

# Japan: LDP lawmakers regroup to promote nuclear power

Saturday 7 May 2011, by [Asahi Shimbun](#) (Date first published: 6 May 2011).

Lawmakers in the opposition Liberal Democratic Party established a task force to counter growing criticism against nuclear power generation, an industry that long supported the party when it ran the government.

The stated objective of Energy Seisaku Godo Kaigi (Joint council on energy policies) is to consider measures to balance supply and demand of electricity and to reconstruct energy strategies.

However, an LDP executive said bluntly, "We made the new group to protect nuclear power generation."

The ongoing crisis at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant has led to huge anti-nuclear protests around Japan and prompted the ruling Democratic Party of Japan to rethink its energy policy, which includes the construction of more reactors.

The LDP task force was the result of a merger of a subcommittee on economy and industries, a research council on electric source location and nuclear power, and a research council on resources and energies, including oil.

Executives of Energy Seisaku Godo Kaigi are all pro-nuclear energy lawmakers, including Chairman Akira Amari, former minister of economy, trade and industry, and Deputy Chairman Hiroyuki Hosoda, a former chief Cabinet secretary who used to be a bureaucrat in the industry ministry.

The vice chairman of the task force is Yasutoshi Nishimura, a Lower House member.

At a task force meeting held April 12, Tokio Kano sat next to the executives. Kano is a former LDP Upper House lawmaker and was once vice president of Tokyo Electric Power Co. He is now an adviser to the embattled company that is trying to bring the situation at the Fukushima plant under control.

During the meeting, Amari distributed a document that read, "There are some Cabinet members who easily talk about the idea of nationalizing TEPCO."

The chairman said: "We are not civic activists. It is irresponsible to say 'we can meet our (electricity) demand with natural energies' by concealing their huge costs and unstable supply. As a realistic problem, we cannot stop using nuclear power."

Kano said Japan should continue to use the No. 5 and No. 6 reactors at the crippled Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

"Words such as solar power and wind power are romantic. But is it possible to secure a stable supply of energy without constructing nuclear power plants?" he said in an interview with The Asahi Shimbun. "Is it possible to take measures to curb carbon dioxide emissions?" "When we buy natural gas and oil from overseas, we can negotiate in an advantageous position if we have nuclear power."

The task force has already come under criticism from within the party.

After the meeting, Lower House member Taro Kono, one of a few anti-nuclear lawmakers in the LDP, blasted the lineup.

"It is problematic that pro-nuclear lawmakers are occupying all the executive posts," he said.

However, the LDP ignored his protest.

Kono expanded on his criticism in an interview with The Asahi Shimbun.

"From the beginning, the claim that nuclear power generation is safe has been a fairy tale. Many members of the tsunami assessment subcommittee of the civil engineering committee of the Japan Society of Civil Engineers are employees of electric power companies. They came up with tsunami countermeasures in their favor and are now saying that the March 11 tsunami was beyond their imagination. Such a claim is unacceptable."

He also took shots at his own party, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry and electric power companies for promoting nuclear power generation.

"The LDP received money from electric power companies and established a system that made it easy for the government to provide subsidies to municipalities that accepted the construction of nuclear power plants. METI set up public organizations funded by power companies and gave lucrative jobs in those organizations to its retired officials."

Kono also noted that Toshiba Corp., Hitachi Ltd., construction companies and other firms supported the building of nuclear power plants.

"Electric power companies offered research funds to universities, thus producing scholars who will support them. Media companies also eased their criticism against nuclear power generation because they were receiving huge amounts of advertising money from electric power companies," he said.

The LDP promoted nuclear power generation as a national policy. Former Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone was a key member of this movement.

In 1955, the party enacted the Atomic Energy Basic Law.

In 1974, the LDP enacted three laws on electricity sources, which led to huge subsidies offered to municipalities that permitted the construction of nuclear power plants in their areas.

Electric power companies provided financial support to the LDP, particularly during elections.

The Federation of Electric Power Companies (FEPC) paid about 6.5 billion yen (about \$80 million) to the LDP over 11 years from the early 1980s in fees for advertisements in the party's newspaper.

So it came as somewhat of a surprise when LDP President Sadakazu Tanigaki said at a news conference March 17, "Under the current situation, it is difficult to promote nuclear power generation."

But he immediately faced protests from pro-nuclear lawmakers in the party, LDP sources said.

A week later, Tanigaki reversed his stance, saying, "It could be difficult to maintain manufacturing industries without a stable supply of electricity."

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\* Asahi Shinbun, May 6, 2011:

<http://www.asahi.com/english/TKY201105050089.html>