19 February 2021

To the Editors of the *New Yorker*

In rebuttal of: *“The Activists Who Embrace Nuclear Power,” (2/19/21) by Rebecca Tuhus-Dubrow*

Greetings –

I just read in today’s *New Yorker* the pro-nuclear press release disguised as journalism, *“The Activists Who Embrace Nuclear Power,”* (2/19/21) by Rebecca Tuhus-Dubrow. It’s the umpteenth “activists-see-the-light-and-go-nuclear” piece that’s appeared over the past decade or so. But – I am awaiting the counter-piece: when pro-nuclear supporters “see-the-light,” and abandon or are critical of nuclear power. Is there a shortage of journalistic integrity that’s accompanied COVID preventing those stories from appearing?

For example**, Dr. Gregory Jaczko**, former CHAIRMAN of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), who states, “the current fleet of operating plants in the US should be phased out because regulators can’t guarantee against an accident causing widespread land contamination…” and that nuclear is no solution to climate disruption: “From everything I've seen and experienced with this industry, I think that's a fool's errand, and I think it's gonna fail the planet when it comes to dealing with climate change, because nuclear is just not up to that task.”

Or how about **Peter Bradford**, former member of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission; former public utilities commission chair for the states of New York and Maine; and while not pro- or anti-, he is, “opposed to unsafe facilities, to uneconomic facilities, to wastes that couldn't be disposed of, to biased regulatory agencies and to technologies that couldn't be adequately safeguarded against proliferation,”

Commenting on how nuclear power cannot have a positive effect in abating climate disruption:

 “Climate change, so urgent and so seemingly intractable, has become the last refuge of nuclear charlatans throughout the Western world. From well-meaning ideologues and editorial writers claiming that the unknowable is theirs to state with certainty, to paid advocates more skilled in pleasing and persuading government officials than furthering consumer and environmental well-being, prophetic arguments have swollen from a stream to a river and now merge with the Seine in Paris, threatening to submerge the world under a layer of nonsense rising as inexorably as the seas themselves.” -- *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 17 December 2015.*

and later,

“Those who assert that the problem of climate change is so urgent that ―we have to do everything (or, another popular substitute for serious thought, ―seek silver birdshot, not silver bullets) overlook the fact that we can never afford to do everything. The urgency of world hunger doesn’t compel us to fight it with caviar, no matter how nourishing fish eggs might be. Spending large sums on elegant solutions (especially those with side effects, like nuclear power) that provide little relief will diminish what we can spend on more promising approaches.” -- *“Honey, I Shrunk the Nuclear Renaissance, “ ElectricPolicy.com, 2010.*

Then there’s **Dr. Alison Macfarlane**, another former CHAIRWOMAN of the NRC, and professor at George Washington University who while not anti-nuclear concedes: “Nuclear cannot provide a short-term solution to climate change because it takes so long to bring new plants online.” – *“It’s the first new U.S. nuclear reactor in decades. And climate change has made that a very big deal,” Washington Post, 6/17/16.*

Then there’s **Arnie Gundersen**: nuclear engineer, director of Fairewinds Energy Education; former licensed reactor operator and nuclear industry senior vice president, who points out: ““We all know that the wind doesn’t blow consistently and the sun doesn’t shine every day,” he said, “but the nuclear industry would have you believe that humankind is smart enough to develop techniques to store nuclear waste for a quarter of a million years, but at the same time human kind is so dumb we can’t figure out a way to store solar electricity overnight. To me that doesn’t make sense.” – *“Did Tesla Just Kill Nuclear Power?”, Forbes Magazine, May 1, 2015.*

The late **Oscar Shirani** was an award winning engineer employed in the nuclear industry for 23 years at ComEd/Exelon Corporation and AREVA, including as a senior lead quality assurance auditor before he was fired by Exelon for refusing to look the other way when he found serious safety violations. He turned safety advocate and whistle-blower, maintaining up until his untimely death, “I am NOT anti-nuclear. But I AM PRO-safety! And the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and nuclear industry is not.” (personal conversation)

Then there’s **Victor Gilinsky**, another NRC commissioner under Presidents Ford, Carter, and Reagan, who recently co-wrote with Henry Sokolski, the executive director for the Nonproliferation Policy Education Center, “One thing is clear: The picture painted by the trade association for the nuclear industry, the Nuclear Energy Institute, of the essential invulnerability of nuclear plants is not correct… Nuclear plants are not without their advantages. But they also come with serious disadvantages... They are an inflexible source of energy that carries an enormous overhead in terms of safety and security, when what we need in our energy system for dealing with inevitable emergencies is not rigidity, but resilience.” *-- The Hidden Nuclear Risk of the Pandemic, April 27, 2020. --* A rather prescient statement, given the current situation in Texas.

No mention of the enormous cost-overruns and multi-year construction delays; the scandalous fraud and bailouts of nuclear plants amounting to $34.1 billion (nearly 65 times the size of the Solyndra bankruptcy) in Ohio, Illinois, New York, Georgia and South Carolina alone; the criminal indictments and guilty pleas of nuclear utilities, executives and legislators in Illinois, Ohio, and South Carolina. While these stories certainly don’t engender that kind of warm feeling associated with one describing the personal transformation of activists, one would think that any activist persuaded to support an industry with a rap sheet this long needs serious professional treatment.

It’s amazing what one can turn up on Google, no? One doesn’t have to work up a sweat to find that this cheap, sensational story line of “activists convert to nuclear” is in fact a two way arrow. A real journalist, and his/her editors, would have required an examination with that level of vigor and ethical fairness. Anything less is merely sensational, manipulative advocacy.

We would have expected better from the *The New Yorker*.

Be well, do better next time.

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