

Will Germany Revive Nuclear Power?

by Rainer Apel

A great disservice done to the German economy under the present government coalition of Social Democrats and Greens, is the formalized ban on nuclear technology. Existing power plants can be operated until the year 2020, but new plants are not getting permits. Instead, the Greens and their radical-ecologist co-thinkers among the Social Democrats keep dreaming of a German energy future based mainly on solar and wind power.

The extraordinary heat wave of this past Summer, which showed a lot of sun but almost no wind, has worked a backlash against the Greens, because many parts of Europe were able to meet demands only through extra purchases of electricity from other countries, which fortunately did have surpluses to sell. Also Germany, where a lot of money has been invested in windmill parks that stood still for several Summer weeks this year, was forced to purchase electricity abroad. This situation has worked to the advantage of the several hundred citizen initiatives in Germany that are opposed to the windmill nightmare, for reasons ranging from complaints about noise, to concerns about safety, and anger about rising energy consumption prices. Anti-windmill groups, which were neglected by politicians and by the media, are now being paid more attention.

This also has to do with the international shock caused by the giant power blackout Aug. 14-16 in the northeastern regions of the United States. On Aug. 28, a blackout occurred in a similar though smaller way in London, affecting a half-million citizens during the rush-hour. Back in June, Italy suffered a national electricity blackout.

Unions, Politicians Shift

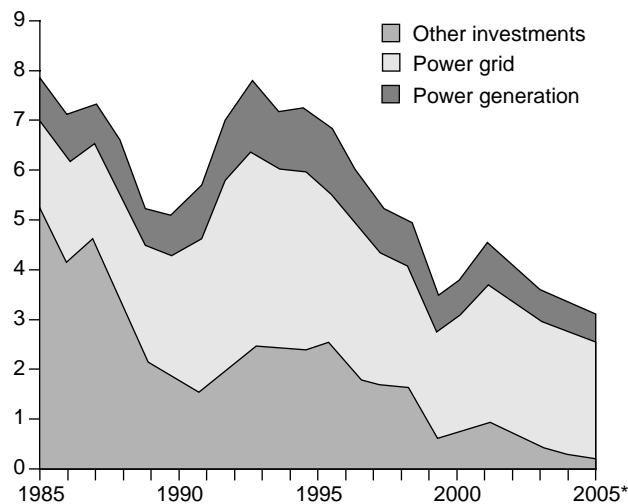
All this has sparked a new debate in Germany about a return to nuclear power. On Aug. 29, Günter Schmoldt, national chairman of the labor union of the energy and utility workers, said that these blackouts contained the message that for a modern industrial nation, a secure power supply cannot be provided without nuclear technology. Building new nuclear power plants in Germany must not be ruled out, Schmoldt said, in what is a statement the more remarkable, as the labor unions in Germany usually polemicize against nuclear power.

Following Schmoldt, two leading Christian Democrats took to the media to call for a return to nuclear technology.

FIGURE 1

Investments by German Power Utilities

(Euro Billions)



*After 2002, Planned Investments.

Sources: IFO Institute; EIR.

Due to much higher investments into the power grid in the past, the German electric power system is still more reliable than those in the United States, Italy, or Britain, where large-scale blackouts have occurred. But investments into power generation and power grids in Germany have declined by 50% since the start of liberalization (deregulation) five years ago.

Angela Merkel, national chairwoman of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), said in an Aug. 31 interview with Germany's leading Sunday mass newspaper, *Bild am Sonntag*, that the German economy would be better off, if pioneer technology sectors of industry were no longer boycotted by the Social Democratic-Green government. "Pharmaceutical industry, genetic research, or nuclear power, many branches of the future are being driven abroad," Merkel said. "I am asking myself: What shall we earn our money with in Germany, in the future? Just with unprofitable wind energy, maybe? A government led by the CDU-CSU would permit the utilities to operate nuclear power plants as long as they want." And Christian Wulff, Governor of the northern state of Lower Saxony, told *Welt am Sonntag* another leading Sunday paper, on the same day, "The energy blackout in the United States shows us how vulnerable the power supply of the industrial states can be." The main conclusion to be drawn from that, is "to permit the industry to consider new, technologically improved nuclear power plants and to begin building them, again," Wulff said, adding the important remark that "only under those circumstances, will young Germans decide to study nuclear physics again."

Indeed, the small handful of young Germans that is coura-

geous enough to enroll for studying nuclear physics at universities, can hardly expect ever to work in this profession inside a nuclear technology sector that is being phased out in Germany. The situation is well-known abroad, and it has occurred repeatedly during state visits of German politicians, that their hosts in India, China, Russia, and South Africa have offered their own know-how and manpower, to help Germany overcome bottlenecks in the nuclear power sector.

Investment Has Fallen

An important contribution to this debate was made by Joachim Schneider, board member of ABB, a leading nuclear-technology producer, and head of the energy section of the German association of the electrical engineering and electronics industry, ZVEI. In an interview with the daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on Aug. 30, Schneider emphasized that wind energy, for principled reasons, cannot solve energy problems in Germany. For every 100 megawatts of wind power installations, one has to keep a reserve of 80 megawatts available from other, traditional energy sources in order to maintain power security! (In other words, wind energy's reliability is that it works except when it doesn't work.) Due to much higher investments into the power grid in the past, the German power system is still more reliable than those in the United States, Schneider said—however, as a consequence of ongoing energy deregulation, this is going to change (see **Figure 1**). Energy suppliers are under pressure to cut costs; therefore investments into power generation and power grids have declined by 50% since the start of liberalization five years ago.

The Aug. 28 blackout in London has shown, stated Schneider, that a secure energy supply is no longer guaranteed in Europe. In London, it was cost-cutting pressure due to liberalization which prevented any substantial investments into Britain's power grids, which were already in a miserable state when liberalization started.

About 40% of the German power plants have now reached the end of their life span and need replacement in the coming years. In view of the giant amount of required investments—about 40 billion euro just for power generation—the construction of new power plants, but also new overland power lines, should rather start right away, Schneider said.

The Civil Rights/Solidarity (BüSo) party in Germany, the movement headed by Helga Zepp-LaRouche, has said that for a long time; apparently, some people in other political camps have begun to adopt the same view.

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