



WAKE UP!! IT'S YER ROTTEN TO THE CORE...

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NUCLEAR POWER: GOING CRITICAL AS SchNEWS WEIGHS UP THE FALL OUT FROM JAPAN'S ATOMIC DISASTER

The terrifying situation in Japan has rekindled the debate over nuclear power around the world. While in the US, Obama has reaffirmed his support for nuclear power to protect the massive investment his administration has made in the industry, over in Germany and Switzerland the governments have jammed the brakes on plans to build and replace nuclear plants. In the UK, David Cameron has already declared his intention to push on with plans to expand the UK's nuclear capacity, with up to eleven new power stations.

Government and the nuclear industry have been close since the Blair government announced plans to build a new generation of nuclear power plants in 2006. In 2007, those plans were ruled "unlawful" by the High Court, who labelled the public consultation "misleading, seriously flawed, manifestly inadequate and procedurally unfair". And yet despite the change in government we're still firmly set on the nuclear path.

The final not-so-green flag was waved for the nuclear industry to start building in 2008, amid controversies over "nuclear cronyism" due to family links between leading industry figures, Gordon Brown (see SchNEWS 618) and Planning Minister Yvette Cooper. Since then, the government (is there any point distinguishing between red, and blue and yellow striped here?) has been carrying out "facilitative actions" to speed their progress.

This wheel-greasing involved launching the Office for Nuclear Development, with its mission to "[make] the UK the best market in the world for companies to invest in nuclear". In the first five months of the department's life, three senior civil servants were revealed to have been wined and dined a whopping 30 times in super swanky London restaurants by the industry.

The government has further eased the way for the plutonium-to-profit businesses by "facilitating" in areas like planning, licensing and design. The industry is also still receiving financial support despite the initial pledge to ensure "the full cost of new nuclear waste is paid by the market". Instead there will be a "fixed unit price" for waste disposal - a cap on the price of waste disposal at the time the plant is approved. Any additional or rise in costs will be met by the taxpayer.

In 2008, the government commissioned a shake up of nuclear regulation, partly as an update, but mostly to sweep away outdated 'red tape' and clear the way for a new generation of fully private reactors. They brought in top KPMG consultant Dr Tim Stone, well known as a nuclear cheerleader, and a man

with fingers in many PFIs. Stone duly reported and now all the previous responsibilities of the Nuclear Directorate, the Department for Transport's Radioactive Materials Transport Team and most of the Health and Safety Executive's role are being bundled together into a much more business friendly 'Office of Nuclear Regulation' (ONR). A fact that the Nuclear Industry Association 'warmly welcomes'. The ONR will be a separate legal entity and run by a largely non-exec board 'with relevant experience', presumably drawn then from the business world and nuclear industry (fox,henhouse?). At least we'll all know who to blame and sue after the next disaster, eh.

CORPORATE ENRICHMENT

Events in Japan may have momentarily derailed the nuclear PR train but if the reactor cores are cooled successfully (or even if not) the all-out push for more nuclear will carry on as before. That's because governments around the world are committed to a technology which is fuelled primarily by over optimism.

This rose-tinted vision pretends that such highly complex machines will never fail (even aircraft crash occasionally but reactor failures are somewhat more costly). Of course after an aircraft has crashed (or been scrapped) you don't have to worry about it any more but, as we are seeing in Japan, the cooling ponds of spent fuel rods (which sit around long after the reactors are shut down) are just as dangerous as the reactors themselves (e.g. Kyshtym disaster in 1957).

Given the new era of budget cuts, unstable political conditions and the increased probability of natural disasters (e.g. extreme weather due to climate change) it seems doubtful that the nuclear power will be getting any safer in the near future. The nuclear industry already has a long history of falsifying safety reports, covering up incidents and wangling extensions to the operation of reactors well past their designed lifetimes (as was the case for Reactor-1 at Fukushima recently).

Then there's the issue of waste disposal for which no realistic solution exists. Large amounts of deadly high level waste - which will need close supervision for decades and will remain highly dangerous for thousands of years - have already been produced and a new generation of nuclear reactors would only add to this legacy. Currently the plan is that we stash it all in barrels of concrete and hide it in a big hole in the ground. Putting a pillow over your face and humming loudly will be optional.

And yet even mainstream greenies (you know

A MESSAGE FROM SOME OF OUR
EVEN-MORE-SPARSE-THAN-USUAL
JAPANESE READERS...



who you are) jumped on the radioactive bandwagon, hoping the nuclear genie would grant them the wish of a carbon-free energy future.

Yes on the face of it, at the point of generation - the reaction itself - nuclear energy is carbon-free. However this completely ignores the nature of the whole nuclear power cycle. Once uranium mining, processing, transportation, power station construction and decommissioning - all of which require vast amounts of hydro-carbons - are taken into account then nuclear starts to come in only slightly below oil and coal based power stations in terms of emissions.

