

# Keep Our Coast Clean – Say No To UCG

Dave Hopper, DMA Secretary



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The Durham Miners' Association is totally opposed to underground coal gasification (UCG) on the North East Coast.

Previous tests have proved that underground UCG is dangerous and highly toxic to both people and the environment and has never been successfully implemented anywhere in the world on a commercial scale despite nearly a 100 years of test projects.

UCG is dangerous because it involves setting fire to underground coal reserves and piping the hot gases produced to the surface. These underground fires have proved difficult to control and are prone to explosions of such force that they can blow back to the surface causing large-scale pollution.

More alarming is the cocktail of dangerous chemicals that, tests have proved, leach into the ground water and escape into the atmosphere. These chemicals can cause leukaemia, attack the nervous system and cause liver, kidney and brain damage.

Despite the potential danger to the

people of the North East, the Tory/ Lib Dem Government has granted licences to two energy companies to carry out exploratory work with a view to exploiting the reserves under the North Sea stretching from Alnwick to Hartlepool.

These energy companies would like us to think that their sole interest is to solve the energy crisis. But, UCG is not just hazardous, it is highly wasteful because it only extracts a fraction of the energy from the coal reserves and destroys any possibility that the coal could be exploited by future generations using advanced methods of total extraction.

Thatcher vandalised our coal industry and destroyed tens of thousands of well-paid jobs in our region. Now, they want to further punish us by imposing on us scores of potentially highly polluting gas plants, which will blight our countryside just when the worst effects of our industrial past have been removed and our coastline has been restored to its natural beauty. The people of the North East deserve this type of environment and we do not intend to allow the greed of these 'entrepreneurs' to destroy it for future generations.

We warned that the destruction of our coal industry, the 'dash for gas' and the privatisation of electricity generation and supply would lead to an energy crisis and we have been proved correct. We said that energy policy should not be dictated by the pursuit of short-term profit for the few, but should be planned for the long term taking into account the interests of our grandchildren and their children.

Coal is going to be burned throughout the world for another hundred years in ever increasing quantities. So, if we are to solve the problem of global warming, the priority must be to invest heavily in Clean Coal Technology and develop a balanced fuel policy.

Next year is election year and the Tories are telling us we should vote for them because they have fixed the economy. Yet, working people have experienced a reduction in their living standards unprecedented since the 19th century. Cuts have decimated vital services and welfare payments. The sick and disabled have been bullied and victimised, hundreds of thousands have been forced into self-employment and even more have had to accept zero-hour contracts. An alarming number of children are going to school hungry and tens of thousands of parents are relying on food banks.

Now, we are told they have only completed 40 per cent of the government spending cuts and therefore 60 per cent more cuts are due in the course of the next parliament. So they are asking us to vote for them so they can drive us down into abject poverty. A 'return to the 1930s' is now open talk.

Since the Labour Party does not appear to have a credible alternative it looks as if we are going to have to fight like we have never fought before to prevent social catastrophe.

Despite this bleak outlook I hope you all have a merry Christmas and a happy New Year.