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COUNTERPOINT

Beware the nuclear village as it readies to rear-end docile Japan again

By **ROGER PULVERS**

Special to The Japan Times

If you remember the Pinto, dear reader, then you may be as old as the hills — or at least as old as I am.

No, I am not referring to the horse that the Cisco Kid rode, a feisty pinto named Diablo. I'm talking about a small car that Ford began marketing in 1970. The Pinto takes the Grand Citrus Prize for being "the lemon of that decade."

But it wasn't a lemon by accident, though the accidents it caused led to injury and death. During the process of manufacture, Ford engineers knew that the positioning of the fuel tank behind the rear axle meant it could explode in a rear-end collision. But instead of protecting it for a mere \$11 per vehicle, Ford decided to "pass on" the fault to the unsuspecting consumer.

I bring up this crass example of corporate negligence as a metaphor for what the nuclear industry has done to all of us in this country since the 1950s. By employing manipulated criteria for the construction of power plants in or near zones with active fault systems — and ensuring those criteria were rubber-stamped by sycophantic scholars in their pay — the captains of the nuclear industry managed to lure the entire populace into dependence on a horrendously dangerous and ultimately costly enterprise. But in light of the ongoing nuclear disaster that began in March 2011, we can no longer say we are unsuspecting as the industry prepares to numb us once again with shoddy excuses for safety.

The case in point now is the Tsuruga nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture. Tsuruga is a lovely town on the Sea of Japan coast; and in prewar days it was a port of call for Russian ships from Vladivostok.

Early this month, a five-member team of fault-system experts was sent to the plant by the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA), an administrative body of the Cabinet. They went to determine the extent of the active faults surrounding and running under the plant. No reactor is permitted to operate in a plant situated above an active fault; and yet, Japan Atomic Power Co., the plant owners, are anxious to get the two existing reactors into operation and two others under construction completed.

This is despite the fact that one of the existing reactors is the oldest in operation in this country. The Tsuruga No. 1 reactor was commissioned on March 14, 1970. Actually, I remember that clearly, as it was the same day that the World Exposition, known as Expo, opened its doors in Osaka. It was a red-letter day for nuclear power, seeing as some of the power for Expo was provided by the No. 1 reactor. Now, though, what we have is a nuclear reactor built to specifications from half a century ago.

Japan Atomic Power Co. had announced, as a result of their own investigations, that no movement had occurred in the fault system near the plant in 130,000

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- I am surprised the number isn't higher.**
- I'm shocked - I thought Japan was more progressive than this.**
- I agree. When possible, mothers shouldn't work outside the home.**
- This sort of old-fashioned mentality is holding Japan back.**
- Did they poll only residents of retirement centers? It seems strangely skewed.**

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years. In fact, however, multiple faults are dangerously close to the reactors, one being a mere 250 meters away; and a crush zone linked to the fault courses directly under the No. 2 reactor.

The so-called Urasoko Fault System which runs for a total of 64 km lies near or below the Tsuruga plant. I checked the geological data on the fault system. They state that activity in sections of the system has been verified as having occurred between 2,300 and 7,200 years ago — and that a quake of magnitude 8.2 is possible in the system's north-central section.

The crush zone directly beneath the reactor contains rocks made up of broken fragments of smaller rocks, as well as stratum deformation caused by shear strain, and non-cohesive rocks formed by tectonic movement. This would indicate that the strata are unstable and liable to shift significantly in an earthquake.

Does the company want to risk contaminating Japan's biggest lake, Lake Biwa, the primary source of drinking water in the Kansai region, thereby crippling its economy? The lake is but 30 km from the nuclear plant.

Does the company want to pollute Kyoto, Japan's ancient cultural capital, to eke out the profits they expected before shutdown?

The damage incurred in the northeastern Tohoku region by radioactive contamination spread from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant following the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011 pales in comparison with the potential damage caused by a similar accident in Tsuruga.

And yet ... we are faced with a nuclear industry that is willing to blindfold us to these dangers in the interests of "getting this country moving again." Moving toward what, we might well ask.

NRA teams will be investigating 18 power plants for active faults, including the Shika plant in Ishikawa Prefecture which was taken up for fault issues in Counterpoint on Oct. 21 this year (www.japantimes.co.jp/text/fl20121021rp.html)

But back to the team of experts that examined the Urasoko Fault System, for this is a test case that calls into question the future of other nuclear reactors in Japan.

They completed their survey on Dec. 2, finding that the D-1 Crush Zone running directly under the plant was "comparatively new" and that there were deformations suggesting as yet undiscovered faults. The western side of the trench they dug was, as the Tokyo Shimbun reported on Dec. 2, "disturbed on a large scale."

According to a member of the team, Takahiro Miyauchi, a professor in the Department of Earth Sciences at Chiba University, "the disturbances (in the crush zone) occur in more than one place and are complex."

On Dec. 10, the team reported their unanimous findings: There is a "distinct possibility" that the fault is an active one and the two reactors "cannot be restarted."

Why weren't these surveys conducted before the construction of the nuclear power plant was undertaken?

The answer is that surveys *were* conducted. But they were done at the behest and under the watchful eye of the plant's owner, in what any fair-minded person would regard as a blatant case of asking the fox to inspect the fencing on the chicken coop.

This is not a case of mere oversight, willful or otherwise. What is at work here is an entire culture of railroading through predetermined policy, with the collusion of the bureaucracy, the politicians who do their bidding and the media that strives to keep up a pretence of objectivity while all the while cajoling the populace into acquiescence (and trousering advertising-revenue "sweeteners").

Power plants are generally built in areas of rural decline, where local authorities sympathetic to their establishment are put in power. Any opposition in the past was, at best, marginalized by the government-industry-media machine or, at worst, attacked verbally and physically by thugs who were cogs integral to that

machine.

Where does this leave us, with a new government dedicated to restarting most, if not all, of the country's reactors?

It leaves us with a sense of helplessness and despair, that our welfare and safety are thought insignificant in comparison with the greed of the powerful interests that tightly control this country's failing economy.

We are all about to get into that seriously flawed car and be driven at breakneck speed ahead. If we are maimed or we die in an "accident," don't worry — any survivors will eventually be paid off with a pittance for their grief.

That's the Japanese way as we enter the year 2013: Let them eat yellowcake.

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