

VIEWPOINT

THE BATTALION
TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

WEDNESDAY
NOVEMBER 29, 1978

Britain explores converted coal for fuel

By BRYAN SILCOCK

LONDON - The world's oil and natural gas reserves will run out in a generation or so, but there is enough coal to last for centuries. Thus Britain is currently promoting research programs designed to transform coal into gas and liquid fuels as well as into chemicals, to be used either for energy or as the basis for plastics, fertilizer and other products now manufactured from petroleum.

The fundamental breakthroughs in the field took place long ago. German aircraft, for example, flew on fuel converted from coal as far back as World War II. But the need in the near future will be for large-scale techniques that are efficient without being costly, and that is what preoccupies British experts at the moment.

Six principal projects aimed at perfecting coal technology are being planned or beginning to function here at present, and they are expected to require a total expenditure of some \$250 million. They are a long way from industrial application, but their main purpose now is to prove the feasibility of methods that have succeeded in the laboratory.

Some of these projects have been shaped jointly by British and American scientists, and it would have been logical to leave their development to the United States, which has immense resources for energy re-

search. But Britain has decided to push ahead, despite a heavy investment, for a couple of years.

For one thing, the British are eager to be out front in this domain rather than give an edge to the United States. And secondly, considering the troubles faced by the Carter administration in passing its energy legislation, there are doubts here about America's ability to move rapidly into coal technology.

Involved in the British projects are the government, the coal industry and mine workers, and their objective now is to build pilot plants in which to perform practical experiments in the conversion process.

The largest and perhaps most promising of these plants, due to start operating at a coal mine in northern England next spring, will test a process known as fluidized-bed combustion. The plant is being sponsored by the International Energy Agency, with costs shared by Britain, West Germany and the United States.

The way this process works, coal is fed into a bed of burning coal and ash that is suspended, as it were, on a blast of air from below so that it behaves almost like a liquid. By adding limestone to the bed, sulphur can be trapped, whereby removing the main pollutant produced by burning coal.

The overwhelming advantage of

fluidized-bed combustion is that it can be carried out in an installation significantly smaller than a big modern power plant that consumes coal dust in huge tubular structures. This reduction in size means a reduction in costs.

Great reductions in size and consequently cost can be achieved if the process operates under pressure, and the study of this operation is one of the purposes of the forthcoming experiment. The installation is modest, with an output of 18 megawatts, but plans are already being drawn up for an 80-megawatt demonstration plant.

Three of the other projects are focusing on the liquefaction of coal to produce Syn-crude, which resembles crude oil. An object of these experiments is to improve the ratio of hydrogen to carbon in the liquefied result. Because it is relatively poor in hydrogen, coal yields less heat than oil when used as fuel.

One plant being built will concentrate on a process called liquid solvent extraction. This consists of treating coal with a hot solvent that produces a thick tarry solution, which can then be "hydrogenated" to make oil-like "coal liquids," among them a form of low-octane gasoline.

Another plant will do a similar job by applying a gas rather than liquid solvent at pressures and temperatures high enough to

"open up" the coal and extract its more valuable constituents.

Yet another process known as pyrolysis, which has been tried in the laboratory, consists of heating coal rapidly in hydrogen at high pressure. The result is a mixture of tars, oils and gas, the blend of which can be controlled depending on the reactor conditions used.

In addition to these experiments in liquefaction, a plant located in Scotland has already had considerable success in producing synthetic natural gas from coal. The gasifier involved in the process has attracted interest in the United States and may be incorporated into a demonstration installation to be constructed there with Department of Energy funds.

Plans are also being made for a small plant in which coal would be turned into gas that could drive a turbine directly, cutting out the steam stage entirely.

With North Sea oil and gas flowing, these projects and plans are not urgent, and British scientists are working on schedules that reach into the 1980s. They feel, therefore, that they have a headstart against the day when oil and gas supplies will begin to dwindle - and they hope to be ready when that day arrives.

(Silcock writes on science and technology for the London Sunday Times, the British weekly newspaper.)

TOP OF THE NEWS CAMPUS

Changes in shuttle bus routes

The campus shuttle bus system will reduce operations on Friday due to the holiday. The Intra-Campus will not run and the other, off-campus routes will run from 7:30 a.m. until 5 p.m. The North route will operate the regular number of buses, the East route will have three buses and the South route two buses. The Holleman and Anderson Parkway route will have one bus, and the 2818 circuit will have one bus. A new intra-campus "Blue Route" will begin Monday.

Aggie Christmas season begins

Texas A&M University President Jarvis E. Miller will kick off the Aggie Christmas season in ceremonies here today. The annual event will feature a short concert by the Century Singers. Miller will give a speech on "Christmas in Aggieland and Around the World" and the lights will be turned on the Christmas tree. The ceremonies will be in the Memorial Student Center Lounge at 7:30 p.m. A small reception for the audience will be held after the ceremony in MSC room 201. The presentation is being sponsored by the MSC Christmas Tree Committee.

