

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EPISODE 88

Arno Mayer, David Helvarg

From the KPFK studios in Southern California it's the Ralph Nader radio hour.

Steve Skrovan: Welcome to Ralph Nader radio hour my name is Steve Skrovan along with my cohost David Feldman how are you today David?

David Feldman: Fantastic

Steve Skrovan: And the man of the hour Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph

Ralph Nader: Hello Steve, David

Steve Skrovan: We've got another jammed pack show for you today. We're going to be talking again to David Helvarg, whom we spoke to last spring. Some of you may remember that David is the head of Blue Frontier, an organization whose mission is essentially to save the oceans and the life in it. He's going to tell us about their latest project, The Sea Party Coalition that is standing against offshore oil drilling. We're also going to see what our corporate crime reporter Russell Mohkiber is covering and uncovering. But first, were going to talk about the Middle East and American empire with our first guest, professor Arno Mayer, David?

David Feldman: Arno J Mayer is Emeritus Professor of History at Princeton. Professor Mayer was born in 1926 into a Jewish family that fled to the United States during the Nazi invasion of Luxembourg in May of 1940. He was later drafted into the United States Army and served as an intelligence officer, where eventually he became the "morale officer" for high ranking German prisoners of war, which I believe means he got information from them. Among many scholarly works Professor Mayer is the author of The Furies: Violence and Terror in the French and Russian Revolutions, and Plowshares into Swords: From Zionism to Israel. Welcome to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour, professor Arno J. Mayer.

Arno Mayer: Okay. Well you must be kind in what you say.

Ralph Nader: Thank you very much Professor Mayer for coming on to the show. Before we get into the various substantive issues that relate to your scholarship and experience, one of your close friends and one of the great political thinkers in our generation, professor Sheldon Wolin who taught at Princeton among other universities, just recently passed away in Oregon at the age of 93. One of his great books dealt with something called Inverted Totalitarianism, by which he is a great knowledge on democracy, he edited The Democracy Journal for years. He talks about that Inverted Totalitarianism, “Is the antithesis of constitutional power. It’s designed to create instability to keep a citizenry off balance and passive.” And he writes, “Downsizing re-organization, bubbles bursting, unions busted, quickly out-dated skills, and transfer of jobs abroad create not just fear but an economy of fear, a system of control whose power feeds on uncertainty, yet a system that according to its analysts is eminently rational.” He adds, “Instead of participating in power, the virtual citizen is invited to have opinions, measurable responses to questions pre-designed to elicit them.” I’m really not doing justice to how he elaborates this, but it’s extremely focused on what we now call the Corporate State, or what the right wing calls Crony Capitalism. You knew him for many years, Professor Mayer. Would you provide us with some description of what kind of scholar and man he was.

Arno Mayer: Well, I mean he was not a colleague; he was a friend. I have many colleagues but very few friends. Usually one can count friends on the fingers of one hand. And when Shelly came to Princeton, we became fast and close friends and needless to say were in constant discussion of the problems that he addressed so forcefully and at the same time very originally. And one of the things that I would like to stress, because it’s not unrelated to how he got to the book that you mentioned, is that of course he was one of the first one to wrestle with the notion and the concept of participatory democracy, which in fact entered the political discourse and vocabulary in the 1960s. Recently, I was rereading the Port Huron Statement, which was the statement that launched Students of Democratic Society and the word, phrase “participatory democracy” appears in it. And this, in my judgment, was at the center of Sheldon Wolin’s concern in the sense that he realized the degree to which democracy what one used to understand with the concept of democracy will be completely travestied in American society. So, I pay more attention and would put the accent more on what we wrote about participatory democracy, which incidentally also is a concept that has gotten certain resonance beyond the United States, rather than the book on Inverted Totalitarianism.

Ralph Nader: Yes, and his work as editor of the Democracy Journal, that’s when I came to know Professor Wolin, was really quite remarkable. It’s one of the few political science articles that you can read and say, “This tells what’s going on today. This tells us the Wall Street Empire, Washington D.C. nexus.” Yeah, go ahead.

Arno Mayer: The second aspect of Shelly in addition to this participatory democracy is that he was in a genuine sense a public intellectual. Not that he ran up the flag, “Look who I am,” but in a way in which there was a connection, because, between his scholarship and his intense political

concern with the society and the world in which he was living. And that is extremely rare, because his scholarship was a very, very high quality. And that journal democracy -- because I was very close to him when he got going on that for two years -- sort of represents the two sides of Sheldon Wolin: that is the political theorist or philosopher and then the engaged intellectual, the public intellectual. A magazine like Democracy was incredibly rare and today nonexistent.

Ralph Nader: That's for sure, there's nothing close to it. You've commented on the lack of an intellectual life on universities, apart from the specialization of professors and graduate students. Do you want to elaborate on that, and what it is costing us as a society?

Arno Mayer: Well I mean, I don't want to judge it only by what I have observed first hand at Princeton. And also I've been retired for 25 years. But in general, not only in the United States but also in so many European countries, there is an intellectual vacuum that is incredibly rare. In other words, in France I would raise the question, "Where are those who could be said to have been inspired by Jean-Paul Sartre?" And the answer is "There aren't any." So, that vacuum is not peculiar to the United States, but it's also very evident in France. Now, in the United States - I mean at the moment -- there's very, very little critical intellection, when I say critical also critical analytic intellection that has the kind of engagement but the French called "engagement" that the likes of shall we say Jean-Paul Sartre had in France, Bertrand Russell in England et cetera.

