

A Global Shift in Nuclear Energy Policy

by Marsha Freeman

Between July 7-9, the Group of Eight (G8) industrialized countries met in Japan to discuss the multiple crises facing each of them, and all other nations. The summit endorsed no sensible solution to the world food crisis, nor the skyrocketing cost of energy, or the global financial collapse. But there was one initiative that, if acted upon, could have an impact on the world economic crisis—the endorsement of nuclear energy.

The consensus reached on nuclear energy marks a turning point in the irrational and self-destructive anti-nuclear policies that have dominated Western Europe's stand, for the past 20 years. Although the discussion of nuclear power is couched within the idiotic framework of stopping "global warming," the final "Chair's Summary" of the meetings, presented by Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda on July 9, also promotes nuclear power as a means to address "energy security concerns." The declaration is based on the joint statements issued by the G8 energy ministers a month ago. Only Germany, among the G8 countries, objected to a stronger call to support nuclear energy.

Like self-sufficiency in food, which was declared virtually illegal for the past two decades, by the world financial institutions which run the "free market," energy self-sufficiency became impossible for most developing nations, when nuclear development was sabotaged, beginning in the 1970s. Now, with the price of fossil fuels being driven by a mad speculative frenzy, what were somewhat more leisurely plans for new nuclear plants have become more urgent.

Russia has already positioned itself to be a world leader to meet this demand.

In an article in the German newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, dated July 7, during the G8 summit, Russian nuclear energy head, Sergei Kiriyeenko, made the case very clearly. He stated that, for "all the major issues that were on the G8 agenda—the food crisis, global warming, and uneven distribution of development resources among countries ... nuclear power is not the only means of overcoming the crises, but it is undoubtedly a major instrument in resolving the three problems." For Africa, he declared, nuclear energy is key, because of "its ability to generate energy and to desalinate water at the same time."

European Turnaround

For 20 years, under the propaganda cloud of the 1986 Chernobyl accident in Ukraine, not only was nuclear power

plant construction halted in nearly all of Europe, but "popular" referenda in countries such as Germany and Sweden, mandated the phased shut-down of nuclear power plants that were *already operating*. Now, reality has overtaken propaganda.

Germany was heavily targetted by the anti-nuclear "movement" in the 1980s, when the nightly television news featured violent "protesters" attacking nuclear power plants. But the hysteria created after the Chernobyl accident is waning. A poll by Forsa for *Stern* magazine, released on July 9, showed 46% of voters queried to be in favor of extending the lives of Germany's operating reactors—the same number who want the plants to be closed. A similar poll in February 2007, showed 38% for operating the plants, and 56% in favor of the phase-out. These results mirror those across Europe as a whole. A recent early July poll of 26,750 citizens from 27 EU countries, also found support for the use of nuclear power at 44% has risen from 37% three years ago.

Although German Chancellor Angela Merkel has, in the past, said that she personally does not support the plan to phase out Germany's 17 nuclear power reactors by 2021, at the G8 summit, she defensively countered calls for more nuclear power: "I don't think that climate protection is decided by the question of nuclear energy alone." Completely beside the point. In June, at a meeting of her Christian Democratic Party in Bavaria, the Chancellor said that the nuclear phase-out law was "absolutely wrong." If this is what she believes, this is what she should be fighting for.

The reality of the European energy situation is that nuclear energy, which provides 29% of the EU's power, is the largest single source of electricity for the 27-nation bloc. No one believes that the targets that have been set for Europe to use Middle Ages-style "renewable" energy sources, such as windmills, can be met. Energy independence for Europe means more nuclear.

On May 22, the Italian government of Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi made a stunning announcement, before a meeting of the Italian employers' federation, Confindustria: "We can no longer avoid an action plan for a return to nuclear power," said Economic Development Minister Claudia Scajola. "During the term of this parliament, we will lay the first stone for the construction in our country of a group of new generation nuclear power stations." In 1987, the Italian government had decided, through referendum, to close the country's four operating nuclear plants. That policy has now been reversed.

In early 2007, the Swiss government announced a new energy policy, reversing the moratorium on building new nuclear plants that it observed throughout the 1990s. Switzerland is facing an energy shortfall equal to about half the country's current electric generation capacity, by 2035. Its five operating nuclear plants, which produce 38% of its electricity, will be replaced as they reach the end of their operating lives, it was decided. In addition, Swiss energy

company Atel has submitted an application for approval of a new nuclear power plant, which would be built alongside an operating unit, to increase capacity and meet increased demand.

