

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EPISODE 423 TRANSCRIPT

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

[Music] Stand up, stand up, you've been sitting way too long.

Steve Skrovan: Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. My name is Steve Skrovan. David Feldman is off again today. He's attending to a personal issue. Good luck with that, David. But in his place is our associate producer, Hannah Feldman. Welcome, Hannah.

Hannah Feldman: Hello, Steve.

Steve Skrovan: Nice to have you with us. Nice to have kind of a different voice, a female voice, to go with me and the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Hi. Well, you're going to hear a real free and decisive thinker today, Chris Hedges.

Steve Skrovan: Yes. But before we get to that, Ralph, you have - and we talked about this on last week's show - a newspaper that's had its pilot edition come out. It's called the *Capitol Hill Citizen*. Give us a progress report? What's going on with that?

Ralph Nader: Well, we're trying to show how to really cover Congress as if people mattered around the country. The coverage of Congress by the main press and by the specialized newspapers like *The Hill* and *Roll Call*, and *Politico*, are very based on official source journalism, or gossip. And that's just nothing compared to what should be covered. And so we started this pilot newspaper, the *Capitol Hill Citizen*, and it's getting really very enthusiastic responses. One person said, "You know, I haven't had a print newspaper in my hand for years and it's really a great pleasure reading these great articles and commentary." It's only in print and we want people to get back to print because that's the way they don't procrastinate; that's the way they give it to one another to read and start conversations. We're opening up those channels for civic leaders, authors, and people who know what's going on at the grassroots to get directly into a media that is delivered to every member of Congress at the door of their office on publication, in print.

Steve Skrovan: Very good, you can go to capitolhillcitizen.com to order your copy. And as Ralph mentioned, we have a great show for you. We're going to welcome back journalist Chris Hedges. Chris's long-running and Emmy-nominated show *On Contact* on RT America and RT International covered many of the same subjects as our program. Public intellectuals like Cornel West and Noam Chomsky, human rights advocates like Steven Donziger, peace advocates like Erik Edstrom, historians, journalists and political prisoners. None of those subjects would seem to violate YouTube's terms of service, so why has YouTube deleted the entire series archive? Where do anti-capitalist journalists go when they've been deplatformed by corporate media outlets? We're going to talk to Chris Hedges about that and many other topics, including the war in Ukraine. And we look forward to talking to Chris about all of that. As always, somewhere in the middle, we'll check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first, corporate deplatforming isn't the same as government censorship, but it's still a red flag. Hannah?

Hannah Feldman: Chris Hedges is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, who spent nearly two decades as a foreign correspondent in Central America, the Middle East, Africa and the Balkans. He has written 11 books, including *Our Class: Trauma and Transformation in an American Prison*, and he is the host of the *Chris Hedges Report*. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Chris Hedges.

Christ Hedges: Thank you.

Ralph Nader: Welcome indeed. Listeners, we're going to cover a lot of ground here – NATO, Putin, Ukraine. We're going to talk first about...tell us your reaction to the media coverage here. You were a close observer, Chris, of the media coverage of the Bush-Cheney slaughter in Iraq, and well over a million people, hundreds of thousands of children killed; the society destroyed, public services, healthcare, drinking water, electricity, internal warrings, huge amount of money wasted, several thousand US soldiers killed, hundreds of thousands exposed to all kinds of toxics like burn pits, criminal war of aggression. There doesn't seem to be the level of outrage on the Iraq situation compared to the congressional White House media outrage here. Could you give us your thoughts on this, and why?

Chris Hedges: Well, it gets to what Chomsky and Ed Herman wrote about in their book, *Manufacturing Consent: [The Political Economy of the Mass Media]*—the difference between worthy and unworthy victims. So our victims are not worthy. Yemenis are not worthy. Palestinians are not worthy. Ukrainians are worthy. It helps, of course, that they're white. So that is a classic trope of empire. Remember, when I was covering the war in El Salvador, that's of course where four church women were raped and murdered by the Salvador National Guard at roughly the same time you had a Polish priest that was murdered by the communist government. The Reagan administration kept speaking about that priest and using it as a kind of bludgeon to attack the communist government in Poland. And yet, by the end of the war, 19 priests were killed and the Archbishop Oscar Romero was assassinated. So that was a kind of dichotomy that some victims count and others don't. So Iraqis don't count. The two decades of war crimes that we committed that have so far dwarfed anything that Putin has done in Ukraine are ignored. And this kind of moral posturing and cheerleading and self-adulation, plays to what viewers, and often readers, want to hear but it's deeply hypocritical. And that's not lost on the rest of the world.

