

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

No truce in nuclear power wars

While the CDU leaders are propitiating the ecologists, some among the party base are brave enough to say the truth.

The German government is committed to hold on to nuclear power technology, Environmental Affairs Minister Angela Merkel, who also oversees nuclear energy, stated on Aug. 11. An immediate end to nuclear power, as called for by the main two opposition parties, the Social Democrats and the Greens, would be “irresponsible” and “meaningful from neither a safety, nor from an economic viewpoint,” she said.

Fine and good. But she also announced that all transport of nuclear waste will be called off until the elections for national Parliament on Sept. 27. The government and the main ruling party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), are bending over backward to make concessions to the media and anti-nuclear “public opinion,” which is shaped by the media.

This propitiation of irrational ecologism has characterized the past 20 years of politics in Germany. Since 1978, no new nuclear power plant has been built, and the CDU leadership has abandoned its previous clear endorsement of nuclear technology. These days, as the CDU of incumbent Chancellor Helmut Kohl is not at all certain of winning the elections, the party is bowing to anti-nuclear sentiments even more than before. The CDU campaign platform gives verbal support to atomic energy, but only in the context of “reducing the CO₂ content of the atmosphere.”

There are many among CDU activists and voters who oppose nuclear power, either because they subscribe

to irrational fears about contamination, or because they do not dare say otherwise, on orders from the top leadership. The CDU leaders want to avoid any “nuclear provocation” of the greenie Social Democrats, who may be their partner in a new Grand Coalition, after Sept. 27.

But there are some at the party base, who refuse to shut up, for example, in the youth section, Junge Union. The JU in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia (N.R.W.), the biggest among the 16 state caucuses, passed a pro-nuclear resolution on May 9, at its state convention in Ahaus—one of the sites for the storage of nuclear waste.

The Ahaus Resolution states: “The nuclear power plants that are in operation in Germany contribute to a safe and efficient energy supply. . . . We will not be able to do without them in the future. That is why now, the legal and actual preconditions for investments in the sphere of nuclear technology have to be created, so that in the future, new and improved nuclear power plants can be built in Germany.”

The paper also warns that the general take-down of nuclear technology is bringing the nation to the verge of losing its high-tech engineering skills in that sphere. This refers to the alarming fact that among German universities, only one is left, in Aachen, which offers a full course in nuclear physics. There are already too few students studying nuclear physics to be able to operate the 19 existing power plants,

during the first decade of the next century. And new enrollments in nuclear physics are down to one-fifth of what they were in 1990.

The Ahaus Resolution also endorses the return to high-temperature reactor development (the gas-cooled THTR), as well as starting up the long-planned, but much-delayed, International Thermonuclear Fusion Experimental Reactor (ITER) at the earliest opportunity. This is the only political initiative in Germany to date, outside those taken by the LaRouche movement, for post-fission technologies in the nuclear sector.

“The N.R.W. Junge Union regrets,” the Ahaus Resolution states, “that the inherently safe and future-oriented technology of the high-temperature reactor is not being pursued in Germany, because of red-green policies, and it denounces the fact that the HTR [experimental site] in Hamm-Üntrop was switched off by the [Social Democratic Party-led] state government, as a regression in energy policy.

“Research in the field of thermonuclear fusion therefore has to be propelled forward. The delay of the start-up of the international ITER research project by three years is understandable, in this tense world economic situation and in view of the high costs of 6 billion euro [\$7 billion], but it is also regrettable. Building such a facility must be given the highest priority for all involved states, in view of the threatening climatic catastrophe.”

Well, there it is again, the seemingly inevitable obeisance to the absurd CO₂ debate; but still, the Ahaus Resolution as a whole is far less propitiatory to “public opinion” and more pro-technology-minded than the rest of the CDU platforms. If the CDU as a whole were more like that, Germany would be much better off, on the eve of the elections. Instead, the CDU is on the retreat in this “nuclear war.”