

Given this background, the Fukushima disaster in 2011 provoked another strong reaction in Germany against nuclear power and the Merkel government reacted by announcing that eight of its oldest operating nuclear reactors would be temporarily shut down and declaring a 3-month moratorium on the implementation of the 2010 reactor lifespan extension. A poll found that 71% of the population believed that this was a tactical manoeuvre related to upcoming state elections and on March 26<sup>th</sup>, in the largest ever anti-nuclear demonstration ever held in Germany took place, some 250,000 strong, under the slogan, “Heed Fukushima - shut off all nuclear plants.”

Two months later the Government responded by returning to the policy of a nuclear phase-out by 2022 and the permanent closure of the eight reactors temporarily shut-down in March.

Currently the phase-out has involved the closing down of six more reactors, with the only three still operating due to close down in December this year.

But this was before the war in Ukraine, a consequence of which is that Germany, like some other East European countries, faces large reductions in gas supplies from Russia.

Indeed, before the Ukraine invasion Germany got 35% of its natural gas from Russia. After the invasion, Germany announced plans to become largely independent of Russian gas by mid-2024. However this was preempted by Russia starting to cut gas flows to Europe by 40% on June 14<sup>th</sup>, it seems in retaliation for EU military support for Ukraine and the sanctions against Russia.

How to make up the resultant shortfall in supplies?

One way urged by some German newspapers, the right-wing CDU opposition and some Liberals within the SPD-Green coalition in the *Bundestag* is to extend the life of the three operating nuclear reactors beyond their current closure date of December and even reopen three nuclear plants closed last December. Together they would restore the 12% of German electricity they previously supplied at no great capital cost, supposing there were no major technical hitches. And they could be replaced by new wind farms and solar farms fairly quickly (I’ve seen figures quoted of 2-5years for a wind farm and “a matter of months” for a medium-sized solar farm)

However the ruling coalition government is standing firm against this proposal, though the German minister of economy and climate, Robert Habeck said in an interview that he would be "open" to extending the life of the remaining three nuclear power plants, but expressed scepticism as

to the feasibility and sensibility of such a move. The economy and environment ministries issued a joint statement in March saying that the costs and risks of extending the lives of the reactors outweighed limited benefits.

Nor are the operators of the plants keen to have the reactors’ lives extended, reportedly arguing that constraints in sourcing fuel rods and finding expert staffing make keeping them open impossible.

The German government instead is planning to temporarily increase generation of energy from coal, speed up construction of renewable sources for energy, and building new liquid natural gas import facilities to replace gas imports cut off by Russia and by imposition of EU sanctions. However this last will take three to five years according to the German government.

So it does seem that Germany will remain the great exemplar of a major industrial country willing to entirely give up its heavy reliance on nuclear power on safety and environmental grounds, in spite of the energy shortages it is suffering as a result of the Ukraine war.

## HINKLEY C – A FURTHER DELAY

At the end of May, *Electricité de France* (EDF) published the findings of a review into the cost and schedule of the Hinkley C nuclear power station it is building in Somerset.



Recent photo of Hinkley Point C in construction

This finds that the opening if the station will have to be delayed for another year to June 2026 and the cost will now be between £25bn and £26bn, an increase of £3bn on the previous estimate (it should be remembered that it was originally planned to open by Christmas 2017, and the estimated cost was originally £18bn)

In its review, EDF puts the blame for this latest delay and staggering price increase mainly on the Covid pandemic. It says pandemic safety measures resulted in the loss of more than half a million days of “critical” work in 2020 and 2021. It also says that its supply chain for the project was also hit by the pandemic with 180 fully shut down in April 2020. It also mentions general supply and labour shortages.

What it doesn't mention is that there have been labour disputes affecting the construction. Business World reported that on 1<sup>st</sup> April some 200-300 workers employed by Blyor civil engineering contractor at Hinkley C walked out in a dispute over working arrangements at Hinkley C. And on 13<sup>th</sup> June, plating engineers creating products to supply to the Hinkley Point C nuclear power station in a pay dispute went on strike at Darchem Engineering, in Stockton-Upon-Tees. Further strikes were planned for 20<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> June.

And Hinkley Point C is the only nuclear power station being built in Britain since Sizewell B went into operation in 1997, 30 years ago, in spite of the government announcing big plans in the interval to replace Britain's obsolescent, and now rapidly shutting down, fleet of nuclear reactors, by a similarly large fleet of new nuclear power stations

With this history of failure, it seems extremely unlikely that the eight new large nuclear reactors, promised recently with much fanfare by Boris Johnson, will ever be built.

## FRANCE TO BUILD MORE EPRS?

In spite of the disastrous history of the French-designed European Pressurised Water Reactor (EPR): only six have ever started building and all have taken vastly longer and cost much to build than originally planned, an EPR design is planned for the two reactors at Sizewell C (and for the other seven new reactors Boris has announced are to be built?) And I have just come across a French government plan, announced in February, to build 6 new EPRs and to launch studies for the construction of another 8 by 2050, with the first new EPR to be commissioned in 2035, and the lifetime of existing nuclear reactors to be extended. Will the new French government endorse this plan, quite similar to the plan for the UK announce by Boris?

# KICK NUCLEAR

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The monthly newsletter of Kick Nuclear and the Nuclear Trains Action Group (NTAG)

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We hold **“Remember Fukushima – End Nuclear Power” vigils** in London **on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and last Fridays of each month**, from 11am to 12.30pm outside the Japanese Embassy at 101-104 Piccadilly, followed by from 1 to 1.30pm outside the offices of the Tokyo Electric Power Company at Marlborough Court, 14-18 Holborn.

All anti-nuclear people are invited to join us.

**July 16<sup>th</sup>, Crewe**, 10.30am: leafleting of people attending the Direct Rail Services (DRS) annual “open day” at its Crewe depot. Demonstration organised by the Close Capenhurst Campaign. For information contact Martyn on [martynlowe@usa.net](mailto:martynlowe@usa.net)

(DRS are the train company running “nuclear trains”, carrying highly-radioactive spent fuel rods on public railways from nuclear power stations to Sellafield in Cumbria to be re-processed or stored.)

## THE GERMAN DILEMMA

Strong popular opposition to nuclear power in Germany has a long history, dating back at least to the early 1970s. In June 2000 The Social Democrat-Green coalition government under Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and the country's four main utilities agreed on a step-by-step nuclear phase-out by 2022. At the time, nineteen commercial nuclear reactors were operating in Germany, producing some 25% of its electricity.

This plan was delayed in 2010, when a conservative-liberal coalition government under Chancellor Angela Merkel decreed a 12-year extension to the phase-out period. This delay provoked strong protests all across Germany, including a human chain, 50,000 strong, from Stuttgart to the Neckarwestheim nuclear plant.