

Hermann Scheer obituary

German politician and tireless champion of renewable energy

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Hermann Scheer had various nicknames including the 'sun god' and the less complimentary 'Stalin of renewables'. Photograph: Thomas Lohnes/ddp

[Hermann Scheer](#), who has died unexpectedly aged 66 after suffering from chest pains, was a tireless campaigner for the promotion of renewable energies, in particular [solar power](#), a cause he championed long before it was fashionable to do so, even in a country with such long-established environmental consciousness as his native [Germany](#). He is credited with boosting the status of alternative energy, both at home and abroad, thanks to his visionary zeal.

Nicknamed the "solar king", the "sun god" and the "solar pope", or – for those who were not complimentary about his environmental goals – the "Stalin of renewables", in 2000 Scheer succeeded in introducing the feed-in tariff, otherwise known as Scheer's law, by which individuals and businesses that generate power through renewable energies are able to sell it back to the grid at above-market prices, thus encouraging the spread of wind, solar and hydro power. The system has been adopted around the world and has contributed to the respect now given to [renewable energy](#), not least because it has encouraged individual participation. A man of considerable energy himself, and also of great impatience, Scheer founded the International Renewable Energy Agency and was president of Eurosolar, the European Association for Renewable Energy.

A member of the Social Democratic party (SPD) since 1965, Scheer took part in the student movements of the late 60s, and became a member of the Bundestag in 1980, representing the

SPD in the state of Baden-Württemberg. He played a key role in introducing the country's solar-roof programmes and was the author of the renewable energy law. He was a member of the SPD's federal steering committee between 1993 and 2009, and belonged firmly to the leftwing of the party. In 1998 he received the World Solar prize for his contribution towards improving the environment and, in 1999, he was the recipient of the Alternative Nobel prize, while the US magazine Time awarded him the title "hero for the green century".

the prolific author and publisher on energy matters was to have presented his latest book, *Der Energetische Imperativ*, subtitled *100% Now: How the Complete Switch to Renewable Energies Can Be Realised*. It sums up his passionate conviction that it was technically and economically feasible for renewable energy to fully replace fossil and nuclear energy within just a few years, if the political will existed. He saw political intransigence as the biggest barrier to achieving this.

He was frustrated by the energy politics of [Angela Merkel](#), the German chancellor, who recently called for an extension to the lives of the country's nuclear power stations, describing atomic energy as a vital "bridging technology". She insisted it would help pave the way for renewables in the long term, whereas Scheer, whose own party had fought for and secured a nuclear phase-out while in government, saw it as cowardly kowtowing to what he described as an all-too-powerful energy industry.

Scheer was never afraid of voicing his views. He often clashed with fellow party members, particularly the erstwhile SPD party leader and former German chancellor Gerhard Schröder, over his decision in the late 90s to back Nato's intervention in Kosovo, which he called a "war crime", to which Schröder responded that he no longer belonged in his party. But his position in the Baden-Württemberg SPD was so solid that his future there was never called into question.

Scheer was born in Wehrheim, in the western German state of Hesse, and grew up in Berlin. A brilliant swimmer, he was a member of the national youth pentathlon team, and later the national pentathlon team. Following his Abitur (A-level equivalent), he volunteered for the Bundeswehr, or military. He went on to study politics, economics and social sciences at Heidelberg University and later graduated as a doctor of political science from Berlin's Free University.

In 1988 Scheer's views began to gain respect when he founded the non-profit Eurosolar, whose goal was to completely replace atomic and fossil energy with renewables. In the mid-90s he succeeded in persuading the rest of the SPD to include in its manifesto the pledge to install solar panels on no fewer than 100,000 German roofs. That initiative contributed to the groundbreaking decision by the SPD-Green coalition government that came to power in 1999 to put 1bn marks into a solar programme.

In recent weeks he was an active participant in demonstrations against the controversial Stuttgart 21 railway reconstruction project, for which he was pushing for a referendum.

A true architect of the renewable-energy age, he lived as he preached, powering his home with a windmill. He never withered under the criticism that his ideas were utopian, and for the past decade was able to enjoy the fact that his views were being taken seriously. The words of

Mahatma Gandhi – "First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win"– are a fitting introduction to his new book.

He is survived by Irm Pontenagel, whom he married in 1970, their daughter, Nina, and his granddaughter, Lilli.

- Hermann Scheer, politician, environmentalist and author, born 29 April 1944; died 14 October 2010