

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EPISODE 470 TRANSCRIPT

Steve Skrovan: Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. My name is Steve Skrovan along with my cohost, David Feldman. Hello, David.

David Feldman: Good morning.

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

Ralph Nader: Hello, everybody.

Steve Skrovan: How do we confront an existential crisis like global warming? Fight, flight, freeze, fold? Climate denialists fold. They pretend there's nothing wrong with our climate or nothing humans can do to change it. The US government freezes like a deer in the headlights rather than taking swift and decisive action to slow industrial pollution and mitigate its catastrophic effects. Billionaires like Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos choose literal flight. They would rather shoot themselves into space and colonize Mars than help prepare Earth.

What if we want to fight for our survival and for the earth itself? Well, this isn't the first time human civilizations have faced dramatic environmental and social upheaval. In the book, *We Are the Middle of Forever*, Dahr Jamail and his co-editor, Stan Rushworth, interview members of North American indigenous cultures and communities, generations, and geographic regions, and they center indigenous voices in the conversation about today's environmental crisis. Indigenous communities around the world have passed on stories of radical environmental transformations through generations. They've also survived attempted genocide at the hands of settler colonialism, mercantile imperialism, and corporate exploitation.

We'll speak to Dahr Jamail about these interviews as well as the importance of bringing indigenous perspectives to the forefront. After that, we'll welcome back friend of the show, Karen Friedman, executive director of the Pension Rights Center, a nonprofit consumer organization committed to protecting and promoting the retirement security of American workers, retirees, and their families. We'll speak to Ms. Friedman about some of the center's recent work.

Finally, we'll speak to two of the students trying to save UC Berkeley's anthropology library, Sandra Oseguera and Jesús Gutierrez. Last month, campus administration announced its plan to close the anthropology library, one of only three dedicated anthropology libraries in the US. In response, students and faculty organized a town hall and overnight sit-in in the library and continue to rally support to try to save it. University leadership blames budget deficits and staffing shortages, but students and faculty argue that the university finds money for athletics and real estate, while neglecting its fundamental educational mission. As always, somewhere in between all of that, we'll check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first, what can the experiences of indigenous peoples teach us about our relationship to the planet, David?

David Feldman: Dahr Jamail is the author of *Beyond the Green Zone: Dispatches from an Unembedded Journalist in Occupied Iraq* as well as *The End of Ice: Bearing Witness and*

Finding Meaning in the Path of Climate Disruption. He's co-editor with Stan Rushworth of *We Are the Middle of Forever: Indigenous Voices from Turtle Island on the Changing Earth*. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Dahr Jamail.

Dahr Jamail: Thank you. It's great to be back.

Ralph Nader: Dahr, just to give some context here, this is a very unusual book. It's hard to summarize its 20 interviews of indigenous people in North America. Just to get an idea here tell us how you selected them, how you interviewed them, and where you went to interview them.

Dahr Jamail: Thank you, Ralph. The book was born from an idea that really seeing people's reaction to my climate book and all of the despair and not knowing what to do, my co-editor, Stan Rushworth and I, who were also very close friends, decided people would be assisted perhaps by hearing a broader perspective coming from indigenous people who've essentially already survived the apocalypse, survived genocide, survived forced relocation, survived reservation life and are still here and have already... if you want to talk about abrupt climate disruption, let's talk to the Apache who were moved from Arizona to Florida via train in one or two weeks and then forced to try to live there. There's your abrupt climate change, and we knew that people would benefit from having that kind of perspective. We actually started the book before the pandemic, so three of the interviews were done in person. But when the pandemic started, and everything moved to Zoom, the rest of them were done that way. I knew a couple of the people; Stan knew a bunch of the people. And a couple of them in the book we reached out to via friends or other people who helped us get in touch with them, but most were folks that we, and primarily Stan, had already known over the years.

Ralph Nader: On the cover of the jacket, your publisher summarizes the book this way, "Although for a great many people, the human impact on the Earth — countless species becoming extinct, pandemics claiming millions of lives, climate crisis causing worldwide, and social and environmental upheaval — was not apparent until recently, which is not the case for all people or cultures. For the indigenous people of the world, radical alteration of the planet, and of life itself, is a story that is many generations long. They have had to adapt, to persevere, and to be courageous and resourceful in the face of genocide and destruction, and their experience has given them a unique understanding of civilizational devastation," which is really what the brunt of the book is focused on. But just to make it concrete, the prairie tribes in the US depended very much on the bison for food and other things, hides, and there were hundreds of millions of bison until the white man came. And describe how fast the change of habitat, so to speak, for the prairie tribes turned out.

Dahr Jamail: Right. Because the accurate history of this is generally not taught in schools in the United States, when we use the words genocide and murderous and things like this, some people might think those go a bit far. But it was deliberate US government policy to annihilate, knowing that the Plains Indians, not just as a food source, but relied on the bison to sustain their own culture and so many facets of their existence. And they knew by annihilating the bison, which they did almost to extinction within less than a generation's time, that they would be able to subjugate and control the indigenous populations that relied upon them.

