

Energy policy : no united people

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Energy policy

No united people

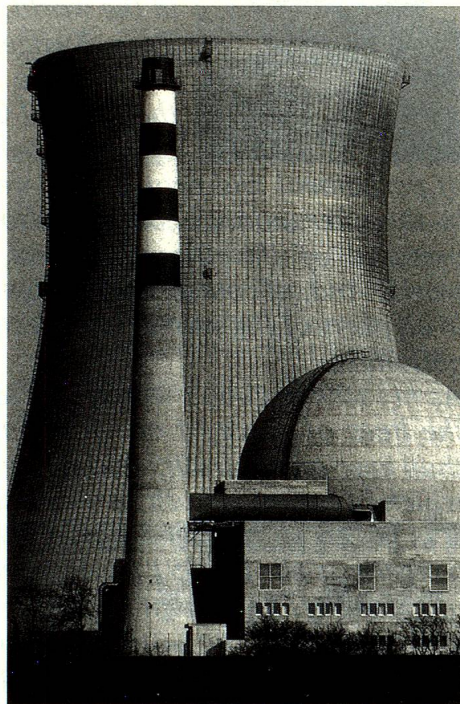
Switzerland is split on energy policy. The powers that be are agreed only in that energy must be saved. The concomitant question of opting out of nuclear energy has become a war of beliefs, and clouds the prospect of an essential national consensus.

The World Energy Conference of 1985 in Cannes established that, out of concern for our vital natural resources and for proper protection of the environment, the use of the primary sources of energy – coal, oil and natural gas – should be drastically reduced. Such conclusions had already found their way into the Swiss report on the *Gesamtenergiekonzeption* (GEK or global energy concept) ten years ago. The crude-oil share of energy consumption should be greatly reduced (the idea then being to replace it by nuclear power) and, above all, energy would have to be conserved. Yet Switzerland as a nation never progressed beyond these findings.

Kaiseraugst out

The controversy about the «right» energy policy degenerated into trench warfare between the opponents and proponents of nuclear power and mostly revolved round the embattled nuclear power station project at Kaiseraugst near Basle. But, today, no one believes that the reactor could ever be built against the resistance of the population. Even the electricity supply industry is no longer prepared to invest still more money in a power project foredoomed to failure. Will a motion now submitted to parliament lead to any escape from this impasse? It could in fact lead to operating consortium and Confederation reaching agreement on abandonment of the project and on indemnity negotiations.

Will relinquishment of Kaiseraugst ease Switzerland's energy policy situation and open up the way to a national consensus or will it ring in the final getaway from nuclear energy and thus prolong the war? Opinions are divided but, above all, the energy scenarios commissioned by government met with sharp protest from the electricity supply industry which accused the Eges, a fact-finding Commission of Experts for Energy Scenarios, of «unscientific work». With good reason, the Federal authorities rejected this charge. Their view was that the Eges scenarios – compared with methodol-



Controversial pulling-out of nuclear energy. Picture: Leibstadt, Aargau N-plant.

ogy in current use – meet the criterion of «scientific character». In the opinion of most experts as well as outside political and social scientists, the scenarios supply a «valid basis for decision» for a future-oriented energy policy – taking the global energy situation into account.

Together with the political thumbs-down given to the projected Kaiseraugst N-plant and the predominant opinion in right-wing circles that any further attempt to build a new atomic power station must lead to «a national political débâcle» (in the words of Christoph Blocher, the Zurich SVP National Councillor), the so-called «Reference Scenario» will most probably already have fallen by the way. The reference scenario envisaged additional consumption of 24% of energy in the year 2025 (reckoned from 1985) and assumed that by 2005 both the

Kaiseraugst and Graben N-plants would be connected to the national grid. And it fore-saw the construction of four further reactors by the year 2025 as well as the modernisation of today's plants, possibly by equipping them with high-temperature piles which, by that time would probably have reached full development.