Ralph Nader: And Noam Chomsky in the US.

Arno Mayer: Noam Chomsky absolutely stands out at the moment as if he were a survivor from another era. And I can just tell you one small story that marked me for life as far as Noam Chomsky was concerned. And that is I was sitting in a café, opposite the railway station of Mantes-la-Jolie which was one of the places in France, suburbs of France, where it was a very, very heavy concentration of Algerian and North African immigrants. And next to me were a couple of Algerians; and one of them turned towards me, because I was reading the Herald Tribune, and he said, "Are American or English?" I said, "Yes, I plead guilty." He gathered all his courage, and he said, he asked me, "Would you happen to know Noam Chomsky?" which was his way of saying we don't have a Noam Chomsky talking for us in France. That was 20 years ago. And it's not irrelevant to the situation today by virtue of the fact that France has the largest immigrant Muslim, Arab population of any country in Europe.

Ralph Nader: Well it also has an effect on stupefying politics today. Look at the presidential candidates. Look at the quality of the debates on the Republican side. Look at the way the media pulls itself down to that level, doesn't check the false statements with few exceptions, just blatant false statements, distortion of the truth pouring out of their mouths of these candidates.

There's no upward pull, which would occur, if there was a core of critical intellectual analysts in this country. But even if there was, it wouldn't get much mass media.

Arno Mayer: But that's -- these elections in particular these debates -- they are a circus. They are not serious debates. And it's interesting that in God's own country, the United States, the phrase is always "must have a discussion" about something. The word "debate" barely exists. And these meetings that are televised; they are not debates. There are no real issues that are discussed. And in addition to that, you know better than I do, that it is so heavily informed by the corporate financial interests that are involved with these television stations that broadcast these things. There's absolutely no space, number one, no space for political discussion at the same time, the critical voices to the extent to which they exist, they are not heard in any of the media. They have no access to them. So that you have a number of, shall we say, dissident sites on the web whether this be Counterpunch and Common Dreams and so on and so forth. But those of us who write for these, we write for one another. And there is, never shall we say a convention of the dissidents and the dissident journals, where one would speak about real issues, including some sort of a radical critique of contemporary American society

Ralph Nader: On that note Professor Mayer, let me turn to one of your books, which came out in 2008 called Plowshares into Swords: From Zionism to Israel. All empires without question eventually devoured themselves. The US does not prove any exception to this in terms of how we're eating at our necessities at home, while we have bases and military activities in dozens of countries abroad without any framework of constitutional legitimacy, one might add. But in this area, the whole history of Zionism, Israel, the occupation of Palestine, the various wars, the back up by the US, there is a severe shortage of factual truth. And what impressed me about your book, which is really quite a history and extremely documented, is that you spend more than a few pages on what you call the humanitarian Zionist in the early part of the 20th century, the first half of the 20th century, who had in Israel a very articulate view of how Israelis would be living with Arabs in that area of West Asia. Can you elaborate on the humanitarian Zionist, what they meant, and what happened to them as Israel became more and more the dominant military power in that region?

Arno Mayer: Well, I mean I would never have been able to write that book if I had not been inspired by Chaim, Martin Buber, Magnus, and company. And it's at the center of my reflection, because from the get-go all of them were calling attention to the absolute need to have an understanding with the Arab population of the area. And this before "Israel" as a state was defined after the, you know, World War II in the light of the Balfour Declaration. And they have been, in my judgment, completely erased from the memory. When I say "they," -- not only their names but also their positions and the arguments they made -- from the discussion in Israel and also of any Jewish organizations outside Israel. One of the things that -- I don't have perfect shall I say confirmation of this -- but I think I'm not treading on very delicate ground when I say it, although very fragile ground: there are no streets, squares or buildings named for a Chaim,

for Martin Buber. The only one for whom is Magnus because he turned out to be the first President of the Hebrew University. But they don't exist in the discourse. I think this has been enormous harm to the development, the development and construction of Israel. Because one of their main points was number one: you have to in one way or another come to terms with the Arabs, compromise with them. And their original idea was a bi-national state. And they referred, they gave as example "bi-national something" and they chose by the federal state they referred to for example Canada and to Switzerland as examples of federal states. But it has completely disappeared from the discussion. And the debate in Israel, and at the moment at this moment when the idea of a bi-national state comes up again it is but 100% contrary to the spirit in which this phrase "bi-national state" was originally invoked by the likes of Buber, Magnus and company .

