

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 85

Gar Alperovitz

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ANNOUNCER: From the KPFK studios in Southern California, it's the Ralph Nader Radio Hour.

STEVE SKROVAN: Welcome to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour. My name is Steve Skrovan along with David Feldman. How you doing, David?

DAVID FELDMAN: I'm doing excellent, thank you.

STEVE SKROVAN: And the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

RALPH NADER: Hello, ready to go.

STEVE SKROVAN: Alright, very good. We have an excellent show for you today. Today we get to a lot of your listener questions. I know we promise this every show, and sometimes we don't get to it. But this time, I guarantee you, we will work our way through your questions submitted either through Facebook or the Ralph Nader Radio Hour website. So hang on for that in the second half. We will also, as has become our custom, check in with the Corporate Crime Reporter, Russell Mohkiber, at the National Press Building in Washington, DC. But before any of that happens, we're going to talk about community wealth building. So David, tell us about our featured guest today.

DAVID FELDMAN: Our first guest is Gar Alperovitz. He is the author of "The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb," a book that insists America did not need to drop the bomb on the Japanese to win World War II. We'll get to that later on in the show. Gar has an impressive resume. We can devote an entire show just listing his achievements. Suffice to say Dr. Alperovitz is an historian, political economist,

activist writer and government official. In addition to a distinguished career in academia, he's also the President of the National Center for Economic and Security Alternatives, and is a cofounder of the Democracy Collaborative, a research institution developing practical, policy-focused and systematic paths towards ecologically sustainable, community oriented change and the democratization of wealth. He is also the Co-chair of the Next System Project, a project of the Democracy Collaborative. Welcome, Gar Alperovitz.

GAR ALPEROVITZ: Good to be with you.

RALPH NADER: Good to have you on the program, Gar. Gar and I go back a long way, which illustrates that he has experience in Congress as well, because I first met him back in the 60's when he was the Chief of Staff of Senator Gaylord Nelson from Wisconsin, a great progressive senator. And Gar and I worked on many issues, but especially the tire safety bill that Senator Gaylord Nelson spearheaded, which became law. And it's important when we talk with Gar Alperovitz to bring down a lot of his proposals to the very necessities of the people in this country, especially tens of millions of poor people, whether they're going to have enough food, enough shelter, enough heat in the winter, whether they're going to have adequate public transit, what kind of community neighborhoods they're going to live in. And his description of what he's doing started out with this short sentence, which I think opens the discussion properly. Quote: "Few Americans are aware of the steady buildup of innovative community wealth-building strategies throughout the United States." CommunityWealth.org brings together, for the first time, information about these institutions that are multiplying dramatically in recent years throughout the country. We read the business pages of the papers and it's all about big business and conventional small business, which is almost heavily franchised businesses like MacDonald's franchises or Jiffy Lube franchises, but what Gar's going to talk about today is quite different and quite exciting. So what do you mean by community assets?

GAR ALPEROVITZ: The starting point on all this I think is to recognize that a mere four hundred people, you could get them in a small conference room, have more wealth themselves than the

bottom 186 million people taken together. Wealth ownership is extremely concentrated in the United States. I once said at a lecture that it's almost feudal or medieval. And a Medieval historian came up to me afterward and said it was never that bad in the medieval era. This is far, far more concentrated. Wealth building, community wealth building is attempting to build up ownership in a democratic form. The most obvious and one of the most common ones people experience is an ordinary co-op, in which it's a one person, one vote form of holding wealth. And if you count all the co-ops in the country, some are agricultural, some of course the big credit unions are one person, one vote banks, there are 130 million Americans who are participating in one way or another in some form of democratic ownership of the wealth production. So that's the general idea, but it is exploding around the country and the local newspapers just haven't been covering it yet.

RALPH NADER: You talk a lot about community development organizations. Explain that, how many there are, what do they do back in the neighborhoods and communities around the country?

GAR ALPEROVITZ: It's a hard number to come to, because there's so many different forms. In the old form of community development corporations, which still exist, there are many hundreds of them around the country, basically tried to set up housing and small business. The new strategies are basically trying to set up actual ownership of wealth. Nobody's got a really good count of this, because as I say, the local newspapers, one, don't want to report on it, they don't do any business reporting that has to do with common democratic ownership, and they're pretty much, the local newspapers are very, very stressed financially so they don't really even have the reporters. So if you go to that website you mentioned, you'll find lots and lots of detail, because that agglomerates information.

But let me give you an example of one of the most exciting ones and to give you an idea of what's happening in the country. In Cleveland, and it's a project we worked on, in a neighborhood of about 40,000 people, mostly black, the average family income is about \$18,000. A really low income average. And unemployment is at about 22 percent, extreme unemployment. But right in the middle of that neighborhood, about 40,000 people, there is a neighborhood corporation, it's a nonprofit corporation

for the whole neighborhood, and attached to it are worker-owned cooperatives. They're not freestanding, they're connected to a community building nonprofit corporation. And they're not little, they're not tiny. For instance, one of them is a very advanced solar installation company. And it's worker-owned, but also connected to this neighborhood complex. It has a huge production. It's got one of the largest urban solar installations in the country, a field that they've established. A second one would be, it's an industrial scale laundry. Again, owned by the workers as part of this complex. And industrial scale means it supplies hospitals and universities and nursing homes. And again, worker owned. And the third one is an urban greenhouse. And again, not small. This one is capable of producing something like three million heads of lettuce a year.

