

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EPISODE 506 TRANSCRIPT

Steve Skrovan: Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. My name is Steve Skrovan, along with my co-host David Feldman and the rest of the gang. Hello, David.

David Feldman: Good morning.

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

Ralph Nader: Hello.

Steve Skrovan: And Ralph, you've got a new book coming out. You're someone who's actually written more books than I've read. Tell us about the latest tome.

Ralph Nader: This is counterintuitive, as *Forbes* magazine pointed out recently. It's called *The Rebellious CEO: 12 Leaders I've known over the years Who Did it Right*. And I wanted to publish this book for the longest time because if we don't have contrast and comparisons with the avaricious corporate CEOs of our time, we're not going to be able to measure them according to standards of these CEOs who made profit, but only by respecting and treating their workers well, their consumers well, and the environment respectfully.

It's going to produce a lot of discussion because this is not some public interest group commenting on what big CEOs should do. This is people who are in the marketplace and who reversed the business model.

Steve Skrovan: All right. And to get a copy of *The Rebellious CEO*, you can go to our Substack site, that'll lead you there, or you can go to rebellious.CEO. That's rebellious.ceo.

Now onto the show. The conventional wisdom in America, propagated by our mass media, would have you believe that we live in a divided country. That's understandable because the media thrives on conflict, and our political class likes that narrative because it allows them to divide and conquer. However, our first guest today, Robert Weissman, the president of Public Citizen, argues that the American public is actually unified on most big issues. Whether it's over Medicare negotiating drug prices, ending dark money and secret spending in elections, getting off of fossil fuels, jailing corporate criminals, raising the minimum wage, protecting our online privacy, and taxing corporations and the wealthy, an overwhelming majority of Americans support reform.

So why don't our policies reflect that? In his new book, *The Corporate Sabotage of America's Future And What We Can Do About It*, Robert Weissman and his co-author Joan Claybrook lay out in stunning detail how giant corporations corrupt the policymaking process, enrich themselves, and leave the American public feeling isolated and disenfranchised.

In the second half of the show, we once again turn our attention to the ongoing conflict in the Middle East. And conflict might be too tame a word for what's going on right now, and our guest will probably have some stronger words. For another perspective, we welcome our guest Chas

Freeman, who has decades of foreign policy experience, including serving as ambassador to Saudi Arabia, along with additional diplomatic postings in Thailand and China. We look forward to his worldly and diplomatic take on what's going on in that troubled part of the Middle East.

As always, somewhere in the middle we'll check in with our tireless corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first, what can we do about the corporate sabotage of America? David?

David Feldman: Robert Weissman is a staunch public interest advocate and activist, as well as an expert on a wide variety of issues ranging from corporate accountability and government transparency to trade and globalization to economic and regulatory policy. For 20 years, he edited the *Multinational Monitor* magazine. And as the president of Public Citizen, Robert Weissman has spearheaded the effort to loosen the chokehold corporations and the wealthy have over our democracy. He is the author, with Joan Claybrook, of *The Corporate Sabotage of America's Future And What We Can Do About It*.

Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Robert Weissman.

Robert Weissman: Hey, it's great to be with you.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, welcome back, Rob. The cover of this book is very impressive, listeners. The designer really hit so many of the points, because as if they're tentacles from an octopus—apologies to octopus—you make a lot of recommendations after your exposés of Big Pharma, Big Oil, the military-industrial complex and so on. I want to start with this enormous left-right support evidenced in the polls for really cracking down on corporate crime, fraud, abuse, corporate control of people's lives. And I remember there was a Businessweek cover about 20 some years ago that asked the American people in a poll, do you think there's too much corporate control over your lives? And over 70% said yes.

And since then, they've had far more control over children's lives and people's lives with the whole Internet gulag and the increasing control over Washington. So give us some idea of the polls that you cite on page 155 of your book that exposes this myth of polarization between left and right back home where people work, live and raise their families.

Robert Weissman: You're exactly right. That BusinessWeek poll, if it were to be redone today, would undoubtedly show even greater support for the proposition that there's too much corporate power. And then when you dig down into specific issues, you see that people overwhelmingly agree on problems and on solutions. So more than 90% of Americans, for example, want the United States government to negotiate drug prices through Medicare. More than 80% want to end secret spending, so-called dark money, on elections. If you ask about campaign finance, basically there's 100% agreement that the current system is a disaster.

In one poll in the *New York Times*, the only difference among the American people was those who thought the system needed fundamental change and those who thought it needed to be completely rebuilt. I've looked at that over and over, and I can't tell which one is the more radical claim.

Three-quarters of Americans want stronger limits on smog. Even if you give people the false choice between environmental protection and economic growth, people overwhelmingly support environmental protection. More than three in four people want to have CEOs held accountable for the crimes they commit. Eight in ten think the minimum wage is too low. Four in five support paid family leave, and on and on and on, as you point out, Ralph, and as you know very well.

One last thing before kicking it back to you. By way of context, those are not regular numbers when you get polls. In fact, if you ask people, "Does the Earth revolve around the sun?" only 80% of Americans agree that the Earth revolves around the sun. So, when you get numbers in the 90% or 85%, these are extraordinary levels of national agreement.

