Knocking on the Devil's Door: Our Deadly Nuclear Legacy - a documentary of the greatest urgency

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
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"We must outlaw nuclear reactors." - Admiral Hyman Rickover, the Father of the Nuclear Navy, to Congress in his farewell speech

Gary Null, radio talk show host and author, with Producer Richard Gale, has produced a comprehensive indictment of nuclear power and weapons. The first thing the public needs to know is that it is not merely a debate about which way to go with policy. Rather, the nuclear issue is about life and death now. So a big public service is in exposing the nuclear industry's lies that are killing people today
at increasing rates. Premiered in August, Knocking on the Devil's Door: Our Deadly Nuclear Legacy has taken on the political, financial, technical and other scientific aspects of a monstrously complicated and scary topic. In 135 minutes the film takes a semi-informed viewer from innocence to mind-blown amazement -- and perhaps depression.

If one could just watch an abridged version of Knocking on the Devil's Door, of maybe only one-fifth of the whole film, it would totally undermine any misplaced faith in the nuclear industry and its handmaiden, the government. The additional four-fifths' content is excellent for burying the zombie forever.

Beginning with footage of Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Three Mile Island, Chernobyl and Fukushima, the early history of the nuclear weapons/power complex and its government backing set the stage for in-depth interviews with well-informed scientists and activists. As the film goes on, the facts and dangers pile upon yet more facts and dangers that soon cause any viewer's head to spin with sadness and outrage.

All aspects of the nuclear assault are covered in this documentary. The expertise is unassailable, including international scientists, and well known anti-nuclear activists such as Pediatrician Helen Caldicott, Dr. Vandana Shiva, Michio Kaku, Greg Palast, Harvey Wasserman, Chris Busby, Dr. Janette Sherman, Karl Grossman, Ernest Sternglass, Aileen Mioko Smith, and Beyond Nuclear's Kevin Kamp.

Find an expert to put them down or object to the premise of the film, and you have an expert who is alright with environmental rape and damage to the human gene pool, and who believes ever more technology and energy is tantamount to (materialist) life itself. After all, such an expert insists, we all must be reasonable and compromising in a democracy.

The film reminds us of basics that we would rather forget: there is no radioactive-waste disposal system that works long term. The stuff is piling up and leaking. It is dangerous and causes cancer and birth defects. All nuclear power plants are ticking time-bombs for accidents, natural disasters, or terrorism. Bomb material comes from nuclear power plants. Worse, government primarily serves industrial profit, so it is not there to protect us or the planet, but to cover for and enrich the polluters and scam artists of the nuclear industry.

Understandably, almost no one wants to believe that the corporate state that foists thousands of years of violent poison on us is so stupid and evil that corruption is the order of the day. But upon watching this film, learning of the games played by Tokyo Electric, nuclear plant contractors, and government officials around the world, one must believe it.

For example, as told by journalist Greg Palast in the documentary, Stone and Webster, now a subsidiary of the Shaw Group, was found guilty of racketeering and fraud for faking seismic data; fined $4 billion. Now the company is bringing on three new nuclear plants. The Shaw Group is a top donor to the Governor of Louisiana, Bobby Jindal.

Years before Fukushima's reactors blew in March of 2011, Tokyo Electric (TEPCO) faked and manipulated inspection results to fool government inspectors. When this became known in a national scandal, the government ruled it was okay because the rules needed to be relaxed. When such institutional crimes are allowed, disaster eventually comes. And it is still coming, loaded into the pipeline perhaps beyond our ability to survive it.

Entergy, once an obscure Arkansas company, now owner of Indian Point reactor near NYC, is part of "one of the worst cases of political power and abuse that I saw with Bill Clinton and the lawyer for Entergy, Hillary Rodham," says Greg Palast in the film. "Entergy owns the Clinton family. The company buys nuclear plants that are supposed to be retired, then gets extensions on them."

Karl Grossman, journalism professor at SUNY, said candidate Obama was quite antinuclear, saying nuclear power plants "can blow up." "But once in office, forget about it. After Fukushima blew, Obama called for loan guarantees for more nuclear, because Wall Street won't touch it."

Obama's Senate reelection chief and administration official David Axelrod used to work for Commonwealth Edison, biggest U.S. utility. "He sold Obama on nukes despite a campaign promise to not build nuclear plants without a place to put the waste. It's like building a building with no toilet," says Greg Palast.

