

The Role of OOA making a Nuclear Free Denmark

Be realistic – demand the impossible! (1)

OOA – Organisation for Information about Nuclear Power - was set up in January 1974 and highly influenced the fact that Denmark, contrary to most industrialized countries, never constructed nuclear power plants. On the contrary, Denmark rather early turned towards renewable energy. How did that happen?

1. In order to deal with the topic of this presentation let me briefly highlight the energy situation of Denmark in 1973. As for energy, Denmark was completely dependent upon fossil energy resources say oil products and coal. The neighbouring countries Germany and Sweden were already constructing and about to complete a number of nuclear power plants.

In 1971, upon request from the electricity companies, the government had initiated a systematic survey for possible sites to place Danish nuclear power plants. During the autumn of 1973 one could understand that a report was soon to be published, pinpointing 12-15 possible construction sites (2).

Already in 1972 the electricity companies, for their part, had begun distributing colourful brochures on nuclear power while the research facility Risø organised pronuclear workshops for journalists and science teachers.

With hardly any exception the politicians were sympathetic towards nuclear power, which was seen not to cause any problem but was regarded as a positive future technology.

The general focus upon energy was dramatically influenced by the OPEC-initiated reduction of oil supplies during the autumn of 1973. After general elections in December 1973, a relatively small liberal party had managed to take over and remove the Social Democrats from the government. A prominent representative of the electricity companies was appointed minister.

Taking advantage of this situation the electricity companies decided to push for an early decision in favour of nuclear power.

2. This was the background for a rather limited group of activists, some related to the peace movement, others related to environmental organisations, to come together during the summer of 1973 and to decide for initiating an educational campaign towards the Danish public, highlighting the serious problems we felt were related to nuclear power and that it would be by far preferable to go for renewable energy. We were also aware of growing opposition against nuclear power in the US, in Germany and in Sweden.

We knew very well, that we were facing powerful and well-established stakeholders in industry, in science, unions and in politics. For that reason it was of utmost importance to collect as much information as possible and to prepare for an organisation to counter the establishment prior to going public.

3. During January 1974 our group intensified preparations for a new organisation to counter the nuclear lobby. We agreed upon the name OOA – in translation: Organisation for Information about Nuclear Power. A simple, straightforward name, that also expressed authority, provided we offered the information promised by the name. The little word “for” indicates the ambition to be a catalyst for a sufficient level of public information. We didn’t start out with a polarising opposition towards our powerful opponents.

At the end of January the government presented a total of 14 possible sites for nuclear power plants. Two days later, on January 31st, the OOA went public presenting, the objectives to be achieved as:

- Thorough assessment of all problems and issues related to the use of nuclear power;
- Increased research and evaluation of alternative sources of energy;
- Elaboration of a long-term energy policy that will also consider of ecological and social factors.

In order to ensure sufficient time to carry out the necessary public information and debate, the OOA requested a 3-year moratorium prior to a final decision concerning nuclear power in Denmark.

4. In spite of the fact that all political parties, with the exception of a small left wing party, were positive towards nuclear power, the political balance of power soon proved to be an advantage for the OOA.

In January 1974 the new government proposed a minor adjustment of the nuclear legislation - update of liability – in order to pave the way for commercial nuclear plants. The procedure for the nuclear decision process remained however unchanged, meaning that a go-ahead for nuclear power would be given by the central administration with a signature by the minister of education (research). When OOA made the members of parliament aware of the fact that a vital decision such as the introduction of nuclear power would be taken without any direct influence by the parliament, substantial sections of the opposition supported OOA's demand for a completely revised legislation related to nuclear power. The adjustment suggested by the government was rejected by the parliament.

In the spring of 1974 OOA also managed to demand a permanent energy committee to be appointed, before the politicians themselves expressed this as a necessity.

These were quick and remarkable first victories, by which OOA gained sympathy and trust from many politicians belonging to centre and left-wing parties.

