

## Worker wants new government to secure safety at Fukushima plant

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THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

A man in his 50s hopes that a new government to be formed after the Dec. 16 Lower House election will protect the health of workers like himself at the stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant, many of whom fear for their jobs.

“Many people work without seeing a doctor because they fear they might be told not to come anymore from the next day,” he said. “It is a distortion caused by the layers of subcontractors involved. I want the government to protect us.”

He plans to return to his home in Yamanashi Prefecture to cast his ballot when he is off.

About 3,000 people are toiling each day at the Fukushima No. 1 plant in an attempt to stabilize its crippled reactors.

According to a man in his 40s, who worked at the plant until recently, all the workers assigned to high-radiation areas around the reactor buildings were from subcontractors, and employees of plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. went around the areas only occasionally.

He said he never saw officials from regulatory government agencies in those areas.

“I doubt whether any politician is giving serious thoughts on how to bring the crisis under control,” he said. “It seems that political parties are calling for a move away from nuclear power only to attract votes.”

The man said workers at the Fukushima No. 1 plant are being exploited.

“Workers come from around the country because they are willing to work even at a nuclear plant due to the economic slump,” he said. “Many businesses siphon off part of their wages, taking advantage of their vulnerable positions.”

A man in his 40s came to the Fukushima No. 1 plant from western Japan because he lost his job at a nuclear plant in the region after last year’s earthquake and tsunami.

He said he is frightened about high radiation levels at the site but he cannot make a living without a job at a nuclear plant.

He hopes that idled reactors will be brought back online throughout the nation at an early date.

The man voted for the ruling Democratic Party of Japan in the 2009 Lower House election, which was dominated by a call for a change in government from the Liberal Democratic Party.

He said he is attracted by the appeal of Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto, who formed the Japan Restoration Party, for speaking out for what he believes. But he has no plans to vote in the upcoming election.

“I do not want to spend money returning home to vote,” he said.

A TEPCO employee in his 20s who grew up in Fukushima Prefecture has become an opponent of nuclear power after the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 plant.

“I was told to work at the plant like a kamikaze pilot,” said the man, who is evacuating from Fukushima Prefecture due to high levels of radiation he received. “I have no idea about how much radiation I was exposed to.”

He said a large number of his colleagues left the company during the past year.

“I wonder if we can raise children,” he said. “I want the government to control our health as its responsibility.”

The employee has doubts about whether decontamination efforts will be able to remove radioactive materials in his hometown.

In a municipal assembly election, he cast a ballot for a candidate who ruled out plans to rebuild the town where it originally stood. He plans to vote for someone who takes a similar position in the Lower House election.

(This article was written by Miki Aoki and Toshio Tada.)

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