

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 401 TRANSCRIPT

Tom Morello: I'm Tom Morello and you're listening to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*.

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

David Feldman: Good morning.

Steve Skrovan: Good morning. Very exciting interview we're going to have today and we have to help us do that – not help us do it, to actually do it, is the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Hi. One of the world's best guitarists with a social conscience coming up, Tom Morello.

Steve Skrovan: That's right. You know, music and activism go hand in hand, striking workers chant s while they hold their picket lines, demonstrators sing protest songs while they march. Plus music is an accessible way to spread the word about your cause. Tom Morello has always imbued his music with activism and his activism with music. Our listeners may know him from his band Rage Against the Machine, his collaborations with filmmaker Michael Moore, or his demonstrations with the garment workers union in the Occupy Wall Street movement.

He'll be our first guest today. We look forward to discussing his long history of civic action as well as this new opinion column in the *New York Times*. Our second guest will be a friend of the show an original Nader's Raider, Robert [Bob] Fellmeth. He's had a long career in public advocacy and is the founder of the Children's Advocacy Institute. We've had him on the program before to talk about how Facebook violates children's right to privacy and puts them at risk for bullying and targeting online.

Today we're going to discuss one of the most vulnerable populations in America, foster children. We have a massive foster care system in the United States. It serves hundreds of thousands of children every year. And according to the Children's Advocacy Institute, they're all targets for Social Security fraud, which sounds like something out of a [Charles] Dickens novel to me. If we

have time, Ralph will answer some more of your listener questions. As always, we'll check in with our resolute corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first, let's hear from an "unapologetic musical rabble-rouser," David?

David Feldman: Tom Morello is an activist, a *New York Times* opinion columnist, a graduate of Harvard University with a degree in social studies, and of course a musician. His latest album is *The Atlas Underground Fire*. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Tom Morello.

Tom Morello: Hey there, thanks for having me. Nice to hear from you guys, and Ralph, it's a nice to be with you again.

Ralph Nader: It certainly is. You were out at the convention in Denver and made some very favorable remarks and you were with other musical activists and I'll always remember that. Thank you very much, Tom.

Tom Morello: My pleasure. I meant every one of those remarks and you probably hear this a lot, but you've long been a hero of mine and an inspiration to me and my work. So, thank you for your service.

Ralph Nader: Well, thank you. Actually, the Denver occasion was protesting the exclusion of third parties from the Commission on Presidential Debates. It was called the Open Debates Rally and Sean Penn was there; Jello Biafra was there; Brooke Smith [and] Cindy Sheehan [were there], and of course, Tom Morello. I can't resist one question before we get into what you're doing in the *New York Times* and elsewhere with other artists. Almost everybody loves music, but almost everybody likes some kind of music and dislikes, sometimes intensely, other kinds of music. So, if some innocent person asked you this question, how would you answer it? Tom Morello, what's the difference between music and noise?

Tom Morello: [laughter] I have integrated both music and noise very liberally into my catalog. So, I would say that I've gone out of my way as an avantgarde guitarist to incorporate sounds well outside the mainstream. One thing through my life and career is that I have no guilty pleasures; there are only musical pleasures. And so, from pop music to punk rock music to symphonic music, I think within each genre, you can find plenty of stuff that's crap, but there are nuggets of gold as well.

Ralph Nader: Well, on that point, what really impressed me here was something you did in 2009. Because one of the aspects of US torturing prisoners in Guantanamo and they no longer after 15/20 years can be called detainees as the press continues to use that term. These are prisoners who have been there without charges for the most part, year after a year. The torturers, US government employees, used music at times – loud music. They played loud music for 72 hours in a row, and other torturous acts that a military jury just recently--they were part of a military jury. And all, but one of them put out a statement calling the moral stigma of such torture at Guantanamo, which was seized from Cuba over a hundred years ago. Tell us what you did on that.

Tom Morello: Yeah. Well, they were using loud music as sort of sleep deprivation torture and Rage Against the Machine was one of the bands that they would crank up to torture the prisoners. And we sued the State Department. It was an unsuccessful lawsuit. But this music that was made in the cause of human liberation, made to help create a more just and peaceful world, was being used in the most heinous way and we wouldn't stand for it. And we at least wanted to plant that flag and let s them know that we were opposed to it and let the world know that we were distancing ourselves from that horrible torturous act that they were doing. We really felt defiled by that and this music that was made for the diametrically opposite purpose of uplifting humanity rather than torture.

Ralph Nader: Well, to show our listeners how music was used as a violent weapon, not just an irritation, you stated, I'm quoting you. "Guantanamo is known around the world as one of the places where human beings have been tortured – from waterboarding to stripping, hooding and forcing detainees into humiliating sexual acts – playing music for 72 hours in a row at volumes just below that to shatter the eardrums. Guantanamo Bay may be Dick Cheney's idea of America, but it's not mine. The fact that music I helped create was used in crimes against humanity sickens me." Those were your words. So, what did you do in terms of an acoustic concert in Wisconsin?

Tom Morello: I played dozens of concerts in the antiwar cause in support of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans against the war. But I had another suggestion and that is one day, if there is justice and some sort of war crimes tribunal that holds accountable the Democrat and the Republican war criminals responsible for such torturous practices as Guantanamo Bay, that perhaps the perpetrators of those crimes, our elected officials and their cronies, would have the black hoods over their heads, the orange jumpsuits. And in that case, I would fully support cranking Rage Against the Machine twenty-four hours a day.

Ralph Nader: You also supported the Occupy Wall Street movement and not only in the East Coast, but in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Seattle, Vancouver, British Columbia, Nottingham, and Newcastle in England. When do you have time to compose music?

