

Anglesey's Nuclear Nightmare

Philip Steele

The battle against a new nuclear power station on Ynys Môn is reaching a crucial stage, and it needs YOUR support.

The government has now given the 'green light' to nuclear power. Having held deeply flawed 'consultations' with the public, Brown finally announced his intention of replacing the UK's existing nuclear plants with more of the same. The government has also made clear that it aims to increase significantly the amount of nuclear generation.

Political fall-out

Anglesey's pro-nuclear politicians are keen to see this policy implemented at the 36-year-old Wylfa plant, which is sited near Cemaes, on the northernmost coast of Wales. They say 'experts' have assured them that the new generation of nuclear stations will be built quickly and that nuclear power will bring about an economic renaissance on the island. The island's AM, Plaid Cymru leader Ieuan Wyn Jones, has joined the pro-nuclear camp in contravention of his party's official policy. The leading proponents from the start have been Albert Owen MP (Labour) and Gareth Winston Roberts (Leader of Ynys Môn County Council), who are both avidly pro-nuclear. They have asserted that a satisfactory technology for dealing with the problem of radioactive waste is already here (although they have not specified what that technology is). 'The UK nuclear industry', writes Mr Roberts, 'can boast a safety record that is second to none.'

Residents of Anglesey who remember the catalogue of accidents, errors and offences at Wylfa's existing plant (Wylfa A) – and elsewhere in the British Isles – would beg to differ. They were appalled at a decision to grant a limited extension of operation to Wylfa A, whose superannuated, unreliable Magnox reactors were originally scheduled for closure in 1995. Dr John Large, an independent nuclear consultant who advises the anti-nuclear campaign group PAWB, has repeatedly warned of the dangers posed by extending the life of Wylfa A. So why is the NDA (Nuclear Decommissioning Authority) proposing a further extension? In order to help pay for Wylfa A's decommissioning, which it cannot afford. It is effectively gambling with public

safety in order to square the financial circle. This is the topsy-turvy logic which prevails in the nuclear industry. To quote Dr John Large: 'The Government wants to build new nuclear power stations, but the backend of the process, which deals with waste, is a shambles.'

Meltdown – of the nuclear industry

It would indeed seem that the wheels are beginning to fall off the UK nuclear industry just at the point where it is being offered a lifeline, instead of being confined to the dustbin of history. Here are just a few examples:

- The official figure for the UK decommissioning programme is a whopping £73 billion. However even the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee will no longer give credence to these figures. The costs are escalating continuously and dramatically.
- The Nuclear Installations Inspectorate (NII) itself has recently reported on operations at the Sellafield site in Cumbria. With regard to the THORP (Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant) it criticises 'poor housekeeping standards'; vital safety inspections which are 'not fully effective'; and a 'lack of focus' on 'emergency arrangements and fire safety'. Gareth Winston Roberts' 'second-to-none' nuclear industry was responsible in April 2005 for an 83,000-litre leak of deadly radioactive liquid. Equipment designed to cool waste failed, a desperately dangerous scenario. After two and a half years' closure, THORP reopened – only to be shut down again in January 2008.
- Energy Minister Malcolm Wicks has admitted that the £473 million MOX plant designed to produce 120 tonnes per annum of mixed oxide nuclear fuel, has produced just 5.3 tonnes – over a period of five years.
- Sellafield is currently planning to send weapons-grade plutonium, suitable for a terrorist 'dirty bomb', to France on an old, unarmed ro-ro ferry ship with little security.



• Finland has often been cited as an example of a country the UK should emulate, having embraced a policy of nuclear new-build. However, construction of the Olkiluoto 3 plant is already running 2 years late, design problems have arisen and the costs are spiralling. It has been conceded that the plant will not now be able to meet Finland's need to comply with international commitment to CO2 reduction – its original *raison d'être*.

The lack of logic in the UK government position is fundamental. If there is an 'energy gap', which is debatable, then the timetable is such that it cannot be bridged by nuclear power. The presentation of nuclear as a CO2-free source of energy is also flawed. If one factors in mining, transportation, construction and decommissioning, then emissions of greenhouse gases are considerable. Reliability of supply is another government mantra: yet uranium is a finite resource, and large reserves of it lie in politically unstable regions. Reliability of delivery we know all about: Wylfa A's reactors have been repeatedly shut down in recent years. One reliability the government is prepared to endorse is that future political and technological stability in the British Isles will be sufficient to guarantee the safe treatment of radioactive waste for tens of thousands of years, a period equivalent to that between the Old Stone Age and the present day. I wouldn't bet on that, myself.

And money matters? Nuclear makes no economic sense. It eats up billions of pounds' worth of public money. The government swears that this time the operators will bear the total cost.

