

have broken the government's own labour legislation if it had gone ahead). Another was the conviction that the timing of the decision was a folly, when unemployment was rising rapidly (as it still is) towards three million. Yet another was the conviction of many politicians that the government was dealing badly with the miners who had kept working through the bruising miners' strike in 1984–85. Miners themselves were naturally moved by the immediate threat to their jobs, of which they are traditionally inordinately fond.

Whatever the economic or social validity of these views, they are political realities and, thus, causes of market imperfection. One way or another, perhaps by direct subsidy, the government will now be compelled to tilt the economic balance towards coal. But this is not the first time that the British energy market has been biased by external considerations. During the privatization of the electricity industry, the Treasury's insistence that electricity sales should provide for the eventual dismantling of British nuclear plants led, first, to the decision that the nuclear plants should remain nationalized and, second, that there should be a levy on all British sales of electricity to provide for decommissioning. That arrangement tilts the balance in favour of nuclear plants, which the government then rightly considered to be strategically important. A similar decision has been made on windmills, which have been given favourable terms of access to the national distribution grid.

So what will be the outcome of the latest further proof that the market is imperfect? Much hangs on how the government's freedom is constrained by international obligations, not least towards its partners in the European Communities, but a subsidy for coal is on the cards. That will be justifiable if it helps to tide the miners over an uncomfortable patch, five years or so, but it cannot in the long run be a device for keeping collieries at work: the labour content in coal is greater than in other fuels, with the consequence that its cost must rise more quickly than the general inflation of salaries. That, and not the quantity of coal left in the ground, is why coalmining must be a declining trade in countries whose prosperity is increasing. The best assurance of the future of British coalmining would be declining prosperity, which even the miners cannot wish for.

The big danger in the government's internal review is that the outcome will be a further polarization between coal and nuclear energy. Some are already suggesting trading the nuclear levy for a subsidy for coal. But that makes no sense. The principle that the costs of operating nuclear plants should include some allowance for decommissioning is impeccable; "internalizing the externalities" is how economists of the environment describe the process. But present estimates of cost are probably unreasonably high, and would be more so if plants were designed with that end in view. If, even with better estimates, nuclear plants after that now under construction at Sizewell in Suffolk are uneconomic, they should not be built.

But would that not mean that Britain would permanently give up its strategic interest in civil nuclear power? Under present arrangements, yes, but only because the government has virtually washed its hands of publicly financed research

in the field. The lesson of the past few uncomfortable months is that the energy market must necessarily be compromised by long-term considerations: the uselessness of disused coalmines and the need to anticipate a future in which nuclear power must be an important source of power. Without breaching European agreements, the government could sensibly, and in the public interest, keep these options open by imaginative research. It may seem a further climb-down to be sponsoring reactor research again, but in logic there is no choice. □

Education for refugees

The University of Warsaw has made imaginative provision for students in the former Yugoslavia.

PEOPLE wring their hands over the flood of refugees between and from the parts of dismembered Yugoslavia. Reactions range from regret, perhaps tinged with genuine compassion, to the fear that this comparatively minor wave in this decade's inevitable tide of migration may be a threat to the jobs, or the civility, of those who work and live elsewhere in Europe. In the midst of the recession, the general opinion of those turned into refugees by an interlocking series of unusually cruel civil wars is that they constitute an embarrassment, more a threat than a spur to economic renewal. Hungary and Germany have so far borne the brunt of numbers, but without enthusiasm, perhaps forgetful that the successive waves of migration to the United States in the nineteenth century eventually proved to be an economic benefit.

The senate of the University of Warsaw has now provided the rest of us with a reminder that the people displaced from what was Yugoslavia constitute more than an undifferentiated crowd whose only meaningful characteristic is a head-count. The crowd, of course, includes young people of ability who would, without the civil wars, have expected to go to some university in September. What will happen to them now that they live in refugee camps instead? Warsaw offers a practical solution: scholarships to five young people who have had to leave their home countries in what was Yugoslavia. Recognizing that five is a small number, the rector of the university, Dr Andrzej Kajetan Wróblewski, says in a letter that "we wish to be able to do more, but our resources are very limited".

Wróblewski goes on to plead that other universities and academic institutions should follow Warsaw's lead, and he is right. The disintegration of Yugoslavia has been a shock for the rest of Europe not simply because of the immediate military dangers, but because of the likelihood that the present turbulence will drag on for decades. What better insurance against that prospect than that something should be done to care for the education of Yugoslavia's young people, in whose hands some part of the future will rest? And in what better way can academics and their institutions, now fretting with frustration over what was Yugoslavia, help to shake off that debilitating state of mind? □