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Nuclear Power

Fukushima, one year later – and what about France?

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A year after the catastrophe of Fukushima, a big mobilization is being organized to demand the abandoning of nuclear power.

In the history of nuclear energy, there will be a before- and an after-Fukushima. After Chernobyl, the Western nuclear lobby found a line of defence: it was the result of bureaucratic management, inefficient and ineffective, typical of the Soviet system. “It couldn’t happen in our countries”. What is this argument worth today, when the cream of Japanese private industry is concerned? Since the end of January, there are only three nuclear reactors still functioning in Japan, with no power cuts recorded. Although this model of a quasi-exit from nuclear power is not desirable (not to mention the consequences of the tsunami), since its rapidity makes a massive recourse to fossil fuels necessary, it does however show that the addiction to nuclear power that some countries exhibit, with France in the first rank, is not incurable. This situation also illustrates the false and dangerous dilemma in which the energy multinationals want to put us. The massive recourse to the “dirtiest” fossil fuels (coal, offshore oil, tar sands, shale gas) is not the solution for abandoning nuclear power, and we do not have to choose between a beautiful radioactive death and slow asphyxiation by global warming.

Nuclear power cannot be safe

A year ago, the media highlighted the irresponsibility, the unpreparedness and the lies of the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) – with the active complicity of the bodies responsible for controlling the nuclear industry and national and local authorities – more concerned about profitability than about safety. These facts are indisputable, but by insisting too much on this aspect, we are likely to lose sight of what is most important: insecurity is inherent in nuclear energy. The nuclear system is basically untenable; accidents are statistically inevitable. Sooner or later, other Chernobyls and other Fukushimas will happen, caused by human errors, internal malfunctions, earthquakes, plane accidents, bomb attacks or unforeseeable events. To paraphrase Jean Jaurès, we could say that nuclear power carries catastrophe as the cloud carries the storm. We can only be all the more revolted by the way in which the principal candidates in the presidential election treat this question.

The disastrous agreement between Europe Ecology- the Greens and the Socialist Party sharply illustrated the capitulations of the Green party, unable to negotiate an objective, even vague, of abandoning nuclear power, and only obtaining a reduction of the percentage of nuclear power from 75 to 50 per cent in 2025. So how can anyone be surprised that the campaign of Green presidential candidate Eva Joly is not finding an echo? The status quo also prevails in the French Communist Party, whose retrograde positions paralyse the expression of the Left Front. As for the UMP, Sarkozy, Besson and consorts pretend to believe that the SP wants to close a lot of power stations, with the aim of frightening the workers in the nuclear industry. In fact this is a piece of double trickery, with respect to the position of the SP, and in relation to the situation of nuclear power workers who, like other workers, experience precariousness, subcontracting and occupational diseases. As for the job creation which abandoning nuclear power would make possible, in spite of the various reports on the subject, neither Holland nor Sarkozy say anything. Quite the contrary, what we are seeing is a reckless perspective of lengthening the period of operation of the reactors to 40 years, whereas they were initially designed to last 30 years.

21 reactors should be closed immediately

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The question of the lifespan of the power stations is today paramount, and our demand is for the closing of reactors which have been in operation for 30 years. There are currently 21 of these which are still in operation and which must be closed immediately and 21 others which will have reached this age in 2017. These demands are in perfect coherence with the plan of abandoning nuclear power in ten years proposed by the NPA, as well as the proposal to stop all nuclear power projects that are currently underway. These demands must be widely supported by the antinuclear movements. The human chain organized between Lyon and Avignon on March 11 is for this reason an occasion not to be missed. It means mobilising tens of thousands of people in the region of France with the most nuclear plants. But this one day of mobilization, a year after the Japanese catastrophe, will not be enough to make the nuclear lobby give way, and we should already be considering further actions, whether it be human chains, demonstrations, blocking of trains carrying nuclear waste... All together, let us block nuclear power in order to put a stop to it.

March 6, 2012