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For Immediate Break with Nuclear Power and Toward All-out Promotion of Renewable Energy

Japanese Communist Party

June 13, 2011

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JCP Policy Proposal
For Immediate Break with Nuclear Power and Toward All-out Promotion of Renewable Energy

Need for national discussion to build consensus

Japanese Communist Party
June 13, 2011

The nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Dai-ichi power plant, caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake and subsequent tsunami on March 11, 2011, shocked the world, and the question whether Japan should continue with the nuclear-power-dependent energy policy is being asked. The ongoing crisis at Fukushima has also accelerated a global shift away from nuclear power to renewable energy. Numerous opinion polls show that the majority of people in Japan now support the call for a shutdown of nuclear plants in Japan. Now it is necessary to conduct a nationwide discussion and reach a national consensus on whether we stay the course with the nuclear-power-dependent policy pushed for by the past governments or make a drastic policy shift to a renewable energy policy.

The issue of nuclear power generation in Japan has been a matter of fierce contention since the mid-1950s. The Japanese Communist Party has strongly opposed the construction of nuclear power plants on the ground that nuclear power generation was based on intrinsically flawed and hazardous technology since the first commercial nuclear power plant was built and started operation in the 1960s. The JCP has continuously denounced the "nuclear safety myth" propagated by the government and the electric power industry and made public appeals concerning the extreme danger inherent in nuclear power plants. The party has pointed out various irresponsible actions by the government which should have managed and supervised nuclear power plants in the interest of public safety.

With the Fukushima nuclear power plant disaster, the JCP on May 17 introduced its "JCP Proposal on the Occasion of the Great Earthquake and Nuclear Power Plant Disaster," urging the government to make a political decision to withdraw from the support of nuclear power and formulate a timetable to shut down all nuclear power stations in Japan.

The JCP makes the following proposal to end government support for nuclear power and initiate government promotion of renewable energy:

1. Facts revealed in the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant Crisis

The Fukushima nuclear meltdown crisis continues with no end in sight after three months of continuous struggle to bring things under control. The serious nature and dire consequences of this disaster is unprecedented in Japan's history. There are several facts that have been clearly revealed by the accident.

(1) Extraordinary hazards of nuclear plant accidents

Hazards associated with nuclear power plant accidents are of an extraordinary nature compared with those of other types of man-made disaster.

Once a serious accident occurs at a nuclear power plant and radioactive material is released into the environment, there is no technological means to contain it. The damage spreads geographically without limit and the consequences are likely to persist for generations. Even the very existence of local communities is endangered. Thus the breadth, duration, and consequences of contamination cannot be restrained. In this regard, nuclear accidents are in a category without parallel.

As for the breadth of effects, radioactive contamination from the Fukushima power plant accidents has spread from Fukushima to other prefectures including Iwate, Miyagi, Ibaraki, Gunma, Tochigi, Saitama, Chiba, Tokyo, Kanagawa and Shizuoka, where contamination has been found in schoolyards, drinking water, pastures, and on agricultural and fishery products. The intensity and scope of oceanic ecosystem pollution is not yet even known.

As for the duration of effects, radioactive pollution lasts for generations. The effects on human health, especially on children, who are more susceptible to radiation illnesses, are of foremost concern. Radiation can induce not only acute immediate effects but also latent effects, such as cancer and other late-onset disorders that may be caused by even a low dose exposure. The damaging effects of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster still persists after 25 years. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimated the additional cancer deaths from the accident as 9,000. Radioactive pollution will continue to threaten people's lives and health far into the future.

As for social consequences, nuclear accidents endanger not only individual lives but local communities, if not humanity as a whole. The government has issued evacuation instructions to the residents in restricted, evacuation, or planned evacuation areas, spread among 12 municipalities. Together with voluntary evacuees from surrounding areas, around ten thousand people have been forced from their hometowns. In these areas, the communities are threatened with extinction.

The JCP strongly demands that the government make every effort to bring the crisis under control as soon as possible, stop radioactive discharges, minimize the health effects, especially on children, and take measures toward rebuilding local communities presently under evacuation.

At the same time, we must pose the fundamental question whether the present state of technology in nuclear power generation should be allowed to exist in society in spite of its extraordinary hazards to humanity inherent in the event of accidents.

(2) Intrinsically flawed and hazardous technology of present nuclear power generation

Nuclear power generation at present is based on intrinsically flawed and hazardous technology.

All types of nuclear reactors now in operation or under development produce massive amounts of nuclear fission waste. A one-million-kilowatt reactor accumulates, after one year of operation, as much radioactive materials as one thousand Hiroshima-type atomic bombs would produce at the time of detonation. However, humankind does not possess the technology to keep this radioactive material safely isolated. This fact was painfully proven by the 1979 Three Mile Island, the 1986 Chernobyl, and the 2011 Fukushima accidents. The inherent danger of nuclear power plants lies in the fact that they produce and then store massive amounts of deadly nuclear waste with no way to safely isolate it.

Further, light water reactors (LWRs), commonly used in the nuclear power industry in Japan, have an additional weakness. By design, the LWRs remain stable only by constantly supplying water to cool the fuel cores, whether in operation or after shutdown. This implies that loss of cooling water may lead to core meltdown and loss of reactor control in a short span of time. In other words, the LWRs are inherently unstable because of their inability to transition to a stable condition in the case of loss of cooling water. This defect in the LWR's design was demonstrated in the TMI accident, as was pointed out in a U.S. Congressional report on the TMI accident. The accident of the Fukushima Dai-ichi power plant highlighted this in a much more ominous manner.

