



Newsletter

April 1996

10TH CHERNOBYL ANNIVERSARY MARKED AT HINKLEY POINT

Members of Mid-Somerset CND combined with Stop Hinkley Expansion to make a collection from workers at Hinkley Point on the 10th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster on April 26.

An open letter had been sent to the workforce the week before giving notice of the collection for the Wells-based charity, the Children of Chernobyl Fund. The organisation provides holidays and breaks for children from the contaminated areas in the former Soviet Union and sends out vital consignments of medical aid.

Although only 56 cars out of several hundred emerging from Hinkley Point at the lunchtime shift change bothered to stop, a total of £75 was collected. They were also handed leaflets explaining some of the effects of the Chernobyl accident on those still living in the vicinity.

"As soon as we had set up, an ex-nuclear power worker drove up and gave us a donation," said Stephen Abrahall of Mid-Somerset CND, who

CHERNOBYL 1986

BRITAIN

1996?



**Crossed fingers won't help
you in the Nuclear Lottery**

coordinated the event. "We are very grateful to those who donated and will be sending out another letter thanking them." Nearly as much again was contributed by anti-nuclear groups and supporters who were not able to help on the day but sent money instead.

The Children of Chernobyl Fund, started in 1991, has already arranged for over 100 children to visit the Wells area. Nearly £20,000 worth of medicines has also been despatched. As little as £2.50 will buy a year's supply of thyroxin for treating one child among the many who have had their cancerous thyroid glands removed.

Earlier in the morning a separate group from Greenpeace handed out leaflets headed "The Future is Solar".

EURO MP SPEAKS IN BRIDGWATER ON WASTE BURNING

Green Party MEP for Dublin, Patricia McKenna, visited Bridgwater on 11 April to lend her support to the campaign over incineration of nuclear waste at Hinkley Point. She spoke at a meeting in the Town Hall called by Somerset Green Party's Hinkley Emissions Campaign. Also present was Elfyn Llwyd, the Plaid Cymru MP for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy, the constituency covering the Trawsfynydd nuclear plant, from where waste is due to be brought for burning at Hinkley.

The date from which transferral of waste from Trawsfynydd could begin was apparently 7 March, but it is not known whether any material has yet been moved. However, it has now been discovered that a brand new incinerator installed at Hinkley has not even been fitted with a filter to reduce any particles in emissions from its chimney.

A letter written to the Pollution Inspectorate by Dr. Jeremy Western, Nuclear Electric's Manager of Environmental Protection and Planning, says that a filter isn't justified because the emissions "would yield only very small doses" and would also "increase the quantity of low level waste consigned



to Drigg (the national nuclear waste dump near Sellafield)".

Sending incinerator ash to Drigg is expensive. It costs Nuclear Electric a minimum of £1000 per cubic metre. But if a filter was fitted to the chimney then 70 times *more* ash would be collected and have to be disposed of. Dr. Western's cost-benefit analysis therefore concludes that a saving of £69,000 per cubic metre of ash is made by not having a filter.

Setting aside the detailed health effects, the Emissions Campaign argues that cutting costs by not having a filter will increase the output of particulates to add to the gases which would anyway escape from the chimney.

The European Commission has meanwhile refused to accept a complaint from Patricia McKenna that the transfer of waste from Wales to Hinkley is not justified because it produces no benefit to counterbalance the increased exposure for local people. However, a local resident near Hinkley has now come forward to act as the "appellant" in a case being considered by the Green Party against Nuclear Electric for failing to adequately justify the pollution.

HOUSE OF COMMONS SYMPOSIUM ON LOW LEVEL RADIATION

An audience of well over 50 scientists, doctors and representatives from advisory bodies attended a three hour symposium in the House of Commons on 24 April organised by the Green Party's Low Level Radiation Campaign. Among the main speakers was Dr. Chris Busby, whose assessment of the health risks from radiation has fuelled the campaign to stop increased incineration of nuclear waste at Hinkley Point.

With Plaid Cymru/Green MP Cynog Dafis in the chair, this was effectively an opportunity for Chris Busby to be publicly challenged by the radiation and health establishment about the soundness of his assertion that radiation from both atomic bomb fallout and the nuclear industry can be directly related to heightened cancer rates.

