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The return of Arthur Scargill [1]

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Quite like old times as Arthur Scargill returns to [3] The Guardian to tell us that coal is the answer to all our problems. If only we employed hundreds of thousands to work underground, banned all foreign coal imports, then we could power the entire island from coal and renewables and all live happily ever after.

Well, yes, although there's a certain amount of wishful thinking there. This can all be done without harming the environment apparently: clean coal technology is sufficiently advanced that not only will there be no particularate pollution but we're able to capture all of the CO2 as well. Slightly unfortunate to have to point out that, at least with present technology, no we can't. No one really thinks we ever will be able to either. We think we might be able to capture some of it, perhaps even a majority, but not all. Further, no one has even built a decent sized demonstration plant yet, let alone a commercial pilot, so we've really no idea how much it is likely to cost either.

But the really breathtaking claim is the one that coal is better than nuclear. For of course, the biggest challenger to coal for baseload electricty production is indeed nucelar power: so out comes the boogieman of radiation.

> Is he unaware that there is no known way of disposing of nuclear waste, which will contaminate the planet for thousands of years?

There are ways known: vitrification and burying it are known to work, the barriers being political not technological. But it's most unwise for those championing King Coal to start talking about radioactivity for a rather different reason [4]:

> A 1,000 MW coal-burning power plant could release as much as 5.2 tons/year of uranium (containing 74 pounds (34 kg) of uranium-235) and 12.8 tons/year of thorium. The radioactive emission from this coal power plant is 100 times greater than a comparable nuclear power plant with the same electrical output; including processing output, the coal power plant's radiation output is over 3 times greater.

Poor old Arthur. His problem always was that his worldview didn't actually coincide with reality, wasn't it?

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