

# **STOP HINKLEY**

## **NUCLEAR POWER IT MIGHT HAVE A FUTURE?**

The nuclear power companies running both Hinkley Point power stations are becoming more assertive. British Nuclear Fuels expect to be given the new site licence for Magnox, and will be looking for ways to extend the life of the reactors. British Energy, which runs the reactors previously owned by Nuclear Electric and Scottish Energy, is doing very well. Their profit has trebled and they are Britain's largest electricity generator with 21% of the market share and operating costs which they claim to be under 2p/Kwh.

## **MIXED MESSAGES FROM THE GOVERNMENT**

Although they said at the beginning of the year that there was no immediate case for public funding of new nuclear power stations, the Labour controlled Trade and Industry Select Committee has now reintroduced the nuclear issue to the national energy debate. They announced that arguments used to safeguard coal could equally apply to atomic power, and stated that new nuclear plant may be required in the course of the next two decades because of the contribution it can make to reducing carbon dioxide emissions. They advise that procedural obstacles to their construction should be "re-examined with a view to their removal".

They do not mention the unresolved problem of nuclear waste, but are aware of the public feeling against this industry. Nor do they recognise the possibility that energy efficiency, renewable energy sources, combined

## **Newsletter**

**July 1998**

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**Next Meeting 15.9.98**  
phone for details

heat and power projects and improved public transport could enable us to meet the 20% reduction in carbon dioxide emissions. Friends of the Earth argue that Magnox reactors could be phased out and the target met through investment in these alternatives, but unless we can make sure that these developments happen, nuclear power could again be seen as the solution to our energy needs.

## **RADIOACTIVE WASTE**

Our local MP, Tom King, was asked to find out from the Government what they propose to do about the waste management problem. We are informed by Michael Meacher that Nirex has no plans to consider any disposal sites in Somerset, or anywhere else in the country. The House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology will report the findings of their enquiry into nuclear waste management later this year and the Government will then consult on its proposals. They will have to find somewhere to put it!

## **THE EURATOM DIRECTIVE**

Mr Meacher informs us that this lays down revised EU basic safety

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standards for the protection of the health of workers and the public. Its purpose is to set levels of radioactivity above which radioactive materials must be subject to regulatory control and should impose a high degree of radiological protection rather than weakening regulation. Government proposals on the implementation of the Directive will also be subject to public consultation later this year, something to look out for.

### **DOUNREAY TO STOP**

**WILL REPROCESSING CONTINUE?**  
At the Dounreay site there are three reprocessing lines, a nuclear waste packaging plant and they make medical isotopes. After a series of disclosures about accidents, hotspots of contamination and failed experiments, the Government announced that the plant is to close. But it will continue reprocessing until 2006 to complete its existing workload; once it reopens after sorting out its safety problems. New imports of spent fuel are banned and the unsigned Australian contract has been cancelled. A German contract is on hold because transport of nuclear fuel has been banned there due to the high levels of contamination on the surfaces of transportation flasks. The decision to close Dounreay is said to be a commercial one, because reprocessing there is said to be no longer economically viable. And there is no use for the reclaimed uranium and plutonium anyway. So questions are being asked about the sense in spending over £100 million in order to restart the reprocessing, if it has no purpose.

All the jobs will continue as the site has to be cleaned up and it will take 100 years to close down, dismantle and encase in concrete the remains of

reprocessing. It will take 70 years to demolish the defunct fast breeder reactors which were an expensive, short-lived experiment that failed. Another £400 million has been set aside to clean out the waste shaft. However, it is hoped that the expertise they gain in dealing with nuclear waste can be marketed elsewhere.

### **SELLAFIELD**

is still said to be economically viable, especially with their contracts for reprocessing paid for by British consumers of electricity. However, their discharge licences are under review and there is pressure from other Governments to stop the release of radioactivity into the environment. It has been found that radioactive seaweed collected on the coasts of Norway, Sweden and Denmark is a result of new discharges from Sellafield. Technetium 99 which is released from THORP has increased 15 fold since the early 1990s and the Ospar Commission which represents 15 countries, is pressing for the discharges to be phased out.

To support the call for reduction of discharges into the North-East Atlantic write to John Prescott asking him to "agree to continuous reductions in discharges of radioactive substances, with the ultimate aim of achieving concentrations in the marine environment near background values".