Tom Morello: [laughter] Well, one of the advantages of going on tour is you find yourself in all those places. And, you know, at one point, there were hundreds, if not, like 1,200 Occupy sites around the globe. And I took every opportunity after the show in whatever city I was in to go down and sit around those campfires and strum some songs in solidarity with people who were trying to put the dirty five letter word 'class' on the map. And I think to some degree, those efforts were successful in at least orienting public consciousness towards an issue that has been front and center for you and I throughout our lives and careers, but it was not appearing anywhere near the front page of the *New York Times*, and that is economic injustice, economic inequality, and the relentless class warfare of corporations against the working class.

Ralph Nader: Before I talk about what Frederick Douglas said about the survival uses of music during slavery before the Civil War, I wanted to ask you about your reaction to former Speaker Republican Paul Ryan, former Speaker of the House. He was a Republican nominee for vice president in the 2012 election. And he said something like he liked the music of Beethoven, Rage Against the Machine, and Led Zeppelin. What did you respond?

Tom Morello: You know, I let him have it with both barrels in a *Rolling Stone* opinion piece where you know, he's the epitome of the machine that we've been raging against our entire careers. And I was curious as to which songs he was drawn to--the ones supporting the Zapatistas, the ones suggesting taking back the means of production, or the ones suggesting throwing him and his cronies in Guantanamo Bay. It's hard to understand where he found an in to the band.

I will say this, though, that there is something – the flip side of that coin is that when music carries a compelling score, soundtrack, vibe, riff, beat to it, it can contain a very potent message. And that message, because of the aggression or the power of the music of Rage Against the Machine, reached a lot of ears of people who had never heard a message like that before. Now, in some cases, you're preaching to the converted. In other cases, you're exposing an audience that likes this particular kind of aggressive rock and roll to a brand-new set of ideas that confronts them. And then there's jackasses like Paul Ryan who just missed the point entirely and is an embarrassment to himself.

Ralph Nader: Well, you've always been able to turn swine's ear into silk purses. [both of them chuckle] Frederick Douglas actually wrote that the purpose of music and the great songs that came out of black slavery were not just entertainment and enjoyment in the few hours they had off. He called it absolutely critical to their mental survival, that they would just implode and give up all hope if they weren't able to sing along with their families. Have you ever looked into that? I mean, that's way beyond the normal definition of enjoying music.

Tom Morello: Yeah, yeah. No, I absolutely believe that's true. I mean, music predates written language and there's something deep in our reptilian brain with the right combination of rhythm and rhyme that feels like the truth deep in our souls unlike any other means of communication. Also, there's never been a successful social movement in this country that hasn't had a great soundtrack either. You know, music can steal the spines of those on – I've seen it firsthand hundreds of thousands of times – music and steal the spines of those on the front lines of social justice struggles [and] can put wind in the sails of those across the globe who feel a kinship with the ideas in those songs.

And I'll share with you my favorite Frederick Douglas quote, which I think is at the heart of the anti-authoritarian sentiment across the 21 albums that I have made. Frederick Douglas said the moment that he became free from slavery – I'm paraphrasing – was not the moment when he was loosed from his bonds. It was when master said yes and he said no. And that rejection of illegitimate authority – whether it's in your home, whether it's in your school, whether it's in your place of work, your government or the world at large – I think is at the heart of all progressive, radical and revolutionary social change.

Ralph Nader: When David introduced you, he mentioned that you majored in social studies at Harvard. Social studies incubated a lot of progressive leaders in the civil rights, environmental, consumer, [and] labor movements. Do you ever keep in touch with a loose alumni association of these graduates?

Tom Morello: Yeah, not so much on the political front. I do play Fantasy Football with a group of roommates though. But it was an invaluable part of my intellectually arming myself for the struggles to come. And it's funny how Harvard has dual reputations; at the time it was known on the one hand as the Kremlin on the Charles [River], and on the other hand, as this kind of bastion of Facebook capitalist audacity. I would have to say that I cut more towards the former than the latter.

Ralph Nader: Whatever happened to the song albums of the major unions in the country. I remember I once bought a whole bunch of albums from the United Auto Workers. They would distribute it to their chapters and they were all the protest songs that you have sung and worked with others on. But I don't see that anymore from the organized union movement.

Tom Morello: Yeah. I don't see it either. But it's funny you mentioned that because just last night, I made a video of my latest record, *The Atlas Underground Fire*, with a great young artist named Grandson, called *Hold the Line*; a song that we made for the many strikes that are currently going on in the United States right now. We made a video for them. And AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations] is putting it out to all of their members. It's sort of in the reverse network, like we're making songs and donating them to the union to help promote even greater solidarity during a time where a lot of brothers and sisters are on strike.

Ralph Nader: You know, just to go over a bit the soft side of music as a link to social protest, I had a retired corporate guy once tell me listen, when we look out of those skyscrapers and we see the people marching and singing, we say to each other, he was a rather cynic, he said, "As long as they're singing and marching, don't worry fellows; they're going nowhere." And this brings me to the Madison Square Garden rally that we had in 2000 for the Green Party and I was the presidential nominee and Winona LaDuke was the vice-president nominee. And we filled that. No other candidate filled it. The Republicans, Democrats didn't even try. And we raised money that way. It was \$20 entry fee and there were like 18,000 people there. And so I'm on the stage with other people who were artists and celebrities. Bill Murray was there. And I'm looking out at the audience. It was overwhelmingly under 30. And I'm saying to myself, I wonder how many of these people came to hear me compared to came to hear the music, right? So, at the end, people closed the gathering by saying right across the street, you can go and register. And about a thousand people went right across the street to register to vote. But we rarely ever heard from those people again. And I've experienced this at rallies that the music is really the priority for a lot of people who come to these rallies, and the message is like a second thought. And a lot of political candidates mix the two. They think people really came to hear them. I wasn't under such an illusion. And the reason I raise this is there are instances in movements for justice where music can be a distraction. It can be so satisfying, makes people feel good, they turned out, but they didn't roll up their sleeves and start building civic muscle on Congress or state legislatures or the powers that be on Wall Street. Have you ever worried about that, Tom?

