

Election issues. Part V, Energy policy : renewable energies as the focus of debate

Autor(en): **Tschanz, Pierre-André**

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Election issues (V): energy policy

Renewable energies as the focus of debate

Energy policy has been a bone of contention for several decades. Initially the debate focused on the question of atomic energy. Now it primarily revolves around the promotion and role of renewable energies in national energy provision, the abolition of nuclear energy and the introduction of controls.

The Swiss electorate has rubber-stamped federal energy policy, particularly with the 1990 moratorium on nuclear energy, which provides for a ten-year ban on new atomic fuel plants and other nuclear plants. Soon it will be

Pierre-André Tschanz

called on to vote on two more popular initiatives on the subject: one on an extension of the moratorium by another ten years, the other in favour of a withdrawal from nuclear energy. The environmental groups behind these initiatives are also in favour of promoting the use of renewable energies, and in particular solar energy. They also call for a system of guidelines to promote energy

"We have too much atomic energy."

RUEDI RECHSTEINER SP

conservation and the use of renewable energies. Centre-right factions, most of whom support atomic energy, are in favour of the current deregulation of the energy market and are calling for the continued operation of existing nuclear plants.

Committed to environmental protection

The Social Democrats (SP) are simultaneously in favour of more environmental protection and a more liberalised market. National Councillor Ruedi Rechsteiner (Basle City) points out that nuclear waste disposal costs (CHF 20 to

30 billion) are not taken into account in the price for electricity generated by nuclear power. "We have too much atomic energy," he says, and supports the introduction of an ecological tax reform to promote renewable energies as well as limited-period controls. In his opinion Switzerland should opt for technical progress. Further to the left, the Labour Party (PdA) is of the same inclination: phase out atomic power plants, promote renewable energies, and introduce conservation measures. National Councillor Jean Spielmann of Geneva wants to see efforts stepped up in the field of applied research. "From an economic viewpoint," he says, "the technological potential for our country is very interesting, but it necessitates a change in procedures and ways of thinking." The PdA supports the introduction of controls and measures to promote ecological awareness.

The Greens take a more radical stand in their statements: Withdrawal from atomic energy within five years and an immediate decommissioning of the nuclear energy plants at Mühleberg and Beznau 1 and 2, as well as the promotion of renewable energies (solar and wind power) through the introduction of controls. According to National Councillor Katrin Kuhn of Aargau, however, the first priority should be an ecological tax reform with substantially more taxation on energy and a simultaneous reduction in supplementary labour costs. "Controls are, however, essential until the tax reform takes full effect," she stresses.

"The best energy is conserved energy," declares National Councillor Roland Wiederkehr (Zurich) of the National Association of Independents (LdU). He also pleads for an ecological tax reform and a taxation system that enables the reduction of the pro-

portion of non-renewable energies and the promotion of energy conservation measures.

"The best energy is conserved energy."

ROLAND WIEDERKEHR, LdU

Environmental awareness also on the right

Environmental consciousness is not the sole prerogative of the Left, the Greens and the LdU. On the far right, the Swiss Democrats (SD) are also environmentally aware and in favour of a medium-term withdrawal from atomic energy, increased research in the field of solar energy, and an optimisation of existing hydro-electric power plants. They call for increased taxation on major consumers of energy. "Such a tax

would encourage energy conservation," declares National Councillor Rudolf Keller (Basel Country).

Innovative and conservative

Environmental issues even occupy the concerns of the major centrist parties. In the matter of energy policy there are

"We cannot do without nuclear energy."

JEAN CAVADINI, FDP

two camps evident in the Liberal Democratic Party (FDP) and the Christian Democratic Party (CVP): an "innovative" and a "conservative" faction, as FDP National Council Marc Suter (Berne) calls them. His party is divided roughly equally into both camps. The "innovatives", among whom Marc

Suter counts himself, support the long-term moratorium on atomic energy and its replacement by renewable energies (optimisation of hydro-electric plants, wood, bio-energy, solar energy) and the promotion of energy conservation measures (i.e. building insulation). "Energy consumption could be reduced by half without any detrimental effect, and even with a resultant increase in the quality of life," says Marc Suter. The "conservative" faction of the Liberal Democrats is against controls and ecological tax reform and sees the solution in the deregulation of the electricity market.

Both these views are also represented in the Christian Democrat ranks. In sympathy with the environmentalist standpoint, State Councillor Bruno Frick (Schwyz) calls for the rapid deregulation of the electricity market coupled with efforts to optimise hydro-electric energy. He also urges the introduction of an energy tax, the revenues from which (initially three to four billion francs) would be used to reduce social burdens: "Energy tax reduces labour costs and strengthens the economy," believes Frick. Moreover, limited-period controls would also promote renewable energies.

Opponents of the market economy

With the exception of the Social Democrats, a free market economy is the main priority for centre-right parties. National Councillor Christian Speck

"The economy cannot take any new taxes."

CHRISTIAN SPECK, SVP

(Aargau) of the Swiss People's Party (SVP) is in favour of the continued operation of existing atomic power plants provided their safety is guaranteed. He agrees with the proposal to renovate hydro-electric plants, provided no public funds are used in the process, and calls for a reduction of water rates. An energy tax is out of the question for

Parties in brief (V)

Social Democratic Party of Switzerland (SP)

Seats in the National Council: 57
in the Council of States: 5
President: Ursula Koch (ZH)
Address: Spitalgasse 24, PO Box 7876
3001 Berne
Tel +41 31 329 69 69
Fax +41 31 329 69 70
Internet: www.sp-ps.ch
E-mail: sekretariat@sp-ps.ch

The SP message:

"Our supporters are people who want a social, environmentally friendly and open Switzerland. The SP campaigns for a fairly-financed health and social insurance system, jobs for all at a wage that guarantees subsistence, equal opportunities and adhesion to the EU."

Liberal Democratic Party of Switzerland (FDP)

Seats in the National Council: 45
in the Council of States: 17
President: Franz Steinegger (UR)
Address: Neugasse 20, PO Box 6136
3001 Berne
Tel +41 31 320 35 35
Fax +41 31 320 35 00
Internet: www.fdp.ch
E-mail: gs@fdp-prd.ch

The FDP message:

"The FDP is both open to the world and patriotically-minded. 150 years ago it was the founding party of this state. Now it safeguards the precious heritage of the founding fathers while at the same time working resolutely to ensure Switzerland's place in Europe and the world."

him: "The economy cannot take any new taxes."

The Liberal Democrats are in favour of the efforts to diversify energy supply but would like to see more of a focus on renewable energies. In their view the deregulation of the electricity market offers promising perspectives. They are in favour of continuing the operation of atomic power plants, provided safety precautions are improved and the search continues for a solution to the problem of atomic waste. "We cannot do without nuclear energy," says State Councillor Jean Cavadini (Neuchâtel).

Finally, the Freedom Party is in favour of nuclear energy and regards the moratorium on nuclear energy as a mistake. In their view it is wrong to want to replace atomic energy with renewable energies. ■

Atomic energy plants have lost some political support at the hand of renewable energies. (Photo: INCOLOR AG)

