

NH #772 - April 14 2026

SPECIAL - Chernobyl at 40: History, Bulgarian Survivor, Gundersen on Damage to New Safe Confinement & comparing Chernobyl and Fukushima

Libbe HaLevy: [00:00:00] Nuclear disasters. April 26 marks the 40th year since the start of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster in Ukraine. In an attempt to keep the radiation releases from the site under control, more than 40 nations came together what is called the I

Bonnie Kouneva: observed, uh, numerous changes. The plants that spring all looked burned and, uh, yellow and gray and, uh. Brown. Some of the annual vegetables, especially the most sensitive like spinach and lettuce I mentioned were also brown and, and, um, dead. Some of them, some of them just, um, looking strange. Some of the, um, lettuce is actually grew huge like.

Three, four size times bigger than the usual size. The next few summers, I actually was working in a farming community and I heard from local farmers that they have observed strange changes in [00:01:00] their baby animals every spring. All of them have their baby goats and sheep and cows and horses. And then they had, um.

Amazingly high number of animals, either still born, born with organs and, um, limbs that are like multiple numbers, like five legs or two heads, or just like missing parts. Actually remember particularly in 1988, I worked a little bit longer, so, uh, it happened at my birthday in September. It was, um. I was still working there and the farmers were so sweet, they wanted to throw a party for me, and they actually killed a baby goat.

And that goat had sex organs for female and male. And if that was a novel, that would be foreshadowing of the future problems because I heard from a scientist that the different creatures have different time of responding to radiation. And, uh, more primitive or simple organisms, uh, mutate faster obviously.

At that time, I heard from a [00:02:00] scientist that they expect the peak in the mutations in humans to occur 10 years after Chernobyl, which was exactly when my son was born. But apparently that even wasn't the, the most dramatic peak because according to the recent statistics, the problems and the mutations continue even in a worse way year after year.

So we really don't know when the peak will be. How are babies affected by this? The babies that were born at that time had bone problems, skin problems, uh, respiratory problems. You were talking before, uh, before we did the interview, you mentioned about a child that you knew who was born three days after Chernobyl happened.

Yeah, that was my doctor. My son's doctor daughter was born three days after Chernobyl, and even that. Doctor who was a medical person and very intelligent woman, wasn't aware of what's going on. So she was exposing her daughter to the sun, which is traditional for the area. And then her, this is part of the health [00:03:00] for giving the baby vitamin D.

Yeah. Especially that, um, winter time in Bulgaria is dark and cold, so you do need that exposure. Yes. Her, her daughter's bones were literally melted and she needed support for the rest of her life. Her bones were melted. Yeah. They, she, they were so soft that they couldn't support her body ever. And she survived.

She survived with normal, uh, otherwise intelligent girl, but, um, disabled for, for life. Did the government continue to deny that there was anything wrong? Absolutely. Absolutely. The government continued to deny. There was no comment at all. The food wasn't, uh, withheld, so people actually were encouraged to eat, uh, food that was definitely contaminated while later on, uh, in, uh, investigation, it turned out that the government itself had deliveries with charter airplanes from New Zealand.

Special food for their, them and their families and their families were in underground shelters, but the ordinary people were actually sent to March on the streets for rallies and get all the exposure that [00:04:00] was at that time, the strongest at its peak. So, no, there was no officially released any information besides the talk among people and, um, lots of jokes.

Bulgarian like to joke on political topics. Tell me some Chernobyl jokes. Grandson is asking his grandfather, Hey, the uh, grandpa, tell me what, uh, what was it in Chernobyl that. Time and the grandfather answers. Oh, nothing, nothing much. Don't worry about it. And Pat his, uh, grandson on both of his heads. Yeah, I know.

It's bad. We shouldn't laugh, but it's so, yeah, the grandson got two heads, so. And unfortunately that's the reality for that area. Uh, if you look at any documentary, you can see children with tumors as big as their heads or organs outside of their bodies, and unfortunately it doesn't get better if you look at the data for Russia and Ukraine and all these areas that were affected.