British Nuclear Fuels, which is still owned by the British Government, are under pressure from the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate to do something about the "intolerable risk" posed by the 1000 cubic metres of high level waste which is stored at Sellafield. This is kept in tanks and should eventually be turned into glass blocks, although opinions differ as to

whether these are safe, and the process will take at least 20 years. Another problem has now forced the company to stop reprocessing at THORP while they find a way to stop the erosion of pipes through which highly radioactive waste is pumped. This follows a series of setbacks in the reprocessing schedule and could lead to the loss of contracts worth £1 billion.

Meanwhile the company has plans to expand into the United States through a merger with an American company, despite fears that this could lead to imports of American nuclear waste or expenditure of our money on cleaning up their liabilities.

**NUCLEAR WASTE CARRIED IN PASSENGER FLIGHTS**  
 British Airways was found to be transporting up to half a tonne of processed radioactive uranium from Dounreay to Montreal. This may happen routinely, "in full consultation with the relevant authorities and government agencies", although the airline did not seem to know how much waste they were carrying. The Consumers Association are concerned that people should know what is being carried so that they can choose whether to take such a flight.

It is claimed that the level of natural background radiation is much higher than that of radioactive materials being carried. However this is not necessarily reassuring. It has now been established that natural radon gas is responsible for about 1 in 20 deaths from lung cancer. Researchers have found that some people are receiving doses of radon in their homes which would be illegal if they were workers in the nuclear industry.

### **NUCLEAR VICTIMS**

Former servicemen who were exposed to radiation in nuclear tests during the 1950's took their case for compensation to the European Court of Human Rights because they were refused war pensions. They claimed that the explosions caused sterility, arthritis, kidney and skin problems, osteoporosis and lung failure, but the Ministry of Defence said it could not trace records that they were treated for medical problems at the time. The European Court would not alter the decision of the Pensions Appeal Tribunal.

### **PUTTING THE CASE FOR RENEWABLE ENERGY**

In Britain we generate less power from renewable sources than any country in Europe - 1 or 2% compared with 25.4% in Sweden. Yet we have vast potential to develop these technologies. The British Wind Energy Association has calculated that power for over 4 million homes could be supplied by offshore wind farms. Denmark is pioneering the way with 2 fully operational offshore farms, and the Danish wind industry employs 11,000 people. Thanks to Government support and ambitious planning they sold 1,000 MW of wind turbines last year, worth \$600 million. Our government aims to produce 10% from renewables by 2010, but has not done much to make this happen. Expenditure on research into renewables fell from £25 million to £11 million from 1992 to 1997, and continues to decline.

Japan, the US and Germany lead the world in solar power, installing solar panels on thousands of buildings, while we have just a handful of solar powered homes. The EU aims to increase renewable energy

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from 6% to 12% partly through the installation of 1 million PV systems on roofs by 2010. If this sort of programme was set up it would cause a rapid price reduction, so we could all afford to do it. They also intend to generate 10,000 MW of electricity from wind and 10,000 MW from biomass. Revision of the Common Agricultural Policy could provide for the promotion of energy crops and the use of agricultural and forestry residues. The UK wave energy programme started in 1976 and was wound up in 1994, when it was beginning to show results, such as Salters "duck" and Cockerells "raft". Norway has proved that wave energy is viable with the tapered channel, and this could be installed in thousands of similar sites throughout the world.

### LOCAL AGENDA 21

Groups are developing all over the country, and we are getting involved in West Somerset and Sedgmoor District Council initiatives. While ideas about renewable energy sources are mentioned they are harder to translate into practical ideas at a local level than things like recycling. However there is a conference which might produce some good ideas:

ENERGY 21 at STROUD COLLEGE on 20/21 AUGUST Contact Jo Badham 01453 752277
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### STOP HINKLEY

We are looking for ways to influence the energy debate at a local level. As a gesture of support for renewable energy we invested £5000 in Baywind Cooperative last year. This has generated a dividend of £201 so far.

### OUR INCOME AND EXPENDITURE FOR 1997

#### INCOME

membership	£454
standing orders	£3883
donations	£534
copies and factsheet	£87.71
bank interest	£323.27
Total	£5281.98

#### EXPENDITURE

fees	£1338
admin	570.75
Low Level conference	1300
Low Level campaign	134.89
radiation factsheet	736
information	139.80
accountancy	300
newsletter	376.85
bank charges	2
Baywind shares	5000
Brian Rome memorial	84
Total expenditure	9985.88

At bank 31.12.97 £22371.11