Former White House Chief of Staff for Obama, Rahm Emanuel, made millions of dollars selling nuclear power. Exelon, formerly Commonwealth Edison, Chicago, owns 17 plants and is buying Constellation Energy. A dozen nuke plants ring Chicago. [Remind me not to go there again, but Amtrak uses it as its hub. - editor]

Steven Chu, Energy Secretary, is of the nuclear cult "nukies." He denies the consequences of radioactivity, dismissing it as something we can live with.

Wasserman gave us yet more bad news: Duke Power is on the brink of giving $10 million to the Democratic National Committee. [These are not your friends. - editor]

Halliburton/Brown & Root incurred a 1,000% cost overrun for one nuke project; no other industry would be allowed this. And no other industry enjoys anything like the Price-Anderson Act that provides insurance for the nuclear industry paid for by the U.S. taxpayer.

The nuclear industry is rife with corruption and fraud, because there's no way to build a safe nuclear plant. "The problem of nuclear power plants is that they are not are built on concrete but on lies," points out Greg Palast. "In many ways, atomic energy is just a big scam," says Harvey Wasserman in the film. In this reviewer's view, this analysis fits with the tradition of the U.S. economy steeped in boondoggles -- from construction projects to wars -- for private gain at public expense. So it is no wonder that the nuclear industry, government and military are playing musical chairs as people go in one door, then out, in another door, and so on.

A heart-breaking prospect for the future of humanity is called up by Helen Caldicott in the film: "The nuclear physicists, engineers and businessmen have no idea about the biological effects of radiation. So they either lie or confuse the public."

The threat to our children and future generations is more true than ever because of Fukshima: "It's essentially a tsunami of radiation still coming at the United States," points out Wasserman. In Japan the news coverage on Fukushima is suppressed. "If we didn't have foreign media here, we'd be totally lost. We have to have the eyes of the world," says Aileen Mioko Smith of Green Action Japan.

After Fukushima the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission extended licenses (including Vermont Yankee which is the identical design of Fukushima) of several dozen nuke plants for 50 to maybe 80 years, inviting disaster and catastrophe.

Karl Grossman says, "The corporate news media is totally in the pocket of the nuclear industry which has bought hundreds of millions of dollars of airtime. Nuclear companies such as Westinghouse and GE own TV networks, and Rupert Murdoch is a very committed pro nuker." Grossman goes on to say "the NY Times has joined with the Pinocchios of the nuclear industry... This is tragic because a holocaust of death from cancers has started."

Apart from fallout, radioactive particles spewing into the sea, tritium in fresh water, etc, the low-level radiation harms the cell membranes and breaks down the lipid barrier. "Stontium 90, like PCBs and DDT, stay in the body for decades... Where the nuclear plants are we're seeing a marked increase in cancer not only in children but in the elderly as well. One of the striking areas is Pottstown, Pennsylvania which is a gorgeous part of the country, and we find that since 1981 when the Limmerick plant went online, and 1998, that the childhood cancer rate has gone up 71%." - Janette Sherman, MD, Chernobyl Toxicologist, Radiation and Public Heath Project.

So, as Helen Caldicott points out, "Children are getting cancer at the age of six instead of the age of 60 because they've been exposed in utero to radiation, epidemics of cancer, leukemia, genetic disease -- how dare we?"

According to MSNBC/Associated Press, June 21, 2011, "Radioactive Tritium has leaked from three quarters of commercial nuclear reactors..." Tritium becomes part of the water molecularly; i.e., water itself, so the tritium cannot be filtered out. This is allowed in part through the extending of the licenses of nuclear plants.

The most thorough documentation of harm from low-level radiation is from the medical industry. In the 1950 Alice Stewart discovered the biggest factor in childhood leukemia was whether the pregnant mother was X-rayed. The medical profession attacked Dr. Stewart personally. Thirty years later the medical profession finally admitted that pregnant women should not be X-rayed.

So, you think you can escape the problem of nukes by staying healthy, such as by eating sea weed to take in natural iodine to fight radioactive idodine, etc.? But "every nuclear power plant is a system for generating nuclear weapons... There has been an extremely false division made between nuclear power and nuclear weapons. From uranium reactors you get plutonium, perfect for making nuclear weapons. There is no way you can keep these two applications separate." - Vandana Shiva, Ph.D, nuclear physicist, environmental activist and philosopher. There are those at top levels of governments and militaries, as well as independent operators known as terrorists, who want to use nuclear weapons. Why is it just fine for Israel allowed to have The Bomb and not be accountable about it? Is the idea to possibly nuke Iran, perhaps at the behest of powerful forces in U.S. leadership?