In reality, the public will have to pick up the tab, in the form of hidden subsidies or raised consumer costs. Watch for the small print and the U-turns.

Wylfa B? It's still 'Dim Diolch!'

Wylfa is certainly on the list of possible sites, and operators are being invited to tender. However, Wylfa's suitability has already been questioned in a report commissioned by the government in 2006. Jackson Consulting found various problems with Wylfa, including its grid connections. Supporters point out that Wylfa's elevated position should protect it from rising sea levels, although the latest UN predictions challenge this assumption; opponents question the seismology of the region.

PAWB has been fighting the battle against a Wylfa B for almost two decades, for a similar proposal was originally made by Margaret Thatcher, only to be abandoned on economic grounds. This time the PR exercise of the pro-nuclear lobby has been formidable. Misleading figures on local jobs have been fed to the press and swallowed wholesale. The relationship between Wylfa and Anglesey Aluminium, a leading electricity consumer and employer on the island, has been misrepresented. Secondary and even primary schools have been targeted by Wylfa's PR machine, as have WI meetings and National Trust associations. Most ludicrously of all, the island's 2008 Tourism Award was given to – Wylfa power station, for its outstanding services to the environment! The pro-nuclear lobby has bought the support of the engineering unions. One wonders whatever happened to international solidarity, when reading of overseas workers and communities blighted by the diseases associated with uranium mining.

The turning tide

Recently however, the tide of public opinion on the island has been turning against the pro-nuclear lobby. This has been suggested by the results of radio phone-ins and newspaper polls and by messages of support sent in to the PAWB website.

Farmers who remember the Chernobyl nuclear disaster are all too aware that there are still restrictions on sheep grazing in North Wales 20

years later, thousands of miles from the Ukraine. Perhaps the public's chief concern is one that the politicians never discuss: health. PAWB has pointed up the December 2007 results of research commissioned for the German government, showing that children under five who live within 5km of a nuclear plant run twice the risk of suffering from leukaemia. PAWB also draws attention to questions of public safety. Emergency measures are so restricted geographically as to be laughable, and are not properly publicised. And in the event of a nuclear disaster on the island, how could people possibly be evacuated? Just a normal wet morning in January sees both bridges off the island grid-locked, and the August tourist influx congests the A55 for miles. And the threat of terrorism? Wylfa is located a few seconds' flight away from an RAF fighter base which trains overseas pilots. A couple of years ago Greenpeace demonstrated the vulnerability of its security by approaching the site by night and projecting a huge KAPOW! on the side of the plant.

PAWB offers positive alternatives, including microgeneration and conservation. The group believes that Anglesey is ideally suited for the installation of renewable energy sources and would like to see research and development by the renewables industries brought to the island, backed by the University of Bangor. PAWB welcomes recent plans for marine turbine generators off the Skerries. Dr Carl Clowes, who has researched the labour market on the island, calls for sustainable principles and for economic diversification, into areas such as IT. The dangers of the island's economy relying on one monolithic power station are already proven: 46 years after the construction of Wylfa A began, northern Anglesey remains one of the poorest parts of Wales. Dr Clowes also points out that the decommissioning of Wylfa A will provide significant employment

(possibly more than the current workforce) for many years to come, allowing ample time for new industries to establish themselves.

Most members of the public still believe that they will be able to participate in a meaningful planning enquiry, not realising that under new 'streamlining' procedures, the crucial issues will be decided by a centralised licensing committee in London. It has been said that 'local democracy will consist of being able to choose the colour of the toilet door'.

Join the campaign

The time to protest is now. This is an issue that affects not just Anglesey, but all Wales, all the British Isles, all Europe. PAWB's online petition has received huge support from Europe as whole, including many French and Breton campaigners. Tenders are being received from European and other transnational conglomerates and consortia, all the old suspects with friends in high places.

PAWB – People Against Wylfa B/ Pobl Atal Wylfa B – means EVERYONE in Welsh, and everyone will be won over to PAWB's cause in the end... well, maybe with the exception of certain politicians.

Action you can take

- Write to your councillors, MPs, AMs and MEPs.
- Visit the PAWB website at www.stop-wylfa.org. Sign the online petition and post messages of support. Or write to: PAWB, c/o Cwpwrdd Cornel, 2 Canolfan y Ffowndri, Stryd Fawr, Llangefni, Ynys Môn LL77 7LT.
- Support the **Welsh Anti-Nuclear Alliance** (WANA) PO Box 1, Llandrindod Wells LD1 5AA and the **Low-Level Radiation Campaign** (LLRC) www.llrc.org The Knoll, Montpellier Park, Llandrindod Wells, LD1 5LW.

