



The Paralysis in Energy Decision Making: European Energy Policy in Crisis

Malcolm Grimston

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This analysis of decision-making in the energy field, especially electricity in the UK and Western Europe, provides a critique of the various claims that are made for different ways of approaching the critical need for vast amounts of new investment. It explores reasons for the paralysis in decision-making, which is contrasted with past periods of rapid change, including the growth of electricity and renewables in the late 19th century, the development of centralised grids in the 1920s and 1930s and the rapid deployment of nuclear power in the 1970s and 1980s. The UK faces a potential crisis in investment in its power infrastructure just as the need for new electricity-generating capacity is becoming urgent. Over the next decade or so the majority of its existing power stations are likely to have reached the end of their operating lives yet very little new reliable capacity is being built to replace it and a government decision to build new nuclear power stations announced in early 2008 had produced no fruit eight years later. This book briefly reviews the history of each major fuel then considers the reasons for the decision sclerosis and suggests possible ways out of it. It reviews the difficulties of investing in long-term electricity generating capacity in competitive marketplaces; the problems caused by a lack of understanding of basic physics among elected representatives coupled with a degree of short-term political opportunism; the fundamentally dishonest approach of the Big Green industry; a naïve approach to communication on the part of the energy industry itself and a lax approach to scientific rigour among those advocating action against climate change which has bred disillusionment and suspicion. Comparisons with recent experience in Germany and Japan are offered to illustrate the issues.

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