The present technology of nuclear power generation also lacks a method to safely dispose the spent nuclear fuel. When the government built a nuclear fuel reprocessing plant in Rokkasho Village, Aomori Prefecture, it envisioned that the spent fuel discharged from all the nuclear plants in Japan would be moved to the site to be "reprocessed" and "recycled" for use as nuclear fuel. However, this plant, based on technology that is even more flawed and more hazardous than that of conventional nuclear power generation, has been riddled with serious accidents and is not scheduled to start operations in near future. Even if it does start reprocessing spent fuel, it would produce high-level radioactive waste which nobody knows how to safely dispose of. With the reprocessing plant out of operation, and its spent fuel storage pools nearly full, spent fuel discharged from nuclear plants nationwide are kept in on-site storage pools, many of which will reach capacity in a few years. Fuel storage pools also require continuous cooling, and failure to do so would make them a major vehicle of radioactive contamination, as demonstrated in the Fukushima accident.

The origin of the technological flaws and hazardousness of nuclear power generation is found in the unfortunate history of present nuclear technology. The LWRs were derived from military research and development for the motive power of submarines. A type of reactor developed for military use with minimal safety considerations was adapted for commercial power generation without significant improvements. This is the historical origin of the dangerous LWRs.

We must now question whether we should continue to rely on technology with no

assurance of safely isolating the massive amounts of radioactive materials; whose reactors are inherently unstable by design; and in which there has not yet been established a way to safely dispose nuclear waste.

(3) Risk of concentrating nuclear power plants in one of the world's most earthquake- and tsunami-prone countries

It is foolhardy to begin with to have a large number of such dangerous plants in Japan, one of the world's most earthquake- and tsunami-prone countries. As research suggests, serious accidents at nuclear plants caused by external factors, such as earthquakes, are estimated to be ten times more likely than those caused by internal factors. Relying on nuclear power in Japan is no doubt far riskier than in any other part of the world.

The government temporarily halted the operation of the Hamaoka nuclear plant located in the assumed focal region of the anticipated Tokai Earthquake. With the high risks associated with earthquakes and tsunamis, the Hamaoka plant must be permanently shut down and decommissioned.

Then do other plants face a "less dangerous" risk of experiencing earthquakes and tsunamis? Three months prior to the Great East Japan Earthquake, the government had estimated the probability of the Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Power Plant experiencing an earthquake with a seismic intensity 6 or above at "0.0%." But on March 11, the earthquake with a seismic intensity of more than 6 actually occurred, damaging the plant even before the ensuing tsunami further damaged it.

The Great East Japan Earthquake has prompted scientists to call for a thorough reassessment of the scientific knowledge regarding the probabilities and consequences of future earthquakes and tsunamis. Dr. Shimazaki Kunihiko, chair of the Coordinating Committee for Earthquake Prediction and professor emeritus at the University of Tokyo, stated, "We took it for granted that magnitude-9 class earthquakes would never occur along the Japan Trench. With this earthquake, it is now clear to us that the present paradigm in seismology must be reevaluated."

Dr. Mogi Kiyoo, former chair of the same committee and also professor emeritus at the University of Tokyo, stressed, "We can never say that nothing will happen because nothing happened in the past. This is what we learned from this earthquake. There are so many things that we still do not understand about earthquakes and how they destroy objects. Even though a reactor itself may be robust, a nuclear power plant is structured with an intricate web of pipes and equipment. We do not know what will happen if massive force is applied to weaker parts of the plant structure. There is no such thing as absolute safety."

Scientific knowledge about earthquakes has not yet developed to the point where seismic risks can be assessed at each individual nuclear power plant. As no place in Japan can be regarded as "safe" from the dangers of earthquakes and tsunamis, no power plants in Japan are free from risk. There are thus no nuclear plants that are absolutely safe.

(4) Adherence to "nuclear safety myth" causes grave consequences

Successive governments, together with the power industry, have promoted the "nuclear safety myth," repeatedly saying, "Japan's nuclear plants are safe," and failed to prepare for serious accidents in disregard of repeatedly issued warnings. The seriousness of these consequences has now become clear.

Since its advent, Japan's atomic energy administration has been severely blinded by the "nuclear safety myth." In particular, it was fatal that the Japanese government learned nothing from the two accidents in which fuel cores melted down at the Three Mile Island and the Chernobyl plants.

In 1988, after these two severe accidents, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) made a recommendation in a report titled, "Basic Safety Principles for Nuclear Power Plants." It advised its member countries to take measures to prevent severe accidents and mitigate the consequences of such accidents in order to reduce the risks of major radioactive releases.

The Japanese government, however, ignored the advice and in 1992 adopted a policy (of the Nuclear Safety Commission) which claimed, "No severe accident will occur in Japan," a stubborn adherence to the "nuclear safety myth." Thus, the government has not taken measures to prevent severe accidents or minimize their consequences.

Talking specifically about the Fukushima nuclear power plant in a Diet debate before the accident even occurred, a JCP representative had demanded measures be taken to improve the safety precautions at the plant, pointing out that if an earthquake and tsunami struck the plant at the same time, there would be a loss of electricity supply to the plant, triggering a core meltdown. Nevertheless, ignoring the warning, the government failed to take any precautionary measures. This inaction eventually prepared the ground of the nuclear accident, creating numerous problems in the accident management. Successive governments, which have deceived the public with the "nuclear safety myth," bear grave responsibility for the consequences.