Caldicott: "360 to 370 tons of depleted uranium 238 ordinance were used around Basra in the Gulf War, It is an alpha emitter like plutonium, very carcinogenic. Much of it is lying around the desert in powdered form, the children play in it... and sand storms blow the stuff up. Soon after the doctors in hospitals... noticed an increase in the incidence of childhood cancer... and very deformed babies being born... Babies being born with no brains or no arms or single eyes has gone up 700%. Women are too terrified to deliver their babies. The half-life of uranium 238 is 4.5 billion years... It will be creating cancer for the rest of time. For the present invasion in Iraq they have used over 2000 tons of it."

Dr. Chris Busby of the European Committee on Radiation Risks: "Because of decreased fertility and reduced sperm counts, by the year 2020 there may be no more Israelis because of depleted uranium floating around the Middle East and the whole planet."

The U.S. has had three space accidents dumping plutonium on the Earth, and Russia six.

An energy critique of the film

Despite the film's enthusiasm for a technological energy solution for the nuclear threat, unintentionally sowing confusion regarding the notion of plentiful, clean energy for today's consumer population, I wholeheartedly recommend this film to anyone. The film's strong point is not energy policy as the cure for society's alleged needs. Inevitably in such a movie about a terrible problem -- such as Al Gore's Inconvenient Truth about climate change -- the critique of the problem gives way to the suggestion for the solution. But sometimes the person describing a problem is not the right person to provide the solution (if there really is a solution).

Claims are made and hopes are expressed in Knocking On the Devil's Door to the effect that perfectly clean and available technology can just step in to replace nuclear energy as well as fossil fuels. But one expert featured in the film, Chris Busby, makes a good case for using much less energy immediately by having a proper economic system that does not involve working too much, in ways that waste energy, enabling us to get rid of nuclear energy now.

As evil as the nuclear power/weapons complex is, such that it clearly needs to be dismantled if we are to see life continue in a healthy fashion on Earth, the idea that a solar-powered, windmill dotted world is a viable alternative to a nuclear-energy powered world happens to be unworkable. Today's industrial, consumer economy and the size of the present population -- dependent on the vulnerable petroleum infrastructure -- cannot run on renewable energy. Renewable energy is appropriate and feasible for small-scale, local operation, and cannot replace petroleum on the scale hoped for. But when renewable energy is a panacea and inflated because we supposedly need so much energy, the focus of terminating now all nuclear and fossil energy is lost or diffused. However, unsuprisingly, the film tells us "The technology is there, the resources are there: we have all the sunlight, all the wind, all the geothermal and ocean thermal and wave energy to run this planet with available technology. What's standing in the way is the corporate investments in nuclear power and fossil fuels." - Harvey Wasserman. Perhaps the idea of "running this planet" is so ill-conceived that it is simply part of the soon to be obsolete, dominant culture that ultimately rips nature to shreds.

Now that the peak in global oil extraction has come, and climate disruption from greenhouse gas emissions has begun, it would appear to make sense to go all out for renewable energy and other alternatives. Unfortunately, humanity's best bet today regarding energy is not an attempt at an industrial conversion to a renewable energy infrastructure for a greener consumer economy but immediate curtailment of energy consumption. Curtailment, whether voluntary or due to sudden, critical shortage of fuels, will end the corporate economy and, when the dust settles, usher in bioregional political self-leadership. Then the only remaining challenge for international cooperation might be cleaning up the nukes from the previous economic paradigm.

The only other error in the film that I noticed was in the opening images of nuclear horror, when the Three Mile Island nuclear plant appears to massively explode as it did not. The plant actually had a partial meltdown, with radiation releases. Special effects for graphic embellishment and editing ought to conform to historical fact.

This reviewer has been an on-and-off anti-nuclear activist, and I've known about the hazards and lies of nuclear industry doings. But it's all so disgusting I've not wanted to know much more. So when I pick up more information like that presented in Knocking on the Devil's Door, I am floored at how much worse the situation really is. Perhaps it is mostly the blatant corruption and risk-taking that the public is ignorant of, when the outrages and absurdities of nuclear energy are so clear.