Similarly, if we look at just what happened in California, for example, also within one generation, at least 90%, if not a little bit more than that, of the indigenous population were annihilated. Again, think about that — within one generation, 90% of the population annihilated. And there are all kinds of historical documents that show this was deliberate government policy.

Ralph Nader: Certainly in the destruction of the bison, they would shoot them from trains in masses as they congregated in their roaming around the prairies. And they wouldn't even bother salvaging the carcasses. They just slaughtered them for hides or food or nothing. There's some person interviewed in your book saying that indigenous people did not have a culture where they shot animals for sport; they shot them for sustenance. And what happened to the bison was almost totally incredible to the prairie tribes. The Sioux couldn't believe that this was being done. And as you say, it was done very, very quickly.

Tell me something about your experience here. In reading this book, what emerges is that the indigenous interviewees have a different sense of time and space than we have in our western culture, and certainly a different connectivity to history. They don't talk about regulation; they don't talk about litigation. They talk about a much deeper sense of reverence for the planet as a survival mechanism, not just the spiritual mechanism. So how did this affect you? It had to take you into a different dimension of observation of what's going on the planet.

Dahr Jamail: That's an extremely prescient question. And personally, working on this book changed my life. It was absolutely the medicine that I needed having concluded a roughly 10-year period as a climate journalist, and then with my climate book, which is a really hard read, a very accurate portrayal of where we are climatologically and with literally everything on the planet under threat now. And I was in a place of despair and needed a different perspective and to find a deeper meaning as far as what kind of work can I do to help, to be a service and not just sitting around in despair over what's happening on the planet. And by working on this book, every single person that we interviewed talking about the genocide and what indigenous people have been through and continue to go through; the erasure continues; the colonization impacts continue. There is no post when we talk about post-traumatic stress disorder for indigenous populations. And one term that Stan likes to use is “post-colonial stress disorder”. And again, there's no post in that that. These are ongoing situations.

Several of the younger people we interviewed for the book talked about coming to a chapter in say a history class in school on indigenous populations and having classmates come up and say, “Well, I thought they were gone.” And literally saying that to this person's face knowing that they're indigenous. And so that's the world that they have to live with coupled with coming through that, adhering to their ways and traditions and continuing to find ways to do very deep work for the planet in each of their own ways. And it was a major lesson to me in here's how you do this. Here's how you live amidst an apocalypse. And I would use that word in the direst way possible when we look at what indigenous populations around the world have had to survive just to remain on the planet.

It was very humbling for me as well as instructive of here's how you get through this. And one of the things that came through consistently that several people talked about that was one of the themes of the book, is the difference between rights — the western settler colonialist mindset of “What are my rights? I have my rights” versus a more indigenous perspective that we came

across time and again in the book of we have two primary obligations that we're born into. One is the obligation to serve and be a good steward of the planet and the other obligation is to serve future generations of all species. So if I focus on my obligations, it's very clear that I have plenty of work to do in service to those. If I focus only on my rights, I'm going to be chronically frustrated.

Ralph Nader: Actually one of your interviews, with Raquel Ramirez, on page 57, says it really remarkably; one can't forget what she says. She said, "I think my rights stem from my obligations versus a colonial mindset where your rights free you from obligations. You know, being a human on this earth means that I have obligations. It also means I have rights. But one comes first. If I can fulfill my obligations and my responsibilities, from there my rights come — my rights are freedom, my rights of finding happiness. These words have negative connotations. But no, I should want as a human being to be obligated to my family and be obligated to my loved ones," which she defined as the people and nature on the planet. That's a reversal of the usual analysis in civil liberties and civil rights materials that we read. She also makes another reverse concept. She said vulnerability can be a strength. She says, "It's vulnerability to acknowledge how small you are yet how much you impact everybody. It takes a lot of vulnerability to be able to acknowledge everything in this climate crisis and in a social and political crisis. I used to think it was an option. You could ignore it. But I don't think it's possible to ignore it anymore. And it's just adding another layer of denial when folks pretend to ignore it. So this then exacerbates the problem." Who is she by the way? Raquel Ramirez.

Dahr Jamail: Well, it's really incredible that the amount of wisdom in Raquel Ramirez's interview. She's a younger student in California and she's Ho-Chunk, Lenca and Ojibwe. And another one of the things that she said was, "We're all carrying the wounds of our ancestors, and this can be seen in our actions and our thoughts." That includes much to what you just spoke to from reading that, not just what happened to indigenous populations, but those of us whose ancestors, the perpetrators, are also carrying those wounds and that trauma. And until this is addressed, we're nowhere, which is another thing that she talked about that I'll just read a short bit from, "Paramount in indigenous ideology is the nature of cycles in the circle like our medicine wheel. There's a constant cycle in human experience of struggle and growth. And until you can experience struggle and you can experience pain, we experience the most amount of growth if we allow ourselves to reflect and we can start reconstructing. For generations of Europeans not to reflect and reconstruct, they're not participating in the cycle of human experience." And so she did go on then to say, "The genocide hurts the heart of the perpetrators as well, because it is such a stark contrast to who we are as human beings — inherently collaborative, inherently community focused. And for you to kill people, that's a wound on your heart. And so they have that generational wound as well. They carry the generational wound of genocide as well. And by not reflecting on that and by not growing from that, they're stagnant."