Still, it doesn't get better. Still. People have all of these problems. Talk to me about [00:05:00] what happened with your son. When I turned, uh, 24, I got pregnant. My husband at that time was also a mountaineer and, uh, outdoor man, and he was exposed to the cherno radiation, even in a closer proximity to the exposure.

And I was marching in that communist rally that was mandatory. Unfortunately, you couldn't sneak out unless you wanted to get in a serious trouble. I was, uh. Young and healthy. I have no history of genetic, uh, diseases in our family. Same with my ex-husband. But, um, our son was born and immediately diagnosed with Down Syndrome and uh, the day he was born, there were 40.

Two or three kids in the hospital, three out of them with Down syndrome kids, which is extremely high ratio of Down syndrome for the normal population. Right. The normal percentage is what those, those are all young mothers for that age group. The normal, uh, ratio, I [00:06:00] believe is one in 3000. Something like that.

And Bulgaria used to be a clean country, and actually it was pretty low genetic, uh, diseases at that time. Uh, with my son, there were three more babies in the hospital, uh, with Down Syndrome. Uh, that was a huge tragedy for. For all these people because on the top of it, the country wasn't prepared. There was no such frequency of problems, mental problems or genetic problems.

So there was no system of support, uh, no services available for them. And uh, these kids were really, really victims.

Libbe HaLevy: So what is it that has shown up in your.

Bonnie Kouneva: Well, uh, he is, uh, severely mentally retarded. He has heart effect and, um, other problems that are related to the, uh, genetic disease, like weak muscles, weak joints, um, blood problems, stomach problems.

Also, I'm diagnosed with thyroid problems, immune problems. Once in a while, tumors here and there, which are pretty benign. But all of this actually, according to [00:07:00] doctors, is linked to the exposure to radiation because there's no history of any of it, uh, in our family. And I'm pretty healthy person. I also was, uh, mountaineer.

So all of these problems actually, uh, according to the. Uh, medical authorities are linked to Chernobyl and actually my son officially is labeled as environmental case by the governmental workers who actually try to get support

for these kids. Even before I got son with Down Syndrome, I was very dedicated to the environmental movement and I was very aware that, uh, we are not capable of.

Controlling and using safely the nuclear power. So I was actually fighter against it. We actually did the protests every, every springtime, every 26th of um, April. We were giving black ribbons to the pedestrians in Sofia and we were doing protests and that was actually pretty fun, uh, rallies in which everybody was, uh, dressed as a mutant.

So we were having fun with that. [00:08:00] But given a chance to tell people One thing I wanna uh, say this, I don't wanna leave a message, uh, about story about some strange girl with Slavic accent who had a unpleasant experience with the bad communist government got screwed, her son got screwed, and then she somehow managed to come to America and get a little bit better help for her.

So that's all great, but. That's not really what I wanna say. The communist governments were evil and they were capable of lying, but they're not the only government capable of lying. I'm afraid that in any situation, powers that be serve their Buddhists, the people with. Power and money. And if big money is involved in, uh, developing, uh, nuclear power in any country, the governments will cover for them.

And they did cover as we saw in the case of Kushima, the information wasn't uh, released. We still don't know what kind of impact that horrible event will have. I feel for the Japanese people, and I know that [00:09:00] it has had impact. To America too. So since Chernobyl in my country and in the whole area, the percentage of genetic diseases, stillborn babies, miscarriages, cancer tumors, uh, respiratory problems, thyroid problems, bone and blood problems.

Skyrocketing it's epidemic. I talked to the director of the biggest, most specialized hospital in Bulgaria, who happened to be somebody I know. She said that miscarriages and genetic illnesses in Bulgaria almost like considered like a flu, like something that almost everybody experienced. And this is not normal and it's not okay and it's not easy.

I myself actually lost a baby. A few years ago, and this is a huge, huge, uh, tragedy that uh, some people maybe never recover from and we shouldn't, uh, take it lightly. We should say, oh, that's the price for using nuclear energy. There are other alternative sources of energy. We really don't need to play with that

extremely dangerous [00:10:00] energy that we really don't know how to control and how to store the waste.

