

Lenin's definition of communism – soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country – sounds a little whimsical today. The Russians never got communism; but they did get Boris Pasternak's novel on the electrification of the Soviet Union, and the rest of the world got Nigel Osborne's Chamber Opera, also on the electrification of the Soviet Union. Lenin was at least correct in recognising the importance of electricity in the industrial development of the Soviet Union.



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This edition of *Focus* reviews the electrification of South Africa, but goes beyond straightforward supply side issues and considers alternative energy sources, sustainability, and the social impact of the energy sector.

Philip Lloyd reviews the historical structure of electricity supply and traces the development from the early 1920s to the present. He is pointed about the supply crisis which led to the blackouts in 2008, and he brings the distribution problem into sharp focus.

Shaun Nel reviews our progress since 'the sovereign electricity shock in the country in 2008'. He is particularly concerned about the regulatory clarity in the industry, and the relationship between public and private sector players. Indeed if one central theme runs through this entire edition of *Focus* it relates to the lack of regulatory clarity and, what Nel refers to as the "strategic and regulatory vacuum which the Independent Power Producers" find themselves in.

David Fig, in assessing the issues around Fracking, draws attention to the problems of consultation and transparency when deciding on the uptake of new technology or development projects. He cautions us that "when citizens are left out of debates confined to government and the business community, the only means of influencing policy is to petition, protest, or litigate, usually after the horse has bolted".

Hilary Joffe's account of the challenges facing South Africa's electricity supply industry takes as a starting point that we have to "keep the lights on". (Even then she does concede that we may have to switch some of the lights off!) She deals persuasively with the perception that Eskom and its Shareholder are averse to competition, but she emphasises the importance of opening up the industry to new players.

The papers by Doug Kuni, and Thomas Garner and Stephanie Kock remind us of just how important it is for political leaders to sketch out their vision for the society and then leave the realisation of that vision to appropriately competent men and women who can ensure service delivery. In this case the visionary is Smuts and the technocrat is HJ van der Bijl, and the year is 1920 - the same year in which Lenin sought to drive the electrification of the Soviet Union.

Doug Kuni identifies a set of three important policy initiatives which government should implement and which entails an immediate revision of the *entire* suite of regulatory documents to ensure that they are concurrent and have congruency.

Thomas Garner and Stephanie Kock stress the importance of certainty (in this

case of electricity supply) in an uncertain (economic and regulatory) environment. Their sober assessment is that South Africa has lost a decade of planning in the supply of electricity. Their timely reminder of Van der Bijl's observation – that “the greatest and noblest function of science and engineering is to raise the standard of living of the human being” – should serve to remind us of the moral and social imperatives of service delivery.

Rob Adam and Steve Thomas evaluate the role which nuclear energy should play in our energy mix.

Adam's *five lessons from Fukushima* are an important reminder of the limitations of believing in any one approach to resolving the energy challenges we face. In his call for “a more lateral marketing approach built on the confidence-building participation of ordinary people” there is a resonance with David Fig's concerns about transparency and consultation even though their responses to policy initiatives may differ vastly. Rob Adam's concluding remarks, that “the nuclear industry treats the world like a big science class, exciting a few people, alienating others and paralysing the vast majority with reams of facts” will resonate with many readers.

Steve Thomas examines systematically the costs of nuclear energy. His assessment is a sober one and he reminds us that the Fukushima disaster can only serve to increase the costs of nuclear energy and probably the complexity of a new generation of nuclear designs.

In addition to these challenges, South Africans should be especially on their guard to ensure that the commissioning of nuclear power stations and the tender processes relating to this commissioning is carried out scrupulously. The country simply cannot afford another corruption fiasco similar to that which followed in the wake of the arms deal.

Joe Roussos provides, if not an obituary, then a lament of the solar parks. He neatly points out that the story of the Solar Park demonstrates a worrying lack of coordination within the Department of Energy and between the Department and other players.

Jonas Mosia offers a class perspective on the debate about the energy challenges we face in South Africa. His views are more derived from Lenin than Smuts as he reminds us that the subsidies accorded to business are invariably paid for by poorer consumers.

Mike Roussos ends our discussion by reviewing energy planning and sustainability. His paper could very well have been titled ‘*Can we keep the lights on without killing the earth?*’ Roussos poses nine questions which policy-makers should address when attempting to create a local green economy. These questions in themselves provide a framework for further discussion and debate.

We end with Antoinette Handley's review of Stephan Chan's new book ‘*Southern Africa: Old Treacheries and New Deceits*’.