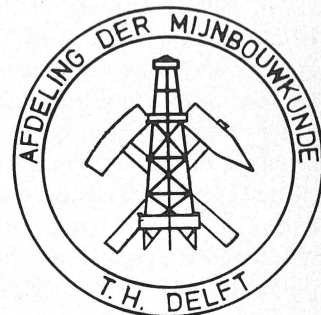


SPECIAL SECTION

RESEARCH ON THE COAL BENEATH THE NETHERLANDS



Editor and collator of this section: Prof. Dr. J.J. Dozy

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I-INTRODUCTION

J.J. DOZY²

The last carload of coal left the last Dutch colliery in the province of Limburg in 1974. At that time the price of oil jumped and a considerable increase in energy costs in general could be foreseen.

The energy policy of the government was and is directed towards stimulation of the use of coal for power generation. The question thus arose, whether the decision to abandon coal mining entirely should be upheld or not under the circumstances (MINISTERIE VAN ECONOMISCHE ZAKEN, 1974). A

commission was appointed by the Minister of Economic Affairs to advise on the merits of further exploitation of the coal reserves below this country. The COMMISSION MARTENS (1977), named after its president, concluded in 1977 that the resumption of coal mining would be too costly and that underground gasification of coal could not be expected to contribute for several decades. It was recommended to follow developments abroad and review the situation from time to time.

The entirely passive policy advocated caused a reaction. Two learned societies, the Royal Geological and Mining Society of The Netherlands (KNMG) and the Royal Institute of Engineers in The Netherlands (KIVI) as well as the

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Netherlands Energy Research Foundation (ECN) at a symposium in The Hague, October 1979 (KONINKLIJK INSTITUUT VAN INGENIEURS & ENERGIEONDERZOEK CENTRUM NEDERLAND, 1979), publicly drew attention to the fact that the knowledge of the coal occurrence below the country was long outdated, that the technology and economy of conventional mining beyond the borders was advancing continuously and that serious research was being undertaken in neighbouring countries on underground gasification of coal. It was considered essential to stimulate research in these fields in order to be in a position to profit from developments and eventual results abroad, even considering the long term aspect of the problems. Also the Mining Council (Mijnraad) proposed a modern geological reconnaissance of coal resources at depths less than 1500 m.

In accordance with these recommendations the Minister advised Parliament, February 1980, to support long term research into new and advanced extraction possibilities of Dutch coal (MINISTERIE VAN ECONOMISCHE ZAKEN EN VAN VOLKSGEZONDHEID EN MILIEUHYGIËNE, 1980).

In March 1980 the three mentioned societies held a symposium at Heerlen (BLESS, 1980) reviewing the problems from a technical and scientific point of view. It was concluded that the possible utilisation of deep coal was of sufficient long term importance to justify a Netherlands effort within the framework of a Western European approach. The institution of a working group was recommended to sponsor, guide and coordinate such studies, also within the framework of the National Research Programme for Coal (NOK).

After parliamentary agreement the Minister appropriated 30 million guilders for a first phase of assessment of the coal deposits below certain parts of the country, to be carried out by the Geological Survey of The Netherlands (RGD). In June 1981 a Commission (Begeleidingscommissie Inventarisatie-onderzoek Nederlandse Kolenvoorkomens, BINK, ANON, 1981) was installed to supervise the assessment, to advise regarding research and development on the utilisation of Netherlands coal, and to coordinate and sponsor such activities.

The writer was invited to organize a series of brief lectures reviewing the research on the coal beneath The Netherlands, to be presented at the meeting of the Royal Geological and Mining Society of The Netherlands, in Delft, February 12,

1982. Since the time available for the review was limited speakers were obliged to restrict their presentations to the essential. The following papers cover the talks given: reports of work performed or in progress, rather than original contributions. Nevertheless, it was felt useful to publish these proceedings of the Society's 1982 Delft meeting, because together they review the present situation, which is believed to be of a general interest.

The papers are brought together under three headings: (1) the geological/geophysical reconnaissance, which started in the fall of 1981, (2) research in the field of conventional mining, and finally (3) subjects on Underground Coal Gasification (UCG). The papers should convey an impression of ideas and projects presently in gestation at the Delft Mining Faculty. They represent the modest beginnings of a new program in the field of deep coal extraction undertaken at the national centre of mining technology.

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