And it's just really something that we should leave alone. What are your thoughts about what's facing Japan as a result of Fukushima? I'm seriously concerned about what will happen in five or 10 years with the kids who will be born at that time. After Fukushima, but kids from parents who have been in the area or the little ones who already have been exposed, are they gonna develop all kinds of cancers, tumors, headaches, bleeding?

We really don't know. And, uh, I feel for them and I worry about them. And I don't think that that's how we should treat our future, our kids. If, if even if we are ready to play Russian roulette or Japanese roulette, we should give. The chance to our kids to actually have safe environment and enjoy their lives without having to deal with tumors and cancers and, and fear and [00:11:00] pain and disabilities.

Because even one kid growing with tumor or like in case of my son, intellectual disability and um, heart effects. He has huge impact. Their life is so much tougher and so much opportunities are taken away. It's like curse upon them. They're, they're really robbed. This is a robbery officially imposed to them, and even one kid is too much.

If we are talking about impact of such a negative event, what about. Million kids. What about million people? I've been told that most of the people who participated in the original cleanup already gone

Libbe HaLevy: cleanup of Chernobyl.

Bonnie Kouneva: Cleanup of Chernobyl. What about the cleanup in Fukushima? I know that they basically sent people who were sent on a suicidal mission.

People who knew that. Basically that's the end of them. And maybe they were willing, willing to sacrifice themselves. But why do we need to [00:12:00] pay that price? We have alternatives. We have alternative sources of energy. We can learn to use less energy. We can learn to be less of a consumerists. There's options.

We don't have to be slaves to the nuclear power and sell ourselves so cheap to such a dangerous business.

Libbe HaLevy: That was Chernobyl survivor, Bonnie Univa. Arnie Gunderson is a nuclear engineer, whistleblower, and green energy advocate who has been a consulting expert on many nuclear reactor issues. He's also a regular guest and commentator on nuclear Hotseat prized for his expertise and clarity.

Here, he updates the conversation about the problems created by the Soviet drone strike that punched a hole in Chernobyl's New Safe Confinement structure, the problems of repairing it, and then goes into a comparison between Chernobyl and Fukushima as to which one is the worst nuclear disaster in history and [00:13:00] why.

Not a race that anybody ever wants to win. My apologies for occasionally calling it the new safe containment instead of New Safe Confinement structure. I spoke with Arnie Gunderson on April 3rd, 2026. Arnie Gunderson. Great to have you back with us here on Nuclear Hotseat.

Arnie Gundersen: Hi. Hey, it's great to be back.

Libbe HaLevy: We are coming up on the 40th anniversary of the Chernobyl Nuclear Disaster, and it seems that the site is at a crossroads yet again.

First, briefly, what happened initially at Chernobyl and what was the radiation danger that it caused?

Arnie Gundersen: The Chernobyl. Reactor is entirely different than the reactors in the rest of the world. The Russian design was different. The movie, the, the Netflix series on Chernobyl is a phenomenal piece of work that explains pretty much everything that happened.

If you got [00:14:00] seven or eight. Hours of, for the five episodes that movie is, is phenomenal. But what happened was that the government did not tell the operators how unstable the reactor really was. And so the operators did move control rods in a way they thought was legal. And it caused not just a meltdown, but.

Essentially a bomb. What happens when a nuclear atom splits? It gives off a lot of energy, but in a bomb, the splitting occurs. The compounding rate is on the order of like a millionth of a second. In a nuclear reactor, the compounding rate is in about a hundredth of a second. So you can control a nuclear reactor, but you can't control a bomb.

So the Chernobyl reactor became a bomb, and the power level increased. 10 times [00:15:00] higher than what the reactor was ever designed for. It blew the lid off the reactor, and the Soviet reactors did not have a Western style containment, but it wouldn't have mattered anyway. There was so much energy that the containment would've shattered anyway, so this radiation instantaneously started to pour out of the reactor and was wafted by winds.

First over Belarus and uh, and Ukraine, and then it's headed up towards Scandinavia, Wales, Germany, even Italy. They're finding the residual in, um, Italian olives and in Wild Bo in Germany, even now, 40 years after. The laplanders up in very northern Finland have contaminated the, uh, lichen that their reindeer chew on.