Busby was forced by time constraints to rattle through his argument that the "second event" theory - through which radiation is seen to make a second attack on already weakened body cells - can help explain the higher incidence of cancer in, for example, Wales in the aftermath of atmospheric bomb tests in the 1960s. A full exposition is given in his book "The Wings of Death"*.

Prof. Dudley Goodhead, Director of the Medical Research Council's Radiation and Genome Stability Unit, challenged the second event theory, but said that his personal position was that although "the hypothesis is unlikely to explain discrepancies in risk estimates, I can't say it's impossible". Experiments were needed to test the idea further. Dr. Colin Muirhead, an epidemiologist from the National Radiological Protection Board, which had a cluster of representatives in the audience, was more circumspect, and centred his attack on the unreliability of base statistics being used by Chris Busby, especially the generally available figures on cancer cases. These were not only liable to misdiagnosis, said Muirhead, but had no correlation to an individual's radiation exposure history. He added that the largest UK study yet of people working with radiation - the National Register of Radiation Workers - had so far reached no clear conclusions.

Busby's more alarming view of the world was supported by US Prof. Ernest Sternglass, a veteran investigator into radiation risks, who produced a stream of statistics to show that Chernobyl had not only resulted in a higher incidence of thyroid cancer in the Ukraine and Belarus but had apparently left its mark as far away as the United States. Among his revelations was an increase in infant mortality in the Pacific states three months after the 1986 accident, a decline in live births in Massachusetts over the same period, as well as a national increase in thyroid cancers. He also correlated low birth weights among US babies with the expansion of nuclear power stations in the 1970s. Sternglass agreed with Busby that Strontium 90, a major element of bomb test fallout, was the principle agent responsible because it attacked the immune system of a mother.

"The real problem," he concluded, "is that if we refuse to look at the data because it would stop us

building nuclear power stations, then our society could go the way of Rome, which put lead piping in the houses of the rich and poisoned the brains of its children. The future is bleak unless we have the courage to face the fact that at the end of the Cold War, human life must come first."

Chris Busby clearly felt he had emerged from this encounter with the medical and scientific establishment relatively unscathed. However, grudging acceptance that there might be something in it and a vague promise of additional research is still a long way from the proper in-depth investigation of the issue which the Green Party expects.

* *"Wings of Death" by Chris Busby available from Green Audit Wales, 38 Queen Street, Aberystwyth SY23 1PU, Wales (01970 611226) for £10.99 including postage (payable to Green Audit Wales Ltd).*

SHE NEWS

GRANT MADE TO RADIATION CAMPAIGN

The SHE committee has agreed to give donations to a number of organisations for whom requests were made at the AGM. £3,500 will be given to the Low Level Radiation Campaign, whose research and campaigning has raised the profile of both the potential effects of radiation and the incineration of waste at Hinkley Point. The money will go towards further research into cancer incidence and the "second event" theory (see report above) as well as to publication and distribution of the campaign's "Radioactive Times" magazine.

A further £1,500 will be earmarked for spending specifically on Somerset Green Party's Hinkley Emissions Campaign, which has taken up the issue of waste incineration. This will be allocated as and when the campaign makes requests for specific items of expenditure.

In addition, a smaller donation of £100 will be made to Green Help, the charitable organisation involved in Chernobyl aid work and for which SHE organised a major travelling exhibition of children's paintings in 1991.

RADIATION CONFERENCE

There will be no Low Level Radiation and Health Conference this year, but special rates are being offered to a similar event at Portsmouth University. The four day "International Workshop on Radiation Exposures by Nuclear Facilities" runs from 9-12 July with speakers from Russia, Germany, the US and UK. It costs £155 for full accommodation and papers. The rate without accommodation is £110, with a single day £40. Any member interested in representing SHE for even part of the time should get in touch as soon as possible.

COMBWICH WHARF BACK IN USE

The refurbished wharf at Combach on the Parrett Estuary, a few miles from Hinkley Point, was brought back to life on 3 April when the first ship docked there for over 20 years. Unfortunately, it didn't unload spices from India or even coals from Newcastle but a new "stator" to be fitted to one of the generators at Hinkley Point B. There were therefore no cheering crowds lining the quayside to welcome it, only disgruntled villagers wondering what the next load through the wharf might contain. The gutted radioactive remains of Hinkley A?

