

Ralph Nader Radio Hour

Episode 512

“Christian Zionism”

December 30th, 2023

Steve Skrovan: It's the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*.

Hannah Feldman: Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. My name is Hannah Feldman, along with my co-host, Steve Skrovan. Hi Steve.

Steve Skrovan: Hi Hannah. It's great having you take the con this week.

Hannah Feldman: Happy to do it. Give your voice a little rest. We're also here with our other co-host, David Feldman. Hello David.

David Feldman: Morning Hannah

Hannah Feldman: And of course, the man of the Hour. Ralph Nader. Good morning, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Morning and welcome listeners. We have to be especially alert for 2024, a portentous year, if there ever was one, in American history.

Hannah Feldman: We've been covering the situation in Palestine since the Hamas attacks in Israel on October 7th and the ongoing Israeli bombing of Gaza. We've heard from Arabs, we've heard from Israelis, and we've heard from American Jews. Today we're going to discuss a Christian perspective. A lot of the most influential American Zionist activity, in groups like AIPAC, come from Evangelical Christians. And what's happening in Gaza today has all the hallmarks of a modern day crusade. It's a bit of a Christmas pantomime with Israel playing the role of the medieval crusader states, the US understudying for the Holy Roman Empire and the Palestinians are reprising their role as the people who already live in Palestine. But do those Evangelical Zionists speak for all Christians? Our guests today would answer no.

In the first half of the program we're going to talk to the Reverend Dr. Donald Wagner. He's the National program director of an organization called Friends of Sabeel-North America. They're a nonprofit Christian ecumenical organization, seeking justice and peace in the Holy Land through education, advocacy, and nonviolent action.

Then we're going to close out 2023 with an open forum. Steve, David and I have some questions for Ralph, and there's a listener question that's been burning a hole in our mailbag for a while. We're going to get Ralph's take on the Supreme Court, AI and the War Powers Act. As always, somewhere in the middle, we'll check in with our steadfast corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first Zionist Christians may have the loudest voices, but they're not the only voices. David?

David Feldman: Reverend Dr. Donald Wagner is the National Program Director of Friends of Sabeel-North America (FSNA), a nonprofit Christian ecumenical organization seeking justice and peace in the Holy Land through education advocacy, and nonviolent action. Prior to his present position, Reverend Dr. Wagner was a professor of Middle Eastern Studies at North Park University in Chicago, where he also directed The Center for Middle Eastern Studies. Has written four books, including *Anxious for Armageddon: A Critique of Christian Zionism*, *Dying in the Land of Promise: Palestine and Palestinian Christianity from Pentecost to 2000*, and *Glory to God in the Lowest Journeys to an Unholy Land*. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*.

Rev. Dr. Donald Wagner: Thanks so much for having me. Look forward to it.

Ralph Nader: Welcome, indeed. You've given us permission to call you Don.

Rev. Dr. Donald Wagner: Absolutely.

Ralph Nader: And we're very informal on this program. Forty-one years ago, you were in Lebanon during the Israeli attack on Lebanon, trying to get the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), leaders out of Lebanon into some sort of exile. You wrote a recollection of that in June in an opinion piece, and you titled it, "I Saw Israel's final a Solution to the Palestinian Problem" in Lebanon 41 years ago, and I see it again today. Could you tell us about that phrase that you have in quotes and the context and your experience on NBC?

Rev. Dr. Donald Wagner: Yeah, sure. Thanks, and grateful to be with you Ralph. I led a group of relief and development organizations to Lebanon in late May '82, and we got trapped in the Israeli invasion and the bombing that started on the 4th of June. We went around, and we visited hospitals. We saw a hospital wing that had been bombed. We watched apartment buildings and refugee camps being hit, and the roughest was at a Red Crescent Hospital when ambulances rolled in with 36 teenage girls, 19 in body bags, after Israel hit their United Nations (UN) school buses, which were clearly marked. I returned after about a week and asked my staff—I was the director of the Palestine Human Rights Campaign at the time—to get some media. After a day back from Lebanon, they got me on an NBC Radio interview with an Israeli general, whose last name was Shromi, and he dictated that he would not allow me in the studio for the interview. So I protested that, but it had already been arranged.

During the course of the interview, he described Israel's precision bombing in selected targets, sparing civilians, and going after the terrorist PLO. And I said the bombing was not precise because it was primarily Palestinian and Lebanese civilians who were killed. I mentioned the schoolgirls, which he claimed was a complete fabrication. He also said Israel must defend itself from the PLO terrorists and that this was our final solution to the Palestinian problem. So I jumped on that opening and said, my god, you are endorsing genocide of an entire people. This is what the Nazis said about your people. I think you owe the audience an apology. The interview deteriorated from that point. The host kind of killed the interview, and I went back to the office and had a call from the NBC program host who said their phone lines had lit up with hatred for what I had said, and that it should have been the reverse for what the General said. But he said I would never be allowed back at an NBC studio because of "my anti-Semitic, offensive remarks." So that was that.