Ralph Nader: And then the accountability issue. Like, now they're talking about bringing Putin before the International Criminal Court, accusing him of war crimes, which he committed of course, but there was no accusation against Bush and Cheney and his successors in terms of war crimes. The International Court, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post* don't even mention it because the parlance on Iraq is, yeah, it didn't turn out the way we wanted it; it was, quote, "a mistake". That's what Hillary Clinton calls it, a mistake. She voted for the Iraq war--a mistake. And of course a lot of the slaughter occurred in Afghanistan as well. People forget that in the first move against Iraq under George Herbert Walker Bush, where they drove the Iraqi soldiers out of Kuwait and back to Baghdad, they went overboard. They blew up the electrical system and drinking water system. And then during these air raids, over 600 huddling children, men and women, were in a shelter, an air-raid shelter deep underground, and the precision munitions of George Herbert Walker Bush somehow found a missile and it went right down the chute and incinerated over 600 people. Of course, that's forgotten.

Chris Hedges: All the shock and awe. It was 3,000 bombs dropped almost exclusively on civilian areas that killed over 7,000 non-combatants in the first two months of the war. Yeah, it's all forgotten. And in fact, it's even worse. Condoleezza Rice was on Fox News and this host, Harris Faulkner, argued that when you invade a sovereign nation, that's a war crime, and Rice answered, "it's certainly against every principle of international law and international order." And that is why throwing the book at them now in terms of economic sanctions and punishments is also a part of it. This just is almost unbelievable given the fact that of course preemptive war; when Russia does it, it's a war crime, but we did it so overtly. And I just want to add that the invasion of Iraq was based on lies and falsifications. The expansion of NATO, and I was in Eastern Europe in 1989 as a reporter covering the breakup of the Soviet bloc and the USSR, that the expansion of NATO is not a lie. The expansion of NATO is a direct provocation.

Ralph Nader: Chris, we're going to get to that in a minute. Just to complete the analogy, Iraq didn't threaten the US. There was no threat there at all. It was 6,000/7,000 miles away, and we still went in with the most modern warfare you could imagine. And of course now, almost 20 years later, it's still chaotic; it's still brutal--the poverty, the refugees, the displaced persons, the diseases and there we have a few thousand soldiers still in Iraq, but the system is in total chaos, and it's called a mistake instead of a first-class war crime. So back to your point on NATO, let's go back into history a bit here. Napoleon invaded Russia--slaughtered. The Kaiser invaded Russia--slaughtered. Hitler invaded Russia--slaughtered. Maybe a total of 50 million people, and it's quite understandable that the Russian people, apart from Putin, are quite concerned about their western frontier. Imagine if that happened on our northern border--three invasions. Do you think we would have calmly set sail for Tahiti or Hawaii? What would we have done to our northern border if the shoe was on the other foot? So start with the NATO assurances with Jim Baker and others.

Chris Hedges: Right. So I was there. First of all, we thought NATO was obsolete, which shows you how naïve we are, because NATO was created to prevent Soviet expansion into Central and Eastern Europe. Well, that was over. In fact, Gorbachev was negotiating observer status at NATO and speaking about building a joint security alliance between the United States, Europe and Russia. There were promises by Hans-Dietrich Genscher, the German foreign minister, Margaret Thatcher and James Baker, as you said, the secretary of state under Reagan, all of whom promised that NATO would not be expanded beyond the borders of a unified Germany. And everybody understood from Henry Kissinger to George Kennan. It didn't matter, that this was absurd; this was a clear provocation against a Russian government that wanted to work with us. But it expanded anyway. And why? Well, because it was a multibillion-dollar a year bonanza.

