

and subsequent buildings, were promoted or deflected? What emotions did city planners and intellectuals want to connect to European cities after the Second World War, and how were they affected by historical processes? Laura Bowie has left me wanting to know more, in the very best sense.

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Atomare Demokratie. Eine Geschichte der Kernenergie in Deutschland

By Frank Uekötter. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2022. Pp. 380. Cloth €29.00. ISBN: 978-3515132572.

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The nuclear power controversy has become one of the most vibrant areas of historical research on Germany in recent years, located at the intersection of the history of technology and the history of civil society. Frank Uekötter provides a contribution to this literature with a monograph dedicated to his mentor, Joachim Radkau, a pioneer in this field. Provocative, interesting, and informative, this work is more a book-length essay than a conventional German academic tome.

The author's central thesis is that, thanks to a robust democratic culture, the Federal Republic of Germany wisely decided to abandon nuclear power, whose economic and technological shortcomings rule it out as a viable long-term energy source.

Nuclear power was the “product of a world . . . that has to a great extent become foreign to us” (65). Rooted in the mental world of the *Wirtschaftswunder*, West German elites believed atomic energy would fuel a dynamic and prosperous economy and provide the foundations for an egalitarian society as well as prestige on the world stage. Assertive scientists, institute directors, and industrial leaders pursued incompatible projects, leading to “tribalism.” To achieve concrete results in this “jungle,” strong “chiefs” (*Häuptlinge*) pushed projects based on disparate technological visions (90). The author asserts that historians should not shy away from interpreting “the dawning of the atomic age as a product of masculine leadership” (95), though he does not analyze this concept of maleness in any depth. Due to a “deficit of democracy,” elites did not take sufficient note of problems associated with nuclear power until considerable resources had been committed to it. Nuclear power plants did not actually go into operation until the 1970s, when fundamental social and political changes were well under way in West Germany.

Uekötter deemphasizes the importance of the anti-nuclear power movement, scoffing at the way the protests over the planned building of a nuclear power plant in Wyhl “exert a magical attraction on historians” (107). He argues that the protest movement was weak and that the authorities and industry were in a position to ignore it. Ideologically and socio-logically diverse, activists nonetheless engaged in a true exchange of ideas. Though leftist extremists found violence acceptable, most protesters from the 1970s onwards respected the rule of law (the *Rechtsstaat*) and took precautions not to become criminals in the eyes of the law. Huge police deployments also discouraged violence, using force judiciously, he argues. The conflict over the construction of a nuclear reprocessing plant in Wackersdorf in the 1980s was “fought with a bitterness that is not good for democracy in the long

run" (233). On the other hand, demonstrations against the nuclear waste storage facility in Gorleben in the 1990s were peaceful.

The author draws a sharp distinction between these protests, which he sees as sometimes problematic, and debates which fortified and expanded democratic culture. He asserts that the communicative style of the nuclear controversy was quite different from the echo chambers of today. Openness to debate reached its high point in 1977-1979, with a flood of publications, parliamentary hearings, and court cases that forced activists to develop a deeper knowledge of nuclear power and to marshal arguments that would stand up in court. He resists placing these debates in a transnational context, arguing that they were "very German," involving "German projects, German events and media," and, mainly, German participants (178).

His chapter on the GDR asks what happened to nuclear power in a system lacking the correction mechanisms of market economy and democracy. His answer: "The nuclear power machine kept on running, even when it collided with hard scientific facts" (198). Though this is true, it is unfortunate that Uekötter minimizes connections between the anti-nuclear debate in East and West Germany. Though activists largely operated within the confines of the East German Protestant church because of the protection it offered, it is important to note that many non-believers were among them.

The author does not view the nuclear power plant catastrophes in Chernobyl (1986) and Fukushima (2011) as turning points, but as events that speeded up processes already taking shape. Attempts to develop new nuclear technologies failed, and no good solutions to the problem of what to do with nuclear waste were in sight. On the national level, a government of Social Democrats in coalition with the Green Party (1998-2005) sealed the fate of nuclear power. Some readers may get lost in the weeds of his account of negotiations carried out by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, but his point is that democracy involves hard work. Paraphrasing Marx, Uekötter writes, "in the end it was men and, in 2011, a woman [Angela Merkel] who made history, but they did not make it as they pleased" (258).

Does he overemphasize high politics? One could argue that the West German anti-nuclear power movement played a more decisive role than Uekötter indicates. It generated not just slogans, but a significant literature based on popularized scientific findings concerning the risks of nuclear power. These enabled the movement to help delay projects in the courts and put pressure on industry to improve safety, thus raising the costs of nuclear power. These arguments gradually made inroads among the general population through media, including television, which was liberating itself from provincial government control. Popular opinion led to the rise of the Green Party, as well as to the growing importance of environmentalism in the large political parties. At the same time, the anti-nuclear power movement brought forth alternative research institutes, which lay the intellectual and technical foundations for the development of renewable energy sources and a shift away from fossil fuels.

Frank Uekötter's study should generate more of the sorts of discussions that he prizes, as well as inspiring further research in this important area. More broadly, he calls for a "new history of democracy" (317) that combines civic engagement and scholarship.

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