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## COMMENTARY

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### You are now paying for the next Three Mile Island

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By Harvey Wasserman  
Online Journal Guest Writer

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As radiation poured from Three Mile Island 31 years ago past weekend, utility executives rested easy.

They knew that no matter how many people their errant nuke killed, and no matter how much property it destroyed, they would not be held liable.

Today, this same class of executives demands untold taxpayer billions to build still more TMIs. No matter how many meltdowns they cause, and how much havoc they visit down on the public, they still believe they're above the law.

Fueled with more than \$600 million public relations slush money, they demand a risk-free "renaissance" financed by you and yours.

AS IF!

In 1980, I reported from central Pennsylvania on the dead and dying one year after. Dozens of interviews documented a horrifying range of radiation-related diseases including cancer, leukemia, birth defects, stillbirths, malformations, sterility, heart attacks, strokes, emphysema, skin lesions, hair loss, a metallic taste and much more. As reported by the Baltimore News-American among others, [such ailments also ripped through the animal population](#).

To this day, no one knows how much radiation was released at the 1979 TMI accident, where it went or whom it harmed. The official line that "no one was killed" is arguably the biggest lie ever told in US industrial history. It is to public health what the promise of power "too cheap to meter" was to public finance.

It parallels Soviet lies about the 1986 catastrophe at Chernobyl, whose health effects continue to

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skyrocket. A devastating summary report issued by the New York Academy of Sciences (Yablokov, Nesterenko & Nesterenko: Chernobyl: Consequences of the Catastrophe for People & the Environment) says at least 980,000 people are likely to die from the fallout.

That would be a small fraction of the casualties had 9/11 terrorists dived into the two reactors at New York's Indian Point instead of hitting the World Trade Center.

In a time of deep financial stress, it also counts that the TMI accident turned a \$900 million asset into a \$2 billion liability in a matter of minutes. Chernobyl has cost Belarus and Ukraine at least \$500 billion and counting. And the price tag on a major meltdown anywhere in the US is virtually beyond calculation.

Thus, those who think a flood of new nukes will flow unimpeded into the American pocketbook haven't been paying attention:

- 1) Four northeastern nukes -- in Vermont, New Jersey and the two at Indian Point -- are under intense public pressure to shut within the next two years. Numerous other aged reactors are likely to go down long before any new nukes could come online.
- 2) French President Sarkozy is demanding that world financial institutions buy a bevy of new French-built reactors. But huge delays and cost-overruns at French projects in Finland and France itself have made the investment community wary to say the least, thus prompting his foot-stomping.
- 3) Documents leaked from inside France's national utility EDF indicate cost-cutting has made the new French reactor design exceedingly prone to explosion, further unsettling potential investors.
- 4) The future of new US reactor construction hinges on massive loan guarantees and handouts. The public number is \$54 billion, but the Nuclear Information & Resource Service says the real bill [could top a trillion](#).
- 5) In the polarized, cost-conscious wake of the health care bill, and the apparent demise of cap and trade as a [centerpiece of climate legislation](#), the idea of such huge sums flowing to a deeply polarizing energy source has become increasingly problematic. Without a clear trade-off for fossil/nuclear giveaways, and with stiffening resistance from the rightist National Taxpayers Union, Cato Institute and Heritage Foundation, the nuke bonanza is anything but certain. The technology may now, in fact, be "too expensive to matter."
- 6) An attempt by Entergy to shift six reactors into

an asset-free corporate shell has been nixed by New York authorities, leaving liability for Vermont Yankee, Indian Point and other northeastern nukes [in limbo](#).

7) As aged nukes stumble toward oblivion, various funds allegedly set aside for decommissioning may be significantly under-funded, deeply exacerbating the financial battles that now encircle the industry.

8) As a lame duck, George W. Bush signed agreements apparently obligating the feds to assume responsibility for enough radioactive waste [to fill two of the cancelled Yucca Mountain waste dumps](#). The complete lack of even one such facility means the potential taxpayer bill is beyond meaningful calculation.

9) Above all the exemption from liability for a major accident -- first perpetrated by a pro-nuke Congress in 1957 -- remains the largest potential cost to us all. Renewed by Bush in 2005, some believe the statute is clearly unconstitutional.

To this day the families of those harmed by radiation at Three Mile Island have been denied the right to make their case in federal court.

But now the shoe is on the other foot.

Desperate for cash, the nuclear industry wants us all to pay hundreds of billions for the joy of living downwind from still more Three Mile Islands for which they intend to assume NO liability.

They want our money AND our lives.

From central Pennsylvania after 31 years, the message is clear: Just Say NO!

*Harvey Wasserman's SOLARTOPIA! is at [harveywasserman.com](http://harveywasserman.com), as is THE LAST ENERGY WAR. He is senior advisor to Greenpeace USA and the Nuclear Information & Resource Service.*

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