The government, under the sway of the Big Six energy companies, wants to build up to forty new gas-fired power stations. If the ‘dash for gas’ goes ahead, our energy bills will sky-rocket even further.

This is a short guide to the ‘dash for gas’, the alternative and the fight ahead.

Fuel Poverty Action
www.fuelpovertyaction.org.uk
In October 2012, 21 protesters entered West Burton gas power station in Nottinghamshire by night. Having evaded security, they climbed up and occupied two of its chimneys and shut the power station down for an entire week.

The protesters took a real personal risk. They spent a week camping hundreds of feet in the air in the freezing cold. They came down from the chimneys to face the threat of a lifetime of debt at the hands of a £5million civil case from EDF Energy, the owners of the power station. Even though huge public pressure has forced EDF to drop the civil case, the protesters still face the possibility of jail for their action.

What, then, drove these people to take such a drastic and high-risk form of protest? The action was taken in the name of fighting fuel poverty, tackling climate change and moving towards clean, affordable and democratic energy.

But what has gas got to do with fuel poverty? Why should we be worried about the world warming up when the weather is so cold? And is there an alternative to building more gas power stations if we want to keep the lights on and to keep our bills down?

This pamphlet aims to answer these questions and to give you some ideas about a future that Fuel Poverty Action think is worth fighting for.
What’s really pushing up our energy bills?

We all know that politicians, big companies and the media have a habit of telling lies. On the question of why energy bills have risen so much in recent years, they’ve all been telling big ones.

The first lie is that energy bills are rising because of the costs of investing in renewable energy like solar power, wind power and energy generated from tides and waves. This lie goes against all of the evidence. The truth is that the main factor pushing up our energy bills is the rising cost of generating our energy from gas.

- **The average UK household’s energy bill increased by £360 between 2004 and 2011.**

- **Less than 10 per cent of this increase was because of the cost of investment in renewable energy.**

- **In contrast, 60 per cent of this increase was due to the rising cost of gas.**

The ‘dash for gas’: who stands to gain?

If it’s the rising cost of gas that’s pushing up the bills, then why do the government and the energy companies want more gas? The answer is that the ‘dash for gas’ makes sense for the energy companies’ profits. The alternative of renewable energy is a threat to the energy companies’ business models, which rely on big centralised fossil fuel power stations. They have invested in and made their careers on gas and oil. Their bottom line is a high return on their investments, not cheap clean energy, warm homes or a safe environment.

The sad fact is that the government is acting in the energy companies’ interests, not ours. The energy companies have key politicians in their pockets, they buy secret lobbying meetings with ministers and their members of staff are even brought in to work on energy policy at the Department of Energy and Climate Change.
Why more gas means bigger bills...

The UK is already very reliant on burning gas to generate energy. Gas is used to power the majority of our heating and almost half of our electricity.  

Experts predict that international gas prices will keep rising. As oil supplies run out and old coal power stations shut down, demand for gas across the world is increasing. A result of increased global demand for gas is higher prices – this is why gas prices are sky-rocketing.

The most recent official prediction is that if the government’s plan to build more gas power stations goes ahead, then our bills could be up to £600 more expensive by 2050. In contrast, if we invested in renewables instead of gas, then our bills would rise by just £100 by 2020, before starting to fall in 2030.  

- **Investing in renewables instead of gas would save UK households hundreds of pounds every year on their fuel bills.**
- **But the government and the Big Six want to increase our dependence on gas by building up to forty new gas power stations.**
- **If the ‘dash for gas’ goes ahead, we’ll be locked into decades of sky-rocketing energy bills. This will mean more poverty, ill health and winter deaths.**

Where do we get our gas?

Britain used to extract most of its gas from the North Sea. But as these supplies run out, we’re starting to import our gas from further and further afield. In 2011, the UK spent over £4billion on gas imported from Qatar. We also import gas from Egypt, Algeria, Yemen, Trinidad & Tobago and Iran.

Rationing, shortages and vulnerability

In the midst of this year’s freezing spring, politicians and energy companies told us that black-outs, shortages and gas rationing could be expected. When keeping the heating and the lights on depends upon the supply of imported gas, this is to be expected – we’re left vulnerable to sudden changes in energy supply in other countries.