Pull-out possible

None the less, the findings established by the Eges scenarios, that through rigorous energy saving and maximum use of alternative and renewable energy sources, pulling out of atomic energy is feasible without forfeiture of living standards, are important for the switching of the points towards a future energy policy. To date, the electricity generating industry has consistently maintained the contrary.

On the basis of stricter energy conservation measures, a ten per cent energy tax and an electricity supply industry law which would sharply increase the price of electricity consumed during peak periods, the «pull-out» version reaches the conclusion that energy consumption in 2025 would be 10% lower than in 1985. This «pull-out» scenario would not only ban atomic current from the grid; it also envisages reduced consumption (by one fifth) of today's imported oil. Against this, – to the detriment of clean air quality – the consumption of natural gas and coal would increase, each by 40 per cent. Further, fuelwood must be used one-and-a-half times more and «white coal» (current from hydroelectric power stations) a fifth more.

The price

Up to the year 2025, getting out of nuclear energy would cost the Swiss Confederation some 86 billion Swiss francs in tax money, of which rather more than SFr. 30 bn would flow into the economy and create new jobs. The federal subsidies for the application of

Energy Scenarios

The Working Group for Energy Scenarios (Eges) has been charged by the government with «setting out the possibilities, prerequisites and consequences of a withdrawal from nuclear energy». The 1,000-page Eges report is based on the three main alternatives: pulling out of nuclear energy by the year 2025, provisional abandonment of new N-plant projects (Moratorium) and further development of nuclear energy (Reference Scenario).

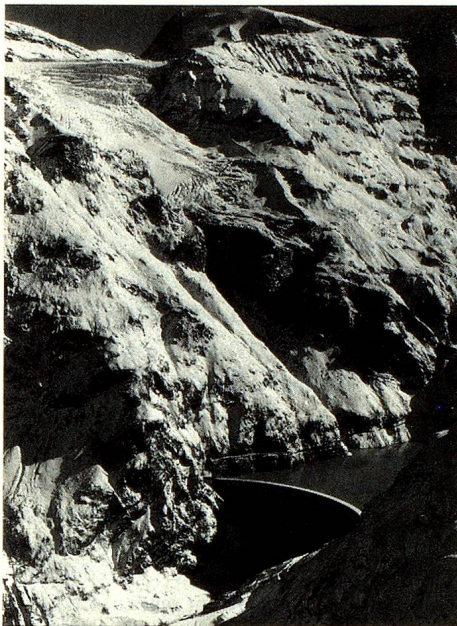


the rational use of energy would swallow up most of the money. This means, for example, motors that give maximum performance for a minimum of energy and car engines that, on a basis of government regulations, do not consume more than a maximum of five and a half litres of petrol to 100 kilometres.

Of course, the drawbacks of the pull-out scenario should not be covered up: for example, new sources of hydraulic power (which also has disadvantages for the protection of the environment and nature conservation), are coming to an end; and particularly the condition that the solar-energy share must increase twelvefold. Government energy-research studies have shown that solar energy could, at the most, replace only a sixth of present power production.

Nine-tenths of all large river courses in our land are already banked up – dammed up for the extraction of electricity from water power. The project for a new, higher, massive concrete dam in the Grimsel area has already been a bone of contention between energy producers and countryside conservers. This planned pumped power-storage station would transform abundant and thus relatively cheap summer (atomic) current into the more demanded, and dearer, winter current.

In addition to this, advanced energy research, particularly in the Federal Republic of Germany, has today reached the conclusion that the introduction of alternative energy technologies – up to and including the use of solar technology and hydrogen as en-



Water power: an increase in output is still possible. Picture: Guitroz Glacier, Valais. (Photos: Keystone)

ergy sources of the future – will depend on the continuation of nuclear technology. This conclusion and the stalemate situation in energy policy now obtaining in Switzerland must in fact favour the «middle way» of the «active moratorium».