Ralph Nader: What comes out of the readings in the book is the lack of vengeance, the lack of denunciation as to how first Native Americans were treated. For example, when we were growing up in New England and going to elementary school, we learned about the pilgrims and how some first natives helped the pilgrims grow food and Thanksgiving. And within 20 years, the colonists had moved into Connecticut and further, and they confronted the Pequot tribe in Connecticut, and they offered their friendship in terms of blankets contaminated with smallpox

and wiped out huge proportion of the Pequot people. Because in Europe, they had some sort of immunity, semi-immunity, but they just passed away very quickly.

Now, the First Nations, as they're often called, or American Indians, it's just remarkable at the equanimity in their public approach to history and how they were treated. Imagine if the shoe was on the other foot. Western culture is remarkably vengeful. And how do you read that? Did that come across to you? I mean, page after page is almost a serene expression of wisdom, reflection, historical rooting, looking to the future. It's not that they were Pollyannaish or super optimistic about the prospects in your interviews. But give me your characterization here of how they reflected on the coming of the colonial powers from Europe.

Dahr Jamail: It really was a matter of survival. If folks who are listening who are not indigenous, if we can put ourselves in their shoes and think about what it would be like to be living peaceably on land as your people had been since the dawn of time, as Gregg Castro in the book puts it, and then settler colonists show up, and in an extremely violent way start to almost immediately begin to annihilate you, and then roundup whoever was left and put them on reservations that tended to be on the worst land available — vengeance of course being completely outgunned/outmanned from a military perspective. Vengeance was just not going to be an option. Plus that didn't fit with cultural values anyway. And so it came down to adhering, to going more deeply into their values. And I interviewed then president of the Quinault [Indian] Nation Fawn Sharp up here on the west coast of Washington State, not too far from where I live. And she's the current president of the National Congress of American Indians, a true leader who served two terms as president of the tribe and is currently vice president. And when I interviewed her for the book, she was president, and she puts it very succinctly with what I think is really the best answer to that question. She said, “Ultimately, the solution to the crisis,” and she means the global crisis, “lies in our values. And we've proven that simply by existing today, regardless of how we had the most powerful country in the world try to destroy us, terminate us, and assimilate us, we lived under great pain and suffering. They carried out murder and genocide and attempted full-scale annihilation, but they never could stop that drumbeat in our heart. One could either just wither away like paper or be like steel that just grows stronger and stronger. When the most powerful country in 400 years can't stop you, you know it is because of our resources, prayers and blessings and everything that has been across this land since time began. And we not only have survived, but we are now emerging even stronger.”

Ralph Nader: Well, what's interesting is there's a part of your book where there's an exchange between two first natives in the family, and I think the mother said, “Oh, this sounds nebulous. How do you translate it into policy?” And the young person said, “That's the way you translate it into policy. That's what drives the motivation and gives root to whatever policy comes out.” In this book, *We Are the Middle of Forever: Indigenous Voices from Turtle Island on the Changing Earth*, edited by Dahr Jamail and Stan Rushworth. By the way, what does Turtle Island stand for?

Dahr Jamail: It's how indigenous folks refer to the continent of North America.

Ralph Nader: Give us a few snapshots of the people you interviewed.

Dahr Jamail: Oh gosh. Well, one person I just spoke about, Fawn Sharp, is very, well-known, but we also made it a point to have a cross section of society. So quite young people — one

young woman we interviewed was 18 at the time of the interview — on up to elders and everyone in between. And there are more women than men interviewed in the book and it's a pretty wide cross-section of society, if you will. But we had other well-known people like the very, very famous Mojave poet, Natalie Diaz, Pulitzer Prize winner and multiple other awards on down to other folks who were younger students just studying different—like Alexii Sigona, who is a student at Berkeley working on a PhD so that he could then take that knowledge out to work for restoration of ancestral homeland for his tribe. So really a very wide variety of people. Terri Delahanty is a Cree medicine woman who lives in Connecticut who pours sweat lodge for folks in her community and is also a pipe carrier. So from academics to non-academics to people steeped in the old ways to everything in between. The other thing I wanted to add, Ralph, is that this is a very pragmatic book. It's almost like a user's manual of how to get through, how to better orient ourselves to the times that we are in — all of this wisdom coming from people acting as mediaries of their elders, just transmitting this deep wisdom that is so helpful for us trying to figure out how to comport ourselves and continue to be of service during these times where everything continues to intensify.

Ralph Nader: It's also a call for sitting down and reflecting, slowing down, looking at a bigger picture, taking your circle beyond your family. Tell us about Gregg Castro and a sense of permanence.

Dahr Jamail: He was a second person in the book, one of the only other interviews that was done in person just before the pandemic hit and a really astounding individual. He lives in California. He's Salinan/Ohlone. He's the person I mentioned earlier who often would say, “Our people did X, Y, and Z and have been doing this since the dawn of time,” is how he put it.