The JCP strongly calls on the government to seriously reflect on its past nuclear policy, give up the "nuclear safety myth," and take all possible and conceivable measures to minimize the risks of nuclear accidents.

(5) Social unacceptability of maintaining nuclear power plants that cannot be safe

Even if we get rid of the "nuclear safety myth" and take maximum measures to minimize the risk of nuclear plant accidents, there can be no such thing as nuclear plants that would be safe and free from the possibility of the occurrence of serious accidents.

Getting rid of the "nuclear safety myth" implies admitting to the danger of nuclear power plants, including the possibilities of severe accidents occurring. That the IAEA itself requires member countries to implement measures against the possibility of severe accidents is evidence of this.

If the government resorts to a publicity campaign that claims that nuclear plants will be safe after so called “improvements” are made based on the lessons learned from the Fukushima plant accident, it would amount to the propagation of another “nuclear safety myth.”

All technologies have limitations defined by history and contemporary societies. There are no such things as absolutely safe technologies. As we stated above, the present nuclear power plants are intrinsically flawed and hazardous. And they entail extraordinary dangers in case of serious accidents, as we are experiencing now.

There is no such thing as a foolproof nuclear plant. How can the Japanese people allow these nuclear power plants, which cause catastrophic consequences once accidents occur, to exist in a country with an extremely high probability of earthquakes and tsunamis? How can the present nuclear power plants and Japanese society continue to exist together? This is the question that everyone is asking because of the Fukushima plant accident.

2. Decide to Withdraw Support for Nuclear Power and Formulate a 5-10 Year Plan to Shut down All Nuclear Plants in Japan

Based on the facts that have come out with Fukushima nuclear power accident, the Japanese Communist Party proposes the following:

(1) Make political decision to withdraw from nuclear power generation

The government should make a political decision to break away from its nuclear-power- dependent energy policy and shut down all the nuclear power plants in Japan.

To achieve this, it is essential to obtain the demand of a majority of the general public in favor of abandoning nuclear power generation and urge the government to act on that demand. Then, through nationwide discussions, we should determine how long the process of nuclear phaseout will be or what kind of energy mix Japan should have.

(2) Formulate a plan to withdraw within 5-10 years from nuclear power generation

The JCP proposes that the government formulate a plan to shut down nuclear power plants within 5-10 years.

Given the enormous risk associated with continued dependence on nuclear power in this country, it is imperative to shut down the nuclear plants as promptly as possible, with necessary efforts to avoid power shortages that might cause social risks or confusion. As we should not simply replace nuclear power with fossil-fuel power which contributes to global warming with carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions, full-scale promotion of renewable energy and a shift to

becoming a low-energy consumption society must be pursued at maximum speed, mobilizing all the resources and technology now available. From this viewpoint, we suggest that the government to draw up a nuclear phaseout plan with a target period of 5-10 years.

In Japan, nuclear power accounts for 25.1% (FY 2009) of the total amount of electricity produced, including from in-house power generation by corporations and other institutions. The share of nuclear power could be replaced, if, for example, electricity consumption is cut by 10% and the share of electricity from renewable energy sources increased by 2.5 times from the present level of 9%* within 5-10 years. (* If large hydro power plants are excluded, it is about 1%)

The current amount of electricity from sources other than nuclear energy is on a par with the total amount of electricity (including nuclear power) generated in FY 1990 during the bubble economy. Only 17 nuclear reactors are in operation out of 54 in Japan as of May this year. Shutting down all the nuclear plants, therefore, is not an impossible task if special measures are taken to cope with summertime peak demand. A government decision to withdraw from nuclear power would accelerate the move to implement full-fledged efforts to develop the use of renewable energy as well as to create a low-energy consumption society.

(3) Take immediate steps toward scaling back on nuclear power generation, aiming at total shutdown

The government should cancel the nuclear power plant expansion plan and carry out the decommissioning of older reactors and reactors located in high risk areas among others.

Decommission Fukushima and Hamaoka plants and terminate plutonium fuel cycle program

The Fukushima Dai-ichi and Fukushima Daini nuclear plants must be totally decommissioned. The recently suspended Hamaoka nuclear plant, located in the center of the assumed focal region of Tokai Earthquake, must be permanently shut down and decommissioned. We also must terminate the plutonium fuel cycle program immediately by closing down the nuclear recycling plant in Rokkasho Village, Aomori Prefecture, decommissioning the Monju fast-breeder reactor, and ending “pluthermal” power generation which uses plutonium-uranium mixed fuel.

Stop dangerous life extension of aged reactors and decommission them

Although nuclear reactors are designed to serve for 30-40 years, among the 54 reactors in Japan, three reactors are more than 40 years old -- one each at Tsuruga, Mihama, and Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power stations --, and 16 are between 30 and 40 years old. The average age of decommissioned reactors worldwide is 22 years. The extension of licensing of aged reactors must end at once. They should be promptly decommissioned.

