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Technology, risk and democracy: The Dutch nuclear energy debate (1981-1984).

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¹ Names appear in alphabetical order. The research done for this paper was for practical reasons limited to a study of part of the main primary sources, secondary literature and newspaper sources. Since this paper is the first of its kind on the subject, no comprehensive research of other authors on the debate is available. A better understanding of some of the issues, such as the internal procedures of the Steering Committee, its reliance on scenario's et cetera, will have to wait for in-depth research at the archives of the Ministry of Economic Affairs, comprehensive media research and interviews with members of the Committee and other participants.

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1. Introduction

Current debates about public participation in scientific and technological innovation may profit from a closer analysis of earlier attempts to involve the public in such matters. The Dutch public debate about nuclear energy in the early 1980s provides an interesting case. The debate was the first in its kind in the Netherlands and displays many of the issues, problems, antagonisms and dynamics that characterize current attempts to involve the public.

The EU funded STAGE project seeks to develop a comparative framework for the analysis of such public involvement. The project focuses on the framing of public debates, their organization and the roles of various actors in the process of defining, deliberating and deciding questions, facts, risks and opportunities. It challenges us to look at how exercises to engage the public draw on existing institutional arrangements and structures in defining the consultation agenda and the questions that can be legitimately raised and addressed in the debate, by whom and in what form.

The STAGE project is itself part of a trend in which policy makers increasingly embrace public involvement in decision-making and public deliberations about new and risky technologies. Such involvement is seen as a way to promote legitimacy and acceptance for policies and to inspire trust among the public.² Although still lurking in the background, the dismissive approach in which references to the public's ignorance are used to discredit public opposition has itself been discredited and officially abandoned in speeches by politicians and high ranking policy makers. Experiments to enhance public participation in deliberations over technological policies abound; attempts to standardize procedures and to identify best practices are underway.³

In The Netherlands the roots of this trend towards enhanced public participation goes back to the 1960s and 1970s. The emergence of environmental activism, the general movement for democratisation from the late sixties and early seventies and the growing awareness of the increasing importance of science-based technologies for society led to more inclusive policies in fields like science policy, physical planning, nature conservation, and health care. In the 1970s the Dutch government established so-called sector councils for research policies. In these

² CEC etc.

³ IFOK

tripartite sector councils representatives from science, government and society (industry, NGOs) would discuss the research needed to formulate adequate governmental responses to social problems.⁴ Yet, such forms of deliberation were inadequate to address the public turmoil about nuclear energy that emerged at that time.

In this paper we will follow the emergence of nuclear energy technology as a solution to the energy needs of the Dutch economy after the Second World War. For long optimistic views about nuclear technology dominated policy making and research. Sceptical and critical voices were seldom heard and easy to ignore. In the early seventies, however, when the technology became operational, widespread public concern and opposition emerged. Governmental measures to fund the introduction of new technology with additional taxes on energy use helped a lot to mobilize public opposition. A political stalemate developed between industry and government on the one hand and social movements campaigning against nuclear energy plans on the other. To assuage the tensions and to get out of the dead ally the government agreed with a proposal from moderate civic groups to organize a broad social debate about energy policies. This would become known as the BMD debate. It was the first in its kind in The Netherlands. From the beginning, it was as much a debate about the debate as it was a debate about nuclear energy. The approach taken and subsequent events tell us about the pitfalls of attempts to combine broad public involvement in technological and economic decision making with representative democracy and economic liberalism. It shows us public debates as essentially contested ‘political machines’ (Barry, 20).⁵ How the issues and questions thrown up are handled and managed is decisive for their political impact and for the answer to the question whether it is yet another form of politics as usual or a genuine enhancement of democracy. As the Dutch debate shows us, organizers walk on a thin line from which one easily falls to one side or the other.

⁴ R.P. Hagendijk, J. W. Smeenk, ‘Sectorraden: Opbouw of Afbraak’ *Wetenschap en Samenleving*. 1984 (5) 23-29.

⁵ Barry, Andrew *Political Machines; Governing a Technological Society*, London, Athlone, 2001

2. Optimists and pessimists. Nuclear optimism in post-war Holland and the rise of its nemesis.

2.1 Pro-nuclear thinking in the Netherlands: 1938 - 1973

Public turmoil about new technologies is often preceded by a phase of paradisiacal tranquillity, when hopes for future benefits fuels restricted laboratory experimentation and some initial jockeying for positions and investments. The voices of the sceptics and critics are not yet heard. Utopian and dystopian stories are easily dismissed in such a period as overblown and premature at a stage when experts as yet understand little more than basic principles. The history of technology provides many examples of this: the steam engine, electricity, biotechnology, micro-electronics, nano-technology and - some decades ago - nuclear energy,

In 1938 German researchers Strassmann and Hahn discovered a way to extract energy from the nuclear fission of the uranium core. A year later Dutch Prime Minister Colijn, a man with strong connections to the Dutch oil industry, was informed about the possibilities of nuclear energy and decided to buy a ship's load of uranium. The Dutch managed to hang on to it during the Second World War. This allowed the country to establish a vanguard position in the post-war European quest for nuclear technology. A technical cooperation project with Norway, started in 1946, helped the two countries to be among the first European countries to run a nuclear energy plant.⁶

In the early post-war era, optimism was thriving about the use of nuclear energy among politicians, scientists and industrial entrepreneurs. Once the proper technology was established, it was assumed, nuclear energy would be as safe to produce, as it would be cheap and clean. Policy makers on energy issues had their eyes on the US, which emerged from the war both with an arsenal of atomic bombs and the technology to build and maintain a nuclear energy site. These policy makers boasted general optimism about nuclear energy with a stern warning to the government: keep

⁶ See Splunter, J.M. *Love at first sight: co-operation between the Netherlands and Norway on the peaceful use of atomic energy, 1950 - 1960.*

up with the US, or lose your industrial and economic position to those who will. The first post-war Dutch government wasn't deaf to this, and stimulated research into nuclear issues. Influential research organisations were established in 1946 (the Foundation for Fundamental Research on Matter, FOM) and 1950 (Institute for Fundamental Scientific Research, ZWO) that would train, organise and finance the first generation of nuclear technicians, future members for an influential nuclear energy lobby in The Hague. In the optimistic fifties and some time beyond, the field was entirely theirs. Only in the sixties the influence of the scientists would be overgrown with specialists from trade and industry: an ever-expanding, amorphous group of participants in nuclear projects such as energy companies, building firms, financing companies and projected users of nuclear energy. In particular the Joint Electricity Companies (Samenwerkende Energie Producenten, SEP) were to put their mark on developments.

In 1953 nuclear optimism first reached a high point, when Eisenhower started his 'Atoms for Peace'-programme. To stimulate the industrial development of the (Western) European economies, the US would share its knowledge and technology on nuclear fission and the building of nuclear plants. The 'atomic fever' that emanated from this led to a contract between the US and the Netherlands in 1954. The Netherlands were allowed to buy US technology and nuclear fuel. As a result the government became an active partner for the scientists on the ins- and outs of nuclear plants on Dutch soil. In 1955 the Committee for Atomic Energy was founded to support government in its decision-making on nuclear issues and work started on a Law on Nuclear Energy. A new strategic alliance between 'science', 'industry' and 'government' now became the protagonist for the nuclear cause. The strategic alliance was exemplified in the establishment of the Reactor Centre Netherlands (RCN, 1954) that was to run future nuclear installations.

In the public domain, nuclear energy was presented as a promise: limitless in supply and clean, exactly the opposite of coal and oil. Television news reporting and a special exhibition at the national airport Schiphol in 1957 about the prospects of nuclear energy use demonstrated and broadcasted this optimism. In 1958 the World Exhibition Expo in Brussels with its characteristic Atomium building exemplifying

the hope for peaceful exploitation of nuclear energy radiated similar views and attracted huge numbers of visitors.

Apart from the optimism about nuclear issues, Dutch Cold War foreign policies played a part in the government's pro-nuclear attitude and the trade agreement with the USA. An Atlantic stance on military and politico-economic issues ensured the positive response to Eisenhower's programme. The strong European stance on trade and industry of the Dutch government ensured the willingness to work on European co-operation: the BENELUX was founded in 1948, and the Dutch were in the forefront of the process of Europeanisation. The Suez Crisis in 1956 and the subsequent drop in oil supplies caused a wave of worried thinking about what would happen when the oil-producing countries would close the tap. Industrial Holland was highly dependent on oil-imports. The Netherlands only had coal to boast as a natural resource, and this in rapidly shrinking quantities. A 'diversification strategy' for sources of energy production was necessary if the Netherlands were to become independent of the Middle East. The phrase 'diversification' played directly into the hands of the nuclear lobby: a choice for nuclear energy was a choice away from the dependency on fossil fuel imports.

