

# **Consumers Union of Japan**

## **Japan Resources**

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### ***From the Editors:***

## **Thinking about Nuclear Energy**

In this issue of Consumers Union of Japan's English newsletter we share articles about our recent activities, with a focus on energy.

This time, the theme is to expose the failed efforts to promote and export nuclear power. Simultaneously, consumers in Japan are being asked to pay for the decommissioning the nuclear reactors in Fukushima. And did you know that you can opt out of

the electricity companies' push for installing "smart meters" in your home? These digital devices are being questioned both for privacy reasons and because they transmit data by electromagnetic radiation.

We hope you will continue to stay updated with CUJ's activities and news on our English website, and support our campaigns.

# Japan on the Wrong Track with its Export of Nuclear Plants

By Koa Tasaka

Without any reflection over the tragic situation in Fukushima as a result of the nuclear plants accident, the Japanese Government has been trying to export Japanese nuclear power plants to Turkey, Vietnam and India.

In October 2014, when the IFOAM World Congress was held in Istanbul, Turkey, I attended this international meeting together with Mr. Seiji Sugeno, an organic farmer in Fukushima. He gave a talk to the participants about the disaster brought by the meltdowns at the nuclear reactors, and called for stopping the import of nuclear reactors from Japan. Turkey is a country with volcanos, and there is the distinct possibility that a similar tragedy may happen in Turkey due to an earthquake. Currently, the Turkish Government is not continuing the process of importing a nuclear plant because of the eruption of terrorism in Istanbul, and the military activities near the border to Syria.

As for Vietnam, the government has given up importing a nuclear plant from Japan because of the people's movement against the import of nuclear reactors. Two years ago, when a participant came to Asian Rural Institute (ARI) from Vietnam, I

handed him a film which shows the suffering of organic farmers in Fukushima, and asked him to show the film to as many people as possible. I do not know how much this film has influenced the people's movement against the import of nuclear plant, but of course I am very happy to hear the decision of the Vietnamese Government to give up their plans.

In the case of India, the Abe administration seems successful in exporting the nuclear plant so far. However, India has internationally a very big problem, because they have nuclear bombs which are not acceptable for the world where there is a very strong sentiment not to repeat the tragedy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki again. So, let us continue our movement against the proliferation of nuclear arms in this world.

## Do Not Shift Nuclear Power Plant Related Costs to Our Electricity Bills

The Japanese government is planning to charge all electricity consumers with the cost of the nuclear power plants that the power companies with nuclear power plants should primarily shoulder. Consumers Union of Japan is requesting the Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry to withdraw the introduction of the new system.

We are also starting a campaign to collect signatures to support our message: “Please do not shift the costs related to the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant accident to our electricity bills.” Please cooperate and spread the word among friends and acquaintances.

The government’s plan seems to be to submit this bill during the ordinary session of the Parliament, so the deadline for Consumers Union of Japan’s signature campaign is January 31, 2017.

## **Withdraw the Proposed New System to Shift Nuclear Power Plant Related Costs to Our Electricity Bills**

On December 22, 2016, Consumers Union of Japan sent a letter to Hiroshige Seko, the Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry. We pointed out that the new system proposed by the government would spread the financial burden of nuclear accident compensation and reactor decommissioning at Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Plant to new electricity suppliers, who would likely pass on their share of these costs to their customers. The government now estimates the total cost for reactor decommissioning plus Fukushima nuclear disaster compensation at some 8.3 trillion yen.

We oppose this proposal because energy problems are important issues that concerns our lives deeply. It is unacceptable that the Parliament will not properly deliberate Japan’s future energy plan in a democratic way, instead sticking to nuclear power generation. The proposal to relieve the current energy power companies of their responsibility goes against all common sense. We urge the Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry to not include nuclear power in the base load power supply, and instead focus on renewable and sustainable energy sources.

