



Convert Military to Green Production, or Perish – Daniel Ellsberg on RAI (13/13)

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PAUL JAY: Welcome back to Reality Asserts Itself. I'm Paul Jay. This is The Real News Network, and we're continuing our discussion with Daniel Ellsberg. Thanks for joining us again.

DANIEL ELLSBERG: Good to be here.

PAUL JAY: If there was a president elected, and if there are, for example, in the Democratic Party enough people elected to Congress who are breaking from the kind of militarist position, what would you recommend? What does a plan look like?

DANIEL ELLSBERG: Well, first of all, realize that neither party has promised any departure from our reliance on the military-industrial complex. Since McGovern, in effect. And he was the only one, I think, who—and his defeat taught many Democratic politicians they could not run for office with that kind of burden of dispossessing, even temporarily, the workers of Grumman, Northrup and General Dynamics and Lockheed, and the shipbuilders in Connecticut, and so forth. And [grutton].

So it would take a different political economy, or it would take a different movement in pressing our Congress, and basically a different kind of Democrat from any we've seen. Our system is a two-party system, which people can find by looking at Wikipedia, the web in general, and asking the question, what is a two-party system? And the answer to that is one that most people don't realize. It's based not just on the strength of the existing two parties, but on the fact that we have a system of single-member constituencies, winner take all, not first past the post. These are terms that can be quickly found out if you look them up. It's a political system that makes it extremely unlikely that a third party will actually succeed, and is why no party has succeeded since 1860, when the Democrats were split on the issue of slavery.

By the way, if there was a third party on the right, I'd be all for that. Because that would enable a really progressive Democrat to be nominated, I think, and actually to win. But without that, a requirement, I think, as early as this year, in 2018, is a Democratic House and/or Senate. Preferably both; Senate is more difficult. Is a requirement, but very far from sufficient to make any of these changes. In the past, the Democrats have not been willing to do that. And almost no Democratic candidate, even the most progressive of them, has really addressed the idea of conversion, which is the prerequisite for any of the other changes on climate and health and education that are needed.

PAUL JAY: Conversion of military production to green, sustainable production.

DANIEL ELLSBERG: Spending has to change away from the ability to destroy life on earth, primarily. And that, without either total disarmament—I am not a total pacifist, and never have been, although it's very hard, be very hard put to find a conflict since the Second World War, that's a long time ago, where I thought it was necessary or worthwhile for the U.S. to

be engaged. And I used to make an exception for Korea. More study on that has recently changed my mind on that.

But I think, in fact, for the Russians, for the British, ultimately for the Americans to oppose Nazi Germany under Hitler and his ambitions, his recklessness, was justified. That is my strong opinion. But without that, and without giving any other country a monopoly of nuclear weapons, let's say, by the U.S. totally disarming nuclear weapons, I don't think it would serve world peace to give, adequately, to give Russia a monopoly of nuclear weapons. Not that they would immediately start throwing them around, by any means. But that it would embolden them in ways that would not be good for world peace, or ultimately avoiding nuclear war.

But that's not the issue. The issue is whether we continue to sustain a doomsday machine of the kind we have, whether we continue to modernize it with the B61-12 bombs, and so many others—on both sides, by the way. Or whether we can move away from that. Doomsday can be made impossible. And not, actually, in some Utopian way that we've never seen in the world, even in the nuclear age. China went for decades after their first explosion in '64, when I was in the Pentagon, not building a large nuclear force. For decades they had only a dozen or so ICBMs against the United States, at a time when we could have launched thousands of weapons against China.

Now, how did they rationalize that? At first we said, well, they can't afford to. They're too poor. But within 20 years, certainly 30 years ago, that didn't work. They obviously could match, achieve parity, as they say, with the U.S. or Russia. They absolutely could. They've chosen not to spend money in ways that threaten doomsday, and threaten their own deterrence, by making us fear they're about to disarm us. China has never pretended to have the capability to disarm a major adversary. They don't, even though they have two rockets-

PAUL JAY: By disarm you mean first strike.