Reception for art award winners

A reception honoring award winners in the Juried Student Art Exhibition will be held at 6 p.m. today in the Memorial Student Center Art Gallery. The exhibit, currently on display in the MSC Gallery, will run through Dec. 3. Both the reception and exhibit are open to the public free of charge.

STATE

Sweeny plant in full operation

Phillips Petroleum Co.'s new ethylene plant near Sweeny, Texas, which will produce 1 billion pounds per year, was completed in the third quarter of 1978 and is in full operation, a Phillips official in Bartlesville, Okla., said Tuesday. The plant at Phillips' refining and petrochemical complex nearly doubles the company's yearly ethylene output to 2.2 billion pounds, said L.H. Johnstone, executive vice president for the chemicals group.

Hughes case motion denied

A Texas federal judge has refused a California request that a case to determine the legal residence of the late billionaire Howard Hughes be moved to Colorado. District Judge Monday said he would hear the case in Austin. Attorneys for the state of California, which also is claiming the western state was Hughes' domicile, had asked Roberts to move the case to the neutral state of Colorado. Texas and California both claim Hughes was a resident and want to collect taxes on the late tycoon's vast estate.

NATION

Mayor's memorial services continue

A series of memorial services both religious and secular began Monday and were to continue through much of the week for slain San Francisco Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk. A memorial Mass was held for Moscone at St. Mar's Cathedral Monday. Rosary services were set for Wednesday at 8 p.m. and the funeral was scheduled for Thursday at 10 a.m. Memorial services for Milk began Monday at the Gay Community Center and were followed by a memorial march from the city's Castro district to the steps of City Hall where participants held a silent vigil. Information on burial services for Milk was not immediately available.

Brother of Ray arrested

A brother of James Earl Ray scheduled to testify in Washington this week before a House panel investigating the assassination of the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was arrested in St. Louis Monday night. He is suspected of burglary and assault. Police said John Larry Ray, 45, was arrested a short time after a man entered a south side home and scuffled with three men before fleeing. Ray and his brother, Jerry Ray, were among several witnesses called to testify this week before a House committee in Washington looking into the assassination of King, for which James Earl Ray pleaded guilty and is serving a prison sentence.

WORLD

Survivors still in Guyana

The State Department said Tuesday it did not expect any survivors of the People's Temple to be flown from Guyana to Charleston Air Force Base Tuesday, where FBI agents are waiting to question them in the murder of U.S. Rep. Leo J. Ryan, D-Calif. Lyndon said the Guyanese government has authorized seven persons to leave Guyana and they are expected to fly out commercially. But he gave no indication when the group would fly out or what its U.S. destination would be.

WEATHER

Fair skies with a high in the mid 60's and a low in the lower 40's. Winds are southerly at 5-10 mph.

THE BATTALION

LETTERS POLICY

Letters to the editor should not exceed 300 words and are subject to being cut to that length or less if longer. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit such letters and does not guarantee to publish any letter. Each letter must be signed, show the address of the writer and list a telephone number for verification.

Address correspondence to Letters to the Editor, The Battalion, Room 216, Reed McDonald Building, College Station, Texas 77843.

Represented nationally by National Educational Advertising Services, Inc., New York City, Chicago and Los Angeles.

The Battalion is published Monday through Friday from September through May except during exam and holiday periods and the summer, when it is published on Tuesday through Thursday.

Mail subscriptions are \$16.75 per semester, \$33.25 per school year, \$35.00 per full year. Advertising rates furnished on request. Address: The Battalion, Room 216, Reed McDonald Building, College Station, Texas 77843.

United Press International is entitled exclusively to the use for reproduction of all news dispatches credited to it. Rights of reproduction of all other matter herein reserved. Second-Class postage paid at College Station, TX 77843.

Opinions expressed in The Battalion are those of the editor or of the writer of the article and are not necessarily those of the University administration or the Board of

MEMBER

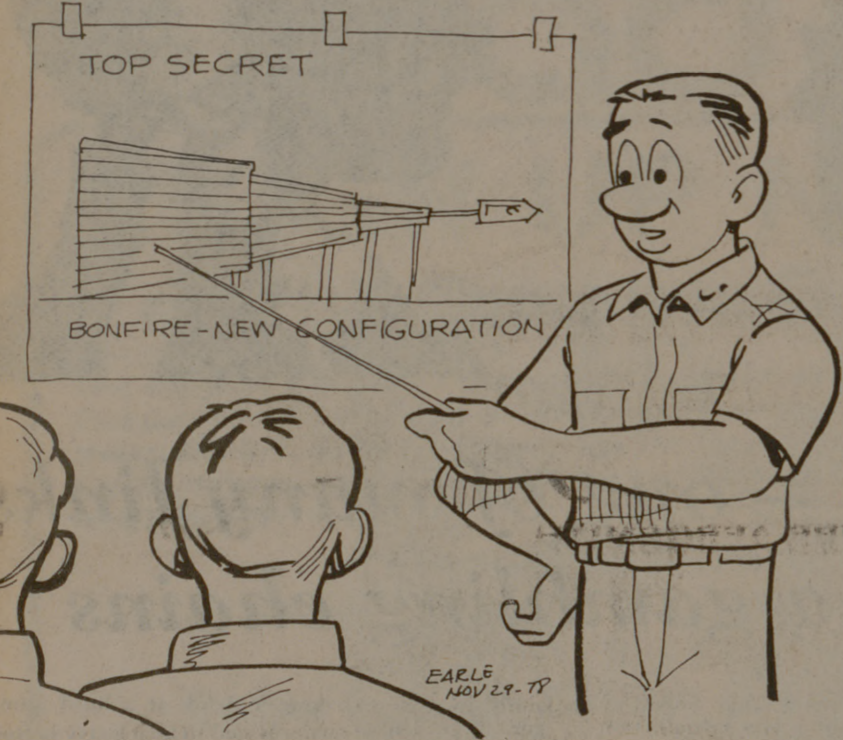
Texas Press Association
Southwest Journalism Congress