Ralph Nader: And huge majorities want to change the tax system from a loophole giant for rich and corporations into something much more equitable so the superrich and the big corporations pay their fair share of taxes. It just goes on and on.

If this is all the case, Rob Weissman, why is Congress behaving in the opposite direction? They can't even get themselves to have thorough hearings on the corporate crime wave, corporate billing fraud, corporate control, corporate subsidies, everything else you put in this book. What's the reason for the gap here?

Robert Weissman: The very short answer is too much corporate power. The slightly longer answer is too much political power by big corporations.

There are more elaborate and important answers as well. So, if we want to ~~sort of~~ look at what's going on in Congress right now, in the House, you have Republican control, a party that is barely holding on to an ideology, 100% or at least 95%, pro-corporate, but also fundamentally authoritarian and increasingly nihilist, without any purpose.

But why did they get that way? How do people like that get elected to office? I think that's rooted in people's real dissatisfaction with how the country has been governed under a regime of bowing down to corporate power. And people have been open to and vulnerable to authoritarian populist appeals, which has landed us in the place we're in.

If you step back from the immediate moment, the big picture story is that the bounds of what's considered important, or the policy solutions that are considered acceptable or reasonable, are really constructed by corporations and their lobbyists. And that's the problem we face every day.

Ralph Nader: What do you make of this? The Democrats opposed the Trump tax cuts in 2017. There were horrendous tax cuts for his family, for the superrich, and for global corporations. And on page 32 of your book, you list some of the companies who made a lot of profit in the US and paid zero tax, or what's called negative income tax. They actually got a refund from the Treasury Department. They include, for example, American Electric Power, Booz Allen Hamilton, Advanced Micro Devices, Duke Energy, Mohawk Industries, Textron corporation, T-Mobile, U.S. Xcel Energy, SpartanNash, Salesforce, DISH Network, and on and on.

We know that in the past, General Electric has made billions of dollars in the early 21st Century in the US and paid no federal income tax. A worker at a GM plant in Schenectady [New York] sent more money in sheer dollars to the US Treasury than the entire giant General Electric. But when the Democrats took control in January 2019 of the House and Senate, Richie Neal, a Democrat from western Massachusetts, a rather liberal area of the country, became chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee. One of the first things he said was that he was not going to revisit the Trump tax cuts. What do you make of that? He defied his own party and got away with it.

Robert Weissman: As you know, individuals make a big difference. And Richie Neal is someone who is really close to the corporate interests and really stood by them. We tell some specific stories about him working on behalf of private equity, for example, not in the space of taxation, but to defend the outrageous practice of surprise medical billing.

But if you step back just from Richie Neal and look at what happened in the Biden administration, Biden came in and his iteration of the Build Back Better bill, he actually wanted to do quite a bit on corporate taxation. And at the end, not because of Republicans, but because they could not control enough Democrats, they were able to do some of what they wanted to do. They rolled back some of the Trump tax cuts, and they meaningfully increased funding for the IRS, which will enable the IRS to go after corporate tax cheats and superrich tax cheats. But they didn't do nearly enough, because of people like Richie Neal and Joe Manchin, who deprived Biden of the majority support that needed to deliver on what he wanted to do.

And now, as we're facing these government shutdown fights over and over, and we're being told this myth that the country doesn't have the money to pay for making a decent society and funding the programs that we need. We've forgotten the reality that corporations and the superrich aren't paying their fair share of taxes. Our country has ~~We've got~~ all the money we could possibly need if we'd just tax the people who have the money.

Ralph Nader: It's interesting the way you organized that in your book, Rob. We're talking with Rob Weissman, president of Public Citizen, author with Joan Claybrook of *The Corporate Sabotage of America's Future And What We Can Do About It*.

You focus on the Big Pharma, Big Oil, the raw power of getting public subsidies, the taxpayers bailing out, subsidizing rich corporations. You have the section on Big Tech, that's Silicon Valley. You have a section on solutions. And then you have something interesting for the reader—the Big Pharma rap sheet, the Big Oil rap sheet, the Big Tech rap sheet. What do they provide the reader?

Robert Weissman: We're trying to tell a story that explains a lot of what's going on in the country and why people are so unhappy. We're trying to point out, as you highlighted at the beginning of our conversation, that there's a huge disconnect between what Americans want, in overwhelming numbers compared to what we actually get. We're trying to explain why that is, and to show how it plays out.

We're looking at the problem of too much political influence by corporations, the really serious problem of corporate welfare, which you've taught me and America so much about. And then we

homed in on those issues as it works through the lens of three dominant industries – Big Pharma, Big Oil, and Big Tech. So that's the story we're telling, and we give some solutions for all these problems.

And then at the end of the book, having told the story, we provide tools for people. So there's very simple half-page bullet points on each of these topics—things you can remember, things you want to get in an argument about at Thanksgiving. Included are some key talking points for you. about how corporations have too much political power, points summarizing how much corporations take from the public in the form of corporate welfare. And then we look at each of these industry sectors with what we call rap sheets. Here's what Big Pharma is doing to us—one two, three. Here's what Big Oil is doing to us—one, two, three. Here's how Big Tech is harming the country—one, two, three.