And for perspective, one of the things he said that I wanted to bring out in this interview is he talks about how he said, “Well, some people think, ‘Oh no, everything's fine.’ They think their God is going to fix it for them so they can do whatever they want. That's a typical two-year-old in a sandbox being a bully. And in their short understanding of their existence, their version of permanence is eternity to them, but it's not eternity. Our stories tell us, very specifically that there was a time before us. There was a time of creation. There was a time when the real first people were here taking care of the place, shaping it, forming it to prepare it for us. A lot of the stories talk about us being last, not first. We were the last. And it was an incredibly beautiful place.”

One more thing he shared that I think is imperative here. He says, “This may be one of the most fundamental differences between cultures because they,” the colonists, “came in thinking we came in God's image while we are taught that we need to know our place. And the society that has grown up around us is still throwing tantrums in the sandbox, still thinking the universe owes them everything. It's extremely immature and it's a huge immature baby that's fully capable of destroying itself.”

Ralph Nader: Well, one thing that courses throughout the book from time to time is indigenous science. For example, on the wildfires burning in California, the people trying to deal with these wildfires are now recognizing and speaking with indigenous people as to how they dealt with spontaneous wildfires and how they dealt with preventing or mitigating them with centuries old knowledge of how the forests live and breathe and recreate. The other thing, you have Hopi elder Thomas Banyacya who spoke before the United Nations Habitat Forum in 1976 in Vancouver,

British Columbia. And he said, “The time has come to join in meaningful action. Destruction of all land and life is taking place and accelerated at rapid pace. Our native land is continuing to be torn apart and raped of its sacredness by the corporate powers of the nation.” That was 1976 and his words were not heeded very much.

You say in your book, and this is well known, that US military policy against the tribes was to separate the children from the parents, send them to boarding schools hundreds of miles away. And to break the family unit — not just the tribal, but break the family unit. And the consequences of this are all over the reservations now—emulating violence, drug use, alcohol use, a sense of hopelessness. The main activity now is either uranium mining or much more, gambling casinos. It's a large range of wreckage in terms of consequences. And when they look at what's happened to them, that's when they go back into history and see the sequence. And they don't want that to expand into the future and engulf all the people and nature in the world because they've experienced it. And that's why your book is so relevant.

We've been speaking with Dahr Jamail, who's the co-editor with Stan Rushworth of the book, *We Are the Middle of Forever: Indigenous Voices from Turtle Island on the Changing Earth*. Thank you very much, Dahr. And I know this book was inspired in part by your prior book on global warming with the eerie title, however accurate, *The End of Ice*, meaning the melting of the glaciers. Thank you, Dahr.

Dahr Jamail: Thanks a lot, Ralph. Appreciate you having me on your show.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Dahr Jamail. We will link to his work at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Corporations, bankers, and politicians that come in after your money, people—your Medicare, your Social Security, your pensions. Up next, Karen Friedman of the Pension Rights Center is going to update us on the latest fights for your future. But first, let's take a quick break to 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, March 10th, 2023; I'm Russell Mokhiber. For years, the United States Postal Service has faced competition from the likes of United Parcel Service and FedEx. To fight them off, it hired outside trucking companies at cut-rate prices, required them to meet aggressive schedules and then looked the other way when they ran afoul of highway safety rules. That's according to a report in the *Wall Street Journal*. The result has been deadly. Postal contractors have been involved in at least 68 fatal crashes that killed 79 people in the past three years, the *Journal* reported. Nearly 50 long-haul trucking contractors that moved mail for the Postal Service had safety records so poor that another arm of the federal government, the Transportation Department, put them on probation. For the *Corporate Crime Reporter*, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you, Russel. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. I'm Steve Skrovan along with David Feldman and Ralph. Our next guest is going to tell us how to protect our hard-earned money from the vultures trying to get their claws on it. David?

David Feldman: Karen Friedman is the executive director of the Pension Rights Center. She develops solutions and implements strategies to protect and promote the rights of consumers, and

for more than 20 years has represented their interests in the media and before congressional committees. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Karen Friedman.

Karen Friedman: Well, thank you so much. I'm very excited to be here today.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, welcome back, Karen. While they're protesting in France and the millions of people, the French government has moved to try to raise a retirement age from 62 to 64, the scene is tranquil in the US even though we have one of the most retrograde retirement systems, public and private, in the western world. Tell us what the scene is here for those of our listeners who are not familiar with the pension situation.

Karen Friedman: Yeah, Ralph. First, I want to just say that the Pension Rights Center is the oldest consumer rights group in the country protecting the retirement security of workers, retirees, and their families. And because we've been around for so long, thanks to Ralph, we really do have a perspective on what's happening. And I do think that retirement issues are so important, Ralph, that people should be hitting the streets like they are in France. But here's the thing. There's just so many issues and people are just inundated by social media and they're more likely to know about Beyoncé than they are to know anything about pensions. And a lot of people don't even know, Ralph, how important pensions and retirement security is. And there's a reason for that. In today's economy where people are worried about daily concerns, paying for rising costs of food, rising costs of fuel, and everything else, they don't really have time to think about the future, but without pensions and other retirement income to supplement Social Security, people won't have enough to live on.