As well as risking sky-rocketing fuel bills, increasing our dependence on gas means increasing the risk of sudden energy shortages. In contrast, renewable power would create a reliable, self-sufficient energy system.
What is ‘fracking’?

A controversial new method of getting gas from the ground has hit the headlines recently. Fracking, sometimes known as ‘shale gas’ or ‘unconventional gas’, involves releasing gas from rocks by shooting high pressure jets of chemical liquid into holes drilled deep into the ground.

Fracking is underway in the UK in Blackpool, more sites are planned in Wales and Kent, and George Osborne just announced tax breaks for fracking in his recent budget.

Some who stand to profit tout fracking as a cheap form of gas due to reports of cheap gas from fracking in the US. However, everyone, from Ofgem, to BP, to the Energy Secretary, agree that **fracking would not bring down energy bills in the UK**.²

Moreover, fracking contaminates local water - communities in the US near to fracking rigs have been able to set their tap-water alight due to high gas content. It also appears to trigger earthquakes.⁷

People living near fracking rigs in the US can set their tap-water alight.
Gas and the changing weather

Have you noticed that the weather seems to be changing? The coldest spring in decades, mass flooding, heat waves - unpredictable and extreme weather is becoming more normal.

Burning fossil fuels – coal, oil and gas – releases ‘greenhouse gasses’ like carbon dioxide and methane. These gases trap heat in the atmosphere and this, in turn, causes the world to warm up. This is climate change.

Scientists have agreed on this theory for decades. A recent independent poll showed that 97–98 per cent of climate scientists agree with this consensus: climate change is happening and it’s happening because of human activity.8

There are people who have an interest in spreading misinformation and lies to persuade us otherwise. For instance, a 2007 Channel 4 documentary called ‘The Great Global Warming Swindle’ was slammed by leading scientists for its distortion of the truth. Many of those involved in the film were funded by fossil fuel companies, just as tobacco companies funded denial of the link between smoking and cancer.9

In fact, we are already feeling the effects of climate change in the UK. Scientists have linked this spring’s freezing weather to melting arctic ice due to climate change.10 They have also warned that recent flooding, heat waves and rising food prices are linked to climate change as well.11 If we don’t change track, these problems will get even more serious, causing more death and destruction both here and in other countries.

We can stop climate change getting worse than it needs to be. We have to take it seriously, for our own sake and for the sake of our children and grandchildren.

If the world’s warming up, then why is it so cold!?

Cold weather does not disprove the reality of climate change. This year’s cold spring was caused by melting Arctic ice, which is itself a result of climate change.12 In general, climate change will not mean that the weather is always warmer. Instead, there will be a gradual trend of the earth and seas warming up, causing extremes of heat, cold, drought, flooding and storms.13
The Dash for Gas
The ‘dash for gas’ would throw away any chance of Britain playing a part in avoiding the worst of climate change. As well as being increasingly expensive, gas is a dirty, polluting fossil fuel. The head of the government’s independent advisory committee on climate change recently wrote to Ed Davey, Energy Secretary, warning that the ‘dash for gas’ would be incompatible with the UK meeting its legislated climate change targets. Going back on these targets may encourage other countries to do the same, multiplying the damage caused.14

Increased flooding is linked to climate change
A cheaper, cleaner alternative...

There is an alternative that would bring down fuel bills & tackle climate change: renewable energy.

Renewable energy is a new technology and, like information technology in computers and phones, its costs are coming down rapidly as technology improves and as mass production brings economies of scale. Some sources of renewable power are currently as cheap or cheaper than gas is now - and other renewable sources will be cheaper than gas in a few years time. Because the cost of gas will keep rising, it makes no sense to invest in gas: there is a cheaper alternative.

Spain generates one third of its energy from renewables, while Portugal now generates three-quarters of its energy renewably. As a windy island, the UK is one of the best-placed nations in the world to take advantage of the sea and the wind: massive resources that could be making us all much better off – bringing down our fuel bills and tackling climate change.

- Energy from windfarms built onshore will be the same price as gas by 2015.
- Energy from windfarms built off the shore will be the same price as gas by 2020.
- The UK has around half of Europe’s tidal energy resources – energy generated from the movement of tides and waves has the potential to meet 20 per cent of the UK’s energy demand.
- Since the beginning of 2011, the costs of solar (sun) power have declined by 60 per cent.