The conscious American likes to think that justice and common sense have a place in the political system, and that there is human goodness in a good many top elected officials. We don't want to be totally disillusioned. When we see the headline "President Obama to Seek Higher Tax Rate on Millionaires" we can't accept that Obama and his circle are doing things like plotting to create more nuclear waste instead of restructuring the country. Instead we want to believe that Obama is vastly different than the Republicans, and that he means so well. Unfortunately, despite his mixed bag of presidential deeds that include some good deeds, the main similarity Barack Obama has with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. -- who sealed his fate by challenging the power structure by eloquently linking poverty, the war machine and materialism -- is skin color.

What is not addressed by Knocking on the Devil's Door, and what needs to be looked at throughout society, starting with conversations in all homes, is "How can nuclear power and weapons be tolerated one day longer when they pose such a clear threat to life?" This question gets into the question of why people are so powerless, or why they keep waiting to exercise their latent power -- until it may be too late to avoid annihilation. Or, are human beings hopelessly stupid, or awaiting liberation from the dominant culture by its collapse?

My hope is that a film such as Knocking on the Devil's Door can radicalize, if it can get well distributed and talked about

widely. Then it will be more likely that the nonviolent, civil disobedience movement can rise up to stop nuclear power and disarm all known nuclear weapons. Until then, or while the movement is stalled, the psychological or cultural obstacle appears to be that until radiation sickness attacks many more of us, the average consumer seems to be much more interested in the next beer or how to get a faster new car -- even if Knocking on the Devil's Door receives an Academy Award.

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Information resources:

Screening in New York City

WHEN Sept. 21, 2011, 7:00 pm to 10:00 pm

PLACE: New York Society for Ethical Culture

ADDRESS: 2 West 64th Street at Central Park West in Manhattan

Gary Null & Associates' website including film trailer

Harvey Wasserman's column in The Free Press: Can we stop the next Fukushima times 10,000?
September 13, 2011
"The horrible news from Japan continues to be ignored by the western corporate media. Fukushima's radioactive fallout continues to spread throughout the archipelago, deep into the ocean and around the globe---including the US. It will ultimately impact millions, including many here in North America. The potentially thankful news is that Fukushima's three melting cores may have not have melted deep into the earth, thus barely avoiding an unimaginably worse apocalyptic reality..."

U.N. Special meeting on Fukushima 9-22
The Energy Net, website of Roger Herried of the Abalone Alliance Archive

Nuclear Roulette: new book puts a nail in coffin of nukes, reviewed by Jan Lundberg

Beyond Nuclear

Nuclear Information and Resource Service

Dialogue on Nukes - a good news source and organizing group

A race to build nuclear plants in China is outweighing the backlash against atomic energy sparked by the crisis at Japan's Fukushima Daiichi plant. New reactors in China - home to nearly half of all such projects under construction - will help to double the world's nuclear capacity by 2030 according to the World Nuclear Association. (Source: Peak Oil Review, Association for the Study of Peak Oil & Gas - USA Chapter, 9/17/2011, #12)

'The Bribe Memo' and collapse of Stone & Webster [now of the Shaw Group] "Lawsuit uncovers failed kickback scheme that dealt firm a huge blow" By Steve Bailey, Boston Globe Columnist, March 15, 2006

Breaking the Information Monopoly

How do we know whether to believe what government officials tell us about the danger of radiation after a nuclear accident like Fukushima?

Non-violent Direct Action Training and Interrogate Festival

"Exeter Anarchist Reading Group" contact:
anarchistexeter@googlemail.com
Stop New Nuclear

Hinkley Point is the first of eight proposed sites for nuclear new build to go ahead. We stopped them here before, and we can do it again. If they fail at Hinkley, it is unlikely the “nuclear renaissance” will have the momentum to continue.

Nuclear Spent Fuel Risk: Severe Solar Storms Could Disrupt Earth This Decade: NOAA

Down The Yellowcake Road - CCAT

A website and film projects educating and raising public awareness of environmental, health, and socio-economic impacts of the front end of the nuclear fuel cycle, and the tremendous wastes involved.

Includes the Fuel Cycle Interactive Graphic
depicting the Nuclear Fuel Production Process at all phases; Exploration, Mining, Milling, Conversion, Enrichment, and Fuel Production. Images are linked to information on each process step.

Depleted Uranium Report 2011, youtube.com
Video summarizing Depleted Uranium and its importance in today's world.

Residents Organized for a Safe Environment (ROSE).
from Rita Schröter: We have international No Nuke demonstrations in Belgium, France (Cattenom, Bure and Fessenheim), Luxembourg, Holland and Germany (Gronau). Contamination knows no borders - and we´ll cross them, too