Ralph Nader: One suggestion maybe that there is a little bit left in Israel, there is B'Tselem the Israeli civil rights and civil liberties group that stands up in defense of the atrocities perpetuated against the Palestinians. There's the news paper Haaretz that has columnists like Gideon Levy who are one of the few people in the Israeli press who actually goes to the West Bank and other columnist in that newspaper. But you've written an article that's on *Counterpunch* -- and some of professor Mayer's articles are on counterpunch.org, that's counterpunch.org -- you've written an article a few years ago called "The Wages of Hubris and Vengeance." And you write, "Israel is in the grip of a kind of collective schizophrenia. Not only its governors but the majority of its Jewish population have delusions of both grandeur and persecution, making for a distortion of reality and inconsistent behavior. Israeli Jews see and represent themselves as part of a superior Western civilization. They consider themselves more cerebral, reasonable, moral and dynamic than Arabs and Muslims generally, and Palestinians in particular. At the same time they feel themselves to be the ultimate incarnation of the Jewish people's unique suffering throughout the ages, still subject to constant insecurity and defenselessness in the face of ever threatening extreme and unmerited punishment. Such a psyche leads to hubris and vengefulness, the latter in response to the perpetual Jewish torment said to have culminated as if by a directive purpose in the Holocaust." And then you go on to elaborate that. Of course you are not without knowledge of the Holocaust and the large numbers of Jewish refugees who fled after the millions who were slaughtered. Could you explain why, in the light -- especially of the 2002 peace offer by the Arab League representing over 20 Arab and Islamic nations that was repeatedly tendered to the Israeli government -- that if they return to the pre 1967 borders there would be recognition of two states. Israel would have normal relations with all of these Arab and Islamic countries. And the Israeli government has never seriously considered that proposal, even though it was described repeatedly, put in full page ads in the New York Times. Could you give us some of the observations given your research in this area?

Arno Mayer: The one point that I would make is there is really by far, less of a left opposition in Israel. It's, I would say, almost impossible for an American, and an American Jew in addition to that -- though I'm treated as a self-hating Jew of course -- to comment on that. Because there's not much of a left opposition in this country. And by God, how could there be one in

Israel, which considered itself to become completely beleaguered. And what struck me in this last election is that the so called left, headed by Herzog, which was running against Netanyahu, that obviously they did not say one single word during their campaign about the settlements. Right? Not a word, which one could only interpret is they're in so many ways subscribing to that. So that even though I am aware of the opposition that you mentioned, they are totally marginal. And I'd have to confess to you, I read Haaretz to the extent to which I can every day, but I also read the Jerusalem Post just as in United States I watch CNN but also Fox News. And to some extent, though I have the highest regard for Gideon Levy and Amira Hass -- she's the one who of course lives in Ramallah -- they don't carry very far, their voices, which is the additional reason for holding them in such high respect. But they don't get much coverage in the American press either. In other words, *you* happen to know who Gideon Levy is and Amira Hass, but I would defy any number of people that I would meet, even at this university. But if I ask them "Who are they?" They couldn't tell me. But they stand out, by virtue of the fact they have the courage; they write interesting things; but also because they are unique.

Ralph Nader: Well last year at the National Press Club there was a conference on the Israeli Palestinian situation, Gideon Levy flew in from Israel and gave a major address, this is the National Press Club, where all of the press is. And he got completely blanked out. Even the Washington Post said they were going to send a reporter down, because the editor on the desk at that time had been Jerusalem Bureau Chief for the Washington Post, and that never happened. Well here's your book, Plowshares into Swords: From Zionism to Israel, meticulously footnoted. How was it received in the United States? And how was it received in Israel when it came out in 2008? Verso Press.

Arno Mayer: There was just a complete silence about it. In Israel not a word, and you and I understand that only too well. And it's extremely difficult to penetrate with very critical ideas on the subject of Israel and its position in the Middle East.

Ralph Nader: Well, let's move to the present day France, the attack in Paris, the use of the word "terrorism." The head of France right after the attack stated loudly, "It is war!" And when I heard that, it occurred to me all these people in the Middle East must say, civilians and fighters alike "It is war?" The West has been warring on the Middle East since the Crusades. And then the last hundred years after World War I, the US, the British and French in particular, moved in, carved up Middle East areas, artificial boundaries, Iraq, Syria under the mandate system. And then of course, we all know what's happened in the last 20, 30 years: US invasion of Iraq, the attack by Iraq on the Iran was backed by the US when the Saddam Hussein was in power as a dictator. And in so many other military assaults, backing dictators in the Middle East to oppress their people, opposing peaceful resistance movements going back 40, 50, 60 years in the Middle East. Can you characterize what's going on here with France just as a symbol of the reaction of the West to any kind of resistance to this kind of military supremacy over the decades?