And as you know better than anyone, Ralph, policymakers have showered tax breaks onto pension plans to the tune of more than \$200 billion in tax subsidies. And the reason for that is the recognition that it's hard for people to save, but it only makes sense that these tax subsidies are really helping low- and moderate-wage earners save who wouldn't be saving otherwise. And that isn't what's happening. The current structure of these massive tax subsidies has really ended up disproportionately benefiting the higher paid and the most affluent in this country.

And to go to your point about the dismal private pension system in this country, 50% of private sector workers don't even have pensions or savings to supplement Social Security. And this has been a factor for more than a quarter of a century. Despite the billions of dollars in tax subsidies thrown in to increase retirement savings, we've seen a huge change over the last 20, 30 years. Originally, more companies were sponsoring good old fashioned guaranteed pension plans, and now those are being frozen. And 401k plans are really supplemental plans and they're not cutting it for most Americans. So we need some changes. That's it.

Ralph Nader: Well, I always go back to Congress in a situation like this. Tell us about the pensions that members of Congress have given to themselves.

Karen Friedman: Well, they have good pensions, and they also have good wages, Ralph. And as you know that typically wages and pensions go together. Pensions are the flip side of wages. But meanwhile, in Congress, instead of encouraging good defined benefit plans, they're coming up with pretty incremental ideas around the edges. And recently, Congress passed the Secure 2.0

legislation [Act of 2022], which is touted as this big retirement bill. But the truth of the matter is, it's hundreds of pages of provisions and most of those provisions help the most affluent.

The Pension Rights Center did help advocate for several provisions that will help people. Thanks to our efforts and those of other consumer and retiree advocates, we were able to get in provisions that will help people find lost plans. And you'd be surprised, like the Pension Rights Center gets hundreds of letters from people who can't find their pension plans, because companies have merged or changed names, reorganized, or restructured. So we did get provisions in on that, which was a great victory for us. And also, it was something that Karen Ferguson, our wonderful founder who died sadly in 2021, really had advocated for. We also got a provision in that bill, which is now law, that will ensure that when companies make mistakes and overpay individuals, if they come back to try to recoup that money, there are now good protections for vulnerable retirees. And you'd be surprised how common that is. Again, the Pension Rights Center hears from lots and lots of individuals who are faced in that situation. And there's also provision that would... it's basically a refundable savers credit providing a direct matching contribution from the government to low- and moderate-wage earners who already contribute to an IRA or 401k plan. So this provision is a step in the right direction because it is aimed at lower- and moderate-wage earners. But you already have to have a plan to get that match. You have to already be contributing to an IRA or 401k to get that matching contribution. So it's a first step, but it's not enough. And we're always out there fighting for other protections.

Ralph Nader: I remember over 25 years ago when I had a conversation with Karen Ferguson. Until the 1970s, most corporations that had pension plans — like the auto industry and the steel industry — they had defined contribution plans. And that was at the time when the 401k started coming in. And Karen Ferguson did not like the 401ks compared to the defined benefit contribution plans, where you got a set amount every month, whereas the 401k were very speculative and subject to looting. The corporations and their attorneys in the last quarter century have learned to deplete and loot pension money, which they hold in trust for their workers when they retire. Can you tell our listeners the comparison between the defined benefit plans and the 401k? And how the 401k come to dominate as fewer and fewer workers are working under a defined benefit?

Karen Friedman: Well, I could say in one or two words, Ralph, why 401ks have dominated. Money and money and savings to employers. So in the old days, and there's still millions of people who are covered by defined benefit plans, largely in unionized sectors and big manufacturing companies. A defined benefit plan is a pension plan where an employer puts in money for you to your deferred wages and you get a guaranteed lifetime benefit that you can't outlive. And these are good plans. They're not always great for younger and mobile workers, but if you stayed with the company for a long time, they're often fantastic. 401k plans really started as sort of a supplemental plan, a way for executives to sock away more money. But as employers realized that this was a great way to save money, all they had to do was set up the vehicle and then individuals did everything else. We went from a collective defined benefit structure to a do-it-yourself savings structure, which is why Karen hated it. And the Pension Rights Center has always been critical of 401k plans because basically first, an employer has to offer one, then an employee has to decide whether they're going to participate. They have to decide if they're going to put in money. An employer can decide to provide a match or not. Then you have to figure out how you're investing the money, and then you have to make the money last. So it's really a

system of do-it-yourself savings. So when the stock market was fantastic, in the 1980s when these things were first invented, everybody thought, “Yay, I'm going to be a millionaire.” But as soon as the market tanked, everybody started seeing how inferior these plans are. And even the sort of the architect of these plans, Ted Benna, who was known as the father of the 401k, many, many years later, wrote an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* saying that he made a mistake. But now we're sort of stuck with the system. Workers don't even know to ask about retirement income. So basically, we want to create a new system, and this is where I know Karen was going. We always fight for incremental change in the system to make it as good as it can be, Ralph; we'll always do that. But the Pension Rights Center's dream, Karen Ferguson's dream, was to push for a universal, secure, and adequate pension system on top of Social Security.