So this is the complex, and a further feature of it, and this is beginning to happen in many parts of the country, right in the middle of this neighborhood, this very poor neighborhood and typical around the country, are three big quasi-public institutions. That is to say, the Cleveland Clinic, world famous hospital is right there. University Hospital is right there, and Case Western University is right there. Well, they buy together \$3 billion, with a "b" dollars in goods and services mostly from wherever they've been buying. But now they've begun to concentrate some of their purchases, and you know, a lot of taxpayer money in hospitals and universities, and they're trying to use some of their leverage to support this neighborhood-building complex of worker co-ops. So it's a very sophisticated development that kind of moves, it's called the Evergreen Corporation, that's beginning to move forward in smaller ways in different parts of the country. There's a smaller one in Atlanta, one being developed in Richmond, Virginia. There's another one being developed in Jackson, Florida. And there was one, Jacksonville, Florida, there's several around the country, smaller scale, that are beginning to move in exactly this same parallel direction, transforming ownership in a way that is democratic but also building neighborhoods and building worker self-management in a whole different model that is a very democratic model.

RALPH NADER: What's the big block for not spreading even faster than what you indicated? Is it that the big banks are not interested in providing credit? That the co-op banks are mostly in the farm

area coming out of the 1930's when they were organized to provide credit for farmers? But is credit shortages the problem here? I take it the Small Business Administration is not very active in this area.

GAR ALPEROVITZ: Credit is part of the problem. I think what's really interesting is partly it's knowledge that you can actually do this. People don't realize that it can be done. Partly it's startup funding. So think about it this way. If you can, and this is true in any city that's got big universities or hospitals, if you can convince them and it's in their interests to do this, to begin buying locally from something that helps build the community, they give you a contract, for instance, to do the laundry or buy the lettuce or even to put a solar installation in, you can go to the bank with that and get credit. So that becomes critical. The marketing is a really big part of this. The other piece is startup funding. And I think this is where the federal government could play a major role. You know, a big corporation going into any business situation sets up a team that go in and survey what can be done and what stages of development and what kind of financing is needed, what programs, government programs are available, state, local and national. And there's a whole startup complex before they start making money. That's a big piece of the puzzle, how to get that rolling in the community. Community foundations can play a big role in this, and they're beginning to kind of turn their attention to it. The Cleveland Foundation, which is what's behind, in part, this development I just mentioned, it's literally the oldest community foundation not only in the United States but in the world. It's kind of the granddaddy of them all. And they pioneered some of this. And we're beginning to see different foundations, community foundations, are already getting to trying to begin to use this model.

RALPH NADER: Gar, you know, we're in a presidential campaign, and for once, with Bernie Sanders running as a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination, Senator Bernie Sanders from Vermont, the word "socialism" is coming into currency again. People are praising it, attacking it. And it's really local, socialism. I mean, there aren't really anybody around in politics saying that we should nationalize the defense industry, although John Kenneth Galbraith thought we should have. Why don't you talk about local socialism? I just wrote a column saying local socialism is as American as apple pie. It

goes back over 200 years. If you don't believe it, look at your post office, look at your public library, look at your public works, look at all kinds of local institutions. One sentence in your material stood out, and I'd like you to talk about it because it should become part of the presidential campaign here. And you say, quote: "In one of the fastest growing and most interesting innovations, a host of local municipal enterprises to help anchor jobs and contribute to the tax base have gained the support of Republican and Democratic mayors alike." End quote. What are you talking about?

GAR ALPEROVITZ: Well, that's what's interesting about this. Again, if you go back to this Cleveland model. On the ground, you could actually call this community socialism, as you did, Ralph. What is it? Because it's community ownership and worker, in this case, it's community and worker ownership combined. And you can call that a form of socialism, but it is as American as apple pie. A hundred and thirty million people in the United States today are members of one or another form of co-op. Very, very conventional, very common. So what really counts on the ground in our experience, and this is with conservatives, as well, I don't mean the Washington type rhetoric that you get from politicians that's trying to create controversy. I mean genuine conservatives at the local level, and I go back to my boyhood friends in Wisconsin where I'm from, I have a very good conservative friends as a good example. On the ground, what he's interested in, does this work? Is it practical? Do these people get a share in the ownership? Does it produce results? Is it effective? And he's all for it if it's effective and practical. That's our experience. You get away from the Washington rhetoric to people who care about locality, it becomes very, very interesting.

RALPH NADER: Yeah. Just to look at an example, you ask people around the country, do you believe in local socialism? They say no. I say well, you ever hear of the public drinking water department? You ever hear of the post office? You ever hear of the public highways? Do you ever hear of all kinds of things that have been established by our forebears? You know, what's interesting, like Nebraska is a bastion of Republican conservatism, and it has a public utility, a big public utility. New Hampshire, a bastion of right wing Republican conservatism, all the liquor stores are owned by the State

of New Hampshire. So it's important to have this kind of discussion. So let me ask you, Gar, is Bernie Sanders talking about this? Because he's going to be challenged because he calls himself a Democratic Socialist, and I thought he sort of bumbled the answer when he was questioned on the debate a few days ago, the Democratic debate. Because he's in the eye of the media now, anything he says is news. Do you think he's going to pick this up, all this work that you and others have been doing to establish and build local wealth and local services for millions of people around the country?

GAR ALPEROVITZ: Well, I hope he will. The one thing that we know he has talked about, and I think he mentioned the other day in one of his talks, something about the local police and the local fire department are a couple good examples of socialism in the United States. But what he has been kind of backing for some time now is worker co-ops. He's got a couple pieces of legislation that support worker-owned co-ops. I haven't heard him talk about it, but I'd certainly like to hear him go further in that direction. Now let me pick up on what you said about Nebraska. Nebraska is a very red, conservative state. There are no private utilities in Nebraska. The entire state is publically owned utilities, and they make a profit for the state. So you find this very, very conservative state looking at these actual practicality of it, and very supportive. That's true throughout the South. I mean, 25 percent, I can use a good figure on this. 25 percent of electricity now in the United States is done either through city-owned public utilities or public utilities and co-ops, another form of democratic ownership, if you like.