You had, if you expanded NATO, then Soviet Bloc militaries or countries that had Soviet Bloc military equipment would have to reconfigure their equipment to make it NATO-compatible. And that's exactly what happened. I was in Warsaw a couple of years ago and there were billboards all over the place from Raytheon because, of course, they're bilking the Polish people . . . a lot of this is paid for with loans but it was what George Kennan later called the expansion of NATO the gravest mistake of the post-Cold War era. And then you had not only the expansion of NATO, but during the Clinton administration there were promises that NATO troops would not be deployed in Central and Eastern Europe, and now there are thousands. And we've got to also

acknowledge that Ukraine, in many ways, is a de facto NATO country. It also has been flooded with NATO military equipment. It had I think 150/200 NATO military advisors before this war began. So yes, Russia has every right to be concerned. We almost went to nuclear war with the Soviet Union when the Soviets attempted to station or put missiles in Cuba, which is 90 miles off the Coast of Florida, while you have NATO missile bases being constructed 100 miles from the Russian border. Again, that doesn't excuse what Russia did. They were baited, without question, but they did pull the trigger. But you can't even begin to acknowledge this in the kind of giddy euphoria. I think a lot of it is really wrapped up in the kind of self-adulation that we've probably not been able to visit on ourselves over the last two decades.

Ralph Nader: Let's talk a little geographically. Chris, tell us the names of the countries on the Russian border that have now joined NATO and they were asked to buy F-16s, F-15s, all kinds of military-industrial complex goodies. What are some of the names of the countries?

Chris Hedges: Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Albania, Croatia, Montenegro and North Macedonia.

Ralph Nader: So they are now part of a military alliance that was created against the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union collapsed in the 1990s. There was a great opportunity - which George Kennan, the preeminent expert on Russian strategy - as a great opportunity to bring the Russian people in. Yeltsin was there after Gorbachev. And it looks like the US blew it.

Chris Hedges: Well, they blew it . . . yes, they did from . . . it made no geopolitical sense. It makes sense only if you're Raytheon and Lockheed Martin. Poland just signed a \$6 billion deal to buy M1 Abrams tanks. So, it made sense from commercial interests, but of course it was a disaster in terms of geopolitical interests. But this is not uncommon. The whole reason we perpetuated the war in Afghanistan. We know from the Afghan papers that were released by the *Washington Post* that the policymakers and military leaders understood that this is a quagmire. They weren't going to dominate Afghanistan. But the war kept perpetuating itself. It was also true in Vietnam, as the Pentagon Papers revealed, because for these corporations, it's a very, very lucrative business.

Ralph Nader: And so, Putin now is in his brutal war against Ukraine. According to the latest polls, two out of three Russians support him. Of course, here they say that's because they're not getting the full story; Russian state propaganda; they know what's going on. The word of mouth, email, phones, this and that, spreads very rapidly. They know that Russian soldiers are in Ukraine, body bags are coming back, and so forth. But the scene is one where Putin thinks he's got popular support. Of course, he talks about neo-Nazi organizations in the Donbas area, and they are white supremacist groups in the Donbas area; Ukrainian groups fighting Russian-supported groups in the Donbas area which is right on the border of Russia. It's about one-tenth of the size of Ukraine. And the fighting has been going on since 2014 when Russia took back Crimea. People don't understand that under the Soviet Union of Socialist Republics, Ukraine was one of the socialist republics. Khrushchev was in charge in World War II of going against the Nazi machine in Ukraine. He saw all the slaughter and he gave Crimea to Ukraine. And then, of course, Putin took it back. But it's important to know all this history. And so, you've been watching the scene. What do you think is going to happen?

Chris Hedges: Well, they clearly want to turn the Ukraine into another Chechnya. That's why they've put these staggering sums of money into providing weapons. Even Germany has lifted its ban on exporting weapons and talked about almost tripling its own defense budget, and then spending 2% of GDP every year, which would make Germany the third largest military in the world after the United States and China. So they are going back to that old Cold War playbook, proxy wars. It's what Brzezinski did in Afghanistan, lured the Russians into Kabul after weakening the government and arming what would become the Taliban. And in their parlance, it's about making Russia bleed. But of course the people who truly bleed are the Ukrainians. So that's the policy. It's very cynical. As long as the amount of weapons that have been provided to Ukraine, as long as this is sustained... The Czechs are now sending tanks; the idea is to perpetuate the conflict.

Ralph Nader: And this could be a gridlock for months, if not years. Is that what you are saying?

Chris Hedges: Yeah. They would like it to continue for a very long time to slowly degrade Russia's military capability. I think they're delighted with what's happening. But then, you have these figures, Robert Kagan and others, who have just . . . I had to deal with Kagan. He worked for Elliott Abrams in Central America as propagandist for the contras and these murderous regimes in El Salvador and Guatemala. There isn't a war they haven't embraced. They were, of course, cheerleaders for the expansion of NATO. They sold us the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. He has an article in the current issue of *Foreign Affairs*, which boils down to "We should go to war with Russia, and don't worry, Putin won't use the bomb."