Scrap reactors that do not have local residents' approval

The Fukushima accident has given a great shock to residents living in the vicinity

of nuclear plants all over Japan and the municipalities hosting them. The central government and power companies should at least explain to residents about the potential danger of each nuclear power plant and safety measures taken, including the probable estimate of an occurrence of a major earthquake and/or tsunami. Because of the "nuclear safety myth," municipalities that host or are located close to nuclear power plants have never drawn up disaster prevention plans or carried out emergency evacuation drills, let alone evacuation or "stay in-house" simulations in areas between 20 and 30 km radius from a nuclear plant, which became a painful reality in the case of the Fukushima accident. There should be a thorough study and disclosure of how residents should respond in the event of nuclear accidents, including whether evacuation would be possible at all. A number of governors and mayors have recently stated that the reactors now temporarily suspended either due to regular maintenance or due to damage from earthquakes or tsunami should not be allowed to restart without tougher safety inspections and strengthened safety measures based on the lessons learned from the Fukushima accident. If local residents and municipalities do not approve of the operation of nuclear plants, those plants should be shut down and decommissioned.

(4) Establish an independent nuclear power regulatory agency to minimize public risk

The process of shutting down and decommissioning nuclear power plants throughout Japan will take some time. During the decommissioning period, the government must put into practice every conceivable safety measure to minimize the risk of nuclear accidents and establish a nuclear power regulatory agency that is independent of nuclear power promoting agencies, and which has the authority of enforcement with a sufficient number of staff. All concerned academics, researchers and engineers in Japan can be called to join forces for this purpose.

Since the decommissioning of nuclear power plants presumably takes about 20 years even after their shutdown, maximum precautions should be taken to prevent possible radiation leaks during this process. Until the technology to safely dispose of spent nuclear fuels is established and the actual disposal completed, nuclear waste must be kept isolated and under constant surveillance for an extended duration of time. This process also necessitates the establishment of an independent regulatory agency with the authority of enforcement and a sufficient number of personnel to carry out required tasks.

Even after the total break with nuclear power, fundamental research on nuclear energy for peaceful purposes should be encouraged to continue in view of the long term future of humanity.

3. Nationwide efforts for full-scale promotion of renewables and creation of low-energy consumption society

As we withdraw from nuclear power generation, there must be a parallel nationwide effort for a full-scale promotion of renewable energy and the creation of a low-energy consumption society.

(1) Explore enormous renewable energy potential

Japan’s future reliance on renewable energy has great potential.

The amount of renewable energy that can be utilized under current technological and social limitations (potential for the introduction of renewable energy) is estimated by the Ministry of Environment and others as more than 2 billion kW, with the inclusion of four major renewables, i.e. photovoltaic (solar) power, small- and medium-scale hydropower, geothermal power, and wind power. This figure is 10 times more than the total capacity of all existing facilities and about 40 times more than that of 54 nuclear reactors in Japan. The total installed capacity of nuclear power plants in Japan is 48.85 million kW. Compared with this, the potential of solar energy is estimated to be 100 to 150 million kW if solar panels are installed on public buildings, factories, and abandoned farmland and other unused land, while that of offshore wind power is estimated to be 60 million to 1.6 billion kW. We have to tap into this tremendous potential without delay.

The world’s total installed capacity of renewable energy reached 381 million kW in 2010, surpassing that of nuclear power (375 million kW). In Germany, which decided to abandon nuclear power by 2022 after witnessing the ongoing nuclear crisis at Fukushima, the federal government approved a basic energy plan to raise the proportion of renewable energy to 35% by 2020 and to 80% by 2050 from the current level of 16%.

Japan’s renewable energy technologies are among the most advanced in the world. And a number of countries that have adopted Japanese technologies have a much more developed utilization of renewables than Japan. With Japan’s technological prowess and with the extensive utilization of renewables in various countries taken into consideration, achieving a 20-30% share of electricity from renewable energy sources out of the total amount of generated electricity within 5 to 10 years is certainly possible. We can permanently shut down all the nuclear plants currently generating 25% of electricity and replace them with renewable energies along with efforts to reduce energy consumption throughout society.

Japan's main obstacle is the lack of vision on the part of the political establishment that has persisted in continuing with the nuclear-power-dependent policy under the pretext of meeting electricity demand and countering global warming. The government spent more than two trillion yen of taxpayers' money for nuclear-power-related purposes in the past five years, compared with 650 billion yen for renewable energy. Let’s urge the government to mobilize nationwide resources by giving renewable energy development the higher budgetary priority, and expanding joint efforts among governmental and non-governmental sectors encompassing the industrial world and the scientific community.

(2) Full-fledged effort to create new industries and jobs

The full-scale promotion of renewable energy will increase Japan’s energy self-sufficiency rate and create new industries and job opportunities. It will help reinvigorate local economies and establish a national economy led by domestic demand.

The renewable energy industry is now abuzz with new entrants, ranging from large corporations to small- and medium-sized enterprises and non-profit

organizations. The industry has a great potential to create new businesses and jobs since a large number of small-scale projects will be needed to utilize locally available renewable energy sources in each area.

There are impressive success stories such as that of Yusuhara Town in Kochi Prefecture with its self-sufficiency rate in electricity generation of 27% and that of the Kuzumaki Town in Iwate Prefecture with energy production exceeding 160%. These municipalities have developed various renewable energy sources, including solar photovoltaic, small hydro power, wood biomass, and wind power to revitalize their local communities and become energy self-sufficient.
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In municipalities hitherto hosting nuclear power plants, it is vitally important to create new businesses opportunities as well as jobs by aggressively developing renewable energy sources. We call on the government to redirect its energy subsidies currently granted to the nuclear-plant-hosting municipalities to promote local renewable energy programs that would create employment opportunities and contribute to local economic revitalization.