Tom Morello: That's interesting. I mean, I would say, though, that first of all, I think that you're underselling yourself with regards to the Madison Square Garden show. If you get one out of 18 who marches out of any venue to go change the world in some way, I'll take that. But the way that I look at it is that music... first of all, as far as my career, I didn't choose to be a guitar player. That chose me. It was a calling when I was 19 years old, kind of stuck, both blessed and

cursed, with this as my vocation. And I've always looked at it as given that as a vocation, it's then my job, my responsibility, to find a way to weave my convictions into it in as powerful way as possible; making music that is compelling, that is the sugar that makes the medicine go down, connecting that music to grassroots organizations on the ground who are really doing the real work, providing a watering hole for your audience, that one 18th of your audience that wants to go beyond slam dancing in a mosh pit to taking some sort of action. And I will say of the thesis, that music can be a distraction, I'm not sure it's a distraction. I think that it may help you find the wheat in the chaff. I mean, I can't go to the supermarket without running into somebody who has either become a public defender or a brick-throwing anarchist or a school teacher or something that was influenced in some way by some album across that catalog. So, it is an interesting – I would probably need more research to be able to come down on one side or the other on that argument.

Ralph Nader: Well put, actually. Well put. Some listeners may be wondering why we're not talking about your actual music. You're described as being known for “his unique and creative guitar playing style, which incorporates feedback noise, unconventional picking, and tapping, as well as the heavy use of guitar effects. Morello is also known for his socialist political views and activism. Creating *The Nightwatchman* offered an outlet for his views while playing apolitical music with Audioslave. He was ranked number 40 in *Rolling Stone's* magazine list of the 100 Greatest Guitarists of All Time, which is quite an encomium.

But what surprised me the most, Tom was I picked up the *New York Times* one day and they've allowed op-eds now to be put where their editorials were from time to time. And there was your opinion piece bringing the IWW [Industrial Workers of the World] back to contemporary attention. Over a hundred years ago, the Wobblies as they were called, led by Joe Hill and others, shook up the whole labor movement like it hasn't been shaken up to the present day. Tell us why you want more people to know about the IWW and its relevance today.

Tom Morello: Sure, sure, sure. Well first of all, writing the *New York Ti*

mes opinion piece, I thought, “Are they crazy asking me to do that?” And my first one was on the IWW. And Joe Hill, the poet laureate of the working class of the early 20th century is my favorite musician of all time! Even though there was no recorded work of him playing or singing, the idea of this kind of anarcho-poet-troubadour who was 51% activist, 49% transformative musician who used his life as a vehicle for doing much more than entertaining but engaging in the struggles of the day. The IWW was a singing union. The IWW forged solidarity. I mean, the counter argument to this music distract was the IWW's ethos that a pamphlet is only read once, but a song is sung over and over and remembered in the heart. They would hijack these religious hymns and infuse them with this kind of anarcho-socialist poetry and get these huge crowds of immigrants from all over the world singing together. And if you can sing together, you can work together and you can fight together. And that, to me, was always the appeal. I am currently a card-carrying member of the Industrial Workers of the World; it still

exists and I'm very proud to be a member of that union and proud to at least bring some attention in 2021 to their great historic deeds.

Ralph Nader: Does it just exist on paper though? I mean, it's not actually a bargaining unit.

Tom Morello: No, no. In Starbucks [Corporation], especially, there are a couple of industries where it's meaningful. I'm also a member of the [American Federation of] Musicians Local 47 here in Hollywood as well. I love to be a part of that union because of its history, but it is a union that is active in the world, not with the same numbers that it once had, but certainly with the same spirit that it has always had.

Ralph Nader: Does it have a website for people?

Tom Morello: Yeah. iww.org would be the website. Check them out.

Ralph Nader: iww.org. Well, this is real history coming to the forefront. I think some of the labor leaders in Washington ought to revisit what Joe Hill and others were all about. Unfortunately, tell our listeners what happened to Joe Hill.

Tom Morello: Yeah. Joe Hill was targeted for his effectiveness. He was executed by a Utah firing squad on a trumped-up murder charge. Everybody from European heads of state to the Pope begged for clemency because it was such a railroading. But his dying wish was that his ashes would be spread across the globe, everywhere except for Utah. I made the pilgrimage to his childhood home in Northern Sweden, which is now like a union enclave. And some of the ashes were spread under the little tree that grows out back there. The small one-bedroom home where his large family lived is guarded 24/7 by union workers because 20 years ago, it was bombed by fascists. And to this day, the idea of the IWW and the idea of Joe Hill and his songs is still considered dangerous and I'd take that as a badge of honor.

Ralph Nader: And Joe Hill was killed in Utah in 1915. And he once said, "A pamphlet, no matter how good, is never read more than once, but a song is learned by heart and repeated over and over." That must have been close to your heart, Tom.

Tom Morello: Ain't it the truth. Ain't it the truth.

Ralph Nader: Let me ask you something that has occurred to me over the years. When I hear ethnic groups sing, they really connect poetry with music. I mean, it's a beautiful thing to see, and I don't see it that much in modern contemporary American music. So, let me reduce it in the interest of time to one question. What do you think of rap music that's sexist, violent and misogynistic, and all the rest of it? What do you think of that?

Tom Morello: Yeah. Well, I wouldn't ghettoize rap music. That said, anything that is sexist, violent and misogynistic, whether it's an article or a painting or whatever, is something that I am culturally opposed to. I will say, though, that there is a huge swath of conscious hip hop that is uplifting and inspiring, from old school like Public Enemy, to the work of Boots Riley to The Roots to groups like Rage Against the Machine who incorporate elements of hip hop and the great lyrics of Zach de la Rocha who incorporate hip hop into their message delivery. Yeah. I mean, like throughout pop music, one thing I will say is that I don't think that there's any music that is apolitical. And whether it is the bread and circuses of the music that you describe or whether it's music that confronts head-on the issues of the day, however, poetically, that's the music that I'm on the side of.