But this is what we're seeing today from the Nakba through the war in Lebanon to what's going on in Gaza, this is the final solution. Netanyahu and members of his cabinet have said they're going to expel as many Gazans as possible into the Sinai and we'll let Jordan, Egypt, Canada, and probably the US take them and be done with them—final solution again. So this is genocide. It's a war crime and we're witnessing it every day.

Ralph Nader: What's coming up early next year is an astounding piece of legislation. 14.3 billion (with a B) dollars to support Israel's operations in Gaza. And there's maybe as many as 25 senators, Democrats, led by Senator Van Hollen from Maryland who are saying, hey wait, we have to have conditions here. We can't have this money go to produce more weaponry and produce more destruction. But it looks like they're in the minority, because both the Republican and Democrat leadership in the House and Senate are favoring this bill. We've called this bill the Genocide tax for a simple reason that why should the American taxpayer be charged for a colossal blunder, and a collapse of Israeli defenses on October 7th? It's so astounding that everything in terms of detection equipment was disabled, and the soldiers were not alert. It indicates that maybe some of the writings in the Israeli press pointing to was this another Netanyahu lure maneuver in order to use it as a provocation, although he probably wouldn't have thought it went that far, in order to attack the Hamas. This is very a complicated relation between Netanyahu and Hamas. Can you describe that?

Rev. Dr. Donald Wagner: I was on a sabbatical trying to write a book in '87 in the fall when the first Intifada broke out. And I went over to Palestine and went right down to Gaza within a week of the Intifada breaking out. I was staying with one of the relief and development guys, and he drove me around and you could see kids in the street throwing stones at the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), tires burning, IDF chasing the kids down alleys. He said he wanted to take me by a mosque, and said we're not sure about this one because it's fairly new. So we went by and he said, let's just sit here for a while. Again, tires were burning in front of the mosque. No IDF soldiers were around. Kids threw stones at the military. They left them alone.

And he said, what do you see here? I said, my god, the IDF doesn't seem to care. They're not retaliating against this mosque. He said, yeah, it's a new group and we are doing research on the sheikh. They're calling themselves Hamas. So it looked like from the beginning, that was a protected movement and the idea was to drive a wedge between the PLO that was strong and really powerful in Gaza and all over the West Bank, although the Intifada was totally independent of the PLO in the first days. But Israel helped foster. They let money come in. We don't know from where. The Saudis could have been involved, Qatar, the Gulf, but they allowed Hamas to grow as a divide and conquer strategy against the PLO, which was more secular. So the roots go back to then and continues. Netanyahu has allowed the money to continue to come in because it gives him plausible denial. We have nobody to negotiate with. Netanyahu is totally against the Palestinian state and any future resolution, so it's a convenient denial. And there are reports that right around October 7th, far right-wing settlers, Ben Gvir, Smotrich and others, asked for security coverage to protect some of their festivals for the Feast of Tabernacles. And the IDF was pulled out from those areas that Hamas went into. We don't know the details and don't want to be too conspiratorial, but whether it's just security lapses or if it was a coordination, Netanyahu and his folks are culpable for allowing Hamas to come across and do this.

Ralph Nader: And by the way, again in the Israeli press, there are all kinds of reports that are being subject to repression. The *New York Times* had an article, and others, on how the voices of descent are being repressed in Israel and reporters for *Haaretz*, the great independent Israeli newspaper, are being subject to a lot of intimidation. What they're upset about is why there weren't immediately official investigations of what happened on October 7th, instead of after the war is over, which Netanyahu has a vested interest in prolonging, because he's under indictment for corruption. All the things are on hold—the investigation to find out the truth of what happened, and to further the prosecution of Netanyahu—because the invasion of Gaza is taking longer and longer. That's another issue of suspicion, because in many parliamentary countries, this kind of defense failure would've resulted immediately in the fall of the coalition, and the ministers and the prime ministers would have had to resign.

But that didn't happen in the narrow majority coalition headed by Netanyahu with his extreme right-wing parties that have nothing but hatred and racial antagonism toward the Palestinians. The magazine *Middle East Report*, reprinted a while ago, some of the unbelievable racial epithets and destructive violent comments by high Israeli officials, prime ministers, former prime ministers, and ministers in the cabinet over the years, which indicate that this is a longstanding level of bigotry. So what is the position of the organized Christian churches? The Holy Family Catholic church and convent were hit by Israeli missiles in Gaza. The Greek Orthodox church was hit earlier, the Indonesian church. There are very few Christians in Gaza. But two quick questions. Why is Israel hitting these areas? And the second is, what do you think that the Pope and the Catholic church, the Protestant churches, the Baptist churches have done and what do you think they should do?