OOA's demand for sufficient time to conduct public education was met already by April 1974. The government informed parliament, that a government-independent Energy Education Facility was to be established and to operate for 2 years financed by public means.

(3) The task was by publications and financial support of lectures and meetings to ensure a broad public debate on matters related to energy politics. As for nuclear power the method "pro et con" was applied.

De facto this meant that the OOA demand for a 3-year moratorium was close to being met after just a few months.

5. During the early days of OOA a logo was developed (4), asking the question "DU YOU FEEL SAFE WITH NUCLEAR POWER?". In order to reach out to as many people as possible we offered questions rather than statements and conclusions. We prioritized dialogue and reflection. Our magazine (5) for that reason was

simply named "ATOMKRAFT?". Our first educational brochure (6) was titled "A FUTURE WITH NUCLEAR POWER?".

OOA was not organised as a membership organisation but worked as an open movement with a central secretariat. Soon local groups popped up across the country. More than 50 the first year. They only had to support a 3-year moratorium for the decision on nuclear power.

The secretariat was in charge of contacting news media and influencing the central institutions while the local groups did the same on a local level. Nationwide campaigns were decided upon during open national gatherings 3-4 times every year.

When OOA had turned the first year, the group in Århus, second largest town in Denmark, discussed the need for a new logo with more appeal than the rather boring "DU YOU FEEL SAFE WITH NUCLEAR POWER?". Moreover, they wanted to slightly sharpen the profile of the OOA, expressing not just questions, but also attitude. As an outcome of these discussions the activist Anne Lund designed the logo (7) with the smiling sun and the friendly phrase "NUCLEAR POWER? – NO THANKS" in April 1975. It was launched on May 1st 1975 and immediately became a great success. In the sometime heated debate, this logo had a depolarising and disarming effect. People were taken by surprise by a logo that questioned an ominous and dangerous technology and at the same time pointed to solar-based energy as the major alternative to nuclear power.

The Smiling Sun was also used to decentralise the financing of campaigns. OOA organised a central production and offered the badges and stickers to the local groups for just above the price of production. Any profit from street stalls remained with the groups and was used to finance local activities.

During the summer of 1976 OOA received the first inquiries from other countries to have the logo made available in other languages. Production of major languages began and OOA applied the principle of low rates also for foreign movement groups.

Also many groups in Spain ordered Smiling Suns from OOA. The local variations were:

(8) Castilian – May 1977

(9) Catalan – October 1977

(10) Basque – April

(11) Galician – May 1979

(12) Porto Galician – January 2012

Over the years the Smiling Sun has spoken in 50-60 languages.

Already in 1976 the undoubted success of the Smiling Sun logo made the OOA have the logo registered as a trademark. By doing so we wished to ensure that the logo would only be used to the advantage of the anti-nuclear movement and not commercially exploited by smart companies. We also wanted to protect the logo from being hijacked by political parties. The following years the logo was registered in many countries, and in 2004 it was registered as a European Union trademark.

6. Besides creating awareness towards nuclear power the OOA also had, as another of her objectives to draw attention to renewable energy as a basic source for future energy supply. Yet, it soon became clear that activities directed towards renewable energy fell short compared to the always-urgent need to directly influence the nuclear debate.

So in September 1975 we called for a work group of people who were especially involved in renewable technologies. The intention was to set up an organisation parallel to the OOA.

This led to OVE – in translation Organisation for Renewable Energy (13), which would now full time engage in spreading knowledge about and promote the utilization of renewable energy. This worked as a constructive division of labour.

7. When in 1976 the Danish nuclear debate entered the third year the gvt. pushed for a decision. A revised nuclear legislation was to pass parliament in May, followed by presentation of an energy plan. In the likely case, that 1/3 of members of parliament would sign up, the nuclear matter could then be proved by a referendum after another 3 weeks. This schedule would indeed leave very little time for campaigning.

