

FRANCE, THE HAPPY ATOM'S LAND ???

General information and facts on nuclear France :

- 58 Nuclear Power Plants on 19 different sites producing nearly 80% of the national electricity (but less than 20% of the total energy consumed in the country).
- 10-11 NPP produce only for exportation at very low prices (but risks and waste stay in France).
- Uranium 100% imported (mainly from Africa, but also from Australia and Canada) and plants built under an American model > Westinghouse license. So, funny to hear the French government speaking proudly about energetic independence.
- More than 200,000 high Voltage pylons cross France in all directions to carry electricity far away from the centralised production centres . And almost nobody seems to notice them.
- On the other hand, there are actually around 600 wind machines installed in France and some pretend we must stop it because they are ugly...
- In the last past 50 years, France has been investing” around 456 billion euros in this nuclear energy ; and we expect almost the same amount of money will be required for dismantling. People were never asked if they agree with that energy policy although they have to pay for it
- In fact, the first ones to insist that they want NPP were the militaries because they needed plutonium (Pu) for the French atomic bombs. Now, they have plenty of it and they realize it is a very dangerous proliferating garbage. So, not to forget that, in France like in some other countries, atom is a monster with 2 heads : civilian and military.

In this aspect, everything related to atom has something “taboo” ; and more especially when it is linked to the army. To discuss atom is like to doubt about the “grandeur de la France” (France’s dignity). To join the “nuclear club” has given France (middle range country with declining world influence) the opportunity to stay among the great powerful ones, for example, in the security council of the United Nations.

Politicians and lobby :

- Another “locking mechanism” is that all the French political parties (except for the Greens) that share power have always been and still are very favourable to the nuclear option. The socialist party sounds a little critical to nuclear energy when it is in the opposition ; but very much in favour again when it comes back in power. The most “original” position is from the communist party which is completely against atomic bombs but nevertheless strongly

promotes nuclear energy. And of course it does not want to hear about proliferation (from civilian to military nuclear).

- As we shall see later, all these politicians don't represent their own population. They just decide everything without its consent.

- A strong, rich and well installed nuclear lobby (under the general name "AREVA") keeps pushing to increase nuclear power in France and if possible all around the world. AREVA actually plays a big multinational game ; but 79% of its money comes from the French State!

- This French coalition of proud blind politicians and greedy powerful lobby is forming one of the most obsessive gang in the world to promote the nuclear dead-end.

Activists :

- In the mid-seventies, there was a strong French anti-nuclear movement. But in 1977, on a big demonstration with 70,000 people, there was a lot of violence. One activist died and two were handicapped. And it broke down the wings of this movement for the next 10 years, except in Brittany (west part of France) where the population succeeded in stopping the construction of a NPP in 1981.

- After 1986, the French resistance rebuilt slowly, mainly against the fast-breeder Superphenix, that was finally stopped in 1996.

- And one month after the Chernobyl's disaster, a group of honest scientists, fed up with the official governmental lies, created a new NGO called CRII-RAD. Since this time, most of the radioactivity scandals have been revealed by them.

- In the meantime, the main anti-nuclear French network to phase out nuclear energy is gathering 720 NGOs ; and is still growing. Last month in Cherbourg (west part of France), more or less 25,000 persons came on a demonstration for the 20th anniversary of Chernobyl disaster and to oppose to the construction of a new NPP. And very good news : Now, a lot of young people join us.

French public opinion :

- What is amazing is that in spite of decades of pro-nuclear propaganda and misinformation, French public opinion remains defiant toward nuclear energy. There has been a poll each fall for years ; and each year, between 51% and 61% of the population keep the opinion they would prefer to phase out nuclear energy.

- Even better : At the end of January 06, there was a euro-barometer done by the EC. The question was : Do you think nuclear energy is a solution for climatic

disorders and lack of other energy resources ? 12% of European-people said “yes” and only 8% of French people.

- But of course, they were never seriously asked if they agree with the nuclear choice. And anyway, their opinion never had any effect. For the politicians, it seems people are there just to pay tax money and to shut their mouth.

- As an example, in two departments of North-East France where the government actually wants to bury deeply long-life radioactive waste, 50,000 signatures have already been collected to ask for the right to a referendum on this question. Total refusal up to now by the authorities. Guess why ?

At least, this story shows how anti-democratic a nuclear country must be to survive with such a decision.

- On one side, the French population is tired and surrenders in front of the nuclear bull-dozer that has imposed this “fait accompli”. And many other social fights make people often march down the streets.

- On the other side, with our continuous activist work, we hope finding catalysts to help the population act as a priority on the nuclear issue.

- And this, before the first French Chernobyl happens, that would spoil a wonderful country; and its neighbours too.

André Larivière

Réseau Sortir du nucléaire, France.

(Network to phase out nuclear energy)

1/05/06