

WHY NUCLEAR IS NONSENSE



Ever heard the story of Chicken Licken? One day, whilst walking in the woods, an acorn fell on Chicken Licken's head. "Oh no!" Cried Chicken Licken "the sky is falling in. We're all doomed." In a state of panic, Chicken-Licken ran off to warn his friends. Duck Luck, Turkey Lurkey, Hen Len and Goose Loose were all told the terrible news and joined in the state of panic.

As the animals ran round in an increasing state of agitation salvation suddenly seemed to appear in the form of Fox Lox. "Don't worry" said the fox "I will provide you shelter. Come with me and we will all be safe". So the animals duly followed Fox Lox to his home and made their way underground into the shelter of his lair. This came as great news to Fox Lox's family, who couldn't believe that lunch had walked into their home on its own two feet.

A great feast was had, but the sky had never been falling in. The lesson we offer to our children from this fable is that if you allow yourself to be thrown into a panic by stupid, irrational ideas you bring about your own, self-inflicted, disasters. So it is with the Prime Minister's claims that nuclear power is back with a vengeance and that it is our only hope of addressing both energy security and the challenge of Climate Change.

Let us be clear about where we are now. If you, me or Chicken Licken wanted to we could go out and build a nuclear power station today. Nothing in existing energy market rules prevents this. It is simply that the economics of nuclear power do not stack up and never have done. The generation that believed that nuclear would provide 'atoms for free', 'energy too cheap to meter' soon discovered that nuclear power has never broken even let alone reduced energy costs. The scale of its costs was only ever masked by subsidies from the defence budget for nuclear weapons grade material. It was the nuclear arms race that kept the show on the road.

Today, we know that the clean-up costs for the last generation of nuclear waste will be between £56 - £80 billion until the year 2080. We are yet to have estimates of the cost beyond that date. The nuclear lobby has only been rejuvenated by the Government's decision that the taxpayer should meet these costs rather than the industry itself. So much for competitive markets.

Blair's announcement that nuclear is back with a vengeance needs therefore to be read in the coded terms that his pronouncements usually require. What it means is that the taxpayer will be asked to fork out huge subsidies for the changes that appear to make nuclear economically viable. In Finland, it meant the Government agreeing that the industry would only be liable for its waste for the first 30 years. The tax payer will take responsibility for the 1000 that follow.

The danger is not just in the inherent stupidity of Blair's claims, but in the knowledge that the nuclear industry will run off with the cash for all other energy options. So, before going down this path, just look at the economics of other choices. MPs have recently had a briefing about the construction, within the

North Sea, of an offshore super-grid of wind generators. It would cost less than £2 million to construct, but with larger costs of around £1.5 billion for the construction of an internal grid. In total it would deliver 10 GW of energy – the equivalent of four nuclear power stations. It could supply carbon-free energy for Britain, Germany and the Netherlands (the three countries they are seeking to involve in the project).

Even if you do a value for money comparison of existing energy choices, the nuclear option comes out as a very poor choice. For every pound you put into nuclear the energy output from other sources is streets ahead. Wind power gives you up to 1.7 times more kilowatt hours per pound and so does gas fired industrial co-generation. Combined Heat and Power systems in people's homes gives up to 6.5 times as many kilowatt hours and the 'heat from waste' systems give up to 9 times as much energy. Most profitable of all are the savings that come from simply reducing the amount of energy we currently throw away. Here - in the area people call 'negawatts' – you can get 10 times more for your money than in any pursuit of the nuclear folly.

Britain currently throws away twice as much energy as the country uses. We do so in a hopelessly inefficient generating system and National Grid. Already, other parts of continental Europe have moved into decentralised energy systems that are infinitely more efficient. Denmark has 50% of its national energy needs met from decentralised energy and the Netherlands has over 60%. By far the most adventurous country in the EU is Germany. It is creating new markets in renewable energy systems that are likely to steal a march on almost everyone else.

Some 80% of the new buildings going up in Berlin generate their own energy. This isn't because German citizens have suddenly become ethically enlightened in a way that rest of us haven't. It follows directly from the Renewable Energies Act passed in Germany in 2004. What the Germans did was to change the market rules. People now get paid four times as much for energy that they supply into the energy system (from renewable resources) as for the energy they take out. Suddenly it becomes profitable for developers to include energy generation in every building they put up. Little surprise then that Germany should have 88% of the current EU market for installed photovoltaic energy systems.

A sad reality, discovered by almost all of those who seek to incorporate renewable energy systems into their own homes in the UK, is that virtually all of the technology and know-how has to be imported. Germany has created a market, for both its manufacturing and for the skill training of its young people, that Britain barely seems to comprehend. Blair's obsession with light touch regulation and non intervention in markets basically throws manufacturing to the wolves and skill training out of the window. It is the refusal to lead into genuinely sustainable alternatives that allows Blair to run with 'the sky is falling in' declaration that nuclear is the answer.

Many in the country (and the Party) believe that Blair had sold his soul to the nuclear lobby some time ago. It was just a question of softening up the public into acceptance and getting rid of ministers who might put up a coherent case against him. It is, however, an option locked into the follies of the past rather than visions of the future; the delusions of someone who clearly needs to get out more.

Despite Blair's promise that he would learn to listen more, following Labour's losses in the local government elections and our collapse of support in the opinion polls, it is clear that he continues to listen only to the corporate lobbyists who have led Labour into much of the mess we now face. The

Prime Minister has clearly entered the David Icke phase of his political career, believing in his own ability to walk on waffle. Perhaps it is the time for Blair to get out too.

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