Ralph Nader: So, you've been described as pulling a "reverse Dylan," referring to Bob Dylan. What do you mean by that?

Tom Morello: Sure. I didn't really kind of fall in with folk music until in my mid-30s. And I began a second career as The Nightwatchman. I made four albums of political folk Americana under that guise against all common sense and commerce. As this audience that I had built over the course of a career. As I sat down at Newport, famously at the Newport Folk Festival, Bob Dylan set down his acoustic guitar, picked up an electric guitar, and everyone was outraged. I did the reverse. I set down the electric guitar, picked up the acoustic guitar. And despite my rich milk chocolate baritone voice, there were many members of my audience that wanted me to continue to play the squealing guitar solos. I've since made peace with that dialectic and freely alternate between the shredding guitar solos and more plaintiff minor key political ballads.

Ralph Nader: Tom, you know, at the Newport Festival, Pete Seeger was appalled when he saw people coming up with electric guitars. So, he must've been delighted with what you did.

Tom Morello: [laugh] Yeah. I had the good fortune of knowing Pete a little and playing with him a few times. It was rumored that he actually was looking for an axe when Dylan originally went electric to chop the chords. He later kind of backpedaled and said it was because he couldn't hear the lyrics. It was the song "Maggie's Farm", which is a brilliant lyrically, and he suspected it might be, but the overwhelming kind of feedback was drowning him out. But, you know, Pete is the best of what we hope to be when we pick up an instrument.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, spectacular. You've had experience with Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band. Can you tell us about that?

Tom Morello: Sure. I had the great honor of playing with the E Street Band over the course of about six years on and off and being an adjunct and an ally to one of the greatest bands of all time. And I'm not a casual Bruce Springsteen fan. I am a very... he's the only personal friend of mine that I subscribe to a fanzine about [*The Bruce Springsteen Special Collection*]. So, that might give you some perspective.

But it was in 2008 when we first played together in Anaheim. We took an acoustic ballad of his called "The Ghost of Tom Joad" and made it into this kind of this roaring rock cathedral that was our first collaboration, and it led to playing together on and off for six years. And I'm not a sideman by DNA. But Bruce is really the only person that would be a sideman for. And being able to stand with him on stage across the world represents some of my favorite highlights of my entire musical career. Like we played in South Africa. I was very motivated by the anti-apartheid movement. So, to visit the Soweto during the day and then play the soccer stadium there by nights and countless experiences [along with] his commitment to excellence and his commitment to every night being the greatest show he's ever played even into his 70s is something that is very inspiring.

Ralph Nader: Well, I can attest to that. I shared a stage in New York City once with Bruce Springsteen, and after he finished singing, he was dripping wet, totally wet from sweat, which shows that he really puts everything in his being into his songs. I couldn't believe it! I mean, he actually had puddles on the floor; he was so committed to what he was doing. One other question. I'm sure some people would wonder why did Rage Against the Machine disband? It is one of the greatest titles for a band. Is it trademarked? Can somebody pick it up? But why did it disband?

Tom Morello: Well, we have shows booked, fingers crossed with the unfolding COVID situation. But Rage Against the Machine has shows booked for 2022 across North America. And so I'm hopeful that we're able to sort of rekindle that flame.

Ralph Nader: Oh, that would be wonderful. Well, I'm sure Steve and David are eager to ask you some questions or make some comments. Steve?

Steve Skrovan: Yeah. Tom, there's a controversy I know in the black community, especially about which prism you approach issues and organizing through, either race or class. And we've talked about this on the show. We've had Professors Adolph Reed and Randall Kennedy on the program. And you personally live at the intersection of race and class. So, I'm curious about where you come down on this.

Tom Morello: Yeah. I mean, in some ways I think it's a false dichotomy. I don't think that you can have racial equality without class liberation, nor can you have a fair and just society vice versa. So, I think that I freely support both lyrically in my music and in the political activism I'm involved in, both sides of those tracks. And I think that what we need are fewer divisions and more solidarity with people who are trying to build a world that is free of both racism and economic injustice.

Steve Skrovan: Tom, about 20 years ago, you did an action with Michael Moore down on Wall Street.

Tom Morello: Yeah.

Steve Skrovan: Can you tell us that story? What happened there and what that was like?

Tom Morello: Sure, sure. We were filming a video. Rage Against the Machine was filming a video for the song "Sleep Now in the Fire." And we were all big fans of Michael Moore, and we met him that afternoon. And I couldn't wait to ask him one question. And that question was: how many times have you been arrested? You know, given his hi-jinks across the country. And he

surprised me by saying he had never been arrested. And I jokingly said, “Well, you've never worked with Rage Against the Machine.”

So, we had a permit to film on the steps of the Federal Building [Federal Hall]. That's where George Washington took his oath of office. It's kitty corner from the New York Stock Exchange. And we did not have a permit to film on the city sidewalk below. Michael is a director with a few words and few directorial edicts. He said, “No matter what happens, don't stop playing. No matter what happens, don't stop playing.”

So, we're like, “Okay, fine.” As your listeners may or may not know, when a band is filming a video, you're miming to playback. You're not actually really performing the song. There's like - at the time - a CD playing, and it's blaring through the speakers, and you're pretending to play the song. And we were doing so with righteous fury. Michael would hand out some placards to day traders as they were walking by. One of them incredibly said, “[Donald] Trump for president 2000.” This was in 1999 we're filming the video. So, there was some Nostradamus-like effect there. And we apologize to all of your listeners for bringing that idea into the world.

But anyway, we play those few takes on the steps. And then Michael says, “Now we're going to go down to the city sidewalk,” the unpermitted city sidewalk. We go into the sidewalk and continue miming/playing to the song. And a New York City police officer comes up to me and says, “I'm sorry. You guys got to get back up on the steps because you don't have a permit for here.” And now I remember what Michael said. He said, “No matter what happens, don't stop playing.” So, I continue playing. And the cop, he's irritated by this. He's like, “Hey, get back up on the steps. You're deaf? You didn't hear me? Get back up on the steps.” We keep playing the song.