Ralph Nader: On page 161, you have very succinct answers to the questions about how serious corporate crime is, and it goes unpunished. Can you elaborate on that?

Robert Weissman: I'm reflecting back things that you've taught me and taught all of us, but with some very specific data. There is this unfathomable chasm between all the focus on street crime, as serious as it is, and as much as it injures families, communities, and individuals, and the much larger problem of corporate crime, which also injures families, communities and individuals yet gets so little attention.

There's one other thing that's really important about this distinction before I go through some of the data points on this. The problem of street crime is complicated and hard to deal with because there's cultural issues and economic deprivation that underlines it. When you think about the actual individuals who commit crime, it's not 100% clear how to deter the problem. We've got a lot of evidence that hyper-sentencing and over-incarceration is ~~not a solution.~~ It's a counterproductive solution.

On the other hand, when it comes to corporations, they are rational actors personified. They have huge resources to make very calculated decisions that take into account expected risk and expected return. And if they think they can get away with breaking the law and make a lot of money, they're going to do it. And if they think the odds of getting caught are high and they'll be penalized severely, then they won't. It's as simple as that. And because the incentives lead them to commit corporate crime, they do. And here's the evidence.

All property crime in the United States cost about \$16 billion annually. Just corporate wage theft costs about \$15 billion annually, not counting all the other ways that corporations steal and rip off money from us. One example of that would be the Wall Street financial crash, which cost the economy on the order of \$22 trillion: that's with a T. One person was criminally convicted for all the wrongdoing that led to the 2008 financial crash.

If you look at the violence, death and injury that's caused by corporate wrongdoing, between 5 and 8 million people are injured on the job every year. Workplace injuries and trauma and disease kill about 125,000 people every year. Almost no one is prosecuted for any of those crimes. Overall, academics have concluded that corporate crime and violence conservatively kills about 300,000

people a year in the United States alone from dangerous products, environmental harm, workplace injuries, and so on, which is about 15 times more than the number of people who are killed by criminal homicide.

And then the last point on this, which you were alluding to, is corporate criminal prosecution has always been weak in all of modern times in the United States, but it is especially weak right now. From a relative peak 20 years ago, prosecution of corporate criminals has progressively declined. It hit record-low numbers in the Trump administration, which is no surprise. But what is disturbing and somewhat of a surprise is that the numbers have basically stayed at the same level, slightly ticking up during the Biden administration. Despite a lot of tough talk from the Biden Justice Department, we've not seen any significant prosecution of corporate crime.

Ralph Nader: There are very few federal cops on the corporate crime beat. What's Congress Watch doing? Tell us.

Robert Weissman: We're pushing on those issues. You're absolutely right. It's also correct more generally that congressional oversight is nothing like what it was 30 or 40 years ago. The culture has changed about congressional oversight, the people have changed, and the expectations have changed, so it's not as intense and effective as it historically had been.

As you know, we do what we can on the House side, but it's pretty difficult. We're in constant contact with the Senate. We're hoping that the Senate Judiciary Committee will soon hold hearings on corporate crime, and we think that they will. From their point of view, they've got a lot of important issues to handle, and they do their best. But I agree with you. Obviously, we need more, and we're pushing them to do more.

Ralph Nader: Give us one minute each one—Big Pharma, Big Oil, and Big Tech—before we go to the kind of reforms that you're pushing in this book. What's Big Pharma doing to the American people?

Robert Weissman: Big Pharma is the biggest lobby in Washington, D.C., by far, which is due in large part to the fact that pharma depends on government support more than any other industry. So they take from us the research that's done by the National Institutes of Health. They use that to develop drugs, don't pay the government anything for it or very little, and then charge through the roof for it.

We all pay for it. We pay for it as consumers, but the government itself directly pays for it as the biggest purchaser of pharmaceuticals in the world through the Medicare Part D program. Because of pharma's political power, until recently, they had made it impossible for Medicare to negotiate those prices, including for drugs that the government itself had paid for. So that's a huge problem. And we see almost one out of three people in the country rationing their pharmaceuticals because the price is so high. Lots of other problems, too, including bad drug safety.

And especially, we should point out, the spread and marketing of opioids by the Sacklers and other companies, as well as the distributors and the pharmacy companies. They made a lot of money from opioids, got lots of people addicted. And although that trade is now diminished under a lot

more control, it set the stage for the fentanyl epidemic that we're now experiencing and is really ravishing people and communities across the country. Those are real community, family, and individual tragedies, and they hang directly on the head of the pharmaceutical CEOs. [fentanyl, 100% stronger than heroin, is an FDA approved deadly drug prescribed to treat severe pain. 2022 deaths attributable to overdose approached 75,000.]

Ralph Nader: These drug companies are so greedy. They've exported the production of a lot of our pharmaceuticals to India and China under very weak supervision by the Food and Drug Administration. People are astonished when they're told that there is no production of antibiotics in this country. Our country relies on China and India for antibiotics, which can be viewed a national security problem. Big Pharma charges the American people the highest price for drugs of any of their customers worldwide. Isn't that correct?

