

ISBN 0 901689 27 0

Published by  
Quaker Peace & Service  
Friends House, Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ  
☎ 01-387 3601

# Communities of Resistance

Nuclear and chemical pollution cross frontiers,  
and so did the protesters of the Upper Rhine

**Roger Rawlinson**



Nonviolence in Action series

£1.75

**Quaker Peace & Service**



Photograph by Meinrad Schwörer

"Halo of Governing Powers", Wyhl forest, February 1975.

*'You have neither wealth nor strength nor power, but you possess truth, justice and courage. These are the weapons which will overcome strength and power,' Lanza del Vasto told the people, as they prepared for their struggle with the authorities.*

## Communities of Resistance

Nuclear and chemical pollution crosses frontiers, and so did the protesters of the Upper Rhine

### Roger Rawlinson

Contents	Page
Introduction	3
The Lead Factory	4
The Occupation	13
Industry Retreats Before the Environment	20
The Nuclear Threat	23
The Threat Moves North	28
Occupying the Site	37
Persistent Persuasion	44
An Example to be Followed	53
Sources	55
Map of the Area	56

**Quaker Peace & Service**  
July 1986

---

## The Lead Factory

---

### Industrialisation for Alsace

Alsace, France's eastern-most province, was under German rule from 1871 until 1918 and again briefly during the Second World War. So it is hardly surprising if the people of the province still suffer to some extent from uncertainty over their national identity. On the other hand, as if to compensate for this, they form a very close-knit community, with their own traditions and their own dialect. They are a conservative-minded folk, who do not normally question the established order.

An ambitious plan for large-scale industrialisation of Alsace was drawn up by the province's technical and economic experts in the 1960s. The Rhine canal would be extended southward to the Rhône, thus creating a navigable route from Rotterdam to the Mediterranean. Power for a vastly expanded industrial zone would be provided by nuclear power stations along the Rhine.

This grandiose scheme was expected to be well under way by the mid-1980s. However, much of it had to be revised or fell into abeyance, partly for economic reasons and partly because too little account had been taken of the human factor. People had become much more aware of environmental problems.

A decree signed in December 1963 declared it was in the public interest for 965 hectares of forest land on the banks of the Rhine to be purchased by the 'Autonomous Port of Strasbourg' (the public authority responsible for operating the river ports and for encouraging economic development) for the purpose of creating an industrial zone with port facilities. A 70-hectare site near Marckolsheim was cleared for use, but for the next ten years it remained empty. In September 1972, the Prime Minister, Pierre Messmer, intervened with a decision to encourage the creation of industrial enterprises in the region. The Association for the Development of Industry in the Region of Alsace (ADIRA) was asked to find French and foreign firms for the Marckolsheim site. A working party under the joint chairmanship of M. A. Bord (MP for Bas-Rhin) and M. Jean Sicurani (the Prefect for that area) met at the Marckolsheim town hall to consider which firms to contact and to find ways of financing the venture.

### Marckolsheim

Marckolsheim is a quiet village of 2,800 people situated about half-way between Strasbourg and Basle, close to the Rhine, which marks the frontier between France and Germany. The rural canton, of which Marckolsheim is the administrative centre, has a population of some 17,000. Nearly one-third of those working make their living from the land.

As far as the people of Marckolsheim were concerned, nothing further happened until 15 March 1974, when a talk was given in the village by a representative of ADIRA on 'The Industrialisation of the Marckolsheim-Sélestat Region'. The speaker denied that it was intended to turn Alsace into a 'French Ruhr' as had been alleged. The government's policy was to establish only small production units, and every care would be taken to protect the environment. He also made a veiled reference to a project to establish a factory on the industrial site, which was being examined by the Mayor. On the following day a working session took place between representatives of central and local government and ADIRA. At the close of the session the local councillors and the press were invited in and over a glass of wine were told, for the first time, that a lead factory was to be established on ten hectares of the site by a German chemical firm, Chemischewerke München (CWM).

Some of the councillors strongly resented being invited to a *vin d'honneur* only to be presented with a *fait accompli*. A newly formed company, Bärlocher-France, a subsidiary of CWM, with its head office in Munich, was, they were told, applying for permission to build a factory for the production of lead protoxides and stearates together with the necessary storage facilities for toxic chemicals.

The administrative services of the prefecture began work on the examination of the CWM dossier in accordance with legislation concerning industrial plants classified as polluting. However, ADIRA presented the factory as clean and virtually free from toxic emissions, and the regional press took up this line. The papers also spoke in euphoric terms of an 'economic take-off' for the province.

### The Safeguard Group (GISEM)

Some local people felt less than convinced that a lead factory could be clean. One of these was Emile Astaud, a teacher at the technical college of Colmar. By chance he heard that CWM had applied to build a factory at St. Avold in Lorraine but had been turned down, apparently because the town already had its fair share of pollution from chemical plants.

At about this time stories appeared in the press about massive lead pollu-

tion in West Germany and a recent accident in Hoboken in Belgium in which children had been badly affected and 300 cattle had died. Shocked by these reports and the news from St. Avold, Emile Astaud and two colleagues, Jean Gilg and Alexandre Herrmann, decided they must do something to discover the truth about the CWM project. They enjoyed the confidence of the local community, as they participated in youth work and cultural activities in the village.

In March, together with other citizens, they formed an Information Group for the Safeguard of the Environment of Marckolsheim (GISEM). Their aim at this stage was to collect information, check it carefully and transmit it to the population. Emile Astaud and Jean Gilg travelled to St. Avold to meet opponents there of Chemischewerke, amongst them a chemical engineer, M. Polo. The two teachers were told of many facts which ADIRA had kept secret. It appeared that the CWM plant in Munich had been unable to expand there, and so Dr. Christian Rosenthal, chairman and main stockholder of the chemical firm, had applied for building licences successively at three places in Germany; in each case the application had been refused. The idea of founding a subsidiary in France was attractive, as the French government offered important subsidies for new enterprises, and anti-pollution regulations were less restrictive than in Germany. However, the people of St. Avold had reacted quickly and effectively. After a public meeting at which considerable hostility had been expressed against the project, Dr Rosenthal had admitted defeat and voluntarily withdrawn his application.

M. Polo had expert knowledge of the manufacture of lead derivatives and the problems and dangers involved. He was able to give invaluable technical information and advice to GISEM throughout the Marckolsheim campaign.

#### **The CWM Dossier**

An official inquiry was opened on 8 April 1974. Although it offered an opportunity for local people to voice their concern, the inquiry only had an advisory function.

The chemical firm required two major licences: a building licence, which was easy to obtain, and the more important *authorisation for a classified installation*. The technical dossier which had to accompany the latter was prepared by the Service des Mines (a technical service working mainly for the Ministries of Industry and of the Environment) in consultations with the technical personnel of CWM. It outlined the plan for the factory, described the production process, and also set out the measures to be taken to reduce air and water pollution.

As soon as the dossier was available at the town hall, the members of GISEM lost no time in closely scrutinising every page. After checking the figures they discovered several mistakes, inconsistencies and omissions. Service des Mines had largely based their findings and recommendations on the report they had been asked to provide for the installation at St. Avold. It did not include any study of the effects of lead pollution on the water-table or on plant life. Nor had climatic conditions peculiar to the Marckolsheim region (a tendency to fog and temperature inversion) been taken into consideration, although these might seriously affect agriculture. Emile and his friends immediately wrote to the Mines for more precise details. They questioned other government services and the head of CWM. They wrote to different experts, to the University of Strasbourg and to anyone who might be able to throw more light on problems connected with lead.

#### **GISEM Takes Action**

As the answers to these inquiries arrived, Emile Astaud and Alexandre Herrmann began drafting a technical report. This was later published and circulated widely, and an information bulletin was also issued to keep the public informed. For scientific advice they relied on well known scientific experts.

The GISEM report revealed the nature of the products which would be manufactured by CWM. Lead stearate, used as a stabiliser in the plastics industry, is characterised by its toxicity and pathogenic effects. It enters into the metabolism of living organisms: plants, animals and humans; children and young animals are particularly affected. It has a cumulative effect and builds up in living organisms and in the soil. Oxides of lead are absorbed less easily and can be eliminated more easily but remain dangerous in high concentrations.

Anyone who worked in a factory such as CWM might be subjected to lead poisoning with possible grave results. There would also be risks of incidents, as the products are highly inflammable. In *L'Alsace* of 3 April 1974, Dr. Rosenthal affirmed that the last accident at the CWM plant had occurred ten years before, yet the Munich paper *Suddeutsche Zeitung* had reported five serious incidents, explosions or fires in the previous four years.

The presence in GISEM of the local vet, Léon Siegel, was an important factor in alerting the largely rural population against the factory. He warned the peasant-farmers that milk, meat, cereal crops and vegetables could be contaminated and unfit for consumption. They were in danger of losing their livelihood.

An information meeting was organised by GISEM on 26 April for the local councillors, some of whom had been on an organised visit to Chemischewerke in Munich. None had expressed any unfavourable comment after the visit, but now, confronted with the full facts, they began to realise that the 'gift' presented to them by the provincial authorities could well turn out to be 'poisoned'. The next day GISEM leaders met the Mayor of Marckolsheim and representatives of the Mines and ADIRA.

In May GISEM widened the debate to include social issues. On the question of employment, it was suggested that the nature of the work at the chemical plant would mean that immigrant workers would be chosen rather than local people, while supervisory and managerial staff would come from Germany. However, not everyone agreed with this forecast. Some young people saw opportunities to work for high wages in a factory which, they had been told, would be modern, clean and perfectly safe. It was said there would be employment for 120 initially with the possibility of 400 jobs eventually.

Alsations are highly sensitive to environmental issues, and GISEM was invited to have its own stand at an environmental event in Strasbourg. This gave the members of the group opportunities to make useful contacts.

Great interest was shown by the federation of conservation societies, Association Fédérative Régionale pour la Protection de la Nature (AFRPN) which linked together 96 local groups in the province, and had become more politicised in reaction to the industrialisation plan. At its general meeting in Mulhouse on 28 April the association had passed a motion against the installation of the CWM factory. Antoine Waechter, chairman of AFRPN in Bas-Rhin and a dynamic naturalist, had put all his energy and enthusiasm behind the fight. The ecology organisation, Ecologie et Survie, also gave its full backing.

### **The Rhine Forest**

The threat to the countryside, particularly to the Rhine Forest, played an important part in motivating people to fight against the lead factory. The woodlands on both sides of the river represent the few remaining traces of the primeval forests which once extended all along the banks of the Rhine. Part of the area earmarked for industrial sites lay within this ancient forest. Conservationists pleaded in vain for it to be a protected zone.

The streams running through the forest represent what remains of the once shifting bed of the Rhine. Their pure waters are safe to drink, and contain a large variety of fish which professional and amateur fishermen are particularly concerned to protect. An exceptional number of botanical specimens

are to be found in these unspoilt woodlands and many species of fauna, including the otter, find shelter there. A colony of beavers was successfully reintroduced in the Marckolsheim forest by the AFRPN in 1972, thanks largely to the efforts of Antoine Waechter. The water-level of the plain of the Rhine, lying at a depth of three to five metres, constitutes one of the largest reserves of water on the continent. With further industrial development this water could become polluted.

### **Democracy at Work**

Just before the end of the inquiry, GISEM held its first public meeting. Seven hundred people turned up—an all-time record for the village. The information group had invited Professor Carbiener (a professor of toxicology and GISEM's most helpful scientific adviser), a doctor and conservationists from the AFRPN as well as spokesmen from the Autonomous Port, ADIRA and the Service des Mines. The meeting helped people to realise that the information group was seriously concerned with discovering the truth about the lead factory and was not engaged in sterile polemics. On the other hand, promoters of the project appeared to be badly prepared. The answers from the Mines to queries sent to them by GISEM were not fully convincing. It also became obvious that safety precautions could not be adequately enforced, and a reference to the eventual manufacture of cadmium stearate was not explained. The representative of the Autonomous Port minimised the problems and tried to ridicule his opponents. This attitude and the questions which remained unanswered served to arouse further suspicions and fears, while Dr. Rosenthal's failure to appear was seen as proof of his determination to ignore a very real public concern.

By the time the public inquiry ended on 8 May, the commissioner had received some 3,000 letters and signatures demanding the rejection of the project. On the same day the municipal council met to consider a motion opposing the installation of the CWM plant. Eleven councillors voted for the motion and nine, including the Mayor, voted against.

During the inquiry the prefectorial services had consulted the various departments involved—the fire service, health and social services, agriculture, the works inspectorate, etc.—but none had commented unfavourably. The regional delegate of the Ministry of the Environment wrote to the Minister informing him of a situation which, he said, could become explosive. A reply from the 'Pollution Prevention' department stated that there was no problem. The Service des Mines, harried by the opposition, specified additional precautions in its final report.

On 27 May the Inquiry Commissioner advised against the installation of the CWM plant. The majority of the population did not want a polluting-type industry, he said. It was not up to him to judge the merits or demerits of the case, but in his view it would be highly advisable for impartial experts to be invited to pronounce on the real dangers of waste emissions. Also, secure guarantees should be provided by the industrialist on the reliability of control systems.

At the beginning of June, GISEM heard that the Prefect was to consult the Bas-Rhin Regional Council. Each councillor was immediately provided with a complete dossier together with the report and critical assessment by Astaud and Herrmann. Out of 43 councillors, most of them UDR (conservative), only three declared themselves against the CWM project. GISEM also sent its report to the ministries, to the Prime Minister, and to Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, who had just been elected President of the Republic. In his election manifesto Giscard had put forward an 18-point programme for the environment, which included an assurance that no development project would be imposed by force on a population which did not want it.

