



The Public Eye Swiss Award 2009 for irresponsible corporate behavior

BKW

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I have been chosen to represent the Bürgerinitiative Saubere Energie Dörpen and sing the praises of the die BKW FMB AG Bern. Where I come from BKW does not spell Bernische Kraftwerke but Beschleunigter Klima Wandel (not Bern Power Works but accelerated climate change). BKW deserves this moniker for its coal power plans near my town. Dörpen is in North-West Germany, ten miles from the Dutch border. That explains why our group is a Dutch-German citizens initiative.

In the short film you saw some of the activities we have been involved in since 2007 to convince BKW and our unregenerate politicians that the era of coal power is over. In January 2008 we submitted 11'000 signatures against the power plant. In many communes all around Dörpen additional petitions were addressed to community councils and some 50 to 75% of the inhabitants are supporting us with their signature. Five council members have also come out against the project. In the summer of last year we organized a demonstration that drew almost 5000 participants, the biggest protest ever seen in the Ems country. A member of our initiative bicycled to Bern to return BKW's coal. Some of us traveled to Bern for the shareholders meeting but we were kept away from the action and guarded over by the police so the shareholders wouldn't see us. BKW doesn't seem impressed by the resistance of the population.

In December Germany's largest paper mill, which happens to be right nearby, announced that they were not interested in working with BKW. Still, BKW does not change its plans.

At present there are plans for 30 coal-fired power plants all over Germany, 8 of which have already broken ground. In Brunsbüttel another Swiss utility – Rätia Energie – is also involved. Companies from Denmark and Belgium too, are hoping to build plants that would be out of the question in their own countries.

BKW don't care about CO₂-emissions any more than they do about the toxic waste they are about to dump on the people and the environment. The climate goals of Germany and of their home countries, for that matter, don't interest them one bit. They just want to make a profit. Making a profit, that's where Swiss and German utilities definitely see eye to eye:

In Germany, the utilities receive the required CO₂-certificates for free but energy customers still get billed for the fictional CO₂-expense.

In Switzerland, cheap night-time electricity is used to pump the reservoirs full of water and the next day this water is used to generate expensive electric power (natural electricity they call it). Not surprisingly, BKW is in on this refining scheme.

BKW recently bought a wind park in Germany. The park was hooked up to the grid in 1999 but has performed below expectations so far. The former owners were probably happy to get rid of their bad investment. Now BKW goes around Switzerland, beating its chest and saying see how green

they are and meanwhile the company just needed a fig leaf for its coal black dirty dealings up here in Dörpen.

The plant in Dörpen is apparently going to be even bigger than they've been saying. The plant will allegedly generate up to 7 million tons of CO₂. If you ask them, what about all that CO₂ ?, they shoot back: look at Asia, why don't you!

I recently came across a vivid comparison. Measured against their respective per capita production of CO₂, the waist of an Indian is 50cm, that of a Chinese 170cm, of a Swiss 400cm and of a German 450 cm. Germans and Swiss are seriously overweight, the Chinese are living beyond their means and should watch it, but how are we going to tell an Indian, so sorry, you need to starve a little longer. It's time for us Europeans to put a stop to this kind of waste disposal. Greenhouse gases don't stop at the border. But many don't seem to have heard the news, BKW especially.

Swiss PR and Dörpen reality are giving BKW a lot of trouble. Here are some examples:

PR: When electricity travels, energy is lost; long trips mean big losses. A decentral distribution of power generating sources increases energy efficiency and energy security.

Reality: Emsland district generates much more energy than is locally needed, even now. As a result, electricity has to be exported over long distances using the very power lines that were originally designed with the coming coastal wind parks in mind.

PR: A large cooling tower, and then the steam clouds? Please, not us. We wouldn't force the population to live with that..

Reality: A cooling tower looms 150 meters high, steam clouds visible for miles around, a boiler house, 110 meters high, open pithead stocks, 19 meters high, 300 m long, 50 m wide.

PR: "What counts is the approval of the citizens.."

Reality: Agreement? consultation? You have elected representatives who decide. That is BKW's answer. Meanwhile, the elected officials back in Switzerland, the cantonal government in Bern, is not in agreement with the company's plans. Now the BKW says, „well, you know, actually the company belongs to the people and our Bern citizens have nothing against our plans.“

I would like to invite Mr. Rohrbach, the BKW CEO, on a drive through Emsland. That way he could find out in person, just how unpopular his project is around here.

My last question at the information center is about the coal that BKW uses to produce electricity. Is BKW concerned about human rights abuses or environmental destruction – all of which happens right there in Columbia, for instance, where BKW's purchases some of its coal? This is the answer I get: „None of our business, that's our supplier's responsibility.“ Immediately Glencore flashed through my mind, last year's award winner. I guess BKW is a worthy successor. In the name of our citizens initiative I congratulate them on this success!