

German Power: Back to Nuclear, or Blackouts

by Rainer Apel

Citizens in about 10 million households in Western Europe were cut off from electrical power on Nov. 4, many for several hours, when the overland power transmission grid collapsed, first in numerous regions throughout Germany, and then also in France, Austria, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and the North African nation of Morocco. The blackout originated in the northwestern German grid of the E.on power company, hitting 1 million households throughout Germany, 5 million households in France, and 4 million in Italy, Austria, Spain, and Morocco.

The blackout was primarily the result of European deregulation and privatization, which has created complicated power grids that do not operate according to the rule of taking the most direct route to the consumer, but are instead based on cost-cutting. The power that one consumes in Italy,

may even come from across the Adriatic Sea in the Balkans, via numerous other grids in Europe. Energy security is kind of a lottery.

The fact that Morocco was also hit by the power blackout, is indicative of the absurdity of the European power supply system: Morocco, which certainly needs power for its own development, has repeatedly transferred power “surpluses” to Spain and France, during extreme Summer drought or Winter snow-and-ice periods. The corporate strategy of buying electricity from wherever it is cheap, instead of investing at home, is typical for the big power companies—four of which dominate most of the German market.

Power companies have not invested as they should have: to improve and stabilize the supply for the big metropolitan region in North Rhine-Westphalia, some 800 kilometers of overland power lines have to be built, and another 400 kilometers of existing lines modernized. The approximately 1.5 billion euros this would cost—capital that would be tied up in long-term investments—is apparently a deterrent for the short-term profit orientation of shareholder-oriented power-sector managements, because they have made little progress on the grid—much of which is 40-50 years old. All in all, net power-grid investments have fallen by 40% during the past 20 years.

The ailing state of entire sections of the power grid became all too evident just a year ago, when ice storms tore down overland power transmission lines overdue for replacement in the northwestern Münsterland region of Germany, leaving 250,000 citizens without electricity supplies for up to several days.

III Windmills Blow No Good

But deregulation and privatization are not the only aspects of insanity in the strategy of generating power. Especially in Germany, the “windmill movement” has grown with substantial state support. Usually, the available wind does not suffice to generate more power than is instantly consumed for the operation of the windmill itself, and if there is no wind at all, the windmills simply do not produce power. And, wind is not really calculable—which was drastically demonstrated on that Nov. 4, when due to very heavy winds, unexpectedly “overproducing” windmill parks in Germany’s north threatened to overload the power grid, therefore numerous conventional coal and gas power plants



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A gust of wind in Germany did in the anti-technology greenie geniuses and deregulators in Europe in one blow. Heavy winds caused windmills in Germany to overproduce electricity, and efforts to protect the grid from the surge provoked a chain-reaction blackout in five European countries and Morocco. Shown here is a windmill farm in Hesse, Germany.

were turned off, to clear the grid for the windmill surge. That caused a chain reaction of grid turnoffs throughout Germany, immediately affecting all the above-mentioned countries. This should have proved to the blackout victims, as well as everyone else, that using windmills to generate electricity is insane.

The advance of windmills in Germany has been accompanied by the decision to abandon nuclear power. As laid down in a treaty between the government and the power industry in 2000, Germany will shut down the last of its nuclear power plants (of which there are still 17 operating) by the end of the year 2021. The power companies signed the treaty because under the dominance of the cost-cutting paradigm, managements argued that investments in nuclear power, with all the safety requirements, was too “expensive,” whereas buying power from surpluses from other countries in Europe was the “better” solution. The other side of this coin, is that Germany imports power from France’s nuclear power plants and re-supplies France if necessary. Therefore, when Germany held back electricity Nov. 4 to deal with the blackout there, French households were hit five times harder than German households. Sometimes (when there is wind), the windmills in northern Germany supply the otherwise nuclear-powered France.

An Insane Energy Policy

After this blackout, a debate has resumed also in Germany about ways to prevent another such disaster. Terrorized by 30 years of continuous ecologist brainwashing and about 20 years of wearing the cost-cutting straitjacket, Germany’s elites are too timid to openly call for a return of nuclear power. The most that could be expected for the time being, is the call for letting the existing nuclear power plants run for a longer period, so that the final shutdown would not be in 2021, but in 2031, or even 2041. The dominant “energy strategy” in Germany is to establish an economy that needs less power, shooting for consuming 20% less by the year 2020. That is being promoted under the misleading term “energy efficiency,” and the government, Christian Democratic Chancellor Angela Merkel most of all, believes that is “a modern approach.”

Insanity on energy policy is worse among Social Democrats (SPD): Typical is the proposal, made in mid-October by Andrea Ypsilanti, chairwoman of the Hesse state section of the SPD, for shutting down the two nuclear power reactors in Biblis by 2010 and replacing them with 1,700 windmills that would be posted along the state’s highways. A broad majority of SPD members, notably its leading party officials, believe that is a “future-oriented approach.”

As of now, the only pro-nuclear political factor in Germany is the LaRouche Movement, and its arguments will convince more and more Germans, with every new power blackout, that windmills are insane and that nuclear power is the only solution.