Rev. Dr. Donald Wagner: There's a lot there. In terms of Israel hitting the churches, there's no real restrictions. They're using bombardment 85% supplied by the United States, that is, randomly hitting and killing civilians. This is their strategy. They've so demonized the Palestinians that they are absolutely trying to annihilate them. As I said earlier, the final solution. Avi Slaim, a great Oxford University Jewish historian recently said "The Nazi dehumanization of the Jews was a major factor in paving the way for the death camps. Israel's demonization of the Palestinians, calling them animals and terrorists, is a similarly dangerous dynamic that can be used to justify the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians." I believe Netanyahu's end game is to force the Palestinians out, kill as many as possible, and then expel them into the Gaza. Avi Dichter, who was a cabinet member said, We are rolling out the Gaza Nakba, which is 1948, '49 ethnic cleansing operation. So it's clear what they're doing and the Biden administration has rehabilitated a criminal in Netanyahu and enabled all this to happen. The churches' silence is appalling to me, and we're trying to awaken them. Presbyterians and United Church of Christ are a little bit better than the others. The Pope has strongly condemned this as terrorism, but it doesn't filter down because so many of the church hierarchy are intimidated by the anti-defamation League (ADL) and other accusations of anti-Semitism, let alone the Evangelical Christian supports Israel, whatever they do, because it's paving the way for the return of Jesus. And that's true for the Speaker of the House now, Johnson, who holds those kinds of views.

Since this has impact on Congress, the church needs to be awakened. And Christians from the West Bank, Bethlehem, Gaza are crying out. A great sermon was preached by a friend of mine,

Reverend Munther Isaac, on Christmas Eve, saying that we will find God and Jesus in the rubble, and we must be there. And he condemned the silence of the church, globally. So we have a lot to do in on mobilizing the church.

Ralph Nader: I read the statement by the National Council of Churches and the conference of Catholic Bishops. They were quite strong in condemning the Israeli slaughter in Gaza. But a statement is not enough. They're not up on Capitol Hill. They're not addressing the growing protests by Jewish Voice for Peace, IfNotNow, and Standing together. These groups could develop an ecumenical civic protest that might reach Capitol Hill, which is a source of the entire power over there—the money, the weapons, the diplomatic cover, the vetoes and the Security Council—all this can go back to Congress, and not just Joe Biden. Joe Biden has called himself "a practicing Catholic," and during an interview with the *Jesuit Review* on September 21st, 2015. He emphatically identified "abuse of power" as a cardinal sin, worse than all others that should be arrested and defeated.

He also said that bedrock Catholic doctrine requires treating every person with dignity. Well, how do you square this? You're a reverend. To what extent does someone like Joe Biden listening and reading what Pope Francis is saying and the words he's using sorrowfully... this is the Pope who when he was a cleric in Argentina, was a main supporter of Jewish Argentine rights against bigotry. And he called what's going on in Gaza terror. After October 7th, he said that one terror can never justify another terror. What kind of standards do you hold Joe Biden? Never mind, political, constitutional, ethical standards, peace standards. How about holding him to his self-definition as a practicing Catholic?

Rev. Dr. Donald Wagner: I wish he would listen to the Pope and take seriously what the Pope has said. But I think Biden's commitment to Zionism overrides any theology, and he doesn't have the depth to grasp the difference at this point, until we see some change. Biden has always been a Zionist. He said before the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) "I am a Zionist." You don't have to be a Jew to be a Zionist. And that means he's embraced a certain narrative interpretation of theology that elevates a national state and the ideology of Zionism, which privileges one race, one party, one country over all others, grants them the right to the land and right to annihilate any opposition. So I think he's still there until we see some change. There are many progressive Catholics, many progressive movements in all major denominations, Episcopal and Presbyterian, lobbying the Hill, demanding a ceasefire, trying to get a change on the Hill. But I think others just are not going to buy it. The lobby is powerful and so many have bought into a type of Christian Zionism, whether it's a liberal Protestant and Catholic or a fundamentalist evangelical. So right now, we're stuck until we see a shift in policy.

Ralph Nader: Technically, the US is now a co-belligerent under international law with Israel.

Rev. Dr. Donald Wagner: Yes, the Genocide Convention calls for the prevention of the crime of genocide. We have enabled it. We've enabled Israel's intent and the action, therefore we are complicit with the funding. And that means if the US can block the International Criminal Court, but maybe not the International Court of Justice. The Center for Constitutional Rights already has a legal brief that will charge Biden, Blinken and others with genocide. And this is the way it has to go, to maybe awaken something in the White House and on the Hill.

Ralph Nader: What Congress is preparing to do with this genocide tax of \$14.3 billion is to pass it without any public hearings at the House Armed Service Committee, Republican dominated, and the Senate Armed Service Committee, Democrat dominated. The White House uses the phrase unconditional support. It's also procedural autocracy where you can't even have the procedures in Congress be open and fair before a decision is reached. Netanyahu keeps saying that he's doing this in Gaza so Hamas can never be an existential threat to Israel again. Hamas never was an existential threat. They were embargoed. All they had was handheld weapons, few rocket, grenade launchers against one of the most powerful armies, Navy's and Air Force in the world, the Israeli military

Rev. Dr. Donald Wagner: And nuclear

Ralph Nader: And of course, one Holocaust survivor told the *New York Times* in Israel, and about October 7th, "It should never have happened." So obviously, if the Israeli defense is modestly alert, Hamas could never do this again, even if it was able to smuggle some arms in, in order to breach the border. So he's exaggerating this in order to justify driving the Palestinians out of Gaza and out of the West Bank. And there's a lot of very powerful antagonistic verbal support for that in the last few decades by right-wing, extreme Israeli politicians. That's why when you criticize what's going on there, always use the word Israeli government because there are many, many Israelis who disagree and oppose Netanyahu, not only for what he wanted to do with weakening the judicial system in Israel, but in the Israeli foreign policy. And so it's a mistake just to refer to the Israeli society because there are very courageous groups. And so we should be very laudatory of the dissenters under extreme pressure going on in Israel at the same time.