RALPH NADER: Rural electric co-ops.

GAR ALPEROVITZ: Rural electric, but other co-ops as well that are in one way or another public or cooperative, 25 percent. So it's a very, when you start, and the whole community wealth building effort that we're seeing around the country all begins at the neighborhood or the cooperative level, and then only kind of gets bigger if you have to because of some technical or larger reasons. So it's very traditionally American, and I think it's growing in significant part, and this is the driving force of this, what we're finding, is because everything else is failing, to tell you the truth. That is, the political system is jammed, there's no capacity to move money in the serious, traditional way of the old kind of

liberals ways that used to be possible. So the business community and the corporations are not interested in what's going on locally in this way. So the pain levels are developing, and what we're finding is that people are kind of looking at what can you do, and they discover that you're going to have to roll up your sleeves, and if you start doing something locally it's got to be benefiting a lot of folks, and the cooperative or community or neighborhood corporations become logical answers to that when you actually look at what's feasible. I think that's what's driving this development.

RALPH NADER: And actually there's a bigger issue here. There's a huge area in our country in the Tennessee Valley that was extremely poor, and the Tennessee Valley Authority, which is a government corporation, was established, led by Senator Norris from Nebraska in the U.S. Senate in the 1930's to generate and distribute electricity. More than any other institution, it helped economic development, including capitalist development, in those states in the South, in Tennessee and going on south in Alabama. Not only that, but whenever big capitalism gets in trouble, what bails them out? It's called socialism, government bailouts, the U.S. taxpayer. So let's get rid of this propaganda, I think. We really got to put everything on the table. And let me ask you this question, Gar.

GAR ALPEROVITZ: Let me tell you something, if we just go back to your Tennessee Valley Authority, because that's a good one, Ralph. This is a huge public corporation, definitely a socialist corporation. It's the biggest one in the United States. And there it sits right in the Tennessee Valley. There's somebody probably in the Bureau of the Budget of the Obama Administration had a bright idea, why don't we sell it off to the private corporations? And the outrage that came against that from the Tennessee Valley political people was huge, led by the Republican conservatives, who really wanted to keep that there because their constituents liked it.

RALPH NADER: That's right.

GAR ALPEROVITZ: And that's another example. If it's practical, you can make it happen.

RALPH NADER: Yeah. One qualification is David Freeman, who headed the Tennessee Valley Authority told me on more than one occasion, they went nuclear big and they paid a big price. But they just opened the first new nuclear plant since the 1970's in the Tennessee Valley. But apart from this, let me ask you this question. When I look at your materials, what jumps out at me is the lack of fervor by ordinary people who know that they're serviced every day by these public institutions that we've just talked about. A more recent one is this. There are 30 million people in this country that banks aren't interested in. They don't want to have them have savings accounts or checking accounts. It's not worth their trouble for Bank of America or Citi Group or Wells Fargo. So the proposal increasingly, starting with some of our groups and your groups and the Inspector General of the Postal Service, and now a very excellent new book by a law professor, says why don't we resurrect postal banking? Postal banking was shut down in the post office in 1968. It was a great success. That's why the banks wanted to get rid of it. But it collected the savings and provided simple financial services for people who lived near the post office. What is your movement doing on that? And do you think that's going to become an issue, and whether Bernie Sanders will raise it? Thirty million people will benefit, and the Post Office will benefit, and there are more post offices and post office branches than there is MacDonald's and Starbucks and Walmarts combined all over the country. Very accessible.

GAR ALPEROVITZ: No, it's a very important direction, and it's common in many other countries. The Japanese system's got a huge postal banking system and it's very local, it's oriented to low deposits. And it could be done. I think Bernie has picked up on that. I've been told the other day that he's making that an issue. But yes, it's another area where we could see this development. I think what's driving a lot of what's happening, and I think why I'm cautiously optimistic about this direction, is people are, you know, there's economic and social pain building up and nobody's passing traditional liberal programs that would help. And I think people are beginning to sort of take it into their own hands and say it's time to go in a new direction. And postal banking could be very important in this, I think.

RALPH NADER: Here's a caution I want to share with you, Gar, and I'm not the only one. That the community development movement is extremely empirical and connects with the needs every day of people. Nobody is going to deny that. On the other hand, can it also begin challenging the massive concentration of wealth, much of it the people's wealth, the commons, for example, the public lands, the public airwaves, the massive R&D that's built all these industries, biotech and pharmaceutical and aerospace and computers. This is all done with taxpayer money, and they don't get anything back for it. And I remember in reading some of your very good books, one phrase stood out when you said that people should start demanding their residual. The residual means getting something for their tax dollars and instead of having their tax dollars go to the top one percent and Wall Street and the global capitalists. So how does this activity also have a good side effect, Gar, in saying look, we earned it, we want it back. We want this residual back. In Western Europe, they get a residual, which is why there's less grumbling about taxes, because they get tuition-free education, universal health care, better pension plans, great public transit, better public parks, four weeks or more paid vacation. I mean, they get something back. Our taxpayers get very little back, which is why there's this almost self-destructive taxpayer rebellion. Instead of going after getting back what they earned, they try to cut it away. And what's your view on this? How can this community development effort, all these institutions, begin having a political impact and saying look, we want a restored minimum living wage? We want better private pensions. We want a transfer of the bloated military budget into building public works in community after community.

