

Justifying UK New Build Nuclear – Call for Independent Inquiry

The meeting was arranged by Dr. Paul Dorfman (Warwick University, Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust Energy Policy Research Fellow and government advisor).

Speakers were Simon Hughes, MP, Michael Meacher, MP, (former Labour Minister of State for the Environment), John Large of Large Associates Consulting Engineering, and Professor Stephen Thomas, (Professor of Energy Policy, Public Services International Research Unit, University of Greenwich).

Both MPs were vehemently against the proposed expansion of the nuclear industry. Mr. Hughes saying that he thought it unsatisfactory that Ed Miliband was acting as judge and jury on the decision. He pledged that the Liberal Democratic party would hold a review on the policy after the general election. He felt that there needed to be a wider view taken, international opinion sought and greater appreciation of the health aspects of the proposed development.

Mr. Meacher went further, saying that, although he was utterly loyal to his party he did not agree with anything they had done in this field. He said that he thought that there had been none of the required checks and balances, and that the government had done away with accountability. He analysed the justification statements and said the Environment Minister's statements were badly flawed. The key points had not been addressed and the consultation process left a lot to be desired. He also pointed out that recently the International Committee on Ionising Radiation had said they felt the risks associated with nuclear radiation had been dramatically understated.

John Large demonstrated a variety of graphs to indicate the highly complex nature of the Generation III fuel's fission products. He said that there were more very volatile radionuclides. He pointed out that the government's justification documents down-played the difference between previous types of fuel, suggesting that they are almost identical, Mr. Large was of the opinion that the new fuels posed significantly greater dangers in the event of an accident or malfunction.

Professor Thomas demolished the government's figures which had suggested that the proposed new reactors were financially viable. He showed how projected costs per kW/h had risen from \$1,000 in 2003, to over \$6,000 today. He mentioned the Olkiluoto reactor being built by Areva in Finland, saying that it was contracted to be complete in 4 years, yet after 4 years it was still 4 years late. Costs per kW/h from that project were reckoned to be approximately \$5,000. However, the cost of construction was 75% over budget, the net result being that TVO are suing Areva for \$1.4 billion, whilst Areva are suing TVO for \$2 billion.

In America things are no better, apparently. In 2010 the US government has agreed loan guarantees for just 2 of 15 proposed generating plants, to the tune of \$8.33 billion (80% of the total projected cost).

In 2009, he pointed out, the UK, Finnish, and French regulators all refused to licence the Areva reactor until design flaws are sorted out. The Westinghouse model also has serious design failures, notably its containment roof which would not withstand earthquake, hurricane or aircraft crash – all of which are design requirements.

All of these factors will exacerbate the number of people in the UK who are currently experiencing fuel poverty. (Currently 20%.) Yet, according to Miliband’s justification, the public would benefit from “downward fuel costs”, with no disbenefits [whatever they might be, we would have used the word detriment].

What seems to be happening, Professor Thomas suggested, was that the government are driving up the cost of carbon emissions, thus distorting the market prices.

EdF are demanding a floor price for carbon footprints before they will build. There seemed to be a consensus of opinion that EdF, being the largest group involved, had now got the government over a barrel and felt they could now make demands. We pointed out several months ago that the government, by accepting the pro-nuclear lobbyists arguments, had painted themselves into a corner.

The manipulations by EdF are quite interesting to read, involving the purchase of farmland in strategic locations, particularly on Anglesey. Apparently critics refer to these as “ransom strips”. Nice to see the industry’s ethical values so obviously displayed.

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Coincidentally, as a bit of light reading on the way to London, we had a copy of “Nuclear Build, A Vote of No Confidence”, published by the Institution of Mechanical Engineers. Whilst beautifully laid out, this does, in our opinion, have a strong pro-nuclear bias. However, some of the financial considerations are very interesting.

The Acrobat file can be found here:

<http://www.imeche.org/NR/rdonlyres/AB2F8701-5BFA-411E-BE6C-8ECA467C6C27/10151/IMechENuclearReport.pdf>

Whilst a synopsis can be found here:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/energy/7405417/New-generation-of-nuclear-in-doubt.html>

Waste – one of the developer’s major headaches - doesn’t even get a consideration until page 17. There is certainly no in-depth assessment of the situation *vis a vis* the legacy and future waste disposal. One might have at least expected some discussion of whether mixing some of the product with glass and shoving it down a hole was actually disposal at all.