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## Made in China: 'Great British Energy' Solar Panels Spark Ethical and Economic Questions

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July 20, 2025

– Categories: *Finance*



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The first rollout of so-called “Great British Energy” solar panels in English schools has revealed an uncomfortable reality: none of the panels were made in Britain. Instead, the first 11 schools to install panels under the flagship scheme sourced their equipment from Chinese manufacturers Aiko and Longi. While the government heralded the initiative as the first major project of Great British Energy (GBE), a new state-owned energy company created ““by the British people, for the British people,”” the supply chain tells a very different story.

The revelation raises critical questions about transparency, industrial policy, and Britain's broader energy strategy. Despite its branding, there is little that is inherently British about the solar technology being installed. China currently dominates the global solar manufacturing industry, controlling more than 80% of all stages of the panel production process, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA). With such a firm grip on the market, it's no surprise that British institutions turned to Chinese suppliers. However, doing so exposes the U.K. to geopolitical and ethical risks, particularly in light of serious allegations tied to forced labour in parts of China's renewable supply chain.

Labour MP Sarah Champion, chair of the International Development Select Committee, voiced concern about the decision to source panels from Chinese firms. In a statement to the *BBC*, she said: "I'm really excited about the principle of GB Energy. But it's taxpayers' money, and we should not be supporting slave labour with that money. And wherever possible, we should be supporting good working practices and buy British if we can."

Champion pointed out that solar panels are manufactured in democracies such as Taiwan and Canada, and even here in the U.K., albeit at a higher price point. But for her, the issue goes beyond economics. "Yes, unfortunately, in the short term, solar panels are probably going to be slightly more expensive. But buying British ensures we support our economy, working standards, and national security."

Both Longi and Aiko told the *BBC* that they have zero tolerance for forced labour and maintain strict policies throughout their supply chains. Nevertheless, concerns persist. The Xinjiang region of China, where some solar panel materials originate, has been linked to the exploitation of the Uyghur Muslim minority. As such, earlier this year, U.K. law was tightened to prevent GBE from investing in renewable technologies if there is credible evidence of modern slavery involved in their production.

The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero maintains that all contracts issued under the school solar scheme complied with current modern slavery regulations. A GBE spokesperson stated that the initiative adheres to all relevant procurement laws and ethical standards.

Even so, the situation underlines a persistent challenge for Britain's renewables sector: how to reconcile rapid decarbonisation goals with the need for industrial sovereignty, ethical supply chains, and economic prudence. Overreliance on Chinese manufacturing, particularly

when tied to human rights concerns, undermines public confidence and raises national security flags.

For a company launched as a patriotic cornerstone of the U.K.'s green future, GBE's heavy dependence on foreign-made hardware feels out of step with its founding promise. It also illustrates the consequences of years of industrial outsourcing, leaving Britain without the domestic capacity to manufacture key technologies at scale.

If the U.K. is serious about reshaping its energy sector in a way that aligns with national values and long-term resilience, then investing in domestic renewables manufacturing must become a priority. For now, the story of Great British Energy's debut project may serve as a cautionary tale: a vision for home-grown energy undermined by global supply chains and ethical blind spots.