

Opponents of nuclear power vow to continue protests under new government

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THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Anti-nuclear protesters who have been gathering for months each Friday near the prime minister's office continued expressing their opposition Dec. 21 in an effort to underscore their cause after the Liberal Democratic Party scored a landslide victory in the Lower House election.

Chants of "No reactor restarts," accompanied by the sounds of drum beats, echoed in Tokyo's Nagatacho district at 6 p.m. on Dec. 21, the winter solstice.

The rally marked the 36th such demonstration, according to Metropolitan Coalition Against Nukes, organizer of the protests.

"We will never forgive the government for its decision to restart reactors," said one protester.

"The outgoing administration should have its successor take over its 'zero nuclear power policy,'" said another.

Twenty-year-old participant Tatsuya Hashizawa, who holds a part-time job in Tokyo, said it was the first time in six months he had attended the rally, but he decided to give it his support once more after being alarmed by the LDP's return to power. "If we are to push for a no-nuclear future, everyone should think hard and raise their voices," he said.

Hashizawa said he voted in the Dec. 16 Lower House election for a party and a candidate both of whom are committed to the abolition of nuclear power. It was the first time he had ever voted.

Also present was a 68-year-old female evacuee from Futaba, a town near the stricken Fukushima No. 1 plant. Now living in Tokyo, she stressed the importance of keeping up the pressure.

"The LDP promoted nuclear power generation," she said, holding a placard that read: "Return Futaba to us."

"Who can we turn to?" she said. "We need to carry on our protest rallies to prevent the LDP from becoming big-headed."

The woman said she had been a regular participant of the rallies, attending nearly every one to date.

Demonstrations in front of the prime minister's office began after opponents of nuclear power became increasingly frustrated by what they considered to be inaction by the administration of the Democratic Party of Japan over nuclear power.

They felt that the DPJ administration was too hesitant to steer the country boldly away from nuclear power despite raised public anxiety over the safety of nuclear plants.

The rallies were strongest this summer after the administration of Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda approved the restart of two reactors at Kansai Electric Power Co.'s Oi nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture.

That decision triggered a rally by tens of thousands of protesters in the capital and demonstrations at dozens of other locations across the country.

It was the first time in many years that protesters had taken to the streets in such numbers, and it led to the prime minister inviting representatives of the Metropolitan Coalition Against Nukes for talks.

A short while later, the Noda administration declared it would abolish nuclear power in Japan by the end of the 2030s.

A 29-year-old man who is one of the coalition's central organizers said he is glad the group's efforts have drawn widespread attention. But he said

taking a different approach might have won more support.

"We should have presented the implications of nuclear power from a logical point of view, rather than merely appeal to people's emotions," he said.

The latest rally, like those before it, saw participants take turns in addressing the crowd through a microphone. It petered out at 8 p.m. Police sources said nearly 1,000 people had taken part.

The Metropolitan Coalition Against Nukes says the demonstrations will continue next year, as the new government settles into office.

Protesters in other cities have mounted similar protests. Rallies have taken place outside the headquarters of Kansai Electric in Osaka and that of Kyushu Electric Power Co. in Fukuoka.

"Casting a ballot is not the only right we have. Coming here and having our voices heard is meaningful, too," said one of the Osaka protest organizers.

The conservative Liberal Democratic Party will take power next week. It has in the past been a standard-bearer for nuclear power and has spoken in only vague terms about Japan's atomic future since winning the recent Lower House election.

Now, more than ever, these protesters believe their voices need to be heard.

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