#### **The Prefect Decides**

On 20 June the Mayor of Marckolsheim refused to sign the building permit for the factory. Although a supporter of the project, he saw it as his democratic duty to give effect to the council's vote and to the views of the majority of local people. Democratic scruples did not however worry the Prefect, M. Sicurani, who signed the decree authorising a classified installation on the industrial site by CWM Bärlocher-France. The building permit was signed on 27 June.

The eleven councillors who opposed the project resigned. On 17 July M. Sicurani received all the councillors in order to explain the reasons for his decision. To the press he declared: 'The CWM factory presents no danger to the population.'

The Autonomous Port of Strasbourg could now sell the 10 hectares site to CWM Bärlocher-France but, before the formalities could be completed, the sale of the land had to be approved by the Ministry of Equipment. However, in the face of the growing hostility of the population, the file was frozen at Ministry level.

#### **GISEM Steps up Action**

Opponents of the factory were surprised at the Prefect's hasty decision and total failure to take public feeling into account. A harder line would be

needed, and the time had now come to seek wider support in the region. The Committee for the Safeguard of Fessenheim and the Plain of the Rhine (CSFR) offered its help. The CSFR, under the leadership of Jean-Jacques Rettig, had had experience of organising a campaign against the construction of a nuclear power station at Fessenheim further south. (Although that station was eventually built, the protest movement there had never died down.) Contact was also made with environmental groups on the German side of the Rhine. The Baden-Württemberg regional government had given permission for a nuclear power plant to be built at Wyhl across the Rhine from Marckolsheim, and the wine-growers of the Kaiserstuhl area south of Wyhl were concerned at the impact the station would have on the climate. They now became worried about the effect on the vineyards of toxic emissions from the proposed lead factory, which would be carried over by the prevailing winds.

GISEM called a second public meeting on 22 July, and 800 people attended. The idea of a public demonstration in the form of a protest march against the prefectorial decision was adopted, and representatives there of the German movement promised the active support of their organisations. A communique issued after the meeting asked: 'Must Alsace become the dustbin of Europe?', 'Do we wish to become the French Ruhr?' The factory was being imposed on a population, whose refusal to accept it was based on 'the right to take charge of our own way of life'.

In spite of the hot sultry weather 2,000 people, including many from Baden, took part in the march on 28 July. Over 80 tractors joined in, a dozen of them from Sasbach, a village on the German side of the Rhine bridge. Banners read: 'Alsace is not a dustbin', 'No to Chemischewerke', etc. When asked to allow the church bells to be rung, the local priest, Father Dussourd, had hesitated, as he felt this could be divisive. However, on the day, the bells rang and he joined the demonstrators. At the end of the march the crowd gathered on the industrial site and planted a tree symbolising the unity of the folk of Alsace and Baden in the struggle they were henceforth to wage together. The idea of occupying the site was for the first time given a public airing.

The following week 28 members of GISEM lodged an appeal with the administrative tribunal of Strasbourg against the prefectorial decree; they also requested a stay of execution. Hundreds of circulars were sent out asking for volunteers to occupy the Marckolsheim site. Fifty people came forward. In Baden, meetings were held to discuss action against the lead factory and nuclear plant projects. A call went out for a joint demonstration

under the slogan, 'No nuclear power station in Wyhl, no lead factory in Marckolsheim'.

On 25 August over 3,000 citizens from both areas marched through Wyhl, with their banners in German or French. The eventual occupation of both sites was decided in principle. On the following day at a meeting in Weisweil, a village north of Wyhl, 21 citizen action groups and environmental associations from Baden, Alsace and Switzerland formed an International Committee for Occupation (CIO).

On 15 September, the first workmen arrived and began enclosing the Marckolsheim site.

A final meeting to decide on the occupation of the site took place the next day. At first most of the local activists were reluctant to take this first step; they were afraid of the authorities, afraid of breaking the law. However, leading members of GISEM came out strongly in favour of the occupation. They were backed by activists from outside the district, including Solange Fernex (leader of Ecologie et Survie), Jean-Jacques Rettig (secretary of CSFR) and by the young environmentalist, Antoine Waechter. After a three-hour debate, the decision to occupy was finally carried. Many felt that the democratic process had failed, and that something more spectacular was needed if the provincial bureaucrats were to be convinced.

---

## The Occupation

---

The date and time of the occupation were kept secret until the last moment. The plan was to occupy the site at 7 o'clock on Friday morning, 20 September 1974. Thousands of leaflets headed 'Lead Alarm' were distributed on both sides of the frontier. When the first demonstrators appeared on Friday, many were still afraid of acting illegally, and the first tent was pitched outside the site boundary. As more people arrived, tents were gradually erected inside the site. Soon some 100 Alsace and Baden folk had arrived. By the end of the day there were 450. They were people of all ages and all walks of life. This was important because, if young people only had taken part, the authorities could more easily have dismissed the opposition as consisting solely of extremists and 'radicals'. The presence of older, normally law-abiding citizens made it a political event which could not be ignored. Some people stood in the holes into which huge fence posts were to be lowered and so prevented work from continuing. The workmen, addressed directly through loudhailers, were asked to leave; it was just as much in their own interest as it was for the rest of the population. Some of the workmen were furious at first, but they were eventually persuaded to leave. The success of the occupation encouraged local notables, including the eleven councillors who had resigned, to visit the site and show their support. The police were present but did not intervene.

News of the occupation was announced on radio and television the same day, and the press took up the story over the weekend.

Notice-boards carrying material about the lead problem were erected, meals were prepared, future plans discussed and, as night fell, those who were to remain had a sing-song round the camp fire. Before settling down they organised a guard rota. At the weekend large numbers of people visited the camp and signed the CIO's book.

On the Monday morning the contractor's men returned but were unable to resume work as all roads leading to the site were blocked by 400 French and German demonstrators, many of them workers and peasants, and 40 tractors. This nonviolent confrontation took place in an atmosphere of mutual respect. After this incident the CIO organised a duty roster. Each morning a different village on the French or German side would be responsible for bringing their tractors and taking turns in guarding the site. In the event of police interven-

tion, bells and fire sirens in the villages would sound the alarm. On the Tuesday the Prefect and M. Bord, the Deputy (MP), refused to receive a deputation from the CIO. On the same day, the Mayor sent a telegram to the Prefect expressing his deep anxiety and asking him to—'Review the situation in order to avoid incidents and violence. Reverse the decision over CWM. Avoid intervention of forces of law and order.'

#### **An International Incident**

On 26 September M. Jarrot, the Minister of the Environment, visited Alsace and invited a delegation from GISEM and AFRPN to meet him at the town hall of Guebwiller in Haut-Rhin. The decision to hold the meeting away from GISEM's home base was taken because the Prefect of Bas-Rhin would not receive the Minister on his own territory. M. Sicurani, evidently fearing trouble during M. Jarrot's visit, closed the Sasbach bridge to all Germans suspected of wanting to cross over to occupy the site. Activists on both sides of the river promptly blocked the frontier at Sasbach and at Breisach further south. A protest by the Federal Government in Bonn forced the Prefect to lift the ban, and the next day the frontier was once more open to all travellers. This incident brought the Marckolsheim affair to the attention of the German public in even greater detail through nationwide press, radio and TV reports.

#### **The Camp**

The occupation was to last five months, during the coldest and wettest part of the year, so the camp had to be made as comfortable as possible. A wooden hut was erected for meetings but, as this proved inadequate, a large round-house was built later. At night an average of 20 to 30 people slept at the camp, some of them under canvas. During the day many people stayed on the site, most of them coming from the surrounding towns and villages on both sides of the Rhine. Each village was responsible for the running of the camp during its period of guard duty. The success of the occupation was due in no small measure to the women, who spent their days at the camp while their menfolk were at work. They cooked meals, played with their young children, knitted, read, or held long conversations with each other. In a traditional peasant community in which politics and outside matters are left to men, the women were now able to come out of their isolation and express their own views on questions affecting their lives. Shopkeepers made free deliveries of bread, sausages and tarts. Farmers, vinegrowers and fishermen brought building material and other supplies. People took time off work to help on the site.

Thousands of visitors called in at the camp, usually at weekends and

holiday periods. They could gather information from well-informed people at a stand where displays were on view and specialised publications and the camp newspaper could be bought. A snack bar and a stand offering home-made cakes were popular and helped to raise funds. Twelve thousand visitors signed the camp register in the first three months of the occupation.

A degree of continuity was provided by a small number of unemployed people, students taking time off from their studies and conscientious objectors to military service. They took turns at guard duty, manned the stands during weekdays, looked after the garden and the hens or helped the peasants on the land. At first there was a wall of incomprehension between the peasants and these youngsters with their different ideas, attitudes and lifestyle. However, they soon came to be accepted for their willingness and dedication.

Members of the CIO and of GISEM spent as much time as possible at the camp. A leaflet was published on 30 October, which listed the demands of the local population. Its text reflected the confrontation of ideas at the camp and showed that original concerns about the dangers to health and agriculture had now broadened to include a range of environmental and social issues.

#### **The Will of the People**

The population's rejection of the CWM project was confirmed on 13 October 1974, when a supplementary election took place. Candidates opposing the lead factory were returned with a majority of 70%. The Mayor resigned and was replaced by one of the newly elected councillors, Léon Siegel, the local vet and a member of GISEM. The first action of the new council was to hold a press conference on the site, at which they declared they would do all in their power to prevent the installation of the factory.

#### **Friendship House**

The round-house, or Friendship House, was completed in November. Its circular framework of tree trunks was 16 metres in diameter, and it provided a sheltered meeting place in which forums on all sorts of social, environmental and political questions could be held. Folk from both sides of the Rhine could converse in the Alaman dialect and, as barriers broke down between French and German, young and old, workers and peasants, they spoke of their hopes and fears and began to experience a new sense of community. They realised that pollution has no frontiers and, in the fight against it, frontiers could be ignored. As they sat round the fire during the long evenings, they sang popular songs and ballads or were entertained by poets, singers or actors. A

theatre group from Strasbourg, Les Musauer Wackes, came to perform its play, 'The sad story of Monsieur Rosenthal' in which huge masked figures of the CWM chairman and of the Prefect were seen ridiculed and thrown out of Marckolsheim.

Every Sunday there were special activities. People were invited to lead cultural activities or to talk about their occupations or interests.

### **Nonviolence**

From the beginning, nonviolence was the hall-mark of the struggle. This was largely thanks to the precedent set by the nonviolent battle of the peasants of the Larzac plateau in southern France, who were then successfully resisting a bid by the army to take over their land. Activists in the nonviolent and pacifist movements were present at Marckolsheim from the start, and this helped people to gain an understanding of a way of thinking and acting completely new to most of them. They came to realise that this method of fighting had a larger dimension than simply the rejection of violence. It could be very effective in appealing to the consciences and sense of justice of those in power. Lanza del Vasto, founder of the Gandhian Community of the Ark, had initiated the use of nonviolence on the Larzac, and he told the people at the camp: 'You have neither wealth nor strength nor power, but you possess truth, justice and courage. These are the weapons that will overcome strength and power. We of the Larzac were only a handful at first. By last summer we were 100,000 and now victory is ours. If you have the courage to stay here through rain and snow, you too will succeed.'

In the camp there were only three or four people who had had any training in nonviolence. One of them was Raymond Schirmer of the French section of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR). He was 25, had just finished his studies and was due to do his military service. His application to register as a conscientious objector had been turned down, and while waiting for the authorities to take the next step he was free to serve in the camp full-time. Such was his popularity and the sympathy felt for his stand that, when he later appeared before an army court at Metz, a coach-load of people went to support him. Raymond pleaded that his work in the camp to defend the people of the region was a valid alternative service. He was given a two-year prison sentence.

Many were uncertain how they would react if attacked by the police: Some training was clearly required, so Erich Bachman, a staff member of IFOR, came to the camp one Sunday to conduct a well attended training session. Men wearing borrowed firemen's helmets and carrying batons took the part

of riot police in a role-play which was afterwards assessed and discussed at length. This session gave new confidence to the participants, who then felt better prepared to face police action if they ever had to. The gendarmes, however, did not intervene, although there was at least one close shave. The occupation committee had a friend in the intelligence unit concerned with the 'security of the territory', who was prepared to warn them of any move by the police. The CIO were warned one day that riot police were to be sent to the site. They immediately made the news public, and late in the night a message came through to say that the police plan had been cancelled indefinitely.

### **The Church**

The Church is very influential in Alsace, and it was expected to make its position clear. But in general it failed to do so; neither the Catholic nor the Protestant hierarchies made any official declaration. Some individuals and groups were, however, prepared to show their support for the popular movement.

The influence of Father Dussourd on the Christian community was perhaps the most effective. As well as supporting the march in July he also, at the time of the municipal elections, distributed his own leaflet in which he associated himself unreservedly with 'the brave peasants of the soil'.

The Bishop of Strasbourg, Mgr. Elchinger, visited the occupied site on 23 October. He arrived later than announced, at a time when most older people had left, and unfortunately was received with little respect by some of the young people present. The Bishop was already known for his pro-government, even right-wing, views and made no public comment afterwards.

Some Catholic priests and Protestant ministers gave their support and there was always a Christian presence at the camp.