Editor Kim Tyson
Managing Editor Liz Newlin
Assistant Managing Editor Andy Williams
Sports Editor David Boggan
City Editor Jamie Aitken
Campus Editor Steve Lee
News Editors Debbie Parsons
Beth Calhoun
Staff Writers Karen Rogers, Mark Patterson, Scott Pendleton, Sean Petty, Michelle Scudder, Diane Blake, Lee Roy Leschper Jr., Dillard Stone
Cartoonist Doug Graham
Photographers Ed Cummins, Lynn Blanco
Focus section editor Gary Weib

Regents. The Battalion is a non-profit, self-supporting enterprise operated by students as a university and community newspaper. Editorial policy is determined by the editor.

Slouch

by Jim Earle



"I'LL ADMIT IT'S A HARD CONCEPT TO ACCEPT RIGHT OFF, BUT IT WILL PUT AN END TO BONFIRES THAT TOPPLE!"

Letters to the Editor

Band drill top show

Editor:

As a member of the Fightin' Texas Aggie Band from 1945 to 1949, I naturally feel it is the greatest musical organization in existence.

I have seen quite a number of half-time performances by the band since 1949, but the show put on last Saturday during the TCU game surpassed anything I have ever witnessed before. The complexity of the drill and the precision with which it was carried out was beautiful to watch and the standing ovation and cheering from the stands at the conclusion of this performance makes me think I'm not alone in my feelings.

I only hope the television cameras will do justice to the Aggie Band this Friday in Austin. In my humble opinion, the Band is the best public relations medium our school has, and it needs all the support and exposure to the people of this state and nation as is possible.

I'm mighty proud to say I was a member of the Texas A&M band, and extend congratulations again on a sterling performance last Saturday.

—Jim Simpson, '49
Hallettsville, Tx.

Vested interest

Editor:

On the weekend of Oct. 28, I visited A&M for the Rice game. A friend intended to deliver a vest to me for my brother to wear in a wedding. The vest, however, never reached me; it was lost somewhere near the Quad.

It is part of a blue-grey suit. It was in a small brown paper bag. On the bag was John Stern's address. It is vitally important that I find this vest. If you find it, please return it to Paula Bane, Dorm 1, 845-2969.

Thank you.

—Maureen O'Brien
Austin, Tx.

Readers' Forum

Guest viewpoints, in addition to Letters to the Editor, are welcome. All pieces submitted to Readers' forum should be:

- Typed triple space
- Limited to 60 characters per line
- Limited to 100 lines

Republicans jockey for congressional slots

By CHERYL ARVIDSON

WASHINGTON — Conservative Republicans are riding high these days after scoring some major wins in Senate races made doubly sweet by a list of losers that includes some of the chamber's most unswerving liberals.

It's no surprise, then, that conservatives are jockeying for places on the Senate GOP leadership team that will be elected when the 96th Congress convenes in January.

Senate Republican Leader Howard Baker has enough commitments from incoming and current senators to assure

Politics

himself of re-election to the top leadership job. But from there on down, the GOP is bracing for spirited races that will prove whether more moderate Republicans will continue their dominance of chamber strategy positions or be forced to yield to the right.

Conservative Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., was rumored to be considering a challenge of Baker but he has apparently backed off, and his supporters are focusing instead on the lesser leadership spots.

Conservative Sen. Harrison Schmitt, R-N.M., has announced plans to challenge the more moderate Sen. Ted Stevens of Alaska for the second highest job, assistant Republican leader. Stevens was first elected to this slot two years ago when the

Writing the editor

The Battalion welcomes letters to the editor on any subject. However, to be acceptable for publication these letters must meet certain criteria. They should:

- ✓ Not exceed 300 words or 1800 characters in length.
- ✓ Be neatly typed whenever possible. Hand-written letters are acceptable.
- ✓ Include the author's name, address and telephone number for verification.

Letters to the editor are printed as a service to our readers. Publication of a letter is never guaranteed. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit letters to remove grammatical errors and to avoid litigation.

Address letters to the editor to:
Letters to the Editor
The Battalion
Room 216
Reed McDonald Building
College Station, Texas 77843