We need to improve the current renewable energy buy-back scheme by requiring utilities to buy back all the electricity generated by renewables at fixed prices. It is also necessary to set up and protect environmental standards and assessments in regard to renewable energy power projects in order to prevent adverse effects such as health hazards that can be caused by the noise of wind power turbines.

(3) Shift to low-energy society away from energy-wasting society

A key to reduce energy consumption is to drastically change the present energy-wasting social norms of “mass production, mass consumption, and mass disposal” and the acceptance of the so-called “24-hour society.”

In present Japanese society, workers in various industries are forced to work night shifts as well as day shifts as factories are operating around the clock. In both the public and the private sectors, having longer and non-standard business hours tends to be regarded as good practices meeting consumer needs. The more people there are who work late at night, the more night services are needed in commerce and transportation, thus increasing energy consumption. We are caught in a vicious circle between long and unusual working hours and increased energy consumption. The social norm needs to be changed in order to shift to a low-energy society.

A society embracing low energy consumption does not necessarily entail austerity. To promote and protect decent and dignified work and a higher quality of life would constitute a first step in establishing a low-energy society that will benefit the majority.

Let’s work to increase united actions based on the single demand of breaking away from nuclear power

The ongoing crisis at the Fukushima plant has triggered a movement not only in Japan but throughout the world to do away with nuclear power. The German government has decided to fully withdraw from nuclear power generation by

2022. The Swiss government has also come to a decision to shut down all its nuclear plants, which currently meet 40% of the country's electricity consumption.

The international community is now paying special attention to what Japan will do as the country that is experiencing one of the gravest nuclear accidents facing humanity. However, the DPJ-led government has not announced an intention to reduce the number of nuclear plants, much less shut down all of them, and has only stated, "We will achieve the highest standard of nuclear safety in the world." The LDP and the Komei Party, which have long been responsible for promoting nuclear power, are criticizing and taking political advantage of this or that action of the DPJ government's accident management. They conveniently neglect to mention their deception of the public by their promotion over the years of the "nuclear safety myth" and have not made any meaningful proposals in regard to nuclear energy policy or alternative energy policies.

These are political forces that are still clinging to the promotion of nuclear power and the "nuclear safety myth" even in the face of the Fukushima nuclear crisis and its disastrous consequences on the people and economy in Fukushima Prefecture and the rest of Japan. Now is the time to isolate those forces through mobilizing and organizing public opinion and movements with the aim of forcing an immediate breakaway from nuclear power generation and the introduction of a renewable energy policy.

A growing number of people have begun questioning Japan's continued dependence on nuclear power and are sincerely looking for a way out. A wide variety of people, including the younger generations, are now raising their voices and creating new movements demanding changes. We now have the window of opportunity to induce a sea change in national energy policy, backed by popular opinion and movements calling for a withdrawal from nuclear power generation. Let's call for and contribute to a national discussion and joint actions to forge a national consensus based solidly on popular public opinion to finally turn away from nuclear power!

The JCP has consistently opposed the construction of nuclear power plants, pointed out the dangers behind the "nuclear safety myth," and called for a policy shift away from nuclear power dependence. It is a party that has jointly worked with local residents in various parts of Japan who have been opposing the construction of nuclear power plants or demanding the implementation of proper safety measures. The JCP is determined to spearhead the national movement in support of breaking away from nuclear power and implementing a full-scale promotion of renewable energy.

Akahata, June 14, 2011

Fuwa speaks on Japan Nuclear Crisis

Fuwa Tetsuzo, director of the Social Sciences Institute of the Japanese Communist Party, in his lecture on classical Marx theory given at the JCP head office on May 10 stated that the JCP has always been opposed to nuclear power generation with no concrete evidence of safety. He also stressed that the nuclear accident in Fukushima has clearly illustrated two fundamental problems of capitalism. His speech is as follows:

JCP opposed unsafe nuclear power generation from the beginning

Pre-mature technologies

It was the mid-1950s when the question of nuclear power generation arose in Japan. In 1957, a research reactor in Tokai Village started its operation for the first time in Japan, and the commercial use of nuclear power generation began in the 1960s. From the beginning, the JCP has opposed the use of nuclear energy because it is still a “pre-mature technology” with no guarantee of safety.

The JCP in its 8th Congress in July 1961 adopted the Party Program. At the party’s Central Committee Plenum held just before this congress, CC members at that time endorsed a special resolution concerning the issue of nuclear power.

It states, “Judging from the present achievement in energy science and technological development in Japan, the condition to install perilous nuclear power stations right now does not exist.”

It also states that the construction of nuclear power stations “should be considered only after atomic energy related basic research, further development of overall applications, and democratic, legal, technological measures in regard to safety and risk compensation are completed.”

From this viewpoint, the JCP demanded the cancellation of the planned construction of Japan’s first commercial nuclear power plant in Tokai Village.

Since then, the party has been consistent in maintaining this stance. Not only promoting our “opposition” but also we have taken every opportunity to point out the risks behind nuclear power and to condemn successive governments for their irresponsibility toward laxity in regulating and supervising the operations of nuclear reactors.

Danger of spent fuel (197)

In January 1976, when I first brought up the issue of nuclear power, the prime minister was Miki Takeo. Back in those years, Japan had nine reactors at six locations with a power output of 4,000,000kW in total. The Miki Cabinet put into motion a plan to increase the output to 49, 000,000kW in nine years.