In the sixties this diversification strategy was well underway. A huge reserve of natural gas was discovered in the province of Groningen in 1960 and exploited from 1964 onwards. Later additional gas reserves in the Dutch part of the North Sea were discovered and brought to exploitation. This was a great relief for the worries about the shrinking capacity of Dutch coal mines. Parallel to this nuclear energy development gained momentum. In 1957 Euratom was created as a part of the newly established European Economic Community (EEC) under the Treaty of Rome. Euratom provided a platform for knowledge-sharing and central purchasing of nuclear fuel. The Netherlands were assigned the task of running a small nuclear test reactor, built on the North Sea coast, in Petten, to be run by RCN. Trade and industry organisations seized the opportunity to fortify their position, by formalising their ties into Neratoom ltd. (N.V. Neratoom, 1959). The government's position was further expanded by a 1960 report of the Committee on Nuclear Industrial Development, led by the chairman of Philips, Th.Ph. Tromp. His report advised the government to aid industrial nuclear development more directly. It should stimulate close ties between

national industry and the electricity companies to promote an export position in the near future. Industrial cooperation should be encouraged and coordinated. In line with these recommendations the government founded several councils and advisory boards, like the Temporary Industrial Council for Nuclear Energy (Voorlopige Industriële Raad voor Kernenergie, 1962).⁷

In 1965 the first Dutch nuclear plant, named 'Dodewaard' after the grounds it covered, was ready. Technology and equipment were bought from General Electric; costs were split between the Dutch state, Euratom and ten Dutch electricity companies. Dutch trade and industry benefited directly from the commercial spin-off that came with the building of Dodewaard. These benefits helped to raise the hopes for a strong national nuclear industry. On other fronts such hopes were fuelled as well. In 1967 West Germany, Belgium and Holland started a joint venture to build a breeder reactor at Kalkar, Germany, based on sodium technology. As a result Ultracentrifuge Netherlands Ltd. (UCN) came into being in 1969, focussing on international cooperation on ultracentrifuge technology. In the same year the provincial electricity company of Zeeland (Provinciale Zeeuwse Energie Maatschappij, PZEM) commissioned the building of the first Dutch commercial nuclear energy plant in Borssele. PZEM was not part of the group of the ten electricity companies that already cooperated in the Dodewaard project. Their decision to buy the Borssele plant from Kraftwerk Union AG, a joint venture of German Siemens and AEG, had a big impact on industry strategies. An alternative Dutch proposal from NERATOM was rejected in favour of Kraftwerk. It showed the perspective of a national nuclear industry that could compete with those of bigger, neighbouring countries to be unrealistic. Stakes in nuclear plant building were changed for stakes in the smaller but commercially more interesting development with the ultracentrifuge project. In 1970 West Germany, the UK and the Netherlands signed the treaty of Almelo (NL), that

⁷ The temporary 'Voorlopige industriële raad voor de kernenergie' would be permanent from 1963 on, when the first trajectory of the Law on Nuclear Energy came into effect (interestingly the Law itself came into effect only in 1970, when Dodewaard was celebrating its first lustrum). The council (IRK) was one of three councils to work on bridging gaps between science, government and industry. The other two, the Central Council for Nuclear Energy and the Scientific Council for Nuclear Energy were abandoned by respectively 1974 and 1975 because they did not live up to expectations. The IRK proved sufficient however and still exists today. The three bodies, short-lived as they were, were the a highly visual expression of the wholehearted implementation of 'Tromp'.

provided a basis for ultracentrifuge building and exploitation: the successful URENCO.

With hindsight, 1970 proved to be the zenith of unchallenged optimism about the use of nuclear energy. Unopposed, the Law on Nuclear Energy came into effect, which formally regulated responsibilities in case of accidents, accountability of the owners of the plant etcetera. The ten electricity companies involved in Dodewaard asked companies to hand in proposals for a third Dutch plant. A formal 'note on nuclear energy' from Economic Affairs Minister Langman to parliament predicted 'tens' of new plants by the year 2000. Three years later the situation would be drastically altered. In 1972 Dodewaard leaked radiation after a small incident with the reactor. The accident did no harm to people or the environment, but it did harm the aura of perfect safety that surrounded nuclear energy plants. That same year the Club of Rome published its 'Limits to Growth' report, which highlighted the negative environmental effects of using fossil fuels. And in 1973 the Dutch 'oil crisis' started as a result of the OPEC decision to boycott the US and the Netherlands for their support of Israel in the Yom Kippur war. All this considerably complicated the discussion about energy policies. Government emergency measures in response to the oil boycott were stern. The public had to curtail its energy use and for a while no private cars were allowed to drive on Sundays. Although the issue at stake here was oil, it illustrated the importance of diversification of energy sources. And it did affect the arguments on nuclear energy. As oil prices were driven up by the boycott, nuclear energy had become economically competitive, enthusiasts argued. This view wasn't met with general approval, however. Anti-nuclear sentiments had been on the rise for a while, and claimed their place in the political arena.

2.2 Atomic Energy? No thanks. Nuclear criticism and anti-nuclear activism 1945 - 1977.

Ever since nuclear energy emerged as a possible energy source, it was met with criticism. In Holland the first instance of nuclear criticism came from the scientists

themselves. In its magazine 'The Atom', the left-wing Union of Scientific Researchers (Verbond voor Wetenschappelijke Onderzoekers, 1947) were the first to warn about safety issues, the military use of nuclear technology and the threats this posed to world order. Although many scientists continued to work on nuclear physics, their warnings would become part of the discourse between technical specialists. From time to time information would surface into public discourse, but never to the extent that it threatened the optimistic agenda of government, science and industry.

It would take many years before the critique from 'The Atom' was repeated in the public arena. In the early seventies American scientists caused a first public stir when they left the Atomic Energy Commission after it failed to acknowledge the risks for civilians in case of a nuclear melt-down.⁸ In Holland environmental groups started to pick up the issue of nuclear energy too, responding to critical and worried sounds that were surfacing worldwide. In the late sixties their arguments would be purely environmental: what would happen to the environment in case of a nuclear accident? What happens with nuclear waste? In the early seventies the arguments expanded. Environmental worries now found their way into left-wing discourse, alongside anti-Americanism, anti-NATO-ism, anti-capitalism and an aversion to the 'military-industrial complex' that was threatening world peace. The arms race between East and West and a critical stand towards the United States also fuelled the aversion to proliferation of nuclear arms. This association between anti-nuclear arguments and radical left-wing thought perhaps explains why right-wing governments treated the anti-nuclear lobby with such disdain, and why the power and the social basis of the anti-nuclear movement was underestimated for a long time.

Dutch political activism in the 1970's and early 1980's looked like an enormous patchwork of small groups and networks. Highly visual and expressive means of communication were characteristic for this period and for the wide variety of topics and opinions assembled. Political opinions would be communicated in a distinctive, often literal showing of colours and catch-phrases. It was the heyday of the button, the poster-in-your-window and the bumper sticker that, usually, due to its size wouldn't fit your bumper at all. Best known was the round yellow sticker with a smiling, red

⁸ Bok, Pauline de e.a. *Achter de coulissen van de praatshow. Geschiedenis en bedoelingen van de BMD*, 10

sun that said 'Atomic Energy? No thanks!' Friendly, yet to the point, this sticker symbolised environmental care, a clear anti-nuclear point of view and willingness to look for alternatives to the energy issues of the time. Other stickers would surround this sticker. Together the anti-nuclear weapons stickers, pro-environment stickers, *Greenpeace's* stickers of humpback whales or seals, broken guns and anarchism signs would show the owner's place in the universe.

The collection of signs and phrases signifies to which extent the anti-nuclear movement was part of a broad multi-issue cultural and political movement. The movement against nuclear energy was one element in a society-wide front of political and cultural activism and awareness, part of a longer left-wing history and of the post-War clash between authority and the youthful upsurge against it. Strategies and arguments would change in response to developments in other activists' agenda's, notably the anti-proliferation agenda, in an ever restless world of floating allegiances. Within the larger movement the anti-nuclear energy movement was a single-issue movement, made up by a loose coalition of a range of activist groups. As we will see it was this combination of dedicated single issue activists with a much broader political and cultural movement that is responsible for the strength of the campaigns as well as for some of its weaknesses.

The first activist group on nuclear energy entered the public arena when the Borssele plant was build. The small 'Association for Environmental Hygiene Zeeland' (Vereniging Milieuhygiëne Zeeland, 1970) used legal procedures in their attempts to stop the building and started an awareness campaign about the threats nuclear energy posed. Two years later a small incident took place at the Dodewaard plant that fuelled suspicions. Questions were raised in parliament, and the government's Committee for Nuclear Energy received a delegation from the activist organisation 'Environmental Defence' (Milieudefensie) to listen to their arguments.

The general interest people were now taking in the pro's and con's of the nuclear issue got leverage in 1973. The government provided a rallying call to anti-nuclear activism when it decided to build three new nuclear plants to find a way out of the oil crisis. At the same time it raised the price of electricity by 3% to finance the project at Kalkar - the 'Kalkar-levy'. This proved to be a major mistake. The measures caused people to flock the banners of activists' groups and anti-nuclear political parties. In

1974 the elections for the municipalities resulted in a swing to small left-wing parties. In press and parliament questions were raised, not only on the financial part of the nuclear deal, but also on nuclear energy in general: its safety, its threats to the environment etcetera. Around the country 'Power groups' ('stroomgroepen') were established by people who refused to pay their power bills as long as the Kalkar-levy was imposed. Other organisations followed suit. The Society of Scientific Workers branched out into nuclear energy activism, and provided doubting scientists with an organisational basis and platform.

Activists' groups of various denominations met to discuss new strategies to oppose the government. New anti-nuclear workgroups emerged. Within a year an umbrella organisation was formed to combine the often small groups and organisations into one power block, the 'Anti Nuclear Energy Movement' (Anti Kernenergie Beweging, AKB, 1973). This would become the major coordinating platform for public unrest vis-à-vis nuclear energy. In 1975 they found an ally in the National Energy Committee (Landelijk Energie Komitee, LEK, 1975) in which members of left-wing and pacifist political parties played a prominent role. Environmental Defence, the AKB and LEK would be the governments' major antagonists in the years to come. The steep and quick rise of the anti-nuclear movement forced the government to postpone the 'three plants-plan' and to seek additional advice. The government asked the national Health Council and a new Committee for Reactor Security to compile a report on safety- health- and environmental issues. Both reported positive with respect to building the plants. Still, government decided to attach three conditions to the building of the sites. Firstly, the government should have a decisive influence in the exploitation and maintenance of the plants. Secondly, a safe storage of radioactive waste should be guaranteed. And, thirdly, a 'balanced choice' in the selection of sites for the three plants would be required. Especially the last condition spelled trouble for the governments' plans: it promised influence across municipal and regional political bodies with respect to the selection procedures.