Robert Weissman: It's not close. We often pay about double of what people in Europe are paying for the same products. And that's simply because those countries choose not to let the companies charge whatever they want. They negotiate prices, or they impose some kind of reasonable controls on it. They probably pay too much themselves, but they don't just sit back and let the monopolist price gouge as much as they possibly can.

Ralph Nader: In the 1990s, you were in the forefront of trying to bring down the price of AIDS medicines to people in Africa. And the drug lobby, with Al Gore's support when he was vice president, was demanding \$10,000 per year per patient for their drugs in Africa, which, in effect, was a death sentence. And you went with Jamie Love and a couple others around the world talking to health ministries, and you got a drug company in India called Cipla to topple Big Pharma's price gouging. Tell us about that.

Robert Weissman: Yeah, that's exactly right. It's a tremendously important story in its own right because it's probably saved the lives of about 25 million people who'd otherwise be dead. And it illustrates the bigger problem with Big Pharma. So as the AIDS epidemic and then pandemic was spreading from the United States and then around the world and really settling in Africa as the epicenter, the industry, driven by work from the National Institutes of Health, started to put together treatments for people with HIV/AIDS and eventually settled on triple drug treatments that worked, and that continue to work and keep people with HIV alive. The companies set very high prices for those drugs, even though they were very, very heavily reliant on government research and development, charging, as you said, about \$10,000 a year per person or more; much more now.

The companies wanted those to be global prices, so they charged \$10,000 a year per person in Africa as well, even in countries where per capita income might have been \$600 per person. So, no possible way for a family with \$600 per capita income to be able to afford drugs that cost \$10,000 a year. And the result was people didn't get access to the treatment and they died. Millions of people died preventatively, even after treatments had been made available.

As you said, we started pushing and said these prices are too high, that there needs to be competition to bring the prices down. We connected with a company in India called Cipla that had expertise in making generic drugs, knew how to manufacture the key HIV/AIDS drugs, and then

agreed to start doing it, and offered first to make the drugs available for \$350 a year, the same drugs that Big Pharma was charging \$10,000 a year for.

Eventually, that price fell from \$350 to below \$100 a year per person. Those low prices made it possible for the US government to come in and say, "Hey, we can save a lot of lives cheaply. We're going to create a new program," which President George Bush did, to support people with HIV/AIDS in Africa and around the world. A new global facility was also created because it was now affordable to treat people. And as a result, we've got about 28 million people around the world in developing countries who are receiving life-saving treatment for HIV/AIDS, which would have been unavailable and unaffordable if Big Pharma still had their way.

Ralph Nader: It's a remarkable story, listeners. They got very little media, how a handful of consumer advocates, who knew what they were talking about and went into one country after another, brought down the price from the death sentence price of Big Pharma for millions of poor people around the world. And Rob Weissman and Jamie Love in our office were very heavily responsible for that.

I think our listeners know about Big Oil—their gouging, their opposition to transition to renewables, the way they keep drilling and buying more oil companies and coal and gas. Tell us briefly about Big Tech in your book.

Robert Weissman: The way we were talking about Big Tech in the book, is focusing a lot on the harms caused by social media, the way it's led to real developmental and mental health problems for teenagers, especially teenage girls, the impositions it's imposed on our privacy, the way the business model of companies like Facebook have driven and intensified hate and scams and racial bias, and the way the companies have maneuvered to defend their monopoly position, all of which is still true.

One thing we didn't touch on is the way the exact same companies are now moving at breakneck speed into developing and deploying new generative artificial intelligence technologies, where they and the other companies involved, the other AI compatriots, acknowledge very, very serious harms as likely to happen without regulatory controls. But they won't pause an instant for those regulatory controls to be put in place.

And just one among the many harms that these new AI technologies may introduce, is the possibility that we're confronted constantly with things that are fake and fraudulent but appear to be real. Well, if you start confronting everything and are unable to distinguish if it's real or fake, you can't really engage civically, you can't really engage commercially, short of person-to-person in-person transactions. So, we're seeing the possibility of the destruction of social trust on which society relies through the spread of a lot of fake media, not the old kind of fake media, but now new, convincing, widely available, deep fake technology and other kinds of things that are going to evolve very quickly.

There are solutions to these problems, but we need to slow down a little bit. The companies so far have not been willing to do that. So, we're working very hard to get controls in place to mitigate

some of the worst harms, but it's going to be very hard to keep up with their rapid deployment of this technology.

Ralph Nader: Well, you have about eight ways to curtail corporate power on page 162 and 163. Can you give us a brief quickly on them?

Robert Weissman: Yeah. These are high-level, and a book or more could be written on each of these solutions, but they're a good place to start.

One is to overturn this Supreme Court *Citizens United* decision. That's the one that says corporations can spend whatever they want to influence elections and end big money dominance of our electoral system. A second would be to end corporate capture of regulatory agencies, so the regulators regulate the corporations instead of the corporations regulating the agencies. A third would be to make sure that the giant corporations are paying their taxes, as we've discussed. A fourth would be to take on corporate welfare and eliminate most of the public subsidies that are available, or where they make sense to big corporations, or where they make sense to make sure the corporations are serving public purposes in exchange for the money they're receiving.