Ralph Nader: Tell us about that. This should become a major level of awareness by tens of millions of Americans. Tell us about this.

Karen Friedman: Yes, yes, absolutely. The fundamental question from our perspective is, with the amount of money we're now spending in tax subsidies to encourage retirement savings, can we do a better job and create a system that ensures that all Americans can retire with adequate income? And that's a fundamental question. That is something that Senator [Bernie] Sanders and others should be having hearings on. No question about it. First, before I say that, Social Security could play this role. If you increase Social Security and increase the benefits, Social Security could play this role, but you're always going to need a supplemental system of private savings. So the question is, how can you both strengthen Social Security and also make the pension system better?

Steve Skrovan: We're coming up to these budget talks and the debt ceiling and all the talks, especially on the right, about so-called entitlements as if that was some magical gift that people were getting. And like you mentioned before, cutting Social Security. What is the real state of Social Security beyond the propaganda we're hearing, especially on the right?

Karen Friedman: I'm so glad you asked me that question because the Social Security system is the strongest system we have. While opponents of Social Security have tried to undermine confidence in its future, the truth is Social Security is the most universal, efficient, secure, and fair source of retirement income. Social Security's one shortcoming is that its benefits are too low, averaging about \$1,700 a month, and what it needs to be is strengthened. So, we should fight all efforts to privatize Social Security and cut Social Security benefits. And the easiest way of restoring long-term balance to the system is simply requiring the wealthiest to pay their fair share. That is just simple — simple dimple.

Ralph Nader: Spell that out. When you say fair share, spell out what that means.

Karen Friedman: Right now these people only pay their taxes — I'm not even sure about the amount, but I think it's like, \$150,000, \$160,000. So if you're making—

Ralph Nader: It's about \$160,000. Up to \$160,000 they pay a Social Security tax.

Karen Friedman: So the limit just needs to be raised on millionaires, people making \$500,000 a year, people making billions of dollars a year. And you could probably right then and there solve all of Social Security's problems. And the idea that in France, they're protesting on the

streets because they're raising the retirement age from 62 to 64. And here, they're talking about raising from 67 to 70, right? And sure, people who are pushing papers on a desk, maybe that's okay for them. But that's not going to work for people who are out there like truck drivers and others who are doing hard labor.

People should be on the streets to stop cuts in Social Security. And without Social Security, you're not going to have a pension system. A pension system and 401ks are meant to supplement Social Security. If you don't have a good Social Security system, nobody's going to have anything. So Social Security is number one. Fundamental. It's the thing, right? So everybody should know that it's not going broke, folks. It's a great system. That's all propaganda meant to scare the bejeesus out of you.

Ralph Nader: The real focus to make Social Security more solvent is to raise the Social Security tax on people making way beyond \$160,000 a year. Like Tim Cook, the CEO of Apple [Inc.], makes \$833 a minute on a 40-hour week. That's \$100 million. And all he pays in Social Security taxes is on his first \$160,000. So people ought to get a sense of the solidarity of workers in France and pick it up here. The workers in France are ready to shut down the economy and almost 60% of the French people support it. That would never happen in the US. Just block a highway and you have a majority of the people opposed to it, even if it was for a good cause to get some media to pay attention to a plight of workers. Karen, we're out of time, unfortunately. How do people reach the Pension Rights Center and what can they get by looking at your website?

Karen Friedman: You can get in touch with us at www.pensionrights.org. Anybody's free to get in touch with me directly: I'm happy to answer questions. We also answer any pension questions you may have, and we can ship you out to six pension counseling projects around the country if you need help. But if you look at our website, you're going to learn a lot about the issues I've talked about. You'll learn a lot about what pensions are about. You can look up what the tax subsidies are. You can see news, testimony, everything that we've done. So please come, look. And if you have any questions, or you, Ralph, have follow up questions or anything like that, I'm happy to answer them. And yeah, it was fantastic as always.

Ralph Nader: Thank you very much. We've been talking to Karen Friedman, executive director of the Pension Rights Center in Washington, D.C. That's the only game in town for millions of people who want retirement security under just conditions and adequate enforcement against corporations looting the pensions that they expect to benefit from. Thank you very much, Karen.

Karen Friedman: Thank you.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Karen Friedman. We will link to her work at the Pension Rights Center at ralphnaderradiohour.com.

Now we're going to take a quick pivot to another topic that involves the University of California Berkeley and their Anthropology Library. Last month, campus administration announced their plan to close the library, one of only three dedicated anthropology libraries in the US. In response, students and faculty organized a town hall, an overnight sit-in in the library and

continue to rally support to try to save it. And we're rallying support because we've invited two of the grad students here to tell us what it's all about. David?

David Feldman: Sandra Oseguera and Jesús Gutierrez are graduate students in the Anthropology Department at the University of California Berkeley, where stakeholders, including students and faculty, have organized to demand that the Anthropology Library be protected and fully supported by the university. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Sandra Oseguera and Jesús Gutierrez.

