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Onderwerp: Drama in Japan: Europe must open a democratic debate about the future of nuclear energy

DRAMA IN JAPAN: EUROPE MUST OPEN A DEMOCRATIC DEBATE ABOUT THE FUTURE OF NUCLEAR ENERGY

16 March 2011



**European Trade Union Confederation [ETUC]
Confédération européenne des syndicats [CES]**

**Faced with the drama unfolding in
Japan, the European Trade Union**

**Confederation (ETUC) is anxious first of all to extend its support to the Japanese
people and to the energy workers who are on the front line in the nuclear power
plants.**

The extreme gravity of the situation must force Europe to draw the appropriate conclusions and ensure that it guarantees and steps up the security of its own nuclear facilities under all circumstances, specifically in an emergency. That is why the ETUC believes it is essential for audits and stress and security tests to be conducted as a matter of urgency in all nuclear facilities in Europe, and for the requisite steps to be taken to guarantee total transparency of the results of these tests and audits, as well as a democratic debate. The standards should be fixed, and if necessary tightened, at international level, whereas at present the authorities are at national level.

The ETUC is concerned that the organisation of labour in the nuclear industry in Europe today takes the form of large-scale subcontracting, with training that is not always adequate, dangerous exposure levels for the workers concerned, and probably a loss of ultimate control over reliability at the most critical stages of processes. Action needs to be taken as quickly as possible to guarantee that employment in this industry is subject to sound and proper social management.

The ETUC wants an urgent debate on the current and future operating conditions of nuclear power plants, in particular in conjunction with the opening-up of the electricity market, which may prove to be incompatible with the demands of security and the risks inherent in nuclear energy, insofar as this technology demands utter transparency, very strict regulation and optimum social conditions, none of which, it is to be feared, can be relied upon to be present in the free market.

More broadly, the ETUC believes that a much more fundamental debate needs to be conducted on Europe's energy policy than the one recently embarked upon by the European Commission, as outlined in the ETUC resolution issued on that subject in December 2010. In future, priority must be given to controlling the demand for energy and ensuring that the means for the production of electricity are diversified and specifically include combined heat and power and renewable sources. Consideration must likewise be given to the need for answers more complete than simply a response to global warming. There is a societal and health impact entailed by nuclear power which is unconnected with the problem of the greenhouse effect. It is the whole ambiguity of the notion of the 'low-carbon' transition, which leaves too many questions unanswered.

The pursuit of research into the effects of radiation, plus research aimed at developing nuclear plants that will be safer, more adaptable, not exposed to terrorist risks, leaner in their uranium consumption, and so on, alongside the development of satisfactory ways of managing nuclear waste which are lacking at the moment, requires a stepping up of democratic procedures based upon transparency and a high level of information.

It is equally important to maintain and bolster the skills necessary for the lifetime of the power plants, for the decommissioning phase and for waste management, etc.

This is why nuclear research needs to be redesigned to stop commitments from being made to undertake research in major technical projects at the expense of research of societal relevance in connection with nuclear energy, such as:

- a) Research linked to radiation protection, the safety of installations (preventing terrorist risks, preventing technical problems, etc.), the impact on the environment, ionising radiation, the effect of ionising radiation in space, radiation protection of patients and medical staff in applications using ionising radiation in medicine, and so on, so as to prevent the risks to the health and safety of workers and the population in general, which is proving necessary in fact for all dangerous occupations;
- b) Research aimed at sound management of nuclear waste, quality control of the conditions for the storage of such waste over time, etc.;
- c) Quality information to be made available to the population on these societal issues.

Such research of societal interest needs to be in the hands of the public authorities and to be subject to the greatest transparency, so as to allow choices to be made as part of a debate, essential in a democratic society, on the future of nuclear energy.

The ETUC exists to speak with a single voice, on behalf of the common interests of workers at European level. Founded in 1973, it now represents 83 trade union organisations in 36 European countries, plus 12 industry-based federations.

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