

EU War on Acid Rain Threatens Coal Jobs

All Britain's 23 surviving deep coal mines will be closed and 70,000 jobs lost in the mining and electricity industry if a European Union plan to reduce acid rain goes ahead, the Trade Union Congress of the United Kingdom will be warned today. Union leaders in the energy industry are joining managers to warn that the proposed EU legislation could mean Britain will have to build 15 to 20 new gas-fired power stations to replace coal-fired plants – at a cost of around two billion pounds and a 15 % rise in electricity prices. The threat comes at a time when the coal industry – squeezed by what is regarded widely as an electricity market rigged against it – faces renewed closures as the power generators prepare to slash their purchases of deep-mined British coal.

The EU has already made substantial progress in attacking the source of acid rain – created by emissions of nitrous oxide (NOX) and sulfur dioxide (SO₂), from power stations, cars, and lorries – but the European Commission is determined to press ahead with even more stringent legislation. The EU proposal to amend the Large Combustion Plant Directive to enforce far lower targets is expected to come before ministers later this year.

Under existing plans, emissions of NOX and SO₂ in Britain are to be cut from their 1990 levels of 2,702 and 3,752 kilotonnes per year to 279 and 753 kt respectively by the year 2010. Now **the commission wants to accelerate those cuts** to bring them down to 60 and 75 kts per year over the same timescale.

Tony Cooper, general secretary of the Engineers' and Managers' Association, the white-collar energy union, will tell the TUC conference today that if the proposals are accepted, **only the Ratcliffe and giant Drax coal-fired power stations** – both fitted with flue gas desulphurisation equipment – could survive. Alone they could not sustain deep mining in Britain. In 1996, the two stations emitted 63 kts of SO₂ – almost the full amount the UK would be allowed to produce under the new targets, despite their special sulfur scrubbing equipment.

The mining unions have repeatedly pressed for the **investment in clean-coal technology** that would allow Britain to maintain its coal industry, but the government has yet to go beyond sympathetic noises. Mr. Cooper will argue that the new targets take no account of the huge progress Europe has made in tackling acidification. He will cite a recent United Nations report which suggests that Norway, one of the worst victims of acid rain, has seen a 50% drop in SO₂ in rainfall since 1980, and that sulfur in lakes has fallen 33%.

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