A fifth would be to really take on the problem of monopoly, which to give credit, the Biden administration is starting to do in important ways. A sixth would be to restore the right to organize unions in this country. We're seeing a real surge in interest and support for labor right now, including after the recent successful United Auto Workers strike. But it's still incredibly hard to actually organize a union, and there aren't that many people doing so. And the primary reason that they're not is because they face the threat of, or actually are being fired for trying to organize. If we had stronger protections for unionizing, we'd have a lot more people in unions and the country would be a lot more just. We need to take much more urgent action to address the climate crisis. We need to toughen corporate crime enforcement, as we've been discussing.

And the last thing that's really important where you've led the way, of course, Ralph, is to give people direct ability to hold corporations accountable through suing them for the harms that they cause to communities. We have that right. We've had that right from the founding of this country, but it's been restricted significantly. And we've got to reestablish this fundamental right of people to sue corporations that harm them, either individually or in groups through class actions.

Ralph Nader: Well, before we close, we're talking to Rob Weissman with Joan Claybrook, author of *The Corporate Sabotage of America's Future*, with a forward by trial lawyer Joseph Cotchett.

Rob, you've been a supporter over the years of Palestinian rights and support a two-state solution. Because of the overwhelming news focus now on the disaster and the genocide in Gaza, what's your view now on our government's immersion with armed shipments, diplomatic cover, and strategic intelligence backing Netanyahu's genocidal destruction of civilian infrastructure, and human beings, from babies to the elderly, and from the infirm to fleeing refugees?

Robert Weissman: Well, it's not an issue that Public Citizen works on directly, but you're right that I've been involved in the issue of Palestinian rights for many decades. You don't need to be an expert to understand the horrific nature of what's going on right now. It's important to engage in

the conversation and to be very upfront about acknowledging the horrific nature of the Hamas attack on Israel. But that doesn't give license to Israel to engage in a horrific attack now at a far greater scale on Gaza.

And we really need to know almost nothing to know it's wrong to kill children, it's wrong to engage in collective punishment of any set of civilians, and it's wrong to attack hospitals. The US government has a lot of influence and sway over Israel and is also supplying weapons to Israel, and I think is trying to prod Israel to back off a little bit. But our government for sure could be doing a lot more.

Ralph Nader: Rob Weissman, how do people get this book?

Robert Weissman: Go anywhere. But online corporatesabotage.org will get you linked up to everything you want, including if you're someone who likes to read things for free, you can download a PDF of it at no cost.

Ralph Nader: Thank you very much, Rob. Good luck on the book. I hope the NPR and PBS and other outlets interview you so you can get that message across to people. It's not just information, listeners, it's empowering you to come back at 535 members of Congress who can make all the difference and have the awesome power to subordinate corporate supremacy to the rights of the citizenry. Thank you, Rob.

Robert Weissman: Thanks to you all. Always a thrill being on the show.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Rob Weissman. We will link to his new book, *The Corporate Sabotage of America's Future And What We Can Do About It* at ralphnaderradiohour.com.

Up next, we're going to get a diplomatic perspective on what the Israelis are doing in Gaza. 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, November 17, 2023. I'm Russell Mokhiber.

In corporate crime cases, there are declinations with a press release[formal signed/notarized statements to prosecutor and judge that the alleged victim declines to prosecute]. There are also declinations without a press release. The declinations corporate criminal defense lawyers prefer are of the second variety, no publicity declinations. That's according to a new report from Public Citizen titled *Corporate Prosecution Doldrums*. The report documents the continued years-long decline of prosecuting major corporate crime cases under the Biden administration.

But at the end of the report, the authors say that the worst part of the Biden administration's safe harbor policy for corporate criminals is the Justice Department's renewed and expanded promise to reward corporate criminals that self-report misconduct with declinations. The report found that corporate criminal defense attorneys openly state that their goal for clients is to win a non-public declination.

For the *Corporate Crime Reporter*, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you, Russell. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. I'm Steve Skrovan, along with David Feldman, Hanah Feldman, and Ralph.

Chas Freeman, Jr. was the editor of the Encyclopedia Britannica's entry on diplomacy. Let's get his take on the war in Gaza. David?

David Feldman: Ambassador Freeman is the author of several well-received books on statecraft and diplomacy, including *The Diplomat's Dictionary*, *America's Misadventures in the Middle East*, and *America's Continuing Misadventures in the Middle East*. He also speaks 12 languages. Today it'll be English. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Ambassador Chas Freeman.

Chas Freeman: Very happy to be here. Thank you for the kind introduction.

Ralph Nader: Welcome, indeed. We're all watching the news of the slaughter in Gaza and the full backing of President Biden and the vast majority of members of Congress in violation of international law and violating federal statutes against the offensive use of US-supplied weapons and against sending weapons to countries that abuse human rights.

You've been in the Middle East many years. You know it very well. How would you critique the present government in Washington, which is what all of the human rights world is relying on to change the direction of the slaughter in Gaza and head for a peaceful resolution of that conflict? Give us your broad-gauge views here.

Chas Freeman: A couple of observations. One is that the latest polling shows that the American people are not in tune with the administration at all on its support for the Israeli genocide in Gaza. People's support is rapidly declining. The number of people who want to stop supplying Israel with weapons is increasing, and the demands for ceasefire are daily going up.

