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Japan/Nuclear Power

Fukushima, a slow Chernobyl

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We can still describe the situation in Fukushima Daiichi as a “slow Chernobyl.” At the time of the accident at Three Mile Island [in the United States], the fuel bar was exposed 1 hour and 40 minutes after the accident, and 52% of the core came into meltdown for about ten hours before the cooling function was repaired. Despite the explosion of hydrogen, the leakage of radioactivity was limited thanks to the construction of the reactor, specially reinforced in case of a plane crash due to the proximity of the airport at Harrisburg.

During the Chernobyl accident, deemed level 7, following the destruction of the building and core caused by a violent explosion, a large quantity of radioactive matter was ejected at altitude, spreading for nearly 10 days over a large area across borders, and strongly radioactive “hot spots” were formed according to conditions such as wind, geography, and rain.

While foreign government agencies assessed this accident at level 6 since the hydrogen explosion of the third reactor on the morning of March 15 and the jet of radioactivity, the Japanese Government continues to place it at level 5, as if it wanted to conceal its initial criminal delay [1]. This delay, manipulation and bureaucratic concealment have aggravated the pollution and radiation. France and the United States - which have atomic experiences in the open air, scattering fatal ashes and radiation among the peoples and fishers in the surrounding area, as well as soldiers - participate today in helping with reconstruction and the removal of radioactive materials by promoting their nuclear power plants.

The worsening of the situation due to delay

The newspaper “Fukushima Minpou” reported on March 28 that the NISA (Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency) had “delayed taking a series of steps immediately to avoid the worst expected scenario, the meltdown of the core, because of the visit of the Prime Minister Naoto Kan to the disaster area carried out at his request on March 12.” According to the weekly “Bunshun” on March 31, the MP Hattori (Social Democratic Party, SDPJ) stated that “during the visit of March 12 by the Prime Minister to Fukushima, in the helicopter, the President of the NSC (Nuclear Safety Commission of Japan) Haruki Madarame told him that all was well and that there would not be any hydrogen explosion.” But eight hours afterwards, a hydrogen explosion occurred in reactor No. 1. The next day, March 13, when I visited the official residence of the Prime Minister, he complained that Madarame had guaranteed to him the contrary.”

In 2007, during the Hamaoka trial, Madarame had testified for the accused, Chubu Electric Power, that: “there will never be any halting of emergency electricity”. We recall that in March last year, the head of the SDPJ strongly argued inside the Government against Madarame’s proposed appointment to the position of Chair of the NSC.

The Democratic Party [currently in power], has left outstanding its electoral commitments on nuclear safety, as well as on the separation of the NSC and the METI (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry), appointing persons such as the MP Akihiro Oohata, formerly designer of the nuclear plant at Hitachi, and has promoted new facilities in Japan and for export. The cause of the delay that we are experiencing is due to sabotage by supporters of nuclear power.

"To avoid misunderstandings"

Agencies of countries affected by Chernobyl such as Australia, Germany or Sweden immediately published forecasts on the release of radioactivity from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power on the Internet. In Japan, this information was widely relayed on the Internet by people who wanted to correctly grasp the situation.

The NSC made public for the first time on March 23, the result of the "SPEDI" projection, a calculation of the spread of radioactivity controlled by the MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, science and Technology Japan) and it revealed that there could be "hot spots" of more than 10 milli sievert/h outside the 30-kilometre radius of the plant. But in reality, the calculation had been already made from the quantity of ejection of radioactivity estimated for March 15 and the prediction had already been made on March 16. Despite this, the NSC continued to conceal the result. The SPEDI was merely a projection, but on April 4 at Namie Cho, located outside the radius of 30 kilometres, a rate of more of 10 milli sievert in total (the threshold of caulking) was observed. The JAEC (Japan Atomic Energy Commission) made it public stating "this will become the criterion of caulking within a few weeks."

On March 18, the Meteorological Society of Japan called on researchers to refrain from making public the forecast on the dissemination of radioactive substances. We also discovered that the JMA (Japan Meteorological Agency) had calculated this prediction of diffusion after the earthquake of March 11 and had communicated the information to the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency), but did not make it public. The JMA has justified this concealment "for fear of being misunderstood" since it was not based on actual observation of the radioactive substances.

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For all disasters

The earthquake and tsunamis have caused the accident at Fukushima, and this accident has made clear the difficulties and the danger of nuclear fission through such a huge complex system under high temperature and overpressure, with a plant producing not only electricity but also an enormous amount of radioactivity and heat. In issue 2166 of our newspaper, "Kakehashi", we spoke of the damage of the earthquake of the year 869, the "Jyogan earthquake", and the need to reconsider it. When TEPCO reviewed it, it underestimated the frequency of earthquakes in this scale, placing them every 10,000 to 100,000 years. And the state confirmed this statement.

The weekly "Kinyobi" in issue number 841 said in its conclusion that "a year before the Jyogan earthquake (in 869), there had been an earthquake in Harima-Yamashiro (868), and 6 years prior to Echuu-Echigo (863), 9 years after in Sagami-Musashi (in 878) and 9 years after in Nankai (in 887)." In around 25 years there was a series of large earthquakes, like today and it concluded that "it is necessary first to stop the 54 reactors that exist currently and not to activate these reactors until we can deal with radioactive substances in all safety centuries later." We support this conclusion in principle, but the people who have had to flee and who are exposed to strong radioactivity will be not satisfied.

To reassure the population, it is necessary that the state and TEPCO declare the definitive closure of all of the reactors at Fukushima Daiichi, the shutdown of the plants at Fukushima Daini and Kashiwazaki-Kariwa and that TEPCO (and the other electricity companies) and other companies in this area mobilize their resources to "repair" the cooling functions of the reactors at Fukushima Daiichi. To do this, all available resources should be employed, while closing all nuclear power plants.

With the shutdown of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant, the "programmed power cuts" will resume because the big thermal power plants of TEPCO and Tohoku Electric Power have not yet resumed production. Consequently other sectors of production will suffer difficulties and will no longer be able to produce. It is necessary to put an end to these discriminatory cuts imposed for the benefit of the capital (Tokyo), and instead limit the opening times of offices

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in the capital so that the maximum of resources are invested to help the stricken population and repair the seismic disaster.

This article is translated from the weekly "Kakehashi" of April 11 2011. Kakehashi is published jointly by the Japan Revolutionary Communist League (JRCL) and the National Council of Internationalist Workers, two organisations which cooperate with the Fourth International.

[1] Since this article was written, the Japanese government has re-evaluated the accident as a level 7