



As resources fail

Posted by [Heading Out](#) on May 31, 2005 - 4:11pm

The article by [Henry Liu](#) that ran in Asia Times contained an unknowing comment on how times change. He said

A fourth discontinuity is pending over Iran's march toward nuclear power status. As a major oil producer, Iran needs nuclear power for civilian use as much as coal-producing Newcastle needs oil.

Well it should be noted that Newcastle no longer produces coal, and has not for some years now. The last remaining coal mine in the North of England (where Newcastle lies) was closed earlier this year when it was decided that the cost of pumping the mine dry was not justified by the coal that might be produced. And in that vein [we have previously commented](#) on the realities of oil production in Iran, where the need for energy can quite likely justify their desire to have nuclear power. Times change, resources die, and the old sayings become meaningless in the new reality.

In which regard, and to finish the thought on people resources, there was an interesting article in this month's [Prism](#), which is the journal of the American Society for Engineering Education, concerning the need for Mining Engineers. There are now only 13 accredited programs in Mining, and collectively they produced some 85 BS degrees in 2004. Average starting salaries are around \$55,000 (but are likely behind those of starting petroleum engineers). Not to flog a dead horse, but, without knowledgeable engineers, finding solutions to ways that improve the mining or oilwell production of fuel is going to be rather difficult. The mining industry conservatively believes that it will need some 300 engineers each year for the next decade, just to replace those retiring. (As a point of reference back in 1981 some 700 students graduated in Mining across the country). As [J](#) has pointed out, it takes a number of years of training before a graduate really becomes useful, and right now that well is running very low.

Following along on that thought, with only a handful of coal mines left in the entire United Kingdom, and a similar situation in most of Europe, the chance of coal playing any significant role in solving their coming fuel shortage is not great. Since in many cases the shafts were filled in, and the mines allowed to flood it will take a tremendous effort in money and time to re-establish the industry. Without coal, oil or gas it could get quite chilly in future winters over there, as the Gulf Stream slowly fades. Their plans only call for a 10% contribution from renewable energy by 2010, and that may well now not be enough. (and this sadly is not a movie script).

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