



FUKUSHIMA : The Media Corruption that Protects TEPCO and Government Censorship of Media.

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by Makiko SEGAWA in Fukushima

In Tokyo, on April 6, a group of freelance journalists centered on Uesugi Takashi, 43, held a [media session](#) with dozens of DPJ lawmakers, including former Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio, to question the performance of the media in the wake of the Fukushima disaster.

Kawauchi Hiroshi, a DPJ member of the House of Representative, stated that "Information about radiation diffusion should be correctly revealed to the nation.



However, so far only once was this done."He explained the frustration of local officials. "The information from TEPCO (Tokyo Electronic Power Company) should be precisely conveyed. I talked to the mayor of Lidate village (in the 30km zone), whotold me, 'There is no information and I do not know what to do."

Uesugi Takashi explained the core of the problem behind misinformation and rumors.

"Freelance journalists and foreign media are pursuing the facts, even going into the radiation exclusion zone. However, surprisingly, the Japan government continues to prevent freelance journalists and overseas media from gaining access to official press conferences at the prime minister's house and government."

Uesugi stated that since March 11th, the government has excluded all internet media and all foreign media from official press conferences on the "Emergency Situation". While foreign media have scrambled to gather information about the Fukushima Reactor, they have been denied access to the direct information provided by the government and one consequence of this is that "rumor-rife news has been broadcast overseas."

In fact, access has been limited in two ways. First, while Chief Cabinet Secretary Edano Yukio holds twice daily press conferences for representatives of the big Japanese media, registered representatives of freelance and internet media are limited to a single press conference per week. Second, in contrast to Japanese media who are briefed regularly by Edano and periodically by Prime Miniser Kan, foreign media are briefed exclusively by administrative staff.

Uesugi also notes that at TEPCO press conferences, which are now being held at company headquarters, foreign correspondents and Japanese freelancers regularly ask probing questions while mainstream journalists simply record and report company statements reiterating that the

situation is basically under control and there is nothing to worry about. One reason for this, Uesugi suggests, is that TEPCO, a giant media sponsor, has an annual 20 billion yen advertising budget. "The media keeps defending the information from TEPCO!" "The Japanese media today is no different from the wartime propaganda media that kept repeating to the very end that 'Japan is winning the war against America,'" Uesugi exclaimed.

There is one particularly telling example of the media shielding TEPCO by suppressing information. This concerns "plutonium". According to Uesugi, after the reactor blew up on March 14, there was concern about the leakage of plutonium. However, astonishingly, until two weeks later when Uesugi asked, not a single media representative had raised the question of plutonium at TEPCO's press conferences.

On March 26, in response to Uesugi's query, TEPCO stated, "We do not measure the level of plutonium and do not even have a detector to scale it." Ironically, the next day, Chief Cabinet Secretary Edano announced that "plutonium was detected".

When TEPCO finally released data on radioactive plutonium on March 28, it stated that plutonium - 238, -239, and -240 were found in the ground, but insisted that it posed no human risk. Since TEPCO provided no clarification of the meaning of the plutonium radiation findings, the mainstream press merely reported the presence of the radiation without assessment ([link](#)). Nippon Television on March 29 headlined its [interview](#) with Tokyo University Prof. Nakagawa Keiichi, a radiation specialist, "Plutonium from the power plant—No effect on neighbors."

On March 15, Uesugi criticized TEPCO for its closed attitude toward information on a TBS radio program. For this, he was immediately dismissed from his regular program. The scandal involving TEPCO's silencing of the media took an interesting turn two weeks later. At the time of the disaster on March 11, TEPCO Chairman Katsumata Tsunehisa was hosting dozens of mainstream media executives on a "study session" in China. When asked about this fact by freelance journalist Tanaka Ryusaku at a TEPCO press conference on March 30, Katsumata defended the practice.

"It is a fact that we traveled together to China," he said, "[TEPCO] did not pay all the expenses of the trip, but we paid more than they did. Certainly they are executives of the mass media, but they are all members of the study session."

When Tanaka requested the names of the media executives hosted by TEPCO in China, Katsumata retorted, "I cannot reveal their names since this is private information." But it is precisely such collusive relations between mainstream media, the government and TEPCO, that results in the censorship of information concerning nuclear problems.

Now the Japanese government has moved to crack down on independent reportage and criticism of the government's policies in the wake of the disaster by deciding what citizens may or may not talk about in public. A new project team has been created by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication, the National Police Agency, and METI to combat "rumors" deemed harmful to Japanese security in the wake of the Fukushima disaster.

The government charges that the damage caused by earthquakes and by the nuclear accident are being magnified by irresponsible rumors, and the government must take action for the sake of the public good. The project team has begun to send "[letters of request](#)" to such organizations as telephone companies, internet providers, cable television stations, and others, demanding that they "take adequate measures based on the guidelines in response to illegal information." The measures include erasing any information from internet sites that the authorities deem harmful to public order and morality.

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