I just read a note from Chicago. The Israeli consulate in Chicago is the subject of a rather large demonstration by Jews for ceasefire, indicating the split in the American Jewish communities on this. This is a political issue which is very disadvantageous to the president. I agree with you that we are violating international law as well as our own legislation by supporting Israel in this venture. That, unfortunately, is part of a broader trend in which the former order that we tried to establish after World War II, which was a facsimile of the rule of law internationally, has given way to might makes right.

We are ourselves a major violator of the UN Charter and international law, and now apparently, we're willing to tolerate genocide and do nothing about it, even though we have the ability to withhold the weapons that are being used to carry it out.

Ralph Nader: Well, I can see Prime Minister Netanyahu in a private conversation with President Joe Biden saying, "You got to support us. You have no moral authority. You violated international law and slaughtered over a million people in Iraq and blew that country apart, although Israel

supported that invasion by Bush and Cheney, you did the same in Afghanistan, in Libya. So, we're just following your approach here. So don't lecture us." If you were advising Joe Biden, how would he answer that?

Chas Freeman: I think he'd have great difficulty answering that. And if I were an honest advisor, I would tell him that he would have to admit that the United States set the precedent for much of what Israel is now doing. That is very unfortunate.

I think one of the great pieces of collateral damage from this is the United Nations Charter, international law, and the credibility of these institutions at UN. But more particularly, I think when next time Americans lecture foreigners about human rights, they're not going to laugh at us, they're going to sneer, because this is such a tremendous demonstration of hypocrisy on our part.

Ralph Nader: Well, as the saying goes, one war crime doesn't justify another war crime. And there was last Tuesday a large rally in Washington by pro-Israeli government supporters. Democratic and Republican leaders, Chuck Schumer, and others, marched along with them. One senator [John Fetterman (D-Pa.)] had the Israeli flag draped around him.

There was something otherworldly about this demonstration against anti-Semitism while the Jewish state in Israel is slaughtering Arabs in Gaza, and there is no sense of recognition of the thousands of civilians and children, elderly, infirm, mothers, fathers, who've been slaughtered in their homes, apartment buildings, schools, places of worship. UN installations bombed, even though they're clearly marked from the roof. Red Cross installations bombed, refugees fleeing south, Israeli orders being strafed and bombed. And when they get to the south, they're bombed in the south with no place to go—no medicine, no food, no fuel, no electricity—on orders of the Israeli Defense Ministry, which are genocidal orders, of course, because nobody can live without those products.

Is there any chance that Congress can begin coming to its senses, asserting its constitutional oversight dealings, having public hearings? There has never been a hearing since 1948 in Congress inviting Israeli peace advocates, many of whom were former generals, ministers in the Israeli government, mayors of cities. They have been blocked from ever having public hearings in the House and Senate to give their view of the conflict against the Israeli government's militaristic party line.

What's your view of Congress here? It seems unless Congress changes, it's just going to be a vast refugee camp in Gaza, more death and destruction in the West Bank, and the possibility of spreading this conflict involving neighboring countries and, of course, involving the US Navy and Air Force even more than it's involved now. Let's start with Congress here. Do you see any possibility of reducing that gap between the increasing public opinion polls demanding ceasefire, demanding a peaceful settlement, demanding rejecting the genocidal tax of 14.3 billion for more arms to Israel that Biden is trying to push through Congress?

Chas Freeman: I think a return to constitutional practices is essential, but I don't think it's going to happen anytime soon. I think with respect to Congress, there are institutional impediments that reinforce venality, which is what we see. People are elected in order to communicate with the

voters. They immediately have to have their handout, the donors to pay for access to the media, and they end up being bought by special interests.

But I think there's a broader issue here domestically, and that is the collapse of the entire concept of due process, which is the basic underpinning of democracy and of the rule of law. The idea of due process is that the legitimacy of an outcome is determined by the fairness of the process that produces it, not by whether you like the outcome or not.

On January 6th, we saw people reject the results of an election because they didn't like those results, even though there was no evidence that the election was unfair. We see now the progressive suspension of parts of the Constitution, habeas corpus now ignored, in many cases, people held indefinitely without charge. And we see an abuse of the system of justice to cripple people financially and basically silence them.

So, we have a fundamental problem, and it is ideological. And unless that is corrected, we're not going to see the Congress restored to the role that it should play according to the Constitution. Congress has done several things to ensure that it will not be reformed. One is gerrymandering districts to ensure that incumbents have an irresistible advantage for reelection. Another is the primary system which guarantees that the extreme wings of any political party have the greatest voice in that party.

I'm not going to hold my breath for the return of constitutional practice in this country, and all the more so because everything I've described is very closely connected with the warfare state that we have created, that is to say, a militarized foreign policy, industrial production that is linked heavily to the military, and the lobbying in the Congress that is linked to the military-industrial complex as well.

While one can hope that the basic design of the US Constitution - which was probably the greatest political engineering product ever produced on the planet - will be restored. But we also have to be realistic. The prospects for that do not look good.

