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The safety and welfare of the people can better be assured with alternative sources of energy which exclude nuclear options in our energy mix. We should be tapping nature's bountiful energy sources

The Folly of BNPP and Nuclear Power

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Just when we all thought that the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant (BNPP) in Morong, Bataan had been permanently laid to rest by its being mothballed in 1992, now comes the "BNPP" Commissioning Act," a bill in Congress attempting to revive and operate the controversial nuclear plant that had become the symbol of corruption and folly of the Marcos dictatorship (1972-1986).

Despite the BNPP's total cost of roughly \$2.3 billion including interest, two previous post-Marcos administrations had decided to permanently mothball the nuclear plant after a comprehensive scientific and technical audit that reviewed the condition of the plant from 1986 to 1990 showed that the safety and health of the Filipino people would be at grave risk should the plant still be put into operation. Very serious defects were found in the construction, cover design, quality assurance, and workmanship of this monument of the Marcos dictatorship's corruption and folly.

An international group of U.S. and European scientists, the National Union of Scientists (NUS) Corporation whose scientists and engineers are not tied to the nuclear industry found more than 4,000 technical defects in the graft-ridden project which even the *Fortune Magazine* branded as a failed project from a fraudulent loan. The NUS Corporation was commissioned by the Corazon C. Aquino government to do a technical audit of the BNPP. This last technical study became the basis why Presidents Aquino and Fidel V. Ramos decided to permanently mothball the BNPP, a policy decision finally made in 1993, despite its tremendous cost. If there will be efforts to commission it after 30 years in hibernation, it will again be the largest contract worth at least 3 billion dollars at today's costs.

Is it safe?

Before we get into any involved debate on this issue again, there is one basic question we have to answer: IS IT SAFE?

Now, more than 30 years after the nuclear power plant was constructed, a new initiative led by no less than the legislator-son of a top Marcos dictatorship crony, has again embroiled the

Philippine Congress to commission the operation of the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant. These people should know that nuclear power plants only have a 30-year old lifespan, and now they want to re-start a 30-year old nuclear power plant? Is it really very hard for some people to resist the temptation of a gargantuan contract in such an expensive project? In recent months, and days, negotiated contracts have been the subject of endless public hearings in the halls of Congress, and the public perception is strong that out of these multi-million contracts, certain public officials, their relatives and friends, are filling up their pockets at the expense of taxpayers.

They invoke the Constitution's prohibition of nuclear weapons on our territory in the BNPP Commissioning Act, and yet do they not realize that nuclear energy from nuclear power reactors is the first major step in the development of nuclear weapons? They invoke environmental concerns such as toxic gas emissions and climate change, and yet do they know that up to now nobody knows how to dispose of the more or less 20 tons of high-level radioactive nuclear waste that a 620-megawatt reactor will produce annually.

Will cost more

Of course the nuclear scientists and engineers who rely on the nuclear industry for a living will tell us that science and technology will take care of everything. But they know that even until now the decommissioning of nuclear plants with a normal lifespan of only 30 years will even cost more than its construction, as a decommissioned nuclear plant with its radioactive wastes will continue to pose risks to health and safety of the people, as well as threats to the environment. We will need at least 20-25 years to develop the necessary scientific and technological infrastructure and national capability to operate a commercial nuclear power plant to respond to nuclear accidents, plant upgrades, repairs and maintenance, nuclear waste disposal, and other related problems.

U.S. nuclear engineer Robert Pollard who did his own inspection of the BNPP in the early 1980s after the Three-Mile Island accident in the United States then concluded that the

BNPP is not safe since it used an old design plagued with unresolved safety issues, making it a potential hazard to the safety and health of the public.

This reaffirmed the Puno Commission's report in 1980 that warned of these flaws. The Puno Commission had made the following conclusions:

- The BNPP is not safe;
- It is an old design plagued with unresolved safety issues, thus it is a potential hazard to the health and safety of the public;
- Its design needs fundamental changes and additional safeguards;
- Its safety is not assured because no safety devices were installed;
- The crucial problem of nuclear waste disposal had not been solved.

These safety issues were never really addressed or resolved by the contractor Westinghouse after both the Puno Commission and Dr. Pollard had pointed them out, as shown by later technical audits of the BNPP in the post-Marcos era.

Dr. Kelvin Rodolfo, a noted geologist and Professor Emeritus from the University of Illinois has recently warned that, based on his scientific studies published in International Science Index journals, the BNPP "sits on Mt. Natib, which is a caldera volcano like Mt. Pinatubo", and that numerous faults of Mt. Natib were found to be extended to Morong, Bataan. Undoubtedly, the BNPP was a man-made financial disaster, so let us not make it into a national disaster.

Risks of nuclear power

Humankind continues to pay an enormous health and environmental price for the development of nuclear power

plants and nuclear weapons in many parts of the world. Diseases related to the "invisible poison" of radioactive contamination not only from previous nuclear plant accidents/leakages, and weapons testing but also from the so-called peaceful uses of nuclear energy in power plants haunt the victims who suffer from radiation-related diseases. Even countries that pride themselves with being at the forefront of nuclear technology have thousands of citizens who are suffering from diseases related to "low-level radiation."

What then is the alternative? We have just approved the Renewable Energy Act of 2008, so let us go on with it instead of distracting ourselves with new projects like the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant commissioning that, because of its costs, will only lead to more questionable contracts and further drain our country's coffers. Some have suggested that the BNPP be aptly converted into a "never again" Museum on the Folly and Corruption of the Marcos dictatorship.

The safety and welfare of the people can better be assured with alternative sources of energy which exclude nuclear options in our energy mix. We should be tapping nature's bountiful energy sources, especially the sun and water, energy from wind, waves, tides, oceans, earth (geothermal), biomass conversion, and many others. Alternative power sources especially from nature can liberate us from foreign energy sources whether it is oil or uranium - the fuel for nuclear power plants. Alternative power sources from nature's bountiful energy sources can provide most of our energy needs, together with energy-saving technology at the supply side. It only requires that the nation and its leaders make the political decision to develop rapidly and expand these renewable, safe, and clean energy sources.

But evidently, some people are again aiming to corner this gargantuan contract at the expense of the safety and health of the Filipino people.

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