OOA had never demanded nuclear power to be decided upon by a referendum. In our opinion that was quite risky, as the proponents always would have far more money and resources to conduct large scale campaigning in any media. Moreover a referendum campaign would vulgarize and emotionalize the argumentation even more than was already the case.

OOA's countermove to the government plan was a large-scale campaign with printing and distributing a total of 900.000 copies of newspapers and other activities. (14) The campaign took off in April with 200.000 (postponement). In May followed 300.000 (radwaste) and in July even 400.000 (employment).

By now the number of local groups had increased to more than 150. The financing of the campaign was based upon thousands of contributions - small amounts - from individuals.

OOA also organised a petition campaign demanding postponement of the government schedule. Within 6 weeks 170.000 signatures had been collected. While the signature campaign was still in progress, the government realized to be under pressure and postponed the deadline for the nuclear decision from June 1st to medio august.

OOA intensified her ongoing campaign throughout the summer focusing on massive selling of Smiling Suns. More than 200.000 badges and stickers were sold along with about a million small paper stickers. Opinion polls revealed a substantial strengthening of the general opposition to nuclear power with now only 9% staunch supporters. In the end the government realized defeat. On August 10th another statement was issued, saying that the decision had been postponed. No new deadline was given.

In a way you can say that OOA anticipated a risky referendum by conducting a large-scale referendum-type campaign, with the advantage that those in favour of nuclear power did not organise their high profile presence.

8. As the general opinion was against nuclear power it was now obvious to initiate an offensive in order to prove that Denmark was able to manage without nuclear power and should increasingly give priority to renewable energy.

For that reason, OOA and OVE had approached a group of energy researchers and asked them to draw up an outline for an "Alternative Energy Plan for Denmark", to stand counter the government plan from May 1976. (15) This first alternative energy plan was presented in October. It showed, that renewable energy could be increased from present the 1% to 12% in 1995, while the Gvt. plan estimated only 4%. (16) The plan was followed by a

OOA/OVE campaign with newspaper (200.000 print) and other activities.

9. In 1977, as the general opinion, was against nuclear power the OOA gave priority to directing the attention towards the nuclear programs in neighbouring countries, especially Sweden, who had placed 2 reactors at Barsebäck, just 20 km from Copenhagen. Nowhere else in the world had one dared to place a nuclear power plant as close to the capital of another country. This was a tremendous provocation.

Together with Swedish and Norwegian likeminded people the OOA organised a sizeable protest march in Sweden in September 1977. (17) During the following years OOA organised a host of activities and published critical reports focused on the demand for closing down the Barsebäck plant. This plant was used to illustrate the special high risk of nuclear power plants placed in densely populated areas. By 1985 this campaign motivated the Danish parliament and government to request the Swedish government to ensure the closing down of Barsebäck. Yet, for this to materialize we had to wait until 1999 (reactor 1 from 1975) and 2005 (reactor 2 from 1977).

10. The year 1978 turned out to be the year a Danish government gave it a last try to reach a decision in favour of nuclear power. This happened when the Social Democratic government prepared for a coalition with the large liberal opposition party favouring nuclear power.

OOA went full steam ahead to make the general nuclear opposition visible. (18) For full 3 days we marched from remote possible construction sites in Eastern and Western Denmark. Every day more people joined the march, ending up with 30-35.000 participating in front of parliament. While another 15-20.000 people marched to Århus.

While the people were marching negotiations for a pro nuclear new government reached their final stage. Yet, three days later the new government declared that a nuclear power decision had been postponed for another 2 years. In reality this was the very end of the nuclear dream.

11. In case somebody was still in doubt that nuclear power really was a lost option, the reactor meltdown on 28th March 1979 at the nuclear plant Three Mile Island in the US made the last doubt disappear (19) Within just 5 weeks OOA collected 312.000 signatures demanding the Swedish nuclear plant Barsebäck to be closed. That represents more than 10% of the Danish adult population.