## **Smart Meters: Saying No, and Yes, You Can Switch Back to an Analogue Meter**

*This is a summary of a series of articles in our monthly Japanese newsletter, Shouhisha Report, about so-called smart meters, or digital meters that use radio frequencies and electromagnetic radiation to transmit information about your home electricity use. They replace the analog meters that have to be checked by staff visiting your home. There is concern about privacy, as well as health risks, in addition to the huge cost of changing meters. In Japanese, smart meters are usually abbreviated as “sumame” and we want to clarify your rights as consumers.*

The current problem is that power companies like Tepco or Kansai Electric Power are “demanding” customers to get new smart meters installed. This happens at the same time as Japan’s electricity market has been deregulated. In some cases, when customers have switched power company, the new provider has installed a smart meter without providing much information. In one such case, a CUJ member contacted us, explaining that the new provider had simply said: “Changing to a smart meter is necessary.” It later reversed its position, and admitted that this was not the case.

A staff member at our CUJ office had the same experience, and decided to dig a little further. When contacting the customer support center at Tepco, they replied in the same way: “You have to change to a smart meter.” This, however, is not true. The issue came up for debate in the budget committee of Japan’s Parliament in March, 2016, confirming that as far as contracts are concerned, smart meters are not indispensable.

The power companies have more tricks up their sleeves. Another lie is when they claim: “Analog meters are no longer manufactured, so we don’t have them in stock.” But according to experts like Taro Amishiro, author of books about electromagnetic radiation problems who is concerned about smart meters, most analog meters will work for much longer than 10 years, and don’t need to be exchanged so often. Old analog meters can also be reused.

It took our CUJ staff member several rounds of tough negotiations with Tepco’s call center to switch back to an analog meter, showing that it can be done. Another CUJ member told us that he had successfully gotten Chubu Electric Power agree to make the switch back.

The privacy concern is connected to how smart meters store data about your electricity consumption. The details are recorded by the digital device every 30 minutes. This can give power companies a very clear picture of your daily life, including when you switch on your TV or open your fridge. Sadatoshi Okubo, an expert on electromagnetic radiation and radio wave health problems, notes that even if the power company agrees to disable the transmission from your smart meter, the data is still stored digitally in the device. In other words, it can still be accessed and the problem of invasion of privacy remains.

Doorstep visitors or phone calls claiming they want to install a smart meter may be someone trying to scam you, so don’t fall for their sales talk. Says Michiyo Koketsu, CUJ: “Please pay attention to any information you get from your current power company as they roll out the switch to smart meters. You have the right to say no, and it is up to you to tell them that you prefer to keep your analog meter. If they customer call center gives you a hard time, just stand your ground. They can’t force you to switch to a smart meter, and you have the right to demand to switch back to an analog meter, if you so wish.”

## ***Newsflash:***

# **The Ecologist: The Collapse of Toshiba**

The collapse of Toshiba, writes Dr. Jim Green in *The Ecologist* (February 3, 2017) is the direct result of its failing nuclear ventures. It is also indicative of the crisis faced by nuclear contractors and utilities worldwide:

Recent revelations that nuclear giant Toshiba faces multi-billion dollar losses and write-downs and may rule itself out of future nuclear construction bids around the world have dominated the world's financial press.

The ripple-effects of Toshiba's latest problems will be many and varied. Japan's ambitions to develop a large nuclear export business are in tatters.

As recently as last year, Toshiba said it hoped to win 50 contracts to build new nuclear plants in India and China over the next decade. Also up in the air are reactor construction projects being planned in the UK, Turkey and elsewhere.

Toshiba says it is "*re-examining its relationship*" with Westinghouse, its struggling US subsidiary. Delays and cost overruns on nuclear construction projects in the US will be expressed as write-downs that could be as high as US\$7 billion.

As Toshiba, so the entire nuclear industry: Toshiba's 2006 acquisition of Westinghouse has turned out to be

a "pivotal moment in Toshiba's decline" according to Bloomberg. Even pro-nuclear commentator Dan Yurman says the looming massive write-down has "doomed" the company's US nuclear business.

## **Consumers Union of Japan**

**CUJ is a politically and financially independent non-governmental organization (NGO). We are funded by membership fees, sales of publications and donations.**

**CUJ was founded in April 1969 as Japan's first nationwide grassroots consumer organization. CUJ is officially certified as a non-profit organization by the Japanese NPO legislation.**

**Address: Nishi Waseda 1-9-19-207  
Shinjuku-Ku, Tokyo, Japan  
E-mail: [office.w@nishoren.org](mailto:office.w@nishoren.org)  
Fax: +81-(0)3-5155-4767**

**English website:  
[www.nishoren.org/en/](http://www.nishoren.org/en/)**

