

German Green party leaders suppress protests against transport of nuclear waste

Dietmar Henning
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Oh, to be a cabaret artist! The German Green Party is supplying material for a new theatre piece from the ecological madhouse. Satire at its best!

The leadership of the party that not so long ago emerged from the peace and anti-nuclear movement is seeking to push through the transport of nuclear waste in Castor containers, and in the process coming into conflict with sections of its own membership that want to protest the project. This latest dispute within the Green party overshadows all the previous political somersaults and twists taken by the party since it entered the federal coalition government.

Since they joined the Social Democratic Party (SPD) government two years ago, the Greens have done an about-face on every issue concerning which they previously organised protests: international peace, inner-party democracy, a variety of social issues. That the issue of nuclear power is no different became clear last summer, when the government reached an agreement with the nuclear industry—the so-called “nuclear consensus.”

Green Environmental Minister Jürgen Trittin gave in to all of the demands of the nuclear industry and signed an agreement that guarantees the existence of the majority of nuclear power plants for the next 30 years. This, however, did not prevent Trittin from claiming that the “nuclear consensus” meant the “beginning of the abandonment” of nuclear energy.

Trittin, who in the past never missed a demonstration against nuclear power or against the transport of Castor containers, and was often carried away by police after attempting to block such transport, is now seeking to push through the transport of nuclear waste. Today he speaks for the government and acts to block anti-nuclear protests.

In so doing he has advanced utterly contradictory arguments. Last week he warned his opponents within the party: “If we want to remain credible, we must stand by the consequences of our politics.” It is no doubt

courageous for a Green minister to speak of “credibility,” but Trittin leaves no doubt that his credibility is surpassed by the suppleness of his spine.

Since the “nuclear consensus” guarantees the existence of nuclear power plants over the coming years, Trittin declares that the Greens in government should aim to insure uninhibited business for the nuclear industry. According to his new credo, this includes the transport of nuclear waste in Castor containers.

The SPD-Green coalition government has already planned several transports of highly radioactive material. The first is to begin on February 28, starting from the nuclear plant Neckarwestheim and proceeding to a temporary storage point in Ahaus. The next begins March 27 from the reprocessing plant in La Hague, France and proceeds to what could become a permanent disposal site in Gorleben. There are plans to make room at this site for the storage of used fuel rods from German nuclear power plants, similar to the storage of nuclear waste at the Sellafield plant in Great Britain.

The German nuclear industry could not maintain production without such transports, which is why the export of used fuel rods had been an important form of support for the nuclear industry under the previous government—the conservative regime headed by Helmut Kohl. Blockades mounted by anti-nuclear activists were directed not only against the transport of nuclear waste and the dangers involved in the movement of radioactive Castor containers through highly populated areas, but against the overall functioning of nuclear power plants, since they would not be able to operate if the transports were halted.

But under conditions where these forms of protest failed to stop a single Castor transport—the Kohl government used massive police deployments and water cannons to break up the demonstrations—the Green party claimed it would be possible to stop such nuclear “madness” and the

dangers to the general population only from a position of strength—inside the government itself.

Now the Greens have been in government for two years, and what has changed? The old “madness” is being justified with new arguments. As the saying goes: “The more things change, the more they stay the same.” As if eager to confirm this saying at any cost, Trittin behaves like the patron saint of the nuclear industry. In a tone of utter conviction he claims that the “Green” Castor containers are completely safe, and that unrestricted collaboration with the nuclear lobby means the “beginning of the abandonment” of nuclear energy.

The arrogance and lack of scruples with which the Green party leadership proceeds underscores the change that has taken place within the former environmentalist party. In a January 22 resolution the Green party claims that, in contrast to the transports carried out under the Kohl government, today “the contamination limits shall be maintained with sufficient security during the entire transport.” Residents living along the transport routes are not alone in harbouring doubts about this claim.

No one in the leadership of the Greens refers any longer to the security of the population. For them it is much more important to develop arguments to break down popular resistance to the measures they are planning. The stock phrase, “We want to achieve the abandonment of nuclear energy through the nuclear consensus,” is repeated in all sorts of variations and permutations. It is usually followed by the admonition: “The attempt to organise stoppages that are not founded on security considerations is in contradiction to the nuclear consensus.... This goes for blockages of necessary transports, such as those called for by parts of the anti-nuclear movement.” This is why the party leadership is calling on its “communal and regional associations to support only such demonstrations as are aimed at abandoning nuclear energy, while maintaining maximum security”—in other words, to support only pro-government demonstrations.

Following opposition within the anti-nuclear movement to this resolution (especially from the affected region of Lower Saxony), Trittin became more outspoken. In his letter of February 6 he bluntly demanded that the party organisations in Lower Saxony abstain from any kind of protests against the nuclear industry. Naturally, he insisted, he still defended blockages as “a form of civil disobedience.” But if they were directed against nuclear energy, he would not stand for any nonsense.

“Just because somebody sits on his backside on a street doesn't mean we agree with it,” he declared. Regarding

the Castor transports, he said, “The party leadership thinks that the protests against the transport of nuclear waste are ... politically wrong. Not because we reject blockages, demonstrations or singing, but because we reject the aims that are to be achieved by this sitting, walking and singing.”

“The requirements for carrying through the transports are in place,” Trittin writes. “Consequently there is no reason for Greens to demonstrate against them.” And that's that!

Meanwhile, party Chairman Fritz Kuhn is visiting the party's communal and regional organisations, attempting to bring the rank and file into line with the policies of the government. He also uses the “nuclear consensus” and the phrase “the beginning of the abandonment” of nuclear energy to pressure and silence the rank and file. As if it were some kind of incantation, his arguments are all founded on the “nuclear consensus,” which is so obsequious and unconditional toward the nuclear industry that industry leaders have thus far not even bothered to sign it.

When the Green party was founded some 20 years ago, a large section of its rank and file came from anti-nuclear groups. Today this party utilises its position in government to suppress any opposition to nuclear power. Its turn to the right seems to know no bounds. The logic of their own arguments will lead the Green leaders to call for the police truncheon and harsher punishment against anti-nuclear activists.

A further thought regarding the credibility of the Greens: the former spokeswoman of the Green party, Gunda Röstel, is now earning millions as manager for project development and business planning for Gelsenwasser AG, a subsidiary of the E.ON group, which under the slogan “New Energy” (water, sun, wind) sells cheap nuclear-generated electricity.



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