Rev. Dr. Donald Wagner: One of the few things that gives me hope after working on this issue for 45 years, is the power of the young American, Jewish and global Jewish activists. They're not buying the Netanyahu line. They range from being embarrassed to just angry about what Netanyahu and the ADL, APAC have done to Judaism in blending it with Zionism. These are the prophetic movements that are taking us back to authentic Judaism and the Torah, which is based on justice, tikkun olam (the healing of the world). And there are movements now of Black Lives Matter, and young Islamic groups. We're working with Americans from Muslims and Palestine and others here in Chicago—Jewish Voice for Peace and IfNotNow—to form a movement, a coalition at the grassroots, and we're proud to be part of a group whose leadership is under 40. My wife and I are listening and taking their lead. She's Palestinian by the way.

So the hope is this young movement and the grassroots from the bottom up. But unfortunately we're not making the dent we need to at the top, at Congress with the mainstream media. Social media is great. As you said, many progressive Israelis who are now under real fire and scrutiny by this extreme government that's clamping down on their activism, not to mention the West Bank where the settlers are out of control. We have family over there near Ramallah afraid to let their kids out of the house and don't know who's going to come back at the end of the day.

This will end, we don't know when, but I think all the listeners just need to mobilize their letters, their calls, and repeat them daily to Congress to stop this 14-point whatever billion, , which is a genocide tax, as you rightly say. We need to do our part, whether it's churches, mosques,

synagogues, your clubs. We need to be more activated because this is a defining moment really of the rule of law. And if the US will stand by it or support what is actually a genocide...

Ralph Nader: In terms of dire necessity, what needs to be done is a ceasefire and allowing UN inspection of hundreds of trucks now at the border for humanitarian relief with food, water, medicine, sheltering materials, etc. And this is where Biden

will be cursed forever by the judgment of history. He has allocated the money for thousands of trucks coming in from Egypt humanitarian, and the Israelis are letting in a dribble of trucks, maybe 20 or so a day, because they're holding them up and they're so-called inspecting them, and he's not doing anything about that. He calls for humanitarian aid. He's using US tax dollars to provide hundreds of trucks a day that can come in and are desperately needed by sick, starving, dying Palestinian families who had nothing to do with October 7th, many of whom probably do not support Hamas in the first place. They just want to get through the day and raise their families in peace. And he can't call Netanyahu and say, *look, I'm finished with urging you, finished with begging you, you will let hundreds of these humanitarian trucks in, and the only way they can reach their destination—the dying, starving people of Gaza—is for you to stop bombing and enforce a ceasefire.* That's what Joe Biden can do. But he's weak. He's indentured. He's intimidated by these powers that be, and most of his reluctance is because he knows that Congress will turn against him. I can envision a private conversation between Netanyahu and Biden. And a hypothetical Biden says, *you will let hundreds of trucks in and enforce a ceasefire.* and Netanyahu says to him, *Joe, I heard what you just said. Why don't you take it up with our Congress?* Congress bears a huge responsibility here. Call them one by one, senator by senator, representative by representative, peacefully protest, run into local offices and join some of these various groups that Reverend Don Wagner just pointed out.

Rev. Dr. Donald Wagner: I'd like to add one thing to the ask, and that is to lift the illegal blockade on Gaza that the US has supported, and open up more access points to the north, east, west, and south of Gaza, so that up to 500 trucks a day can get in, which was the level before October 7th. So call Congress. Put the heat on. Call the White House as Ralph said, and do it more than once, because this really is a defining moment with this genocide bill [HB 226-196]. And one thing you can also add is that military aid to any country should be conditioned upon international law and humanitarian human rights performance. That is the US Arms Export Control Act of 1976 and the Leahy Laws that were passed later, yet none of that has applied to Israel. Now's the time to do that.

David Feldman: Can you do a two-state solution without folding Hamas into the negotiations? And I would assume the Hamas leadership is in Doha [capital of Qatar]. Are they prepared to make the transition that Yasser Arafat supposedly was to go from warrior to statesman?

Rev. Dr. Donald Wagner: Hamas revised its charter in I think 2017, that showed an opening to a Palestinian state anywhere, but with full Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories and end to the settlement, etc. And the state must have the right of self-determination and political rights and control over the air, land, everything under that state. Right now, I don't think a two-state solution is possible because the US backing Israel has allowed the settlements to destroy that opportunity. The Palestinians live in little enclaves surrounded by settlers in the military, but the right to a state could be negotiated and get strong support. There may be some people like Marwan

Barghouti, who is in prison right now, who would rally Palestinians behind them, whoever they are, whatever their political party. But Israel has them in prison and there are others. So you need to appoint a Palestinian group. The Palestinian authority is bankrupt and unpopular. So there has to be a new movement. A revived PLO, opening up all the Palestinians in diaspora, is what needs to happen to provide Palestinian leadership for the future.