GAR ALPEROVITZ: Well, I agree with you entirely. And you know, in one of the books I did that we went through, so much of the research that's gone into, for instance, the internet and the computers that made Bill Gates. That's all public money. And invention after invention after invention, this has been researched to death, and most of it, if not of the big things, we find there's public dollars went into it and private gain. Well, if you begin tapping some of that, that kind of funding, what the results of that would be, you'd have an extraordinary kind of benefits for the public would be possible out of what the public already invested. So I think the question becomes building a new politics that

understands the relationship between wealth ownership and wealth development and benefits. So far, we haven't done much of that. You, I think, were one of the first ones way back I think in the early 70's to push for the co-op bank, which is a piece of that puzzle and could have been developed if we had a political movement to take it in the right direction.

RALPH NADER: Yes.

GAR ALPEROVITZ: But I think the next political movement's got to move towards ownership at every level, and particularly when there's been huge public investment, as there has been in science and technology behind many of the modern developments. Jet airplanes being another obvious one. But the one that is really crucial is the whole internet system and all of the development. Bill Gates himself, when he developed the operating system that became the basis of his fortune, was working at MIT on a contract paid for by the U.S. government, the taxpayers. So you dig through these things, and after many, many pharmaceuticals, you find the same thing. Television, you find the same thing. The jet aircraft, you find the same thing. The public put the money in, and then the corporations run away with it. I think that whole idea of who owns things has got to be rebuilt from the bottom up. Co-ops are important and community ownership is important directly, but even more in beginning to generate an idea about really what should be owned in common and what should be private and how do you get a different mix to take back some of these benefits?

RALPH NADER: You know, for our listeners, we own the biggest wealth in the United States by far. The people own the commons. That's one-third of America, the public lands, offshore, all the minerals, the forests, the grazing lands, own the public airwaves, own all this R&D money that made Google and Intel and Cisco possible. But we don't control it. It's controlled by the corporations. In other words, we're the landlords of the public airwaves, but the radio and TV stations are the tenants and they get control 24 hours a day on our radio and TV stations free, free, through the Federal Communications Commission. So part of it is education, isn't it? We don't grow up knowing about the commons. We don't grow up knowing about the kind of economy you've been talking about. We just grow up to say hey, you

know, it's Horatio Alger, you can be a Wall Street magnate if you work hard and follow the rules. So it starts with our elementary schools, high schools, universities. Even at law school, I don't recall ever seeing anything on the commons, the property in this country that's owned by all the people.

GAR ALPEROVITZ: Let me pick up on what you said, Ralph.

RALPH NADER: Yeah, go ahead.

GAR ALPEROVITZ: Because as you know, one of the areas where we have seen some really exciting development is in public cable television and public cable networks. Because they're beginning to get several, I think the last number I saw was 400 of them, and a number of them in referenda, saying this ought to be public rather than private and give it to Comcast. So there's a movement building up to do the same thing with internet services and local television that will put some actual positive traction on in different parts of the country.

RALPH NADER: We got to get it into the political arena of elections, just the way the big corporations do. You'll see the debate, the second debate by the Republicans. It's all going to be on economic issues. And you know, it's going to be Federal Reserve, it's going to be Wall Street, it's going to be tax reductions for big business, deregulation. They control the dialog. I think we have to turn it around, and you helped a lot in doing this. Let me just ask you, quickly give your website where people can find out more, and then I'm going to put a couple questions to you in conclusion.

GAR ALPEROVITZ: I'll give you three different websites. One is called Community-Wealth, put the dash in, because there's one without a dash that's different. Dot org or dot com. That's where you'll find reporting on all this stuff we've been talking about in detail. The other one is called TheDemocracyCollaborative.org. And that's kind of give you a general idea of what we're doing. And then there is something called TheNextSystem.com. And that's a large project trying to open up these questions in the systemic level as well, and it's beginning to get some real traction as to how do we open

up big picture, where does this all go? So those are the three major websites, and you'll find a lot of detail and chapter and verse on all that we were talking about there.

RALPH NADER: And they give you things to do right in your community, like how to push for postal banking. That's where the change comes from. More and more people spending a few hours here and there pressing for this kind of community resurgence and development. In one of your materials, you say there are also now more than 11,000 employee-owned firms, ESOPs, they're called. More than 11,000 employee-owned firms in the United States, which employ more people than workers in America's private sector labor unions. Now it's been said that the ESOP is really a tax dodge, that the workers really don't control these companies, and that the companies don't behave all that differently from companies that are owned by stockholders. What's your answer?

GAR ALPEROVITZ: Well, it's a very good point, because the ESOP, it's employee stock ownership plan structure, is a permissive structure. There are certain tax advantages, and this is very common now because so many people are retiring. If you own a company and sell it to your workers through this ESOP mechanism, you get a tax break. So that's a really important time. It can be structured with unions, there are several with unions, and as democratic ownership and control. Most of them are not. Most of them, people haven't woken up to it. They're controlled by a trust and they're just like any other company, except the workers themselves get a bigger share of the profits. That is a big change. So there is a movement within the ESOP movement to try to democratize and use the power that they have to have democratic control. But it's a very small movement so far. We'd like to see encouragement. But the fact is, labor unions unfortunately have been going down in numbers, and worker ownership through ESOPs and co-ops have gone up over the last thirty years. So there's a possibility here of really something happening if people begin demanding what's already available to them under law, but they haven't been taking advantage of it. It's been kind of a tax dodge for some people selling under these for many people.

