

# On The Nuclear Disaster At Fukushima

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<http://www.NoNukesNow.net>

### ***Introduction***

The nuclear disaster at Fukushima has shown once again that nuclear power plants are, next to nuclear warheads themselves, among the most dangerous devices that our species has ever created. Along with nuclear weapons, the construction and proliferation of nuclear power is “the most irresponsible, in fact the most criminal act ever to have taken place on this planet.” (Patrick Moore, **Assault on Future Generations**, 1976)

As an educational and humanitarian organization dedicated to the abolishment of war and the elimination of nuclear weapons, Veterans for Peace understands the importance of linking nuclear power plants and nuclear weapons with the entire military industrial complex, the same destructive machine that gave us the wars in Vietnam and the Middle East. As former U.S. Marine General Smedley Butler wrote in his book, **War Is A Racket**:

*“WAR is a racket. It always has been. It is possibly the oldest, easily the most profitable, surely the most vicious. It is the only one international in scope. It is the only one in which the profits are reckoned in dollars and the losses in lives.” (1935)*

If General Butler had lived to see the birth of the nuclear weapons/nuclear energy complex, he would no doubt describe it in similar terms, and say that NUCLEAR POWER IS A CON GAME.

The con began with Eisenhower’s “Atoms for Peace” speech in December 1953. The Eisenhower Administration had decided that the best way to counter public revulsion against the A-Bomb and nuclear testing was to aggressively market the “peaceful uses of atomic energy” and “thereby create a climate of world opinion that is more favorable to weapons development and tests.” (Tanaka and Kuznick 2011)

This public relations campaign included Walt Disney Productions, which released a film, “Our Friend the Atom,” in 1957 describing the benefits of atomic power. Shown on the TV show Disneyland and in public school auditoriums and science classes, Disney’s film “was instrumental in creating . . . a mostly favorable attitude toward nuclear power.” (Wikipedia 2011)

By July 1955, the United States opened its first commercial nuclear power plant and by October 1956 the U.S had agreements with 37 nations to build atomic reactors. Under this cover of the “peaceful atom,” the Eisenhower Administration pursued “the most rapid and reckless nuclear escalation in history. The US arsenal went from a little more than 1,000 nuclear weapons when (Eisenhower) took office to approximately 22,000 when he left.” (Tanaka and Kuznick 2011)

Although the PR campaign was largely successful, wide public skepticism and resistance remained. After Three Mile Island and Chernobyl, the global construction of nuclear power plants was nearly halted.

In the last few years, however, as public concern about global warming has increased the con artists have brazenly begun once more to push nuclear power as a solution to global warming and other environmental problems with fossil fuels.

But Fukushima has exposed once again the basic facts about the nuclear industry As Dr. Helen Caldicott wrote on March 16, 2011:

*“The world is now paying – and will pay however severe Fukushima turns out to be – a grave price for the nuclear industry’s hubris and the arrogance and greed that fueled their drive to build more and more reactors.*

*“What’s more, having bamboozled gullible politicians, the media, and much of the public into believing that it is a “clean and green” solution to the problem of global warming, the nuclear industry has operated facilities improperly, with little or no regard for safety regulations, and they have often done this with the connivance of government authorities.*

*“Nuclear power is not the answer to global warming; it is not clean, it is not green; it is not safe; and it is not renewable. It is instead “a destroyer of worlds.” It is time the global community repudiated it – however economically painful in the short term that taking such a step would be. There is no other choice for the sake of future generations.”*

In talking about Fukushima, however, we must also talk about Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the entire nuclear weapons complex that puts the very survival of our species in question.

### ***Nuclear power: A Socialist Perspective***

Nuclear power is different from other energy sources. The fossil fuel technologies of coal and oil—which rival nuclear power in their destructive impact on our species—grew, in a sense, out of the “normal” processes of capitalism. That is, they developed because they were profitable, so profitable that the oil industry played a key role in transforming the capitalism described by Marx in Volume 1 of *Capital* into the monopoly capitalism and imperialism described by Lenin in *Imperialism*.

