

FRIENDS OF THE EARTH JAPAN – WYLFA B WEBINAR

Presentation by Rob Davies from PAWB (People Against Wylfa B)

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Thank you for inviting me to join your webinar today. My name is Rob, and I was privileged to visit Fukushima and other parts of Japan in 2018 to campaign against Wylfa B alongside our great friends in FoE Japan and many other anti-nuclear activists.

CURRENT POSITION ON WYLFA B AND POLITICAL OVERVIEW

The decision on the Development Consent Order (DCO) for Wylfa is due to be announced by the UK Minister on 31st December 2020. A DCO allows the project to proceed by giving the necessary consents and imposing conditions which have to be met. It does not mean that the development will go ahead – it merely enables it to do so if all the necessary finance and so on is in place. The decision has been delayed for 6 months on two previous occasions by the UK Government, and this additional 3 month delay was at the request of Horizon Nuclear, the wholly owned Hitachi subsidiary. It is in order to allow the company to find a prospective developer to take over the project, and amend details of the DCO to suit the prospective buyer. This would be in order to avoid having to start the DCO process from scratch.

I will refer to the American consortium which has been named as a prospective developer later.

Locally, the politicians at the level of Ynys Môn (Anglesey) County Council have welcomed the new possibility.

Welsh Senedd (Parliament) member for Ynys Môn, Rhun ap Iorwerth, has been a staunch supporter of Wylfa, but had seemed to concede that a large scale development of the Hitachi type was unlikely, though leaving the door open to a possible Small Modular Nuclear Reactor (SMNR). He has not made a public statement about the American consortium as far as I know.

The new Westminster MP for Ynys Môn, Virginia Crosbie, is totally in favour of Wylfa and welcomes the new consortium. She is a Conservative – so in the same party as UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

At the level of the Welsh Senedd, nuclear is still supported, but apart from waste disposal it has no real legislative powers in deciding whether or not nuclear reactors can be built. In the UK Parliament in Westminster, both the ruling Conservatives and the opposition Labour party support nuclear. How that translates into financial support is another question of course.

The UK Government is due to announce its 10 point plan for reaching Carbon Neutral by 2050 in the very near future – which is why speculation is rife about what part nuclear could play in the Government's plans. These are some of the considerations which may affect the Government's decision:

1. The need to “keep the lights on” is perceived as essential for political survival – and traditionally nuclear has been seen as essential.
2. Sizewell is strongly rumoured for the go-ahead to follow the under construction Hinkley Power Station.
3. Both Hinkley and Sizewell are owned by EDF, the French company, and CGN from China. There is much concern about how far China should be allowed to own UK infrastructure and so have a strong political lever here.

4. The lobbying for SMNR development, in particular by Rolls-Royce, may influence the decision to promote an UK nuclear industry. Rolls-Royce provide the nuclear engines for the Trident nuclear missile submarines.
5. The UK's position as a nuclear arms power has from the start made it favour nuclear despite all reasonable arguments – including economic – against it.
6. Boris Johnson has said that the UK is to be the 'Saudi Arabia of wind power', and that it will produce enough energy for all UK households.
7. The tumbling costs of renewables; the development of energy storage; smart grids; the cost benefits of house insulation – all of these militate against nuclear.
8. The always increasing costs of nuclear, and the intractable problem of final disposal of radioactive waste.

It is likely that Horizon see this as yet another 'last chance' to keep the Wylfa project going, and for Hitachi to recoup some of their investment. Clearly the requirement for massive UK Government subsidy is essential, as it was for Hitachi, or the American consortium won't proceed. This a complete about turn from the position at the start of the so-called 'nuclear renaissance' when the UK Government said that there would be no public funds to back new nuclear.

THE POSSIBLE AMERICAN INVESTORS

Which is the last company you would want to welcome to Ynys Môn? What if it was a choice from the following?

1. A company which only recently had to cough up nearly \$58million for a 10 year fraud in tandem with another company at the Hanford Nuclear Reservation, the USA's most contaminated nuclear site perhaps? ¹ This on top of a \$125million fine for substandard work at the same site in 2016.
2. Or maybe a company which privatised water in Bolivia, precipitating unrest as ordinary people couldn't afford to buy it? Eventually the company was kicked out of the country.
3. Or could it be a company which won a contract to build a chemical plant for Saddam Hussein, even though it knew that he had been using chemical weapons against the Kurds? This company was awarded a \$680million contract by the US Government to rebuild Iraq's bombed out water supply infrastructure after the Iraq war to topple Saddam. ²
4. How about a company whose former principal vice president was sentenced to 42 months in prison for "accepting \$5.2million in kickbacks to manipulate the competitive bidding process for state-run power contracts in Egypt"? ³
5. What about a company who profited excessively from the Big Dig project in Boston, USA? It was described by Professor C William Ibbes of the University of California as "like the fox