Ralph Nader: What would you have Washington do other than rhetoric? What process of resolution for a more permanent settlement of that conflict would you recommend? There have been one-state and two-state solutions. Some satirists have said maybe a three-state solution—secular Israel, ultra-Orthodox Israel and Palestine, or the present status quo. How would you go about it if you were in charge of the White House here?

Chas Freeman: If I had my way, I would have favored a one-state solution, that is a democracy in which the talent and energy of the Israeli Jewish population would have given them a safe and predominant role in management of the country. That is now impossible as a result of the hatred that—that's correct. Israel was basically harvesting the hatred that it has sown in Palestine. I cannot see Israeli Jews and Palestinian Christians and Muslims peacefully coexisting in any immediate future.

So one conclusion that I draw from this conflict is that a two-state solution is essential to the peace and security of both Palestinians and Israelis. On October 7th, the Hamas engineered a sort of

jailbreak from the world's largest concentration camp. And a lot of other people came out and committed horrifying atrocities, not unexpectedly, because they hadn't been treated as great in humanity over an extended period of time. Israel calls them animals. They behaved like animals, frankly. Understandable as that may be, it is inexcusable.

I did not really know Norman Finkelstein before this crisis erupted, and I've never met him personally. But I've listened to him. He makes a very sound analogy to Nat Turner's slave revolt [1831 in Virginia]. Nat Turner and company were driven to the point of madness. They killed about 60 whites, and their policy when they had the revolt was to kill all white people. That is murder by any definition. It is inexcusable, morally, and legally. But perhaps it's understandable.

It certainly did not justify the killing of 120 African Americans by southerners angered by the Nat Turner revolt. And just so, Israel cannot justify what it is doing in Gaza. And what it is doing in Gaza, it is made very clear, is one of two things—either genocide in the form of murdering people at the mass level, or the expulsion of people to other countries. Neither should be acceptable.

Ironically, what happened in Gaza resembles nothing so much as the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto. And if anybody should understand that it's the survivors of the Holocaust who are now carrying out their own Holocaust. So, what I would argue is that when the war ends, which it will at some point, we need to make sure that a two-state solution emerges. It is said that the settlements in the West Bank make a two-state solution impossible. Nonsense. When Algeria was freed from France and became independent, a million Frenchmen who had settled in Algeria went home.

It wasn't pretty. It wasn't nice. But their behavior in Algeria wasn't very nice either. And that of the settlers at present is simply unspeakable. I don't think there's anybody very much who had sympathy for the way they're behaving.

Ralph Nader: Well, history didn't start October 7th. Seventy-five years ago, when Israel was established, David Ben-Gurion, who was the prime minister and considered the father of the modern state of Israel, told Nahum Goldmann, which was published in Mr. Goldmann's book in 1978, that basically *it was their land and we took it*. And he said it in more confirming detail. And he said, *why would we expect them to accept it? It was their land, and we took it*.

Recently, the *Times* repeated statements by Prime Minister Netanyahu saying that in order to block a two-state solution, Israel's strategy under his rule was to support and fund Hamas. He used those words, “support and fund Hamas.” The quote was taken out of a statement he made to the Likud party in 2019. And yet the Israeli lobby here in Washington gives him a free pass. How in the world did Hamas get all those weapons? They couldn't begin to match F-16s and Abrams tanks and all the modern civilian technology of the Israeli army.

Under Israel's embargo, which is illegal under international law, how did they get all these weapons to begin with? Having said that, the present war in Gaza has the Hamas fighters outnumbered 10 to 20 to 1, and the difference in military hardware is totally staggering. How'd they get these weapons if they didn't come through the Israeli underworld?

Chas Freeman: I think they came through tunnels from Egypt and elsewhere, not from the Israeli underworld. I think a lot of them were supplied by Iran. A lot of the training that went into what was, from a military point of view, as quite a brilliant breakout on October 7 was also provided, I believe, by Iran and some by Hezbollah, which has shown that you can beat the Israeli army even if you lack the F-16s and bombs that it has or tanks that it has.

These guys who came out on October 7 and those who are holed up in tunnels in Gaza knew that they were going to die, and they didn't see any alternative superior to that. Whatever one says about them, there's no question about the determination that they had and the willingness to sacrifice themselves that they showed. So, this will be a slaughter, yes. I think Israel is basically trying to starve the population of Gaza, to get them leaving, and it's very likely to gas the tunnels that Hamas is hiding in.

Some of those tunnels, interestingly, apparently, including those under the Al-Shifa Hospital, were actually built by Israel when it controlled. That is why Israel is so sure that there is a bunker under there, because they built it. And they assume that Hamas is using it. So far, I've not seen any evidence of that.

Had Israel been behaving in a normal as opposed to a psychotic fashion, it would have invited the Red Cross or the Red Crescent or some international body to go in and inspect the hospital and determine whether there were, in fact, Hamas headquarters or whatever underneath it. If those inspectors had been denied access to the basement, that would have been circumstantial evidence in support of the Israeli claims. But no, they didn't do that. Now their heavily armed soldiers are going through the hospital, interrogating everyone one by one, terrifying everybody. Meantime, babies who were in incubators have died because of the lack of power, and everybody is terrified. No excuse for this.