DANIEL ELLSBERG: By a first strike. They don't have that capability. They have, perhaps, 300 warheads now, mostly tactical, against Russia [in their area]. But many, several dozen, strategic warheads. More than they need. Enough to cause nuclear winter. But less than 10 percent of what we have. China, in other words, has followed a relatively sane policy in the nuclear era, I would say, if any nuclear policy can be sane. And I would say, actually, they have. They bought themselves a good deal of deterrence with a handful of weapons capability, and didn't go beyond that.

We could, we could ... the world would be much safer, we would be safer, if we had no more weapons than the Chinese. Likewise, the Russians. And that would be true whether the Russians imitated that or not. The same would be true for the Russians. They would be safer from a false alarm on our side, let's say, against a Russian, supposedly surprise attack, if they dismantled their ability for a surprise attack.

PAUL JAY: And this underlying idea that the Soviet Union is trying to take over the world, it seems to me it's just as true about modern-day Russia is also not trying to take over the world. There's no reason to think Russia would not comply in such a scenario.

DANIEL ELLSBERG: Yes. As you say that, you know, I don't think the U.S. is trying to take over the world by military means, although our military spending is so vastly greater than [the combination].

PAUL JAY: No, I wasn't saying the—I wasn't saying that.

DANIEL ELLSBERG: I don't think anybody is. But certainly Russia, it would be absurd to say that's what they're trying

to do.

PAUL JAY: So why don't they move to that? It's the only sane move-

DANIEL ELLSBERG: Why don't they, you said?

PAUL JAY: Well, all three. I mean, China's already in a relatively modest position. One would think, instead of developing new hypersonic planes, and new bombs, the sane course is a modest amount.

DANIEL ELLSBERG: I can only guess. For much the same reasons we do it. On the one hand, as Gorbachev has indicated, as I say, to a friend of mine, Cynthia Lazaroff, in Russia, they have their profit motive over their [inaudible] again. They're supporters of Putin. Their oligarchs are not all drug dealers. Some of them are arms makers, as over here.

Second, the idea of being a great power has domestic politics implications, and implications in negotiations in general. Status, prestige. The only reason, by the way, for the UK or France to have nuclear weapons at this time, to be in the nuclear club. To be a shadow, at least, of their former imperial selves. To be one of the big boys.

There's—in terms of how many weapons are actually needed for the deterrence of nuclear attack, which I think is not an entirely, is not an illusory notion altogether, what does it take? Dr. Herbert York, the physicist who was the first director of Livermore Nuclear Weapons Design Laboratory, one of our two laboratories; Los Alamos, and ... which produced the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs, and Livermore. He was the first director of Livermore, which was set up in particular as the home of Edward Teller, and to press H-bomb development. He said in a meeting at Livermore later, years later, after he'd been head of the research and engineering in the Defense Department, and major arms negotiator for several, for several administrations, asked the question, how many weapons are needed to deter nuclear attack from an enemy rational enough to be deterred? To be influenced? He said, one? Or ten? He said, perhaps 100. Not more than that. But closer to 10 ... sorry. Closer to 1 than 100. [That'll be like] 49.

He went at it from one other point of view, too. He said, what is the largest amount of destruction that we think one man, or one nation, should be able to inflict in a short period of time on another, on the world? Supposing we take World War II as an upper limit there, 60 million dead in a short time. That would take about 100 weapons. Largest, maybe 200. But more likely 100 weapons. So again, he says one to ten to 100 weapons. Now, of the nine nuclear states, North Korea is the only one who's clearly below that level. We, of course, are many more, ten times more than that. And [coughing] I would say that no nation in the world can actually justify having as many weapons as the least of them, putting aside North Korea.

PAUL JAY: What is the rationale, and does it play any real deterrent for Israel to have nuclear weapons?

DANIEL ELLSBERG: Yeah. Well, Israel's nuclear weapons are only first use weapons. Their adversaries have no nuclear weapons. So like us in the late '40s, their plans are only first use. First strike. Not for responding to nuclear weapons. Still, they are faced with, as NATO felt it was faced, by large adversarial forces, non-nuclear. If you add them all together, if you put them together, they have relied on their first use threat. They're said to have some 80 weapons.

Now, what would they do with 80 weapons? Actually, a better figure is—I've seen other estimates. It's very likely closer to 200. But whether it's 80 or 200, how can anyone, how can Israel, justify having that many? That's 80. But we have, you know, 1500 on alert, thermonuclear weapons. How about, when you go above Israel, then, you get in the level of 100, 140 or so, when you look at Pakistan, India. Those are atomic weapons, fission weapons. Or Britain and France, either have on

the order of 100-200. None of these countries could really justify in hearings, rational hearings, having that many, as a matter of fact. And we, come back to it, have more than 10 times more.