Sandra Oseguera: Hi. Thank you so much for having us.

Jesús Gutierrez: Thank you so much for having us.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, welcome indeed. There's a real brouhaha in Berkeley these days. The administration of the University of California Berkeley is shutting down the Anthropology Library of Department of Anthropology, one of the great anthropology libraries in the western world on the grounds that they want to save some money. Well, they don't talk that way about the football coach or the football program, which produces deficits for the overall budget and the coach is paid an enormous sum and they're paid enormous salaries at the high administration levels.

So this is a symptom of the corporatization and inverted priorities that affect public universities all across the land. And there's increasing media interest because the students are sitting in. They've been actually running the library to keep it going, after the administration laid off the librarian and a full-time assistant. It's a gathering place for students, and the administration wants to take all the books and put them in some central depository and use the space for other purposes. So with that background, we have two graduate students, PhD candidates in the Department of Anthropology, to tell us what's going on and what the chances are to protect this library before it is forcibly vacated. Sandra and Jesús, give us your view.

Sandra Oseguera: Hi. Well, thank you so much for that introduction, Ralph. I want to say to the first point that you bring up that the UC system has the mission to serve society as a center of higher learning, providing long-term social health benefits, transmission of advanced knowledge and discovering new knowledge and functioning as an active working repository of organized knowledge. This statement is in complete disconnect with the actions of our administration in UC Berkeley. The Anthropology Library at UC Berkeley costs around \$0.4 and \$0.3 million to run. And they are telling us that this is a necessary cut to maintain the other libraries in our university. As you point out in your introduction, we are seeing that the university is prioritizing other investments such as \$0.4 billion in Blackstone great housing project and also buying a new house for the president of the UC system, which costs \$6.5 million. As I mentioned before, it's a huge disconnect between the mission of the university and the actions of our administration.

Ralph Nader: Jesús, your view?

Jesús Gutierrez: Yeah. I think the Anthropology Library at UC Berkeley is extremely valuable on three fronts. It's valuable as a research tool. It is valuable as a community resource and a public good since it is accessible to the broader community. You don't even have to be a Berkeley student to access the materials in there. And it's valuable as a living and dynamic

archive of what anthropology is and has been in the United States. I think a lot of the arguments that we keep hearing from the administration, that there's not enough money — because since the passage of Prop 13 in the '70s, we get less money than it takes to support a student, and we keep hearing things like “you'll be able to access your books if we digitize them all,” or “you'll still be able to request them digitally and have them shipped to a library near you.” And I think the argument that we have heard really powerfully over the last week or two of constant struggling, sitting in, holding town halls testimonies is that this library is extremely meaningful, for shaping not only future generations of diverse scholars that will carry the social sciences forward, but also as a public good that will allow many people to access knowledge about the diversity of human phenomena, including people who see themselves represented in the materials that this library holds.

Ralph Nader: Well, former Governor Jerry Brown is on your side. He has close relations with the Department of Anthropology, and over the years he has attended events there at Berkley. Who else is on your side? How about the faculty? How about the law school, which is right next door to the Anthropology Department and could consider a temporary restraining order? Some of the law students can help you because you have all kinds of standards and rules and protections and procedures that may not be widely observed by the administration, and maybe it ought to be aired in an open court.

Sandra Oseguera: Yes. Well, thank you for bringing that up, Mr. Nader. Right now we do have the support of all of our faculty, and we also have the support of different members of the anthropology community as well as other disciplines. We actually have a petition requesting that the university returns our library to a fully operational library by the end of the spring 2023 semester. And that has been signed by important authors, important anthropologists, social scientists from around the world, professors, and directors of research institutions, because they know the value of our Anthropology Library.

I want to highlight that when the grad students, initiated our sit-in, we were doing this without support of anyone else. And in the last minute, when the faculty learned about our actions, they were so supportive because they had tried so many times through the administrative ways to get an answer from the university to stop the closure of our library. And once grad students put themselves together to work and organize our movement, faculty fully supported us. And we also got a lot of support from the undergraduate community across campus. And it has been a wonderful experience of community and collaboration between many stakeholders. However, we, the grad students, see ourselves as the keepers and also the main users of that collection because all of our research really relies on the resources that are there.

Ralph Nader: And the administration confesses a saving of only \$400,000, which some people think is inflated. There's just one librarian, one staff, part-time janitorial service, and they say it's \$400,000. They have seriously deficient vision here. Isn't it right that citizens can access this library? It's not just accessible to students and faculty.

Jesús Gutierrez: Yes, I can speak to that, because I have been the closest thing that we have to a librarian for the past year. I'm the graduate student that the department is paying as a compromise with the university administration to keep the library staffed, at the very least, as a community space. And one thing that I have seen from being stationed at the front desk since

August of 2022, is that about a third of the people who use that library on any given day are people from the Berkeley community, people who are not affiliated with Berkeley at all, but who come in to either reference a book or work on some things that they are personally invested in, like things that they may have to do for their job, work from home or something at the library. It's a really valuable space, and it's not only a space for simply going in and accessing a book, it's also a space of encounter. The kind of thing that the university's trying to destroy is essentially this possibility for having a happenstance run-in with a book that you may not necessarily have intended to type into the catalog system, or with a person who you may not otherwise run into.