There are many other sources of renewable energy like small-scale hydro-electric power - which allows communities to generate power from water – and geothermal energy – energy generated from the heat below the earth’s surface.

Brixton energy co-op
Brixton in South London is home to the UK’s first co-operatively owned renewable energy project on a social housing estate. The project installed a solar power station on the roof of Elmore House. The estate now receives energy at 20 per cent of the cost of standard commercial rates. Find out more at www.brixtonenergy.co.uk.
False solutions: nuclear & biofuels

Not all forms of energy being touted as ‘clean’ should be trusted.

**Nuclear power is expensive.** When it was brought in we were told it would make electricity “too cheap to meter” - but the costs have skyrocketed. Despite promises, it is subsidised through our bills. Wind power is cheaper. Nuclear does little to tackle climate change. Even the most ambitious investment in nuclear power would reduce carbon emissions by just four percent by 2025. And, we can’t forget the dangers of nuclear power, as were demonstrated in the Fukushima disaster in Japan two years ago.

Another false solution is **biofuels** – big companies burning food crops and trees as fuel (wood chip ‘biomass’). This is causing rising food prices, hunger and deforestation, while worsening climate change. And we’re paying for this through hidden biofuel subsidies on our energy bills. Then we’re told it’s ‘green measures that are pushing our bills up’!

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**Should we be worried about wind power?**

- **It’s not always windy – does that make wind power unreliable?** No – for one thing, it’s very rare for there to be no wind in any region of the UK – the power generated in one region can be **shared with others**. Also, the power output of windfarms can be **forecast accurately** in advance. When we know that it’s going to be less windy, we can switch to other energy sources without a problem. Finally, **energy storage** technology is being developed, which allows us to store the power generated by turbines so it’s ready to go when it’s less windy.

- **Do wind farms make people sick?** A recent study showed that any ill health experienced by people living near wind farms is more likely to have been caused by the **false expectations** of illness spread by anti-wind groups than by any factors relating to the wind farms themselves.

- **Do windfarms kill birds?** **For every one bird killed by a turbine, 5,820 are killed striking buildings.** New planning laws require an assessment of the impact of turbines on local wildlife before new windfarms are built.

- **But aren’t wind turbines ugly?** This is, of course, a matter of personal taste. Many find **grey smoke-belching gas power stations** - or oil tankers parked on the horizons of our beaches - ugly as well. It’s worth remembering that a lot of our wind power can come from **offshore, out of sight.** As for wind turbines built on land, we have to ask ourselves whether the benefits of this cheap, clean source of energy outweigh this concern. Many communities who own and benefit from turbines find them beautiful.
Why we need renewable energy…

1. **Renewables would bring down energy bills.**
   If the dash for gas goes ahead, then our bills could be up to £600 more expensive by 2050. In contrast, if we invest in renewables instead of gas, then our bills would rise by just £100 by 2020, before starting to fall in 2030.25

2. **Renewables are necessary to tackle climate change.**
   Renewables would stop most of the greenhouse gas emissions from the energy sector.

3. **Renewable technology is viable now.**
   We currently generate around 10 per cent of our energy from renewable sources. In the first quarter of 2013, Portugal generated two-thirds of its energy from renewables.26 Spain generates almost a third of its energy from renewables while Germany generates around a quarter.27 The government’s independent climate advisors estimate that it is possible for 65 per cent of our energy to be generated by renewables by 2030.28 The WWF put this figure at 88 per cent.29

4. **Renewable energy would be more reliable.**
   Instead of relying on imported gas, a combination of wind, sun, wave and tidal power would allow us to generate our own energy and develop a self-sufficient and reliable energy system.

5. **Renewable energy is what the public want.**
   79 per cent of the UK are in favour of renewables, four per cent are against.30

6. **Renewable energy would create jobs.**
   Renewable energy is already making a vital contribution to the failing UK economy. The CBI recently calculated that the green industries contributed a third of economic growth in 2010-11, employing just under one million people.31 The mass investment in new renewable energy infrastructure we need would create hundreds of thousands more skilled jobs. So would a program to make UK homes insulated and energy efficient.

7. **Renewables are more democratic.**
   The old forms of energy – coal, oil and gas – require big centralised power stations. In contrast, renewable energy works best when it is produced on a small-scale basis, under community ownership, produced for the benefit of communities.