In the face of the ever rising public protest, not only the 'three plants plan' faced an uphill struggle. In 1974 a test plant for ultracentrifuge techniques was started at Almelo, a site that over time would become more renowned for being beleaguered by activists than for its results. The same counted for Kalkar, which pulled 50.000

protesters in 1977, and for all other nuclear sites. Press coverage secured attention to the anti-nuclear cause.⁹ A group of renegade scientists asked the government to postpone all nuclear plans due to growing scientific insecurity about several nuclear issues. In May 1976 Dutch industry lost a bid to build nuclear plants in South Africa to France, partly due to a government that was bugged by leftists' insistence not to assist the Apartheid system. And in Rotterdam a plan for a new commercial plant failed when General Electric withdrew from a joint venture with Dutch firms: delay after delay caused the Americans to back out.¹⁰ A political and regulatory stalemate had emerged.

2.3 Stumbling into the BMD: 1977 to 1981

The political stalemate became fully evident when a decision had to be reached on the locations for the 'three plants-programme'. The standard bureaucratic trajectory prescribed agreement on a 'Core Decision on Planning' (Planologische Kernbeslissing, PKB). In this PKB, civilians were formally given a chance to have a say about the issue at hand. Normally this procedure posed few problems for the planners. On the 'information meetings' about (and at) projected locations for the nuclear plants however, officials were harassed by activists. Activists demanded a discussion not on the location of new nuclear plants, but on the necessity of the use of nuclear energy. A guideline for their demands was provided by the AKB's 1975 manifesto 'The Dutch People demand an Energy Policy'.¹¹ In this manifesto the AKB demanded a 'democratisation' of the economic policies of Dutch government. Civilians should be able to influence these policies through direct participation. Issues like the necessity

⁹ The 50.000 protesters (of various countries) at Kalkar and the broad press coverage it received helped to make people aware of the size and strength of anti-nuclear activism. See Bok, Pauline de e.a. *Achter de coulissen van de praatshow*, passim, Gabriëls, René. *Intellectuelen in Nederland. Politieke controversen over kernenergie, armoede en Rushdie*, passim, Brinkman, Gerard. *De terugval van de Anti Kernenergie Beweging* passim.

¹⁰ Kees Boender, Milieuprotest in Rijnmond. Sociologische Analyse van Milieusolidariteit onder Elites en Publiek.

¹¹ 'De bevolking van Nederland eist een energiebeleid'. The demand for a 'truly integrated energy policy', not only 'based on economic factors but (...) on all aspects of national well-being', was first expressed by a Study Group on nuclear energy of Environmental Defense, in its 1973 'Note on nuclear energy'. See Werkgroep Kernenergie. *Kernenergienota*, 72. Also Bok, Pauline de e.a. *Achter de coulissen van de praatshow*, 12.

and direction of economic growth had to be discussed before a decision on the use of nuclear energy could be reached.

The deadlock was further enhanced by the national political situation. In the spring of 1977 the centre-left coalition government fell. After elections it took a dazzling 208 days to form a new government, a center-right coalition under the right-wing confessional leadership of Prime Minister Van Agt. Known as ardent anti-leftist, Van Agt was not the man to resolve the conflict with the anti-nuclear movement himself. Yet, something had to be done. The initiative to do so came from three influential organisations that covered the middle ground between politics and public: the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, the Federation of Dutch Labour Unions (FNV) and the Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG). Together they pressed for a discussion in which the people could have its say about nuclear energy issues. The Minister for Economic Affairs, Van Aardenne, hard pressed for a way out of the deadlock, ordered the Common Energy Council (Algemene Energie Raad, AER) to come up with a discussion layout for such a public debate. About the same time a group of oppositional parliamentarians and AKB-members, 'people with experience in participation procedures'¹² - the 'Initiative Group Energy Discussion' - drafted a proposal: 'Thinking along and joining in: democratic decision-making on (nuclear) energy'.¹³ It proposed a participation procedure that went beyond those of the past: the deadlock in the Central Decision on Planning had shown how outmoded the older participation models were. A 'broad' public discussion was proposed, in the sense that all civilians who took an interest should have a chance to have their say. 'Rationality' and the 'level of democracy' were the two basic values of the new procedure. Two rounds of talks would be necessary according to the proposal, the first to index the exact amount and value of arguments, the second to have the actual discussion. Importantly, the talks needed to have an 'open start', to avoid the idea of a biased or manipulated discussion: government notes were equally important as others. The practical organisation should be put in the hands of a special board outside of

¹² The ad-hoc Initiative Energy Discussion Group (Initiatiefgroep Energiediscussie), see Gabriëls, René. *Intellectuelen in Nederland*, 91.

¹³ Initiatiefgroep energiediscussie 'Meedenken, Meedoen: democratisch beslissen over kernenergie'.

parliament, a 'steering committee', which should report every month to the Minister of Economic Affairs.¹⁴

The AER-plan followed the note of the Initiative Group by two weeks and would draw heavily on this proposal; the AER's chairman and secretary had attended the meetings in which it was drafted. On the 17th of July 1978, the government issued an 'agreement in principle' to organize a 'Broad Social Discussion on energy issues'. Whether the government would follow the AER proposal remained to be seen, however. One year later, in August 1979, the AER-advice was followed by a governments' plan for the discussion.¹⁵ [??] In it the government adopted the two stage approach recommended by the Initiative Group, but left out the important idea of an open start. Instead the government's energy policy intentions - summed up in a solid 1200 page report – should be the starting point. Next, government pointed out it could take its decisions on energy policies without being dependent on the outcome of the discussion. This alarmed activists greatly about the intentions and goodwill of Van Agt's cabinet. A former professor of state law and a catholic conservative, Van Agt had been publicly reluctant to commit his government to a public discussion forced upon him by the radical political left. Neither he nor Van Aardenne (Economic Affairs) were supporters of experiments in direct democracy as a matter of principle, but the government was in hot water over the issue. A statistic survey showed 85% of those questioned were against the extension of nuclear plants in the Netherlands.¹⁶ Van Agt's attitude towards the discussion remained sceptical even though he accepted the debate. In a newspaper interview in 1980 he said: "I am already convinced about the necessity of (the use of) nuclear energy. But in the Netherlands we first need a Broad Social Discussion to drum this into the people."¹⁷

¹⁴ *ibid.* passim

¹⁵ The 'Opzetnota augustus 1979' unfortunately was not available in the short course of researching this article. Other researchers see no differences between the AER-note and the Opzetnota. See Gabriëls, René. *Intellectuelen in Nederland*, 91

¹⁶ Onderzoek Nederlandse Stichting voor Statistiek, 1979. See Bok, Pauline de e.a. *Achter de coulissen van de praatshow*, 17

¹⁷ *Trouw* (June 14th 1980): 'Ik zelf ben al van de noodzaak van kernenergie overtuigd. Maar in Nederland is eerst een Brede Maatschappelijke Discussie nodig om dit het volk in te prenten'. Also cited in De Bok (p. 14) as an example of the political scepticism reigning at the start of the BMD-process. The quotation, in a well informed but left-wing biased book on the BMD before the start of the discussion phase, informs us also on the extreme distrust of leading (centre-right) politicians at this point in time. Bok, Pauline de e.a. *Achter de coulissen van de praatshow*, 14

The decision to organize a broad public debate could be seen as a major victory for the anti-nuclear movement: its fierce opposition in and outside parliament had made the BMD inevitable. Yet, activists were sceptical about the government's commitment to the discussion and the possibilities the discussion could create. Would the discussion really influence government's policies? Or was the whole 'show' a clever tactical move to take the wind out of the sails of the anti-nuclear movement? Van Agt's commentary suggested that. Such questions would never leave the movement, and would eventually have the self-fulfilling effect activists worried about.

3. The 'information phase' of the BMD (September 1981 - October 1982).

The commitment to enhanced democracy and public rationality sketched in the previous paragraph remind us of the recent turn of governments and the EU to participatory politics following the furore about GM food in the 1990s. The BMD was the official reaction to a stalemate about the introduction of new generic technology. The technology had been developed in experimental settings for many years and opposition to it had been marginal, but nevertheless large scale introduction provoked wide scale opposition. A special tax to finance the introduction of the new technology and discussions about the siting of nuclear energy plants[or nuclear power stations] offered activists excellent opportunities to mobilise massive support for their anti-nuclear stand.

In this highly politicised environment the broad public debate was to engage the public in a rational assessment of problems, opportunities and policy making. The organizers were to conduct the debate in such a way that the public debate would indeed become more rational and future policy decisions would have sufficient public support and legitimacy. To achieve this they had to attend to two problems. On the one hand capture by the opponents of nuclear energy had to be avoided. On the other hand they had to ensure that the lukewarm government would not distance itself from the debate and its outcome. For the environmentalists a major concern was how to avoid the exercise becoming a form of political marketing for the pro-nuclear lobby and its representatives in government.

The design for the debate drawn up by the government was quite clear: The starting point for the debate should be its own report about the relevant evidence and arguments pro- and con. A first phase should be to assess the information thus provided and to add and distribute further evidence. After this 'information phase' the real debate about various alternative policy choices would start. The assumption underneath such a two-phase design is that facts and value commitments can and should be sufficiently separated in a way acceptable to all participants. Furthermore, it draws on the assumption that full and adequate information gathering should proceed the formation of opinions and commitments. And finally, it is based on the assumption that the problem at stake should and can be adequately demarcated from wider political concerns (liberal economic policy at large, i.e. capitalism) as well as from narrow-minded interest group politics (from the energy industry to NIMBY activism).

One might say that these assumptions combined form the core ideology of modernist rational governance. To organize a debate framed in this way is to engage the public in a related conception of modernist citizenship: collect evidence, construe alternative choices, balance pro-s and con-s, define your preferences and cast your vote. Alas, as we will see, the practice of public debate is more complicated. Public debates about new technology are always debates about the technology as such as well as debates about the debate itself and the assumptions underneath.