By contrast, nuclear power did not develop because it was profitable. Nuclear power was made profitable so that it would develop. It is unlikely that individual capitalists, even

giant corporate ones, would have made the transition to nuclear power on their own. Even today, capitalists will not invest in nuclear power without massive subsidies from the government (which, of course, they themselves control). As Jeffrey Immelt, CEO of General Electric put it:

*“If you were a utility CEO and looked at your world today, you would just do gas and wind. ... You would never do nuclear. The economics are overwhelming,” “The nuclear industry is here because government supported it.... This notion that government is not a catalyst in this industry has no basis in fact.”*

This does not mean, however, that nuclear power is not a product of capitalism for, as the *Manifesto* stresses, capitalists have “exclusive political sway” in the modern state: “The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.”

Nuclear weapons and nuclear power are products of capitalism, but not the capitalism described by Marx in *Capital*. Rather nuclear power is a product of the monopoly capitalism of Lenin’s *Imperialism*, more specifically, “the Old Age of Imperialism” as my friend Raj Sahai calls it.

As the world moved towards WWII, all the rival imperialist powers began research into nuclear weapons, but only the Anglo-American Manhattan Project received the unconditional government support necessary for success. Both the German and the Japanese governments believed that, although nuclear weapons were possible in theory, they could not be developed in time to be used in WWII. This was a correct assessment, for even the Manhattan Project was successful only after the defeat of Nazi Germany and after the Japanese imperialists were already ready to surrender.

But the Americans had more grandiose schemes than simply victory in WWII and saw nuclear weapons not just as a way to end WWII, but as the weapon to end all wars. As H. Bruce Franklin notes, Americans have long lived

*in a culture that bubbled with fantasies of ultimate weapons. Appearing first over a century ago as American science fiction, these fantasies helped to shape the nation’s conceptions of nuclear weapons and responses to them, decades before those weapons materialized.*

*American authors churned out hundreds of novels and stories imagining future wars from a peculiarly American perspective. In these fantasies, the emergent faith in American technological genius was wedded to the older faith in America’s messianic destiny, engendering visions of made-in-America superweapons that would allow the United States to defeat all evil empires, wage war to end all wars, and make the world eternally safe for democracy. (1989:18-20)*

Franklin tells how President Truman was an avid advocate of this “fatal fiction,” and, on the way to Potsdam, read to a reporter lines from a poem by Tennyson which depicted the

“aerial superweapons of the future” and described how the “horrors of this scientific warfare bring about universal peace and world government:”

For Americans, of course, universal peace and world government means Pax Americana. Atomic diplomacy began even before the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and continues to occupy a central place in U.S. military planning.

Nuclear weapons are essential for the preservation of capitalism in the face of the rising influence of communism. As Winston Churchill put it in 1949, “I must not conceal from you the truth as I see it. It is certain that Europe would have been communized some time ago but for the deterrent of the Atomic Bomb in the hands of the United States.”

Nuclear power in the Soviet Union has a somewhat different history. Research into nuclear physics began shortly after the Revolution, but it was not until Stalin was informed about the Manhattan Project that research on nuclear weapons began, and it was not until after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that serious efforts to develop the bomb were made. These began in August of 1946 and resulted in the first Soviet bomb on August 9, 1949. The first H-bomb was tested in 1953, and the world’s first nuclear plant was opened near Moscow in 1954.

Thus, without the impetus provided by the threat of U.S. nuclear attack, it is doubtful that the Soviet Union would have developed nuclear weapons on their own, nor nuclear power. Once created, however, the nuclear weapons/power complex is quite similar, as Lichterman notes (2010).

The United States brought us into the Atomic age and therefore has a special responsibility to provide leadership in the abolition of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. No other nation can do so. Yet the United States has consistently refused to negotiate in good faith on this and other issues of vital concern to the well being and even survival of our species.

Discussions of arms negotiations usually describe it as a complex and difficult process of trying to get the five nuclear powers, the United States, Russia, United Kingdom, France, and China to agree to arms reductions. Such a view is as misleading as the idea that there can be a “peaceful atom.” The reality is that there is one nuclear power, the United States, with overwhelming military capability and a thousand military bases circling the globe, that insists on preserving its global domination. The U.S. commitment to nuclear disarmament is less than its commitment to preserving the global system of corporate capitalism that enriches the few while condemning increasing numbers of our species to poverty, ignorance, and disease.