### **Dealing with the Media**

The provincial dailies at first echoed the 'good news' announced by the authorities. Two journalists, one working for *Les dernières nouvelles d'Alsace* and the other for *L'Alsace*, wrote euphoric articles about the advantages of the project, ignoring or even misrepresenting the opposition. As more people became involved in the struggle and noticed that what they read about the situation often bore little relation to what they knew and experienced, they began to monitor everything which appeared in the press. After the occupation began, the two papers conducted an even more virulent campaign against an opposition directed, they said, by left-wing extremists. Whenever reporters appeared they were now besieged by angry readers, who insisted they

---

## Industry Retreats before the Environment

---

The Minister of the Environment had become convinced that the decision had to be reversed. President Giscard d'Estaing's cabinet was divided over the issue, with the more liberal members lining up behind M. Jarrot. The government had come into power partly because of its liberal image and its concern for the environment. Giscard, in his election campaign, had said he was a partisan of 'development with a human face', so it would have been difficult for him to ignore the will of the people of Alsace.

The agreement to sell the site had been signed but final approval had not been given by the Minister of Equipment, who was now asked to investigate all the operations involved, in case of any irregularities and also to take into consideration any public interests which might be affected.

Everyone knew that the answer would be unfavourable to the promoters of the project. A big celebration took place on the site but the occupation continued, though at a reduced level. A midnight mass was held at the camp at Christmas, and in the New Year there was a three-day fast to show solidarity with the starving people of the Third World. The CIO remained vigilant; they wanted official confirmation before bringing the occupation to an end.

On 22 February the contractors removed the material they had left on the site. At a press conference three days later, M. Pflimlin, Mayor of Strasbourg and President of the Autonomous Port, read out a letter announcing the government's refusal to complete the sale of the site to CWM Bärlocher-France. The Minister stressed that all the procedures carried out by the parties concerned conformed to the norm. He argued, however, that certain municipalities were hostile to the project and might refuse to provide the necessary services and living accommodation. This would hinder the industrial plan and involve the Autonomous Port in serious financial difficulties.

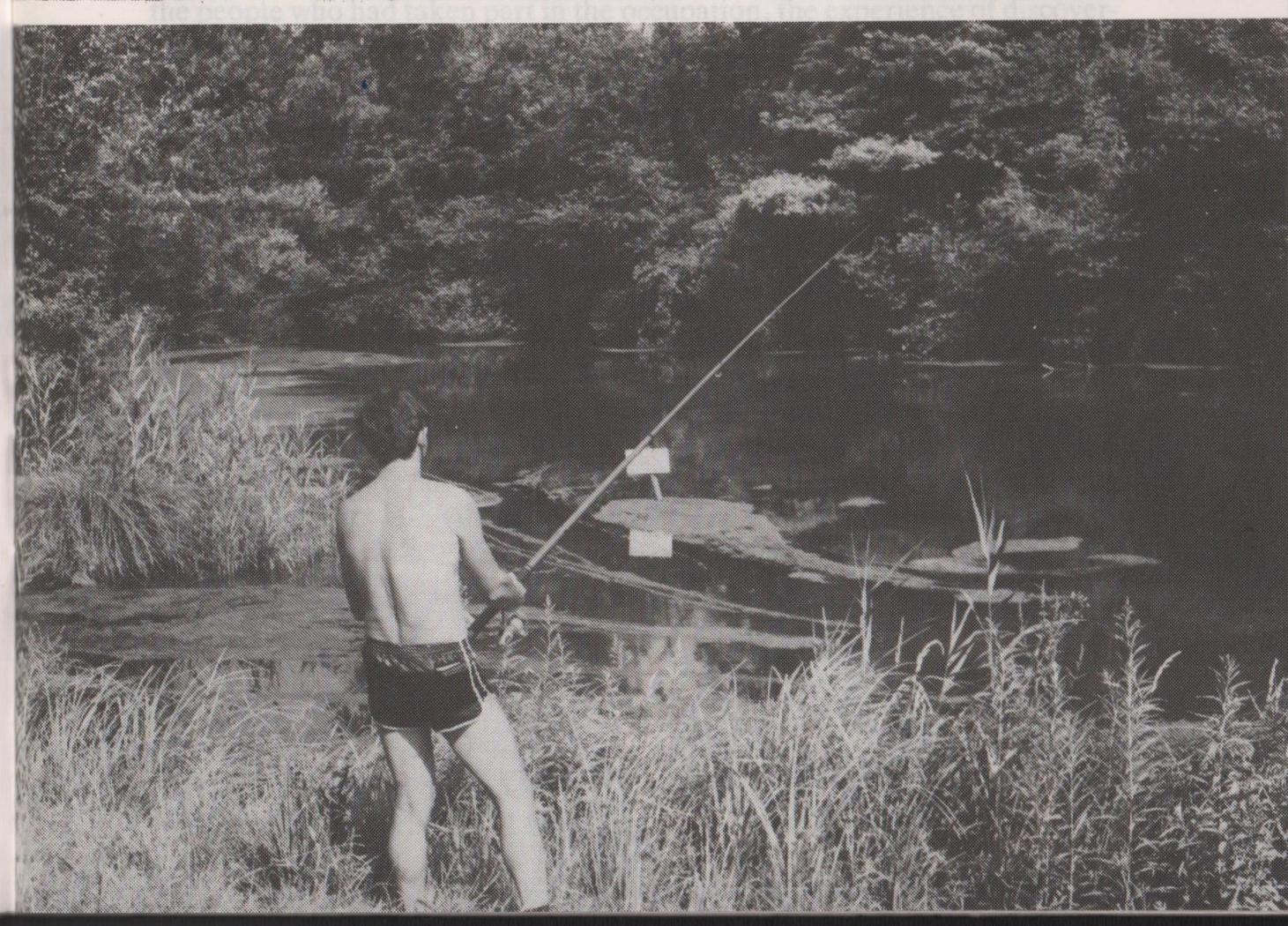
---

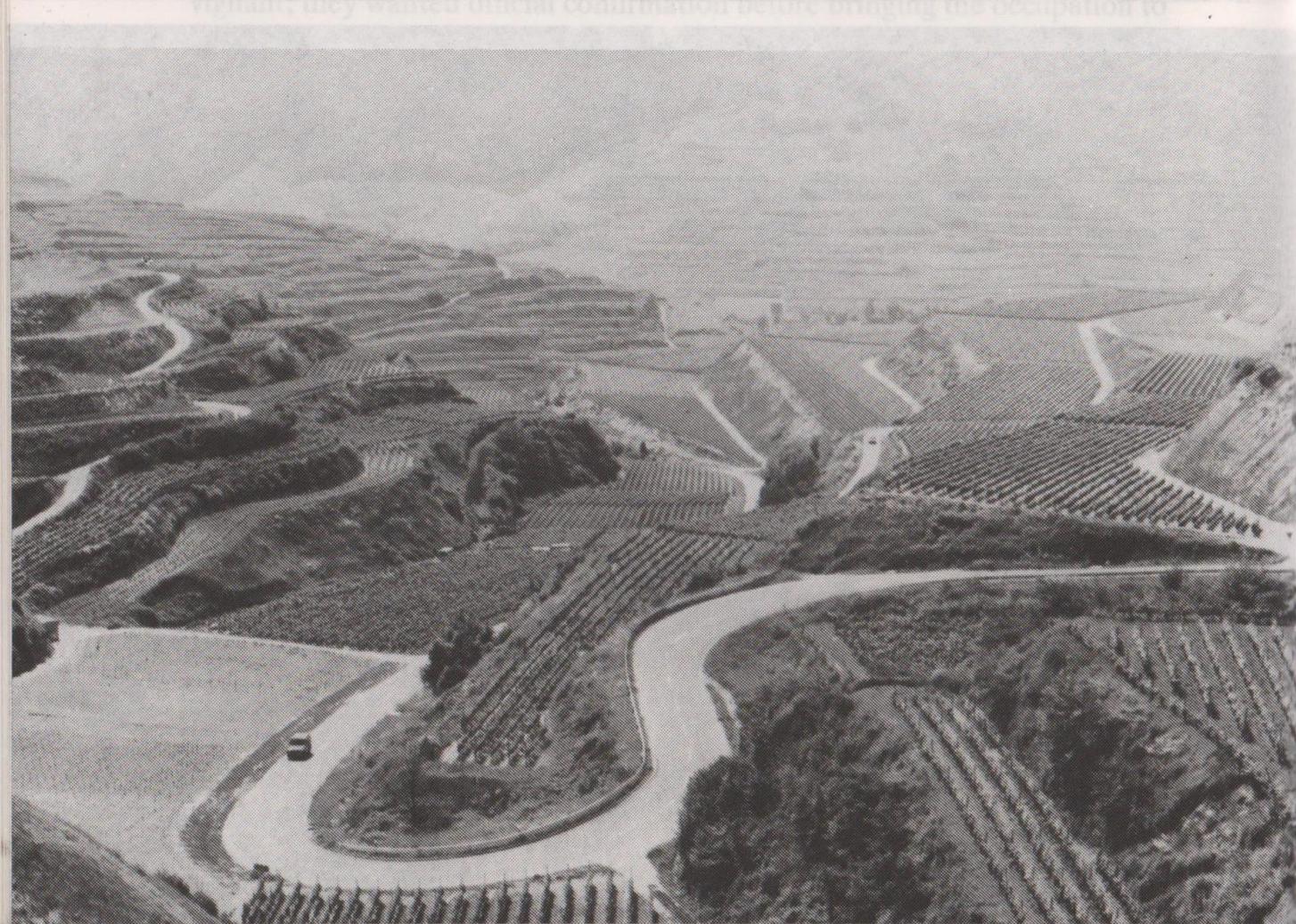
Facing page: Top; Guarding the occupied site, Marckolsheim, September 1974

*Photograph by Meinrad Schwörer*

Below; The clear water of a Rhine forest stream in Alsace

*Photograph by Roger Rawlinson*





M. Pflimlin then went on to speak of the need to revise industrial objectives in order to achieve the necessary balance between the demands of industry and the protection of nature.

It was only four months since M. Pflimlin had publicly denounced 'those committees of irresponsible people who organise meetings, distribute leaflets and seek to substitute themselves for the mayors'. These committees and other opponents of the lead factory had now won a decisive victory. Readers of *Les dernières nouvelles d'Alsace* were told: 'This is the first time that industry has retreated before the environment.'

#### After the Struggle

Once the fight had been won, most local people returned to their personal preoccupations. The peasants, deeply relieved that the threat to their health and livelihood had been lifted, felt free to concentrate once more on their farming pursuits and country-life activities. The affair had divided the community, and many wanted to forget the whole episode.

The ecologists had hoped that, through the experience of Marckolsheim, many more people might become aware of other problems and do something about them. However, the campaign had lasted less than a year, not really long enough for meaningful changes to take place. Nevertheless, for many of the people who had taken part in the occupation, the experience of discovering each other's ideas and problems had opened up new horizons. The realisation that they were not completely powerless could never be forgotten.

The new Marckolsheim council were thankful that the factory with its potentially dangerous pollution had been stopped, but they were not opposed to industrialisation as such. The new mayor, Léon Siegel, had given his full support to the occupation but was not prepared to consider other issues which might require changes, and he showed no further interest in the environment. For a while the new municipality encouraged the public to attend council meetings and to participate in local affairs, but very few people took up the challenge. So the councillors, finding it too difficult to bring about changes, returned to the normal town hall routines. Disappointed, a member of

---

Facing page: Top; Annemarie Sacherer and her husband tending vineyards in the snow

Photograph by Meinrad Schwörer

Below; Vineyards on the terraced hills of the Kaiserstuhl

Photograph by Roger Rawlinson

GISEM on the council stood down at the next election. The population continued to vote conservative.

### Some Positive Results

Although the government's review of its industrialisation programme was partly dictated by the economic crisis at that time, the determined stand at Marckolsheim also helped to produce a policy change. The total area earmarked for industrial development was substantially reduced. Of the five nuclear power plants planned for Alsace (including one near Marckolsheim) only one, Fessenheim, was finally built.

The Marckolsheim experience had helped many people to realise the power of nonviolence, and this awareness became general in the province. GISEM received many requests for information on how to run campaigns. Some of these were successful. At Gerstheim, for instance, in 1977, the electricity authority erected a tall mast which, the inhabitants were told, was solely for meteorological purposes. However, after they had been warned by the ecologists that this was the usual preliminary to the construction of a nuclear power station, local people organised a lively campaign. It was found that 86% of the population in the area were against the project. A roundhouse was built and the site occupied until the electricity authority finally agreed to dismantle the mast.

Activists of the environmental movement had learned important lessons during the struggle. They had come to understand better the spirit which lies behind nonviolence, and their practical experience of direct action was to prove invaluable in the anti-nuclear fight across the Rhine to which they now turned their attention.



## Der Bundschuh

The flag with the 'union shoe': see page 34

---

## The Nuclear Threat

---

The people of the Upper-Rhine valley began to be aware of nuclear energy plans for both sides of the border in the early 1970s. Three nuclear power plants were to be built: at Fessenheim in Alsace, Breisach in Baden, and Kaiseraugst in Switzerland.