They still contaminated and they have to bring in reindeer meat to maintain the [00:16:00] indigenous community. So it was the worst, instantaneous, I'll say, eruption. Explosion in, in nuclear history. Let's keep in mind, um. Instantaneous, because I think when we look at Fukushima, Fukushima may in fact be worse in the long term, but the reaction at Chernobyl was hideous.

If your readers go up online and look for something called the elephants for. The nuclear core melted down, and there's this molten mass of a combination of nuclear fuel and metal that's in the basement, and it sort of looks like an elephant's foot. Highly, highly radioactive, but that's where the nuclear core is right now, sitting as a solid lump of incredibly highly radioactive stuff, even, even 40 years after.

Libbe HaLevy: Immediate [00:17:00] aftermath of the disaster, what was done to confine chernobyl's radiation.

Arnie Gundersen: There was a a lot of really, really quick, courageous work done to get the radiation. Back into the building that it was blown out of. And in the process there was about 600,000 Russians called the liquidators who were highly exposed to radiation and are still being paid for by the state because of the exposure.

So the first thing they did was. Very rapidly clean up the site. And again, that Chernobyl movie's phenomenal in, in that regard. But then the question was, well, what do you do now? You've got a building with no roof that's still highly radioactive. So they built something called a sarcophagus. And when you do construction of something that's massive, it's important to get a good foundation, and they didn't have time.

So basically they built [00:18:00] a building as quickly as they possibly could. I, I'm not placing blame here, they were on the clock. They had to get this thing covered up and. It began to crack over time and it was obvious that it wasn't gonna last a long time. So the first sarcophagus was a quick and dirty fix, appropriate, given the speed at which it had to be done.

But because they couldn't make the foundation solid, it was sort of doomed to crack, but it did its job then. Ukraine is a poor country, and at the time the Soviet Union was collapsing, so whatever finances were were available were incredibly limited. And what happened then is the eu, the European Union came in and helped and they built a second, I'll call it a containment structure, a second sarcophagus.

This is a beautiful piece of engineering. It looks [00:19:00] like. The old drivable hangers. It's, um, it's a semicircle and it's, it's long. It was not built over the reactor because it's so radioactive, but it was designed to be rolled over the reactor after it was built. So if you can imagine, half a cylinder rolled over the reactor.

Now, to give you an idea how high this thing is, the Statue of Liberty would fit under it. This is a massive piece of engineering and it was designed to last a hundred years. At which point the theory is that the radiation levels would be low enough that they might begin to be able to dismantle the reactor.

Libbe HaLevy: I want to make the point that the New Safe Confinement took nine years to build, cost some 2.7 billion with a B US dollars, and the funding was contributed to by more than [00:20:00] 40 nations.

Arnie Gundersen: Yes. It was a, I don't know if it was the global effort, but certainly the entire. The European community and I imagine the US and perhaps the Russia.

Yeah, \$3 billion is a lot of money for this structure and it's impressive and it was designed to last a hundred years.

Libbe HaLevy: That was great in theory, but what happened to the New Safe Confinement on February 14th, 2025

Bonnie Kouneva: as the result of a drone strike?

Arnie Gundersen: The problem with nuclear power is that no one counts on war, and the Russians hit the containment.

This, this structure, this \$3 billion containment. They poked a hole in it, but in addition, that caused a fire in the insulation. It was severely damaged. It was seven or eight days before they were able to completely isolate the [00:21:00] fire that the containment. If you look at it from the right angles, you won't see the hole, but a containment with a hole in it is not really a containment anymore.

So the question is now how do you repair this thing? You pull it back and repair it away from the reactor, in which case, now you've got this open to the elements. Nuclear reactor, again, I think they're still trying to figure out what the best way of doing, and of course there's still a war, so the issue here is the same as that.

The Zia in Ukraine as well is that. Nuclear plants are not designed to be bombed. Maybe they can withstand a, a hurricane or a flood, but they're not designed to for, you know, missiles or drones and things like that. And really the Chernobyl containment won't be safe until that war's over. And, um, who knows when that will be.

