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# Japan/Nuke Lobby: Power companies waged campaign to win lawmakers' support

Saturday 15 October 2011, by [FUJIMORI Kamome](#), [ITABASHI Hiroyoshi](#) (Date first published: 11 October 2011).

In a disturbing pattern dating to the 1990s, electric power companies have been found to be wooing Liberal Democratic Party Diet members at breakfast meetings organized by an industry organization, along with offering major campaign contributions and other perks, such as wining and dining at pricy Tokyo restaurants.

The LDP members were mainly those working on issues related to the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, which supervises the electric power industry, according to aides and other sources.

A former employee of the LDP headquarters said of the parties that were held by Tokyo Electric Power Co. executives in ryotei, traditional first-class Japanese restaurants, in Tokyo until the late 1990s:

"We ate gorgeous cuisine in ryotei restaurants in Mukojima (known as a traditional entertainment district). We also received fruits and other goods as souvenirs. In addition, cars were reserved to take us home. In those days, we often received such entertainment from TEPCO."

Recently, it was revealed that TEPCO purchased tickets to LDP lawmakers' fund-raising parties and orchestrated a campaign of "personal donations" by power company executives to the LDP.

In addition, the latest revelation of the breakfast meetings and related issues shows that the nine electric power companies, including TEPCO, were jointly engaged in activities to win LDP lawmakers' support.

Such activities were often conducted in the 1990s when the LDP was the ruling party and thus controlled legislation and regulation of the power industry. The breakfast meetings continued until recent years, the aides and sources added.

According to aides to lawmakers and former executives of the electric power companies, the breakfast meetings were organized by the Federation of Electric Power Companies of Japan. They were held once every two or three months at Tokyo hotels.

In addition, luncheon meetings were also held between several electric power companies and lawmakers on an irregular basis.

Participants at the breakfast meetings were executives of nine electric power companies, excluding Okinawa Electric Power Co., and LDP lawmakers or their aides. Many of the Diet members were mid-ranking lawmakers and were engaged in issues related to the industry ministry.

At election time, the executives visited lawmakers' offices and handed cash donations to them or their aides. An aide to a lawmaker said, "In some cases, an amount ranging from two million yen to three million yen (about \$25,000 to \$37,500) was contained in each envelope."

Executives of electric power companies also wined and dined lawmakers in ryotei once a year. Presidents of those firms sometimes joined in the parties.

In another example, according to an aide to a Lower House lawmaker, the Diet member, whose hobby is fishing, knew that there was a prime fishing spot at a pier in the compound of a TEPCO-operated thermal power plant.

The lawmaker told a TEPCO employee, "I want to go fishing there."

Then, the employee immediately obtained permission for the lawmaker to fish at the site.

When the Lower House member arrived by car at an entrance to the plant on a weekend night, executives of the plant greeted the lawmaker, and led the lawmaker to the spot.

At the location, another TEPCO employee, who was holding a light, was waiting for the lawmaker with a bucket for him to wash his hands.

Eventually, the lawmaker caught many fish, each measuring 30 to 40 centimeters, and said, "My cooler is full of fish."

After that, the Lower House member often came to the fishing spot.

Meanwhile, a former TEPCO executive said, "I was asked by aides to lawmakers, whom I became acquainted with in breakfast meetings, to make room reservations for 'onsen' hot spring inns." Lawmakers' aides and supporters often travel to onsens in groups.

The executive made the reservations without revealing TEPCO as the sponsor. TEPCO covered half of the entire fees for the trips using its funds designated for business entertainment, although its employees never appeared at the inns.

The former TEPCO employee said, "As there were many such requests from aides to lawmakers, I thought, 'Is my company a travel agent?'"

TEPCO officials said that when the utility was asked by lawmakers' offices to help with local sports events, the firm dispatched its employees to those sites for assistance, including serving as judges.

In addition, the utility donated electric rice cookers, hot plates and other goods as commemorative gifts of the events.

Electric power companies also offered support to the lawmakers at election time in the form of personnel and donations.

According to an employee in an office of a lawmaker, when the lawmaker opened a campaign office, Kyushu Electric Power Co. dispatched several employees of its affiliated companies to it to serve as permanently stationed staff.

The employees helped prepare lists of names for elections or served as drivers.

"The employees worked hard for the lawmaker," said the source.

As for other parties, lawmakers of the ruling Democratic Party of Japan are regularly holding breakfast meetings with the Federation of Electric Power Related Industry Worker's Unions of Japan, which consists of labor unions of electric power companies and related firms.

According to an aide to a lawmaker and other sources, some DPJ lawmakers became acquainted with members of the federation through the breakfast meetings and, as a result, the federation began to purchase tickets for the lawmakers' fund-raising parties.

According to TEPCO officials, since the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant in March, lawmakers have stopped making requests of them.

However, an aide to a lawmaker told a TEPCO employee, "After several years, we will make requests to you again."

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