And now I don't know if any of you have any experience with law enforcement, but there's a thing that I call the cop vein. There's a vein in a cop's neck that begins to pulse when there's about to be trouble. And there was about to be trouble. The vein pulsating, and he's like, “Get back on the steps right now.” And we continue to play the song. So, he reaches down in anger and unplugs my guitar, and the music keeps playing, and he can't believe it. And he unplugs Timmy C's [Tim Commerford] bass, and he takes Zach de la Rocha's microphone, and he takes Brad Wilk's. And like there's a look of religious horror on his face. Like he can't believe what's happening. Like it doesn't add up that somehow we are like these warlocks who are defying him. The song is happening, even though there's no... “how could it possibly be happening?”

He does the only thing that he can think to do, which is arrest Michael Moore. So, he puts Michael Moore in handcuffs. And as he's dragging Mike away, Mike delivers his second directorial edict of the afternoon, which is "Take the New York Stock Exchange!" So, we put our guitars down - which they're still blaring the song - and Zach and I are the first ones through the door of the Stock Exchange. This is all the wholly unscripted.

The cameras don't even reach us by the time we're there. I go in. There's a guy, like sort of a frumpy jacket security guy. I'm like, "I'm here to take the New York Stock Exchange. Is that a left or a right?" The guy hits the riot button, and the sirens go off, and the riot doors come down, and we're physically expelled. All of this is in the video for "Sleep Now in the Fire." We're physically expelled from the New York Stock Exchange. But for the first time, I believe it in like its 150-year history, that capitalism was brought to a halt on a Tuesday afternoon by Michael Moore and Rage Against the Machine.

Steve Skrovan: That's a great story.

Ralph Nader: What a great story. [lots of laughter by all] That will go to a Wall Street archives with the big boys.

Tom Morello: Yeah, yeah.

Steve Skrovan: And the idea that the cop is unplugging everything, but he can't stop it.

Tom Morello: He can't stop it, and he just couldn't figure it out. You know, like at first, when he unplugged my guitar, the look on his face was like, "Oh!" He was like, "Oh, it must be coming from that guitar, the bass." And he unplugged that, and then he took the drums away and then Zach's microphone. And he was stupefied since the song continued, and he just couldn't add it up. It was pretty awesome.

Steve Skrovan: It's quite a metaphor. You can't stop the music.

Tom Morello: You can't stop the music, yeah, no matter what.

Ralph Nader: David?

David Feldman: First, I want to thank Ralph and Tom Morello for today because my kids are so impressed. Thank you for the secondhand glory that I'm getting. But on a serious note, the stampede at AstroWorld in Houston last week, Travis Scott is taking a lot of the blame, but Live Nation was also involved and they are a monopolistic music promoter, notorious for exploiting low-wage workers. Do we know if that was a union show? Is it IATSE [International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees], the American Federation of Musicians? Who is supposed to protect the performers and the crowd at AstroWorld? Do we know if that was a union shop as they say?

Tom Morello: That I don't know. And for me, I have to raise my hand and say I know nothing about the details of any of the administrative stuff that went on there that contributed to that tragedy. What I do know is that throughout the history of my Rage Against the Machine and Audioslave and Prophets of Rage and my own shows that the safety of the audience is a priority. There's also something in a lot of the bands like that came up in our time in the punk rock world, there's this ethos to really look out for each other in the crowd. You know what I mean? And that we spare no expense in security to make sure--and have stopped shows multiple times in the middle of a song if security is a concern.

David Feldman: But are they primarily union? I mean, do we know if rock shows use IATSE, the roadies union?

Tom Morello: Stagehands at venues are almost 100%. As far as the like security company, I'm not sure what the exact breakdowns of the security companies or the actual guitar techs and things. I think that that is a mixed bag. I know that like the people who are setting up the stuff are almost always union.

Ralph Nader: We're talking with Tom Morello. You know, if someone asked me what my all-time favorites are in terms of protest songs, it would be "We Shall Overcome" and "This Land is Your Land". I mean, "This Land is Your Land" really is so relevant today because one third of America is in the hands of the people. They own it. It's the public lands – the parks, the forests,

plus offshore doubles the size. And yet the corporations are controlling the disposition of these lands and minerals, oil, gas, timber, et cetera. It's just a side comment of mine. One of the aspects of empire Tom, is that there's no music. When our country was involved in what was defined as defensive wars against the attack, say at Pearl Harbor, there were songs of war. There are no songs of criminal wars of aggression in Iraq and Afghanistan and Libya. And we used to know the name of our generals in World War II, World War I. That's another aspect of empire. You hardly know the names of the generals. What is your comment? Is it fair to say that when you have evil criminal wars of aggression, you're not going to have music?

Tom Morello: Well, I mean, I don't know. I mean, I've been involved in writing music about all those wars over the course of the last 30 years. So I'm not certain I enjoyed that. I mean, that's sort of the whole point. It's to shine light into the darkest corners of the horrors of the military-industrial complex. And also in some ways the best source, whether it's rap or whether it's punk rock or whether it's the different bands that I've been involved in, is to provide an alternate news source. And whether it's naming [Norman] Schwarzkopf by name or whatever, moving the goal post for a set of ideas that is outside of those commonly accepted and digested by mainstream media. I mean, that's what I look at as the role of the political troubadour over the course of the last few decades and certainly in 2021.

Ralph Nader: And on another subject, have you ever shared a stage with Patti Smith? She was campaigning with us on one presidential year.

Tom Morello: Absolutely yes. Yes, I have. It's been a great honor to share a stage with her.

Ralph Nader: And what do you think her main contribution to punk rock was?

