

## 'Free market for nuclear energy?' from Welt der Arbeit (23 March 1956)

**Caption:** On 23 March 1956, Ludwig Rosenberg, a Member of the Executive Committee of the German Federation of Trade Unions (DGB), publishes an article in the weekly trade union publication Welt der Arbeit on the new implications of nuclear energy.

**Source:** Welt der Arbeit. Wochenzeitung des deutschen Gewerkschaftsbundes. Hrsg. BIEDORF, Wilhelm ; Herausgeber SATERNUS, Artur. 23.03.1956, n° 12; 7. Jg. Köln: Bund-Verlag GmbH. "Freier Markt für Kernenergie?", auteur:Rosenberg, Ludwig , p. 1; 2.

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## Free market for nuclear energy?

*By Ludwig Rosenberg, Member of the Federal Executive Board of the German Federation of Trade Unions*

**The question as to what approach the European countries will adopt to regulate the exploitation of nuclear energy is not a matter which could be settled in a restricted circle of technical experts. Atomic power, as even the most unsophisticated Europeans have by now understood, is not comparable with other sources of energy with which we have been familiar hitherto. Anyone who equates nuclear energy with coal and oil automatically disqualifies himself as a serious partner in the discussion of ways in which to exercise effective control over nuclear energy as a raw material.**

Indeed, that discussion involves a number of questions which, in the fog of designations denoting one solution or another, risk almost being lost from view. 'Euratom', 'OEEC Plan', 'Monnet Plan' — the various proposals become a confused jumble for the average newspaper reader or radio listener. This confusion is even more understandable when we go on to learn that combinations of the various systems are also being considered, and we can really no longer tell whether the OEEC Plan dressed up as Euratom is still essentially the same as the original Euratom concept.

It is, perhaps, worthwhile, therefore, to present some basic ideas which it is reasonable to think should be addressed by all governments at national and international level.

### **Who may exercise control?**

If it is correct that nuclear fuel, what is known as fissile material, is as immensely dangerous as all the scientists tell us, then it must be subject to the most rigorous controls so that its peaceful use is assured.

These controls may be exercised by anyone who holds and retains the right of ownership of this nuclear fuel. As we are dealing here with dangers which may assume virtually incalculable proportions, even where only small and minute quantities are involved, the question of ownership as a means of control becomes that much more crucial; a few kilos of this material are more likely to be misappropriated — and to disappear — than materials which need to be present in much larger quantities before they can become dangerous.

The implication of this is that, at both international and national levels, an international authority or the State must be the owner of such nuclear material. Only this approach will provide a guarantee that the nuclear material will be supplied only to reliable users, will be reserved for their exclusive use and may be recovered in the event of misuse at any time and without cumbersome procedures, and that everything is subject to democratic supervision by parliaments or international supervisory bodies.

For this reason, those countries which have so far played any role at all in the atomic industry, e.g. the USA and Britain, have created national atomic energy authorities on precisely these lines. For this reason, too, a similar form of ownership supervision, in the guise of Euratom, has been mooted for the resolution of the question of European cooperation in this field.

Some objections are now being voiced. We see them presented in more or less open form in the press and in occasional statements of opinion, and we want to deal with them because they are the issues with which the conflict at European and national level is mainly concerned.

It is said that the development of the peaceful industrial use of nuclear fuel is being inhibited by state interference. It should be possible for the much vaunted entrepreneurial initiative to take effect here, but it is being held back by state ownership of nuclear fuel.

It is claimed that the necessary controls may be carried out on the basis of the imposition of legal obligations, without the need to confer rights of ownership on the State. It is said that such controls already restrict ownership for all practical purposes and that that is sufficient.

It is said that industry cannot be expected to set aside resources for the construction of plants whose use is dependent on a fuel which is owned by the State and the supply of which may be discontinued at any time.

It is pointed out that, even in the USA, there are plans for a relaxation of the hitherto rigid regulatory system, since there is no wish to maintain a system set up under wartime conditions, and it is felt that private ownership of nuclear fuels should be restored.