Libbe HaLevy: Has there been an acknowledged or a [00:22:00] measured radiation release from Chernobyl since this damage took place last year?

Arnie Gundersen: The bulk of the airborne radiation from Chernobyl was released in the first month, the vast majority that contaminated, um, uh, Europe and, and Belarus and Ukraine. So the vast majority was released in the first couple weeks through to month, but it is still releasing gases now.

So. Maybe it one thousandths of what it used to, but that's a, there's a lot of radiation still coming off that, which this was designed to prevent. And it was also designed to prevent, um, you know, the elements from causing further damage. Rain in the nuclear reactor will, will cause the radiation to enter the groundwater, so it, the radiation's going down and up.

So the containment. This new containment structure, which now [00:23:00] has a hole in it, is no longer containing. I think it's better that it's there than to be completely removed, but it still has a hole in it, you know, and a, a containment with a hole in it really isn't a containment.

Libbe HaLevy: It's been announced that it could take another three to four years before the outer domes.

Primary safety functions can be regained, and the cost is estimated at 500 million Euros or approximately 576 million US dollars. What are the risks until this hole is repaired?

Arnie Gundersen: Well, it will continue to leak gaseous radiation, there's no doubt about it. So for the next three or four years, radioactive gases will continue to come out, and small particles, they're called hot particles, that that will be wafted out and transported to the to the environment.

There's no doubt that you'll [00:24:00] have fallout with that containment. Dome missing. Yep. Nobody knows how to fix this yet. Part of the problem here is that the structure was the first of its kind, and so now you're damaging a structure. That was the first of its kind. It's a tough engineering feat and hey, a half a billion dollars is a lot of money.

Libbe HaLevy: You have said that as bad as the original Chernobyl accident was and continues to be, Fukushima is the worst disaster. Why do you say that?

Arnie Gundersen: I was friends with Alexia Yabloko, who was the science advisor to Yeltsin and, and, uh, the Soviet went during the Soviet Union, and Alexia and I agreed on this, that the initial blast from Chernobyl was worse than the initial blast from Fukushima.

But Chernobyl is one reactor core and [00:25:00] Fukushima is three. So there's essentially three times more radiation in the nuclear, in three different nuclear containments than there is in the one at Chernobyl. That's 0.1 is that you have three cores of Fukushima and one at um, and one at Chernobyl. The other thing is that, let's get back to that Elephant's foot.

The elephant's foot. Is dry, it's sunk into the basement, but it's not in contact with groundwater so that the majority of the water of the, of the radio activity that was in the nuclear core is very highly radioactive, but it's dry now. It's not entering the groundwater. So that's not true at Fukushima, that Fukushima.

The containments did fail. All three exploded, but after a day, as opposed to initially, the initial radioactivity from Fukushima was [00:26:00] less, although they did pick up noble gases, Xenon and Krypton in Seattle at 400,000 times higher radiation levels than normal,

Libbe HaLevy: and these would be radiation releases from Fukushima.

Arnie Gundersen: Yes. Within a week or so after the meltdowns of Fukushima, the, um, radiation spiked in, uh, in Seattle, which is an indication that the containment's failing. So the Fukushima containments failed just like the Chernobyl containment, but they failed a little bit later, and that means that less radioactivity was released initially.

So, so 0.1 is both containments failed, but Chernobyl is worse initially. Point two is that when Chernobyl melted down, it melted into the basement, but it's dry. That's not true. At Fukushima, all three nuclear reactor cores melted down. [00:27:00] Think of the nuclear reactor as a giant pressure cooker. The nuclear core reached 2200 degrees.

It ignited the water, so the water created hydrogen and oxygen and exploded and failed the containments. Then that molten mass laid at the bottom of the pressure cooker, and then the pressure cookers melted through, and we know that because they have been able to get remote probes underneath the Fukushima reactors, and they found pieces that definitely belonged in the core.