Tom Morello: Well, I have to say, first of all, she's a force of nature. I think that she has a poetic sense that is powerful and very, very unique. And also, that a woman she stands as a poetic titan and a punk rock icon in a world that is predominantly male and [she] is an inspiration; her existence is an inspiration.

Ralph Nader: Well, I have to say, I did share a stage with her in a church in Albany at the peak of the Iraq war invasion, which happened to be recorded by some professors at Rensselaer [Polytechnic Institute] and they boiled it down to 30 minutes and we would alternate. I would talk about the war, the history, and she composed a special song on the occasion. And I suppose I've never seen any recording that would have such an impact on people. And I hope that we can

get a copy to you. But it was such a blend and she recorded this new song, she said in just a matter of hours, so angry and inspired, she was. And she had this phrase ‘we invented the zero and you mean nothing to us; you mean nothing to us and we invented the zero’ talking about Mesopotamia and the origins of Iraq.

Tom Morello: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Ralph Nader: So, that's just another contribution to what your work is. Tom, what's your latest release?

Tom Morello: I have a new album out called *The Atlas Underground Fire*, which features a lot of collaborations. It was a record that was made during lockdown alone but with this kind of global net of rock and roll pen pals, including Bruce Springsteen, Eddie Vedder from Pearl Jam, the country star, Chris Stapleton. One of the artists is a great young Palestinian DJ Sama' Abdulhadi. She has really changed the face of electronic music in that corner of the world and our song, “On the Shore of Eternity”, which is what Saladin called Jerusalem, it was the city on the shore of eternity. It's one of my favorite compositions. Anyway, *The Atlas Underground Fire* is a record that's out now, so check it out if you get the chance.

Ralph Nader: Just to end, you have two sons. You've written about one, Roman. He's currently an almost innate guitarist at age 9 or 10.

Tom Morello: Yes.

Ralph Nader: What about your other son?

Tom Morello: My other son is a feisty preteen. He's very interested in anime and Japanese culture and has no interest in his dad's music. He finds his dad's music embarrassing, which is probably how it should be.

Ralph Nader: But Roman has, of course.

Tom Morello: Yeah, Roman has. Roman and I were jamming last night. I never imagined a moment as quite as satisfying. I'm now like the second best guitar player in the family. I'm just like the rhythm guitarist in our band. So my job is just to strum the chords while he does his [Jimi] Hendrix, Jimmy Page, [John] Coltrane solos over the top.

Ralph Nader: Amazing improviser, eh?

Tom Morello: Yeah. Great. He just began learning at the beginning of the pandemic. And I had two guitar lessons when I was 13 years old that turned me off from playing the guitar for four years. And so, I'm very sensitive to that beginning stage. And I tried with him to just make it everything. On the first day of picking up the guitar, he wrote a song. He learned "Stairway to Heaven", which was a song that he liked. And now we've just run before we walk. All he does is improvisational soloing. He probably knows a handful of chords, knows no music theory, but he'll blow your mind just plugging in and feeling the music. And that, to me, feels like the right place to be.

Ralph Nader: Well, we're all looking forward to how he grows and develops in his own pioneering way. Tell our listeners that if you want to see what Tom Morello is up to in terms of his writing, on October 2021 in the *New York Times*, he was featured on the editorial page called Songs of Justice Songs of Power and he is going to have several opinion columns in the coming months. And you might want to download it and follow his writings. This has been a great pleasure, Tom. You described "the IWW's mighty music of equality, justice, and freedom as a reminder of struggles won and lost, as well as the battle hymns of struggles to come." So we look forward to the constant elaboration of your public interest career. Thank you very much, Tom Morello.

Tom Morello: Well, Ralph, thank you so much. I really appreciate you. Lots of love to you and your family and continue to fight the good fight.

Ralph Nader: We sure will and we'll stay in touch, all of us.

Tom Morello: Okay. Thanks, guys.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Tom Morello. We will link to his work at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Let's take a quick break. When we come back, we'll talk to Professor Robert Fellmeth about how the state steals from foster children, if you can believe that. 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 12th, 2021, I'm Russell Mokhiber. Just days before workers at three Starbucks stores in the Buffalo area were scheduled to begin voting on unionization, both labor and management took steps that reflect the high stakes involved, including an attempt by Starbucks on Monday to delay the election. That's according to a report in the *New York Times*. No corporate-owned Starbucks stores in the United States are unionized! Since workers at the three locations filed petitions in August seeking to affiliate with a union, the company has brought in officials from out of state, including managers and its president of retail for North America, to address problems at stores in the area. The union filed a charge with the National Labor Relations Board last week accusing the company of unlawfully "engaging in a campaign of threats, intimidation, surveillance, solicitation of grievances and the closing of facilities" during the election campaign. 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 and Ralph. Now we turn to a topic I find downright Dickensian. How are foster children being fleeced by the foster system, David?

David Feldman: Robert Fellmeth is the Price Professor of Public Interest Law at the University of San Diego and the executive director of the Center for Public Interest Law at the Children's Advocacy Institute. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Professor Robert Fellmeth.

Robert Fellmeth: Thanks, David.

Ralph Nader: Yeah. Thank you very much, Robert. You have a very concise description of a travesty of justice that's been going on for a long time involving foster children and the Social Security Administration. Can you tell us about it?

Robert Fellmeth: Sure. It's almost unbelievable. I mean, when I first explain it to people, they don't believe me, but it's actually true. And I know about this area of the law, first of all, because I'm the author of *Child Rights & Remedies*, a textbook that's used at some 50 law schools right now, and I'm a former white-collar crime prosecutor. And so these themes and these issues are close to my heart and I'm very familiar with them. But I was not familiar with what the Social Security Administration has been doing. Children are eligible for SSI [Supplemental Security Income], disability payments, perhaps as much as \$700/\$800 a month. And they're also eligible for survivor benefits, OASDI [Old-Age, Survivors, Disability Insurance], from the Social Security accounts of their parents. And children who are in foster care have the opportunity to get that money, especially SSI money because a lot of them are disabled.