Ralph Nader: It also, Jesús, diminishes person-to-person interaction among students and faculty and throws them into the digital impersonal world. The situation in Berkeley has become grotesquely inverted in terms of the university. They have millions for the football and other sports and paying coaches huge salaries. They have millions for administrative officials, but they want to shut down one of the great anthropology libraries in the western world. So we support you fully and I hope the *New York Times*, which is considering an article now, will come out with one very soon. How imminent is the arrival of trucks to take these books away?

Jesús Gutierrez: The process of removing and relocating some of the materials has already begun. The library staff/the folks from the library system, have already gotten the green light from higher-up administrators to begin the process of dismantling the collection and relocating things either to the Richmond offsite warehouse storage facility, where they store a lot of overflow holdings or the central library stacks, the Doe Library, which is the big Central Berkeley library. So it's kind of happening now. But as Sandra was saying, one of the things that has been really inspiring to me in the aftermath of the sit-in — me and Sandra did a lot to try to get that occupation running smoothly and off the ground — and made all of that worth it was seeing the kind of support that we've gotten also outside of anthropology from other community and campus stakeholders. I think more and more people are realizing this is not just about saving one small specialty library, but this is actually about a long pattern in the university deprioritizing education. We see the destruction of this one curated dynamic archive of print media as one symptom of a broader underlying issue, which is fundamentally about the deprioritizing of education and the transformation of the American university into something else.

Ralph Nader: Well said. Go across the sidewalk to Boalt Hall, which is the law school, and connect with the students who belong to the National Lawyers Guild. Tell them the story, have them look into the procedures and the standards, and file a temporary restraining order (TRO) in the court in Berkeley where these issues can be aired and the trucks coming to empty the library can be temporarily restrained.

Sandra Oseguera: Thank you so much for that advice.

Jesús Gutierrez: Just one quick bit of background on the current library situation. A lot of this new wave, the most recent push to save the library began last spring when almost overnight all of the library backstaff were essentially fired. When I first got to Berkeley, the library used to have, like as Sandra said, a dedicated librarian from the morning until the evening hours whose role was to take care of the curation and maintenance of the collection as a specific curated collection of books. And there were several staff/student workers employed at the front desk, and a couple of other library staff sitting in the back offices. So, it was a robust operation, making sure that the

library was not only integrated into the broader UC Berkeley library system, but that it functioned like a living, growing library that was able to check books in and out to students.

What has changed since is that what I am doing right now is essentially just overseeing the space, making sure that no one sets the building on fire, and that no one steals any books off the premises. There is no circulation capacity at the library right now and you have no idea the amount of angry graduate students and faculty that approach me at the desk being, like, "I'd like to check out this book, please. Wait, what do you mean I can't check out a book when you are standing right here." There's all of this that goes into having a functioning library that essentially has been taken away from us by the university's choice to allocate its money elsewhere and to not even let us do the bare minimum thing that we require as researchers and as students, which is accessing the books that are sitting on the shelves right next to us.

Ralph Nader: Let me ask you two quick questions. Who's the chancellor? Let's put a name on the rulers of the university and how can people get in touch with you in the Berkeley area once they hear this program?

Jesús Gutierrez: The Chancellor is Carol Christ. And they can definitely get in touch with us by coming to see me at the library's front desk between 1:00 and 5:00 PM Monday through Friday. They can also email us. There's an amazing website called the saveuclibraries.org that was created by a bunch of library advocates who have been fighting for many years against closures of libraries all across campus. It's a great reminder that this isn't an isolated issue, but rather part of a string of library closures. This is not the first time this has happened. And if graduate students are sitting-in and protesting, it's because we've tried giving feedback in the Google forums. The Berkeley Faculty Association has passed unanimous resolutions condemning all of this. All of the official bureaucratic channels have been complied with. We are now doing what the university is refusing to do, which is prioritizing our learning, our teaching, and our education.

Ralph Nader: Well, we're out of time. Thank you, Sandra and Jesús, for taking a stand and staying with it and expanding public awareness. This is not just the Anthropology Library at University of California Berkeley that's at stake. It's the raid on libraries all over the country, public and private. Thank you very much.

Jesús Gutierrez: Thank you.

Sandra Oseguera: Thank you.

Steve Skrovan: I want to thank our guests again, Dr. Dahr Jamail, Karen Friedman, Sandra Oseguera, and Jesús Gutierrez. 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." A transcript of this program will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* Substack site soon after the episode is posted.

David Feldman: The producers of the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* are Jimmy Lee Wirt and Matthew Marran. Our executive producer is Alan Minsky. Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* when we'll be marking the 20th anniversary of our war in Iraq. We'll be having some very special guests. Thank you, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you, everybody. As you can see, it's the Congress. You have to focus on the Congress if you're concerned about the revelations, disclosures, and declarations about injustice that you hear on this program. It's the Congress, your two senators, representative, they're using your power. Make sure it's used for you.