RALPH NADER: I think that's the key point you just made. It's the Achilles' heel of co-ops and all kinds of worker-owned enterprises. That is, folks, if you don't become active as a member of a co-op, if you don't become active as a member of an employee-owned firm, etc., etc., the structures aren't going to work to the potential that they can work. And so it is changing our culture, changing the way we use some of our time, raising our expectation levels, rather than just paying through the nose for convenience of having stuff delivered instantly to us when we buy it from Amazon or elsewhere. And Amazon is doing a lot to destroy the very kind of community that Gar is trying to rebuild with his movement. Just to change the subject to something extremely important historically, the bomb. Bombing Hiroshima, bombing Nagasaki, after that occurred the American people were told by the military establishment and the political establishment, especially Harry Truman, that if we didn't do that, we would have had to take Japan door to door fighting, a million American soldiers would have died. And so that is why destroying over 300,000 lives in a matter of seconds in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, not to mention the cancer that followed, was necessary. Well, as a young man, you dug into this history and you came out with some pretty astounding findings about what some of our leading generals thought in contrast to Harry Truman. Can you just tell us, was it necessary to drop those two bombs, which were dropped deliberately to kill civilians? That was the plan. They were not military targets.

GAR ALPEROVITZ: I wrote a book, this was my doctoral dissertation many years ago at Cambridge University, and then I wrote another one on the 50th anniversary. We now have documents for most of the story, but not all of it. The fact is that, think about this. President Dwight Eisenhower is on record publically and privately in his memoirs, but publically he said it wasn't necessary to hit them with that awful thing. That's a direct quote. He claims he told President Truman not to do it. And he certainly told the Secretary of War, Stimson, not to do it. The Chief of Staff to the President, a five-star admiral at the time, head of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, called it outrageous, a barbarian thing. Almost every major general and admiral who was in the know, on the inside, the highest men are publically on record saying the use of that atomic bomb was totally unnecessary. Many historians

now, finally, have come to realize one, the bombing was totally unnecessary. Most people agree with that now who have studied the documents, that's common knowledge among historians.

RALPH NADER: What do they mean by unnecessary?

GAR ALPEROVITZ: The war was about to end anyway. All the Japanese were asking for was that we not get rid of their Emperor in some kind of form without any power, because they regarded him as a god. And we'd already decided that internally, we were going to kick the Emperor, because it would help control the military. So there was no difference in what was going to happen. And the Japanese were trying to get out of the war. We had broken the Japanese codes, we knew that they were begging to get out of the war. And there couldn't have been an invasion for another three months, because we had to move all our troops over to do an invasion. So most historians recognize now fully that the use of the atomic bomb was totally unnecessary. The real debate was, was it known at the time? And the answer to that now is that the codes were broken and the top military people, virtually all of them are on record saying they understood the war could be ended without the bomb. The Joint Chiefs of Staff begged Truman at the Potsdam conference just before the bomb was used, the British and the American Joint Chiefs of Staff begged Truman to say what they were going to say anyway, you can keep your Emperor if you don't have power. They knew they were going to do that anyway. And they said the war would end. We wouldn't have to kill so many people. They were horrified by this. You find the U.S. military was almost to a person horrified. If you go down to the Naval Museum, as opposed to the Air Force Museum, you'll find a plaque on the wall that says right today, it was discovered very recently, somebody pointed it out to me and sent me a picture, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was not a military decision. It was decided by the politicians. The military was basically against it. So we know this story pretty well.

RALPH NADER: Japan was in ruins. I mean, the military was destroyed, Japan was in ruins, and the question is, Gar, why did President Harry Truman give the order? And why did he do it again a few days later in Nagasaki?

GAR ALPEROVITZ: That's where it gets pretty speculative, but not entirely speculative. The strongest interpretation, and we don't have many records on this, they didn't keep public records of any kind, there is a lot of evidence of what they are really showing the bomb for was to show the Russians that the United States had some, this new power and that that's what you were really talking about. And they also wanted to end the war before the Russians could get in. We'd been begging the Russians to come in and help us before the bomb was started. And then with the bomb we showed them this new muscle. Harry Truman called it, "I've got a hammer on those boys." A direct quote. The Secretary of State, James F. Burns, who really ran the show for Truman, was quite open with the scientists. He met with them in May and he said, I know the war's going to end. But we need the bomb, quote, "to make the Russians more manageable." Now we can't prove all of this because there aren't any really solid documents, but the strongest line of evidence strongly suggests they were thinking about this is going to give us real clout in the post-war struggle against the Russians. That's where the interpretations and the evidence points. And one day we'll have more documents and be able to really nail it down to the wall.

RALPH NADER: Of course, there was enormous state terrorism by the Japanese and German military in Europe and Asia. But right now we're just talking about the decision to drop the atomic bomb on civilians for the first time in history. In conclusion, Gar, is it fair to say, using modern lingo, that the attack on civilians, hospitals, schools, residential areas, blowing up Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which were not really military targets, against the advice of our top military commands, including General Eisenhower, is it fair to say that this was a massive demonstration of state terrorism?

GAR ALPEROVITZ: You could call it that. You could probably call it a war crime. It's only been litigated once. It's really interested, and we tried to search for, there ought to be some real legal work done on this. The Tokyo courts litigated it once and so found. But think about it this way. The Japanese young men of military age were all out at war. Who was left in Hiroshima and Nagasaki were young kids, women and old people. And they were bombed, neither one of those places had a significant military installation. They did have small, modest military installations, but they were not regarded as

significant. That's why they'd never been bombed throughout the war. They were left unblemished. And basically, those were the people we killed in that period. It's a very, very nasty story about American diplomacy and politics.

RALPH NADER: And there never was going to be an invasion and door to door fighting, exposing our soldiers. That's what they were telling our soldiers, by the way.