David Feldman: And folding Hamas into the PLO is what some people are suggesting. But would Hamas agree to be absorbed into the PLO?

Rev. Dr. Donald Wagner: I don't know. That remains to be seen. Until now, they didn't want anything to do with the PA (Palestine (National) Authority]. But if you can remove the PA and get creative and open up new possibilities in a global new PLO that is not the PA, and not controlled by the US and Israel, there might be an opportunity, whether it's Hamas or some other group.

Ralph Nader: In the last 10 years, Don, there is a growing movement for a one-state solution. And we had author of *The General's Son*, Miko Peled an Israeli peace advocate on our program, and he made an interesting point. He said, look, there's already a one-state solution. It's called Israel proper, and controlling, occupying the rest of the 28% of Palestine called the West Bank in Gaza.

Rev. Dr. Donald Wagner: From the river to the sea.

Ralph Nader: In Gaza. He said all that's needed is to give everybody living in Israel proper Gaza, and West Bank equal rights. Like in South Africa, one person, one vote. He said, there already is a one-state solution. But of course, it never gets much attention in the mainstream press here because the focus is on a two two-state solution, which the Israeli regime adamantly opposes. And Netanyahu has bragged in past years, right up to the current year that he would never allow, an independent coexisting Palestinian state. Hannah.

Hannah Feldman: Reverend Wagner, my question is about how American fundamentalist, Christian clergy fetishize the holy land. We've had previous guests speak to how birthright Israel and other similar programs fetishize Israel and try to turn Zionism into a core tenet of American Judaism. Could you speak to how American Christianity, whichever relevant sects, fetishize the holy land and the work that you're doing to counteract that?

Rev. Dr. Donald Wagner: That's a book right there, but I deal with that in my memoir, *Glory to God in the Lowest: Journeys to an Unholy Land*. I grew up in this right-wing evangelical Christian Zionism. It's actually a form of fundamentalism that predates Zionism and worked with Zionism like as a handmaiden, symbiotically, back in the 1890s. But Christian Zionism, as an evangelical fundamentalist movement, really elevates the modern state of Israel and it equates biblical Israel with the modern state. That in itself is a heretical teaching. There's nothing in the Bible that says a modern state will be the fulfillment of prophecy. But this movement takes that kind of a direction, and it has kind of a three-act scenario to it. The first act is that we are now in a difficult period, but we must support Israel because that is, not only the locust, but the movement that will bring Jesus back. The second act of the scenario is that soon we will enter a final period where Israel will be attacked from the North. Christians who are true believers, born again Christians, will be raptured

and lifted out of history conveniently. This is all heresy in my opinion. So two-thirds of the Jews will die in the final battle of Armageddon. So that's act two. And Act three is that Jesus comes back, and you have a chance to build a 1,000 year rule and convert to Christianity or go to hell. A great Jewish writer, Gershom Gorenberg was on *60 Minutes* once and he was asked about that. He said, Yeah, it's a three-act scenario and we Jews, two-thirds of us die in act two, or we have to convert to Christianity. He said, as a Jew, I don't like my chances.

So that's a summary of the movement. It's very strong. It has a movement called Christians United for Israel, which has offices in every state, mobilizes groups, and Trump loved them. And he had John Hague, the director on. They work hand in glove with the pro-Israel lobby APAC to mobilize Evangelical Christian support and funding. They are funding settlements. They raise money, Hague raises money and gives millions of dollars to the Israeli Defense forces and it's all tax exempt. That is a loophole that has to be closed to shut this down. And they're aligned with many of these militant settlement groups.

This is a dangerous movement, and it's not just in North America, it's growing in Central and South America, Africa, and Southeast Asia. So Netanyahu is reaping global support and they bring people to Israel and spend a lot of money when no one else is coming like now. So that's just a summary, but you can get more of this in my book, *Anxious for Armageddon: A call to Partnership for Middle Eastern and Western Christians*. And there's a great website that I worked on for a while called www.christianzionism.org, where evangelicals critique this heretical theology and show alternatives. We're hoping to have a powerful coalition working from the bottom up to mobilize more people at the grassroots to change Congress, but we're not quite there yet. So we need your help.

Ralph Nader: Thank you very much Reverend Dr. Don Wagner.

Rev. Dr. Donald Wagner: Great to be with you. And please everyone get busy mobilizing those calls. This is an illegal operation. Our tax dollars are being used illegally in this case. So thank you all. Let's go to work.

Hannah Feldman: We've been speaking to the Reverend Dr. Donald Wagner. We'll link to his work at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Up next, we've got some of our own questions for Ralph, but first, let's check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber.

