

## Nuclear wastes

# “But you, what do you suggest?”

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*Two out of three times, when we say that we're opposed to the storage of nuclear waste at Bure, we're inevitably asked: “but what alternative do you suggest?”*







According to the old tune “*one does not condemn if one has nothing else to suggest*”, we, the opponents, are expected to have an alternative solution ready to be deployed before we can legitimately criticize burying nuclear waste in Bure – even though all nuclear-producing countries have systematically failed to find any adequate solution to the problem of nuclear waste for the past 70 years.

In this regard, faced with a nuclear industry whose waste will stay toxic for hundreds of thousands of years, and whose accidents can abruptly endanger the lives of millions of people; faced with an atomic science whose concrete implementation took place 70 years ago, before anybody really knew its physical and biological consequences, in the dramatic circumstances that we know (Hiroshima); the most elementary wisdom commands us to stay humble and cautious in our answers.

No, we do not and cannot have any miracle solution to offer, because the studies and knowledge that should reasonably be accumulated about nuclear energy in order to do so exceeds our human lives. Because the irremediable is already underway, and every day nuclear power drags us further into its headlong rush. Nuclear power is the fruit of a capitalist economic system that seeks rapid profit and growth; it has been forcibly imposed and built on a long series of State lies to meet the energy needs of galloping industrialization. From the Manhattan Project, which used the tragedies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to demonstrate the power of nuclear energy for civilian uses, to the systematic concealment of physiological

studies on the populations living near nuclear tests and accidents sites, and the pollution resulting from the immersion, by many countries and for several decades, of toxic nuclear waste barrels in Somali waters – which are now being sent to the Siberian permafrost –, the nuclear industry is nothing but a long series of arbitrary decisions and accumulated errors hidden behind a “classified” stamp. Its track record is appalling: millions of deaths, leukemias and cancers, and entire geographical areas that have become unfit for life and agriculture for hundreds of years.

“Clean energy”, “vitrification for decades”, “underground venting without surface leakage”, “language to warn future generations about burial sites”... these are all scientific approximations and political assertions that struggle to hide the economic bankruptcy (notably that of Areva/Orano) and the scientific negligence<sup>1</sup> that governments have to face, together with the heavy heritage of decades of inconsistent and reckless nuclear policies. Rather than tackling the necessary rethinking of our entire energy policy, putting all nuclear production on hold without delay and



1 Fire at the WIPP (USA), water and air pollution around La Hague (France), meltdown of the Fukushima reactor (Japan), impossibility of recovering the radioactive waste barrels in the Asse mine (Germany), repeated incidents in aging nuclear power plants, etc. On this topic, see the France Culture interview of Monique Sené, nuclear physicist:

<https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/terre-terre/nucleaire-1-monique-sene-decryptage-du-nucleaire>

resizing electricity consumption accordingly, they keep on maintaining a system that consumes the future.

The nuclear lobby relies entirely on the fatalist assertion that no alternative can seriously take over from atomic energy – even if that means ignoring numerous contradictory studies on renewable energies. This amounts to substituting the effect for the cause: the whole point of our proposition is to question energy policies, to question overconsumption, not to argue about energy output and productivity.

To be clear, the goal here is not to make everyone buy energy-saving light bulbs while the number of electronic devices in every home keeps increasing exponentially; what we're aiming at is drastically curbing industrial production and consumption. Millions of hectares of computer servers already feed the insatiable appetites of the data-mining giants that are Facebook, Google and others, who no longer put any limits on data storage; urban lighting for private, advertising and even public uses is spreading endlessly for purely “aesthetic” and commercial reasons; all the while, so-called “eco-labels” and “high environmental quality standards” seem to be proliferating. The current trend is the opposite of energy sobriety: it is a consumerist orgy, in a universe of constant and omnipresent interconnection between individuals within a globalized economy. Above all, we should question this economic and social model which dissociates production and leisure from their energy costs and consequences.

