

# Nuclear Illusion - Risks and False Myths

by Sergio Zabet & Carlo Monguzzi

## Introduction

Following the abrupt run-up of the oil price, with peaks reaching over 140 \$ a barrel in the summer of 2008 and the subsequent volatility of prices – with an overall downward tendency after the collapse of the world financial system - nuclear energy has been, by now, widely acknowledged in number of media, from daily newspapers to TV, from political to economical debates, as a necessary resource - as well as a competitive, reliable, and safer one than any - of paramount importance for our survival and for preserving the climate.

The main arguments in order to fetch consensus and to prepare public opinion in Italy to the come-back of our country in the “nuclear club” run as follows:

1. electric energy produced by nuclear means is cheaper;
2. nuclear plants don't produce CO<sub>2</sub>;
3. nuclear power plants are safe;
4. disposal of nuclear waste is a solvable problem;
5. the nuclear option grants security in energy supply.

Now, all that is false. In fact, after decades of splendor and hopes that had led us to expect that the energy produced by nuclear plants would become in time so cheap as to be - *too cheap to meter* <sup>(1)</sup> – nuclear energy is keeping its long declining course in the globalized market.

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<sup>(1)</sup> - The quote is contained in a speech delivered by Lewis L. Strauss, chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, to the National Assembly of Scientific Writers held in New York on September 16, 1954.

Amory B. Lovins<sup>(2)</sup> maintains that “nuclear power is continuing its decades-long collapse in the global marketplace because it’s grossly uncompetitive, unneeded, and obsolete - so hopelessly uneconomic that one needn’t debate whether it’s clean and safe; it weakens electric reliability and national security; and it worsens climate change compared with devoting the same money and time to more effective options.”

But what the *Nuclear Renaissance* needs most of all is social consensus. Without it there is no way to build nuclear power plants. The task of the ongoing build-up campaign is that of creating such a consensus. For nuclear waste disposal, well, we’ll see in due time how best to take care of it ...

What is alarming is the fact that the debate about the energy future of Italy is getting more and more politicized and, moreover, that it is getting ideological contours. This polarization could be particularly serious in case it should oppose a “leftist” view – favoring renewable sources – to a “rightist” nuclear-prone one.

Unfortunately, after Chernobyl, some environmentalism of a kind has reduced the “nuclear question” to an ideological one, in the fear of stumbling against all kinds of “China Syndrome”<sup>(3)</sup> at any moment. It is thus a positive thing that in Italy the discussion has eventually started again on the future of power supply: with the 1987 referendum Italian citizens had decided to put an end to the activity of the nuclear plants and to say “No” to any planning of future ones. Since then Italian policy has been guilty of having ignored the question.

One must not, on the other hand, make the opposite mistake of ideologizing the nuclear option as an inescapable one. Fossil fuels, basis of modern economy, are treated as income items, although they are capital items: one does not care to put limits to their use, although they are not-renewable.

Uranium belongs to this lot; we all the same hear statements that wish for building one thousand new nuclear plants, when there is not enough uranium to make more than four hundred work.

Energy is the engine, in nowadays world, that makes economical activities run and energy problems represent the obsession of all modern societies. But the answers to these

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<sup>(2)</sup> - Amory B. Lovins & Imran Sheikh, *The Nuclear Illusion*, may 2008

<sup>(3)</sup> - The China Syndrome is a fanciful hypothesis, or rather a metaphor, of a possible extreme result of a nuclear meltdown in which molten reactor core products breach the barriers below them and flow downwards through the floor of the containment building. The origin of the phrase is the concept that molten material from an American reactor would melt through the crust of the Earth and reach China.

problems can't – and must not – be given merely by increasing the scale factors: nowadays we suffer of an almost universal worship for gigantism. To proceed towards gigantism means proceeding towards disaster. The aims of growth can't be unlimited aims because – as Gandhi said – “Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not for every man's greed”. Economical growth must take into account the availability of resources, meant as capital and not as income, but it must above all take into consideration the capability of the environment to cope with the interferences of human development.

The monetarist logic along which our society reasons and acts seems to follow the “after us, the deluge” line. But the vision of our future requirements for power, needs a copernican revolution concerning the modalities with which such requirements are evaluated, paid for and used. Refusing to look through the telescope of “reason”, the way in Brecht's *Galileo*, the priests refused to look at Jupiter's satellites, does nothing else but delaying truth and damaging the whole mankind.

In this book there is almost nothing that has not already been said or written. We have merely tried to collect and to arrange in good order valid arguments to debunk the high-sounding demagogy by which we are assailed. We just wish to provide well-documented answers to the lies we are daily served.

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Translated by Brown Onion & Revised by Tazio Borges