I asked if they are thoroughly examining the safety of nuclear power plants before embarking on such a “high-speed growth” plan. The government answer was, “Yes, we are doing so.”

Then I compared examination processes in Japan to that in the United States. The U.S. administration had an organ consisting of 1,900 technical staff and engineers screen and manage nuclear power plants. They were technical experts being independent from the power industry. They inspect everything on the spot from plant design and site selection to plant operations. How about in Japan? I asked the government if Japan has special examiners. The answer was, “Yes.” However, the Japanese specialists were not regular staff. They normally lectured at universities. Only when the government needed them, they were asked to examine nuclear power plants. In other words, they were on-demand part-timers. What they were actually doing was just a design check. I asked, “Do you think this is sufficient?” The government’s reply was, “We will enhance their capacity.”

I also took up the issue of nuclear spent fuel. Just at that time, Japan set out to construct a nuclear reprocessing plant using French techniques. My Diet questioning began with pointing out the lack of awareness that the plant they are building is potentially dangerous. A nuclear power reactor is designed to keep fuel inside, never let it out. However, when it comes to the reprocessing of spent fuel, the fuel comes outside releasing heat.

So, when transporting spent fuel from nuclear power stations to reprocessing plants by truck, it must be stored in fuel shipping casks with cold air circulating. What’s more, when France reprocesses Japan’s spent fuel, it must be carried by ship. I asked up to how many meters a cask can be resistant under water. None of the government officials could answer this question. I was later told that after my questioning, ministry officials in charge of spent fuel transport immediately bought large scale laboratory equipment to assess the strength of casks.

Anyway, they did not seriously consider the possibility of accidents. They started the project of spent fuel reprocessing without an assessment of safety concerns.

The Fukushima accident has clearly exposed the problem with spent fuel storage. Unprotected storage pools for spent fuel at the four units pose a serious danger.

When I first took up the issue of spent fuel, the government hardly knew what should be done with spent fuel. Thirty-five years have passed since then. The government still dose not handle the used fuel in a proper manner. This is why nuclear power plants in Japan are called “condos with no toilets”.

Failure to learn lessons from Three Mile Island (1980)

When the late Ohira Masayoshi was prime minister in February 1980, I took up the government's nuclear energy policy in the Diet for the second time.

In March in the previous year, the Three Mile Island accident occurred. The level of the accident under the guidelines of the International Nuclear and Radiological Event was lower than the ongoing Fukushima crisis. However, the accident became a significant issue worldwide at that time.

The biggest lesson that the U.S. government, led by then President Jimmy Carter, learned from the accident was to overcome "the belief that nuclear power plants are sufficiently safe."

President Carter put 3,000 engineers on staff to regulate nuclear power plants, strengthening safety standards that were already far higher than in Japan.

In contrast, in Japan, four years after my first Diet questioning, the government's expert committee on nuclear safety still had no full-time member.

After the Three Mile Island accident, the U.S. government developed more specific steps to protect local people in case of nuclear power plant accidents: if such an accident occurs, areas within 16km from the relevant plant will be designated as the first line danger zone; in areas within 80km, necessary measures will also be taken.

I visited Fukui Prefecture, where most nuclear power plants in Japan were concentrated at that time, to ask about the prefectural government's countermeasures against nuclear power plants accidents.

To my surprise, neither the prefectural government nor the city government had implemented any countermeasure. When I asked government officials why they have no countermeasures, they said that was because not only the national government but also Kansai Electric Power Co. gave no information regarding nuclear disasters, what kinds of things might happen, and what kinds of measures will be necessary.

They also said that the government established the Emergency Technical Advisory Body which deals with nuclear disasters and that they rely on this organization to instruct them in case of nuclear disasters.

After my visit to Fukui, I contacted one of the members of the body. The person told me that he did not hear from the government since it called a meeting one time. This indicated that this body had no functional ability. However, in response to my question about the organization in the Diet, the government said that the body can send its members to the site of a nuclear disaster.

In order to build more nuclear power plants, electric power companies propagate the "safety myth" of nuclear power plants. They never provide explanation about a

possibility of nuclear plant accidents in order to not weaken the “safety myth”. If they mention that possibility, no municipality would accept a nuclear power plant in their locality. That’s why local governments hosting nuclear power plants are unable to prepare for a possible nuclear disaster in a sufficient manner.

Residents near the Fukushima nuclear power plant are experiencing severe hardships. They were ordered to evacuate with only the barest necessities no matter if it was in the middle of the night. Electric power companies have ignored the need for preparing for a nuclear disaster at their nuclear power plants while sticking to the “safety myth”, and have neglected to implementing measures against disasters by propagating the “safety myth” on nearby residents.

Approval of more nuclear reactors in possible Tokai quake area (1981)

The third question I made in the Diet was in February 1981, when Prime Minister Suzuki Zenko took office after his predecessor Ohira Masayoshi died. I took up earthquakes as a subject for discussion. Three years before this questioning session, the government enacted a law on special measures to prepare for a massive earthquake, stipulating that a system of earthquake prediction be set up to prepare for the danger of a possible large scale earthquake in the Tokai region. After the legislation was passed, an observation system for earthquake prediction has been established to prepare for a possible Tokai quake.

The problem is, however, little can be done to respond to an earthquake even if it is predicted. The key is to build a city that can withstand an earthquake, and not to have anything dangerous located in the area.

