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Monday, March 14, 2011

for Truthout/Buzzflash

by Greg Palast



Texas plants planned by Tokyo Electric. Image:NINA

I need to speak to you, not as a reporter, but in my former capacity as lead investigator in several government nuclear plant fraud and racketeering investigations.

I don't know the law in Japan, so I can't tell you if Tokyo Electric Power Co (TEPCO) can plead insanity to the homicides about to happen.

But what will Obama plead? The Administration, just months ago, asked Congress to provide a \$4 billion loan guarantee for two new nuclear reactors to be built and operated on the Gulf Coast of Texas — by Tokyo Electric

Power and local partners. As if the Gulf hasn't suffered enough.

Here are the facts about Tokyo Electric and the industry you haven't heard on CNN:

The failure of emergency systems at Japan's nuclear plants comes as no surprise to those of us who have worked in the field.

Nuclear plants the world over must be certified for what is called "SQ" or "Seismic Qualification." That is, the owners swear that all components are designed for the maximum conceivable shaking event, be it from an earthquake or an exploding Christmas card from Al Qaeda.

The most inexpensive way to meet your SQ is to lie. The industry does it all the time. The government team I worked with caught them once, in 1988, at the Shoreham plant in New York. Correcting the SQ problem at Shoreham would have cost a cool billion, so engineers were told to change the tests from 'failed' to 'passed.'

The company that put in the false safety report? Stone & Webster, now the nuclear unit of Shaw Construction which will work with Tokyo Electric to build the Texas plant, Lord help us.

There's more.

Last night I heard CNN reporters repeat the official line that the tsunami disabled the pumps needed to cool the reactors, implying that water unexpectedly got into the diesel generators that run the pumps.

These safety back-up systems are the 'EDGs' in nuke-speak: *Emergency Diesel Generators*. That they didn't work in an emergency is like a fire department telling us they couldn't save a building because "it was on fire."

What dim bulbs designed this system? One of the reactors dancing with death at Fukushima Station 1 was built by Toshiba. Toshiba was also an architect of the emergency diesel system.

Now be afraid. Obama's \$4 billion bail-out-in-the-making is called the South Texas Project. It's been sold as a red-white-and-blue way to make power domestically with a reactor from Westinghouse, a great American brand. However, the reactor will be made substantially in Japan by the company that bought the US brand name, Westinghouse — Toshiba.

I once had a Toshiba computer. I only had to send it in once for warranty work. However, it's kind of hard to mail back a reactor with the warranty slip inside the box if the fuel rods are melted and sinking halfway to the earth's core.

TEPCO and Toshiba don't know what my son learned in 8th grade science class: tsunamis follow Pacific Rim earthquakes. So these companies are real stupid, eh? Maybe. More likely is that the diesels and related systems wouldn't have worked on a fine, dry afternoon.

Back in the day, when we checked the emergency back-up diesels in America, a mind-blowing number flunked. At the New York nuke, for example, the builders swore under oath that their three diesel engines were ready for an emergency. They'd been tested. The tests were faked, the diesels run for just a short time at low speed. When the diesels were put through a real test under emergency-like conditions, the crankshaft on the first one snapped in about an hour, then the second and third. We nicknamed the diesels, "Snap, Crackle and Pop."

(Note: Moments after I wrote that sentence, word came that two of three diesels failed at the Tokai Station as well.)

In the US, we supposedly fixed our diesels after much complaining by the industry. But in Japan, no one tells Tokyo Electric to do anything the Emperor of Electricity doesn't want to do.

I get lots of confidential notes from nuclear industry insiders. One engineer, a big name in the field, is especially concerned that Obama waved the come-hither check to Toshiba and Tokyo Electric to lure them to America. The US has a long history of whistleblowers willing to put themselves on the line to save the public. In our racketeering case in New York, the government only found out about the seismic test fraud because two courageous engineers, Gordon Dick and John Daly, gave our team the documentary evidence.

Japan, it's simply not done. The culture does not allow the salary-men, who work all their their es for one company, to drop the dime.

Not that US law is a wondrous shield: both engineers in the New York case were fired and blacklisted by the industry. Nevertheless, the government (local, state, federal) brought civil racketeering charges against the builders. The jury didn't buy the corporation's excuses and, in the end, the plant was, thankfully, dismantled.

Am I on some kind of xenophobic anti-Nippon crusade? No. In fact, I'm far more frightened by the *American* operators in the South Texas nuclear project, especially Shaw. Stone & Webster, now the Shaw nuclear division, was also the firm that conspired to fake the EDG tests in New York. (The company's other exploits have been exposed by their former consultant, John Perkins, in his book, *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*.)

If the planet wants to shiver, consider this: Toshiba and Shaw have recently signed a deal to become world-wide partners in the construction of nuclear stations.

The other characters involved at the South Texas Plant that Obama is backing should also give you the willies. But as I'm in the middle of investigating the American partners, I'll save that for another day.

So, if we turned to America's own nuclear contractors, would we be safe? Well, two of the melting Japanese reactors, including the one whose building blew sky high, were built by General Electric of the Good Old US of A.

After Texas, you're next. The Obama Administration is planning a total of \$56 billion in loans for nuclear reactors all over America.

And now, the homicides:

CNN is only interested in body counts, how many workers burnt by radiation, swept away or lost in the explosion. These plants are now releasing radioactive steam into the atmosphere. Be skeptical about the statements that the "levels are not dangerous." These are the same people who said these meltdowns could never happen. Over years, not days, there may be a thousand people, two thousand, ten thousand who will suffer from cancers induced by this radiation.

In my New York investigation, I had the unhappy job of totaling up post-meltdown "morbidity" rates for the county government. It would be irresponsible for me to estimate the number of cancer deaths that will occur from these releases without further information; but it is just plain criminal for the Tokyo Electric shoguns to say that these releases are not dangerous. Indeed, the fact that residents near the Japanese nuclear plants were not issued iodine pills to keep at the ready shows TEPCO doesn't care who lives and who dies whether in Japan or the USA. The carcinogenic isotopes that are released at Fukushima are already floating to Seattle with effects we simply cannot measure.

Heaven help us. Because Obama won't.

Greg Palast is the co-author of *Democracy and Regulation*, the United Nations ILO guide for public service regulators, with Jerrold Oppenheim and Theo MacGregor. Palast has advised regulators in 26 states and in 12 nations on the regulation of the utility industry.

last, whose reports can be seen on BBC Television Newsnight, is a Puffin Foundation Writing Fellow for investigative reporting.

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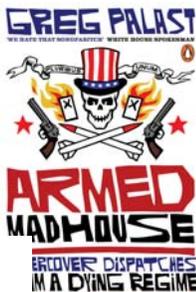


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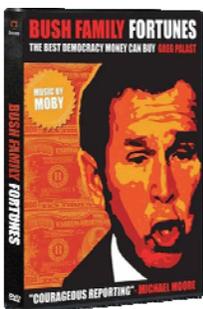
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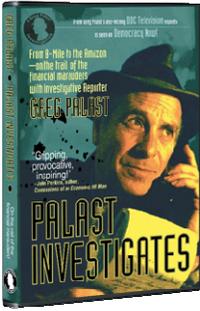


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