It’s understandable that rural communities are unhappy when windfarms are built in their communities without those living there having a say or any
promise of benefiting. But what if, instead, the energy produced was used to power the local area with financial returns going back into the local community who, in turn, enjoyed lower energy bills?

In Germany, 65 per cent of renewables are under individual or community ownership. Berlin’s local authority just made the decision to buy back their energy grid from private companies and to move to 100 per cent renewable energy.

This move towards renewable energy democracy has already begun in the UK. In co-operative energy projects in Brixton, Bristol, Brighton and the Penines, local communities have invested money in buying their own wind turbines and solar panels and have started to generate their own energy, with all money raised going back into the hands of the community.
Fighting for the future: No Dash for Gas

Last October, 21 protesters climbed up two chimneys at West Burton gas-fired power station in Nottinghamshire in an action called ‘No Dash for Gas’. They set up camp 300ft high in the air, shutting down the power station for seven days. West Burton, owned by EDF Energy, is one of the first of the new gas power stations that is being built.

The protesters came down from the chimneys to a £5million lawsuit from EDF Energy with the threat of their homes being repossessed, future wages being docked and a lifetime of debt.

This fuelled a real public backlash – hundreds of people filed complaints to EDF and changed their energy supplier while over 70,000 people signed a petition calling on EDF to drop the case. After just a matter of weeks, EDF dropped the case, having taken considerable damage to their brand already, fearing more protest and more terrible publicity.
Having won this battle, the protesters now face the possibility of jail for their action. But we have to ask, who are the real criminals: protesters taking a stand against dirty and expensive energy or EDF and the government, determined to undermine the right to protest to push ahead a ‘dash for gas’ that no-one else wants?

Climbing power station chimneys is a brave and bold form of action, but it’s not something that all of us can do, nor is it the only form of action that we can take...

- We can all switch our energy suppliers from the big energy companies to hit their profits. Find out more at www.edfoff.org.
- We can expose the government’s and companies’ lies, and make sure other people have access to real information.
- We can help get others on board with the fight against gas – our friends, families, neighbours, workplaces, campaign groups, trade unions.
- We can inform and mobilise our communities in public meetings and through public info stalls.
- We can picket and protest outside government departments and energy company offices.
- We can take civil disobedience and direct action, for instance, by blocking roads and occupying offices.
- We can get involved in community renewable energy projects to build our own alternatives.
- We can support the No Dash for Gas activists as they go through court.
- We can support each other when we can’t – or won’t – pay extortionate bills.
- We can Reclaim the Power this August (see overleaf)…
Reclaim the Power this August

This Summer, No Dash for Gas will be returning to West Burton gas power station in Nottinghamshire for a four day protest camp called Reclaim the Power. The camp will be 17-20 August.

You don't have to be up for climbing chimneys to come along...
The aim is to get hundreds of people together on the doorstep of the power station for a big, participatory protest that the government and the energy companies can't ignore. The camp will be a chance to meet other people opposed to the dash for gas, to plan resistance, discuss alternatives and build our movement. There are likely to be different forms of protest and action happening - you can get involved in whatever you feel comfortable with.

You don't have to be up for camping to come along...
If you’re not able to camp or don’t like the idea, you can come along for a day! No Dash for Gas want to make the camp as accessible as possible and will try to make sure anyone who wants to participate is able to. One option being explored is a day trip to the camp including travel to and from London. Several members of the Greater London Pensioners’ Association have already committed to coming along and we’re going to explore the options together. Contact Fuel Poverty Action using the contact details below to see how these plans are shaping up.

Find out more about the camp at: www.nodashforgas.org.uk.

Fuel Poverty Action

Fuel Poverty Action are a grassroots campaign group. We use community organising, protest and direct action to take on the robbers driving fuel poverty: profiteering energy companies, corrupt government and greedy landlords. We work towards a clean, fair and democratic energy system and economy, which produces and distributes energy on the basis of need, not private profit. We work in solidarity with a diverse range of groups including pensioners’ campaigns, disabled activists and women’s organisations.

Visit fuelpovertyaction.org.uk to find out more.

Any questions about the content of this booklet or anything else? Get in touch at fuelpovertyaction@gmail.com or call 07586 482157.

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