¹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/hanford-contractors-agree-to-pay-58-million-fine-for-fraud/2020/09/23/7d963a32-fdb3-11ea-b0e4-350e4e60cc91_story.html

² <https://peoplesworld.org/article/bechtel-the-evil/>

³ <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/former-bechtel-executive-sentenced-42-months-prison-and-ordered-forfeit-52-million-connection>

guarding the chicken coop. We would like to think they are honest people and act with the highest integrity. But they are profit driven".⁴

6. Or a company which has built ridiculously expensive roads in Kosovo and other areas in the Balkans, leading to concerns about the "corporation's business practices, including high prices, poor transparency, and accusations of corruption"?⁵
7. Possibly worst of all a company considered to be so suspect that a book has been written about it, detailing how it has profited "from the wreckage of failed wars and environmental disasters"?⁶ A corporation which has worked hand in glove with the US Government, benefitting hugely from what has been called "crony capitalism".

In fact, all of the cases mentioned above are the documented actions of the same company – Bechtel Corporation of the USA. Such a catalogue of disaster capitalism writ large should deter any rational elected representative on Ynys Môn or anywhere else from welcoming them with open arms as a partner in the US consortium which is reported to be interested in Building Wylfa B – if the money is right.⁷ Bechtel had been appointed by Horizon Nuclear Power as prospective project manager for the Hitachi scheme.

The other two consortium members, Westinghouse and Southern Electric, have a poor record in nuclear too. Southern's Vogtle nuclear project in Georgia, USA, helped to cause the bankruptcy of Westinghouse, and Bechtel was brought in to assist. The two AP1000 reactors of the type proposed for Wylfa are five years behind schedule, still being built, and the costs have at least doubled to \$25 billion. Federal guarantees of \$9 billion have been insufficient, and there is no certainty that the reactor construction will ever be completed.

The V C Summer plant in South Carolina was supposed to have two Westinghouse AP1000 reactors, but was abandoned in 2017 after a decade, but local ratepayers are still footing the bill. These were meant to be the first reactors to be built in the USA for 30 years.⁸ The project's senior executive Stephen Byrne pleaded guilty to charges of fraud and criminal conspiracy.⁹

It is ironic that Westinghouse lost out to Hitachi in the bidding for the Wylfa site in 2012.

And yet Horizon Nuclear Power, wholly owned by Hitachi, apparently consider them to be appropriate and acceptable investors to take over the project.

It comes as no surprise at all that Ynys Môn councillor and economic portfolio holder Carwyn Jones, has welcomed the news that this consortium is interested.¹⁰ Yet again, it seems that there is no desire whatsoever by local politicians to open their eyes to reality. Not only are the realities of the costs, dangers and waste ignored, but so are the ethical questions regarding the companies in the consortium. Nor, indeed, their capacity to deliver on their promises.

SMALL MODULAR NUCLEAR REACTORS (SMNR's) AND TRAWSFYNYDD

The so-called new player in town is the SMNR. The concept isn't new, but has never been made to work. Indeed, the reason for developing larger and larger reactors was on the grounds of economy.

⁴ <http://archive.boston.com/globe/metro/packages/bechtel/>

⁵ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/01/30/steamrolled-investigation-bechtel-highway-business-kosovo/>

⁶ https://www.huffpost.com/entry/builders-of-the-american_b_10051064?guccounter=1

⁷ <https://www.ft.com/content/a210b0ed-8b82-4376-ac7d-a9a0d365d2d1>

⁸ <https://www.chooseenergy.com/news/article/failed-v-c-summer-nuclear-project-timeline/>

⁹ <https://www.thestate.com/news/local/crime/article244429397.html>

¹⁰ <https://www.dailypost.co.uk/news/north-wales-news/anglesey-economic-boss-speaks-out-19267211>

However, using the logic of the nuclear lobby, the reasons why it hasn't worked have been changed into reasons why it would work. In reality, of course, it is a symptom of the way the nuclear village seeks out ways to justify its own existence.

The concept is to manufacture the reactor components in a central factory, which can then be assembled at the reactor site, and therefore a standardised production and assembly method is supposed to minimise costs. But you can't justify building a factory unless you have orders. You won't get orders until you have a system which has been proven to work. And you need orders to lower costs. So really it is all a house built on insubstantial foundations. The reality is that the initial proposed sites for an SMNR will really only be experimental – so they will carry all of the risk and few of the benefits.

Trawsfynydd in Wales is promoted as a premier site, and it would not surprise anyone if Wylfa was in the picture too if the big Wylfa project fails. The push for Trawsfynydd started in earnest in 2014.

The Welsh Government has announced that it will form a company called Cwmni Eginio to develop the Trawsfynydd site, and are giving £2.5million towards setting it up and associated costs. We believe that this is to promote nuclear, with maybe a token attempt to support some green technology. Welsh Government, Gwynedd Council and Trades Unions are heavily committed to nuclear at Trawsfynydd. It is seen as part of the UK's Nuclear Sector Deal, part of the North Wales Economic Growth Plan and part of the Welsh Government's National Development Plan – as indeed was the Wylfa Hitachi project.