3.1 The Steering Committee frames the discussion

On July 3rd, 1981 Queen Beatrix installed the 'Steering Committee' for the 'Broad Social Discussion on Energy Policies' by Royal Decree.¹⁸ It was chaired by Esquire M.L. de Brauw of the liberal-democratic party D'66. The nine members of the team assembled by him were supposed to be 'acceptable to everyone' and had distinctively different social and political affiliations. The members shared five political denominations between them, and they were specialists in such different fields as

¹⁸ Koninklijk Besluit no 76, 3 juli 1981. Stuurgroep Maatschappelijke Discussie Energiebeleid. *Het Tussenrapport*, 11

energy policies, environmental issues, economics, social sciences and law. Their opinions about nuclear energy were wide apart. Some were known for their support, most were doubters; two members of left-wing parties stood out for their rejection of nuclear energy. The same was true of the Committees 'scientific staff' of twenty-twentyfive people. The selection of 'acceptable' members of the Steering Committee and their staff proved to be successful: it would never be criticised for its composition. Only the chair, De Brauw himself, became a popular target for critical commentary by the anti-nuclear energy movement. His 'flexible political past' and his aristocratic title made it easy to encourage suspicions. Over the years De Brauw had switched political parties three times, though within the spectre of liberal democratic parties and without compromising his own undisguised pro-nuclear points of view.

De Brauw himself, however, was enthusiastic about the project he was about to launch: an instrument like the BMD could 'enrich democracy'.¹⁹ More than a national enquiry on energy issues, De Brauw and the Steering Committee saw the BMD as a chance to build a new model of reaching political consensus. The standoff between government and the people's movements had reached a critical point. Not only on issues of (nuclear) energy, but also on the issue of nuclear weapons 'technocratic' officials and their authoritarian 'parliamentarism' were severely criticised in- and outside parliament. These were days when a record-breaking 400.000 people could be mobilized in Amsterdam, November 1981, for a protest rally against nuclear arms.²⁰ Not only government sensed an impending crisis of authority; their opponents did too. One adversary analysed the crisis in terms of 'ungovernability' of the people: 'The governing powers of politics are exhausted. The advancement of society can no longer be guaranteed. New means are necessary to fend off the wear and tear. These means are found in temporary constructions to bridge the problem.'

Once established, the Committee started preparations drawing on the available government reports. The information phase would run from September 1981 to October 1982. In this phase the views of specialists, stakeholders and critics were gathered. Pros and cons would be combined into a number of 'energy scenarios' or

¹⁹ Gabriëls, René. *Intellectuelen in Nederland*, 92.

²⁰ The American historian Walter Laqueur subsequently coined the word 'hollanditis' to catch the wide support for the ideas of the Dutch anti-missile movement.

'models' for future energy policies. These scenarios would be the starting point of the discussion phase. The scenarios were seen as guidelines, as a means and not as an end, as we will see.²¹ Combined the scenario's should provide the basis to answer the central question for the BMD: 'What are the prospects and possibilities for the Netherlands' energy economy against the backdrop of international developments, and what could be the place of an enlarged employment of nuclear energy therein?'²²

The legitimacy and acceptability of the process was a central concern for the Steering Committee from the start. The Committee knew the fate of its final report would depend on it. From day one it tried to be as transparent as possible about the process and the neutrality of those in charge of the debate. The Committee deliberately drafted a different blueprint for the debate that differed from the one the government had provided in 1979, to make the discussion more balanced and to create more distance between itself and government. The government's 1200-pages report on its 'energy intentions' would no longer serve as the main starting point, but would merely be one of the many sources for the information phase. Thus, after years of negotiating about the most acceptable form for the discussion, the first blueprint made was used after all: the 'thinking along and joining in'- note with its reliance on an open start. Furthermore, as a result of a fierce fight in parliament in 1981 not only the building of new plants would be point of discussion. The future of the two already established plants, Dodewaard and Borssele could also be discussed, as well as the installations at Kalkar, Almelo and other sites. The Committee broadcast as wide as possible that there would be no restrictions to the number of possible subjects.²³ All the topics people could come up with would be considered. There would be due time to assess their relevance to the key questions in the course of the debate process. Regularly appearing newspaper advertisements would be used to explain which step of the process was due. These ads displayed a frankness and openness quite different from the earlier attempts to focus and to restrict the debate on more narrowly defined questions.

²¹ The responsible member for the implementation of scenario's of the Committee, Van de Klundert, stressed this point in the newspaper the Committee released with the progress report. "They [the scenario's - *RH&AT*] are tools - nothing more, but also nothing less - to be able to reach agreement on opinions on an energy policy that is good and responsible." Quoted in Bok, Pauline de e.a. *Achter de coulissen van de praatshow*. See paragraph 3.4 for a discussion on the Committee's reliance on scenario's.

²² Cited in Gabriëls, René. *Intellectuelen in Nederland*, 92

²³ This was also recommended in the 1979 AER report.

All these changes were badly needed to overcome the suspicion that the BMD would be a manipulative fix, or a 'wax nose' in Dutch prosaic language: a theatrical mask to hide the government's intentions. Yet, the changes in the design of the debate were clear victories for the anti-nuclear movement. They created a space that would allow for the discussions the opponents had asked for. Nevertheless, the opponents still remained to be convinced and some groups were not planning to give in. The struggle about the definition of the debate as 'sincere' or 'political manipulation' continued.

With respect to the information phase, the Steering Committee took a number of initiatives. Firstly, it asked 260 institutes and groups for their opinion on energy issues. Institutes and organizations were selected for their relevance in the field of energy production, their research work or their resistance to the use of nuclear technology in energy-related issues. Secondly, the Committee put its first of many adverts in the newspapers. It appeared October 1981 and asked the public: 'Which energy sources do you want, and which not? That's what The Hague wants to know'.²⁴ Thirdly, the Committee launched a procedure to subsidize organizations to allow them to further elaborate and develop their views on energy policies. The idea was that this encouraged a wave of 'reliable' publications on the issues, which would enhance the discussion. Finally, a series of 'Controversy hearings' was planned to deal with matters that emerged from the information gathering as vital to the debate.

The response to the advertisement and the letter to the institutes was quick and overwhelming: a total of 3952 reactions were counted, consisting of letters, reports, pamphlets, and petitions.²⁵ The scientific staff of the Committee brought this deluge back to 400 contributions that showed useful 'argumentations or a start to argumentation', and that were 'stripped of frills and sham arguments'. With some participants a correspondence was started to fine-tune aspects of their contributions; thirteen hearings were held over the country to make possible 'a more personal contact' with participants. The subject material was eventually divided into four sets

²⁴ *de Volkskrant* October 17th 1981. 'The Hague' is the seat of the Dutch government and most governmental institutions.

²⁵ A complementary report with the progress report elaborates on the exact contents of these contributions. See Stuurgroep Maatschappelijke Discussie Energiebeleid. *Bijlage behorende bij het Tussenrapport*, passim

of issues: 1. The costs of nuclear energy, and the costs and possibilities of renewable energy sources (i.e. wind- and solar energy), 2., The structure of electricity provision, 3. Risk analysis and risk perception, 4. Processing and storing of radioactive waste.

For the controversy hearings at the end of the information phase new contributions were sought after with participants who opposed the ideas of others, to further massage the abundance of material into a usable format. To help this process, participants were sent questionnaires on matters the Committee deemed to be central. This questionnaire was specifically designed for the occasion by an external bureau, after a request from the Steering Committee.

At the end of the discussion phase the results from the hearings were integrated in the progress report in which the Committee presented the scenarios to be discussed in the discussion phase. This progress report was accompanied by reports on each of the four subjects of the Controversy hearings, which showed the 400-odd contributions at length and with cross-references.²⁶

3.2 Controversy frames the Steering Committee

The open approach adopted by the Steering Committee did not pacify the opponents of nuclear energy. Activists continued to describe the debate as undemocratic, unevenly balanced in opportunities and financing of the different parties, and biased in favor of nuclear energy.²⁷ Since 1979 another argument had emerged. The debate about the safety of nuclear plants was misguided: Why talk about the safety of nuclear plants after the Harrisburg/Three Miles Island incident?²⁸ Wasn't 'Harrisburg' proving enough?

²⁶ See Stuurgroep Maatschappelijke Discussie Energiebeleid. *Bijlage van de analytische verslagen van controverse zittingen gehouden in het kader van de informatiefase. 1, II, III, IV (Steering Committee Societal Debate Energy Policies. Appendices to the analytical reports about the controversy hearings held as a part of the information phase. Parts I thru IV).*

²⁷ Newspaper research (in newspapers ranging from liberal *NRC Handelsblad*, through centre-left *Volkskrant* and *Trouw* to left-wing (communist) *De Waarheid*) shows scepticism had the upper hand with anti-nuclear activists for the whole duration of the BMD, with - in general - heated arguments at the start of the BMD and during the information phase, a last burst of scepticism in response to the release of the progress report and a disinterested posture during the discussion phase and the release of the final report.

²⁸ On the 28th of March 1979 radioactive gas escaped from the nuclear plant at Three Miles Island, Biddletown, close to the capital of Pennsylvania, Harrisburg. Also a potentially threatening hydrogen-bubble formed in the reactor. Biddletown was evacuated and all systems in the plant were shut down to

Nevertheless, the decision to organize a broad societal debate had put the social movement against nuclear energy under stress. The question intensely debated among activists was whether the BMD would give opponents a real chance to alter the energy policies of the country. Should groups and individuals join the BMD or not? Strategy sessions were held all over the country. When the BMD actually started in 1981, 'the movement' - already a complex network of collaborating as well as competing groups - showed signs of splitting in two about the issue. One part decided the BMD was indeed a chance for influencing government policies on energy issues and joined in. The other part - made up mostly by left-wing hard-liners - decided (in a gradual process of erosion within the ranks of AKB and the small organisations that constituted AKB) to ignore the BMD and use other means of protest, such as blockades of nuclear installations etcetera. Of the bigger organisations, LEK and Environmental Defence decided to join. The AKB, the umbrella organisation for a range of smaller groups, was split: part of the organisations joined, the other part did not. Effectively, this meant the end of the influence the AKB had had on the government.²⁹ AKB itself started the Study Group Energy Discussion (Werkgroep Energie Diskussie WED, 1979) to join the BMD.