This likewise presupposes taxation of energy consumption and would prescribe the use of, and subsidies for, electrical motors and appliances that are more economical in operation. The moratorium envisages a

higher consumption of around six per cent of present energy requirements up to the year 2025 and would freeze the production of atomic power at today's level – this last consideration being an essential part of the «active moratorium».

The active moratorium, as it has been dubbed by Peter Schopp, economist and lecturer (at Geneva University), would have the advantage that it could use nuclear energy in the best possible way to develop newer sources of energy, such as sun and hydrogen, and, what is more, that it would not inhibit the further development of nuclear technology beyond this – eventually to «inherently safe types of reactor».

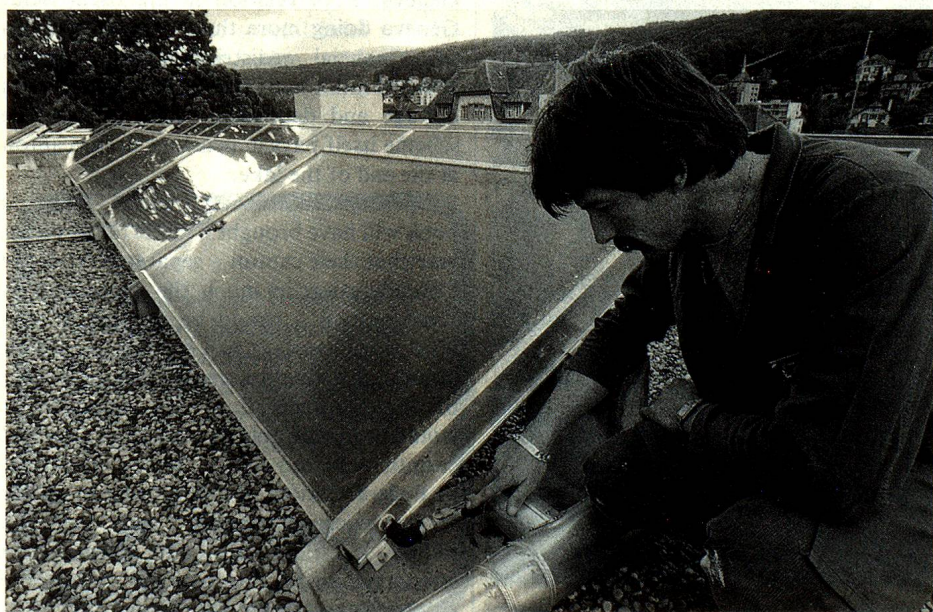
Moratorium as solution?

Can the energy policy in our country be eased? Will both the opponents and the proponents hold out a hand to nuclear energy and tread the path of the signposted middle way of a moratorium? As if destined for the Swiss economy, a chance is offered for the performance of great achievements in the field of solar and hydrogen (nuclear fusion) technology and thus of a decisive contribution towards the safeguarding of «*Werkplatz Schweiz*» and thus jobs in Switzerland.

The precondition for this is and will remain political accord. Will the readiness to act, to finally come to terms on a wieldy energy tax, stay under the dome of the Parliament building? The majority in Federal Energy Commission, headed by the Ticino National Councillor Fulvio Caccia (CVP) would tread this middle path. According to Professor Tschopp, a member of the Commission, if the radwaste problem – the question of the removal and disposal of radioactive waste – can be solved and whether new «safety reactors» can be developed, there would be no valid reasons for shutting down all nuclear reactors. The way out of the energy dilemma should be found through active energy research which encourages the solar energy technologists and which ceases to stamp them as the mendicants of the energy marketplace.

«I accept that we do not build still more nuclear power stations but I am enough of a realist to admit that if we are to guarantee our energy supply we simply cannot shut the existing plants down.» Thus, the Zurich National Councillor Konrad Basler (SVP) also advocates the third way, «For only it (the third way) offers the guarantee of an emergence of alternative energy techniques». On the basis of the opinions held in parliament, the third way would seem to have the best chances.

Bruno Schläppi



Solar collectors for hot water supply on the roof of an old peoples' home in Neuchâtel.