

As World Goes Nuclear Why Doesn't Germany?

by Rainer Apel

If you stroll along the busy downtown areas of Germany's bigger cities, you are almost certain to encounter a group of young people handing out leaflets next to a poster that asks the German population whether it is more backward, with its post-nuclear thinking than, for example, the so-called "developing nations" such as Morocco or Saudi Arabia, which are convinced that nuclear power is the technology of the future. Other posters point out the irony that numerous nations, far less developed than Germany, believe that maglev trains are the ideal transportation system, whereas many German politicians reject that system, although it was developed by German engineers.

These polemics, coming from the abundant campaign arsenal of the LaRouche Youth Movement, hit a real pro-technology ferment in the country, in favor of nuclear power and maglev projects, which still has difficulty getting into the open. As for nuclear development, it is gaining increasing support now, in the context of the intensifying public debate on the so-called global warming issue, because among energy resources, nuclear power is the one with the least greenhouse gas emissions. Even market speculators have discovered the benefits of nuclear power development: On April 23, the German edition of the *Financial Times* carried an investment column with the headline, "With Nuclear Power Against Global Warming," recommending that investors buy uranium stocks, as the mineral of the future. The down side of this is that speculation, notably by aggressive hedge funds, has quadrupled the market price of uranium in less than two years. It is urgent, therefore, that governments intervene, to control the pricing of such a strategic mineral.

There have been a number of prominent endorsements of nuclear power by business leaders and policy-makers in Germany, since mid-April. On April 23, financial market newswires reported that Michael Diekmann, the CEO of Allianz, Germany's leading insurance company, said in a statement on global warming that he "cannot imagine that Germany stay out of nuclear, if it wants to meet the climate protection criteria." And just a few days before, German Economics Minister Michael Glos, said in Hanover, at an event related to the traditional Springtime industrial exhibit there, that the next national election campaign in 2009, will have to take up the nuclear issue, in order to break through the present paralysis.



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The LaRouche movement in Dresden, Germany calls for a Russian-German energy alliance: “Yes to nuclear power!” For some 20 years, the LaRouche forces have stood almost alone in supporting nuclear power, but now some other Germans are coming to the realization that this is both safe, and necessary.

On May 3, E.ON, one of the largest power producers in Germany, presented its outlook for expansion to the East of Europe and to Turkey, in the wake of its recent takeover of a 30% share of Spain’s energy giant ENDESA. The Spanish firm holds stakes in numerous energy firms of Eastern and Southeastern Europe. There are E.ON plans to build nuclear power plants in Romania and Bulgaria, and the firm is also engaged in talks to find a partner also in Russia. That may become relevant in respect to Turkey’s intention to build its first three or four nuclear power plants in the coming decade—a project which Russian energy firms are very much interested in.

As far as the future of nuclear power in Germany itself is concerned, E.ON’s CEO Wulf Bernotat said on May 3 that while his firm respects the Nuclear Exit Law* in Germany, he thinks the country will have to begin discussing nuclear, again, as there is “no other way” to meet the anti-emissions targets for 2020 and 2050. On May 7, Bernotat shifted into a higher gear, in an exclusive interview with *Die Welt*, a leading national news daily, complaining that the German government and most politicians talk a lot about the “protection of the environment,” but not about energy policy. The so-called “national energy summits” of government, industry, and experts have so far failed to produce a well-thought-out agenda, and the question of where energy is to come from in the fu-

*In 2000, the German government officially announced its intention to phase out nuclear power altogether by 2020; the legislation to implement this policy, subsequently adopted, is known as the Nuclear Exit Law.

ture, remains unsolved. Therefore, Bernotat hinted that it may prove useless to attend the next such summit, scheduled for July 3.

If Germany wants to keep the climate protection targets, it cannot have the illusion of replacing coal and nuclear with renewables, Bernotat said, insisting, “We cannot fill all of Germany with windmills.” He noted that it is absurd that top politicians tell him in private that the “nuclear power exit is nonsense,” but would never come out with that in public. The energy issue is left hostage to emotions; sober arguments are not possible in the public debate. Bernotat

also attacked the European Union Commission in Brussels for its strategy of deregulating energy prices and power grids, as creating obstacles for “expensive” investments in the energy industry.

Outside of the LaRouche Movement in Germany, which has always been a committed supporter of nuclear power development, some cautious first steps toward a revival of a constructive debate on nuclear technology, at least on the part of the Christian Democratic party, can be reported. On May 4, Katerina Reiche, deputy chairwoman of the CDU parliamentary group and nuclear safety spokeswoman of her party, said in Berlin that the climate protection agenda “puts enormous pressure on the (anti-nuclear) Social Democrats to rethink their policy.” Whereas nuclear technology alone would, in her view, not solve the greenhouse gas emissions problem, one thing, she stressed, is clear, namely that “without nuclear power, it cannot be done at all,” and the nuclear exit policy of the SPD has to be reviewed, therefore. And on May 7, Ronald Pofalla, general party manager of the Christian Democrats, said in Berlin, when announcing that his party will sharpen its political profile in preparation for the coming elections, that if Germany stays committed to a 30% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020, it cannot keep its present policy of walking away from nuclear power. While these are not yet the long-overdue endorsements of new nuclear power projects—these remarks still address the extension of licenses for existing power plants—but a first step in the right direction has been taken.