SONE

Supporters of Nuclear Energy

ANNUAL REPORT 2019

ANNUAL STATEMENT OF THE DIRECTORS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30TH JUNE 2019.

The position of SONE and the status of UK Nuclear Energy today.

It's twenty years since SONE was formed to promote civil nuclear power in the UK. It is time to review how the UK has fared during that time in its commitment to nuclear energy.

On the one hand

In truth, over that time we have seen a decline in nuclear energy in the UK to an alarming extent. Alarming that is unless you are a Green or a Government official, whose fear of having to deal with nuclear matters has led them to do everything they can to eliminate the concept. This fear among Government officials stems from the lack of scientific appreciation in the civil service and among politicians, and a desire to control anything that might impact on them or their Minister. Weasel words have so often smothered any real progress while incompetence and dithering have ensured the failure of the industry. The nearest we ever get to an energy policy is a collection of half-baked "initiatives." The Greens' opposition is easier to understand; they oppose the industrial society on which our modern civilisation depends and nuclear energy is the prime example of industrialisation.

Just over twenty years ago, the UKAEA and Harwell were names synonymous with the cutting edge of nuclear technology; BNFL was generating £300 million a year in profits for its owner, the British Government, and earning £300 million worth of Japanese yen for the UK balance of trade; the National Nuclear Corporation, having just completed Sizewell B, was enjoying an international reputation for nuclear engineering. Where are they today ? The UKAEA is left as custodian of the European fusion project at Culham; BNFL no longer exists [the THORP reprocessing plant, once described by Mrs Thatcher as "a British flagship project," has been quietly shut down by the Nuclear Decommissioning Agency – incidentally,

subtly retitled by officials in its infancy from the Nuclear Development Agency]; the remains of NNC has just been sold to the American engineer, Jacobs. The Magnox power stations have all closed and the rest of our nuclear stations, still generating around 20% of our electricity, are run by the French. Any new stations to be built depend on foreign investors. Moreover, increasingly, the UK is being seen as an unreliable customer by these investors. We put obstacle after obstacle in the way of would-be builders. Now, these nuclear go-getters are turning their attention to the likes of Vietnam, Cambodia and other emerging nations, where they are welcomed with open arms. It is true we still have some excellent contract engineering organisations but no longer have the international reputation that attracts invitations for keynote speakers at the world's major nuclear conferences. In turn this means that the UK has ceased to have any influence on international nuclear affairs.

But what of new technologies, for example, the much trumpeted Small Modular Reactors? Yes, this is an exciting concept and could overcome many of the obstacles to building the more conventional large power stations. And the Government has, time after time, declared its support for this concept. But what has actually happened? The UK Government's support reminds one of the weak puppy yapping at the fringe of a real dogfight; pretending to be in the fight but in reality having no impact. Meanwhile, the big dogs, the Americans, the Japanese, the Chinese etc. are getting on with it and leaving us far behind. Isn't it a familiar story?

On the other hand

There is no alternative to a large scale deployment of nuclear power. Prospects for our children and grandchildren depend on it, and members of SONE should remain convinced of that.

Climate change is appreciated as a major issue. More evidence is needed to understand what is likely to happen to the atmosphere and oceans in the future. However, it is already clear to most people, and even to their governments around the world, that early action is required. Younger generations are alarmed and marching, "Extinction Rebellion". Though against fossil fuels, they have no real clue about what they want instead. In fact, the only alternatives are nuclear energy and "renewables" – a number of back-to-nature solutions with an emotional appeal but with an efficacy that defies science. The German experiment with wind and solar, the Energiewende, has already failed to deliver lower carbon emissions. With its political clout the German "green" movement has stopped Germany embracing nuclear – they are set to close their remaining plants by 2022. "Renewables" are weak, unreliable, vulnerable and destroy the very environment they supposedly

preserve. Because they are weak, any plant – wind farm, solar array or hydro dam – has to be huge to deliver what is needed, and it is consequently easily damaged in freak weather. Historically, the great leap forward in prosperity came when these energy sources were replaced by the predictable 24/7 energy of fossil fuels. Going back to relying on weak pre-industrial sources of energy would be a great leap backwards for mankind.

The widespread adoption of nuclear power could drive a second industrial revolution. Those countries ready to lead this leap forwards should prosper, as happened with the first such revolution. In those days it was the UK, starting from initiatives based in the Midlands and North of the country and an outward looking view of the world. Resources came to those motivated by ideas and knowledge, rather than by authority and law. At a time of rapid change, economic and social stability is only possible if first priority is given to education and public support. These take longer to build than any physical plant and are needed, not only for the skill base but also to establish public understanding. The UK is one of the few countries that already has some relevant industrial know-how and also a fairly supportive public view. What is completely missing is support from the government and the media. Their personal view is often based on weak scientific understanding and influenced by vested interests that cling to a vision of the future based on the past. Without nuclear energy the fabric of civilisation will implode.

So when is the Government going to engage? When is it going to relax the absurd regulations that surround nuclear projects and are responsible for a doubling of costs and delays, regulations that benefit no one except those who administer their imposition? By making one or two clear choices now the UK Government could establish confidence and a long term position on nuclear energy. This should involve learning from some countries and teaching many others. This way would lead to reputation, prosperity and social health. In other directions lie power cuts, industrial decline, social breakdown and worse.

It is the business of SONE to expose this challenge internationally and to expect the UK Government in particular to respond. On current form it seems unfit for that purpose.

Neville Chamberlain, *Chairman*

Wade Allison, *Honorary Secretary*

September 2019

SONE Activities in 2018/19 as recorded in the Newsletters.

October No. 238	*Saving carbon emissions from electric vehicles could be illusory* by Paul Spare
November No. 239	A summary of the talk given at the 2018 SONE AGM by Alan Woods, Rolls Royce.
December No. 240	*My Energy – an important aspect of personal security*
January No. 241	*A time to look forward – the future for nuclear*
February No. 242	*We need the Government to show more confidence, Competition from Renewables* and *Behind the scenes in USA*
March No. 243	*Energy, life and the environment*
April No. 244	*A Good News Month – mostly*
May No. 245	*A Zero Carbon Policy,* The SONE visit to Hinkley C*, Questions for nuclear plants*
June No. 246	*Fact, Fiction or a Blend*
July No. 247	Celebrating a centenarian, the Why Theatre Company and other news

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