GAR ALPEROVITZ: No. The soldiers were told that. They believed it, understandably. At the highest levels, the generals and admirals, they knew the war was over. You couldn't have an invasion for another three months, because you had to bring up all the troops and all the supplies. They knew the war was going to end within a couple weeks in August rather than in November. So there's a mythology here, and it's not a particularly pleasant mythology.

RALPH NADER: And your book's name, your two books' names on the subject? Could you give that to listeners as we close?

GAR ALPEROVITZ: Well, the biggest one, which I did at the 50th anniversary, was called "The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb." Very simple. The first one that got, the book opened this debate, is called "Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam." Potsdam was the conference in Germany where the decision was made. But "The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb" is kind of easy to remember, and that's out there and available and kind of lays out the details.

DAVID FELDMAN: I have a question. Do we know how Stalin reacted to the atomic bomb? Did it temper his military decisions in any way?

GAR ALPEROVITZ: What we know is that he set up the decision to try to build nuclear weapons for the Russians, and intensified the overall effort. There's a lot of evidence that before the atomic bomb was developed, and this was the Roosevelt policy, there was kind of a reason for the Russians and the Americans to cooperate. And that reason was a big one, which was we needed them to help us hold down Germany in the post-war period. And they needed us to help to hold down Germany.

So there was kind of a basis for kind of a mutual agreement to kind of hold things together in the post-war period. Well, the atomic bomb both kind of scared the Russians, which is one of the things we wanted to do, unfortunately, and also we didn't need the Russians anymore once we had the atomic bomb to control the Germans. So it kind of made the possibility of an alliance based on real politics disappear. It got very ugly in 1946 and 1947.

DAVID FELDMAN: But I mean Truman was aware that Stalin was going to encroach on Eastern Europe once Germany fell. So could an argument, wouldn't people who argue with you say, well, we had to kill a million lives to save three million? That kind of argument.

GAR ALPEROVITZ: Well, I think there were people who thought that you could get the Russians out of Eastern Europe, but not many of them really believed that, because the Russians had been invaded through Eastern Europe so many times, with 30 million lost during World War II. They were clearly not going to let the invasion be controlled by somebody else, given what they'd experienced. The conservatives within the U.S. government, Secretary of War Stimson, were saying basically, look, if we clamp down, they're going to get tougher in Eastern Europe. If we ease up, we got a chance of them easing up. So there's a whole argument made by some of the sophisticated conservatives that we made it a lot worse by trying to get tough on them at that point. For instance, General Marshall, who was head of the U.S. military, at one point said if we clamp down, they're going to take Czechoslovakia. And Czechoslovakia was not, it was occupied but it was a democratic system at that point. And boom, as soon as we clamped down, they clamped down. So there's a whole 'nother story about the Cold War and what the Russians might have done or might not have done had different things gone a different way. Roosevelt had a different policy.

STEVE SKROVAN: I have another question. And this is not a moral question but a practical one. It's kind of along the same lines as David. Is there any argument to be made, in retrospect, that because we saw the horrors of the atomic bomb at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, that in the long term it has had an

arresting effect on our willingness to use it again? That it made it real instead of being an abstract concept? What would your view on that be?

GAR ALPEROVITZ: You know, it's very speculative, and I think there is something to that argument. On the other hand, what's happened is nuclear proliferation all over the world because there's no arms control, rather than, you know, we wanted to build up more and more nuclear weapons and we really didn't want to have arms control in any serious way. So what you've got is a lot of possibilities for either accidents or terrorism. If you look at the Pakistani nuclear installation and the really rabid kind of religious control of some parts of that, there's a lot of nasty stuff that's flowed from this. People tried, there was an attempt to cut short the arms race. What you say is true, nobody wants to see the atomic bombs start to fly. But on the other hand, I think our policy contributed to building up the arms race around the world. We knew that once we had them, the other guys would try to get them, too, because they had to. So it's not a great story either way.

DAVID FELDMAN: Can I ask Ralph a question and then have the Professor respond about Social Security? Has there ever been talk of taking our Social Security and investing it in the Fortune 500 companies to gain a better return for retirees, and what effect that would have on corporate decision-making? Would that ever be allowed in this country?

RALPH NADER: No, right now it's not allowed. The Republicans in Congress wanted to do that, and they were beaten back a few years ago.

STEVE SKROVAN: That would be done through private accounts. But I'm talking about like official Social Security Administration.

RALPH NADER: Well, the surplus doesn't exist. It's just government IOU's. Because the huge surplus that was built up after the 1983 Social Security agreement between the Republicans and Democrats under Reagan was used for daily government deficit spending, military deficit spending, other kinds of deficit spending. And so it's just government IOU's, that's all, and it's pretty hard to mess

around with government IOU's in the U.S. stock market. So, well thank you very much Gar Alperovitz. This has really been a very interesting discussion. I hope people who are listening will go to the website, CommunityUnderlyingWealth.org, and other websites that are cited, and participate in the community. Learn what other communities have done. It was done by ordinary people doing extraordinary things. You can do the same thing in your community. Thank you very much, Gar.

GAR ALPEROVITZ: Thanks, Ralph. Good to be with you.

STEVE SKROVAN: We've been talking to Gar Alperovitz. To find out more about his work on community wealth building, go to either Community-Wealth.org or DemocracyCollaborative.org or TheNextSystem.org. And his book about the atomic bomb is "The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb." We'll link to that on our website. Before we get to your listener questions, we're going to take a short break to check in with the corporate crime reporter, Russell Mohkiber. Russell?