Are four and five inches big. So there's holes in the bottom of these nuclear reactors that are at least four or five inches and nobody really knows for sure. So the Chernobyl elephant's foot, you can actually, you know, stick your head in a room if you're quick and see it. The, the Fukushima reactors, you can't.

So there's four, there's [00:28:00] 880 tons of uranium at Fukushima, the three cores, and they've only removed about two or three ounces of it for analysis. So, you know, we were talking about billions of dollars at Chernobyl. The bill at Fukushima is now estimated at three quarters of a trillion. Dollars and perhaps when you figure the communities around it actually is a a trillion dollar problem now.

I've been an advocate of doing exactly what they did at Chernobyl is, is put a containment over it and prevent the groundwater from getting in. The key difference between Fukushima is that now the core is sitting in groundwater because the nuclear containment building. It's not a solid thing. It's got pipes going in and out with rubber gaskets to keep the, the pipes from sliding and nobody [00:29:00] anticipated the temperatures, pressures and radiation levels and all that rubber has disintegrated.

So now water's coming in, water's going out. And the groundwater under the site is becoming contaminated, which is why they're continually pumping water out in into those tanks. It's not so much to cool the core as it is because the groundwater is becoming increasingly contaminated. I was approached by

people in the oil industry then, and you'll recall the Deepwater Horizon that blew up in the Gulf.

They injected drilling mud into that hole and plugged it. Drilling mud is a hydraulic fluid that eliminates groundwater from seeping through. So I actually, years ago I approached friends in Japan about the concept of using drilling mud to seal the site. And the Japanese have a non [00:30:00] invented here syndrome and they decided to go with an ice wall instead, which has been ineffective.

But if they were to seal the plant. Completely seal it, drill put drilling mud around the entire facility. They could prevent the inflow of groundwater and then put a containment over it and walk away for a hundred years. My theory is that right now they're jeopardizing the gene pool of Japan. They're gonna have.

Thousands of young men, constructive people on that site, working to clean it up and becoming irradiated and, and there's gotta be genetic damage. My theory was keep the water out of the basement. Button it up and come back in a hundred years, at which point the radiation levels will be 20 or 30 times lower, not zero, and the plutonium stays forever.

But most of the radiation that the workers would be exposed to would be much, much less. [00:31:00] I thought it was more remain. For the workers, and I also thought it was genetically remained for the entire country. Somebody sent me a, the clothing from a worker and I don't know how it ever got through custom because it was radioactive, but we got the complete garb from a worker when I lived in Vermont.

And um, we tested it and, um, you wanna guess where the most contaminated spot on the clothing was?

Libbe HaLevy: I would have to say somewhere in the genital area.

Arnie Gundersen: The zipper. Yep. Yep. So the genetic damage to thousands of men in a country, I, I just don't think it's fair. So button it up for a hundred years. But we're dealing it with a trillion dollar problem at Fukushima and just the containment at Chernobyl is, is three or \$4 billion and they haven't even begun to discuss how to dismantle the facility.

They're gonna kick that can down the road [00:32:00] a hundred years. Both of these facilities. Are billion dollar problems, which you can build an awful lot of wind turbines for \$2 trillion.

Libbe HaLevy: One last thing about the radioactive water from Fukushima, it's been siphoned off and put into tanks, but Tapco Tokyo Electric Power Company and the government have said that they don't have any more space.

So they have been doing batch releases of this radioactive water into the Pacific Ocean. What does that portend for the future? It's,

Arnie Gundersen: I hate to say it, but it's not just that water, the ground is contaminated and is leaking into the Pacific as well. Now everybody looks at the tanks, which they claim to be, uh, demineralizing before they release, but in fact, the stuff that's sitting in the groundwater.

Is percolating right down into the Pacific and is not treated, and this [00:33:00] is where I really consider the Fukushima disaster to be worse than Chernobyl. The releases into bodies of water, the groundwater and the Pacific are hundreds of times worse than the releases into the groundwater at Chernobyl, so they're dramatically different.

One had a very quick release of an awful lot of radiation. And one had significant releases for months at a clip, and now we have contaminated groundwater and contaminated Pacific, so they are comparable. When people say Chernobyl was the worst, it was for the first week. But I'm not convinced when you look at the fan of time over a decade or more, that Fukushima, uh, doesn't become on the same par as as Chernobyl.