The UN, by the way, has never lost anything like the number of UN workers that have been killed by Israel in this Gaza attack. Over 100 have died, and that is to this point. So it's indiscriminate vomiting. It is a gross violation of any standard of human rights. And the fact that we support it is discrediting us. We started out claiming that the eyes of the world were upon us, and we should shine like a city on a hill. I think much of the world looks at us now and they see dead babies in a rubble, not a shining city on a hill.

Ralph Nader: What do you see in a year now in Gaza, other than a destitute, vast refugee camp that the world has forgotten about and is paying attention to other situations around the globe? Do you see anything other than that? And some humanitarian aid coming in here and there, Israel soldiers coming in, blowing up houses as they do in the West Bank. Is that what you see?

Chas Freeman: Much of Gaza has already been flattened. I think it will be resettled by Israel if Israel has its way. It will take a while for that to happen, because any settlement that is done there will be on a pile of rubble and dead bodies, very unhealthy. I hope that this is halted, and I hope that out of this comes a determination by the United States and by the world to insist on the two-state solution, which has been an illusion, a mere talking point with no reality for all of this century.

Ralph Nader: We've been talking with Chas Freeman, former diplomat, former Assistant Secretary of Defense, Assistant Secretary of State, author of books, fluent in almost 12 languages. I think you're an historical figure, Chas Freeman. I want to give my colleagues a chance to ask you a question. Hannah?

Hannah Feldman: A lot of ink has been spilled and words written about how to, quote-unquote, "fix" things, how to solve the situation. Are signs pointing to the situation actually being resolved? You were involved in mediation for Namibian independence and Cuban troop withdrawal from Angola. Is this one of those moments where the people who have power to resolve the situation are actually planning to resolve it?

Chas Freeman: Well, that is a question, really, for the American administration, because it's very clear that the cabinet in Israel is composed of racist extremists whose objective is the genocidal elimination of the Palestinian population.

By the way, Mr. Netanyahu is on record many years ago as saying that he hoped for a good war so that Israel could get rid of the Palestinians in its midst. So, this is the culmination of years of low-intensity conflict now high-intensity. There's no impulse that I can see on the Israeli side to resolve this. In fact, what I suspect will happen is that the anxieties that Israelis naturally have now about their security in the middle of the Arab world, unaccepted by it, subject to violent opposition, resistance by any Palestinians who happen to still be there, is going to have many effects.

I noticed that a lot of Israelis are emigrating, and I agree that they will find our country a great deal more congenial and a safer place for Jews than their own. That is, of course, an irony, because Israel was established as a safe haven for Jews, and there's probably no place on earth now that is more dangerous for Jews than Israel.

Also, you're seeing the emigration of startups, young companies that are moving abroad rather than staying in Israel. And I don't know what this is going to do to the investment climate in Israel. Some people are talking about parallels to the two Christian kingdoms, Crusader kingdoms, that were established in the Middle Ages, that the Kingdom of Jerusalem established twice. I believe the first time lasted 88 years and the next time 99.

In both cases, what ended those kingdoms were circumstances very similar to what we see now. That is a combination of internal political rot of the sort that Mr. Netanyahu's effort to deprive the judiciary of its independence had set off, and the failure of foreign backers to be able to retain their enthusiasm for backing its alien presence in the Middle East. So those are the two things.

And Israel is alienating the world. And a good part of the Jewish population outside Israel is at least as upset as everybody else about Israeli behavior. Ironically, therefore, I'm sorry to say, that anti-Zionism, which is quite different from anti-Semitism, is breeding anti-Semitism. And that is nothing that anybody should take lightly or be comfortable with.

Ralph Nader: Well, we've come to the end of our interview with Chas Freeman, former ambassador, former Assistant Secretary of Defense, Assistant Secretary of State, and a whole variety of diplomatic posts in countries around the world. Thank you very much, Chas Freeman.

Chas Freeman: Well, thank you, sir. It's been a pleasure to speak with you.

Steve Skrovan: I want to thank our guests again, Robert Weissman and Ambassador Chas Freeman. 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", featuring Francesco DeSantis and "In Case You Haven't Heard". A transcript of this program will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* Substack site soon after the episode is posted.

David Feldman: Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. Thank you, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you. The 40-page, print-only edition of *Capitol Hill Citizen*, listeners, is out. You can get it for \$5 or more if you wish by going to capitolhillcitizen.com. It's got up-to-date articles on the Israeli Gaza situation, letters to Biden on the Israeli Gaza situation, and very unique articles like how the gambling industry is now in the process of addicting high school students. After they have been addicted by other industries—the junk food industry and the Internet gulag,—now they're going to get these young kids addicted to using their iPhones or computers to gamble while they're at home.

The new *Capitol Hill Citizen* also features coverage of a good legislative proposal before Congress that says any benefits members of Congress get, they cannot give to themselves—like health insurance—until they give it to all the American people [Medicare for All].

We even have an open letter to the congressional staffers to stop being toadies and do what they did in 1960s and '70s - informing senators and representatives and urging them to serve the people. Other articles are eye-opening, and you'll never read about them in the mainstream press. Again, capitolhillcitizen.com.