What's been happening for the last 20 years and it's kind of amazing is that the states that pay for the foster care of these children have been stealing the money. They've been taking the money that's supposed to go to the foster children and they have not notified anyone connected to the child. They have not notified the child or the parents of the child or the foster parents of the child or the judge who is the legal parent of the child in every case or the attorney for the child. In 37 states, there are attorneys for the child. None of them are even notified. Instead, the representative payee under the statute is not supposed to be the state. The state is seventh on the list of those that are supposed to be notified as potential representative payees for the children. Instead the state steals the money; the state takes the money. Counties then grab the money in their local jurisdiction. They don't tell anybody about it. And they then either put it in the general fund or they use it for the foster care payments they're required to make anyhow and take the money that they save in doing so and put it in the general fund. So they're just stealing money for their own purposes.

Ralph Nader: And what do they do with this money? In the meantime, how much are we talking about? How many foster children deserve this targeted money to them not generally to foster children needs? And what are we talking about in terms of the amount of money and what they do with it – the states?

Robert Fellmeth: Well, first of all, we have 440,000 or so foster kids in the country. There are 55,000 here in California and between 15% and 20% of them are eligible for SSI because they tend to be high disability populations. And that's a lot of money. It's \$700/\$800 a month for each of those kids. It's a lot of money for the state. And in fact, the cost of care for the child that the state pays, with some federal contribution, averages in California about \$900 to \$1,000 a month.

So this is money that could be very valuable. These are children who when they age out of care at the age of 18 or 21--they're allowed to extend care now to 21 at least for housing--they will be among the poorest in the country. I mean, we're talking about kids here who have extremely high rates of homelessness. Like 30% or so are homeless. The median age for self-sufficiency for American youth is 26, not 18 or 21; it's 26. And they do not get very much help between 18 or especially 21 and 26. And so the homeless population is extremely high; talking about 30/35% of the entire population here are homeless. They're CSEC [Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children]. They're sexually exploited. The girls are especially sexually exploited. There are all sorts of problems here and they need the money and they should have the money and they should all have trust funds to help them achieve self-sufficiency by 26. That's obvious.

Ralph Nader: I'm sure our listeners are asking, why are the states withholding the money and what are you talking about? Billions of dollars? But clearly, why are they withholding the money?

Robert Fellmeth: Well, because no one's making them pay it to the payees who are supposed to receive it. Nobody is making them do it. And because they're able to take the money and use it, or the equivalent amount, in their general fund. I mean, they don't want to have to pay for anything if they don't have to. And if the people who are receiving the money don't care, they're going to take it, and they do. In 49 of the 50 states, only in Maryland is now not doing it.

Ralph Nader: Why don't some of the foster parents claim the money? And from what you say, if you don't claim it on behalf of the foster child or directly by a guardian, the states won't affirmatively hand it out. So why aren't there children's lawyers and others helping the foster parents get the money?

Robert Fellmeth: Well, we don't want the foster parents to get the money either. We want the children to have the money and have it saved for them in a trust or whatever; [There are] all sorts of ways you can do it. But they don't know, Ralph. They don't know. The Social Security Administration in Washington researches the foster care population and makes a list of those that are eligible for these benefits of OASDI or SSI. And they don't tell and anybody else, except the state officials. They don't tell the parents, the attorney for the kid, the kid, the foster parents for the kid, or the judge who is the legal parent of the kid. They don't tell any of these people.

Ralph Nader: Are the newspapers onto this and the television?

Robert Fellmeth: Not really. We have done a report. You can go to Google and put in *The Fleecing of Foster Children* and then you'll see our report detailing it with footnotes and documentation and so forth. And there is one attorney who is really very, very good in this area. His name is Dan Hatcher. He's from the University of Maryland and he got this whole issue nailed and has written wonderful memos on it and briefs on it and so forth. And he's the one who got the law changed in Maryland.

Ralph Nader: And how much are we talking about in money? And it's still not too late to get this money to the foster children. How much are we talking roughly nationwide over 20 years still being withheld?

Robert Fellmeth: Oh, that's billions. It's just billions. I mean, I can't even give you the grand total, but I can tell you that it's \$700/\$800 a month for SSI for the children. There are 15% to 20% of them who are eligible of the foster children and there are 440,000 foster children in the country. So you do the math. It's a lot of money.

Ralph Nader: And what are the names of the state agencies? What are their usual names? So people can contact them if they have a problem.

Robert Fellmeth: Usually, it's the Department of Social Services at the state level or its equivalent and similar agencies at the county level. And they coordinate with each other. The state helps the local counties steal the money. They're conspirators or whatever you want to call them. I know this sounds kind of unlikely. I mean, if I were to just listen to this, I'd say, oh no, that can't be. That's too stupid. That's too cruel. That's too irresponsible. That's too criminal. It's embezzlement! For my nine years as a public prosecutor, I would've charged this as an embezzlement if I were still in the DA's [District Attorney] office.

Ralph Nader: And who is responsible in the Social Security Administration outside of Washington, D.C.?

Robert Fellmeth: It is the Social Security Administration in Washington, D.C. who is doing it. They're the ones who are doing it. Now, I have to tell you this, that we've been lobbying the new directors of the Social Security Administration over the past six months. We're now getting for the first time some response, some "Oh really? Uh-oh. That's a problem." For the first time

[we're getting] recognition that this is a problem. It should be obvious. You state the facts and they should be up in arms already, but they are beginning to realize that this is wrong.

Ralph Nader: Steve, David, do you have any comments on this amazing situation that's been going on for so long?

Steve Skrovan: Yes. Bob, so this is not a matter of people personally feathering their own nest. It's really just the state bureaucracy putting this money in the general fund so they can use it on other things. Is that true?

Robert Fellmeth: Right. That's true.

Steve Skrovan: Wow.

