

Brexit Independence Must Include Energy

Below we are publishing an article by one of our affiliate organisations, The Bruges Group. Writing on the hot topic of energy security, Michael Wood shares a wealth of experience in International Trade.

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There are still areas of our lives that have not benefited from the people's decision to choose independence from the EU. The unfinished business is harming our country and its future. One aspect of government policy that it shares with the EU, is the Green agenda drive to Net Zero. How a small island off the coast of Eurasia became a world superpower has been written about and debated for hundreds of years. Apart from the creativity and ingenuity of the people, one element stands out. Energy Independence.

Arguably, the world was little changed for millennia. Life depended on seasons and the seasonal availability of food and fuel. Life for most, changed little as energy depended on wood, horses, cattle and man power. Wind power for sailing ships is an ancient use. Not until the 9th century was wind used industrially to produce flour and irrigate crops. Developed in Iran and Afghanistan the technology did not reach Europe until the 12 century. Apart from the end of Serfdom a British person of the 17th century faced much the same life challenges as their forbears.

Coal changed everything. Economist William Jevons in his 1865

enquiry into Britain's dependence on coal was in no doubt that it was the use of coal that had ended what he termed the 'laborious poverty of early times'. A reliable non seasonal energy that powered machines broke the old cycle. Free from the famines that had suppressed population, the population of Britain grew dramatically. From an estimated 5.5 million in 1695 it grew to 9.3 million in 1801 and to 15.9 million in 1841. A growth of 60% in 40 years. Despite overcrowding in cities, there was an increase in life expectancy, an improvement in health due to reliable food supplies and improved sanitation.

The Industrial revolution was made possible because of coal. Its most enduring legacy, in my view, is the middle class. Industrial society freed people from dependence on the vagaries of the weather. It allowed an upward mobility in society and access to the comfort associated with progress. This was widely spread as one can judge from the observations by 18th century English travellers in Europe on the rarity of glass windows. The agriculturist Arthur Young wrote 'Pass an extraordinary spectacle for English eyes, of many houses too good to be called cottages, without any glass windows'. Britain's reliable energy meant cheaper glass, wider availability.

British manufacture and invention opened a new world. It was a world of possibility. Of a self-belief and willingness to experiment that seems sadly lacking today. Isambard Kingdom Brunel inherited the fruits of the first Industrial Revolution. Used them and drove the process unrelentingly forward. I wonder what he would make of today's timidity in so many field. BREXIT should release a renaissance in British engineering and manufacture. Government hesitancy and high energy costs conspire to thwart that ambition.

The terrible events currently unfolding in Europe are a timely reminder of the need for energy independence. The EU is reliant on an unreliable source. Its Green agenda compounds

the problem. We do not have to suffer the same fate.

The refusal by our government to use our own resources is beyond comprehension. Apparently, the line is that Fracking will not help the immediate situation. That kind of thinking, applied to our past would have seen us stuck in a pre-industrial agrarian world of famine and disease. The anarchist founders of the Green agenda claim their aim, is precisely that. The concept is frightening. The fact that our government is tacitly supporting it, incomprehensible.

British prosperity, the industrial revolution, universal suffrage, freedom itself were possible only because we were energy self-sufficient. We can be again. Our reserves of natural gas are sufficient for centuries. All it needs is the courage to face down a noisy minority of ill-informed eco cultists. Denying the British people the benefit of their own resources is only helping those who wish us harm. We expect our government to lead, to protect and further our interests. We invented Nuclear Power for energy. Shamefully, we now rely on foreign companies to build power stations. Rolls Royce's Small Modular Power stations offer the way back to our previous independence. Fracking, will provide the breathing space, the energy certainty and affordability that we need. The governments failure to seize the opportunities of BREXIT are desperately disappointing. Refusal to use our own resources would be a catastrophic act of self harm. Time for an urgent change in policy.