

Black Crosses and Black Deaths

Attacks on coal-mining and use would trample on hopes, progress, living standards and lives

Bishop Harry Jackson, Jr. and Niger Innis

Are these people crazy? Are they so disconnected from reality that they don't understand how vital coal is to jobs, living standards, civil rights progress and life itself?

How else can anyone react to a new environmentalist campaign to erect black crosses at coal mines and coal-fired power plants, to symbolize their opposition to this vital energy source? The Black Cross Alliance (BCA) is little more than another sordid campaign against affordable energy, especially hydrocarbons. Its policies are misguided at best, harmful and even lethal at worst.

When we see the Black Crosses, we need to remember the blessings of coal-based electricity: the economic uplift, the enhanced quality of life it provides for millions of working class Americans of every color. When we think of groups like the Black Cross Alliance and their undue influence over energy and economic policy, we need to remember the pain of rising unemployment and poverty in America. We need to remember the needless deaths of millions every year in the mostly black and brown developing world, due to radical environmentalist campaigns against energy and economic development.

America needs coal. Half of our nation's electricity is generated with coal. Moreover, as National Black Chamber of Commerce president Harry Alford has pointed out, 86% of all African Americans live within 700 miles of Nashville, TN – many of them in states that get half to nearly all their electricity from coal.

These states are also our industrial heartland. Millions of jobs, millions of families, thousands of communities depend on abundant, reliable, affordable, coal-based electricity. It is their lifeblood. Illinois generates 48% of its electricity with coal; Alabama 51; Pennsylvania 53; Michigan 61; Tennessee 63; Wisconsin 66; Missouri 81; Ohio 85; Kentucky 94; Indiana 95; West Virginia 98 percent!

When militant environmentalists attack coal mining and burning, they attack mining jobs – and jobs in factories, hospitals, schools, offices and stores that depend on the affordable, dependable electricity that coal provides. They shackle people's hopes and living standards. They make it harder for people to heat and cool their homes, pay their rent and mortgage, afford a car or medical treatment.

The pressure groups' websites shout out, "Donate!" Translation: Help us wreak more havoc.

In Britain, nearly 25,000 more people died during recent winters than during the summers. Most of them were elderly people, who had circulatory or respiratory problems and could no longer afford adequate heat, due to energy costs that keep rising because of global warming and renewable energy policies. That's just plain wrong. It cannot be allowed to happen here.

Most Americans understand this intuitively. A September 2010 Ipsos Public Affairs poll found that fully half of all Americans are unwilling to pay even \$5 more per month in total energy costs, even to create "green" jobs, build wind and solar projects or prevent "global climate disruption." A third opposes paying even a dime more than they do already.

We need to burn coal more cleanly and efficiently. Thanks to tougher laws, changed attitudes and improved technologies, we've already made tremendous progress. Power plant emissions are way below where they were in 1970, and they keep going down.

Groups like BCA say we should end coal mining and burning – and replace it with renewable power. This is technologically impossible and economically unfeasible currently. Renewable energy requires billions of dollars in subsidies that governments can no longer afford. It means thousands of wind turbines, solar panels, and new high-voltage transmission lines and access roads across millions of acres of land. It requires mining, processing and manufacturing operations – driven by oil, gas, coal and nuclear power – to get steel, copper, concrete, fiberglass and other materials to make the turbines, panels and power lines.

This Green Jobs Revolution does create “green” jobs – for China and India. Green Jobs Revolution indeed! The United States is paying billions in subsidies for these energy programs, but the mining, manufacturing and thus job creation are increasingly taking place overseas, where labor and energy costs are lower, and environmental regulations are far less stringent than in the US.

In addition, because China, India and other emerging economies are building new coal fired power plants every week – to reduce energy deprivation, poverty, misery, disease and premature death – they are steadily increasing atmospheric carbon dioxide levels. Even if the United States, Canada and Europe all reduced their hydrocarbon use and CO2 emissions to zero, global atmospheric levels would continue to rise.

This radical chic energy/economic policy may be fashionable in the elite university parlors of Berkeley and Cambridge. But it is economic euthanasia for millions of struggling working class Americans.

The percentage of Americans below the poverty line is the highest in 15 years, the Census Bureau reports. Millions are barely getting by, through a mixture of unemployment and welfare benefits, pooled incomes and combined households. Especially for the 24 states that rely on coal for over half of their electricity, restricting coal use would be economically ruinous. For them, the Black Crosses represent RIP for jobs, modern living standards, and the progress the Civil Rights Revolution promised in America.

Around the world, the Black Crosses symbolize disease and death for millions. Over 3.5 billion people worldwide still do not have electricity, or enjoy its countless benefits only a few hours a week.

For them, anti-coal campaigns mean no lights or refrigeration, no jobs, no modern hospitals and schools. They mean lives spent foraging for manure and cutting trees in wildlife habitats, for heating and cooking fires that cause rampant lung disease. They mean walking miles with canisters of water so laden with bacteria and parasites that the next drink can kill a parent or child. For them the Black Cross movement equals Black Death.

The Black Cross militants and allied groups say absolutely nothing about these needless, unspeakable, intolerable conditions. They invent all kinds of eco-hobgoblins, but ignore the real, life-or-death threats that real people endure every day. The militants might promote solar ovens, solar panels on huts and a few wind turbines for villages – enough to power a light bulb, radio and 1-cubic-foot refrigerator. But they oppose the abundant, dependable, affordable energy that only coal (or natural gas) power generation can bring to the world’s poorest countries, communities and families.

So when you see one of their Black Crosses or self-serving news releases, remember what they really commemorate. Opposition to jobs, decent living standards and civil rights progress here in America. Opposition to life-enhancing, life-saving electricity for billions who have yet to enjoy any of the basic necessities and comforts that electricity brings. And perpetuation of poverty, misery, disease and death in far too many communities all over our planet.

Give thanks to God for the blessings that electricity brings. And resolve to champion real environmental and social justice for millions of Americans, and billions of destitute people worldwide.

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September 30, 2010