MEMBERS BACK ONGOING CAMPAIGN

A pile of letters since the last newsletter confirm the view that many members want SHE to continue taking on nuclear issues like the burning of waste at Hinkley. "It is vital for local groups such as SHE to keep going in order to maintain awareness of the hazards which will be with us for a long time," as one letter put it. Many people congratulated the campaign on its success over Hinkley C and Crispin Aubrey personally on his stint as main SHE worker. A few members, however, have decided to back out now that Hinkley C is ditched.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SHE

I was asked before the AGM if I could give a rundown in my annual report of the history of the Stop Hinkley campaign from its beginning. This would be an enormous task, but a brief summary is given here. Anyone who wants a reasonably full account could read the relevant chapters in

“Meltdown: The Collapse of the Nuclear Dream”, which I wrote in 1990. Copies are still available from the SHE address for £2.50 (including postage).

The original proposal to build Hinkley C by the then Central Electricity Generating Board was made in the late 1970s. In 1982 the plans were firmed up when a secret memorandum from the CEGB said that Hinkley Point was a good site partly because there was “no strong local opposition and no known County Council objection”. It was then expected that the station would be built and operating by 1994.

The “Alliance against Hinkley C” was formed in the aftermath of this announcement as an offshoot of Bristol Friends of the Earth. In 1985, Somerset County Council was won by the Liberal and Social Democrats and almost immediately brought in a policy of opposition to Hinkley C. Combined with mounting anti-nuclear activity around the country, the long-running public inquiry into Sizewell B (the first US-style pressurised water reactor planned in Britain), and a series of incidents at Hinkley Point itself, this transformed Somerset into a new focus for opposition to the nuclear industry.

In 1986, the Alliance decided to change its name because of the confusion with the then active Social Democratic Alliance political party. Stop Hinkley Expansion was born. Also that year, in the wake of the Chernobyl accident, SHE was offered support from Greenpeace. This enabled us to start employing people, and to organise the biggest demonstration ever seen at Hinkley Point, on the first anniversary of Chernobyl in 1987. A small plane circled over the site trailing a banner reading “Shut Them Down”, hundreds of people followed a trail round the perimeter fence and MP Paddy Ashdown addressed the crowd on the sea shore.

During this period - 1986-87 - a propaganda battle also developed between the extremely well funded CEGB, which delivered glossy leaflets and videos to local people, and SHE, which decided to counter with its own well-produced material, a travelling billboard for people to sign up on, petitions, opinion polls, stunts and mailshots. The CEGB promised 10,000 jobs during construction; SHE promised

“Chernobyl, Cancer and Chaos”. During late 1987 and early 1988, a major drive was made to get people to register their formal opposition to Hinkley C by sending in postcards and letters to the West Somerset District Council. As a result, the authority’s cramped offices were swamped with mail: we eventually recorded over 20,000 objectors, a record at the time for a planning proposal and a clear propaganda success.

The public inquiry into Hinkley C started in the autumn of 1988 and ran on and off for 14 months until November 1989, when the government announced a moratorium on further nuclear construction until 1994. The inquiry was a major enterprise for SHE and a much longer event than anybody expected. Funded by Greenpeace, we ran an objectors’ advice office inside the inquiry building, the first time such a facility had been provided, we pushed the organisers into providing a daily coach service and a creche, and we encouraged hundreds of individuals to give their personal testimony in front of an intimidating semi-legal forum. The 182 days of hearings, including visits to Cardiff, Bristol and Chernobyl, were faithfully recorded over 23 issues of the “Hinkley Inquirer”, produced by SHE. The campaign also organised its own team of a dozen or so expert witnesses and cross-examined all the important protagonists from the nuclear industry and regulatory bodies.

Despite the weight of evidence, Inspector Michael Barnes decided at the end of his nine volume report, published in September 1990, to recommend permission for Hinkley C to be built. His decision was rubber-stamped by the government, who extended the length of permission from five to seven years. This runs out in September 1997.

Crispin Aubrey

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