Libbe HaLevy: Anything you'd like to add?

Arnie Gundersen: You know, they are finding, continually finding radioactive fish in the Pacific, [00:34:00] relatively near the plant a couple miles away. Then of course. Right after the meltdowns, they found, uh, tuna that had swung from Japan all the way over to San Diego and were too radioactive to eat.

So the Pacific's a big place, and if you compare it to like the Great Lakes where the Palisades nuclear reactor. The Pacific is 10,000 times bigger than all of the Great Lakes combined. So if we have a meltdown at a Palisades or at a plant, there's 40 plants that surround the the Great Lakes, the impact on the aquatic.

Ecosystems will be phenomenal. It's time. I always say, you know, the Eisenhower had this thing called the Adams for Peace program, and the theory was that the America would build a thousand nukes. I, I, I've been saying now it's time to pick up the pieces after Adams for Peace,

Libbe HaLevy: [00:35:00] Arnie Gunderson, it's always a revelation, a shock.

And in certain ways, a pleasure to know that we're getting the straight facts from you on all of this in great detail and specificity. And I want to thank you for once again being my guest this week on Nuclear Hotseat.

Arnie Gunderson: Thank you for having me. And thanks for all the work you do. I mean, my work pales in comparison with this effort you put in.

Thank you.

Libbe HaLevy: Nuclear engineer and whistleblower, Arnie Gunderson. Now just in time for tax day, did you know. The longest war tax protest in US history began with one couple's conscientious refusal to pay for nuclear weapons or war, a commitment that inspired supporters nationwide and built a community through the power of non-violent direct action.

Here with another story from our shared history of resisting nukes is Jack Cohen Choppa, [00:36:00] co-coordinator of the nuclear resistor.

Jack Cohen-Joppa: It is tax season and if nothing is certain, but death and taxes. What if we don't want our taxes, the fruit of our labors to hasten the certain death of others? We could just not pay, but that too has a cost.

Newly married Betsy Corner and Randy Kaler understood the cost. When they stopped paying for war in 1977, the first year they filed jointly. Each year, Betsy and Randy gave notice to the tax man about their refusal to pay while donating their taxes. Due to groups helping the poor and victims of war, their war tax resistance was grounded in their shared opposition to the deadly connection between us militarism abroad and its ever present threat of nuclear attack and while profoundly personal in its impact.

Their ongoing tax resistance was no secret as Randy gained prominence as the National Director of the influential Nuclear [00:37:00] Weapons Freeze Campaign in the early 1980s. In March, 1989, the federal government legally seized their family home in the town of Coal Rain, Massachusetts to recover \$32,000 in unpaid federal taxes.

Western Massachusetts was by then known not only for anti-nuclear activism, but also a long history of war tax resistance assured of their neighbor's support. Betsy, Randy and their young daughter stayed put in 1990. The IRS tried to

auction off the house, but there were no bidders. The government ended up buying the home for the minimum bid of \$5,100.

Supporters had publicized the politics of the home seizure, and potential buyers had learned that while the government was auctioning title to the house, the house sat on land leased from a community land trust that had no interest in cooperating with the seizure. A year later, the family still hadn't moved out, so the government successfully [00:38:00] sued to evict them.

They were ordered to leave by Thanksgiving day, they did not. Randy was alone at home when federal agents came knocking on December 3rd, 1991. They took him into custody that afternoon, a federal marshal returned to the coal mine and arrested Betsy Corner at a neighbor's home. The couple were soon brought before a federal judge who only wanted to know if they intended to reoccupy the home or encourage others to do so.

Prevented from reading his prepared statement. Kayla responded simply. It is my intention to oppose the use of my tax dollars for killing and preparations for war. He was found in contempt and taken straight to jail for up to six months or until he agreed to comply with the eviction order. Acting on her intention to avoid jail in order to care for their daughter.

