

DO YOU HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN HEATING AND EATING? MILLIONS IN THE UK DO.

ENERGY EXTORTION FORCES THOUSANDS INTO POVERTY

What is fuel poverty?

The accepted definition is that any household spending more than 10% of its income on energy consumption is in fuel poverty. Of course, this is just the boundary line, and many households in the UK are forced either to spend significantly more than 10% of their income on energy - or to go without adequate heating.

families and pensioners, but everyone will feel the brunt of the rising prices. More and more families who never previously had any serious worries about energy costs will find their budgets stretched, particularly with the extra burden being placed on the economy due to the irresponsible behaviour of the banks, which has led to the credit crunch and the upcoming recession. With every ten percent rise in energy costs, 400,000 more people are drawn into fuel poverty. Furthermore, with UK industry paying more for energy than their European competitors, 100,000 manufacturing jobs are now on the line. The knock on effects of job losses on this scale, coupled with significantly less free capital in the economy could be disastrous for everyone in the UK.

Who is to blame?

The parliamentary select committee at Westminster pinpointed several causes of the energy crisis. While it is true that the price of gas has been linked to oil on the international market, meaning that the rising oil price has forced up gas prices internationally, there are

particular reasons that the UK has been more harshly affected than our European neighbours. Specifically, a lack of investment in infrastructure, and limited ability to stockpile gas has harmed the UK consumer. More worryingly, the committee found evidence of cartel-like behaviour in fixing prices amongst the so called "Big Six" energy companies: NPower, Centrica, EDF, Scottish Power, EON and Scottish & Southern Energy. These companies are guilty of extorting money from their customers, particularly those who live on very low-incomes, who must pre-pay for their energy consumption at a punitive rate. However, most blame must be given to our successive governments, who have overseen years of decay in the UK energy industry: utter failure to invest in green energy alternatives to gas and oil, failure to update aging infrastructure, and failure to protect consumers from greedy privatised energy companies.

Consumer gas prices have raised by around 100% in the last four years, and with yet more rises on the horizon, more and more families will be forced into fuel poverty. Energy Action Scotland notes that many families are forced literally to choose between a cooking a hot meal and turning on the heater each evening. And, according to National Energy Action, winter mortality rates in the UK are already markedly higher than those of other countries with similar climates and standards of living. With prices already so high that many struggle to afford them, further rises will mean more families struggling to feed and heat themselves, and will indubitably lead to yet more temperature related deaths.

Who does it affect?

Fuel poverty has its greatest effect on low income