Russell Mokhiber: From the National Press Building in Washington D.C., this is your *Corporate Crime Reporter Morning Minute* for Friday, December 29th, 2023. I'm Russell Mokhiber. Didion Milling, Inc., (Cambria corn milling company), will pay more than \$1.8 million in penalties after a May 31st, 2017 explosion that killed five workers and injured more than a dozen others. The company has also agreed to make extensive safety and health improvements at the facility. Didion Milling pled guilty on September 29th, 2023, to charges related to falsifying the mill's cleaning and Baghouse logs, and agreed to pay restitution of more than \$10 million to the 2017 explosion victims and a \$1 million criminal fine. Didion Milling's agreement to make extensive safety improvements, and work with OSHA and industry experts to protect the millworkers, will protect the safety and lives of their current and future employees, OSHA said. For the *Corporate Crime Reporter*, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Hannah Feldman: Thank you, Russell. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. I'm Hannah Feldman, along with Steve Skrovan, David Feldman, and Ralph. Steve, why don't you kick things off with a listener question.

Steve Skrovan: This is going to be an open forum. We've got Ralph and we're going to ask questions. Ralph, we're going old school here. This is how the show began with David and I asking questions of Ralph before we, a few months later started having guests. And we're going to start by jumping off with some audience feedback first. And this first question is from a regular listener from Canada, from Prince George, British Columbia. His name is Jerry Chidiac, and this is a question about Gaza, but it's a different angle. He says, "This is a question regarding the repression of free speech regarding the current crisis in Gaza." He says, "People are being slandered for speaking up for human rights and some are even losing their employment. Once this crisis is over, if members of the IDF and the Netanyahu government are convicted of war crimes and crimes against humanity, will those who have been slandered and wrongfully dismissed be able to press civil charges on the Zionists who attacked them and charge their employers with wrongful dismissal? And if so, why isn't the pro-Israel lobby taking this into consideration? Perhaps you could also address the training and financial incentives offered by pro-Israel groups, like honest reporting." He says, "Thank you for clarifying. I'm a teacher and an op-ed columnist. I'm always mindful of the potential for such attacks unless I weigh my words carefully." That's from Jerry Chidiac from Prince George, British Columbia. Any comment on that, Ralph?

Ralph Nader: As Amy Goodman has reported on *Democracy Now!*, there's a wave of oppression of pro-Palestinian voices among students and faculty at universities and colleges in the United States. As trustees and administrative officials of these institutions they're being called by donors, threatened with withholding money if they don't silence these pro-Palestinian voices or censor or discipline them. And it seems to be getting worse as the drama/as genocide unravels Palestinian Gaza, instead of backing off and saying, look, these people have a point. First of all, they have a right to express their opinion on the First Amendment, whether you agree or not. But second of all, there's a lot of substance to what they're saying. Look at the visuals. Look at the images. Look at the findings of the Israeli human rights groups day by day. It doesn't seem to be happening that way. The suspension of jobs, including by public agencies, people are being suspended. Job offers to law students are being turned back. And it's all about importing the authoritarianism from this Israeli regime into the public dialogue of the U.S.

So the question is, not just what is the US doing for Israel? The question is, what is Israel doing to our democracy here? Not just how we spend our money, not just what Congress is doing, but how it's affecting people here. You can boycott the U.S. government publicly as a citizen and still do business with the US government. But if you boycott certain state governments like Texas and say that you support a boycott of Israel until it respects Palestinian human rights, you can have your contracts rejected or pulled back with the state government of Texas. So it's a situation where the Israeli regime has more rights here than the US government, which is unable to pull this off because of something known as the US Constitution. And another point, of course is that Netanyahu has far more power over Congress than he has over his own Knesset!

Steve Skrovan: Yeah, that's interesting. Thank you for that question, Jerry Chidiac. David, you want to jump in here?

David Feldman: Ralph, if Hillary had won in 2016 was reelected in 2020, by now she would've picked four Supreme Court justices, which means six out of nine Supreme Court justices would either have been picked by Obama or Hillary. So how progressive would America be right now? Would her appointees be easily influenced by big money donors the way Alito and Thomas are? What would this country look like right now and would we get Supreme Court justices that are immune to the temptations that Alito and Thomas don't seem to be?

Ralph Nader: Certainly, we wouldn't be getting the kind of Supreme Court justices that Trump or his predecessors nominated. We would get more justices like Justice Sotomayor, Justice Ginsburg, Justice Kagan, called moderate Democrats, protective of civil rights, for example. Not all that great on corporate power, but not completely surrendering to it as well. We'd get more justices like Steve Breyer, and it wouldn't be as anywhere near as intimidating to Democratic principles and constitutional principles as the six/three majority now on the court. And we may see evidence of that on multiple decisions coming up in 2024 involving Trump and other petitioners.

Hannah Feldman: *ProPublica* recently launched a searchable database for the Supreme Court's financial disclosure paperwork. And it's a really interesting read. I'm just plugging that for anyone who's curious. And there's a lot of crossover between justices, I would say on the right and left. But most of them are probably center right, even if they were appointed by Democrats. I get the impression

that they're pretty much all influenced by the same--a lot of the same donors, a lot of cross pollination from the same sort of benefactors.