Chubu Electirc Power Co. went ahead and constructed the Hamaoka Nuclear Power Plant at Cape Omaezaki in Shizuoka Prefecture. Though the area had been identified as having a high probability of earthquakes, the electric power company started operations at the plant’s Unit 1 and Unit 2 nuclear reactors. A Tokai earthquake is regarded as inevitable. If you look at the focal area on the map, you realize that the site where the Hamaoka power plant was built is at the center of the most dangerous quake zone where a big seismic fault underneath will most likely be the epicenter. The government had a special law enacted to protect against an earthquake with the assumption that this area has the greatest potential of a major earthquake. It would be reasonable for the government to order any nuclear power plant construction to be restricted from the area. The fact is that the company went ahead with the plan to build the third reactor, and the then Trade and Industry Ministry showed no hesitation in approving the plan. At the time of my Diet questioning, the plan was waiting for the approval of the Science and Technology Agency.

I said at the Diet that it is unacceptable for the government to allow more nuclear reactors to be built at the most dangerous quake zone. The then trade and industry minister answered, “Responses to an earthquake are fully considered from all possible angles.”

However, the documents on a safety review of reactors which I had requested showed that anti-quake measures can be approved as long as reactors can withstand an earthquake of an intensity of up to five. Earthquakes of an intensity of five as the maximum are just at the level of aftershocks that we have experienced in the latest Tohoku quake. An earthquake of an intensity of seven should be the minimum standard to prepare for a possible Tokai quake, along with the necessity to respond to the possible danger of widespread soil liquefaction.

When I referred to the possible dangers, the trade and industry ministry came up with some flimsy excuses claiming that the conclusion was made on research about maximum possible seismic movement beyond the intensity of five, although the text limits the maximum intensity to five.

I concluded my question session by requesting that the Science and Technology Agency play its part as the last hurdle in the authorization process. It turned out that soon after my Diet questioning, the agency permitted the construction, with the result that Nos. 3, 4, and 5 reactors were hastily built one after the other.

The Hamaoka plant is not the only plant at issue in this respect. As Japan is one of the most quake-prone countries in the world, Japan's seismic academic circles designated areas which have high risks for major earthquakes, not only a Tokai quake, to be covered by a special monitoring system. The system consists of "designated observation areas" and of "strengthened observation areas". Many nuclear power plants in Japan are located in either of these two high-risk areas.

The situation in regard to nuclear plant construction at the time was as follows: the No. 1 reactor was under construction at Onagawa in Miyagi Prefecture, two reactors out of six were under construction in Fukushima, two reactors at Hamaoka and the No. 1 reactor at Kashiwazaki in Niigata Prefecture were under construction. Shimane had one reactor, and one of two reactors at Ikata Plant in Ehime Prefecture was under construction. Twenty-one reactors in all were in operation at that time, which meant that half of them were located in places specifically identified as high seismic risk zones. It seems that electric power companies in Japan are attracted to quake-prone areas and the government has shown no scruples about authorizing their construction. This is indicative of how deeply the electric power companies and the nuclear energy administration of Japan are reliant on the "safety myths" of nuclear power generation.

With research on active earthquake faults progressing at present, quake danger zones are more clearly identifiable than at that time.

No separation between promoters and regulators (1999)

Then in 1999 under the Obuchi Cabinet, I pointed out that Japan's system of screening nuclear power plants is in violation of international treaties.

Following the 1979 nuclear accident at Three-Mile Island, the world experienced the more serious accident at the Chernobyl plant in 1986 which generated major discussions in the international political arena in regard to inspections and

regulations of nuclear power plants. In 1988, the Basic Safety Principles for Nuclear Power Plants was published. Then in 1994, the Convention on Nuclear Safety was concluded. Japan signed the treaty in September 1994 and approved it in the Diet in April 1995. That was when Japan finally accepted the responsibility to drastically change its atomic energy administration as we had been repeatedly demanding it do. However, Japan has never carried out this international responsibility.

I brought up this issue in Diet discussions in November 1999. My question focused on the most important part of the convention which strictly requires member states to separate organs regulating nuclear power generation from its promoters. The organ in charge of safety regulations must be independent, apart from the administrative body promoting nuclear energy. This is clearly stipulated in the treaty.

However, as we can see right now, the government's information regarding the Fukushima nuclear accident is always released by officials of the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA). They represent the regulatory body, which is part of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI). This is a clear violation of the international convention since the METI is a promoter of nuclear power generation.

The government may insist that a regulating role is played by the Nuclear Safety Commission (NSC) which is outside the METI. Yes, this organization is not part of the government ministry. It, however, does not have any authority. The treaty designates "regulatory body" as "any body or bodies given the legal authority by that Contracting Party to grant licences and to regulate the siting, design, construction, commissioning, operation or decommissioning of nuclear installations." No such authority is given to the NSC. It only has a supplementary role.

In fact, what the NSC is doing right now is very minor work, like releasing some related data every once a while.

The NSC is not independent at all. Before NSC Chair Madarame Haruki took up his current position, he appeared in court as a witness for a utility company in a lawsuit over the safety of the Hamaoka nuclear power plant. In court, he insisted that the Hamaoka plant is safe and that no nuclear reactors can be built if the government listens to what the plaintiff side claims. Right now the NCS is headed by Madarame.

This is the reality behind the Japanese administration of atomic energy. It completely ignores international regulations and treaty stipulations. I believe no other country promotes nuclear power generation under such a conflicted administrative system.