With the start of the information phase, discussions shifted from the BMD as such to the detailed design and content of the debate. In the information phase, objections were raised on two main issues: to the construction of the BMD and more specifically the Committee's overreliance on scenarios, and on matters of finance. Criticism in the media and in the controversy hearings about the reliance on risk analysis illustrates the problem with the BMD's construction in the eyes of its critics. In the hearing about 'Risk analysis and risk perception', no-one was happy about the straight-jacket provided by the questionnaire and the emphasis on risk. "When reading your questionnaire", one participant wrote, "my team came under the impression the

avoid further accidents. Though no one was affected by the incident, the televised evacuation left its mark on the discussion-to-come. It would take four years to clean the plant itself and increase its safety.

²⁹ In his unpublished bachelors thesis on the AKB, Gerard Brinkman gives valuable inside information on the decline of the AKB as an influential and functional organisation, describing the slow but inevitable schism between 'collectivists' that wanted to stick together and criticize the BMD from within, and 'autonomists' who tried small-scale activism outside of the BMD to frustrate the nuclear infrastructure. The question is who was more frustrated with these actions: according to Brinkman autonomists groups were deeply infiltrated by police who briefed nuclear plants and planners on actions to come. See Brinkman, Gerard. *De terugval van de Anti Kernenergie Beweging*, passim

compiler has a strong preference for risk analysis."³⁰ Commentators argued that 'risk analysis' was just one way to address the bigger issue of (environmental and human) safety. It was considered to be an approach with strong methodical flaws and an emphasis on partial technical issues instead of perceptions and the issue at large. "Risk analysis can show us much. I, however, prefer an emphasis on risk perception. This is an ethical point I would like to stress: too often non-objectifiable factors are disqualified as non-relevant or emotional." Others started their contributions in a similar vein: "In my opinion the present discussion on risk revolves around a conceptual scheme that is not right. Central questions on future energy conditions - like the ways and means of democratic decision making - are threatened by this."³¹

The anti-nuclear groups broadened the arguments against the reliance on strict scenarios to criticism of the whole of the BMD construction. The careful step-by-step approach of De Brauw towards discussable scenarios made the movement restless: who decides which, how and when contributions are amended to fit a scenario? Who decides which contributions are of no use to any scenario? Asking for an open discussion from start to end, it had not expected an *information* phase where discussion was discouraged by the Steering Committee. As to be expected the scenarios in themselves became subject to similar discussions upon their publication. In the newspapers commentators wrote expressing dismay about the scenarios adopted. The Steering Committee influenced the shape of the scenarios too much to inspire trust with respect to its neutrality. The Committee brought itself under suspicion as it pulled too many strings in the process of preparing the scenarios.³²

Alongside these 'discussions on the discussion', financial matters became a matter for critical debate. First, De Brauw had a row over budgets with the Minister for Economic Affairs. Thirteen million Dutch guilders had been earmarked for the BMD,

³⁰ The pages of the four reports are not numbered, highlighting the practical approach to the process of gathering and processing the documents. If possible the footnotes in this paper will show the names of participants, when I use quotations from their contributions. All other references unfortunately need to be marked by a *passim*.

Stuurgroep Maatschappelijke Discussie Energiebeleid. *Bijlage van de analytische verslagen van controversezittingen gehouden in het kader van de informatiefase. 3. Risico analyse en risicobeleving.* *passim*

³¹ *ibid.* *passim*

³² In the critical assesment of the information phase of De Bok et al, the argument is widened by reflecting on an 'open forum discussion' in *De Volkskrant*, where engineer Potma raised questions to the 'mistake the Committee makes by seeing itself as a scenario builder'. See Bok, Pauline de e.a. *Achter de coulissen van de praatshow*, 28

but De Brauw demanded thirty-five million. He eventually settled for twenty-five and a salary of 205.000 guilders a year for himself. In days of massive unemployment and major cutbacks on government's budgets, these figures stood out in the public eye. Especially De Brauw's own financial compensation was an obvious target for left wing attacks. The Committee's funding of organizations caused a further row. Pro-nuclear institutes with their own promotion budgets and PR-staff received more money than small anti-nuclear organisations that relied on volunteers' work, according to critics. Especially the 1.7 million guilders subsidy for (the already well-funded) Neratoom were considered an outrage. Likewise the subsidy for the right-wing liberal-democratic party VVD attracted critical comments. That party had never showed any enthusiasm for a BMD, but profited from subsidies once it had been forced upon them. The WED, the AKB's new platform, only received half of what they had asked for: 2.5 instead of 5 million to develop promotion material.³³ Although may be not that relevant in the overall course of the debate, these skirmishes about the financial arrangements with respect to the debate served to raise pressure with respect to the neutrality and legitimacy of the debate led by De Brauw.

3.3 The Controversy hearings

The critical comments received did not bring the Steering Committee to change its course. Steadily it proceeded with compiling and selecting ideas and arguments, both textually and verbally aired, and their channelling into four bundles of subjects. It would ask participants to expand on their contributions, to explain contradictions or to respond to contributions of others. The 'controversy hearings' were organized to allow participants to explain their ideas verbally and to expand on them. Texts and taped statements from these hearings were collected into four massive reports, the 'supplements to the analytic statements of the controversy hearings'.³⁴ Crammed with ideas and arguments these 'Controversy hearings reports' show the width and breadth of both the energy issues at stake, and the mass of arguments that were around at the

³³ Ibid. 26.

³⁴ Stuurgroep Maatschappelijke Discussie Energiebeleid. *Bijlage van de analytische verslagen van controversezittingen gehouden in het kader van de informatiefase. 1. Kosten van kernenergie. Mogelijkheden en kosten van duurzame energiebronnen. Item 2. De structuur van de electriciteitsvoorziening. Item 3. Risico analyse en risicobeleving. Item 4. Verwerking en opberging van radio actief afval.*

time of their compilation. The Controversy hearings report on 'The costs of nuclear energy and costs and possibilities of durable energy sources' for instance, is a compilation of over a hundred contributions from institutes and individuals; interest groups and protesters alike. The cheapest way to achieve economic growth would be an expanded use of nuclear energy, some scientists and interest group representatives would argue. They pointed to France for evidence in support. Econometrists would use the same example, however, to argue the opposite and opt for coal and oil as the cheapest options. Both parties would be criticised in a subsequent contribution in which a sceptic claimed both arguments to be unfounded as adequate research into the French situation was lacking. Without such research no conclusions were possible, according to this commentator.³⁵

Figures were balanced with contra-figures, explanations were challenged and conclusions altered. "...on second thoughts the question about the price of a KWH of atomic energy cannot be answered"³⁶ What could be answered, according to energy specialists, was the question of the cost-effective use of solar energy in the near future. 'No, not even when current techniques are developed further', an energy expert with high stakes in the nuclear energy programme claimed. "Yes", an ardent environmentalist joined in: "and at low costs too." At which a third participant replied it made no sense at all to talk 'costs', especially when the use of nuclear energy was at stake. "Low costs for nuclear energy give no support what so ever to people who claim nuclear energy is risk-free and harmless to the environment. It's my opinion that the wrong questions are asked and the discussion is wrongly aimed at detailed calculations."³⁷

This last fundamental criticism, however important, was never fully addressed in the report on costs. It could perhaps have found its proper place in the third of the Controversy hearings, on 'Risk analysis and risk perception', or in the fourth, 'Processing and storing of radioactive waste', or even in the second, 'The structure of electricity provision'. Since the argument was raised as part of a discussion on costs, it was not raised in these other contexts. This proves both the strength and the weakness of the procedure for the information phase. Strength, because 'the energy issue' was

³⁵ Stuurgroep Maatschappelijke Discussie Energiebeleid. *Bijlage van de analytische verslagen van controversezittingen gehouden in het kader van de informatiefase. 1. Kosten van kernenergie. Mogelijkheden en kosten van duurzame energiebronnen.* passim

³⁶ *Bijlage 1*, contribution of Th. Van Waas.

³⁷ *Bijlage 1*, contribution of A.A. de Boer (*De Boer & Van Teylingen Consultancy Group*)

indeed dealt with in its total, complex scope: it demonstrated how decisions or thoughts on one aspect of the energy issue influenced others. Weakness, because the more fundamental questions disappeared in the cracks between the topics chosen, while the technical, scientific, philosophic or numerical complexity made it difficult to the average reader to discriminate between good and bad arguments across topics.

3.4 Scenario's for the discussion phase

The weakness just sketched was met - or so the Steering Committee hoped - by the progress report that saw the light of day in January 1983.³⁸ This report gave an eloquent summary of the proceedings so far, of the range of issues and arguments and of the coherence of the different elements. It was backed by ten supplementary reports that showed calculations, compilations of arguments, statistics on opinions and the like, that again underlined the complexity of the issue at stake.

In spite of this complexity the progress report closed with four neat 'energy scenarios', distilled by the Committee from the material at hand, and five 'important questions for the coming discussion.' The procedure used for the distillation of four scenarios and five questions from the 400 (or even the 3952) contributions is lost in time. As far as the public sources show, the Committee never explained its internal procedures.³⁹ It is not clear how the staff worked to boil down the flood of reactions into a limited number of scenarios. No public report or methodological account on this exists. It is worth noting, however, that this part of the operations of the Committee's bureau did not become a topic of focussed public debate. This may be due to the fact that the committee simply published the reactions received in full.

The same counts for the Committee's strong reliance on scenarios, the BMD's least appreciated feature. Unfortunately the rationale behind the decision to use scenarios as a basis for discussion was never fully accounted for by the Committee in its official reports. There are however strong hints this choice was never a point of extended discussion between the members of the Committee. In a chapter on the four scenarios in the progress-report, the Committee writes:

³⁸ Stuurgroep Maatschappelijke Discussie Energiebeleid. *Het Tussenrapport. Basis voor de Brede Maatschappelijke Discussie*, passim

³⁹ See footnote one; more research needs to be done into this issue.