Ralph Nader: Well, the corruption of Clarence Thomas has been documented by *ProPublica*, the *New York Times* in article after article. He's gone on these junkets paid for by billionaires. He's accepted huge gifts that he had not disclosed. It's because until very recently there were no ethics codes applying to Supreme Court justices the way they apply to lower federal court judges. And now there is a weak new code of ethics, but it leaves enforcement up to each Supreme Court justice, which makes a mockery of satire. So what we're seeing here are mealy-mouthed Democrats investigating in the Senate, Clarence Thomas and to some extent Justice Alito freebies and junket, and not calling for their resignation. The columnist for the *Washington Post*, a Harvard law grad, Ruth Marcus, just had a column demanding that Clarence Thomas recuse himself in the upcoming decision about Trump's assertion that he's immune from prosecution because what he did occurred when he was exercising his duties as President in the White House. She should be asking for his resignation. And the Senate Judiciary Committee under Senator Durbin and Senator Whitehouse, have got loads of evidence on Clarence Thomas, but they still haven't called for his resignation.

Now, the comparison—under the period of Lyndon Johnson as president, Supreme Court Justice Abe Fortas was accused of taking a grant from a politically connected person who had a foundation in Florida. And after a few denunciations in the press, Abe Fortas tendered his resignation. Clarence Thomas has done far, far worse, and blatantly so, and he's arrogant about it. He's

defending it, and he is not remorseful, and the Democrats aren't even asking for his resignation. This illustrates decline in public ethics and morality—decline is too easy a word—has fallen off a cliff. And Clarence Thomas is really the Donald Trump of the Supreme Court.

Steve Skrovan: Ralph, I just want to follow-up. As long as we're talking about the Supreme Court, how do you feel about the Supreme Court as a branch of government? Because when I look at what I know of the Supreme Court and the decisions they've made throughout history, aside from a few years in the fifties and sixties of the Warren Court, it seems like they've made mostly bad decisions on the big issues, like *Dred Scott*, or corporate personhood, or the Second Amendment, *Bush v. Gore*, *Citizens United*, the repeal of *Roe v. Wade*, *Buckley v. Valeo*. They seem not to make good decisions throughout history. Is it worth it for them? Is it worth it for us?

Ralph Nader: Well, they were the bastions of the property classes, as they used to say in the old days. And they made no bones about it. They presided over a period of slavery. They presided over a period where women didn't have the right to vote. They presided over the Jim Crow period after the Civil War, and they didn't disturb the entrenched status quo of a corporatist white male domination. And of course, until recently they were all white males. And as you say, starting with the Earl Warren Court, they produced *Brown v. Board of Education*, saying that school segregation was illegal. And they fostered the Civil Rights Movement and case after case. And then the Burger Court (Warren Burger) took over and turned it to the right. And it hasn't stopped. It is now the most extreme court in generations with the six/ three majority that is pro-corporate pro-executive branch power at the expense of the Congress--anti-union, anti-worker, and anti-consumer.

And the only time they defer to Congress and defeat the Petition for the People is when they feel it necessary to reign in the regulatory agencies. But worse is yet to come. They may come out with a decision next year stripping the regulatory agencies of the delegation of authority to regulate corporations like the oil companies, drug companies, the auto companies. They may issue a decision that strips them saying that this is an unconstitutional delegation of authority by the Congress that is legislative in function and has no business being exercised by executive branch agencies, throwing it back to Congress saying you want to regulate these corporations? You do it. With thousands of pages of regulations, presumably. As if Congress has the expertise or is willing to labor more than three days a week when they're not in recess. So I think they are reaching a point, the six-Justice majority, of getting a huge backlash and calls for impeaching them altogether before the Senate.

I wrote an article several years ago saying - I don't call for impeachment of justices very easily - but when in case after case, these justices come down on the side of artificial entities called corporations - which are never mentioned in the Constitution - against real human beings, whether they're workers or victims of different oppressions or looted consumers. When they continually vote in favor, of artificial persons (corporations), which is never mentioned or authorized in the Constitution, that is a severe ground for collective impeachment proceedings before the U.S. Senate. And I think that's what we're going to be looking forward to if the progressive liberal interests in this country have any sense of being able to look at themselves in the mirror and not be seen as surrendering the sovereignty that the Constitution gave them as real human beings--surrendering to the supremacy of giant corporations.

David Feldman: I want to circle back to a conversation Ralph and Bruce Fein, were having about the War Powers Act and Elizabeth Holtzman, I believe the New York Congresswoman who stood up, fought, and sued to defund the (Iraq) war. When you watch Joe Biden scrambling to get military aid to Ukraine, Israel, and Taiwan, you see the Freedom Caucus reminding us that the power of the purse resides in the House of Representatives. The practicality of Congress actually stopping a war: how this would play out because Nancy Pelosi, to her credit, voted against the war authorization in Iraq, and then she became speaker in January of 2007 and immediately said, *as long as our troops are in harm's way, I have to fund the war*, which was a really disingenuous thing for her to say. She was the Speaker of the House in 2007, and we're seeing with the Freedom Caucus, the power of the purse. Could you walk me through the practicality of Nancy Pelosi in January of 2007, becoming speaker and doing what Elizabeth Holtzman did defunding the war?

