

The two-edged revival of nuclear power

As climate deadlines loom¹, governments are struggling to find clean, reliable sources of energy. Could nuclear power be their silver bullet²? The question is raised in the dossier – an article from the Independent, published in 2021, two opinion pieces from the Guardian and The Conversation dated 2021, and a cartoon by Martin Ferran for the tenth anniversary of the Fukushima disaster. As nuclear power is making a comeback, is it the best solution to curb climate change or could it cause more harm than good?

Autres problématiques possibles :

Might nuclear energy be a suitable alternative to fossil fuels?

The dossier raises the intractable question of the future of nuclear energy.

To what extent is nuclear power the future of clean energy?

How far can nuclear energy be a/the solution to the climate crisis?

What role should / can nuclear energy play in the fight against climate change?

Is nuclear energy the future of energy or just a transition to renewable energies?

Ten years after Fukushima, which was a stark³ reminder of the high health and safety risks involved by nuclear power, governments are realising they need nuclear energy to achieve a net-zero world by 2050, as The Independent shows. Countries phasing out⁴ like Germany are struggling without it. To meet their transitional electricity needs, they have had to reopen coal plants, sending carbon emissions soaring⁵ according to The Guardian. Meanwhile, other countries are going nuclear. After announcing the end of ICE cars by 2030, Britain plans a complete switch to renewable energy by 2035, gradually replacing fossil energy by wind, solar and nuclear as explained in The Independent.

True, nuclear power does have many advantages. As The Guardian exposes, its output⁶ does not vary with the elements - unlike solar and wind energy. The Independent adds that it can make a country like the UK independent from foreign oil and gas and their fluctuating prices. The Guardian columnist even claims past fears are unjustified. The cold war is over, disasters like Chernobyl could not happen now, which is echoed in the cartoon, with experts saying Fukushima had no dangerous effect on people's health. The amount of nuclear waste has plummeted⁷ through recycling, while nuclear production generates no more destruction or pollution than renewables do.

¹ To loom = menacer / s'approcher dangereusement

² A silver bullet = une solution miracle

³ Stark = saisissant

⁴ To phase sth out = supprimer/abandonner progressivement qch

⁵ To soar = monter en flèche

⁶ Output = rendement

⁷ To plummet = baisser brusquement

Yet, environmentalists are still wary⁸. They deplore the reliance on costly large-scale reactors when the future lies in flexible, decentralised storage solutions described in The Independent. More worryingly, they sound the alarm bell⁹ on new safety climate-related issues. With sea rising and more extreme weather, many plants are at risk of serious incidents, and likely to be closed temporarily or permanently to prevent disasters that could affect millions of people as outlined in The Conversation. It is a sobering¹⁰ prospect, and the three-eyed or two-legged Fukushima fish in the cartoon are reminders that nobody knows the long-term consequences of a nuclear disaster on ecosystems, let alone¹¹ on humans.

There is no magical solution to climate change. People pushing for nuclear energy need to be aware that heavy costs and safety concerns are still an issue. (439 words)

Autres conclusions possibles

Nuclear energy has many benefits that can make it a fine option to completely end the use of fossil fuels, but because of all the risks that it involves, every aspect of nuclear energy should be studied before deciding if it is really worth it.

The upshot is that nuclear energy seems to be necessary, so it may be used in the near future, but it will have to disappear in long run.

Climate change forces humans to rethink their energy strategies. And although there are arguments against nuclear energy, it seems that there is no real alternative, at least for now.

⁸ To be wary (of sth) = se méfier (de qch)

⁹ To sound the alarm bell = tirer la sonnette d'alarme

¹⁰ Sobering = qui donne à réfléchir

¹¹ Let alone = sans parler de / et encore moins ("he was incapable of leading a bowling team, let alone a country.")