the reasons. While authorities do not deny the danger of radioactive emissions, there is an assumption that low amounts are acceptable. When the nuclear industry seems likely to exceed its authorised emissions it can just apply to raise the limit. There is much debate about radiation risks and our rights to protection, the findings being presented at the annual Radiation and Health Conferences. I understand that no one has volunteered to organise the next conference so -

IF ANYONE IS INTERESTED IN HELPING WITH A RADIATION & HEALTH CONFERENCE, PLEASE CONTACT SHE.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FOR THE NEXT CENTURY

- AGENDA 21

At the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, Governments produced policies designed to tackle the major environmental problems facing the world and agreed a programme called Agenda 21. This aims to ensure that development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Because of the burden it places on future generations, nuclear power with its production of waste is not compatible with sustainable development. During 1996 Local authorities should be consulting local people and organisations to come up with practical ways to improve and safeguard our environment, such as the promotion of renewable energy and help with energy conservation.

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