Arno Mayer: Well the one thing that I was reminded of as people have been discussing what happened in France, in particular in Paris last Friday, is that this all started -- I hesitate to say this on the air -- we know a thing or two about Vietnam. And, how did we get into this mess in Vietnam? It's largely because the French were not able to hold onto what they call Indochine, Indochina. But the significant thing struck me that I vaguely remember -- and I may be wrong on this, but I don't think I am -- is that none other than Charles DeGaulle tried to bring about a negotiation between North and South Vietnam to avoid the Americans proceeding with what obviously we then got into under at once JFK and then Johnson and Hollande in my judgment. In other words, DeGaulle have tried to brings about some sort of negotiation to avoid that it be... the situation become completely militarized. What I find so striking about Hollande is that because he is stuck at home, as you know, his popularity is close to 2%. He as is so very often the case, launched himself more and more into the international arena, in so many different ways wanted to become America's primary ally in Europe to take Britain's place almost. Look what they did in Libya. Look what they're doing now in Mali. And now -- and they had been involved ever since before that -- the events in Paris, in Syria. In other words, there's a very, very long history behind it, and in addition to that, France is the country that has Europe's largest Muslim population, which in an economy, which at the moment is not in the best of shape and has the high unemployment rate, the unemployment rate of the Algerian, shall I say Arab Muslim population in France is close in many areas, close to 35%, 40%, because nobody talks about that. And then the last thing that I would say that also no one talks about: that if we have this mess in Middle East, it is also in large part because American policy from the beginning of the after war would not tolerate either local nationalists like Nasser or Mossadegh, or needless to say communists and socialists. And as a result, it has created I would call an ideological vacuum that obviously religion, absolutely threw itself into. Politics became to be, shall I say religionized. And we are living with that at the moment. But they are not uniquely responsible for that. We have a very, very heavy burden. And when I say we, I include also the French.

Ralph Nader: Professor Mayer was referring to Prime Minister Mossadegh of Iran who was elected on many bases, but one of them: he was going to take back control of Iranian oil from the giant Anglo-Iranian oil company. The US and the CIA didn't like that --

Arno Mayer: And the Brits.

Ralph Nader: -- and the British. And they conspired to overthrow him -- that's historical record -- and put the dictatorial Shah of Iran in for 27 years of repression, which led to the rise of the resistance headed by the Ayatollah. So you see, people over there remember these things, just like we would remember if the shoe was on the other foot .

Arno Mayer: Yeah but, there are also some people in Iran who remember that Iran's nuclear program started under Shah Pahlevi, who was sitting on the Peacock Throne.

Ralph Nader: That was okay by the US.

Arno Mayer: And then the other thing which I would say is as far as Nasser is concerned: of course his crime was that he did something with the Aswan Dam and then the Suez Canal.

Ralph Nader: He nationalized the Suez Canal. And then French and British attacked him. Fortunately ...

Arno Mayer: Exactly.

Ralph Nader: ...Eisenhower put a stop to it in 1956.

Arno Mayer: Eisenhower put a stop to it. But that was part of the same policy you see, basically.

Ralph Nader: That's right.

Arno Mayer: I'm not saying that the only culprits in this are the Americans. I'm saying the Brits, I mean the British, the French obviously are involved, and then I don't know enough about Belgium, but because so many of these guys are supposed to be -- who did the the attack in Paris last Friday -- are supposed have been, either nurtured in Belgium or born in Belgium -- what do I know. And so one can't forget that Belgium had its own empire for God's sakes. And the last thing that I would like to say on empires: empires inevitably, eventually begin to decline. And it's in those moments when they decline that they become particularly dangerous. Look at what the Brits did in India after World War II.

Ralph Nader: Before we conclude Professor Mayer, what's the way out here? Let's say you were in charge of Washington in D.C. What is the way out? What's the... turning the situation to a more benign and respectful future for everybody?

Arno Mayer: I wouldn't address that question, but if you'll allow me, I'll make one observation. I'm struck by the fact that there is this total silence about the ways in which Martin Luther King addressed this issue. At the height of the Vietnam business, he broke his silence on Vietnam and then went out of this way to insist you can't both fight these wars abroad and then build what even Johnson himself called the Good Society at home. And he gave two such speeches, which is another way to say: that even today Senator Sanders can't get himself to cite Martin Luther King on this issue. You cannot, for example, implement the social program that he puts forward, with which I agree, without cutting into what these days we call the Defense budget as we did in the War Department, the War budget, if you think just not possible. So that when you ask me as to what can be done, nothing can be done, because even Senator Sanders can't address the issue of that military budget, which is absolutely merely -- in my judgment -- accentuating the gradual decline of the American Empire, which in turn leaves to the insurgence of the McCains and company who had their equivalent in France during the Algerian war.

Ralph Nader: Well when you hit the wall like that nothing can be done by the officialdoms. That's when we have to go back to the people, which is what Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights leaders did.

Arno Mayer: That's what Shelly Wolin was about when he said participatory democracy.

Ralph Nader: Exactly. And by the way, looking up Shelly Wolin's writings listeners: it's Sheldon Wolin with two L's W-O-L-L-I-N. It's back to the people. Its back to the sovereignty to people. Its back to the Preamble of our constitution. It's We the People, not we the corporations or we the formal government. Thank you very much Professor Mayer. We've been talking to professor Emeritus of Princeton University the author of ground breaking books and one of the least noticed: Plowshares Into Swords: From Zionism to Israel. He's also written books on the French and Russian Revolution. Thank you very much, Professor Mayer for your insights.

Arno Mayer: Thank you.

Ralph Nader: And we hope we can have you on again.

Arno Mayer: Okay, well thank you very, very much.

Steve Skrovan: We've been talking to Professor Arno J. Mayer, Professor Emeritus of History from Princeton University. His book is Plowshares into Swords: From Zionism to Israel from Verso Books. We'll post a link on the Ralph Nader Radio Hour website.