Ralph Nader: Well, she said we have to support the troops, therefore she's going to support the funding of the criminal invasion of Iraq by her political opponents, George W. Bush and Dick Cheney in the White House. My answer to that at the time was, Speaker Pelosi the best way to support the troops is to bring them home. Because two years earlier there was a professional poll of US soldiers in Iraq, including Marines, and it was approved by the Pentagon, and they interviewed statistically representative sample of soldiers who said that we should pull out of Iraq in six months, which is about what it takes logistically just to get everything out. And she could have referred to that--the way to support the troops is to bring them home from a criminal war that has never been declared under the Constitution and is in violation of international, federal, and constitutional law. She didn't do that. She succumbed to the hysteria of the times. She succumbed to the corporate and military industrial complex swarming Capitol Hill, to the Israeli can do no wrong lobby, which wanted us to go into Iraq and overthrow Saddam Hussein using American soldiers. And she succumbed to all that. In 1974, the Congress simply passed a bill cutting off funds for the Vietnam War that were not in the pipeline. There were enough in the pipeline so they could get the remnants of the US military out of there as fast as possible. But Congress did it because Congress has the power of the purse. And the Freedom Caucus is quite correct when it says the Constitution puts the appropriation power first in the House, then it goes to the Senate and then to the White House. That's been completely turned around now for decades where the budget for appropriations is prepared by the executive office of the President in the White House and sent presumably to be rubber stamped with minor tweaks by the House and Senate, which is what happened in the huge allocations of money for the Afghan and Iraq wars.

David Feldman: It's amazing that you could actually have a party run and say, vote for us for Congress as if I'm elected speaker. I will bring the troops home. I'm not going to wait for the President. I will bring the troops home by defunding this.

Ralph Nader: Exactly. And in fact, Madison said that Congress has the most awesome power of all, the power to declare war and the power of the purse. And it's using neither. It is letting the President and the military-industrial complex control Executive Branch, Pentagon, and the Congress. There's only bipartisan support for the military budget that in recent years has given the Generals more money than they've asked for, as I've pointed out many times. In other words, the voter in America cannot say, I want to vote for the party who wants to reign in the military-industrial complex, unless they vote for third party like the Green Party. Both parties have almost the identical position in Congress on the military budget, which is the reservoir for the American

empire, astride the globe at the expense of public investment for the necessities of the American people here at home. And there will come a time when our domination of the world produces a backlash, militarily equipped, against our domestic society. We think we can continue to be immune from drone warfare and other kinds of warfare that we're inflicting on other societies. Indefinitely, we're whistling in the wind. And if the attacks do come, we will turn into an authoritarian regime where all dissent will be suppressed as we attack in all directions the perceived source of what caused the damage in this country. That's what we did after 9/11, spent trillions of dollars and it has not brought us any security. It has simply postponed the time for the exercise of revenge by the innocent people in societies that we've blown up who had nothing to do with being threats or imminent threats to the United States. And we know the names of those countries.

Hannah Feldman: I want to thank our guest again, the Reverend Dr. Donald Wagner. For those of you listening on the radio, that's our show. For you podcast listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material we call "The Wrap Up. Francesco DeSantis has the week off so there's no, "In Case You Haven't Heard." But there's plenty of other stuff for you to listen to. A transcript of this program will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* Substack site soon after the episode is posted.

David Feldman: Subscribe to us on our *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* YouTube channel, and for Ralph's weekly column, it's free. Go to nader.org. For more from Russell Mokhiber, go to corporatecrimereporter.com.

Hannah Feldman: The American Museum of Tort Law has gone virtual. Go to tortmuseum.org to explore the exhibits. Take a virtual tour and learn about iconic tort cases from history.

David Feldman: We have a new issue of the *Capitol Hill citizen*. It's out now. To order your copy of the *Capitol Hill Citizen*, "Democracy Dies in Broad Daylight," go to capitolhillcitizen.com.

Hannah Feldman: And remember to continue the conversation after each show, go to the comment section at ralphnaderradiohour.com and post a comment or question on this week's episode.

David Feldman: The producers of the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* are Jimmy Lee Wirt and Matthew Marran. Our executive producers Alan Minsky. Our associate producer is Hannah Feldman.

Hannah Feldman: Our theme music "Stand Up Rise Up" was written and performed by Kemp Harris. Our proofreader is Elisabeth Solomon. Our social media manager is Steven Wendt.

David Feldman: Join us next year on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. Thank you for a great year, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you all that made it possible. And I'd just like to say to our listeners, when you get a copy of the *Capitol Hill Citizen*—you can go to capitalcitizen.com, order a copy or copies that you'll get it by return first class mail. Follow-up with some reporter friends you might have and say, have you heard of the *Capitol Hill Citizen*? You might want to read it.