

EIR Science & Technology

The Fraud of Bush's 'Pro-Nuclear' Policy

The contrast between the Chinese program to build the next generation of nuclear plants, and Bush's energy plan, shows the "pro-nuclear" label to be a fraud. Nancy Spannaus reports.

Speaking at the Detroit Economic Club on Feb. 8, President George W. Bush took a brief side-trip from his continuous litany about Social Security privatization, and talked about the need for a national energy plan. He said: "And that plan must modernize the electricity grid, and it must encourage conservation, and it must encourage increases in domestic production. And we can do so in an environmentally friendly way. We're spending money—and important money and good money—on new technologies such as clean coal technologies, and ethanol, and hybrid and fuel cell vehicles. I believe that we ought to expand the use of safe and clean nuclear power. And I think we ought to allow for exploration in environmentally responsible ways in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge."

Some advocates of nuclear energy have desperately grabbed onto this statement to reinforce their hope that the Bush Administration will finally ditch the anti-nuclear hysteria of the past decades, and embark on what they call a "nuclear renaissance."

What a delusion! What a fraud!

The fraud was writ large by a front-page article that appeared the same day as Bush's speech in London's *Financial Times*, under the headline "China Claims Nuclear Power First As It Selects Site for Pebble Bed Reactor." That article, backed up by an extended feature about China's nuclear program, accurately described China's drive to develop the world's first commercially operated version of a revolutionary nuclear design which would be "meltdown-proof," and

provide the basis for cheap, safe, and massively expandable nuclear power generation worldwide.

The contrast between the Chinese commitment to the frontiers of nuclear technology, and the U.S. program couldn't be greater.

The Bush 'Energy Program'

The very mention of the Bush energy program brings three subjects to mind: first, the Enron scandal; second, the Energy Taskforce run by Bush's svengali, Vice President Dick Cheney; and third, the Iraq War. The smell is overwhelming: What is being produced is not energy, but corruption.

In this case, that smell is a fairly accurate guide. The major focus of the Bush energy policy has been to permit the leading oil and gas companies, and so-called energy companies like Enron—most of which were major political contributors to his political campaigns—to make more money. The primary thrust has been deregulation, whose implementation had the well-known results of 2001, with the massive running up of electricity prices in California and the other West Coast states, the ripping off of small investors in companies such as Enron, and the subsequent exposé of the financial frauds and looting by these companies. The fact that Enron's bubble burst, and its management is now on trial, has not changed that fundamental thrust.

Even as the Enron scandal blew up in 2001, the Bush Administration and former Halliburton CEO Dick Cheney

continued to push for an energy bill whose main feature was deregulation. Despite all the muscle that House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-Tex.) and Cheney himself were able to deploy in Congress over the next few years, the Bush energy bill has not been passed.

But, thanks to Freedom of Information suits going after the secretive Cheney Energy Taskforce, more information about the Administration's energy plan has been revealed. Documents obtained in July 2003 from a lawsuit filed by Judicial Watch against the Energy Taskforce featured maps, dated March 2001, of Iraqi oilfields, pipelines, refineries, and terminals, as well as "exploration blocks." The documents also contain a listing of "Foreign Suitors for Iraqi Oilfield Contracts"—none of which at that point were U.S. companies. The documents included similar maps and charts for Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Not surprisingly, the publication of these maps (including in this magazine) raised the question of whether the war in Iraq was not an integral part of the Administration's "energy plan."

The Question of Nuclear Energy

As reflected in President Bush's Detroit speech, the nominal position of the Administration is to expand the use of nuclear power, the most efficient source of power for a modern, advancing economy, but one that has been blacklisted by the malthusian mafia within the industrialized world for the past 20-30 years. This goal, of course, comes within a laundry list of other programs, including boondoggles for the grain cartels such as ethanol.

While the overall Bush energy bill has not passed, its objectives are known, and they do not include anything like the 20-plus-year perspective of the Chinese government, for large expansion of nuclear power, or even ambitiously accelerated development of the next generations of nuclear reactors, on which much work has been done.

There have been changes in nuclear policy carried out through the budgets adopted in the last few years. But the primary development in the nuclear industry was that accomplished by deregulation: the buy-up of a dominant portion of the existing 103 nuclear plants in the United States by three energy giants: Exelon, Entergy, and Dominion Resources. Exelon, a company formed by the merger of the holding companies for Commonwealth Edison and the Philadelphia-area utilities, is the nation's largest owner and operator of nuclear plants, and is planning to purchase at least 3 more, bringing its total to 20 out of the 103. These companies have been successively relicensing the aging nuclear stock, which is generally operating safely and well.

Such a concentration of ownership of this vital resource could well represent a danger to the energy supply of the nation, should these companies—at least one of which, Entergy, is known to be politically close to Bush—decide to go for the quick buck. Exelon, as of 2001, was a 12.5% partner in the Pebble Bed Modular Reactor project in South Africa,

but pulled out in April 2002. Clearly, the Enron example should be a warning to all.

But, so far, the big companies have continued with electricity production, and have put their major efforts into lobbying the Department of Energy for more streamlined licensing procedures for building new plants in the future, and for Federal government funds in order to build at least one nuclear plant by the year 2010.

In February 2002, the DOE announced a Nuclear Power 2010 Initiative, with the goal of building that one plant, by either the end of this decade, or the beginning of the next. The point is to demonstrate that a new nuclear plant can be built in the United States on time and on budget, and for that reason, the Congress has appropriated monies toward paying for half the cost of siting and licensing. Three nuclear consortia are preparing proposals for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, in the hopes of getting the contract to produce this plant.

What a contrast! Here the Chinese are putting major resources into building a whole new generation of advanced reactors, on top of purchasing regular light-water reactors off the shelf, and developing their own conventional reactors, and the big pro-nuclear policy of the Bush Administration is to build *one*.

The DOE has put research monies into advanced systems research, as well, including a variety of high-temperature reactor designs, breeders, and multipurpose reactors. There is also a program called the Nuclear Hydrogen Initiative, which aims to demonstrate the commercial-scale production of hydrogen using nuclear energy. But, as you can see from the story of the Fast Flux Test Facility (FFTF) included below, even the commitment in this direction is half-hearted, at best.

A New Dark Age

Most telling about the Bush Administration nuclear program, however, is its policy toward nations such as China, South Africa, Brazil, and Iran, which are in the process of committing major resources to develop the full fuel cycle for nuclear energy. The policy is firm: No country that is not already a nuclear-weapons state should be allowed to have access to nuclear technology, period. They should not have the science, they should not have the scientists, they should not have the capability, to develop the most efficient, clean, powerful energy source man has yet produced.

Back in the 1970s, the LaRouche-sponsored Fusion Energy Foundation did a study estimating that millions of Africans had already died due to the lack of economic growth caused by the denial of nuclear energy to that continent. Today, that denial policy continues with a vengeance, including threats of obliteration, as the Iraq example shows without a doubt.

The world does need a nuclear renaissance, in the spirit which the Chinese have adopted. But a close look at the Bush Administration shows that it is an obstacle, not a stimulus, to that urgent mission.