Ralph Nader: By the way, you remember when the attackers in Paris they left some messages behind they said "We struck at the heart of the Crusaders?"

Steve Skrovan: Yeah.

Ralph Nader: You know, in this country we think the Crusades are never remembered and all the slaughter. I mean they beheaded tens of thousands of Saracens in one day. One day, okay?

Steve Skrovan: Right.

Ralph Nader: All you got to do -- when I was a kid, we had to sing "Onward Christians Soldiers." David and Steve, when you get the chance read the lyrics of "Onward Christian Soldiers," which are being relayed every day in the Muslim world. Just read 'em. The idea that we would sing songs like that totally impervious to some of the savage phrases, it's just an example of the ethnocentrism.

Steve Skrovan: It's time to check in with the corporate crime reporter Russell Mohkiber. Russell?

Russell Mohkiber: From the National Press Building in Washington D.C. this is your corporate crime reporter morning minute for Friday November 20, 2015. I'm Russell Mohkiber. New criminal provision that would make it a crime for companies and executives to hide information about serious dangers in their products must be added to the Highway Bill. That's the demand the Public Citizen and five other groups to members of Congress. The past few years have witnessed extraordinary wrong doing in the auto industry. Product defects and product defect cover ups have resulted in the preventable deaths of many hundreds of people and devastating lifetime injuries to hundreds more. By incorporating the criminal penalties into the Highway Bill, lawmakers would ensure that companies that recklessly endanger people -- by selling defective vehicles or parts, or hide information from the public and regulators about product safety defects -- would be held accountable. For the Corporate Crime Reporter, I'm Russell Mohkiber.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you Russell. We're going to do something a little different here this week, before we get to our next guest. We are going to answer a listener question. The question comes from Susan Warren on Facebook who says, "I read that back in early 1990s Ralph Nader was fighting car companies about seat back failure. Seat backs of cars were breaking and falling backward when a car was hit from behind." And then she goes on to tell us how she was in an accident in her Toyota Echo five years ago, and her seat back failed, resulting in unfortunately permanent injuries. And she wants to know why seat backs to this day keep failing. Now, to answer that question Ralph referred us to auto safety expert Byron Bloch who was been a nationally recognized and court qualified expert in auto safety design and vehicle crash worthiness for over 40 years. So, I called Byron; and this is what he had to say:

Byron Bloch: The reason is that too many automakers design and test their seat only to meet the minimum requirements of the federal motor vehicle safety standard, which frankly shouldn't be called a safety standard, it's more like a bargain basement minimum. And it only requires a rear ward pull on the seat back up to 20 times the weight of the seat. And that's it. There's no test dummy on the seat and ironically no crash test is conducted at all. Car companies have figured out that with such a simplistic minimal requirement, all they have to do is have a seat that's strong enough to meet a rear ward pull on the back rest of 20 times the weight of the seat and that's all they have to do. Some automakers have done significantly more than that, and some have been embarrassed by the rear impact crash test for fuel tank performance with dummies on the front seats and that shows the seats failing. That's not the safety standard for seats, but it has been embarrassing enough so some car companies have made stronger seat. But by a far most seats are incredibly much too weak.

Steve Skrovan: Which companies are safer? Which cars?

Byron Bloch: The safer seats generally are in the European vehicles, such as Saab and Volvo, Mercedes, and BMW, and some Volkswagen seats and Audi seats. They typically are stronger seats and are supported on both the outboard side of the seat and the inboard side of the seat toward the center line of the car with what are called recliner mechanisms. Whereas, other seats short change the backrest support by having a recliner mechanism only on the outboard side of the seat. While the inboard side is free to pivot rearward, there is no support at all. As a tip to car buyers: when you go shopping for a new or used vehicle, check and see whether the seat back rest has a single recliner on the outboard side, which should be the left side for the driver's seat, and also it should have a recliner mechanism on the right hand or inboard side of the driver seat. You need the door recliners to have the better support of the backrest. But if the vehicle has only a recliner on the outboard side, and that would apply to the driver's seat and the passenger seat, don't buy the car, because the seat backrest will be much too weak to protect you, if there's a rear impact collision accident.

Steve Skrovan: Byron also told me that the cost of reinforcing the seat backs is probably only \$4 to \$10 per seat. And that a rule was pending in the late 90s to do that, but was killed when George W. Bush became president. Ralph do you have anything to add?

Ralph Nader: Yeah, well that rule's got to be revised, because there's the good director now, Director Rosekind of the National Highway Safety Administration in the Department of Transportation. And he's ready to really upgrade a lot of these obsolete standards, as well as demand faster recall and fixes of cars by VW, General Motors, Toyota and others. This is, shall we say a little bit of a golden age for the Department of Transportation in the last months of the Obama Administration. We really have to take advantage of that. Some of these seatback failures were really pretty grizzly. Byron Bloch documented years ago how in a Volkswagen Beetle there would be a rear end collision into the Beetle, and the seat back would fail, and the front seat passengers would be catapulted straight through the back window and out of the vehicle. Obviously, that's not a survivable crash. So, we need to have the auto safety agency pick up on that early proposed standard, bring it up to date technologically and issue as a mandatory requirement for all motor vehicles of all models.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you Byron Bloch for that answer. Now David, introduce us to our next guest.

