

The De-industrialisation of Europe

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"May I ask the Commissioner if he has considered the competitive position of Europe in the world? The EU is pursuing expensive, unreliable and intermittent renewables, while China and India race to build coal-fired power stations, and America looks forward to an industrial renaissance based on cheap, indigenous fossil fuel - shale gas.Â How will the EU compete?" - **UKIP MEP Roger Helmer to EU Energy Commissioner Günther Oettinger (20.03.2012).**

[By Roger Helmer MEP](#)

€ Last night we MEPs had an opportunity for what's called "[an exchange of views](#)" with German Energy Commissioner Günther Oettinger.Â He set out to describe his "[Energy Road-Map to 2050](#)".Â This was nothing less than his plan for the de-industrialisation of Europe.Â He called it "de-carbonisation", but so far as I can see it amounts to the same thing.

At least he had the good grace to admit that it was difficult to predict forty years ahead.Â There would be technological developments which we couldn't dream of today.Â Indeed the hubris of setting policy for our grandchildren is amazing.Â How would we feel in 2012 if we were bound by energy policies set out decades ago by Harold Wilson and Tony Benn?

Yet in one sense he has a point.Â As he said, some of the energy infrastructure decisions we make today will be with us for decades.Â A nuclear power station commissioned now is likely to last sixty years.Â The same cannot be said of renewables.Â Wind turbines are unlikely to achieve their design life of 25 years.Â We are already seeing their [abandoned rusting hulks](#).Â They are spinning post-industrial junk -- although in Hawaii, they aren't spinning any more.

We are hearing [stories of the insolvency](#) of large-scale solar photo-voltaic enterprises, while Chinese solar cell manufacturers are [reported to be in deep trouble](#).Â

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Commissioner Oettinger recognised that agriculture, industry and transport could not be totally decarbonised, and suggested that therefore electricity generation would have to be zero-CO2.Â He even showed just a glimmer of trepidation at his own ambition, but justified it by saying "I was appointed in 2009 and I inherited these targets".Â Did I hear just an echo there of the Nuremberg defence?Â "Only following orders"?

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Oettinger set great store by technological fixes, and especially "the smart grid", invoked like some sort of talismanic charm.Â Slovenian MEP Romana Jordan came up with a wonderful comment: "Smart grids are not enough -- we also need to generate electricity".Â A blindingly obvious point which the Energy Commissioner had perhaps missed.

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I had the opportunity to ask a question.

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"I'm Roger Helmer, Spokesman on Industry and Energy for the United Kingdom Independence Party.Â May I ask the Commissioner if he has considered the competitive position of Europe in the world?Â The EU is pursuing expensive, unreliable and intermittent renewables, while China and India race to build coal-fired power stations, and America looks forward to an industrial renaissance based on cheap, indigenous fossil fuel -- shale gas.Â How will the EU compete?

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"Is the Commissioner aware of studies in the UK that suggest that up to half of UK households could be in fuel poverty by the end of the decade as a result of our pursuit of renewables in our attempts to meet Brussels targets?

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"If the Commission wants to reduce CO2 emissions, why has it biased the market by favouring renewables at the expense of nuclear?"

UKIP MEPs

<http://www.ukipmeps.org>

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"We are closing coal-fired power stations under the EU's Large Combustion Plant Directive, and we are closing nuclear power stations for a range of reasons.Â In your own country, Commissioner, you have decided to close all nuclear power stations.Â Do you imagine that this base-load capacity can be replaced by intermittent renewables?"

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"Has it ever crossed your mind that in 2050, sociology professors will be setting their students dissertations on our early-21st-century obsession with CO2 emissions, which by then will be seen as a bizarre collective psychosis?"

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I wish I could give you the Commissioner's answer, but apart from reaffirming his confidence in anthropogenic global warming, there was little of substance in his reply.

[Roger Helmer's blog](#)

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