All nuclear states seem to subscribe to the policy of Mutual Assured Destruction, or MAD, but only the United States has developed Nuclear Use Theories and Strategies, or NUTS. As Daniel Ellsberg wrote in 1981:

*“The notion common to nearly all Americans that “no nuclear weapons have been used since Nagasaki” is mistaken. It is not the case that U.S. nuclear weapons have simply piled up over the years—we have over 30,000 of them now, after dismantling many thousands of obsolete ones—unused and unusable, save for the single function of deterring their use against us by the Soviets. Again and again, generally in secret from the American public, U.S. nuclear weapons have been used, for quite different purposes: in the precise way that a gun is used when you point it at someone’s head in a direct confrontation, whether or not the trigger is pulled.”*

Ellsberg has later listed 25 occasions when the United States used nuclear weapons to threaten non-nuclear states, from Korea to Vietnam to the Middle East.

Telling the truth about nuclear power/weapons does not mean accepting any of the myths about coal or other fossil fuels. Fossil fuels—and the profits to be made from them—have been perhaps the major cause of the destructive wars of the twentieth century. We, as a species, cannot inhabit this planet in peace until we develop a just and sustainable energy system.

### ***The Solar Alternative***

The sun is the source of all life on earth, and will continue to shine for billions of years in the future, providing some 15,000 times the amount of energy used by even our profligate bourgeois civilization. As (Scheer 2002, p. 62) states, it is therefore “utterly grotesque” when apologists for the fossil fuel and nuclear industries assert that “renewables cannot even come close to meeting the world’s need for large-scale clean energy in the 21st Century” (Ritch 2001).

The sun does have one major disadvantage as an energy source for modern civilization, however. No one owns the sun, and therefore neither PG&E, ConEd, or any other utility corporation has figured out a way to profit from sunshine. In fact, sunshine is so free, democratic, and decentralized that it threatens the profits and very existence of the energy corporations. That is why, when people began to realize the potential of solar energy in the 1970s, “the giant fossil fuel and nuclear power corporations” took action to marginalize the “already practical solar energy.” Yet, as Ralph Nader notes, “all the reasons for self-sufficiency rooted in local democratic structures and decision-making remain compelling and even more dynamic than two decades ago.” (in Berman and O’Conner 1996, p. xi)

During and since the 1970s, a variety of studies have shown the practicality of solar and other renewable energy options. Perhaps Ritch would complain that these “incline strongly toward fantasy about solutions,” so for a more authoritative statement we can look to the U.S. Department of Energy which has done studies on various aspects of solar feasibility:

*In the United States, cities and residences cover about 140 million acres of land. We could supply every kilowatt-hour of our nation's current energy requirements simply by applying PV to 7% of this area—on roofs, on parking lots, along highway walls, on the sides of buildings, and in other dual-use scenarios. We wouldn't have to appropriate a single acre of new land to make PV our primary energy source!*

*What would our world look like if we used PV to produce significant amounts of electricity? The answer is that instead of our sun's energy falling on shingles, concrete, and under-used land, it would fall on PV—providing us with clean energy while leaving our landscape largely untouched.*

Of course, no one has suggested that humanity's total energy should come from PV alone. As Scheer points out,

*Constructive use of renewable energy requires a mixture of the various generation technologies—a combination not just of wind and PV, but also other sources, which nature offers in differing quantities in different locations. (2002, p. 64)*

The point is, renewable energy has been a viable alternative to fossil fuels and nuclear power for decades. Over thirty years ago it was recognized that

*global well-being, if not the survival of humanity, dictates an immediate turning from the path of conventional industrial technology—characterized by mammoth refineries and power plants serving millions of customers each—toward a prompt and resolute emplacement of "appropriate technology" scaled for use by small communities and individual units of production (Reece 1979, p. 16)*

Appropriate technology, of course, means renewable energy as Amory Lovins, wrote in Foreign Affairs (October, 1976), in an essay entitled "Energy Strategy: The Road Not Taken?"