David Feldman: David Helvarg is executive director of Blue Frontier who's mission is to raise awareness of the plight of our oceans and offer solutions to those problems facing the Marine Conservation Community. Mr. Helvarg is the author of six books on conservation. He's the editor of the "Ocean and Coastal Conservation Guide" and also the organizer of Blue Vision Summits for ocean activists; and the Peter Benchley Ocean Awards. He's here today to talk to us about something called the Sea Party Coalition, which is opposed to offshore drilling -- what he calls the Keystone Pipeline of the Seas. Welcome back to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour, David Helvarg.

David Helvarg: Thank you. It's so pleasure to be here.

Ralph Nader: Good to have you again David. I first came across David's work through his first book -- well it wasn't his first book -- but it was his first book on oceans called Blue Frontier. Beautifully written in part because he has great imaginative literary skills, but also in part because he almost lives in the ocean whenever he gets near it and has actually done investigative work on the effect of Katrina, the hurricane, on the under seashore of Louisiana, and has written many articles and books. Right after President Obama ended the Keystone Pipeline project, at least temporarily, David thought that the next fight was going to be offshore oil drilling, because the Obama Administration has been more favorable to the oil industry in

terms of offshore oil drilling. And he wrote this article. And I want to set the background for our discussion, David, by quoting the first paragraph. This is David Helvarg: “So what do conservative Congressmen Curt Clawson of Florida, Mark Sanford of South Carolina and liberal congressman Sam Farr of California, climate activist Bill McKibben, a former petroleum engineer, evangelical minister, and surfer all have in common? No it’s not a joke. They all spoke out against off shore oil and gas drilling at a November 4th press conference in Washington D.C. for the newly formed Sea Party Coalition. The sea party S-E-A, the sea party aims to make opposition to proposed offshore drilling, a major issue in 2016” This is very nice news to my ears because I’m a big advocate of left right alliances to dismantle the corporate state apropos my book over year ago called Unstoppable: The Emerging Left Right Alliance to Dismantle the Corporate State. David Helvarg explain ...

David Helvarg: We’re living -- yes but -- the Sea Party Coalition is living proof of your theory, because we’re looking at offshore drilling proposals in the Arctic Ocean, which has at least been delayed since Shell hit a dry hole six weeks ago. But, also the Obama Administration opened up much of the East Coast from the Mid Atlantic from Delaware down to Florida. And so, what you have is the Democratic Governor of Virginia supported this along with the Republican Governors of South Carolina and North Carolina. This bipartisan greed, I’d call it. So the opposition is kind of unique. It’s not the traditional environmental battle that aligns right and left. As I say, we’ve got: Mark Sanford’s the former governor of South Carolina, who’s lost his office but came back in as a congressman representing most of the coastal part of South Carolina and all of the coastal towns and communities along the coast of South Carolina have passed resolutions against surveying and drilling off their coast, because they value what they already have on their coast: the beauty and the tourism and the other industries that depend on healthy seas. So, you’ve got this the interesting effect of -- you know, the day after we had our press conference underneath an 85 foot inflatable life-sized blue whale, and as they say this mix of Sam Farr, where a kind of ultra-liberal congressman from California with these Tea Party conservatives from South Carolina and Florida. And the next day the main paper and the main newspaper in South Carolina actually ran a headline, “Mark Sanford: From Tea Party to Sea Party.” So, I think it’s going to have interesting effects in places like the Carolinas and swing states like Virginia and Florida. We certainly hope to make this an issue all the candidates are going to have address. And it’s not going to be the traditional left right split. It’s more about the coast versus the state house. And as I say bipartisan or non partisan coalitions on both sides of issue. The other side of the issue, of course be those bought and sold by the fossil fuel industry. But I think it’s part of... well it’s interesting because we did this 30 years ago in California. We in the 1980s; they tried to give us 1100 more oil rigs, and instead we opted for marine sanctuaries. We now have some of the nation’s largest marine sanctuaries, where drilling’s not allowed. And I think at the end of 2016, it’s very likely that the next president will withdraw these proposed drilling sites and leasing sites.

Ralph Nader: David, it’s another example of a few people making the big difference. You’ve got 65 organizations as part of your Sea Party Coalition, which includes everything from Sierra

Club, Surf Rider Foundation to commercial fishing groups, aquaculture, and small business, who as you say depend on healthy seas. Tell us about this petroleum engineer that's joined your effort, whose name is Peg Howell of Pawley's Island, South Carolina, a petroleum engineer.