Robert Fellmeth: That's true. These are children who need the money – I mean, really – more than any other population. There's another fact about it that's important. These are our children. I mean, I don't mean in an ethereal sense that all children are ours or whatever. These are different. These are children whose parents, whose legal parents are state judges, our state judges that we pay and that our public officials appoint or sometimes they're even elected. These are children who are our children in a very direct sense. So when you gyp them of money they're supposed to get, and children who need the money more than any other group than you can imagine, and who have very, very unfortunate consequences facing them, it's a seminal, basic ethical issue.

Ralph Nader: Can listeners get more information from you?

Robert Fellmeth: Yeah. Well, they should just go to Google. Heaven forbid that we have information in any other place. Go to Google and type in *The Fleecing of Foster Children* and you'll get our report and you'll get 60 pages of detail on how it works, footnoted with authority.

Ralph Nader: What's the title again?

Robert Fellmeth: *The Fleecing of Foster Children*. And by the way, we are pondering a major case here in California, maybe federally, but certainly California, challenging it. And we have major pro bono firms offering to help out.

Ralph Nader: Well, we're out of time. Thank you very much. We've been speaking with professor of law, Robert Fellmeth, University San Diego Law School, a leading children's advocate, exposing once again a travesty of justice affecting the most vulnerable children. And listeners, if there's anything you can do about it in your state or ask about it, get ahold of the report that Bob just mentioned and make your usual calls. This should be an easy one for the press in your community to report on. Thank you very much, Bob.

Robert Fellmeth: Thank you.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Professor Robert Fellmeth. We will link to his work at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Let's do some listener questions. Now, this first one is from Reuben Yancey and I'll try to get through it. It's a lot, but I'll try to get through it here quickly. "Dear Mr. Nader. I listen to your show every week. I'm profoundly appreciative your lifelong commitments to democracy. Thank you. Repeatedly you have encouraged in no uncertain terms that communicating our concerns to our elected representatives is essential.

I'm writing to dispute that perspective. I've written, phoned, contributed and attended town meetings. I've come to the conclusion that all this activity is useless. The level of corruption is so high. The degree of control over our legislature is so complete that Congress is, in all ways, owned by the corporations and banks. We've become an imperial oligarchic kleptocracy. This disastrous state has led me to stop regarding Congress as a viable outlet for my social concerns. Instead, I've shifted my support and interests to activists on the ground – labor, environmentalists, civil rights, the issue of poverty all demand immediate direct action. My other issue that you rarely present is the contrast between a government that is democratic and one that is oligarchy. The two forms of government behave in very different ways in which the general public appears to be entirely oblivious. Congress is meaningless because we are an oligarchy. When you encourage folks to treat Congress as though we are democracy, when we clearly are not, you're engaging in denial. People want to believe we are a democracy. Sadly, this is simply not true. This erroneous perspective, undermines, weakens, authentic political engagement. I understand your persistent belief in our Congress. I no longer share that belief, but I still listen to your excellent show every week. Thank you." That's Reuben Yancey.

Ralph Nader: Thank you, Reuben Yancey, for your acceleration on the road to serfdom. What you say about Congress is correct, but then you don't give up. You don't leave Congress to constant capture by the big business lobbyists in the oligarchy and plutocracy. You fight back. I had exactly your experience back in the 1960s. No one answered my calls. No one answered my letters on auto safety. I would go up and down with Congress. I couldn't find any help, but I was faced with a choice. I could either develop a smarter, more persistent strategy and keep hoping that we can hit pay dirt in terms of a congressional staffer and a congressional committee, or I could fly to Malibu and watch the whales. So I decided that I was going to stick to it and we got the legislation through. Always remember, we completely outnumber these people. When it comes to Congress, votes count more than money if we allow them to count votes more than money by coming in hard on them, senator by senator. If we don't, then money counts more than votes. So, where do you stand? On the ramparts or speeding along on the road to serfdom, defeat, and surrender?

Steve Skrovan: All right. Well, thank you for that question and comment, Reuben. And thanks, Ralph, for that answer.

David Feldman: This next question comes to us from Scott Sokol. "I wanna know where you stand on geoengineering of our weather that has been going on for decades. The geoengineering of our weather, especially the nanoparticles of aluminum and other toxic heavy metals that have been put into the atmosphere by our military and funded by people like Bill Gates, explains all the environmental and social issues, such as super fires, ice melting too fast, health issues, and many others. It's the most pressing issue today and everyone is ignoring the obvious. I want you to have Dane Wigington of Geoengineering Watch as a guest. He has been the leader in getting out the scientific evidence. He has just finished the documentary, *The Dimming*, which shows the evidence of the geoengineering covert operations. Please watch the documentary as soon as you can."

Ralph Nader: Scott, there has been experimentation by the military and some corporate interests. You know, the early ones that were trying to get rain to come to dry areas, but it's become more sophisticated. I think you're going to have trouble connecting it with the super fires and some of the global warming aspects that have other declared origins. But I think it's very dangerous to engage in geoengineering. We don't know what the side effects are going to be. It could be total disaster when it's done at a scale of magnitude that people like techno-twit Bill Gates want to have done. But my answer, whenever I hear that word geoengineering, is to say, stop, look and listen. The greatest geoengineering has been accomplished by the sun and it's going to be around for four billion years. Use it in all its manifestations to replace fossil fuel and nuclear power energy in this world of ours.

Steve Skrovan: Well, thank you for your questions. I want to thank our guests again, Tom Morello and Professor Robert Fellmeth. For those of you listening on the radio, that's our show. For you, podcasts 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* website soon after the episode is posted.

David Feldman: Subscribe to us on our *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* YouTube channel. And for Ralph Nader's weekly column, you can get it free by going to nader.org. For more from Russell Mokhiber, go to corporatereporter.com Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. Thank you, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you, everybody. And David is right. The column is free. It's in its 50th year. Just sign up at nader.org. You get it every week. Seven minutes of agitation and motivation. Thank you.