### **But what should we do with nuclear waste? Stop producing it? And what about the waste that's already been produced?**

Something that really makes governments and the nuclear industry – which are intimately linked in the lie – break out in a cold sweat is the first generation of nuclear power plants reaching the end of their useful lives. These old dinosaurs like Fessenheim, for which no replacement has been found as of yet, accumulate technical incidents and should already have been discarded. Dismantling them represents thousands of tons of highly radioactive waste that is already blocking the queue. The new generation of EPR reactors, which is supposed to take the next turn, is already off to a bad start: whether it be at Flamanville or at Olkiluoto (Finland), there's been a growing number of construction site incidents and design errors



with those reactors; while their efficiency has not been proven, the danger they pose is real.

These old crates should therefore quickly be put away, so as to be able to move on and justify decades of more than costly spending of public money. “The show must go on!” And in order for the show to go on, for EPRs to keep being sold to China, for nuclear power to keep being promoted to all “emerging countries”, and thus be able to pretend to bail out a very loss-making nuclear industry, they have to show that they also know how to deal with the waste.

This is where Cigéo, the WIPP, the Onkalo project in Finland, or the projects in Ontario and southern Australia come in: big holes in which to throw all the past and future nuclear waste, while waiting for a hypothetical miracle solution in 100 or 150 years. Just slap a couple thousands of pages of scientific speculation and other vitrified safeguards on top of it to reassure everyone, and *voilà!* Politicians can then sweeten the pill with a phony reversibility law passed in an almost empty parliament – with no real requirement to demonstrate the technical feasibility of this reversibility: as of today, we do not really have the means to remove radioactive waste “packages” from the galleries if we had to do so in the short term. This is the syllogistic house of cards of the nuclear industry: if they’re authorized, then they must have all the necessary safeguards; and if they have all the necessary safeguards, then they can

continue to be authorized – or, as in the case of the Bois Lejuc’s deforestation in Bure, they can count on impunity to act without any authorization whatsoever. The trick is to cover it all up with a veneer of social acceptability<sup>2</sup>: on one hand, the National Commission for Public Debate (CNDP) arranges an illusory public consultation; on the other hand, in the background, the silence of elected officials is being bought massively with numerous perks (like hunting parties in the newly acquired woods) and huge amounts of public money from the Meuse and Haute-Marne “Public Interest Groups” (GIPs), and a climate of fear is created through pressure, intimidation and threats skillfully orchestrated in order to keep the landowners whose land is needed for the project silent. This is how within the past 15 years, 3,000 hectares of land have been extorted, almost every municipal council has been put under control after critics have been silenced, and an entire population has been made to feel resigned and powerless. Acceptability is a palliative care for a territory that’ll be in agony by the preliminary phase of the project; its goal is for a whole village, department, region to internalize the death of hope and the irremediable.

If the power plants are to be closed, what should we do, then, with the radioactive waste irradiating the pools of La Hague? Perhaps we should leave it and treat it on those irradiated sites, where the environment has already been deeply polluted, and stop moving it around, which pollutes the air even more for hypothetical solutions. And above all, stop producing more of it, allowing us to take the necessary step back to calmly look for real solutions, and not a “last resort” solution that’s only aimed at maintaining production while postponing and worsening the problem for the next generation.

In any case, “solutions” that keep evolving in real time, that are based on disastrous recent experiences, that are the subject of opaque communication, and that are proposed by mafia-like organizations such as Andra, cannot reasonably be taken seriously. We cannot take the risk that the water tables, which extend far beyond the Meuse region, become polluted and unfit for any kind of use, leading to a monstrous ecocide, all because inconsequential and venal scientists and politicians of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century will have played god because they were anxious to maintain a bankrupt industry afloat.

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2 On this topic, see the movie “*Poubelle la vie*”: <https://archive.org/details/poubelle-la-viea>



***The truth is that no one has solutions; not you, not us, and not them! And when there's no solution, what we should do is cut our losses, sit down and think about the whole thing. Otherwise, we'll only continue to accumulate errors and aggravate the problem we claim to solve. Immediate and total shutdown of nuclear power!***

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