At first these projects were seen mainly as a threat to agriculture and to the environment. People's concern was that the huge cooling towers getting rid of the heat would affect the climate and therefore the environment, in three ways: by raising the temperature of the Rhine, which might turn it into a 'dead' river; by causing fog as the water turned into steam, which would affect the crops (particularly the vineyards of the Kaiserstuhl); and by lowering the water table, which could seriously damage the Rhine forest. Later they learned of dangers from radiation, both in and around nuclear power stations and during transport and handling of nuclear fuel, as well as the possibility of accidents.

There had already been protests by fishermen and conservationists at increasing pollution due to the industrialisation of the region. Now this movement broadened with opposition to the projects at Fessenheim, Kaiseraugst and Breisach.

### Fessenheim (France)

At Fessenheim village, close to the Rhine near Mulhouse, construction of a Westinghouse-type pressurised water reactor began in 1971. In 1972, 500 Germans crossed the Rhine to join the French protesters, but opposition grew slowly until 1977, when the Committee for the Safeguard of Fessenheim and the Plain of the Rhine distributed bulletins to every household. A local anti-nuclear group also started a letter-writing campaign to put pressure on nearby municipalities, 40 of which agreed to sign a petition against the station. Veteran ecologist Solange Fernex started an open-ended fast together with six other people, including conscientious objector Raymond Schirmer, and there were demonstrations of support all over Alsace and Baden. After four weeks, the authorities agreed to a control commission. But this has never functioned satisfactorily; on some occasions its members did not even know of serious incidents until they read about them in the press.

The station went on stream in April 1977. It has had to be shut down many times because of technical faults. The local opposition continues to this day.

#### *Some Positive Results*

Although the government's review of its industrial programme was slow, the people of the Upper Rhine valley began to be aware of the dangers of nuclear power.

#### **Kaiseraugst**

Opposition to the Kaiseraugst plan began in 1969. The project was rejected by Kaiseraugst Council after a referendum in 1972, but this decision was overruled by the Swiss Federal Court. A young conscientious objector, Ruedi Epple, founded a nonviolent group, Gewaltfrei Aktion Kaiseraugst (GAK), which during 1974 built up a direct action movement in Basle and created citizen action groups in the villages around the site. GAK members gained experience by participating in the Marckolsheim occupation and, when work began at Kaiseraugst in mid-March 1975, it was decided to occupy the site.

Expecting to be forcibly evicted, the squatters, almost half of them from Baden and Alsace, began training for passive resistance, but the police never came—possibly because there was sympathy for the anti-nuclear cause in all political parties. Large demonstrations followed, both at the site and before the Federal Council House in Berne, the federal capital. Eventually GAK reached an agreement with the government for a month's halt to the work, all fences to be removed and a firm commitment to negotiate. Only when those conditions were met, in June, was the site freed. The building halt was later prolonged, and it was announced that no permit would be granted till new negotiations were completed.

Following the eleven-week occupation the opposition movement seems to have been bedevilled by political dissensions. Nevertheless, it remained sufficiently united when major campaigns were mounted, and popular support continued to grow. In 1979, under pressure from the electorate, the Basle government came out against the project. But responsibility for nuclear development belonged legally to the Federal Government, and in October 1981 permission was given for the project to go ahead. In an immediate response, 20,000 people demonstrated against the Federal Government's decision. The issue then went to the National Council.

In a referendum on 24 September 1984, the Swiss people rejected, by 55% to 45% of the popular vote and by a majority of the cantons, a proposal to construct no more nuclear power stations. A second proposal to expand the use of alternative energy was also rejected. The city of Basle, however, supported both proposals, and this was seen as a vote of no confidence in plans to build the plant at Kaiseraugst. The struggle continued.

#### **Breisach (West Germany)**

In 1970 Badenwerk AG, an electricity supply company then fully owned by the Baden-Württemberg regional government, bought land from the town of Breisach as a site for a nuclear power station. The public did not hear of the plan until early 1971, shortly before Badenwerk applied for a building licence. This nuclear plan was in line with the Federal Government's energy policy and was approved by the majority Christian Democratic Union (CDU) government of Baden-Württemberg region.

That summer, doctors and scientists, as well as professors and students of Freiburg University, founded an Upper-Rhine Committee against the Threat of Nuclear Power Stations to oppose both the Breisach and Fessenheim projects. An active group of young chemists from the University produced a leaflet, in which they outlined in detail the dangers of nuclear power to man and the environment. Contact was made with the inhabitants of the vineyard villages of the south-west Kaiserstuhl, and soon regular information meetings were being held, attracting over 100 people each time.

#### **The Kaiserstuhl**

The Kaiserstuhl is a collapsed volcanic massif rising from the plain of the Rhine. On its terraced hills grapevines thrive in the mineral-rich loess soil and the warm sunny weather which lingers on into late autumn. Other kinds of fruit, as well as tobacco, maize and other crops are also grown. The Kaiserstuhl produces some of the finest high-quality wines in Germany and grapevines have been cultivated there for hundreds of years. Compared with other agricultural activities, vine-growing offers a good living from a small area of land. It is labour-intensive and requires special skills. Most of the growers work small or medium-sized vineyards, often with the help of their families. The people of the Kaiserstuhl are mostly hard-working, traditional in outlook, and they have a strong community feeling.

The vine-growers were the first amongst the peasant-farmer population to be concerned about the way the cooling towers would affect the local climate. Temperature inversion acting on the plumes from the cooling towers could be expected to produce blankets of mist or fog, which would drastically reduce sunlight over long periods and damage the vines, which need plenty of sunshine to ripen the grapes. Also, it was feared that the increase in humidity of the atmosphere would encourage a high incidence of vine diseases, and, if this happened, there could be a financial loss of up to 50%. The vine-growers feared too that the possible radioactive contamination of their wine would further depreciate its value. Thus, the whole district could be ruined.

## The Struggle Begins

The vine-growers expected their union to take action but the union officials at Freiburg reacted very cautiously. Eventually, in January 1972, a meeting was held to clarify the situation and dispel the growing fears of the rural population, but it had an opposite effect. One of the speakers suggested that the vine cannot really be said to be a sun-loving plant. This provoked cat-calls and booing, which led the Kaiserstuhl-born president of the growers' union to upbraid his compatriots for their emotional reaction. With lessened faith in the 'experts' and in their own union representatives, the vine-growers now gave massive support to the anti-nuclear movement. A strong organisation was built up under the joint chairmanship of Dr. Bühler and Herr Kionka, a pharmacist. Regular meetings started between the various citizen action groups now being formed in the area and their opposite numbers in Alsace. This alliance became known as 'Internationale Rheintal Aktion'.

The Breisach project was discussed in the regional parliament on 3 March. Many citizens were not satisfied that sufficient expert advice had been obtained, and an open letter with 800 signatures was sent to the regional Economics Minister calling for independent reports by experts on climatology, limnology and radiology.

During the summer, placards with protest slogans appeared on vineyard terrace walls and other vantage points along the roads. The vine-growers' union was persuaded to arrange a meeting between the Upper Rhine Committee and the regional Economics Minister, Dr. Eberle, in the first week of September. However, the delegation realised that whatever views they held, the regional government in Stuttgart wanted the nuclear power station.

In Breisach, protesters organised an information campaign during September 1972. Some stood in front of the beautiful gothic Münster tower with a large poster depicting it dwarfed by two cooling towers (the actual height of these would be 115 metres). The *Badischer Zeitung* reproduced this poster together with a full-page article outlining the case against 'nuclear electricity'. It was the first time the local press had publicised the views of the anti-nuclear movement.

When the regional Prime Minister, Hans Filbinger, described all those against nuclear power as 'left-wing radicals', activists and many of their fellow citizens protested vigorously. Leaflets were distributed and signatures collected for a petition against the project.

Meanwhile in the Kaiserstuhl a tractor demonstration was being organised and, on 16 September, 560 tractors carrying placards with slogans were driven by vine-growers and peasants from Oberrotweil to Breisach. On arrival at the

town hall, a vine-grower handed in a petition asking the city fathers to revoke Badenwerk's land-purchase contract. Over 65,000 signatures had been collected for the petition, mainly in Breisgau (which includes Freiburg)—a figure indicating that some 90% of voters in the area had said 'No' to the nuclear plan.

## A Temporary Victory

A public hearing took place in Breisach on 31 October 1972. Several hundred vine-growers turned up, also supporters from Freiburg. On the platform sat gentlemen from the regional Economics Ministry, from Badenwerk and all manner of experts. There was considerable irritation at the overbearing attitude of the chairman, and the presence of the Economics Minister, Dr. Eberle, did not help either; he was known to be a member of the board of directors of Badenwerk. Eberle admitted that the inquiry so far carried out on the project was insufficient, and further expert evidence would have to be heard. The first speaker for the opposition spoke in the Alaman dialect and in blunt terms told Eberle exactly what he thought of all the machinations going on behind the scenes. But Eberle no longer wanted to hear, and he switched off the microphone. The vine-growers were provoked by this and rushed towards the platform, where they engaged in heated arguments.

At discussions held directly between representatives of the Upper-Rhine committees and Badenwerk in January 1973, the two parties failed to come to any conclusion.

In face of such widespread and determined resistance, the authorities decided to suspend the licensing procedure for a reactor at Breisach. It appeared as if the people had won, but it was only a temporary victory.

---

## The Threat Moves North

---

In March 1973, unknown to the general public, Badenwerk AG and Energieversorgung Schwaben set up a joint company to build a reactor, and in May the new company, Nuclear Power South (KWS) applied for a licence to build at Wyhl.

Wyhl is a well kept village of about 2,700 inhabitants 25 km. north-west of Freiburg and just north of the Kaiserstuhl. It lies within the rural district of Emmendingen where over 12% of the population earn their living on the land. Wyhl also offers some employment in shops and light industries. Some villagers commute to work in the nearest towns. Its council is predominantly CDU (conservative).

On 19 July, the people of Wyhl heard for the first time on the radio that the regional Economics Ministry had agreed to an offer of a site to KWS in the Rhine forest near the village. They learned later that the decision to offer the land had been taken by the Mayor and councillors at a secret sitting of the council. The villagers were surprised and shocked when they heard the news. Details appeared in the press the following day and soon everyone was discussing the situation.

The plan was for a 1,375 MW heavy-water reactor scheduled to come into operation in 1979. Another reactor of the same capacity would be added later. The information was repeated in the council's bulletin on Saturday, 21 July, and villagers were invited to attend a meeting about the project on the following Monday. On the Sunday, anti-nuclear-energy banners were seen hanging on the walls of the town hall and the school, and after the church service a large crowd demonstrated in front of the town hall.

However, not all the citizens of Wyhl agreed with this opposition, and on Monday evening the local sports hall was soon full. At 8 p.m. tractors bedecked with banners roared in from the countryside and surrounded the hall. The protesters, who had driven in from many parts of the region, were not allowed in, and so they lined the windows to watch what was happening inside. Mayor Zimmer outlined the positive results to be expected from the council's decision; the building of a new indoor swimming pool and a sports centre with a club house, tennis courts and other facilities; new employment prospects for local people at the power plant; increased business activities in

the village; and villagers would no longer have to travel far to work. The Mayor was rewarded with thunderous applause. Then the Badenwerk people explained the operation of a nuclear power station, comparing the risks involved to a steaming kettle on a burner. This way of minimising the dangers angered those outside, and they began hammering on the windows with their fists. It was not till 11 p.m. that the first critical comment was allowed, and then Herr Zimmer dealt with objectors in an arrogant manner and with ridicule.

### Nuclear Power—'Yes' or 'No'?

Some Wyhl citizens were convinced that it was in their interest to accept the power station. Others thought differently, and the following evening a few citizens decided to form a Wyhl citizens' action group. This was soon started, with the help of a Breisach activist. Their first leaflet asked for independent scientific experts to examine the consequences of the project.

The citizens of Wyhl took sides over an issue which sometimes even divided families. On 21 August a 'KKW-Ja' (Nuclear Power Station—Yes) group was formed in the village. Free trips from Wyhl to visit the 345 MW Obrigheim nuclear station, 40 km. from Heidelberg, were organised almost every week. But the visitors saw very little. After looking round the buildings, they were shown some slides or a film, and given a free meal. They did not seem to worry that the form they had to sign at Obrigheim indicated that they entered the building at their own risk and that admittance was forbidden to pregnant women.

However, in other villages, especially those in the Kaiserstuhl, a large majority of the population opposed the project. On the day Dr. Eberle had announced the regional government's decision, the Weisweil village council sent a protest telegram to the regional prime minister, Hans Filbinger. The next day a Weisweil citizens' action group was founded. On 26 July the group organised an information meeting at which experts explained, to people from all over the district, the dangers to health and to the environment presented by a nuclear power plant.

### Weisweil and the Fishermen

Weisweil, a village north-east of Wyhl, soon became an important centre of resistance in the anti-nuclear struggle. For centuries farming and fishing had been the main sources of livelihood, but now small industries and shop-keeping provide a living for many local people.

Balthasar Ehret, whose family have been fisher-folk for 300 years, has

described in an article, the life and concerns of Weisweil's fishing community. At one time, some 60 different sorts of fish could be found in the Rhine; now, because of industrial pollution, only 20 remain. Much of the fishing is carried out in the waters of the 'Old Rhine', and other unpolluted streams flowing into the main river. Today fishing provides a living for the Ehrets and three other families in the village. They belong to a long-established guild which, every year, introduces hundreds of thousands of young eels, trout, carp and tench into the clean waters of the Old Rhine.

