

# Germany's phase out of nuclear power: The pathos of national unity

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A sense of national pathos dominated the German parliament at its sitting in the Reichstag on Thursday. The parliament had convened to vote on Germany's plan to phase out nuclear energy by 2022.

Environment Minister Röttgen (of the ruling conservative CDU) spoke gushingly of this "generation and national communal project". He praised the consensus "which characterised the country after 30 years of irreconcilable debate." The conservative *F.A.Z.* newspaper titled its comment "The End of the Thirty Years' War," the *Frankfurter Rundschau* called it a "historic decision", and the *taz*, the house organ of the Green Party, headlined its article "The national communal project".

The CDU, CSU and FDP, the social-democratic SPD and the Greens voted almost unanimously for the government bill. Only the Left Party voted against, but only criticised the law on the basis of a few details. The dispute in parliament was merely over the question of who should get the credit for the nuclear phase-out. Röttgen claimed credit for the government, while the SPD and the Greens maintained they were the real authors of the measure.

With their vote on Thursday the protest generation of 1968, embodied in the Green Party, finally made their peace with the German state and nation. The *F.A.Z.* assessed the parliamentary decision as "the end of the last great ideological battle, with its frequent religious traits, between Germans." The struggle over nuclear power had "politically shaped generations, brought generations against each other and permanently changed the political landscape."

The conflicts at the nuclear power plants, reprocessing stations and nuclear dumps situated at Wyhl Wackersdorf, Kalkar and Gorleben had often assumed a civil war character. Winemakers, farmers

and environmental activists from all walks of life had conducted fierce battles with the police. "Nothing in this country in the past 40 years has forced citizens to the streets like nuclear power," declared the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

In fact, the real significance of the nuclear phase-out lies precisely in this national reconciliation with environmental activists and the Greens. The deal is of considerable value to the government. Chancellor Angela Merkel had to overcome strong opposition in her own ranks, and the shutdown of all nuclear power plants within ten years is bound up with considerable economic risks. While the producers of renewable energy systems are hoping for a boom, businesses heavily dependent on energy fear energy shortages and rising prices, endangering their export potential. They have been pacified somewhat with the inclusion in the new legislation of annual subsidy commitments totalling half a billion euros.

From the standpoint of the environment, the phase-out also makes little sense. Neighbouring France, which increasingly supplies Germany with energy, operates about 70 nuclear reactors, some of which are only a few kilometres from the German border. In Germany there are just 17 nuclear plants, eight of which have already been switched off.

While the federal parties shift closer together on the nuclear issue and are celebrating national reconciliation, society as a whole is drifting ever further apart. Almost one in ten residents of the Federal Republic is dependent on state support, and many more millions live on low-paid, precarious jobs.

The latest austerity measures in Greece represent the beginning of a new offensive against the working population of Europe by finance capital. The welfare cuts, wage cuts and tax increases imposed on the Greek

population in order to satisfy the demands of the banks are to be the benchmark in future for all European countries, including Germany. At the same time, the finance crisis is intensifying national tensions in Europe and all over the world.

Against this background the ruling elites are closing ranks. In particular the Greens are now needed to form a government of national unity and strengthen state and government for future conflicts. The attacks on working people require a regime that is stable enough to withstand pressure from below.

It is to this end that the Greens offer their services. The former ecological party is one of the fiercest advocates of a strict fiscal consolidation, even if this requires brutal social cuts. The party is even a vehement advocate of the deployment of the German army in all corners of the world. From their standpoint, the latest suggestions of Defence Thomas de Maiziere (CDU) do not go far enough.

The debate over nuclear power is only as a means to an end. The phase out of nuclear power in a single country will do nothing to limit the risk of disasters such as that in Fukushima. There can be no protection against such disasters or the destruction of the environment, as long as economic and social life is dominated by the profit interests of the banks and big business.

When Germany entered in the First World War and the SPD voted to fund the German war effort in 1914, German Emperor William II declared, "I recognise parties no more, I recognise only Germans." Today the pathos of national unity is designed to prepare a class war against the working class.



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