

## What Price Energy? Spring 1985

Clare Champion Friday, March 29, 1985 From: Fred O'Brien, Kilkee May, 17, 2013

### Environmental Threat From Moneypoint

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Concern is expressed about the threat to the environment through emissions from Moneypoint in an editorial in the Spring edition of The Environmentalist.

The journal is published by the Environmental Health Officers' Association whose Chairman is Mr. Fred O'Brien (the author of the article) who worked for many years in the Limerick/Clare area.

The editorial refers to the Report of The Inquiry into electricity prices and states that it has failed to evaluate the real costs and benefits associated with the variety of fuel options available for the generation of electricity. This, despite the fact that true costs and benefits in relation to health and environment have been assessed elsewhere and emission reduction strategies have proved economically attractive.

The Committee was requested, among other things, to 'itemise and quantify the components on which electricity prices are based, to identify and analyse reasons for higher/lower costs in Ireland, and to make recommendations regarding prices and costs in the electricity industry as are felt to be in the public interest'. The Report gives an altogether inadequate treatment to the question of the costs and benefits of emission control, and its lack of enthusiasm for incurring costs on environmental health protection is made abundantly evident.

The first recommendation of the Inquiry is that Moneypoint be completed, that oil-fired stations be converted to coal and that additional coal burning plant be planned. This recommendation comes out of a report that fails to analyse the environmental health consequences of such a policy, and that would have Poolbeg in Dublin, Aghada in Cork and Great Island in Wexford converted to coal. The Report offers no welcome to the proposed European Commission Directive which seeks to control and reduce emissions from power plants of 50MW thermal capacity or greater, claiming that emissions in Ireland appear to be 'on a small scale in comparison with the localised problems in areas of Western Europe'.

"Information of a more precise nature is to be found in the current Report of the Chief Health Inspector of Dublin in which a dramatic reversal of the fairly consistent decrease in atmospheric pollution levels over the period 1973 to 1981 is recorded. Detailed data are presented, trends are analysed, causes given and radical solutions offered. Additionally, the health and environmental effects of air pollution are outlined and the benefits of clean air highlighted. Breaches of E.E.C. emission standards in parts of Dublin are recorded and the marked deterioration in air quality is

identified as an inevitable result of households switching to coal for heat.

“The fact that an Inquiry, established by the Government to examine fuel costs should give such little attention to the social costs of energy use brings to mind the catastrophic London smog of 5-9 December 1952, which was responsible for at least 4,000 deaths. For a few days, at that time, death rates attained a level that had been exceeded only rarely during the previous century ? for example, at the height of the cholera epidemic of 1854 and of the influenza epidemic of 1918-1919. Deaths from bronchitis in the county of London increased nine-fold in the week ending 13<sup>th</sup> December and from pneumonia by four times. Additionally, deaths from respiratory diseases remained abnormally high for some two months after the December smog. There was little concern at the time for the health consequences.

“The smog exacted its major toll from those already suffering from respiratory ailments of one kind or another and was regarded as doing no more than advancing slightly the death of those who were, in any case, ailing. In medical terminology the smog had a ‘non-specific effect on persons already having serious respiratory or cardiac lesions’.

“Since 1952 our understanding of the environmental health impacts of coal combustion has significantly improved.

“Atmospheric emissions have been shown to affect pulmonary ventilation, increase the prevalence of lower pulmonary disease, increase the frequency and severity of asthmatic attacks and increase the prevalence of chronic respiratory disease. In addition, high concentrations of sulphur dioxide and particulates have been associated with acute illness. Emissions can cause eye, nose and throat irritation, nausea and headaches, structural changes in lung tissue and chromosomal alterations of blood cells.

“An Foras Forbartha’s Ecological Impact Assessment of the proposed Moneypoint generating station outlines some possible effects on the environment. Referring to growing crops, plants and soil properties, the report predicts changes in soil fertility; injury; stunting of growth and changes in the distribution of plants; and predicts the possible elimination of certain plants which rely on delicately balanced interactions with other organisms. In addition, problems with selenium and molybdenum stack emissions were referred to as possibly requiring changes in the management of the station.

“By 1987, when the third 300MW generating unit is due for commissioning, the station, if running at full capacity, could burn 84,000 tonnes of coal per day. While An Foras Forbartha warns of the possible impacts of pollutants, it feels compelled in its assessment of Moneypoint to recommend or warn that ‘If concentrations of SO<sub>2</sub> and particulate emissions rise to levels which cause either national concerns, the Electricity Supply Board and other producers should review their policies controlling these emissions’.

“Atmospheric pollution seriously effects human health and despoils the environment. Its effects, particularly when energy decisions are being formulated, should be assessed and costed. We believe that the Report of the Inquiry into Electricity Prices is fundamentally defective in that it has ignored significant social costs”, the editorial concludes.