A nuclear power station would be a disaster to the Rhine fishermen. Fish are attracted to the warm water from the outfall, where they may be contaminated. (Fish caught below Obrigheim nuclear station were found to have large cancerous growths and were genetically damaged.) It would be impossible to sell such fish.

A water-borne demonstration, organised by the citizen action groups and the fishermen's guild, took place on the Old Rhine on 25 August. About 200 people took part with four flat-bottomed fishing boats and a number of canoes. Notables such as Karl Nicola, SPD (social democrat) member of the regional land parliament, and Mayor Peter of Weisweil joined in. The KKW-Ja group had set up posters near the starting point to show their support for Mayor Zimmer. As the boats proceeded towards Weisweil, the demonstrators could observe signs of wild life everywhere in the reed-lined banks of the stream and among the forest trees beyond; they realised more than ever that the fight was also concerned with saving this fine nature reserve.

### **The Nuclear Debate**

In the winter of 1973-74, the oil crisis was at its height. Supporters of nuclear power argued in favour of its rapid development since, if oil became scarce, it would provide an independent source of energy. However, figures showed that only 4% of oil consumption in the Federal Republic went into electricity production. As for the nuclear industry, it is dependent on uranium imported from countries which could become politically unstable. Scientific experts warned that radioactive discharges from a nuclear plant would contaminate the environment and create a health hazard. Questions such as these were debated at public meetings at Weisweil and elsewhere.

Under the title 'The Quality of Life' Christian responsibility for the environment was discussed at the Protestant church of Weisweil. Meanwhile, KWS set up an information centre at Wyhl town hall where visitors could see a model of a nuclear power station and cooling tower and could take away

glossy brochures. In February 1974, the rural district council of Emmendingen held a day-long open meeting at Wyhl; the sports hall was filled to capacity. District delegates asked searching questions about the project, and were answered by Dr. Eberle and experts from the Federal Scientific Research Ministry and the Reactor-Safety Institute. After this, a great deal more was known about the dangers of nuclear power stations.

Preparations went ahead, and construction of the power plant was planned to start in July 1974. Some details of the KWS proposal to the licensing authority were disclosed in a leaflet produced by the Wyhl action group. This showed, among other things, the expected increase in population and traffic density, building plans, and the vast amount of water needed for the operation of the power plant. A reproduction of a ground plan showed an industrial site of 85 hectares—was this for heavy industries, petro-chemical plants, refineries? No one could be sure of the real intention of industry and the government, and many people in the area were alarmed at the news. Wyhl council denied the truth of the report and attacked the group for wilfully deceiving the public. However, the authenticity of the information was proved correct when it was compared with the text of the original report.

### **A Tractorcade**

As the campaign to inform the population intensified, the opposition movement rapidly gained ground. More and more people wanted to express their concern in a concrete way, and so it was decided to organise a large tractor demonstration.

At 9 a.m. on 27 April 1974, tractors carrying banners with slogans such as—'Atomic stations destroy people and countryside', began to arrive at Endingen, north of the vine-growing area. An hour later, there was a thunderous roar as the engines started up and the first tractors set off. The 400-strong column wended its way through all parts of the Kaiserstuhl. Police on motorcycles blocked side roads when necessary to allow the tractorcade to proceed unhindered. As the demonstrators drove through the picturesque villages, they received an enthusiastic welcome. People working in the fields and vineyards waved to show their support.

At Wyhl there was a demonstration in front of the town hall. It had been a long tiring day, but everyone felt satisfied. That evening there was a meeting at Forchheim between some of the demonstrators and a delegation from Alsace. The two groups discussed their common concerns over the atomic project and the Alsatians spoke of the plan to build a lead factory in neighbouring Marckolsheim.

### **Petition and Public Inquiry**

The nuclear power station plan was announced in the press by the Economics Ministry on 17 May. Objectors had 17 days within which to lodge their complaints. Eight citizen action groups immediately set to work to organise a petition against the proposal. Teachers collected signatures in their colleges, students in the university, ministers before and after church services, doctors in their surgeries. Farmers' wives went from door to door. Signatures were collected in offices, banks, guest houses, dairies and many other places. Social and sporting events were not forgotten. Stands were set up at vantage points in Freiburg. The result was a total of 95,000 signatures (later increased to 100,000). People were also urged to send personal protests to the Ministry, and many did so. With the help of scientific experts some 300 people sent in more detailed objections to the plan. Eight municipalities, including the town of Lahr (further north), and 53 local associations sent in their objections. This led the regional Economics Minister to summon the mayors of the objecting councils to Stuttgart where he tried to persuade them that his decision was right.

An important meeting was held at Weisweil on 25 June. Specialists again lectured on the operation of nuclear power stations and the risks involved. The chairman of the local action group reported that the support for the petition had surprised the Federal government in Bonn. Many more action groups were being formed in the region.

Some of the churches joined in the controversy. The Protestant Bishop of Baden-Württemberg and the Catholic Archbishop of Freiburg both held press conferences at Weisweil. The Church is not without political influence in Germany, and the hierarchy see their role on such occasions as being mediators between state and people. They were in regular contact with the regional government throughout the struggle, but never declared publicly which side they were on.

A public hearing was held at Wyhl on 9–10 July 1974. Representatives of the Economics Ministry, Badenwerk and the Reactor Research Centre were left in no doubt about the views of the opposition; there were 'KKW-Nein' (Nuclear Power Station—No) posters everywhere. The Baden-Württemberg flag flew from many houses with posters in the windows, showing the occupants were CDU voters but opposed the plan. Banners stressed that the Prime Minister and the Economics Minister could not be impartial, since Filbinger was chairman of Badenwerk and Eberle was on the company's board. Dozens of tractors with banners surrounded the sports hall, and

opponents of the project were present in force—mayors, legal representatives and experts, as well as ordinary citizens.

The government experts took up most of the time. As the inquiry proceeded, the opposition became increasingly exasperated by the one-sided and arrogant attitude of the chairman—they had expected a carefully balanced examination of the pros and cons of the case. Representatives of the farmers' and vine-growers' unions offered no clear and consistent line and were also a disappointment. On the second day, people sang protest songs outside the building. One man had brought a cow with 'KKW-Nein' marked on its back. The situation inside was getting worse, and by the afternoon many questions had still not been dealt with. The opponents wanted an adjournment, as many could not sacrifice a third working day at the hearing. However, this was refused by the Minister. Late in the afternoon the audience walked out in disgust. A coffin marked 'Democracy' was carried out of the hall.

Representatives from the villages sent a protest telegram to the Prime Minister. Three hundred and sixty wives and mothers of Weisweil sent him an open letter. The CDU MPs and clergy of the district expected a second hearing, but as far as the regional government was concerned, the problem had been cleared up.

### **Nonviolence and the Bürgerinitiativen**

In the summer of 1974 there was increasing concern over the lead factory plan for Marckolsheim. As we have seen, many Baden folk crossed the Rhine to help their Alsatian comrades. The occupation of the site, in which the Kaiserstuhlers played an important role, was excellent training for the Wyhl struggle. Amongst those who took part were members of Freiburg Non-violent Action, which had arisen out of a Christian student working group. They had studied Gandhian ideas and proposed applying them to the situation in the region. After Marckolsheim they helped to spread those ideas amongst the population engaged in the Wyhl action.

Citizens' action groups were formed in response to the nuclear project. In Germany, these 'Bürgerinitiativen', as they are called, are a country-wide phenomenon. Their purpose is to defend the interests of local citizens and to protect the environment against damaging government decisions. They represent a true grass-roots movement for greater participation in decision-making.

The work of the Baden-Alsace Bürgerinitiativen (the citizens' action groups in south Baden and their equivalent associations in Alsace) was

coordinated at a centre in Weisweil in the home of Lore Haag, the groups' enthusiastic and tireless secretary.

Intense discussions took place within the action groups on what their guiding principles should be. It was recognised that those engaged in the fight were ordinary citizens—farmers, vine-growers, workers, students, professional people—belonging to different parties or none. (The region is very conservative with a 60% CDU vote.) It was therefore decided that their strategy would be based on three principles: first, that the movement was above party and everyone had an equal right to be heard; secondly non-violence; thirdly, that decisions should be taken by majority vote when necessary. Later, training sessions in nonviolence, led by Eric Bachman, were held at various places in the region.

University students reminded the population of their historical past, of the popular revolts in 1848 and back in the 16th century, when insurrection had been crushed ruthlessly.

A peasant's shoe with long laces had been a feature of the Alsatian peasants' union banner in 1495. This 'union shoe' was later adopted as a symbol in Baden and was again revived during the Wyhl battle. The union shoe emblem once more symbolised the will of the population to unite and defend itself, but this time their weapon would be truth—the power of nonviolence.

### Citizens' Protest

In a press notice on 6 November 1974 the Economics Minister explained the regional government's decision to approve the nuclear plant at Wyhl. The regional CDU party was meeting at Kiechlinsbergen that same day. The news spread like wildfire, and although it was a working day thousands of Kaiserstuhlers converged on the village. They blocked the way to the conference hall, and when the chairman of the CDU parliamentary party, Lothar Späth, and other top politicians arrived there were angry protests. One vine-grower explained to Späth: 'We want a future in which we can continue to work as farmers. At this moment when there is a ray of hope that Marckolsheim can be stopped, our own government stabs us in the back with Wyhl.' Further discussion followed, in which people made their views known in no uncertain fashion. In the end, Späth said he would report their views to the regional government in Stuttgart.

During the following days the media reported widespread criticism of the government's decision. In the regional parliament, the SPD and FDP (Free

Democrats) opposition registered their disapproval, but when Wyhl was discussed a week later only 25 MPs were present.

Even the vine-growers' and farmers' unions took action; they called for a demonstration at Sasbach on Sunday, 10 November. Five thousand people turned up in spite of pouring rain.

On 17 December over 600 people, from both sides of the Rhine, travelled to Stuttgart to protest directly to the regional parliament where the Commission for the Environment was discussing the Wyhl issue.

### Referendum

The Wyhl Bürgerinitiativen discovered that a referendum was possible under the constitution. In May 1974 they collected 663 signatures in the village asking for a chance to vote on whether or not to sell communal land to Badenwerk. In spite of a vigorous campaign during the summer, the village council turned down the idea. The action group appealed to Emmendingen district council and they distributed thousands of leaflets in the surrounding villages. This had the unforeseen result that many calls were made to town halls in the district asking what *they* were doing about the nuclear plan.

Eventually Mayor Zimmer had to agree to a referendum. Minister Eberle stated at a press conference in Freiburg on 9 January 1975 that, if Wyhl said 'No', the land would be compulsorily purchased. The following morning every citizen in the village received a personal letter from Prime Minister Filbinger. At the same time an open letter, signed by 19 doctors in the neighbourhood, appeared in the local news-sheet warning of the risks of atomic energy.

Although a public meeting that evening was intended for local villagers only, Dr. Eberle arrived with a team of eleven specialists. This angered members of the citizens' group, especially when their request to bring their group's legal representatives and experts into the hall was refused because they were not of the village. This led many opponents of the project to walk out in protest. At last, following three hours of speeches from the platform, some discussion was allowed. After much critical comment, the meeting ended at midnight. The following day, both sides worked hard to make last-minute conversions.

The referendum took place on 12 January with a record participation of over 92% of the population. Fifty-five per cent approved the sale of land to Badenwerk; 43.2% voted against it.

### Legal Action

The Bürgerinitiativen (now 30 in number) warned that the fight would continue. Wyhl might have decided to sell the land, but the population of the region would decide about the building of the plant.

On 22 January, Prime Minister Filbinger warned against occupying the site. The same day, a partial building licence was granted by Eberle and given immediate applicability so that it could not be suspended if a legal case were brought against it. The action groups reacted with a march in Weisweil on 26 January. The police carried out identity checks as over 3,000 protesters gathered in the village. Occupation was again considered.

On 29 January six local councils and ten individuals from the Kaiserstuhl filed a case with the Freiburg administrative tribunal against the licensing of the plant on grounds of danger to health and farming. (Administrative tribunals deal with disputes between citizens and all levels of government.) The action groups, which had no legal right to appeal to such a court, chose the individuals best suited to represent important facets of the case against the nuclear project. An appeal was also lodged against the 'immediate applicability' condition. The two cases were to run in parallel, but the main case, against the licensing, continued much longer. Meanwhile the Freiburg court decided that work should not begin until it had given its ruling.

The contract for sale of the site was signed in early February. Although the voting had been about selling 40 hectares, the Mayor sold an extra 30 hectares. Wyhl municipality received two million marks for the sale of the land.

Facing page: Top; 'You gentlemen of Stuttgart take care lest we Kaiserstuhlers become radicals'. Sasbach demonstration against Wyhl and Marckolsheim, September 1974

Below; Meteorologist Dr. von Rudloff speaks for the objectors at the public hearing in Wyhl, 9-10 July 1974

Following page: Top; Citizens of Baden and Alsace protest against both the lead factory and the nuclear plant in Wyhl, August 1975

Below; Folk High School slide show in Friendship House, Wyhl

Photographs by Meinrad Schwörer





## Occupying the Site

In spite of the tribunal's warning, work began on the site on 17 February 1975. A boundary fence was erected and 50 lumbermen, brought from outside the region so they would not be known locally, began felling trees in the forest.