David Helvarg: And very outspoken. She's a retired petroleum engineer. She used to be, when she first went out offshore for Chevron in the Gulf and in the North Sea, they literally called her "the company man." And I know what she went through, because I've been out on the rigs. And when you find one of woman engineer working with 80 guys -- they named the rigs after wild species and cartoon characters, not after feminist's icons. But she said this is the riskiest work of her life when she was offshore. And she says, the people working off there, they're highly professional, they're highly skilled and dedicated, but spills still happen. It's inevitable. Drilling and spilling are just linked. And so, she's speaking from experience about what she's seen out there, which is high level of technical ability, but also the inevitable accidents happening. And in an environment in which the consequences -- it's low probability, high impact consequences -- like we saw on the Gulf of Mexico with the BP just under six years ago. And her feelings is the disasters that inevitably follow drilling offshore are not worth the risk to what already exists, which is healthy coastal economies. I was back East this August and briefly went to Montauk and Jersey Shore, The Eastern Shore of Maryland and Delaware and you realize, it's not just a multibillion dollar fish industry that depends on a clean ocean. But this is like the high point for people. This week or two on the shore is the high point of their lives, and to risk that -- plus the ports, plus the national security training zones that are essential off Virginia. We get so much from the ocean in terms of just recreation, transportation, trade, protein and a sense of awe and wonder that there's a real blue economy that we can't put at risk to keep developing fossil fuels, especially when the science tells us that we need to leave 80% of the known reserves in the ground if we're going to avoid the worst consequences of fossil fuel fired climate change. So it makes no sense to be looking for new reserves. We can't afford to burn the ones we have. I mean coal and oil were great energy systems from the 16th to the 19th century, but when the 21st century -- we know we've got examples like Germany, where we can transition off of fossil fuels. And if you have clean energy, solar, wind, the other advantage is no offshore wind turbine ever destroyed your favorite beach.

Ralph Nader: And petroleum engineer Peg Howell, David, she goes further. She says, "People make mistakes and spills happen, not only on the rigs, but also from on shore processing facilities, pipelines, tankers and rail cars." So, it also ends up with spills on the ground.

David Helvarg: And it's interesting in like Georgia or in the Carolinas, they're finding as more and more people along the coast are turning against this, that they're finding it's not just the threat of spills that people are concerned with, it's that whole infrastructure that comes along with it of onshore refineries and rail transit and shipping depots. You know, we saw that here in California. We thought we stopped the oil 30 years ago. And we had a corroded pipeline that broke in Santa Barbara just a few month ago. People in the beautiful -- I mean the coast of

Georgia is one of the most amazing salt marsh habitats on Earth. And people who live there don't want to see it turn into Port Fourchon, Louisiana, an industrial complex. There are just endless numbers of reasons not to do this. And the only reason to do it is to make the oil companies, the largest industrial combines in human history, even more wealthy and powerful.

Ralph Nader: And when the oil industry wanted to do it off the west coast of Florida years ago, people really rebelled on the west coast Florida. It didn't matter they were conservative or liberals. But now you tell me that presidential candidate ...

David Helvarg: And that's Curt Clawson who's the congressman, who was at our launch. He's from Naples, Florida and he says -- so is -- Marco Rubio lives in this district -- and Marco Rubio is not very popular there because he is touting the oil industry line that you can do it safely, which never has happened and never will.

Ralph Nader: What's Jeb Bush's position, former Governor of Florida on drilling off the east and west coast of Florida?

David Helvarg: As governor here was against it; as a candidate he's for it. Although he waffles when it comes to his home state. But basically, he's pushing the company line, and the companies are oil companies. It's interesting. This is where you do see party differences with the candidates. But on the ground, it's very much people reflecting their constituents.

Ralph Nader: How do you explain the Obama Administration? President Obama increasingly is warning about climate change, is warning about the need to expand renewable energy, and here he goes trying to give licenses to drill in the Arctic and then on the Atlantic Coast. What's going on in his mind?

David Helvarg: Pretty odd. I think he was told early on that it was shallow water and not a problem like deep key. And also his Secretary of Interior was worried about Senator Murkowski of Alaska holding some of the funding for Interior. And it was sort of like one of these stupid Inside the Beltway ideas of "We'll give Murkowski something, and she won't cut our funding." So there are some big groups, big national environmental groups that think that by the end of his administration, the President might withdraw his leasing off the East Coast, certainly put in an abatement like they did after Shell hit a dry hole in the Arctic. My feeling is and the feeling of the Sea Party Coalition really is, we can't count on the good will of the President, who initiated this bad idea. And we really have to mobilize the grassroots citizens, so that it becomes an issue in this election and force the candidates to take a position. It is also a way, people -- it was just a month ago I was on work trip. Although, it's always hard to claim a work trip to Hawaii. But

I did get time to go snorkeling. And when I went snorkeling, I saw off the big island coral bleached skeletal white. And this is the third global coral bleaching event since 1998, where because of the warming water, the coral loses those zooxanthellae algae that gives it about 70% of its nutrients. The water gets too hot, and it becomes toxic, and the corals expel it, and it starts slowly starving. And this is now happening across the world in all the tropical coral reef systems as a result of the warming ocean tide. The fossil fuels – and this just outrages me-- when we're seeing the rainforest of our seas, these incredibly beautiful and diverse coral systems collapsing and where the oceans actually turn more acidic as a result of fossil fuel burning, that we continue to do this. Makes no sense. And because it's such a bad idea, I think that just like the tar sands didn't make sense with cheap oil and the environmental risk involved, I don't think offshore drilling does. And, I think in fact, it's a way to talk about things that the public doesn't get. At this point, they don't get coral bleaching or ocean acidification. But they get oil spills and the risk of oil spills. And when you start talking about oil, you talk about all these other issues that plastic pollution -- plastic is just a solidified form of an oil spill. We have to figure out how we're going to get off fossil fuels and restore the ocean. And the good news is that you're right, that we can form coalitions across traditional party lines and get things done. This past May at our last Blue Vision Summit, where we had the largest citizen lobby for the oceans in US history last May 13. And along with putting our markers down against offshore drilling, we also lobbied for a bill against pirate fishing. And it had bipartisan support. But most of the people we met with -- we had 163 meetings with nine senators and 25 house member and lots of their staffers. And most of them haven't heard of the bill, were surprised that constituents came to Washington to advocate against the illegal fishing. And as a result of hearing from their constituents, a lot them moved forward and the House and the Senate passed the bill. And about three weeks ago, the President signed it into law. So now we were going to start getting serious about enforcement and taking down all these pirate fishing boats operating on the high seas that are also using slave labor from Burma, that are also part of organized crime that's using the high seas as a kind of free zone of operation.