RUSSELL MOHKIBER: From the National Press Building in Washington DC, this is your corporate crime reporter morning minute for Friday, October 30, 2015. I'm Russell Mohkiber. Politicians and law enforcement officials in the United States make a big deal about foreign bribery. But Mike Taylor, an Assistant Professor at the Southern Illinois University School of Law, wants to know, what about bribery right here in the United States? And what about bribery committed by our own government? Taylor says that it's much easier to point the finger at corrupt foreign officials and corrupt foreign business practices than it is to look in the mirror and realize that much of what the U.S. government labels corruption abroad happens right here at home. The elephant in the room is a system of legalized domestic bribery in the United States. Why make a distinction between cash payments bribery and Citizens United bribery? For the corporate crime reporter, I'm Russell Mohkiber.

DAVID FELDMAN: Thank you, Russell. Remember, if you have missed any of this episode on the radio, you can go to RalphNaderRadioHour.com and catch up with our conversations with Gar Alperovitz or any of the other informative conversations we've had on our previous 84 episodes. We

provide links to guests and their work. You can submit questions, and we have also added a new feature, a downloadable pdf transcript of the show. You'll see the link posted just above the audio player on your computer. I said you could ask questions by going to [RalphNaderRadioHour](#), so let's get right to them, Steve.

STEVE SKROVAN: Alright. Our first question, Ralph, is from Scott Benowitz, and he says, do you believe that statehood status for Washington DC might realistically be achievable any time within the foreseeable future?

RALPH NADER: Not if the Republicans control the Congress, because they don't want two more Democratic senators and one more Democratic representative. But in 2009 and 2010, when President Obama and the Congress were Democratic, and President Obama said that he favored statehood, although not in an official statement, just in a private remark that was overheard at a gathering, that was the best time to get statehood. People may not know around the country that people in the District of Columbia cannot vote for members of Congress who have the vote. They have a representative, but she doesn't have a vote, she just is an observer there. And this is the only state capitol in the western world where the people are disenfranchised. So the argument for it is pretty overwhelming. I think it would have great support, obviously, in the District of Columbia. The Democrats had a great chance to do it in 2009 and 2010, but they never even actually proposed it. So the answer is, not until the Democrats get control of Congress and the White House at the same time and really want to give the people the District of Columbia what democracy is supposed to be all about, which is voting members in the Congress.

STEVE SKROVAN: Why was it set up that way in the first place?

DAVID FELDMAN: Yeah, I was just going to ask that.

STEVE SKROVAN: I asked it first, not you, David.

DAVID FELDMAN: OK.

RALPH NADER: It was set up that way in the first place because they wanted to depoliticize the federal district. And it was carved out of Maryland largely, and it's pretty small. It's got about, oh, 700,000 people at the most living there. But a lot of them are not from the District of Columbia, especially the power brokers. And they don't seem to mind not having the vote in Congress. They have other ways of influencing Congress. All the trade associations and all the lobbyists.

DAVID FELDMAN: This question comes from John Rikowski. He says Ralph, how could a third party that represents the American people be successfully formed?

RALPH NADER: If a lot of people like you roll up their sleeves and start chapters of a third party, run local candidates to give the third party a real base at the state and federal level, then move to the state candidates and then move to the national. That's not likely to happen unless we get some maybe thousand of very active people all over the country to get going. I don't think it takes more than that, actually. But that's a big order, given how few people have tried in the past. The other answer to your question is, if a multi-billionaire or billionaire gets in and starts a party, billionaires get credibility by the press. They get credibility by pollsters. Ross Perot, for example, tossed it into a three-way race with his Reform Party in 1992. But he got 19 million votes and not a single electoral vote. And that has discouraged people like former Mayor of New York City Michael Bloomberg, who told me once that he would run if he thought he could win, but he thought the system was so full of hereditary Republican and Democratic voters and so rigged at the Electoral College that he wouldn't have a chance, even if he got tens of millions of votes. So there's no doubt, though, if any billionaire got into the race in the coming year, that person could turn it into a three-way race. Because a lot of people are turned off to two parties.

STEVE SKROVAN: Now is the Green Party the closest thing we have to something resembling a third party? Do they have enough of a foundation?

RALPH NADER: No, they don't, unfortunately, and the largest third party traditionally in the last few decades has been the Libertarian Party. They get more votes than Green Party candidates, except

when I was on the Green Party ticket I got quite a lot more votes than the Libertarian Party. So I think coming up, unless something changes, of the two parties the Libertarians will get a little more votes. But none of them get even close to a million votes.

STEVE SKROVAN: Well, as the standard bearer for the Green Party in the early 2000's, you weren't interested beyond that in building it up? What's your personal view of all that?

RALPH NADER: I spent a lot of time in 2001 going to Green Party gatherings, fundraisers, and it was like pushing a string. These are people who are well intentioned, but they're not serious enough to raise enough money to hire full time staff and open Green Party offices around the country, which is what you got to do to start recruiting candidates. That was the problem. I gave it a good push, but it didn't work.

STEVE SKROVAN: Our next question comes from Ricky Steamboat. Sometimes I think we've got some pseudonyms going on here.

DAVID FELDMAN: Who would call themselves Ricky?

STEVE SKROVAN: That's right. And it actually plays right into what we were talking about, because Ricky asks, do you support the fair debate fight taking place now with the Green Party and Libertarian Party? If so, do you plan to endorse it and offer your presence? If not, why?