And there's another whopping problem - peak uranium. Those slightly lower carbon emission figures per kilowatt hour are for power stations running on the highest quality uranium ore. But the world only has a limited amount of high quality uranium ore - maybe not more than 50 years' worth at current consumption rates, and if there is a big global increase in nuclear power then the problem becomes as acute as peak oil. Mining lower quality ore will increase carbon emissions because it is more difficult to extract, thus requiring more energy.

FIGHT THE POWER (STATION)

UK activists are seizing the moment of nuclear's international notoriety to hammer home the point, with group 'Kick Nuclear' saying, "Over the last 60 years, the nuclear industry has proved time and again that it is incapable of controlling such a dangerous - and expensive - form of energy"

* This Sunday, 20th March, Kick Nuclear will support a vigil organised by CND outside Downing Street, London, opposing new nuclear builds in the U.K

* A national rally against new nuclear build will take place outside the gates of Sizewell nuclear power station in Suffolk, England on Saturday 23rd April.

* A weekend protest camp is to be held on the beach in front of the Sizewell plant from 22nd-25th April, organised by members of the Stop Nuclear Power Network.

The camp will coincide with the 25th anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster.

* Kick Nuclear is reinforcing its campaign for a national boycott of EDF Energy. The French state-owned energy giant is spearheading the push for new nuclear build in the UK, and elsewhere. See <http://boycottedf.org.uk>

PARTY & PROTEST

For events listings updated weekly see
www.schnews.org.uk/pap

INFORMATION FOR ACTION

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CLEGG-STRAVAGANZA

Nick Clegg received a heated welcome when he returned to the city of his constituency for the Lib Dem party conference last weekend.

On Saturday (12th) some 5000 people marched through Sheffield to show their opposition to the Lib Dems collusion in public sector cuts. They were met by a thousand police with mobile barricades, surveillance and a steel protest cage outside City Hall.

On arriving there, an anarchist block decided to avoid the cop's waiting pen, and instead, set off on a direct action spree in the centre of town. They succeeded in shutting a string of banks and tax dodgers, including Topshop, Vodafone, Nat-west and Boots.

Police were initially caught on the hop by the flying 'bail-ins' but when they did respond, it was with force. For the most part protesters successfully used anti-kettle tactics to stay on the move. However, police did manage to form one small kettle, trapping protesters and bystanders alike. Aggro coppers punched a 15-year-old girl in the face and pushed a mother to the floor in front of her kids in the the confrontation (for similar customer relations see the and finally).

The day before (11th), 800 protesters marched on City Hall to give the Lib Dem delegates a vocal reception. A Critical Mass bike ride also brought traffic on the busy Ecclesall Road grinding to a halt. If only the coalition would do the same.

DALE FARM: 28 DAYS LATER

The Tory controlled Basildon council has fired the starting gun on the Dale Farm eviction, voting to spend an estimated £18 million to turf out more than 400 people from their homes. In these times of local government austerity, the cost of all this is an astonishing one third of the council's entire annual budget to be blown on this one operation. This is like a farcical vendatta pursued by a Basil Fawltyesque sit-com character bringing themselves to near ruin over a neighbour having their garden fence pitched a few feet further out than the deeds decree.

Nonetheless they are hell-bent on their course, whatever austerity it brings to the other residents of Basildon. Dale Farm could now be served with a 28-day eviction warning at any time.

The Gypsy Council say they are still hoping for a "peaceful solution to what must unavoidably become a long-drawn out and violent confrontation." They have lodged proposals for alternative sites while also threatening the council with legal action if the plans go ahead.

Meanwhile the community are preparing for the arrival of the bailiff thugs of Constant & Co (see SchNEWS 738). When the 28-day notice arrives, friends and supporters will descend on the camp to provide support and help the community resist the eviction. The community has issued a call out for people to join them to actively resist, to act as human rights/legal observers and to coordinate outreach and media.

To get involved see www.dalefarm.wordpress.com/get-involved

CORRIE ANNIVERSARY

On Wednesday (16th) family, friends and supporters marked the eighth anniversary of the death of Palestinian solidarity activist Rachel Corrie. In 2003, a Israeli Defence Force bulldozer crushed Rachel to death as she tried to prevent it demolishing a Palestinian home in the Gaza Strip. The Corrie family's search for justice in their civil case against the state of Israel will resume on April 3rd.

* See www.rachelcorriefoundation.org

CHARITY BEGINS ABROAD

It's hard to make the imprisonment of innocent children palatable, but getting a children's charity on board in the whole exercise is one amazing bit of spin. After Cleggo's dramatic U-turn on his promise to "end the shameful practice" of locking up kids with new-style 'pre-departure accommodation' such as the one planned for Pease Pottage, East Sussex (see SchNEWS 760), now Barnado's is to help oversee the 'welfare' side. Presumably the 'welfare' aspect of sending home families who, in many cases, fear for their lives will be one big cuddly-toy elephant in the room.