"A responsible energy policy asks for an appraisal of the future. *For several years scenario-studies have been used* (our italics, RH&AT) to formulate such coherent explorations of the times ahead."⁴⁰

From such a quote and from others⁴¹, it seems as if the Committee has never spend much thought about its reliance on scenarios. Support for this interpretation also comes from the fact that two of the four scenarios were written before the BMD took off: the CE-scenario was 'prepared' by the Center for Energy Reductions as early as 1975! The 'reference-scenario' had been developed for the greatest part, by the Ministry of Economic Affairs 'before the Steering Committee started its work in 1981', as the progress report indicates.⁴² This scenario was only slightly altered to fit in with the others, by fine-tuning it in respect to methods of calculation and updated points of reference.⁴³ On the one hand this may seem strange from a democratic point of view: after narrowing almost 4000 contributions down to four scenarios, it seems odd that two of the four scenarios used to catch the variety of commentary were already in existence. On the other hand: the four scenario's together do show the scope of the matter at hand, and gave the reader ample opportunity to reflect on what would be best. Furthermore, as *NRC Handelsblad* observed in an editorial on the progress report, 'with the strong emphasis on the four energy scenarios, the Committee meets the wish to have a fundamental, socio-economic discussion more than half way.'⁴⁴

During the BMD, the Committee never answered the criticism of its procedures directly. In the progress report it gave a small warning signal about 'overreliance' on scenarios, but that was it.⁴⁵ It did, however, acknowledge the

⁴⁰ 'Een verantwoord energiebeleid maakt (...) een taxatie van de toekomst gewenst. Sinds een aantal jaren wordt in zogenaamde scenario-studies geprobeerd om dergelijke samenhangende toekomstverkenningen uit te voeren.' Stuurgroep Maatschappelijke Discussie Energiebeleid. *Het Tussenrapport*, 157

⁴¹ In 1980 the AER advised the Minister of Economic Affairs on the use of energy scenario's. It opens with a crucial frase: 'From many sides the wish was heard to give the BMD, next to the two scenario's [already written] other scenario's at its disposal.' It is unclear who these 'may sides' were; it is clear however, that scenario's were on everyone's lips. From this document there is a hint the BMD could have started with more than two scenario's at hand, if the time had been given to write them. Voorlopige Algemene Energie Raad. *Energiescenario's. Advies uitgebracht aan de Minister van Economische Zaken op 18 juni 1980.*, passim

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ *ibid.* 158

⁴⁴ *NRC Handelsblad*, hoofdredactioneel commentaar 24 januari 1983

⁴⁵ Stuurgroep Maatschappelijke Discussie Energiebeleid. *Het Tussenrapport*, 158

criticism in an indirect way, in a concluding remark at the last pages of the progress report:

"One subject is deliberately left out of this report: the value of a BMD and the correctness of the route the Steering Committee choose for it. Not, because the Committee does not want to acknowledge doubts hereabout. [But] the subject of discussion is now: the National energy policy."⁴⁶

The progress report was printed in great quantities; some 50.000 copies were distributed.⁴⁷ A newsletter was launched in an edition of 1.1 million copies, summarizing the contents of the report and explaining the discussion phase. In the report and newsletter, the public could read what was at stake, which options were available and which questions needed answering. The point of departure would be: which socio-economic scenario do you prefer? Could it be the 'reference-scenario', where energy policies were left more or less as they were? This would mean a choice for 'more diversification of energy sources, more attention to energy reductions and a lesser dependence on oil supplies.'⁴⁸ 'Natural gas in this scenario will be put to use more purposeful than today.' This might have an interesting ring to it, but, warned the scenario: 'unemployment will be large.' The scenario had two versions, one with and one without use of nuclear energy, just as the next two scenarios had: the 'industrial recovery scenario' and the 'job-sharing scenario'. 'Industrial recovery' meant the social-economic policies would be aimed at expanding the economy and reduction of unemployment. Of course, this would mean the use of energy would rise too. With a mix of efforts like in the reference-scenario the threats to the environment could be kept in hand. The third scenario, labelled 'Job-sharing', turned the second on its head: instead of focussing economic growth it focussed on a better management of the existing socio-economic situation. To counter unemployment the fashionable idea of job-sharing was considered - hence the name 'job-sharing scenario'. Leisure replaced growth in this scenario; the energy- and environmental situation would have the same basis as the reference-scenario, and the same choice: with or without nuclear energy? The fourth scenario didn't have this option: it said no to nuclear energy, and did put environmental care and energy reductions centre-stage. Energy-intensive industries

⁴⁶ *ibid.* 172

⁴⁷ Stuurgroep Maatschappelijke Discussie Energiebeleid. *Het Eindrapport*, 54

⁴⁸ *Het Tussenrapport*, 159-160

should be replaced by industries that were smaller and used 'clean' energy. This scenario was called the 'CE-scenario', after a 1975 study of the Centre for Energy Reductions (Centrum voor Energie Besparing) that had first shown the possibilities reductions could give.⁴⁹

To focus the discussion phase, five 'important questions' were raised that were to be addressed in the discussion: 1) Which goals are considered the most important in energy policies? 2) How much energy do we need? 3) What's the best mix in electricity sources? 4) Who will distribute electricity? And 5) Are levies on electricity and gas prices to be used to stimulate energy reductions or a social-economic policy?

No doubt, these were key questions for a debate on energy policies, but their framing differed considerably from the questions that preoccupied citizens and activists groups. Public concern focussed on safety, democratisation, anti-proliferation or the dangers to the environment.

4: The 'discussion phase' of the BMD and its results.

4.1 The discussion phase (January 1983 - December 1984)

With the scenarios ready and points of discussion set, the Steering Committee started the 'discussion phase'. It was as meticulously planned as the information phase, and had a three-way route to conclusions. The first route was to ask contributing non-governmental organisations to organize small-scale internal discussions on the scenarios. The second route was to ask municipalities and provincial bodies to do the same in their communities. The third route focussed on schools and aimed to help teachers to start the discussion there. For the first and second route, the Committee provided manuals on a 'possible set-up' for the discussions, produced backing folders and slide-shows on several issues, and offered training for organisational staff and discussion chairpersons.⁵⁰ The set-up showed a time-table and a step-by-step plan:

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ Bok, Pauline de e.a. *Achter de coulissen van de praatshow*, 28

'two to three evenings of discussion, from information gathering to exchange of ideas to taking positions'.⁵¹ Results could be taken down on pre-printed forms, to be sent to the Steering Committee once a local discussion was over.⁵²

The system adopted by the Committee would allow for meetings around the country as well as a quick gathering and aggregation of the outcomes. Yet, it would only work as envisaged if the various parties and facilitating institutions would indeed collaborate in the specified way. As we will see below, the Committee greatly overplayed its hand in this respect. Nevertheless, both the amount of debating activity and the participation levels generated were quite impressive. According to the reports, citizens did participate rather seriously, filed their forms without too many blanks and showed eagerness to communicate their opinions. Emotions in debate never ran too high and the participants were willing to listen to others, though not much inclined to change their opinions.⁵³

The Committee distinguished between 'local' discussions organized by municipalities, 'organisational' discussions initiated by non-governmental organizations, and school debates. The Committee also gathered 'individual opinions' from those unable to attend sessions: disabled, expats etcetera. The number of municipal discussion events was 1811. Often two subsequent meetings were organized in municipalities, first an information meeting and subsequently a discussion meeting. The 907 'information sessions' pulled in 14.866 persons, the 904 'discussion sessions' 12.973. Some 18 or 19 people on average attended these municipal or provincial meetings. The discussions initiated by independent organizations amounted to 1120 meetings by 680 groups, of which half needed a second or third session to reach conclusions. These sessions were visited by some 19.000 people. The count of school discussions and number of youthful participants is lost. Only 25 schools reported back while 9000 schools had been sent 63.495

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Unfortunately these forms were unavailable for research at the time of writing. It would be interesting to investigate the pre-printed questions and the individual answers, to better appreciate the qualitative levels of participation.

⁵³ Stuurgroep Maatschappelijke Discussie Energiebeleid. *Het eindrapport*, 46 - 54

newsletters, 1170 progress reports, and 264 slide-shows. The Committee received 2751 contributions from individuals.⁵⁴

Apart from the head-count another figure was important for the participation-levels: the return of questionnaires that had been handed out. In the local discussions the number of returned questionnaires was 12.038, after 19.332 had been distributed - a response rate of 62%. The organisational discussions yielded a similar response rate: 63% of the 12.575 forms were returned. In schools the questionnaires were only used for didactic purposes; the 2751 individual contributions were treated as returned questionnaires.⁵⁵ The questionnaires would be important in composing the conclusions to the BMD; it was developed to get detailed opinions on virtually all matters at hand.

4.2 The Committee loses its rudder.

The figures about the number of events and about the response to the committee's initiatives are impressive. And yet, the Committee started to loose its grip on the debate from the start of the discussion phase onwards. When the 'progress report' was published the liberal quality newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* expressed 'strong doubts about the effects of the BMD'. It observed that the BMD in general was 'not considered neutral' by environmentalists. With much of their participation lost, 'one can ask oneself if the course the BMD has taken is still in line with what government and parliament had in mind when designing the discussion.'⁵⁶ Another newspaper, the left wing oriented broadsheet *De Volkskrant* didn't even take the time to write an assessment of the progress report; a short notice on page three would have to do. Page nine showed an interview with one of the more optimistic members of the Steering Committee, Leo Jansen of the pacifist's party PPR, with the ominous header 'Leo Jansen sees rays of hope.'⁵⁷ "If the BMD can as a result only show the fact the card [of

⁵⁴ *Het Eindrapport*, 51 - 53

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶ *NRC Handelsblad*, hoofdcommentaar 24 januari 1983

⁵⁷ *De Volkskrant*, 25 januari 1983. "Discussie kernenergie gaat anders dan minister dacht/Oud-kamerlid Leo Jansen ziet lichtpunten."

involving people in the discussion, *RH&AT*] is played, I'm satisfied", Jansen was quoted as saying.