The following morning the action groups called a press conference on the NATO-ramp, a concrete quay 400 metres from the site. Press representatives and about 300 activists from both sides of the Rhine were present. Attention was again drawn to the petition signed by 100,000 citizens. Local men and women, horrified at the damage already done to the forest, wandered around speaking to the workmen. Some stood on the bulldozers and made it impossible for work to continue. The workmen switched off their machines and went home. Many activists had brought camping gear, and a group of Alsations were the first to pitch a tent in the clearing. Hundreds of people came to visit the site during the day. Police, local men from Emmendingen district, were also present. Some were opposed to the project and a few had KKW-Nein badges on their caps. Local people chatted to them and gave them hot coffee. From time to time a policeman with a loud-hailer called on people to leave but, when this had no effect, the police took no further action. By evening there were 50 tents in the clearing. Rough wooden shelters and a cook-house were built. One hundred and fifty men and women of all ages stayed there that night.

Speaking on German television, Prime Minister Filbinger stated that extremists and left-wingers were at work in Wyhl. Seventeen Protestant ministers immediately sent him a protest telegram.

### Eviction by Force

The squatters had been warned by the police that the 'Bereitschaftspolizei', or special police, would be sent in. This happened on the night of 19-20 February. Immediately, camp sentinels put the 'Atom alarm' into operation. About 650 police (who came from Göttingen, 200 km. away) entered the forest at 4.30 a.m., moving silently in full riot-gear and with dogs. As dawn broke they reached the camp. At that moment the sirens started wailing in the villages round about. This was illegal, but everyone knew what it meant, and

within half an hour hundreds of people had arrived at the site. By late morning there were thousands.

At first the police isolated the 150 squatters from the new arrivals by erecting barbed-wire barricades. They were sitting round a camp fire and, when ordered to leave, they linked arms and started singing the 'Wacht am Rhein' (with new wording about the Wyhl and Marckolsheim struggles). Annemarie Sacherer of Oberrotweil, a vine-grower's wife and mother of two children, described her experiences:

'The order to leave the site continued to come from the loudspeaker but we drowned the sound with our singing. I thought of the children at home. It was because of them we were occupying the site . . . We were fighting here for our health and existence and for the future of our children . . . Then the police started trying to pull some of us away. They picked mostly on young people with long hair and beards. This was obviously a deliberate choice so that they could say, "There were no locals here at all". We Kaiserstuhlers shouted to the police that they should take us also. But they did not want us. There were some really rough types amongst them. Those to whom we had spoken earlier were particularly brutal. One felt they had to prove to their superiors that they had not been influenced by our arguments. They dragged young girls by the hair across the dying embers. A young Alsatian woman's two- or three-year-old child was brutally pulled away from her . . . Even today tears come into my eyes when I think of those times. Our people let themselves be carried away without resisting. Fifty-four persons were arrested . . . The water cannons were now brought forth. We covered ourselves with plastic sheets but the police pulled them off. The water jets brutally struck us down. I got the full force of the jet in my face. It was very painful. My eyes were burning and my face was red for days. I don't know what had been mixed into the water . . . So they drove us off the site like a herd of animals.'

The soaked demonstrators were cared for by the crowd beyond the barriers. Those arrested were later released from Emmendingen police station. News of the brutal eviction spread like wildfire throughout the region. The self-control and determination of the squatters made a big impression on the population, who were horrified by the way the police had behaved; it was not at all what they expected under a democratic regime. A 45-minute film of the incident shown on TV a few days later reinforced those feelings.

Following the eviction, the workmen returned and with the police erected around the site a three-metre-high fence with barbed-wire entanglements. Tree-felling was resumed and continued after dark by the light of head-lamps.

On Friday, 21 February, relief units of the special police were sent to the site. In the afternoon 5,000 people came to protest at the previous night's police action. They were angered at the sight of the barbed wire and police patrols; it reminded them of the early days of the Berlin wall. However, as they talked to the police through the fence they discovered that many were not happy about what they were doing.

A major demonstration was announced for Sunday. The news spread through press reports and the network of citizens' groups and ecological associations. From Friday until Sunday nonviolent activists spoke to the police through loudspeakers, day and night, to inform them how they had been misled: the people of the region were defending their livelihood and their homeland without violence; they were not 'dangerous radicals'. The police, many of them very young, were given no rest. For many of them it was a traumatic experience. Before being called out they had been confined to barracks for three weeks, then, in the early hours just before leaving, they had been shown a 1968 film in which students were stoning policemen. Here in Wyhl forest they found a very different situation. They began to listen, and a dialogue started through the fence; on the Saturday they exchanged their coffee for hot soup provided by people camping outside.

#### **Re-entering the Site**

By early on the Sunday morning vehicles started arriving from all over the region and other parts of Germany. There were also anti-nuclear contingents from France, Holland, Switzerland and other countries. That afternoon some 28,000 demonstrators were massing along the banks of the Rhine, facing 1,000 special police. During speeches, a diversion was mounted to attract the water cannons. A large group, mainly Kaiserstuhlers and nonviolent activists, approached from the north. As they advanced up to the barbed wire at the entrance to the site, a number of policemen attacked them with their truncheons, and dogs were also brought into action. Some of the peasants, taken by surprise, started throwing stones, and there were a few casualties on both sides. Using megaphones the marshals reminded the demonstrators that this was a nonviolent action. They advised people to walk round the site and carefully examine the fence. Everyone knew what this meant. Large numbers of men hauling on ropes tied to the tall fence-posts soon toppled them down. Tree trunks were used to weigh down the barbed wire, and in no time the crowd was pouring into the site from all directions. It was a moment of great tension but also of great satisfaction.

Throughout the operation the police were addressed through loud-

speakers: 'We are fighting for just and legitimate reasons. We ask you to leave. You will not be harmed.' The marshals could pick up on the radio the voice of the chief of police in a helicopter overhead as he asked for reinforcements. It appeared that his troops were demoralised. Eventually they were ordered to leave. Some of the young policemen were crying, such was the inner conflict they had undergone. Although there were some isolated instances of violence, perpetrated mainly by outsiders well known for picking fights, the vast majority of demonstrators obeyed the instructions of the 200 marshals present and remained strictly nonviolent. The police also responded to the order to keep calm.

It was later learned that two companies of special police (100 men in each), which had been called out, never reached Wyhl. One company claimed it could not find the place. The other simply refused to go.

### **The Second Occupation**

As the mass of supporters left for home, 50 tents were again erected on the site, but the squatters were uneasy. Would the police return? They worked hard into the night, blocking all pathways to the site with barricades of tree trunks. At 4 a.m. the sirens in Weisweil sounded and the church bells rang in surrounding villages. Some 800 police had returned with tear-gas, which they could not use as there was a thick fog and they had no gas masks.

On Monday the regional Prime Minister indicated that the government would take no further action until the Freiburg court had come to a decision, but he warned that the site would have to be cleared. CDU members in the Kaiserstuhl were in revolt, and many resigned from the party. Another attempt by the police was expected, so on the following night 1,500 people stayed at the camp and the population remained on the alert. However, no police action materialised. Two days later Badenwerk removed all their equipment.

The occupiers organised the camp with typical German thoroughness. Each village in turn was responsible for guard duty. Support groups from Freiburg and other places also took their turn. A kitchen, canteen and other buildings were erected, and a spring was impounded to provide a water supply. In early March a round-house, or 'Freundschaftsheim' (Friendship House), similar to the one at Marckolsheim, was completed. Emmendingen district councillors visited the site and marvelled at this splendid building. This one was larger, big enough to hold 300 people. Again the women's presence proved vital for the success of the occupation. A nucleus of unemployed people, conscientious objectors and students provided continuity.

They kept the camp in order and manned the information stand and snack bar during weekdays.

During the occupation thousands of people visited the camp, where they could gather information or take part in lively discussion sessions in the round-house. At holiday times people came from all over Germany and from other countries. Many pitched their tents in the forest to experience at first hand the running of a nonviolent struggle and to learn about techniques which might be applied to similar problems in their own homelands.

As soon as Friendship House was built, a Wyhl Forest Folk High School was formed by a Freiburg citizens action group and an environmental protection group. Lectures and lively debates took place on various aspects of nuclear power and how it could affect health, the environment, the economy, social structure, etc. Later, with the collaboration of vine-growers and farmers, the scope of the programme was broadened to include farming, vine-growing, bee-keeping, local history, and other nonviolent struggles (such as that of the French Larzac peasants). Singing and musical evenings, film shows and drama also became part of camp life, particularly at weekends. This people's 'university' contributed to changing the ideas and attitudes of many and strengthened local involvement in the struggle.

### **Reactions**

In a debate in the regional parliament, Filbinger insisted that the nuclear power station must be built. The action groups again said that building should not start before the main court case had been decided.

On 21 March the Freiburg tribunal decided that the 'immediate applicability' rule was illegal and that work should not be resumed until the main case was decided. The Badenwerk company immediately appealed against this ruling to the federal administrative tribunal at Mannheim.

The Baden-Alsace Bürgerinitiativen called for an international demonstration on Easter Monday at the NATO-ramp. In spite of atrocious weather, over 10,000 people turned up. In a surprise announcement at the end of the meeting a Swiss speaker asked for support for the occupation of the Kaiseraugst nuclear station site near Basle that evening. A coach was immediately organised to take supporters to the site. Others went by car.

### **Winning Hearts and Minds**

After the Freiburg decision, each side redoubled its efforts to win public support. The nuclear plan was a major issue in the municipal elections of April 1975. In view of the strong CDU presence in the district, the results

were encouraging. In Wyhl one-third of those elected to the new council were opponents of the nuclear plant. Anti-nuclear councillors were also returned in Endingen, Weisweil, Sasbach, Jechtingen and Oberrotweil.

The regional government decided provisionally to abide by the court's decision. It embarked on a massive campaign to 'educate' the public on nuclear energy, earmarking DM 10 million for this purpose. Display advertisements appeared in various periodicals and brochures extolling the advantages of nuclear electricity were delivered to every home. Badenwerk provided the schools with nuclear-power exhibitions and produced pamphlets specially designed for teachers, trade unionists and farmers. There were also free conducted tours of nuclear plants. The action groups, with rather more modest funds, responded with their own publicity. Money was raised by sales of work in the villages, and antique fairs in Wyhl forest.

A congress against nuclear energy took place in June at Weisweil and on the site. Over 300 scientists and students from all over West Germany discussed the risks involved in nuclear power. This was the first such gathering in the Federal Republic, an indication of the growing concern in scientific circles.

In July a resolution of the Baden-Alsace Bürgerinitiativen insisted the site would be evacuated only if independent experts could prove that a nuclear plant would not endanger life or health nor be harmful to the weather or farming.

The chairman of the CDU regional parliamentary party, Lothar Späth, and other government notables went on a speaking tour of the area in the summer. The Kaiserstuhlers soon became disillusioned, as they gained the impression that these politicians and government 'experts' often knew less than they did about the dangers of nuclear power.

The affair had now reached federal level. After a demonstration outside the Ministry for Science and Technology in Bonn, the Minister invited the action groups to discuss the nuclear project. These talks were unhelpful, and the action groups demanded 'an end to misleading propaganda on nuclear energy paid for out of taxes'.

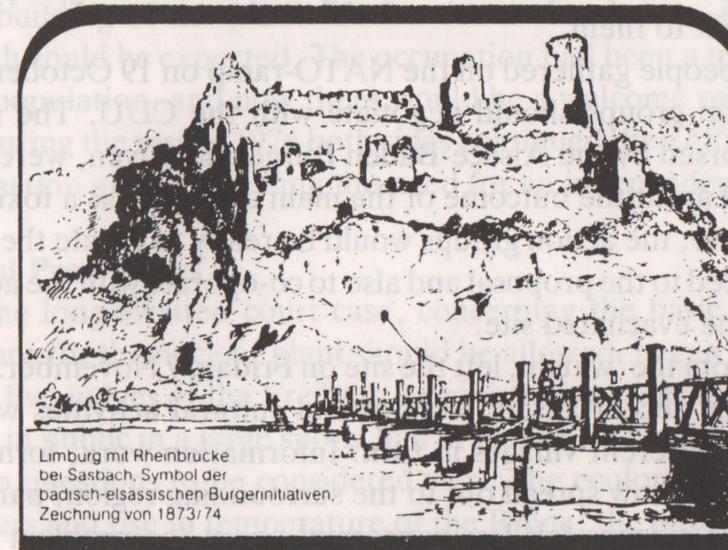
#### Positive Events

A harvest festival was held in August on the Marckolsheim site, which had been cultivated and sown with cereals. The harvested crop was sold to raise funds for a well-building scheme in the drought-stricken African Sahel. Hundreds of people from Alsace and Baden gathered on the site to celebrate with dancing and singing.

The regional SPD, at a public meeting in Freiburg that same weekend, supported the idea of developing energy-saving technology—solar energy and insulation of buildings. Their advice to the government was to wait for the main case to be decided before resuming work at Wyhl.

The Bürgerinitiativen were awarded the 1975 nature protection medal for their work in protecting the environment at Marckolsheim and Wyhl.

## RECHTSSCHUTZBON ZUR ABWEHR EINES ATOMKRAFTWERKS WYHL



Limburg mit Rheinbrücke  
bei Sasbach, Symbol der  
badisch-elsässischen Bürgerinitiativen,  
Zeichnung von 1873/74

MIT IHRER SPENDE ÜBER DM 50.-

in den Treuhandfonds leisten Sie einen persönlichen Beitrag zur endgültigen Abwehr einer großen Bedrohung unseres heimatlichen Lebensraumes. Ihre Hilfe wird eingesetzt zur Bewältigung der Prozeßkosten der beiden Instanzen Freiburg und Mannheim sowie zur bestmöglichen Vorbereitung und Durchführung des dritten Wyhlprozesses vor dem Bundesverwaltungsgericht Berlin.

