

No Nukes - an essay by Ralph Nader

Written by

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- Ralph Nader, Saturday, February 13, 2010 reposted from Common Dreams

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by CommonDreams.org

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All Americans better get informed soon, for a resurgent atomic power lobby wants the taxpayers to pick up the tab for relaunching this industry. Unless you get Congress to stop this insanely dirty and complex way to boil water to generate steam for electricity, you'll be paying for the industry's research, the industry's loan guarantees and the estimated trillion dollars (inflation-adjusted) cost of just one meltdown, according to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, plus vast immediate and long-range casualties.

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The Russian roulette-playing nuclear industry claims a class nine meltdown will never happen. That none of the thousands of rail cars, trucks and barges with radioactive wastes will ever have a catastrophic accident. That terrorists will forgo striking a nuclear plant or hijacking deadly materials, and go for far less consequential disasters.

The worst nuclear reactor accident occurred in 1986 at Chernobyl in what is now Ukraine. Although of a different design than most U.S. reactors, the resultant breach of containment released a radioactive cloud that spread around the globe but concentrated most intensively in Belarus, Ukraine and European Russia and secondarily over 40% of Europe.

For different reasons, both governmental and commercial interests were intent on downplaying both the immediate radioactively-caused deaths and diseases and the longer term devastations from this silent, invisible form of violence. They also were not eager to fund follow up monitoring and research.

Now comes the English translation of the most comprehensive, scientific report to date titled Chernobyl: Consequences of the Catastrophe for People and the Environment whose senior author is biologist Alexey V. Yablokov, a member of the prestigious Russian Academy of Sciences.

Purchasable from the New York Academy of Sciences ([visit nyas.org/annals](http://visitnyas.org/annals)), this densely referenced analysis covers the acute radiation inflicted on both the first-responders (called "liquidators") and on residents nearby, who suffer chronic radioactive sicknesses. "Today," asserts the report, "more than 6 million people live on land with dangerous levels of contamination--land that will continue to be contaminated for decades to centuries."

Back to the U.S., where, deplorably, President Obama has called for more so-called "safe, clean nuclear power plants." He just sent a budget request for another \$54 billion in taxpayer loan guarantees on top of a previous \$18 billion passed under Bush.

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You see, Wall Street financiers will not loan electric companies money to build new nuclear plants which cost \$12 billion and up, unless Uncle Sam guarantees one hundred percent of the loan.

Strange, if these nuclear power plants are so efficient, so safe, why can't they be built with unguaranteed private risk capital? The answer to this question came from testimony by Amory B. Lovins, chief scientist of the Rocky Mountain Institute, in March 2008 before the [House of Representatives of the U.S.] Select Committee on Energy Independence (rmi.org). His thesis: "expanding nuclear power would reduce and retard climate protection and energy security ... but can't survive free-market capitalism."

Making his case with brilliant concision, Lovins, a consultant to business and the Defense Department, demonstrated with numbers and other data that nuclear power "is being dramatically outcompeted in the global marketplace by no and low-carbon power resources that deliver far more climate solution per dollar, far faster."

Lovins doesn't even include the accident or sabotage risks. He testified that "because it's [nuclear power] uneconomic and unnecessary, we needn't inquire into its other attributes." Renewable energy (eg. wind power), cogeneration and energy efficiencies (megawatts) are now far superior to maintain.

I challenge anybody in the nuclear industry or academia to debate Lovins at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., with a neutral moderator, or before a Congressional Committee.

However, the swarm of nuclear power lobbyists is gaining headway in Congress, spreading their money everywhere and falsely exploiting the concern with global warming fed by fossil fuels.

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The powerful nuclear power critics in Congress want the House energy bill to focus on climate change. To diminish the opposition, they entered into a bargain that gave nuclear reactors status with loan guarantees and other subsidies in the same legislation which has passed the House and, as is usual, languishing in the Senate.

Long-time, staunch opponents of atomic power who are leaders in countering climate change, such as Cong. Ed Markey (D-MA), have quieted themselves for the time being, while the Republicans (loving the taxpayer subsidies) and some Democrats are hollering for the nukes. All this undermines the valiant efforts of the Union of Concerned Scientists, NIRS, Friends of the Earth, and other established citizen groups who favor a far safer, more efficient, faster and more secure energy future for our country and the world.

Just recently, a well-designed and documented pamphlet from Beyond Nuclear summarize the case against nuclear power as "Expensive, Dangerous and Dirty." The clear, precise detail and documentation makes for expeditious education of your friends, neighbors and co-workers.

You can download it free and reprint it for wider distribution from www.BeyondNuclear.org . It is very well worth the 10 to 15 minutes it takes to absorb the truth about this troubled technology -- replete with delays and large cost-overruns -- that has been on government welfare since the 1950s.

Ralph Nader is a consumer advocate, lawyer, and author. His most recent book -- and first novel -- is, Only The Super Wealthy Can Save Us. His most recent work of non-fiction is The Seventeen Traditions.