

Energy

The Government's Energy Review was finalised in July last year. The proposal to set up a Coal Forum was a welcome development, the NUM will eagerly play a full part and take the opportunity once again to present the compelling case for the expansion of existing coal mines and the opening of new ones. The Government's commitment to Clean Coal Technology is also welcome but it is becoming apparent that there is no clear commitment to Britain's deep-mined coal industry. The NUM is deeply dissatisfied with the Review for this very reason. The Review dedicates 11 pages to the nuclear option but only half a page to coal. Given the insecurity of world energy supplies British deep-mined coal must surely be an essential part of the nation's energy mix.

The situation in the Middle East has become immeasurably worse, causing further political instability throughout that critical energy producing region. It is clear that Russia is determined to extract the prevailing market prices for its oil and gas as evidenced by the cutting off of gas supplies to the Ukraine last year and to Belarus this year which also affected gas supplies to countries across Europe. It is vital we turn to our indigenous energy sources to protect us against over reliance on foreign importers of oil, gas and coal.

There is a way forward for Britain if we learn quickly from developments taking place in America, India, China and Australia where clean coal technologies are being developed to take advantage of indigenous reserves of coal.

Britain has vast untapped coal reserves which could provide both short and long-term energy security that could be burned in an environmentally friendly way. Also, coal is economically viable given the recent massive increases in both oil and gas prices.

Gas consumers have once again been rocked by massive price increases amounting to more than 100 per cent in the past few years.

Against this background it is madness not to exploit fully our indigenous deep-mined coal reserves.

But our collieries are being closed without regard to Britain's energy needs as UK Coal close pit after pit whenever it becomes more profitable to liquidise the land asset sterilising coal reserves along with the skills of our miners.

Readers take note that the NUM has been informed that two new board members of UK Coal are property developers.

However America, who also has vast coal reserves, is pressing ahead with the development new clean coal technologies such as the FutureGen project.

Clean Coal Technology

The FutureGen project represents the future of power generation by coal, a fuel source the United States, like Britain, has in abundance.

The FutureGen Alliance includes several large coal companies and electric utilities. While the U.S. Department of Energy will lead the effort, the alliance includes eight companies from the United States, China and Australia, plus the Indian Government.

Another promising technology for burning coal without pollution is integrated gasification combined cycle, known as coal gasification or IGCC. This technology cooks off coal impurities, producing a clean-burning synthetic gas nearly on a par with natural gas. In the UK Hatfield Colliery is being re-opened and a clean coal power station will be built at the pit head - it will be equipped with carbon dioxide capture ready technology. In Germany RWE is also building a large IGCC to burn lignite (brown coal).

Other technologies such as coal liquefaction are being developed for the turning of coal into oil.

Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS)

Using carbon capture and storage technology, waste carbon dioxide from power stations can be pumped through a pipeline network to an underground storage site such as a disused North Sea gas field. This could be done from power stations in Yorkshire - Ferrybridge, Eggborough or Drax

The TUC's Clean Coal Task Group

The Clean Coal Task Group - set up in late 2005 submitted proposals to the Energy Minister in a document "A Framework for Clean Coal in Britain" it argued that adoption of Clean Coal Technology, together with a new carbon capture and storage technology will help the UK meet its EU target for the reduction of CO2 emissions. It states that the UK has plenty of coal reserves which can be mined cheaply and which are not subject to the same price fluctuations as other energy sources, notably oil which would open up a whole host of new manufacturing and employment opportunities for the UK. This move to green technology would also set a good example for the rest of the world to follow.

The NUM has been arguing for Clean Coal Technology for 30 years. Is it not time we really started to do it and exploit the vast coal reserves our nation has been blessed with?

Steve Kemp, NUM National Secretary

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