**DIE BADISCH-ELSÄSSISCHEN  
BÜRGERINITIATIVEN**

Voucher for a 50 mark donation to the legal fund. Limburg castle ruins and the pontoon bridge near Sasbach (1873); view from the Alsace side of the Rhine. Symbol of the Baden-Alsace Bürgerinitiativen

---

## Persistent Persuasion

---

On 14 October 1975 the Mannheim court reversed the Freiburg judges' ruling on the 'immediate applicability' issue, arguing that building the plant was not in itself a danger to the population and environment: work could begin immediately. This example of chicanery made the Kaiserstuhl people even more determined to continue the fight. The action groups stated that the site would remain occupied until the main case was resolved.

Although it was now legally possible for work to go ahead, elections were looming and the regional government was unwilling to evacuate the site by force. It stressed its willingness to negotiate. Although the CDU chairman, Lothar Späth, had previously expressed contempt for the action groups, he was now willing to talk to them.

Several thousand people gathered on the NATO-ramp on 19 October and agreed that the action groups should negotiate with the CDU. The main proposals, later endorsed by the Alsace-Baden Bürgerinitiativen, were that building work should await the outcome of the main case and, as a token of willingness to negotiate, the action groups would be ready to vacate the site. The government agreed to the proposal and also to co-operate with the action groups in guarding the evacuated site.

Everyone, apart from the 'watch', left the site on Friday, 7 November. The Folk High School was decentralised; lectures and cultural activities would instead take place in different villages in turn. Information work, formerly carried out at the camp, now spread out to the surrounding region, particularly the towns where citizens felt less concerned about the problem than country folk did. On 13 December, anti-nuclear groups from Alsace and Baden offered country products in the Freiburg market. Wine, fruit, nuts, fish as well as kugelhopf cakes were sold to Christmas shoppers. Leaflets were distributed, a Kaiserstuhl band played and groups sang ballads composed during the occupation.

### The Offenburg Agreement

On the Monday, 10 November, delegates from the action groups met for the first time with Späth in the chair.

An important role in supporting the action groups during their negotiations

with the CDU was played by Dr. Hans-Erich Schött, a Free Democrat member of the regional parliament. He had given up his work as a pharmacist to enter the Stuttgart parliament out of a sense of duty, in order to take part in the nonviolent fight.

After several rounds of negotiations, the two sides agreed on a formula: (1) Work would not start and the site would not be enclosed before November 1976. (2) No actions or claims for damage would be brought against anyone involved in the occupation. (3) No one would be dismissed or excluded from public employment (legally such sanctions could have been applied). (4) Independent expert advice would be sought on the impact of the nuclear project on the weather and environment and on the dangers of radioactivity.

This so-called 'Offenburg Agreement' was the subject of intense discussions within the action groups. Many felt it did not go far enough and wanted to renegotiate. But finally, on 8 April, the groups formally accepted the agreement, while at the same time reiterating their determination to prevent the building of the plant. Under the circumstances, it was the best result which could be expected. The occupation had been a tremendous burden on the population, and now there would be a welcome respite.

During the rest of 1976 both sides continued their efforts to swing opinion, the action groups stressing the need for an independent expert opinion.

### Legal Proceedings

The long-awaited court case, concerning the basic issue of whether the licence for the nuclear plant should be allowed, began on 10 February 1977. The five judges of the Freiburg administrative court conducted the proceedings in public in a large sports hall at Herbolzheim (12 km. from Wyhl). The main questions to be considered were: the ecological impact of the cooling towers and rise in temperature of the Rhine; the effects of radioactivity; the operational security and the protection of the population.

The means brought to bear by the promoters of the project and by its opponents largely reflected, by their disproportion, the respective strength and financial resources of the two sides. Forty-seven expert witnesses were called, of which only five were opposing the project. The case against the licensing was brought by mayors representing the local authorities of Eningen, Forchheim, Sasbach, Schwanau, Weisweil and the city of Lahr. The action groups were not allowed to bring cases to court and so were represented by nine individual citizens. A vine-grower brought an action concerning the danger of grape disease, a fisherman regarding water pollution, a farmer about the effects on agriculture, and so on. Everything was

done to discredit them: one was said to be too left-wing, another was not scientifically credible, etc. For three weeks the debate was bogged down in quarrels between experts. Although the plaintiffs had excellent legal help, no one on the anti-nuclear side was very hopeful of the outcome.

### **An Unexpected Decision**

The verdict, delivered on 14 March 1977, astonished everyone. The judges imposed what amounted to a ban on the construction of the nuclear plant at Wyhl, and the grounds for their decision was the greatest surprise. They considered that the possibility of the pressure vessel in this type of reactor exploding would create a 'national catastrophe'. If the conditions of 'taking all reasonable precautions' were to be met according to German law, an additional burst-proof shell would have to be provided, and this was not technically possible at the time. The effects on the weather, water pollution, radioactivity, the disposal and transport of nuclear waste, dangers arising out of sabotage or war: none of these had been considered as grounds for the court's decision.

The implication of the ruling was that most reactors in the Federal Republic should be closed down and existing nuclear plans should be revised. However, the Freiburg judge insisted that their decision applied to Wyhl only. A Bonn spokesman admitted that the Republic's nuclear programme for an installed capacity of 50,000 MW had received a set-back, which he attributed to 'popular opposition'. The Baden-Württemberg government appealed against the verdict to the upper administrative court at Mannheim.

### **Differing Views**

The Mannheim court was expected to deliver its judgment within months, but it was five years before it handed down its ruling. The authorities may have hoped that given time the opposition would die down, but the people remained as determined as ever. At least 90% of the population was against the nuclear project. The Bürgerinitiativen kept up their publicity work, while the activities of the Folk High School in the villages continued to make a significant contribution to the life of the movement.

SPD and FDP politicians continued to express their opposition whenever possible. In December 1981 the district SPD demanded the abandonment of the project, maintaining that it was unnecessary and was not conducive to peace in the community.

However, the CDU regional government still insisted that Wyhl power

station must be built, even though many thought this would be difficult to do in the face of public hostility.

### **Christians in the Bürgerinitiativen**

The Church hierarchies, accustomed to follow the government line on political and social questions, were not prepared to side with the majority of the population on the nuclear issue. Many Protestant ministers in the area did respond favourably to their congregations' demand for support. Catholic priests, on the other hand, distanced themselves as far as possible from the Wyhl conflict and refused pleas from Catholics in the action groups to give them at least the spiritual help they needed. Eventually a group of Catholics met to consider what their mission should be in the struggle: what was the relevance of the Gospel to their situation? What does nonviolence mean for Christians? After they had discussed these questions together and with a friendly priest from outside the area, they celebrated the Eucharist on the Litzelberg hill, a place of pilgrimage near Sasbach. From 1979 onwards they began to meet several times a year to hold services which encouraged them in the Christian approach in this conflict situation and strengthened their unity. A series of lectures was also held on the churches' tradition of peaceful resistance to injustice.

Peter Modler, a leading member of the Catholic group who had been active in Freiburg Nonviolent Action and had taken part in both occupations, thought of an idea to arouse the consciousness of Christians. At full moon a dozen men erected on the Wyhl site a four-metre high wooden cross on which had been carved: 'Where the Creation is endangered, God is crucified'. Hundreds of people from the region gathered spontaneously in front of the cross the following afternoon. The cross remained a focus of interest for nearly three weeks; then it was found blackened by fire and flat on the ground, with the inscription still intact. This action by supporters of the nuclear project was an indication of the very strong emotions brought to the surface during a nonviolent fight.

### **Solidarity with Others**

The occupation of the Wyhl site had encouraged resistance to nuclear plans in other parts of the country. As the people of the Upper Rhine became aware of those struggles they were often keen to show their solidarity. The Baden-Alsace Bürgerinitiativen organised a demonstration at Sasbach, which attracted 2,000 people with 100 tractors carrying banners to support the farmers of Gorleben, north-east of Hannover, where a nuclear waste depot

was to be established. A week later, a delegation of the action groups set off by road on a 700-km. journey through wind and snow to join a Gorleben protest. On 31 March 1979, they joined a tractorcade entering Hannover, where 10,000 protesters from various parts of Germany assembled in the city centre. The Kaiserstuhl contingent received a tumultuous welcome and were invited to a 'question-time' by the Prime Minister of Lower-Saxony. He was embarrassed to see so many farmers—having expressed an opinion that all those taking part were 'communists and anarchists'. A top-ranking police officer commented afterwards: 'There has never been in Hannover such a large protest demonstration in which the police did not have to take drastic action. The precept to be nonviolent was strictly observed.'

Six months later, on 14 October, a large Upper-Rhine contingent joined a 150,000 strong demonstration in Bonn against the Federal Republic's 'Atom Programme'. So many wanted to join in that three trains had to be chartered for the occasion.

### **The Mannheim Proceedings**

The appeal court proceedings against the decision of the Freiburg judges to annul the building licence for the nuclear plant began at Mannheim on 30 May 1979. The lawyers representing the anti-nuclear side—three councils (Endingen, Weisweil and Forchheim) and nine citizens—objected to the seven experts chosen by the state to appear as witnesses. Six of them were well-known supporters of nuclear energy, and the lawyers argued that these experts would be biased and there would be a lack of balance in the proceedings. However, their pleas were rejected and the case continued.

The last speech for the defence was heard in October 1981, but the verdict was not announced until 30 March 1982. The upper court reversed the Freiburg ruling and ordered that construction of the power plant could go ahead.

On the evening following this announcement, some 100 tractors from the Kaiserstuhl were driven to Königschaffhausen in a spontaneous demonstration. Next day 10,000 people gathered at Freiburg under the slogan 'Fessenheim is already too much—no nuclear plant in Wyhl'. The Baden-Alsace Bürgerinitiativen issued their third 'Wyhl Declaration', in French and German, outlining the demands of over 50 action groups and ecological associations in South-Baden and Alsace.

In a pastoral letter published three days after the verdict, the Catholic bishop declared it was a Christian duty to accept the court's decision. The

Protestant bishop was evasive when questioned at a press conference; he would study the question further before answering.

On Sunday, 4 April, 50,000 citizens assembled in Wyhl forest with their banners to show their determination to fight on. This was a great success for the action groups who had had only three days to organise the demonstration. Later they distributed thousands of copies of a free paper explaining the situation to the population. When the Mannheim court delivered its written argumentation, the action groups held meetings in every village to discuss this 548-page document, the longest text ever known for such a case. None of the pleas put forward by the anti-nuclear side had been accepted by the judges who, on all points, followed the government line. The court admitted that, in the event of a major accident, towns as far away as Freiburg, Lahr and Colmar would be subjected to lethal doses of radiation but, in their view, the danger of such an accident 'appeared practically impossible'. As for 'normal' radioactive emissions it could not be proved they would be cancer-producing. Fears about the effects of the cooling towers were also dismissed.

After the Mannheim decision the nine protesters decided to take the case to the Federal Appeal Court in Berlin.

A worrying aspect of the case was that, if it were lost, all expenses incurred during the whole legal procedure would have to be met by the plaintiffs. The total amount could be DM 500,000. In 1975 the financial committee of the Baden-Alsace Bürgerinitiativen had started a fund to meet the possibility of individual plaintiffs having to pay expenses. This special fund was placed under the trusteeship of Karl-Heinz Ulhaas, a Quaker from Freiburg. Subscribers to the fund could contribute sums varying from five to 100 marks; in return they received a voucher with a view of the region.

### **'Bauline-80'**

The Baden-Württemberg Prime Minister, now Lothar Späth, confirmed in parliament that the Wyhl plant would be built, but he added that the nuclear plant's original design, now out of date and no longer in line with German safety requirements, would be replaced by the new 'Bauline-80' (or Construction-Line 80). He also announced that he wanted to discuss the project with all sections of the population.

Bauline-80, it was claimed, would provide a burst-proof containment for the reactor. In plain words, thicker steel and concrete would be used. New regulations regarding licensing procedures were to be brought into force. Design changes for greater safety would no longer require public inquiries. In this way, and by standardising nuclear plants, the Federal Government found

a way of cutting out the long delays involved when Bürgerinitiativen brought cases to court each time there was a change in design. In the case of Wyhl, however, the whole plant concept would be changed, and it was anticipated that licensing procedures would have to start anew.

It was also planned to store all nuclear waste on the power station site, which of course would make it all the more dangerous. The local population certainly did not agree to the revised project, and a petition against it quickly attracted 43,000 signatures.

The Prime Minister, as he had promised, carried out a programme of discussions with various bodies in the region: the unions, professional and environmental associations, the churches, etc. On 25 March 1983, over 200 people—mayors, councillors and other notables— assembled in Wyhl sports hall, while hundreds of citizens protested outside. Most of the politicians present owed allegiance to the Prime Minister's party, but none spoke in favour of the project. To their objections, Späth asserted that increased electricity production was necessary to meet the region's future energy needs. As for the cooling towers, alternative methods of cooling would be investigated.

The highlight of this series of meetings was to be the public hearing for the citizens of the region. Späth was intent on showing that he was capable of making the population accept his decision. It would be a political triumph if he succeeded.