Betsy Corner agreed not to reoccupy the home, but when she was asked by the court if she planned to organize others to occupy the [00:39:00] house, she reminded them that her supporters were acting on their own behalf. And that next morning, 150 supporters rallied outside their home. 14 people dubbed the morning after team then removed the locks installed by federal marshals and reentered the home.

They remained overnight the first of at least a dozen affinity groups who had pledged to take non-violence training, occupy the home for a week at a time risk arrest, and provide support to those in jail and their families. The house was successfully auctioned off in February, 1992, two months after Kor's arrest for \$5,400.

Police arrested seven occupiers that day, and Kaler was ordered, released from jail. His contempt mooted by the sale of his property. Despite lacking a valid lease for the land police soon helped the new owners move into the house while Betsy and Randy's supporters sustained their 24 7 [00:40:00] piece vigil in a tent shelter pitched on land to trust property right next to their house.

Over the next 18 months, the coal rain action turned into the longest and most remarkable war tax protest in US History. Police made 60 arrests mostly for trespass, including 52 people who spent from five days to two weeks in jail. The final arrests occurred in September, 1993 after a court ordered injunction forced an end to the vigil.

The government never did recover. All they claimed was due. And over the span of those several years, Betsy, Randy and their daughter and hundreds of their friends and neighbors experienced the power of building community through a commitment to nonviolent direct action. To learn more about the many options for war tax resistance, the National War Tax Resistance Coordinating committee@nwtccc.org has a [00:41:00] wealth of excellent resources.

This has been Jack coa for Nuclear Hotseat with a tax seasoned story from the archives of the nuclear resistor.

Libbe HaLevy: Jack Cohen-Joppa of the nuclear resistor who can be reached through the website, nuke resistor.org. And if you would like to explore information about your taxes and resistance, there's a group called the National War Tax Resistance Coordinating Committee at it can be reached@nwprcc.org or just go to the website.

We will have a link up. Nuclear hotze.com. Under this episode number 7 7 2. And a quick activist shout out. The International Uranium Film Festival will be held in Chicago on April 24th through 26th at DePaul University. It's being sponsored by the Nuclear Energy Information Service, and we will have a link up for [00:42:00] further information on our website.

Nuclear Hotseat.com. Under this episode number 7 7 2, and a reminder that nuclear Hotseat has finally joined this part of the 21st century and begun creating transcripts for each episode. If you wanna research some aspect of a show, you can download the PDF from the webpage and then search for keywords or phrases to find the information you seek.

Right now, transcripts are in place starting from nuclear Hotseat number 7 65 on February 24th, 2026. But we're putting a system in place to go back in time and generate transcripts for all the earlier episodes, starting with a few of our classics. And there's about to be more good social media news for nuclear Hotseat.

We'll keep you up to date at each step in our growth. This has been Nuclear Hotseat for Tuesday, April 14th, 2026. If you'd like to get nuclear Hotseat

delivered via [00:43:00] email every week, we make it easy. Sign up for it on our website, nuclear Hotseat.com, and you'll see a big honking yellow box. Just fill in your first name and whatever email address you want to use and send it to us, and then every week in return, you'll get one email with the link to that week show as soon as it posts at a short description of its content.

Do that and you never need miss a single update to what's happening in the nuclear world. Now if you have a story lead, a hot tip or a suggestion of someone to interview, send that to me in an email at info@nuclearhotseat.com. And remember, if you can go to nuclear Hotseat and donate, thank you. Any amount you can provide will help us out and we really do appreciate your support.

This episode of Nuclear Hotseat is copyright 2026 libe [00:44:00] Halevy and Nuclear Hotseat. All rights reserved, but fair use allowed as long as you cite the program website names of any guests whose comments you use and me For now, this is Libe Halevy of Nuclear Hotseat, reminding you a nuclear accident anywhere.

Is a nuclear accident everywhere. This from former chair of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Allison McFarland, and there you have it, your weekly nuclear wake up call. So whatever you do, do not go back to sleep because we are all in the nuclear hot.

Nuclear Hotseat Theme: Nuclear Hotseat. What are those people thinking?

Our time to act is shrinking, but the activists are linking

Hotseat. [00:45:00] It's the bomb.