Ralph Nader: David it's just an example of all the good things that David is doing. And the Sea Party will be ready for the presidential candidates in the important primary in South Carolina coming up next year. They're not going to be able to dodge this issue. Steve and David, do you have a question for David Helvarg?

Steve Skrovan: Yeah, I have a question. It's on a slightly different topic. We're having a drought here in California where you are also now.

David Helvarg: Yes.

Steve Skrovan: And, I've had some people talking to me about turning more to desalinization of the ocean for our own water needs. Is this a viable strategy from your point of view? What are the implications for the ocean, if we do desalinization?

David Helvarg: Yeah. Well, I've written about it. It's a viable tool in a whole tool kit of adaptations we're going to need now. They just opened a billion dollar de-sal plant in San Diego, which has sort've got all the problems that we don't want to move forward on de-sal. But if we get rid of the major problems which is: the use of fossil fuel that takes a lot of energy, if we power de-sal with clean energy, if we don't put pipes directly into the water that suck a lot of life out of the ocean, and if we find a more useful way to deal with the saline accumulation, don't just dump it back in the ocean. The state's actually starting to do rule making that will make for viable de-sal. It can't be big billion dollar facilities on the coast. Some of it will be small facilities inland to clean up the polluted ground water from agriculture and sea level rise. It's part of the mix. And, we've got to realize we're going to lose about a third of our water sources in the Sierra snow fields. So, there is a green form of de-sal, which isn't here yet. But if we do it right, we can get there. You know, it's a scary moment. I mean it's scary that we're all out here in California rooting for disaster for the El Nino storms this winter to overcome a worse disaster with our 500 year drought. I think conservation, recycling, de-sal, and new forms of agriculture, where we're not exporting 10% of our water in the form of almonds shipped to China or hay to Saudi Arabia. We're all going to have to learn how to adapt. And California is very good at adaptation. I mean, my book, [The Golden Shore: California's Love Affair With The Sea](#), we figured out how to live fairly well with our coast and ocean, by becoming good stewards. But, we're going to have to make major changes to adapt to major changes in our climate and our ocean climate.

Ralph Nader: David Helvarg, we're out of time, but before we close give our listeners precise contact information, how they can reach you, be part of your coalition, get your information.

David Helvarg: Absolutely. You could start by just going to our Blue Frontier newly updated website: bluefront.org. And we also have the seaparty2016.org website up. And we're on Facebook. And you can reach me directly at helvarg@bluefront.org. We're the first wave of what we think is going to be real movement in 2016 and beyond to kind of do right by our ocean economy and environment and restore the blue in our red, white and blue.

Ralph Nader: So it's bluefront.org.

David Helvarg: Correct.

Ralph Nader: Bluefront.org. And spell your name.

David Helvarg: H-E-L-V-A-R-G. So it's Helvarg at bluefront.org. You can contact me directly or info@bluefront.org. You can go to the website. Or the seaparty2016.org. We're all sort of trying to do what we can from the civil society side and work with our friends and turn the tide.

Ralph Nader: Thank you very much David Helvarg. To be continued.

Steve Skrovan: I want to thank our guests today Princeton Historian Arno J. Mayer author of Plowshares into Swords from Zionism to Israel and executive director of Blue Frontier David Helvarg, whose new campaign is to put an end to offshore drilling. Go to bluefront.org for information about the Sea Party Coalition. A transcript of this episode will be posted on ralphnaderradiohour.com. Give us at least a couple days get that up there.

David Feldman: Our thanks to auto safety expert Byron Bloch for answering our seat back question. To find out more about Byron's work go to autosafetyexpert.com.

Steve Skrovan: For Ralph's weekly blog go to nader.org. For more from Russell Mokhiber go to corporatecrimereporter.com. Remember to visit the country's only law museum the American museum of Tort Law in Winsted Connecticut. Go to tortmuseum.org.

David Feldman: The producers of the Ralph Nader hour are Jimmy Lee Wirt and Matthew Marran.

Steve Skrovan: On behalf of David Feldman, I'm Steve Skrovan.

David Feldman: Next week we're going to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of Ralph's seminal work Unsafe At Any Speed. Please join us... and talk to you next week Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you very much David, thanks Steve. And as always, thank our active involved engage listeners.