The procedure chosen by the Committee for the discussion phase immediately aroused frustration. Groups that had been in favour of the BMD felt the information phase had taken too long. They had hoped the discussion phase would finally allow people to stage their thoughts and views unrestricted. They were not inclined to adjust their long-standing views to the set-up for the discussion provided by the Committee and to curtail their arsenal of thoughts and arguments to fit into one of the committee's scenario's. Many who already had doubts on the use of the BMD abandoned the discussion as a wave of criticism that now swept over the Committee's approach. Besides individuals, organisations responded negatively to the Committee's approach as well. The WED simply refused to organize discussions about the scenarios. Right after the release of the progress report it published a pamphlet, called *Green Economy* (*Groene Economie*, 1983) in which the constructive rigidity and biased character of the scenario approach was criticised. By combining economic growth with only the 'industrial recovery-scenario' for instance, the Committee made it appear the other scenarios would make growth impossible. According to the WED this way of framing the scenarios 'ends the Committee's impartiality'.⁵⁸

More important the committee's endeavours to manage the debate were the desertion of moderate organisations and the reluctance among municipalities to organize the debates in accordance with the procedure set out by the committee. The Federation of Dutch Labour Unions (FNV), one of the three organisations that had proposed a BMD to the government in 1978, organised an internal discussion without heeding the prescribed set-up. The Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG), the second of the three initiators of the BMD, wrote the Steering Committee it would not be able to help out with the discussions in the municipalities. Cities with left-wing majorities - most of the bigger cities - rejected the BMD, according to the VNG. Smaller cities and towns with right wing or mixed governments expressed their hesitations. Some

⁵⁸ Quoted in *NRC Handelsblad*, January 24th 1983, p 3

municipalities complied, some didn't, but as a result the VNG considered it impossible for itself to stimulate the BMD in an acceptable way.⁵⁹

Public opinion about the Committee and the debate deteriorated at this stage. Enthusiasts turned sceptic, sceptics cynical or anti. Anger grew about the length of the process, irritation mounted about the Committee's attempts to manage it, and frustration about the restrictive framing inspired people to develop their own alternative debate. Those who had abandoned the BMD probably also did so as a new political hot topic concerning nuclear technology had emerged in the meantime: the plans to station newly developed nuclear missiles in The Netherlands as a part of the new NATO strategy against the USSR and its allies. On the 29th of October 1983, The Hague saw the biggest rally in the Netherlands ever, when 550.000 marched against nuclear arms. In the face of this show of public discontent, the prospects of reviving the now dwindling cause of anti-nuclear activism looked bleak.

4.3 Deligitimation, left and right

The widening rift between the 'broad social discussion' and the 'Broad Social Discussion', delegitimized the work of the Committee and threatened the acceptability of its conclusions. This was exactly the issue the committee had been concerned about from the very start.

Using its limited resources for PR the Committee tried to stem the tide, but to no avail. In the mean time the value of the BMD was further undermined by a second, structural problem: the increasing gap between the BMD and the government with respect to energy policies. The government had been somewhat sceptical from the start about the debate and had insisted it would continue to investigate and develop the policies already endorsed. As the BMD came to a close, the attitude of the government became an issue of increasing importance that would further delegitimize the Committee's work.

⁵⁹ Bok, Pauline de e.a. *Achter de coulissen van de praatshow*, 29

At the start the Committee seemed to have been closer to the government, but internal dynamics both in the Steering Committee and in government policies led to a widening gap. During the BMD government agencies issued report after report on energy matters. These reports often had a direct bearing on the issues under discussion, but no mention was made of this officially⁶⁰ Yet, newspaper headlines spoke volumes: 'Closing of nuclear plants will cost 5 billion', *NRC Handelsblad* wrote January 13th 1983.⁶¹ Costs would be huge, a government committee ('Committee Beek') had calculated, not only in revenues but also in loss of jobs and loss of expertise. Interestingly, this report made no reference to the BMD whatsoever. On January 22nd, 1983 the new Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers seemed to ignore the BMD when he said the government was 'not inclined' to close the plants in Borssele and Dodewaard. The conclusions of the committee Beek 'said enough' he was quoted as saying. In the newspaper article a reference was made to the trajectory of the Beek report through parliament. Once again no reference was made in this context to the ongoing public debate. The implication is clear: political conclusions on the two plants - or, for that matter, on any decision on nuclear energy - could well be reached without waiting for the BMD's outcomes.⁶² A similar approach characterized the publication of new surveys done by the Common Energy Council (Algemene Energie Raad, AER), on the prospects of coal and uranium as energy sources, or on wind and solar energy. The publication of these reports and the neglect of the BMD on such occasions were important indicators for the stance the government would eventually take on the conclusions of the BMD. In the mean time they reinforced the view already broadcast since the start by the opponents that the BMD was yet another form of political manipulation.

The Steering Committee was well aware of the growing distance from the policy process inside the government. Already in December 1982 the Committee asked the

⁶⁰ In the period under consideration, the AER published several notes on energy issues, most of them touching on the BMD's issues, but hardly mentioning it, apart from those notes that directly concerned the proceedings of the BMD. The situation is intriguing and needs further investigation: on the one hand the AER shows its run-of-the-mill handwork for the EZ department without heeding the BMD. From this perspective it's intriguing to see the bureaucracy work and decide on energy issues, hardly giving support to the proceedings of the BMD. On the other hand there is a source gap that is intriguing: shouldn't the AER, in its function as official advisory board, have explicitly advised on the BMD to the Minister? The AER was the ideal watchdog for the independent Steering Committee; where is its analysis on the Committee and the BMD?

⁶¹ *NRC Handelsblad* 13 januari 1983, 1, 12.

⁶² Ibid. 22 januari 1983

government to show the public that 'politics' was very interested in the BMD, and showed interest in what the public wanted. The Committee sought political backing to its work, which, in its own view, it did not receive. In the final report it wrote about this episode:

'The question was asked because of worries inside the Committee about the distrust of politics it encountered among the public regarding the results of the BMD. The disengaged stance of parliament would cause great erosion to the credibility of the BMD.'⁶³

In a newspaper interview after the release of the final report, chairman De Brauw explained the effects of this disengaged stand on the debate. "Participants often started the sessions of the discussion phase with the question: what do we do this for? Do you really think 'The Hague' will listen to all of this? They would say 'The Hague' in a tone as if it's situated on the North Pole, somewhere really far away."⁶⁴

The erosion of credibility was not only sensed by the Committee, it was demonstrated in two nation-wide surveys on the BMD, one in June 1982 and the other released in June 1983. More people had come to know about the BMD: a rise from 47% to 61%. But the urgency of the energy problem was considered to be less in 1983: the number of participants that thought energy issues to be the most urgent issue dropped from 50% to 29%. Worries on nuclear arms, unemployment and loss of income topped the list in 1983. Nevertheless, the surveys showed a rise in numbers of people who had serious doubts about the influence of their opinions on political decision-making. 60% of those interviewed were highly sceptical in June 1983, the month in which the discussion phase closed.⁶⁵ This very much annoyed the Steering Committee's members. In a self-assessment of the BMD, it pointed out two main arguments that had negatively influenced the proceedings. One: the 'common perception that the voice of the people will not be heard in policy making'. Two: 'the disengaged stance of government and parliament regarding the outcome of the BMD.'⁶⁶ What many had suspected about the BMD, and what radical activists had known from the start, was at

⁶³ *Het Eindrapport*, 51

⁶⁴ *NRC Handelsblad*, 25 januari 1984, 6

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 54

⁶⁶ *ibid.* 61

the end openly criticised by the Steering Committee itself: the government did not care too much about the BMD.

4.3 A 'No' if ever there was one. The final report and its reception.

The discussion phase ended July 1983. On the 23rd of January 1984 the Steering Committee published its final report and was dissolved. In a critical self-assessment it pointed out some of the weaknesses of the BMD: no scientific research accompanied the BMD to verify the methods of quantification used by the Committee; no money had been reserved for unforeseen expenditure; more research should have been done about the international situation; and negative articles on the BMD should have been countered by articles from the Steering Committee to correct the BMD's negative image. Nevertheless the Committee was still positive about the BMD. The levels of participation had been reasonable, certainly on a qualitative level. The quantity of participants had been slightly disappointing, but the BMD could still be considered a broad civic debate. It had been truly 'broad', in the sense that arguments had been gathered from all corners of the Dutch social landscape. The Committee claimed it had organised a regular 'discussion'; a true national discourse between thousands of participants, in which every voice had counted.⁶⁷

From all this it followed that the conclusions of the BMD report could be said to have a broad, nation-wide basis, the Committee argued. The Dutch government could now read what the public wanted: the detailed conclusions spoke for themselves. These conclusions were summed up in a long chapter, with a division into tens of paragraphs. Each paragraph was crammed with conclusions and recommendations, and explained in detail which energy related issues had been at stake, to which other issues they related and which percentage of the public favoured what. Boiled down to a single message the outcome was a clear and unambiguous 'No' to nuclear energy, 'Yes' to a clean environment, and 'Yes' to the use of either alternative energy sources like the sun or the wind, or a more environment-friendly use of fossil fuels. These general conclusions were an extension and summary of the specific conclusions on nuclear energy. These read as follows: 1) 'an extension of the use of nuclear energy in the Netherlands is no option at this point in time'; 2) 'the

⁶⁷ *ibid.* See also interview with De Brauw, *NRC Handelsblad* January 24th 1984.

nuclear plants Borssele and Dodewaard do not have to be closed'; 3) 'the issue of nuclear waste has to be addressed carefully, independent of what decision will be reached on nuclear issues'. 'These conclusions', the Committee added, 'are drawn in full awareness of the fact they are against the wishes of a substantial part of individual and institutional speakers.'⁶⁸

The conclusions just summarized were further supported by a comprehensive and representative survey about energy policies in 1983 carried out by the Foundation of Sociometric Research (Stichting voor Sociometrisch Onderzoek).⁶⁹ The survey was held at the closing months of the discussion phase. The conclusions point in exactly the same direction as the Committee's: 'From all possible combinations of energy sources and efforts without any doubt only one combination could be implemented if the Dutch public has its say: a decision for wind energy, reductions in energy use and a better use of natural gas.'⁷⁰

The conclusions of the Committee came as a surprise to many observers.⁷¹ The anti-nuclear movement had always expected a big majority of the population to be on its side. Representatives of the pro-nuclear lobby also suspected this. It was not expected, however, that the Steering Committee would draw the same conclusion. In discussions about the BMD the activists had always argued that the Committee was biased towards the use of nuclear energy. Conclusions were expected to be warped in support of the government's position. When their anti-nuclear opinions were sustained in the final report, anti-nuclear critics were taken off balance. WED, the biggest anti-nuclear organisation, was keen to compliment the Steering Committee on the final report, as did LEK.⁷² Yet, to keep their posture, they immediately continued to criticize the recommendation not to close down the plants in Dodewaard and Borssele. Pro-nuclear critics condemned the Committee's conclusions, mainly on technical grounds: the proceedings of the BMD had not been transparent enough, calculations were too biased to ensure the validity of the conclusions: similar

⁶⁸ Ibid. 352

⁶⁹ Saris, W.E. *Kernenergie: ja of nee? Een weloverwogen oordeel van de Nederlandse bevolking*, 68

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ *NRC Handelsblad* and *De Volkskrant* both had front-page summaries of reactions to the final report, plus ranges of quotations from different angles, in their January 24th 1984 issues. NRC published an interview with De Brauw. The remarks in this text are abstracted from these two newspapers.