Talking of deportation – the death of Angolan deportee Jimmy Mubenga during forced deportation last October is back in the spotlight. Security firm G4S (see SchNEWS 746), whose guards are thought to have caused Mubenga's death by suffocation through their violent restraining techniques, may face corporate manslaughter charges. There has only ever been one case of a company being convicted of this, so if you're holding your breath this time you might go the same way as G4S's victims. The company earns over £600m from the government for services and, as the cuts axe keeps falling, they have been contracted for even more - including the private sector replacement for the scrapped youth unemployment schemes. And although G4S was swiftly removed from its deportation duties after the incident, it still runs three immigration removal centres.

It seems the government likes to keep their (corporate) friends close, and their (campaigning) enemies even closer.

SHOPPING STEWARDS

With the anti-cuts march of March 26th shaping up to be a big one, police preparations to keep a tight grip on law and order are well underway. With the shrieks of protest from the liberal press over 'crowd management' techniques that involve horse charging, beating and kettling students ringing in their ears, police will this time be employing an army of soft-cops.

The Met has managed to achieve unprecedented collusion with protest organisers the TUC and Liberty (see SchNEWS 761), supposedly in the interests of 'public safety'. What this means for protesters is that on the 26th all may not be what it seems. FitWatch have uncovered the extent that TUC stewards are to be the police's lackeys on the day, including intelligence-sharing and calling the bona-fide cops in if demonstrators try anything other than walking from A to B. FitWatch said, "For this demonstration the TUC has been co-opted into the entire policing operation, bringing about a whole new level of police control."

And if that is not enough, the police have promised to deal "robustly" with any lawful or unlawful disobedience, employ snatch squads and CCTV, and have a 'kettling manager' with a specific remit to deal with the standard unjustified detention (avoid, avoid, avoid!).

A word of warning about travel – don't expect to be able to get the tube or a bus anywhere near the demo once it's started. Arrive early and have a plan of what to do if you can't get to the main march. Meet yer on the streets!

SchNEWS BENEFIT

Help SchNEWS buy its very own no-fly zone and get yerself down to Hectors House, Old Steine, Brighton this Saturday (19th) for our latest benefit. The Inner Terrestrials will be joined by The Sporadics for a night of punkydubskapunk.

BERK-ING MAD

From creches in banks, to day centres in council chambers, the trend (movement?) for re-appropriation of space as a response to the cuts continues. Protesters in West Berkshire staged a sit-in on Monday (14th) as a response to the council's decision to close five out of nine adult day centres in the area. They said: "The message to the council is simple. If you close these facilities, we will seek to use the council offices as an alternative facility for providing somewhere for the service users to go". Darn straight.

WHAT COMES A MOUND

Guerilla gardeners at Brighton's new food-growing community garden The Mound (SchNEWS 762) received a possession order on Wednesday (16th). They are now going to fight their corner in court on the 23rd March. The garden held a successful open day on Sunday (13th) during which new vegetable patches were filled, seeds were sown, and stove-making workshops were held. Despite there being no immediate plans to develop the once-barren site, it's likely the success of the the Lewes Road Community Garden has got the owners worried that public support for the garden will become a thorn in their side in the future (see SchNEWS 739). Visitors and helpers always welcome - see <http://brighton-mound.org.uk>

LOSING HIS WRAGG

Animal rights activists in Cambridge scooped the jackpot this week as they were awarded compensation for a wrongful arrest back in 2009. One lucky arrestee got his hands on four grand thanks to the misdeeds of Sergeant Jason Wragg.

Back in October 2009, a handful of animal rights activists were demonstrating outside Zippos circus, due to their use of performing animals. Two were arrested, allegedly for breach of Section 14 Public order act and Section 5. Basically their crime seems to have been having a better understanding of the law than Mr Wragg. Charges were dropped at virtually the first opportunity, at the pre-trial review in December.

Speaking about his arrest and payout, one nouveaux riche vegan told SchNEWS, "This was very typical of animal rights demos in Cambridge - the police are usually very unaware of the actual law and when they do know it they twist it". If you want to get involved in the struggle for inter-species justice in the Cambridge area or are simply short of cash then check out <http://animal-rightscambridge.webs.com>

...and finally...

For a customer-relations masterclass, get over to www.youtube.com/watch?v=C-A193TUIoA for a classic demonstration by a 999 call operator. She was responding in July 2007 to a call from someone alarmed that a Met copper had illegally entered his house. She tells him that the police have every right to be in his home (they don't), and that she will send more officers to assist – the officer, not him. She ends the exchange by labeling the caller a 'twat'.

While an internal 'investigation' in Dec 2007 cleared their officers of any wrongdoing, this was overturned by the IPCC in Apr 2008 who confirmed that Barry Hargreaves, the breakin' n' entering cop was acting unlawfully. Unsurprising no great disciplinary action followed.

That's modern Policing style for you, not so much Dixon of Dock Green as Dirty Harry (or Barry). At least in the old days they'd be polite when they were screwing you over...

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