PAUL JAY: So why does Israel have so many?

DANIEL ELLSBERG: Probably—I don't know the answer, actually. But for reasons like ours. Probably a lot of theirs, by the way, they think of as tactical weapons, many of them may be neutron bombs, who would be used against armies in the desert. I doubt it. They wouldn't need that many—they wouldn't need 10 against cities.

PAUL JAY: But there would be nothing left of Israel after blowing up all these bombs.

DANIEL ELLSBERG: No, no, no. The—and the fallout-

PAUL JAY: Whether the—by fallout. Whether the enemy has nuclear weapons or not, there wouldn't be anything much of an Israel left.

DANIEL ELLSBERG: Sam Cohen, the father of the neutron bomb, was convinced that Israel had built his neutron bombs; that they had seen the advantage of those—which are weapons, by the way, which if they explode at a high altitude don't cause a lot, if any, fallout, and actually don't destroy structures. They penetrate through structures or tanks, and they kill the living organisms inside, the humans. The Communists at that time called it a capitalist weapon; it preserved property and killed only humans. But the Soviets, like Reagan after President Carter, almost surely did build neutron bombs and test them.

So with a lot of those, you could think of those as tactical weapons in the desert. They are [faced] in the desert. I don't know their planning [worth] knowing. In the case of India and Pakistan, for example, they have so far only fission weapons. A hundred of those, 50 each in a war against cities, a country, would cause the absorption of about 7 percent of the sunlight. Not nuclear winter, which U.S. and Russia would absorb perhaps 20 ... 70 percent of the sunlight, and starve everyone. India-Pakistan would cut sunlight by 7 percent, shortening the harvest, killing the harvest, depending on the season, and probably cause by starvation 2 billion deaths of the most ill-nourished people in the world. That's the calculation of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. Ira Helfand and others have calculated that. Something between 1-2 billion, one third of the earth's population.

If, however, testing resumes, as the Republicans for a long time have been proposing should be, should happen, as a matter of fact; and Russian labs are said to be anxious to resume testing. If testing resumed, India and Pakistan would quickly achieve H-bombs. They're on the verge of it now. North Korea, again, has claimed it has tested an H-bomb. May or may not, but certainly would need more tests to have an operational H-bomb. That would give them a full nuclear winter capability. So a war between India and Pakistan wouldn't kill only one third of the earth's populations, but three thirds, like ours. The in between nations, the UK, France, China and the others, perhaps may or may not be able to get a full nuclear winter. But they can starve, if they launch their forces as they plan, including cities like Moscow and other capital cities; many other cities with command and control. They would reflect sunlight. Between 1-7 billion. Probably somewhere in between.

There's no excuse. These are, I say, evil outcomes, certainly. And plans that risk them or prepare for them have their uses, but at the risk of causing this effect, which I would say is absolutely unconscionable, as well as a vast diversion of the world's resources that are needed otherwise.

Daniel Ellsberg ends his book, *The Doomsday Machine, Confessions of a Nuclear War Planner* with this:

“Is it simply quixotic to hope to preserve human civilization from either the effects of burning fossil fuels or preparing for nuclear war? As Martin Luther King Jr. warned us,³²⁸ one year to the day before his death, “There is such a thing as being too late.” In challenging us on April 4, 1967, to recognize “the fierce urgency of now” he was speaking of the “madness of Vietnam,” but he also alluded on that same occasion to nuclear weapons and to the even larger madness that has been the subject of this book: “We still have a choice today: nonviolent coexistence or violent co-annihilation.”

He went on: “We must move past indecision to action.... If we do not act, we shall surely be dragged down the long, dark, and shameful corridors of time reserved for those who possess power without compassion, might without morality, and strength without sight. ... Now let us begin. Now let us rededicate ourselves to the long and bitter, but beautiful, struggle for a new world.”

PAUL JAY: Thanks for joining us.

And thank you for joining us on *Reality Asserts Itself*—one hopes this is not a reality that is going to assert itself—on The Real News Network.