



Supporters of Nuclear Energy

Newsletter

No 241

January 2019

– A time to Remember –

Jim Corner, first treasurer of SONE who died recently

Sir Bernard Ingham writes: (edited)

Jim hailed from Ashington in Northumberland and inevitably went into the pit. But he studied at night school and qualified as a certificated colliery manager. In 1961 he became editor of the Colliery Guardian and later at CEGB head of news services and managing editor of Power News.

Together we were in on the start of the great nuclear debate in the 1970s on whether the UK should adopt the American PWR generating system. We did - half-heartedly – and delivered only one at Sizewell. Getting there probably caused Jim less angst than me because at the start I was press secretary to the anti-nuclear energy secretary, Tony Benn. On the face of it, I thus stand with Jim as a failure – he as secretary general since 1976 of both the British Nuclear Industry Forum and FORATOM, and me as a press secretary with governments of both political hues.

But the fact that the nuclear flame is still alive here and on the continent is due in substantial part to Jim. Undaunted by the euro-wide obtuseness of politicians, he joined me in our “retirement” in 1998 at the newly formed Supporters Of Nuclear Energy. His immaculate book-keeping as treasurer put my untidy self as secretary to shame. And when the lights go out, don’t blame Jim. But for him we would have been plunged into stygian gloom years ago. He saw through the fog created by so-called environmentalists, besotted with wind, waves, tides, the sun, the moon – and incredibly biomass, which used to be called wood. He was the long time servant of the electricity consumer, if they did but know it.

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A time to look forward – the future for nuclear

We live in exciting times, and I mean that in a positive sense. The benefit of new nuclear is evident from the large plants now coming online in China. The future for the UK is fraught with major financial and political hurdles but the investment has to be made if the UK is to thrive.

In the past nuclear power has been seen as undesirable for many separate reasons.

- the weather has always fluctuated and climate change is nothing to worry about, so we don’t need nuclear;
- the energy sources known as “renewable”, though weak and intermittent, can provide enough electrical power at all times, if connected together in a sufficiently wide grid;
- solutions to unsolved problems will “turn up”, the Mr Micawber attitude;¹
- radiation damages your DNA and such damage accumulates as dangerous genetic errors, the most serious cause of cancer;
- nuclear energy is the most concentrated form of energy and to protect life from its exceptional dangers requires exceptional safety, only achievable with international oversight;
- nuclear waste is a problem without a solution;
- nuclear power stations are very expensive and take a long time to build.

Actually these are not reasons but beliefs, previously accepted as true by default, but now seen as increasingly problematic. As doubts about each rise, the overall case

1. A lazy attitude that supposes that the basics of natural science can be overridden if somebody spends enough money on development. This includes any expectation of huge strides in battery technology and any new means of cleansing the atmosphere and oceans of carbon on a worldwide scale.

for rolling out nuclear energy on a massive worldwide scale looks more and more realistic.

In 2018 there was another international conference on climate change at which for the first time attempts to downplay the role of nuclear were relaxed. While we do not know how far or fast the changes in climate will go, most people accept that action is now necessary.

The next article of faith, the belief that “renewables” can substitute for fossil fuels, is untenable. Many environmentalists who ought to know better are still happy to accept the destruction of nature that comes from plastering the face of the Earth with solar panels, vast windmills and huge hydroelectric schemes. Being so large they are vulnerable to the extremes of weather that are now expected.

Furthermore, they work too intermittently to provide today’s energy needs, however much land and sea they cover, as confirmed in a recent academic study from Stanford. In Europe those who carry the daily responsibility to maintain electricity supplies point out the risks when trying to match fluctuating demand to fluctuating supply under these conditions. Public opinion has not quite realised this yet, in part because too many bets, private and public, have already been placed on “renewables” and those promoting fossil fuel plants are anxious to fill the gap. We may expect this to start to unravel in 2019 with electricity cuts and financial failures. So far the public are aware only that the electricity charges are rising fast and emissions are not falling, for instance in Germany.

Radiation protection professionals want to maintain concern about radiation – that is their job. If protection were scaled back as the evidence suggests, many of them would have to find other employment. If low exposure to radiation is beneficial as the data suggests, the authority given by the word “protection” in their title would be undermined.

Much of the negative image of nuclear comes from the supposed link between nuclear radiation and cancer. But this link is broken. The work of recent Nobel Laureates point to the self-healing abilities of life that correct the damage caused by radiation and other agents, except in extreme acute attacks. The study of cancer is increasingly focussed on the workings of the immune system instead www.amazon.co.uk/Breakthrough-immunotherapy-race-cure-cancer/dp/1911344862

After Chernobyl many tens of thousands were predicted to die and that the surrounding area would be uninhabitable. Although humans were evacuated the wild animals were left free to roamed in the radioactive environment. Like a canary

left in a gas-filled mine they were expected to die. But many reports and wildlife videos from the BBC www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-32452085 and others show the animals are well and thriving. Similarly the human death toll from radiation was not thousands, but 43. Do the animals know something that we don’t? They are an innocent assessment of safety, like a canary in the mine: if the canary is alive and well, the air cannot be poisonous. *But they know nothing!* Dr Watson might say, to which Sherlock Holmes might reply *Quite so. But something that we know may not be true.*

The unexpected message that nuclear and its radiation are relatively harmless was confirmed at Fukushima where nobody has affected by the radiation despite all the bally-ho in the media. More people are taking a personal interest www.ukrinform.net/rubric-society/2606666-number-of-chornobyl-exclusion-zone-visitors-growing.html .

Even amongst previously entrenched anti-nuclear opinion the message is getting through, for example www.ucsusa.org/nuclear-power/cost-nuclear-power/retirements#.XC5Wus3go6s . In 2019 we may expect more scalps, though Greenpeace with its heavy investment in the contrary opinion will take longer to fall.

In 1896 when the risk from motorised road traffic was finally accepted as tolerable, a plethora of motor car designs competed for the market. It was an exciting time, and the same is true today of nuclear fission reactors. Many investors will lose their money; others will make a fortune. We should encourage the imminent demise of the precautionary principle, the equivalent of the pedestrian walking in front of a car waving a red flag. Fear has been allowed to mislead the public opinion for too long.

For 70 years the world’s press has exploited nuclear as a source of fear and excitement. In the years ahead climate change may inherit this role. If so, we must hope that the press will not exaggerate the dangers, and thereby induce panic, as they seem inclined to do. We may certainly expect that nuclear energy will be seen as an essential part of the solution to climate change, even by the press. Indeed it is starting to happen already www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2018-12-31/nuclear-power-is-part-of-the-solution-to-climate-change

Wade Allison

NOTE

Any member of SONE who would like physical copies of Radiation and Reason and Nuclear is for Life for £20 the pair, posted (UK), please email sec@sone.org.uk