In Sweden, the post-Chernobyl decision to phase out nuclear energy is now supported by only 15% of those recently polled. It is time for a change in policy.

France, which is nearly 80% nuclear, and never succumbed to the anti-nuclear assault during the 1980s, is the only country in Western Europe well positioned to take advantage of the orders for new nuclear plants that are now coming in from around the world. Its nuclear industry is scrambling to expand manufacturing facilities quickly enough to meet the demand.

But Russia has been preparing for the strategic global shift toward nuclear energy for more than two years, and has moved into a prominent place in the world nuclear equation.

Russia on the World Stage

For the past 50 years, Russia's nuclear industry complex has provided for the construction of new nuclear power plants almost exclusively in Russia, the countries of the former Soviet Union, and the former East Bloc nations, which were part of its political and economic sphere of influence.

But more than two years ago, the Russian government made a bold move, to upgrade and consolidate the multi-enterprise research and development, power plant construction and servicing, equipment manufacturing, uranium mining and fuel fabrication, and export arms of the industry into a coherent, centralized nuclear industry.

In March 2006, President Vladimir Putin explained that nuclear power engineering is a "priority [industrial] branch for the country, that makes Russia a great power; the most ambitious projects and progressive technologies are linked with this branch." For Russia, advanced nuclear research is recognized as a driver for overall economic advancement.

Rosatom head, Sergei Kiriyenko, explained that Russia plans to build 60 nuclear power plants abroad, in order to finance the construction of the reactors Russia itself needs to have on line by the middle of this century. Russia's outreach for nuclear cooperation agreements, and commercial orders for new plants, encompasses countries in every corner of the globe.

Russia has secured a contract to build a new nuclear plant in Bulgaria. It



Sergei Kiriyenko

is increasing cooperation with China and India, the two Asian economic powerhouses that are going nuclear. Elsewhere in Asia, in May, the government of Vietnam held an International Nuclear Energy Exhibition in Hanoi. An executive of Rosatom said at the meeting that Russia is willing to cooperate with Vietnam to build their first plant, and that Russian companies have a good prospect of winning such a bid. A month later, the parliament of Vietnam overwhelmingly passed a law to enable the peaceful use of atomic energy.

And right in the United States' backyard, Russia is offering nuclear cooperation to nations in Ibero-America. Speaking at the meeting for foreign ministers from Russia, India, Brazil, and China at the end of May, Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso Amorim said, in an interview with Russia's Interfax, that Brazil seeks to develop cooperation with Russia in the peaceful use of nuclear energy. There exists an agreement ... between our countries, signed in 1994," which includes research and the construction of energy reactors. A few weeks earlier, Science and Technology Minister Sergio Rezenda of Brazil reported that an executive order could be signed by the President soon to create a nuclear development program.

On July 8, a high-ranking official of Russia's nuclear export company, Atomstroyexport, was quoted stating, "We are planning to expand our range of works, including in the South American market, particularly in Chile and Ecuador."

Back to the Future?

More than 50 years ago, President Dwight Eisenhower's Atoms for Peace program promised that civilian nuclear energy technology would be made available to all of the nations of the world. During the first international conference, in 1955, on the Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy, 38 nations made presentations on their plans for nuclear development; 73 countries participated. On the first day of the conference in Geneva, papers were presented by India, Brazil, Japan, Argentina, China, Egypt, Korea, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, Jordan, Israel, Puerto Rico, and many East Bloc nations allied with the Soviet Union. How many of these nations have operating nuclear power plants today?

The promise of Atoms for Peace was sabotaged in the 1970s, in the West by the anti-nuclear "movement," funded by London financial interests, and in the developing sector countries, through "globalized" economic warfare, and the "technological apartheid" that was justified by the specter of weapons "proliferation."

Now, after lost decades, confronted with catastrophic shortages and the unaffordability of energy, fresh water, and food, and aided by the strategic global shift in nuclear energy policies, dozens of developing nations are not just presenting papers and proposals, but are taking the steps necessary to build their first nuclear power plants.