

Climate Change and Nuclear Power: You Don't Cure the Plague by Spreading Cholera. Nuclear Radiation is not the Solution to Global Warming

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In the lead-up to COP21, a hundred French and international personalities are signing an [appeal on Mediapart](#), entitled :

“Let’s leave the fossil fuels in the ground. That’s how to put an end to climate crimes”.

And we, simple citizens, are invited to sign too. One would like to be able to sign, but alas, the text is not suitable : not because of what it says, which is generally true, but because of what it doesn’t say and which immediately casts great doubt on the rest. For to say half a truth and omit the other half is not truth-telling.

This appeal says rightly that we must take now the urgent measures that will – perhaps – put a stop to global warming and climate disruption in time to prevent the planet from becoming uninhabitable, and that failure will amount to « ecocide... doing violence to all living beings, ecosystems and societies, and threatening the rights of future generations ». But to continue the production and consumption of nuclear energy, what is that if not an « ecocide... doing violence to all living beings, ecosystems and societies, and threatening the rights of future generations » ? Failure to say a word about this is not at all insignificant. It amounts to tacit preference for one ecocide over another, denouncing the first and accepting the second. Even if that is not being done deliberately.

The appeal actually declares : « *We know that multinationals and governments will not easily abandon the profits they draw from extracting reserves of coal, gas and oil or from globalised industrial agriculture greedy for fossil energy* ». According to this appeal, there are therefore three sources of fossil fuel to be banned : coal, gas and oil. A more prudent appeal, that of the NGOs issued [last June on Mediapart](#), expressed a wish to « *ban all new projects involving polluting energies and thus guarantee that access to clean inexpensive and secure energy becomes a public good*», without citing any particular energy source, but in fact excluding nuclear energy, which is not clean or inexpensive or secure. Why then, in this new personalities’ appeal, is not uranium extraction cited among the « reserves » from which certain multinationals (AREVA for example) and certain governments (such as France) seek – with greater or lesser success, admittedly – to « draw profits from » ?

Is that because they view uranium as a mineral and not a « fossil fuel » ? Is it just a semantic concern, a mere question of definition ?

Let’s look closer. What do we describe as « fossil » ? The Larousse online dictionary says : «

things in the state of fossils ». Enlightening, eh ? But fossils ? There it says « *debris or print of a plant or animal buried in rocky strata before the current geological period and conserved there* ». That definition is unchanged since the printed Larousse Encyclopedia (1962, vol. 5).

Coal, gas and oil do not bear the print of plants and animals, and they cannot be called « debris » either, even if they derive from plants. Obviously that's not what makes people call them « fossil ». So in what other sense ?

Simply the first sense of the word « *fossil* », if we refer this time to the "Online Dictionary" (and also to "Reverso") : « *what is extracted or sourced from inside the earth* ». This meaning matches the etymology indicated by Larousse : « *from the latin fossilis, drawn out of the earth.* »

So the « fossil fuels » are called « fossil » not because they result from the decomposition of plants, but because they are produced from materials extracted from the ground – where they exist in limited quantities« *unlike renewable energies* » as the online Larousse puts it. This is a definition that fits nuclear energy, so long as it depends on the extraction and treatment of uranium ore. The fact that the « *natural uranium* » in the ore is then enriched (into Uranium 235), whereas crude oil is refined, makes no difference. We must therefore say once and for all, to stop the cunning tricks of the nucleocrats : nuclear energy is not only fissile, it is also fossil. It forms part of the fossil energies, drawn out of the ground and exhaustible. It should be named every time anyone lists the « fossil energies».

Having solved this question of vocabulary, how can we explain the favorable treatment given to nuclear energy ? It is certainly a favor to omit it from listings of the « fossil energies » being pilloried for their nasty effects on climate.

Here too, we must point to the clever propaganda of the nucleocrats, who are even rash enough to claim that « *nuclear energy is good for the climate* ». In reality, nuclear energy, viewed merely from the perspective of climate, shares all the defects of the other fossil fuels.

It is non-renewable, as we have just said. At the current rate of extraction and consumption, the known reserves of uranium will be exhausted roughly as soon as the reserves of crude oil, maybe before. And the collapse would occur even sooner if the number of nuclear power-plants grows through the proliferating actions of the nucleocrats.

The growing rarity of its fuel means that nuclear energy will merely compound the « oil wars » by creating « uranium wars », which have already started in Africa, notably in the form of terrorism.

Nuclear energy exploits the countries of extraction (for example AREVA in Niger), maintaining a neocolonial system and endangering the health of the local populations.

It pollutes even more seriously than the other fossil energies do. The inhabitants of Pripiat and Fukushima, the 600 000 liquidators of Chernobyl (or their survivors), the thousands of cancer victims, non-smoking and not exposed to pesticides, the victims of nuclear tests after those of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to mention only the best-known victims – all those people can testify to that.

Finally and above all, nuclear energy contributes also to global warming :

- ▶ directly, by heating the atmosphere through the plumes of steam that rise continuously from the « cooling towers » which are indeed « climate warming towers », and by putting into waterways or the ocean its cooling water which heats the climate ;
- ▶ indirectly, by using other fossil energies that produce greenhouse gases, in all the activities involved in the building and fuelling the plants, all the way from the mine to the « treatment » plant.

These are common faults of fossil energies, to which nuclear energy adds at least three of its own :

- ▶ Its effects are, like radioactivity, invisible, inaudible, odourless, tasteless, in short, undetectable except by special devices, and therefore much harder to avoid... and harder to inculcate after they have affected people's health (as was learnt bitterly by the civilian and military victims of France's nuclear tests) ;
- ▶ Its deadly effects are almost eternal (half-life of plutonium : 240 000 years ; half-life of uranium 238 : 4,5 billion years), which means that the radioactive pollution adding to that of greenhouse gases is impossible to pin down in space and also in time ;

– last but not least, its fuel is usable and is indeed used to make weapons of mass destruction (16 000 currently in existence), which permanently threaten to explode the planet.

All the same, let's recognise one advantage that nuclear has over the other fossil energies : although the particular ecocide it causes is more insidious than climate ecocide, the wholesale death that it threatens us with will be much more brutal than that of global warming.

Whether by multiplying Chernobyls and Fukushimas (in France most likely), nuclear energy will save us from having to combat climatic ecocide, since there will be very few people left to suffer from it.

But that should not stop us from thinking and *saying out loud* that no, no, no, to propagate nuclear cholera is not the way to treat the climate plague.

The signatories of the Appeal « Let's leave the fossil fuels in the ground. That's how to put an end to climate crimes » would be well advised *to say so too*. By publishing, why not, an extra codicil to their appeal.

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