*The great force of Lovins' argument derives from his skillful use of the very data and econometric models of the corporate planners themselves to demonstrate that their "solution" to the energy crisis—which Lovins calls the "hard path"—is not only unnecessary but unworkable and fraught with apocalyptic consequences. . . . Lovins opposes the corporate strategy with what he calls the "soft path." This begins with a determined program of energy conservation which could halve our national energy demand by the year 2000 without degrading our "standard of living." It would exact a tiny fraction of the projected cost of developing additional fossil resources, thus providing the capital to replace the fossil-based system itself with a new decentralized energy system based on solar and wind technologies. The social returns inherent in such a transition would be manifold, increasing in an exponential ratio with the distance and pace at which "hard" technologies and economic arrangements are left behind. World peace would be enhanced, for one thing, due to a curbing of the gluttonous appetite of industrial states for diminishing natural resources. Corollary payoffs include a*

*revitalized emphasis on community life and institutions, community control over resources, permanent protection of the environment, and a long-term proliferation of "employment" opportunities based on the labor-intensive character of "soft-path" farming methods and modes of commodity production. (Reece 1979, p. 16)*

Reece and others have described how our nation, poised to make a transition to a solar economy in the 1970s, instead was sidetracked by the corporate elite into introducing

*an aggressive new master plan tying energy policy not to human survival but to U.S. economic growth, "national security," and foreign trade considerations. Not that such items haven't always been linked in the modern corporate mind: at least since World War II, when combat production salvaged the capitalist order from a Great Depression which had kept the system on its knees for 12 years, the corporate leadership has perceived and taken advantage of a useful symbiosis between U.S. "defense" needs and the health of the corporate economy. (1979, p. 18)*

## **Conclusion**

Clearly, if our nation must assume leadership in the development, we must embrace the revolution of values called for by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1967, shortly before his assassination :

*"A true revolution of values will soon cause us to question the fairness and justice of many of our past and present policies. . . . True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring.*

*"A true revolution of values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth. With righteous indignation, it will look across the seas and see individual capitalists of the West investing huge sums of money in Asia, Africa, and South America, only to take the profits out with no concern for the social betterment of the countries, and say: "This is not just." It will look at our alliance with the landed gentry of South America and say: "This is not just." The Western arrogance of feeling that it has everything to teach others and nothing to learn from them is not just.*

*"A true revolution of values will lay hands on the world order and say of war: "This way of settling differences is not just." This business of burning human beings with napalm, of filling our nation's homes with orphans and widows, of injecting poisonous drugs of hate into the veins of peoples normally humane, of sending men home from dark and bloody battlefields physically handicapped and psychologically deranged, cannot be reconciled with wisdom, justice, and love. A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.*

*"America, the richest and most powerful nation in the world, can well lead the way in this revolution of values. There is nothing except a tragic death wish to prevent us from reordering our priorities, so that the pursuit of peace will take precedence over the pursuit of war. There is nothing to keep us from molding a recalcitrant status quo with bruised hands until we have fashioned it into a brotherhood. . . .*

*“These are revolutionary times. All over the globe men are revolting against old systems of exploitation and oppression, and out of the wounds of a frail world new systems of justice and equality are being born. The shirtless and barefoot people of the land are rising up as never before. The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light. We in the West must support these revolutions. . . .*

*“A genuine revolution of values means in the final analysis that our loyalties must become ecumenical rather than sectional. Every nation must now develop an overriding loyalty to mankind as a whole in order to preserve the best in their individual societies.”*

It’s time to end this madness. Nuclear weapons do not make us safe. Nor do nuclear power plants provide safe energy.

At the dawn of the Nuclear Age, on witnessing the first atomic bomb test in New Mexico, Robert Oppenheimer, the “father of the atomic bomb,” remembered the words of the *Bhagavad Gita*: “Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.” From Hiroshima and Nagasaki to Three Mile Island, Chernobyl, and Fukushima, the power of the atom has truly become “Death, the destroyer of worlds.”

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