

## FUKUSHIMA THE DEMOCRATIZACION OF ENERGY

### (PART 2)

The always changing and interesting news offered by the media seem to have a magnetic effect on the population similar to that of the tides. That effect will surely become an advantage that the producers of nuclear energy will take, because they will probably restart their coercion on the political elite once the people's attention on Fukushima finally disappears; a coercion that has two clear goals: the approval for the building of new nuclear plants and the life extension of the old ones.

There are 442 nuclear plants in the world, and 65 will soon be inaugurated. What is more, up to today more than 50% of the existing plants have already reached the end of their planned existence, but they have got the political approval to continue running for 20-25 more years; the intention was that some Japanese plants lasted for 70 years. In general, the governments find more solutions than problems in the already traditional nuclear energy, and they do so because the people have little or no interest for the ultimate source of the energy they consume. This is the reason why the political class in general has not turned its attention yet to the funded research and development of cleaner sources of energy -an energy that

would not produce collateral damages in the case of a natural accident or human error-.

Renewable energies have many positive advantages, but unfortunately the citizens are not well aware of them. For example, from sunlight, wind, biomass... each home could produce its own energy, and could then "sell" the exceeding energy back to the power company. In the long run, renewable energies will guarantee optimal levels of power without putting at risk human life and the environment.

Being all these things true, the question arises: Why are there so many people interested in maintaining and expanding nuclear energy? Why does it still happen when we already have cleaner sources of energy at our reach?

It is clear that politicians of all kind will tend to avoid any discourses or situations containing the word "nuclear". This is due to two reasons: 1) on one hand, for citizens being both pro or against the nuclear energy, the topic opens a transversal controversy that eventually may have electoral costs; 2) on the other hand, any change in the energetic policy of a nuclear country will surely open wounds among the numerous employees of the nuclear plants. As we have seen, only under very exceptional circumstances could the announcement of closing old nuclear plants gain voters for the party in charge of such decision (this happened in the German State elections in March, following the Fukushima accident).

More and more plants are arriving to the end of their lives, but the owning companies put pressure on the governments so that they concede extensions to those lives. This extension will let the companies make extra profits once their plants have already redeemed many years before; these profits are such that even in the case that the public opinion demands a substantial improvement of the security, the highest investments would be petty compared to the net gain generated after every extended year.

This is the reason why, under the current legislation, the returns of the nuclear plants are much bigger than those offered by clean energies. It is important to underline the expression "under the current legislation", because the reason why the nuclear business is still so lucrative is that these companies are monopolies - this is the case of TEPCO in Japan and AREVA in France, being Japan and France the biggest producers of nuclear energy in the world. On the contrary, renewable energies require lower installation costs and work in a perfect competition, something that always ends up leveling the prizes and limiting the excessive profits.

Nuclear energy is a monopoly because of the enormous amount of money needed to build a plant. A plant like Fukushima costs 10,000 million dollars and that money can only be invested if the government commits to guarantee returns in the long run, and more importantly, if the

government acts as a last resource insurer in the case of a nuclear accident. On their side, governments accept this treat because the nuclear energy contributes to the energetic independence of their countries, it generates a constant amount of power, and it hires a big part of the civil engineers of the country (those engineers that might be called in the case of a military emergency).

Once there is an alliance between the elite that produce energy and the political elite, the outcome becomes perverse. All around the topic of energy becomes too technical for the citizens to understand; those in charge of the elitist nuclear energy are so empowered that they rampantly claim their energy to be the cleanest and safest of all. At the same time, politicians tend to limit the nuclear debate to the shadowy rooms of the experts and the Nuclear Security Agencies, agencies that quite often are precisely co-run by the nuclear companies.

No doubt that progress requires energy, but there is no progress without democracy. If we analyze the topic and take nuclear energy into consideration, such energy is: 1) potentially lethal in the medium run and incredibly polluting in the long run, while it does not even imply an independent, real and future economic development; 2) it produces an antidemocratic breach, since the power plants can only exist under monopolistic markets. It is a shame that no mass media has made the following question yet: How

is it that consumers can choose which company they buy their energy from, but cannot choose the source of that same energy? Choosing the source of the energy one prefers to use would be quite natural, in the same way that we now select our food among the one from organic, transgenic, intensive farms...

Maybe the remembrance of Fukushima nuclear reactors will encourage people to locate the core of this problem. Such understanding will lead to a demand of a more democratic, safer and cleaner solution for the energy.

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