The idea that towns and cities across the UK would welcome a nuclear reactor in their neighbourhood is a fantasy. Without rolling out the concept in this way there will be no orders – so this brings us back to the real reason for backing SMNR's – which is to retain nuclear engineering skills in the UK in order to service the nuclear arms industry.

If the SMNR concept became reality, then there would be nuclear proliferation, many sites requiring secure guarding, a far greater likelihood of radioactive disasters, and more waste.

There has recently been a promotion of nuclear at Trawsfynydd to produce medical isotopes – but you don't need a reactor to do this – a cyclotron is cheaper. This is just a sweetener to try to persuade people to accept nuclear.

And of course SMNR's still produce radioactive waste, and add to the still unsolved problem of safe disposal.

We are concerned that the promoters of SMNR's over here are forming links with others in Canada – this is especially true for the Universities of Bangor in Wales and New Brunswick in Canada. At a time when Bangor University is making cuts due to its Financial crisis, its nuclear department is expanding.

There was a recent webinar “Debunking the Myths around Small Modular Reactors” hosted by Beyond Nuclear International. It can be accessed on YouTube via this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-lhV-gAEUc&feature=youtu.be> The presentations can be seen via this link: <http://www.beyondnuclear.org/home/2020/10/23/smr-webinar-presentations-and-video.html>

PAWB's ROLE

PAWB continues to respond to all developments in the Wylfa saga. We are continuing to develop and maintain our links internationally. There may be a “Nuclear Village”, but there is an “Anti-Nuclear Village” too!

It is impossible to thank our friends in Japan enough for their fantastic support for several years. I will never forget my 2018 visit to your wonderful Country, and the good people I met there.

We try to maintain solidarity with other anti-nuclear organisations within the UK.

In Wales, we work with the Welsh Anti-Nuclear Alliance (WANA) and Geiger Bay, who campaign against the dumping of radioactive mud from Hinkley off the Welsh coast.

More locally, we see our campaign merging more and more with that of CADNO, who campaign against nuclear at Trawsfynydd.

Wylfa Ni project.

Clearly the major decisions are made in London, but we do our best to get the issues discussed and give people information so that they understand that there are other safer, better, cheaper ways of producing energy. And that there are other ways of generating worthwhile jobs in our beautiful land. Jobs which don't cost the Earth. Jobs which put People before Profit. Jobs which are answerable locally, not to a few people in a boardroom thousands of miles away.

Arigato!

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POSTSCRIPT

The UK Government on the day of the webinar announced "The Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution".¹¹ As expected it contained a commitment to support nuclear, but there was no specific mention of the anticipated go-ahead for Sizewell, and there was no mention of Wylfa.

An Energy White Paper is expected to be presented this year, which may say more about specific nuclear projects. There is also expected to be some form of announcement of funding models which would shift the financial risk as far as possible from the companies investing in nuclear, and instead onto the UK taxpayer and electricity bill payer.

This is what was said about nuclear:

Point 3: Delivering New and Advanced Nuclear Power

Our electricity system will grow and could double in size by 2050 as demand for low-carbon electricity in sectors like heat and transport rises. Nuclear power provides a reliable source of low-carbon electricity. We are pursuing large-scale nuclear, whilst also looking to the future of nuclear power in the UK through further investment in Small Modular Reactors and Advanced Modular Reactors.

The UK was home to the world's first full-scale civil nuclear power station more than sixty years ago, and this industry now employs around 60,000 people in the UK. We see the ongoing potential of this technology. Whether a large-scale power plant, or next generation technologies such as Small and Advanced Modular Reactors, new nuclear will both produce low carbon power and create jobs and growth across the UK. We are pursuing large-scale new nuclear projects, subject to value-for-money. To support this, we will provide development funding.

Alongside this, we are also looking to invest further in the next generation of nuclear technology. Subject to value-for-money and future spending rounds, we are announcing up to £385 million in an

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/936567/10_POINT_PLAN_BOOKLET.pdf

Advanced Nuclear Fund. This will enable investment of up to £215 million into Small Modular Reactors to develop a domestic smaller-scale power plant technology design that could potentially be built in factories and then assembled on site. It will unlock up to £300 million private sector match-funding.

We are also committing up to £170 million for a research and development programme on Advanced Modular Reactors. These reactors could operate at over 800°C and the high-grade heat could unlock efficient production of hydrogen and synthetic fuels, complementing our investments in carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS), hydrogen and offshore wind. Our aim is to build a demonstrator by the early 2030s at the latest to prove the potential of this technology and put the UK at the cutting edge against international competitors.

To help bring these technologies to market, we will invest an additional £40 million in developing the regulatory frameworks and supporting UK supply chains.