As the hearing opened on 20 June 1983, government ministers and experts lined the platform in the Wyhl sports hall. A thousand citizens turned up from all parts of the Kaiserstuhl and surrounding area, most of them in their working clothes. The citizens' action groups had planned their response beforehand, as they realised that the hearing was a political show—the decision to build having already been taken. When the turn came for the Bürgerinitiativen to speak, the delegate for Weisweil spoke for them all. For the past ten years they had explained at length all the reasons for their opposition. It would be a waste of time to repeat arguments already known to everyone. The Offenberg Agreement had not been fully honoured by the government. There had been no independent inquiry on the dangers to the people and environment. There was no point in carrying out the meeting—they had their own work to do. The whole audience then rose up and walked out in a body. A hearing planned to last at least three days was over in a couple of hours.

#### **Police and Politicians**

A contingency plan to 'invade' the region in case of trouble over the construction of the plant, was revealed by the *Schwabischer Zeitung* of 18

April 1983. Based on a confidential police paper, the story showed that 15,000 special police would be involved using the latest riot gear and weapons—rubber bullets, gas grenades, armoured cars and helicopters. This revelation further eroded any confidence people might still have had in the government's handling of the issue.

In July, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture travelled to Sasbach by helicopter. Their purpose was to convince the farmers' and vinegrowers' unions that there was no alternative to the nuclear station. Union speakers put forward various arguments designed to justify abandoning the plan or at least finding a compromise solution (such as an alternative cooling system). Challenged on the police plan, Späth denied any knowledge of it. An unusually large police presence ensured that angry citizens protesting outside were denied access to the hall. Later, at a press conference in Freiburg, Späth said he understood that the population was against the project; it was the first time he had been heard to use the word 'population' in this context.

With the police plan in mind and fear that the building of the plant would now quickly go ahead, the Upper-Rhine anti-nuclear forces began planning a new resistance campaign. On 30 August, Späth was quoted as saying that the necessity for Wyhl was now less urgent in view of the lower rate of increase in electricity demand. However, he also said that 'Wyhl cannot be abandoned in the long term'. The groups went ahead with their arrangements to hold various events designed to remind people of the importance of the struggle. After long discussion, the existing cooperation between the anti-nuclear groups of Baden, Alsace and Switzerland were formalised with a pact to come to each other's aid in case of an emergency. To dramatise this understanding a lighted torch was carried from Marckolsheim to Wyhl, then to Kaiseraugst, thus marking the solidarity between those three centres of resistance.

#### **The People Prevail**

In October 1983, the Prime Minister announced in parliament a new energy plan for the region. A revised estimate of electricity needs showed that the rate of increase in demand had fallen, and so cheap electricity would be imported from France as necessary. The nuclear plant of Philippsburg II and the extension of Neckarwestheim nuclear station would be completed, but the Wyhl nuclear plant would not be required until the year 2000. This decision to defer construction until the end of the century was, in political terms, as good as a cancellation of the project. The opposition parties took

the opportunity to call for the definitive abandonment of further nuclear plants.

The news was received in the region with surprise and great relief. However, many people wondered whether this was merely an election move or perhaps a trick to put the citizens' groups off their guard? In the March 1984 elections there was some increase in votes for the opposition but, as usual, the CDU was returned to power. Nine Green Party members were also elected to the regional parliament.

No government will admit it is wrong and Späth could not abandon the project officially, but it was clear that the anti-nuclear movement had won the struggle. There was some unhappiness at the prospect of imported electricity from the French grid, which is fed by so many nuclear power stations including Fessenheim. The groups also realised that government policy might change. They would have to remain vigilant.

## Ä Johr Plakbsethung 18. feb. 1975 - 76



Kei KKW in Wyhl  
un au sunscht nirgends!

The banner of freedom, taken from a woodcut, was used to illustrate an account of the year-long occupation of the site, 1975-76. The line at the foot reads 'No to a nuclear power station in Wyhl or anywhere else'

## An Example to be Followed

In 1975, the year the Wyhl site was occupied, there was still no Green Party, and the CDU had not yet thought it necessary to have their 'South-Baden Green Charter' or the SPD their 'Socialist-Ecology'. There was no public concern over the destruction of forests by acid-rain or over first-strike nuclear missiles. Brockdorf, Kalkar, Gorleben and other nuclear energy locations were unknown.

Wyhl soon became the symbol of the anti-nuclear-power movement in Germany, and it influenced similar struggles in Europe and even in the USA. A cine-film showing the occupation was shown widely. American activists after viewing it decided to occupy Seabrook nuclear station site in New Hampshire.

There has been, and still is, strong local resistance to nuclear projects in other parts of Germany, but it is only in the Kaiserstuhl that nonviolence has become so deeply rooted in the population. Important support came from Freiburg and other towns in the region, but for 14 years, beginning with the Breisach plan, the Kaiserstuhl was the heartland of the resistance. Success there lay in the determination and unity of the people, together with the large numbers actively involved and their devotion to nonviolence.

### Evolution

Changes in the thinking of many people took place in the course of this long struggle, but it is perhaps too early to evaluate them with accuracy and say how permanent they are.

At the beginning people thought only of their own situation but soon they became aware that they shared similar problems with many other communities, not only in Germany but elsewhere in the world. Their experience also called into question much more than any project, be it a lead factory or a nuclear power plant. They awoke to the realisation that politicians were more interested in their personal careers than in representing the real interests of their electors, while big business was concerned with maximum profits rather than the welfare of people. They began to glimpse the sort of world divorced from nature which the technocrats are preparing for us. Through a growing understanding of the connection between nuclear energy and nuclear weap-

ons, they readily associated themselves with the growing popular nuclear disarmament movement. The activists, however, had to make the conscious decision to devote their time to the Wyhl problem and not dissipate their energies in related struggles.

Another outcome was that people began to look at alternatives usually associated with the development of a nonviolent way of life—renewable energy, food reform, nature cure and herbal remedies, organic cultivation, etc. Some vine-growers experimented with organic methods in the vineyards. Earlier, they would have considered this madness; now *they* were the ‘mad men’. A small factory was set up in Sasbach which installed solar-panel heating systems in many houses. Many more people became conscious of their heritage and the importance of the environment. A new culture began to develop through songs and theatre describing the conflict. There was a feeling that people were taking a hand in shaping their future.

### Lessons

The main lesson to be learned from these extraordinary events in Marckolsheim and Wyhl is that *people are not powerless*. Once they realise they are being misled by governing powers, they can break through the wall of apathy, fear and ignorance which too often prevents them from reacting positively. Means of resistance can be found which will oblige politicians to face the truth of a particular situation and attend to the well-being of the population. Most people prefer reform rather than revolution; only despair makes them take up arms. If all efforts to achieve a needed change in policy fail, nonviolence is an effective option. Societal changes and a greater measure of democracy which often follow a nonviolent battle, provided it lasts long enough, are likely to prove more permanent than changes made after a bloody uprising.

The initiative in reacting to an unjust situation is usually taken by thinking citizens who inform themselves and others about the particular threat causing concern. All constitutional and legal means must be used. At the same time, if the powers-that-be take no notice, all manner of imaginative actions can be carried out until negotiations became possible. The struggle needs to be conducted in an open and non-hierarchical way, so as to retain the trust of the population. Care should be taken not to allow political groups to co-opt the movement to serve their own ends.

Unity is probably the most difficult condition to achieve, but it does seem to be of vital importance. It was probably the deciding factor in the case of the Larzac, Marckolsheim and Wyhl. How can a nonviolent fight be waged successfully by people with a wide variety of occupations and interests and

different backgrounds? If there is no strong community feeling in that society in the first place, how can it be fostered? Answers to such questions may well have to be found before nonviolence can be developed on a sufficient scale to meet the even greater threat presented by the nuclear war-mongers.

The example of the people of the Upper-Rhine region helps to bring us nearer the time when nonviolence will be accepted as the only effective alternative method of fighting for justice and peace and the welfare of all.

---

## Sources

---

Recorded interviews of activists by the author in Alsace and Baden Papers on Marckolsheim—

*L'affaire CWM/Marckolsheim et ses Prolongements*. Edith L. Wenger (Faculty of Law and Political Sciences, Strasbourg) 1980

*Analyse des Mouvements de Défense de l'Environnement et du Cadre de Vie à partir d'Oppositions locales à des Projets d'Equipements. Le Conflit de Marckolsheim*. Edith Wenger & Bernard Durr, Université Louis Pasteur, Strasbourg, April 1982

*WYHL, kein Kernkraftwerk in Wyhl und auch sonst nirgends. Betroffene Bürger berichten*. Edited by Bernd Nössler and Margret de Witt. Dreisam-Verlag, Freiburg, 1976 & 1981

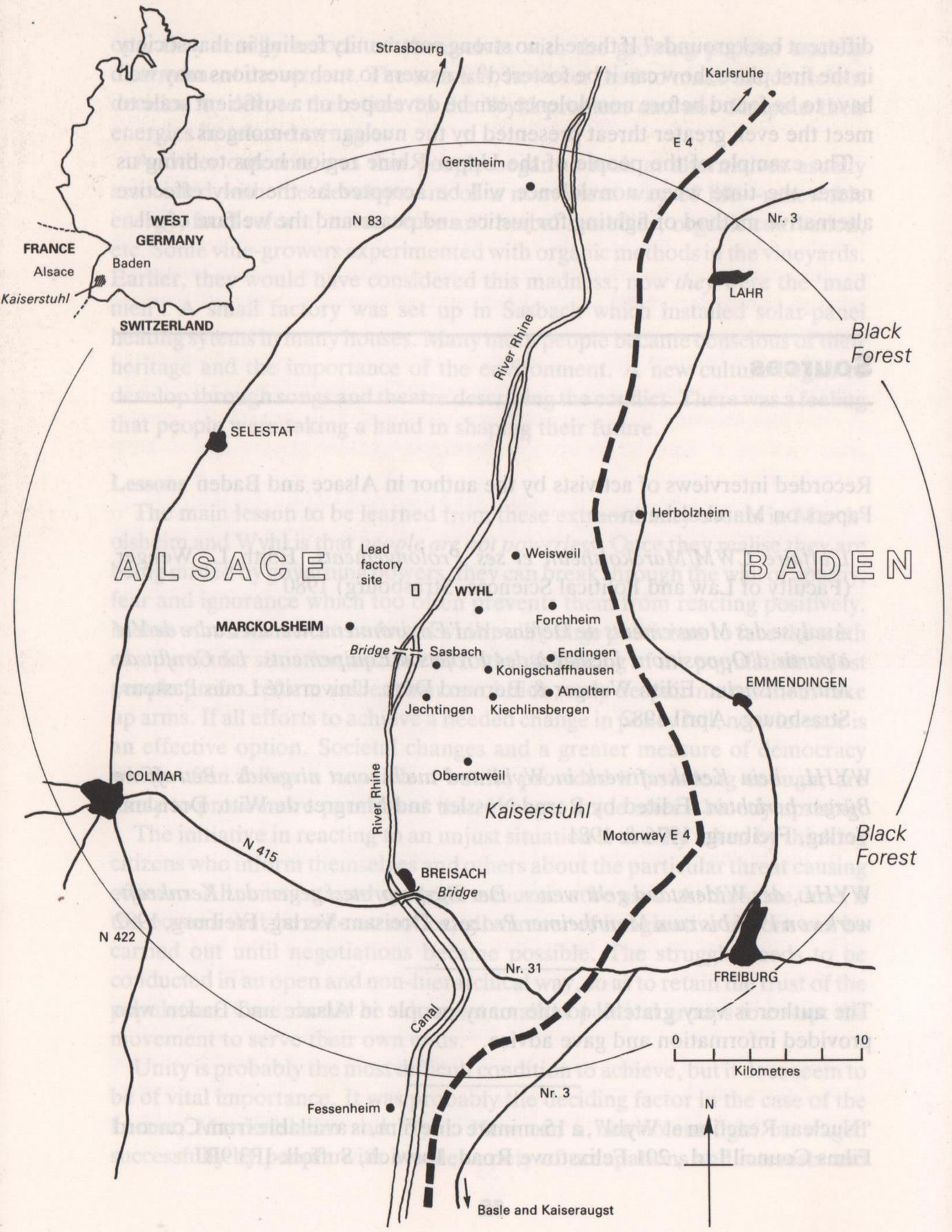
*WYHL, der Widerstand geht weiter. Der Bürgerprotest gegen das Kernkraftwerk von 1976 bis zum Mannheimer Prozess*. Dreisam-Verlag, Freiburg, 1982

---

The author is very grateful to the many people in Alsace and Baden who provided information and gave advice.

---

“Nuclear Reaction at Wyhl”, a 15-minute cine film, is available from Concord Films Council Ltd., 201 Felixstowe Road, Ipswich, Suffolk IP3 9BJ



A group discussing the Gospels and their relevance to the struggle: Peter Modler (left, with glasses), and Meinrad Schwörer (right) who took most of the photographs used in this book  
*Photograph by Bernd Nössler*

◀ **Notes on the map**

This is a simplified map of the region where the struggles in France and Germany took place. The Rhine marks the frontier between the two countries.

Only a few main roads are shown and only the place names mentioned in the text are shown. Some 160 towns and villages lie within a radius of 25 kms from Wyhl. The area within this circle, including large towns like Freiburg and Colmar, could be affected by dangerous levels of radiation in case of a major nuclear accident.

There are dense woodlands all along both sides of the Rhine (the Rhine Forest) where many water courses run into the river.