So, when I raised this question to Prime Minister Obuchi Keizo, he got stuck, though he was reading from a statement written by bureaucrats, since he could not recognize the difference between "promoting" and "regulatory body." At the time, I was surprised and disappointed by how little the prime minister was aware of

nuclear energy issues.

Fukushima nuclear crisis and capitalism

Threat of profit-first principle

We can nowadays easily recognize the threat of the profit-first principle of capitalism by reading the newspapers.

Media question why TEPCO did not immediately inject seawater into the reactors in order to try to cool them. They blame the delay of the utility's response for worsening the situation. Some reports say that TEPCO could not make an immediate decision since it knew that once seawater was poured into the reactors they could no longer be used. This illustrates the profit-first principle, the intention to keep using the reactors even after the serious accident occurred.

Also in Japan, why are many nuclear reactors located in the same place? Since it costs a lot of money and time to obtain land for a nuclear power plant, they want to build as many reactors as possible once the land is secured. So the answer is simple: to cut costs.

However, earthquakes frequently occur in Japan. It would be disastrous if a major quake hits in an area where nuclear reactors are concentrated. Of course nuclear plant promoters are aware of this, but they continue to build nuclear facilities even in earthquake zones just because they can save money that way.

Moreover, our nuclear reactors are very old. Out of the 54 reactors in this nation, 20 were built over 30 years ago. There is no set life span internationally recognized for nuclear plants, but of course, the longer they are in operation the more they are weakened by age.

One thing we know for sure is that property taxes levied on nuclear plants for their depreciation period of 16 years. In other words, utilities do not have to pay property taxes after the 16 years of their plants' operation. That is why they want to continue to use their facilities for as long as they can. Although all six reactors at the Fukushima No.1 plant are old, operating since the 1970s, TEPCO still hesitated to inject seawater into them. This shows how deep seated the profit-first principle is.

‘Ruleless capitalism’ in nuclear power generation and successive gov’ts

This profit-first policy is driving the present nuclear power industry. Successive governments have also left the entire question of people’s safety up to industry, thus what we are witnessing now in the Fukushima accident is the worst-ever case of “capitalism without rules”. We need to think about whether we can afford to keep the situation as it is or not.

The LDP is now eagerly challenging the DPJ. It is true that the Kan Cabinet is guilty of unreliable politics, but who is really to blame for the present situation? When I was a Dietmember, I took up the question of nuclear power risks several times in Diet deliberations with the Miki, Ohira, Suzuki, and Obuchi cabinets. They were LDP governments. In the 2000s, JCP representative Yoshii Hidekatsu pointed out the concrete risks by predicting what disaster could occur at Fukushima’s nuclear reactors in the event of a major earthquake and tsunami. In his Diet questions, he called for certain measures to be taken, stating that the Fukushima plant is highly vulnerable to a disaster. However, all the cabinets, from LDP’s Koizumi and Abe to DPJ’s Hatoyama, ignored his warning. Although the LDP is the party that had promoted the nuclear energy policy and is to blame for the present catastrophe, it is forgetting its own role and pointing their finger at the DPJ. Of course, the DPJ is irresponsible as a governing party, but the LDP should also be held responsible for the ongoing crisis.

Withdraw from nuclear power generation and create safety-first structure to control nuclear energy

The JCP will try its best to make a success of the current major efforts to constrain the nuclear disaster and revive the stricken area by demanding that the DPJ-led government do what we think is necessary and pointing out its neglectful and irresponsible behavior.

Together with reconstruction -related issues, the Japanese people now have to consider other major questions.

That is, the Japanese people should squarely address the issues on how to address the issue of nuclear energy and what energy policy to choose, and find a reasonable solution with bright prospects for a sustainable future.

In this effort the following two points are significant.

(1) As a strategic approach, we should decide to withdraw from Japan’s present energy policy dependent on nuclear power. Of course it will take a certain period of time to achieve this change. But what we need is to implement the decision now and establish a national strategy for achieving it.

(2) As an urgent near-term approach, it is essential to establish a structure to control and inspect nuclear facilities with priority on safety by clearly breaking away from “capitalism without rules” scheme created in the nuclear energy field based on the nuclear “safety myth.” In Japan, we have plenty of nuclear scientists and engineers with no direct relations with electric power companies. We also have the Science Council of Japan, a public organization of socially-responsible scientists. In addition, some people once involved in nuclear energy projects have recognized the collapse of the “safety myth” and are beginning to raise their voices against the blind promotion of nuclear energy. Utilizing the expertise of these people, we should establish the best safety system for nuclear energy in the world to control nuclear facilities with safety truly prioritized while at the same time decommissioning the plants.

Without this system, withdrawal from nuclear power will fail to be achieved because abolishing nuclear plants involves a number of stages. After operations come to halt, spent nuclear fuel should be taken out from reactors and disposed. Since reactors without the spent fuel still give off a significant amount of radiation, this radiation should be removed. Then the reactors have to be dismantled. Measures are also needed to dispose decommissioned reactors and their nuclear waste. In addition, we should consider how to use the sites after the reactors are removed. These processes will take at least 20 years. And all the stages should be carried out under the strict control system placing priority on safety.

These two points—strategically deciding to break away from nuclear power generation and urgently creating a framework to control and regulate nuclear energy with a mandate and responsibility putting great significance on safety—should be discussed nationwide. In the national political arena, these two issues will probably become major topics of discussion. I hope you can use what I talked about tonight as useful tips in this debate.

Akahata May 14, 2011