

## NUCLEAR NONSENSE



They are at it again. Politicians talking about ‘nuclear as part of a balanced energy policy’ have this amazing ability to make second hand car salesmen look like saints. Downing Street’s much leaked ‘green light’ to the nuclear industry has been doing the rounds for ages. This is the nuclear industry that has been free to build nuclear power stations for the last 30 years. This is technology that was supposed to deliver atoms for free, energy too cheap to measure. In reality it has never broken even.

The scary addition is that we have no clue about how to deal with the long-term management of the nuclear waste. Britain’s nuclear scientists describe the existing storage sites as ‘nuclear soups’. The race to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons meant that no-one was particularly interested in the nuclear waste. Given that plutonium

isotopes have a toxic half-life of anything from 24,000 years to 80 million years, this is not an issue that is going away.

For the taxpayer, it isn’t going away either. Last year each household paid a £23 subsidy to the nuclear industry to manage the nuclear mess. This year, it rises to £31. As costs rise, all the indications are that we will soon be paying £100 a year for the management of a waste that few of us want.

The case for nuclear is now driven by fear rather than by reason. ‘If we don’t build new nuclear, the lights will go out’. What a load of garbage. Germany is planning to meet 40% of its energy needs from renewable sources by 2020 **and** phase out nuclear power. This isn’t a decision based on ignorance or prejudice, simply a recognition of energy economics in the real world.

A nuclear power station costs around £2 billion to build and has about £5 billion of clean-up costs at the end of its life. This is three times the cost of any other form of power station. At best the nuclear stations are still only 30% efficient. In contrast, the new Scandinavian super-efficient power stations are 90% efficient and can use biomass and sustainable fuels as well as fossil fuels.

Alternatively, for the same construction costs, you could have a whole North Sea network of wind turbines. This would deliver the same amount of energy that the UK currently gets from nuclear power... and with no long-term clean-up costs.

Those who argue that nuclear is a way of meeting our carbon reduction targets are no less self-deluding. If Britain built 10 new nuclear reactors this would only cut 4% of our carbon emissions, and then not until sometime after 2025. Scientists at the Bali World Summit pointed out that we had, at most, 6-7 years in which to make profound shifts in our energy systems if we are to avoid catastrophic climate change. Nuclear is a delusion and a distraction from this task. What’s more, even the nuclear enthusiasts cannot deal with the inadequacy of their own preferred poison.

Britain currently gets 8.6 gigawatts of electricity from its nuclear power stations. This amounts to 3.6% of our total energy needs. Globally, the world has only been building new nuclear power capacity at the rate of 1 gigawatt a year since 2000. There is a six year waiting list for reactor coolant pumps. Only 2 places in the world produce the specialist forgings required for nuclear reactor vessels. And in the last 2 years there has been a 300% increase in the cost of nuclear power station construction.

Finland, often heralded as the model for the new nuclear era, is already 2 years behind schedule, £1bn over budget and facing construction costs that are 25% above forecast. Not bad for a programme that is only 3 years old.

All you do when entering the nuclear energy race is guarantee that the costs (and energy solutions) will spiral out of reach. Before the first new reactor starts to deliver electricity we would find ourselves in a global crisis where the world stock of uranium begins to run out over the next 10-20 years.

The worst part of this scenario is not that the logical arguments don't stack up. It is that the politics suck. The Prime Minister's advisers have held at least nine secret meetings at Downing Street with nuclear energy bosses. They want to rig the energy market to give themselves monopoly prices for the rest of their nuclear lives. As yet, the Government has not committed the magic ingredient the nuclear industry hunger for – a guaranteed price for carbon – but it is only a matter of time.

The Government will rig long-term energy markets by defining nuclear as carbon-free (which it isn't) and making the industry eligible for carbon credits. As well as making the general taxpayer liable for a slice of the waste disposal costs, the energy market will make all energy consumers pay a cross-subsidy for nuclear energy... whether you want it or not.

At the moment, every household in Britain pays around £140 a year in Government climate change / carbon reduction measures. For this, we get next to no carbon reduction and make little impact on climate change. In Germany, their feed-in tariff laws cost the average household £14 a year and deliver something approaching 97 million tonnes of carbon savings each year.

The trouble is that feed-in tariff systems favour and empower the citizen, whereas nuclear levies and carbon trading feed the big corporate energy companies. Brown's 'bold decision' on energy policy is not about a radical transformation. It is simply about feeding those whose noses are already deep in the trough of energy subsidies; pigs snorting their way towards oblivion.