It is said in relation to European cooperation that Euratom is too rigid and that Britain and the Scandinavian countries could not participate in Euratom; the route set out in the OEEC Plan should therefore be chosen, since this would impose only loose supervision and would involve a form of cooperation along the lines of that generally pursued in OEEC institutions, which is geared more to mutual coordination and consultation on a voluntary basis than to cooperation in a fixed framework.

Altogether: a catalogue of reasons designed to prevent the development, in matters relating to atomic energy, of real and effective cooperation in Europe and of real and effective controls at national level.

### **Objections overruled**

Let us take the objections as they are presented. 'The development of the industry would be held back by state ownership of nuclear fuel.' Neither in the USA nor in Britain are any such consequences to be observed. They are the leaders in research into and the uses of atomic energy, whereas, in Europe, it is generally admitted that there is a great deal of catching up to be done. It is almost comical for this objection to be raised. It is even stranger to hear simultaneous calls for the State itself to bear most of the costs of research and then be obliged to make the research results available to industry.

'Legal obligations are sufficient' is another objection. That does not require state ownership. It is claimed that, in practical terms, this form of control would substantially limit the concept of ownership. If that is so, why should there be private ownership at all? If it is not so, it is just as essential that this dangerous material should not be transferred to private ownership.

People say: 'if the State owns the fuel, it may at any time refuse to supply it to industry, which will then not undertake major investment in plants dependent on this fuel.' — If this argument were valid, it would be impossible to explain why, in Britain and other countries where the mines are nationalised, industries which are dependent on coal have not closed their gates — the same applies to large numbers of plants supplied with electricity from municipally owned power stations. Do they really expect this objection to be taken seriously?

'There are plans in the USA to relax the existing regulations': in that case why should such regulations be introduced in Germany? To begin with, nobody is planning to introduce the same regulations in Germany as those applying in the USA. Secondly, that would not be possible on constitutional grounds. Thirdly, the intention in the USA is, at most, to relax specific provisions connected with military control measures. And, fourthly, the wishes of a few industrialists in the USA are not yet law. — It is, moreover, remarkable how the USA is presented as a model of the way forward or as an example of what not to do, whichever fits the occasion.

'More OEEC than Euratom — otherwise Britain will not participate.' If we want European integration, we should stop hanging on until Britain joins in; Britain will not and cannot participate in any genuine integration. It will seek to be associated wherever others actually implement such integration. If we want to frustrate every plan for European integration, we only need to make them conditional on whether Britain participates or not. All who know this realise that it is not the result of some malevolence on the part of Britain; it is rather a consequence of its particular situation in the world. But we should cease using this argument as a convenient way of frustrating plans for Europe. It would be more honest to say: we do not want real integration.

And, in that context, we have this to say: the trade unions want genuine European integration. They want

European cooperation in the closest possible forms — but only on one non-negotiable condition: that everyone is ready to make sacrifices without constantly demanding from one party prior concessions which others are not prepared to make. It is also essential to acknowledge that European policy is not brought about by pinning a ‘European’ label on long-standing national or even nationalist interests and then declaring that whoever does not measure up to these demands offends against Europe. Those who take this attitude are just as much enemies of European integration as those who are always talking about Europe but use all their ingenuity to seek ways of not bringing it about.

### **Straightforward decision**

On the question of atomic energy in Europe, too, the decision is not as difficult as many would claim. Anyone who sincerely wants real cooperation in Europe in this area of such importance to the future of industry and peace for mankind must come down in favour of Euratom. He must then join with his friends in Europe in ensuring that the result is honest and genuine European cooperation and that hard lessons are learned from the mistakes of the European Coal and Steel Community. At both national and international levels, the peoples of Europe cannot afford to allow this dangerous material to pass into private ownership anywhere. This question is not a problem of economic theory, it is a political decision for which we are accountable to future generations.

**What is at stake here is not the hallowed principle of the free market economy — nor even Socialist theories. We are tapping into forces whose dangers and effects no scientist today can assess with complete certainty. They must be used in the service of peace and progress, they must be at the disposal of industry in sufficient quantities and without discrimination, they must serve to increase the prosperity and wellbeing of mankind in economic affairs, research and medicine; but they must remain in the hands of the State, which is responsible for the safekeeping of dangerous raw materials, subject to constant and unrestricted democratic controls. What individual could and would willingly take on the responsibility which must be borne in this area?**