RALPH NADER: Well, I support the Green Party and Libertarian Party candidates being on the national presidential debates. That's where the big audience is. They can have their own debates, the little parties, but they're not going to get much exposure. In fact, there was one in 2008 and the Washington Post ignored it, the New York Times ignored it. And it was right in Washington DC. I was participating in it. And they had four candidates from four small parties, including the Green Party and Libertarian Party. The Debate Commission, listeners should know, is a private corporation set up in 1987 by the Republican and Democratic parties to get rid of the League of Women Voters supervision of presidential campaigns, because it couldn't control the League of Women Voters the way they wanted to. So now we

have this private corporation in conjunction with the mass media deciding who gets on, who doesn't, who's chosen as a reporter to ask what questions. It's incredibly incestuous between this two party tyranny. And no matter how many audiences of huge size you get campaigning around the country as I did for the Green Party in 2000, filled Madison Square Garden and other giant arenas, I didn't reach more than two percent of the people I could have reached had the Debate Commission listened to national polls that wanted me and Pat Buchanan on the stage, if only to reduce drowsiness among the public.

DAVID FELDMAN: Right. It's really interesting to watch debates that were sponsored by the League of Women Voters, because the moderators were moderating members of the press. You had about five members of the press asking questions. Now it's just one person asking them.

RALPH NADER: Yeah. Not only that, David, they're not really debates. They're not going after each other and challenging each other. They're multiple news conferences. And that's what we're seeing this year. And that's why they get away with it, because they can predict most of the questions or dodge them, and time's up and they go to the next candidate with the next question. It's only when they mix it up with each other, like if Bernie Sanders mixed it up with Hilary Clinton, he could nail her on a lot of things, which he hasn't done. And if he doesn't do it, how can we believe he's really serious in defeating her?

DAVID FELDMAN: Frank Black writes, Dear Ralph, why do we still bother? The world will be unlivable in fifty years. This is not a joke question.

RALPH NADER: First of all, there's a book called "Why Bother?" by Sam Smith, who's a very wise person and he has now moved from DC to Maine. You should look it up. He answers your question. Another answer to your question is, what if our ancestors said "Why bother?" What kind of world would we have inherited from them? And what kind of world do we want our children and grandchildren to inherit if we're known as quitters and we let a few people around the world ravage the world and destroy the planet so that our descendants end up with a world of huge cruelty, deprivation and injustice?

DAVID FELDMAN: At the opening of the Tort Museum, I don't know who it was, but somebody quoted you. You were once interviewed by a reporter and she said, how do you keep going? Do you remember what the answer was that you gave, Ralph?

RALPH NADER: Justice?

STEVE SKROVAN: No. You said, "I don't do mood swings."

RALPH NADER: Oh, that was another answer. That's right. You can't get discouraged if you're striving for justice, because you're not going to win likely on the first round. You got to show failure resilience and overcome it and learn from your last mistakes. I mean, that's the mature approach. Where do they have that attitude? It's called the sports arena, right?

STEVE SKROVAN: Right.

RALPH NADER: Nobody gives up on the sports arena. Nobody goes to the basketball coach in the last third quarter and says, well, you know we're behind 40 points. Why stress out? Why don't we just call it a day? I mean, that would be the end of the player's career. So we got to get civic stamina, civic maturity. It just takes one percent or less, folks, representing majority public opinion, to turn this country around.

STEVE SKROVAN: I always, I get asked that question a lot, too, through doing the radio show and being on the board of Public Citizen. And it's a very real psychological thing, because people sense the forces arrayed against us are so large and so opaque, and I basically say yeah, that may be true, but I'm going to go down with my boots on. You know? I want to be able to look my children and their grandchildren in the face and say, when all this was going down, what side were you on?

RALPH NADER: And there's another saying, which is once the people get aroused, and it's only the people that have the vote, not the corporations, they have the money, but what really counts in Congress is not just the money, it's the votes. They want the money to get the votes with ads on TV, etc.

So if you cut off the money at the pass with targeted, intelligent votes demanding that members of Congress listen and do what the people need done on their behalf, then the saying comes, the bigger they are, the harder they fall.

STEVE SKROVAN: Well, we've come to the end of the show. Thank you for all your questions, and I'm very happy we were able to get to a whole slew of them today. I want to thank our guest today, Gar Alperovitz. Go to GarAlperovitz.com to find out more about him. Go to CommunityWealth, Community-Wealth, to find out about the community wealth movement. Also you can go to DemocracyCollaborative.org or TheNextSystem.org for that again. And his book is called, "The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb." So pick that up. We'll link to it on the Ralph Nader Radio Hour website. And for Ralph's weekly blog, go to Nader.org. Remember to visit the country's only law museum, we just spoke of it, the American Museum of Tort Law in Winsted, Connecticut. Go to TortMuseum.org. We've got you all dot org'd here today. You can also subscribe to us on iTunes and Stitcher. The producers of the Ralph Nader Radio Hour are Jimmy Lee Wert and Matthew Marin. On behalf of David Feldman, I'm Steve Skrovan. Until next week, Ralph.

RALPH NADER: Thank you very much David and Steve. And the listeners, spread the word and connect with the kind of work that Gar Alperovitz has been doing in his website, Community-Wealth.org.

DAVID FELDMAN: From Pacifica, you've been listening to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour, www.nader.org.

STEVE SKROVAN: Special thanks to John Richard, Matthew Marin.

DAVID FELDMAN: Our graphic designer is Jimmy Lee Wert. Our editor is Jimmy Lee Wert. Our board operator is Jimmy Lee Wert.

STEVE SKROVAN: Oh, what the hell, let's make him our producer.

DAVID FELDMAN: Our producer is Jimmy Lee Wert.

STEVE SKROVAN: And thanks to our executive producer, Alan Minsky.

DAVID FELDMAN: And most importantly, special thanks to Mr. Ralph Nader, www.nader.org.

STEVE SKROVAN: Our theme music, Stand Up Rise Up, is written and performed by Kemp Harris.

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DAVID FELDMAN: He's Steve Skrovan.

STEVE SKROVAN: I'm Steve Skrovan, he's David Feldman.

DAVID FELDMAN: Until next time.