From this point on the urgent matter for OOA was, generally speaking, not longer to provide information on nuclear power, but to involve the population of Denmark in a demand for energy supply based on renewable energy. Although nuclear power was no longer a real option in Denmark the government and relevant authorities displayed an acute lack of visions for a decisive change of the energy policy.

During summer of 1979 with huge optimism OOA prepared for her most ambitious campaign. (20) We decided to draw up an instructive educational brochure presenting "Denmark without nuclear power", by OOA-activists to be distributed to all Danish households. For financial and logistical reasons this operation was to be realised stepwise. 1. print run with 500.000 copies was ready in November and distributed in areas where OOA had its strong hold and could expect the largest financial flow back to finance the next steps of the campaign. Step two and three followed in January and March with 800.000 and 1 million copies, in total 2,3 million. With only 2 of 12 pages related to nuclear power, the main focus of the brochure was to highlight the options for renewable energy. One of our outstanding researchers, Bent Sørensen, described a vision for 2030 with 26% wind energy, 31% biomass, 43% solar energy and already by 2000 a total energy consumption slightly less than in 1978. In fact it went down from that time 5.251 W/cap (watt per person) to 4.990 2000 and by 2010 even dropped to 4.661

12. In 1981 the Danish government gave in and presented an energy plan that did not include nuclear power. It was, however, a rather traditional document. The expectation until 2000 was a fast growing energy consumption based on massive use of fossil fuel (42% coal, 46% oil, 9% natural gas) and only 3% renewable energy.

This motivated the same group of energy researchers, who in 1976 had drawn up the first alternative energy plan for Denmark, to elaborate an update version "Energy for the future". (21) The energy consumption, by the year 2000, would be half the level of the government's 1981-plan and renewable energy would count for 12 % compared to the government's meagre 3%. (22) OOA decided for her last major campaign to push for new thinking in energy politics and converted the new plan into a more popular brochure.

13. Finally on 29th March 1985, by a modest majority of 79 against 67, the parliament voted that nuclear power would not become part of any future energy program in Denmark. (23) In reality the idea of Danish nuclear power had lost momentum already in August 1976, less than 3 years after OOA entered the scene. However, a parliament split along energy-ideological lines, pressure from electricity companies, industry and unions delayed a formal decision for another 9 years. Nine lost years.

Anyhow, already years before quite a few minor companies had started developing technologies based upon renewable energy. More companies joined. In the 1990'ies Denmark managed to become the world-leading nation for development and production of wind power. This position is now under pressure by Chinese companies.

In 2012 renewable energy provided full 24% of the overall energy supply. The perspective is 35% in 2020, with the ambition by 2050 to have completely ceased using fossil energy. So, the wild visions 30 years back of Bent Sørensen and other researchers are well on the way to become reality.

14. OOA had completed her mission. Denmark did not get nuclear power and renewable energy was convincingly advancing. Accordingly OOA abolished herself on 31st May 2000. However, we set up the OOA Fonden with the task to care for the Smiling Sun logo as the common logo for the worldwide movement against nuclear power and to take action against commercial and political infringement upon the logo.

15. In the wake of the catastrophic accident in 2011 at the Japanese Nuclear plant Fukushima, the anti nuclear movement in several countries resolved that the nuclear industry has lost for good and that it is crucial now to campaign for a change of energy priorities mainly stressing renewable energy and higher energy efficiency. During recent months the OOA Fonden along this line has received requests from movement organisations in France, Switzerland and Germany who would like to use a renewable energy version of the Smiling Sun logo for their nation wide campaigns. (24)

The board of OOA Fonden has recently discussed the general frame for messages to be used along with the Smiling Sun. It was unanimously decided that time has come for new green versions promoting renewable energy and alternative energy planning. For the Smiling Sun Logo a new perspective is opening.

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