⁷² *NRC Handelsblad*, 24 januari 1984, 13

arguments as the activists had used during the debate but now employed to further the case of the pro-nuclear lobby. When De Brauw was asked to comment on these remarks, his answer was as self-confident as ever before: "Those who say our report only consists of opinions of a non-representative portion of our population, have probably hardly looked into it. These commentaries are rather old-fashioned and belong to the days before the final report."⁷³

The government decided to lay low for the time being. No official comments were issued. It thanked the Committee for its work and announced it wished to study the report carefully before drawing conclusions. Yet, individual members of the government could not hold their tongue. A televised response of the Minister of Economic Affairs, Van Aardenne, was dismissive about the outcomes of the BMD. A commentary in *NRC Handelsblad* took his reaction as point of departure to warn the government about its treatment of the BMD. 'Those who trivialize the BMD, trivialize democracy', the headline read. 'Van Aardenne was not happy with the conclusions of the final report, and he is no sport when it comes to losing. The way the Minister played down these conclusions is no compliment for democracy. Because the BMD has indeed been democratic, from beginning to end.'⁷⁴

With the dust settling over the BMD's final report, the political end-game over the employment of 48 NATO cruise missiles on Dutch soil took centre stage and - again - forced the BMD to the margin. In May 1984 900.000 people went on strike against the government's intentions, and the year was full of fierce protest rallies. The massive unrest forced the government into a delaying tactic: a permanent decision on employment [?deployment?] would be postponed until 1985. In this major political confrontation not much room was left for a balanced political discussion about nuclear energy. The anti-nuclear movement wasn't in for a fight either. It waited for the governments' next move. It was by then weary about the nuclear energy issue, its membership was divided and pre-occupied with anti-missile activism.⁷⁵ One reason for the energy drain on the movement was its continuing erosion. From the start of the BMD hard-line 'autonomists' were walking out of the movement and focussed on

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ *NRC Handelsblad*, 30 januari 1984, 'Wie BMD bagatelliseert, bagatelliseert democratie', An Salomonson

⁷⁵ Brinkman, G. *De terugval van de Anti Kernenergie Beweging*, *passim*.

small-scale blockades of nuclear plants. These forms of activism would harass industry for some years to come, but without much effect on industry procedures, let alone public opinion. The groups of 'collectivists' who stayed in the BMD proved too small a basis to mobilise mass protests against government's decisions on energy issues. The decline had started from the moment the anti-nuclear movement had to decide if they would join the BMD or not. After the BMD the mass movement had shrunk to a shadow of its original size.

In 1985 government finally decided on nuclear energy, the anti-nuclear movement was in no condition to mobilize massive protest. The decision in principle of the 23rd of January 1985 to reject the conclusions of the BMD and to build ten new nuclear plants was hardly met by public criticism or outrage. It would take another year before a nuclear disaster provided the government with a less democratic yet very convincing argument. In April 2006 the Chernobyl nuclear reactor melted down and caused the government to announce a revision of its policies. Since then no new nuclear plants have been built in The Netherlands; Dodewaard and Borssele dutifully perform their services until this very day and are currently on the brink of planned dismantling. Dutch 'risk perception' prevented any more discussion on nuclear energy issues, and so the nuclear situation was frozen in time.

5. Conclusion: Nuclear energy and democracy on stage.

The BMD is an early example of deliberative governance as described in the STAGE framework⁷⁶ The debate was public and non-hegemonic in its stress on equal access, a neutral and rather general starting point and the idea that all views should be considered in the debate. It was inspired by notions of enhanced democracy (nieuwe vormen van inspraak) as well as by the belief that it would be possible to weigh various options for energy policies in a rational way, through a debate focussing on arguments and evidence.

Although the entire debate was initiated because of the plans to build nuclear energy plants, the point of departure chosen for the debate was much broader: what sort of energy policies do we and how do these relate to socio-economic development,

⁷⁶ Rob Hagendijk and Egil Kallerud, 'Changing conceptions and practices of governance in science and technology in Europe'. STAGE Discussion Paper 2.

environmental care, value-commitments etcetera. Framing the key issues in this way distanced the debate from the governments' preference for nuclear energy and enhanced the public acceptance of the debate.

Maybe characteristic for the 1980s was the strong reliance on scenario approaches in the design of the debate. Of course, energy policies are an area for which prognostic methods recommend themselves. But the approach was extended far beyond energy prognostics. The central idea was that the variety of value commitments and factual information could be reframed in terms of a limited number of alternative scenarios. These alternative scenario's could then be discussed around the country as an input to the discussion and a way to check the general public's preferences and views.

In the debates risk calculations played an important role both with respect to the design of scenarios as well as in their critique. Technical risk analyses were criticised for their inherent limitations and their disregard for the fact that risk perceptions should be considered as at least as important as the calculations.

The debate was supposed to inform future decision-making. At the same time the organization was put in the hands of an independent committee to avoid the impression of political manipulation. Because of its two-phase design one may say the debate had an educational dimension. The actual public discussion would follow after an extended review of positions, arguments and evidence in the information phase. The BMD does not fit the educational model outlined in the STAGE discussion paper, however, as the primary assumption underneath the information phase was not that the public had to be educated or was suffering from a deficit in understanding. Rather, the information phase became a period of sometimes heated debate between experts of various sorts about arguments, counterarguments and criticism. Experts were divided about most issues and the primary line of distinction was certainly not between those who know and those who don't.

The deliberative nature of the debate and its execution were the outcome of continuing power struggle over questions of design and process. The government agreed with the open approach but had preferred a design that would take its own policy papers as the starting point for the discussion. As this was not the course the Committee took, the government explicitly announced that the debate would not be

accompanied by an intermission in the further elaboration of the governments' plans that included the building of nuclear power plants. It was also clear that contrary to the approach taken by the Committee, leading government spokesmen proceeded on the idea that public understanding of the technologies and the related problems was deficient. At a later stage the refusal of the government to commit itself to the debate would negatively affect the acceptability of the debate and its political legitimacy.

The hands-off approach was not restricted to the government but could also be found among the opponents of nuclear energy. Radical activists were convinced the debate would be used to lure the public into acceptance of nuclear technology and to shift the political ground to their disadvantage. They were inclined to say that the debate was tilted in favour of nuclear energy. At early stages of the controversy they had demanded that the debate should not so much be about nuclear technology, but should focus on socio-economic relations and energy policies in general. They won in this respect, but especially the radical left preferred to keep out of the debate as such and to keep their hands free. In part they resorted to more confrontational tactics viz-a-viz the existing nuclear plants. Those who did participate became frustrated by the length of the information phase and subsequently by the attempts to restrict the debate to the scenarios and the rather general questions defined by the Committee. They claimed more space for themselves to conduct the discussion in formats they considered appropriate. In line with the STAGE paper the lack of cooperation between local organizers and the Committee in the discussion phase can be seen as a form of agonistic politics at the margins of deliberative democracy.

Whether one calls the debate deliberative, agonistic or educational, a major feature was that the debate was as much about nuclear energy as it was about the debate itself and how it should be organized. This two-level character of the debate should be seen as a natural feature of such debates and of deliberative democracy writ large. The difference with agonistic forms seem to be that agonists reject the possibility that one might reach agreement about the terms under which a deliberative debate is possible that might lead to results that break through current hegemonic definitions of the problems and what to do about them.

During the process the Committee tried to stick to its deliberative conception of the debate and its own ideas on how to organize the discussion phase. To execute its plans, however, it was dependent on the help from municipalities, NGO's and schools. Their request for support was not honoured in full and individuals and organizations started to divert from the procedures prescribed. In hindsight the debate has been interpreted as being high-jacked by the opponents of nuclear energy. In so far as the outcomes of the discussion events depended on the ways issues were framed and who attended that may well have been the case. Yet, the radical activists had already abandoned the debate so their effect on the discussion events as such must have been indirect. The high-jacking effect may also have been controlled, but only partly by the questionnaires distributed and filled in by participants. In so far as one wonders to what extent such a lack of control over the discussion phase has affected the overall outcome of the debate, controlled experimental surveys among a representative sample of the Dutch population organized at the time show a similar lack of support for nuclear energy. And in any case a leading commentator from the liberal newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* found sufficient basis to argue that a government that trivialises the debate was trivialising democracy.

In hindsight the debate is remarkable as an early example to organize a nation wide open discussion about such a complicated issue and to do so mobilizing massive amounts of technical information. In hindsight it also seems as if concern about activist seeing to influence the course of the debate was less strong than two decades later. The distinction between envisaged lay members of the public and ordinary citizens on the one hand and concerned activists and activist claiming to represent these citizens and their interests on the other still had to be invented.

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