Ralph Nader: We had an interview with Ted Postol, the expert on nuclear warfare, professor of engineering at MIT, emeritus, and he said that this could rapidly spin out of control. That if you put the nuclear weaponry on alert the way Putin did, and they only have radar ground technology that can see that can see supposedly what's coming at them, they can make a mistake, as they did a couple times. Luckily, the ground person decided not to give the retaliation signal. And the US can determine any firing from any international ballistic missile anywhere in the world; it's more advanced. And he says that this could lead to an accidental launch or the Russians seeing something that isn't coming at them because of deficiency of their detection system. So this could be a modern version World War I, the assassination of the grand duke in Sarajevo, leading to a clash of egos of the monarchs of Russia, Germany, France, England, Austro-Hungarian Empire. And you know how that turned out. So what do you think people in this country should be doing?

Chris Hedges: Well, I've covered war, of course, and any time you open that Pandora's box of war, you don't control it; it controls you. So you just look at the way the kind of bizarre situations that we've maneuvered ourselves into in the Middle East. So there is this insane idea of arming moderate rebels. Again, this comes from the neocons who, by the way, work in either administration. Victoria Nuland was Cheney's chief foreign policy advisor, worked for Obama, and now works for Biden. And her husband is Robert Kagan. It's kind of a family business. Fred Kagan, is the one told us we better build up our military so we can fight both Russia and China. These guys are just nuts. So you saw in Syria where we spent \$500 million arming, quote-unquote, "moderate" rebels, whatever they are. That creates the Caliphate; they decide to destroy it, so they're bombing the forces Assad is attacking. They end up acting as Assad's de facto air force. This is what happens in war. You just don't want to go there. And World War I is a good

analogy. Europe stumbled blindly into this suicidal slaughter. Nobody expected it; nobody understood it. They were still kind of mentally locked in the 19th Century Haig. The field marshal who led the British forces was convinced that his cavalry forces would deliver the crowning defeat to the Germans in the age of machine guns and heavy artillery etc. So yeah, it's very, very, very dangerous. You don't want to do this. The whole idea that they have dismissed diplomacy and imposed draconian sanctions that are clearly designed to bring Putin down means Putin is cornered. And you don't want to corner a nuclear superpower.

Ralph Nader: Especially humiliating him and leaving no backdoor to have him save face. It seems like all these neocon warmongers, and they're from both Democrat and Republican--Paul Wolfowitz, Elliott Abrams and Madeleine Albright who said it was worth it that half a million Iraqi children died during the sanction period. She was interviewed on *60 Minutes*. They just go from one party to another, from one administration to another. And they know the history but they deliberately ignore it. They just are warmongers. It's like we haven't learned from Vietnam. We haven't learned from Iraq. We haven't learned from Afghanistan. We haven't learned from Libya. And it's just a gung-ho attitude. The only time Congress was pressured not to go along with Obama on going into Syria was when hundreds of thousands of people flooded the congressional offices of their senators and representatives. It was coming in 95 to 5 against going into Syria. Ninety-five to five was coming in from conservatives and liberals, and Congress said to Obama, "No way."

And that's what we've got to start doing, because Congress is the only thing we have left in a situation like this. Five hundred and thirty-five of them; we all know their names. Listeners, you know what you have to do. You have to shout diplomacy; you have to shout negotiation; you have to shout for an end of a war that could spread all over the world. You even hear people talking about World War III, which would be the last world war because of the massive destructive capacity of our nuclear weaponry. Well, let's talk about the US press here. First, I've been listening to NPR. They seem to always ask war-inciting questions. They don't ask peace or negotiating-inciting questions. What's your take on NPR here?

Chris Hedges: I used to work for NPR, Ralph. I covered the Falklands War for them, and it was a very different organization with its flaws of course, but a better news-gathering organization. Federal funds got cut. They, like PBS, are dependent upon corporations and wealthy donors, including the Koch brothers, certainly within PBS. And that has essentially neutered their capacity to give a platform to voices that don't represent the power structures, corporate structures, military structures. And NPR, is either fluff, some . . . I have no problem with kind of a radio magazine format. Indeed, I've done it as a radio correspondent. But in news, they'll spend 10 minutes on the latest country western singer, whatever, and then of course, as you point out, they give a platform to those who are in power because they don't want to antagonize those who are in power. I remember at the tenth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, they gave like 20 minutes to I think it was Wolfowitz or somebody. That was insane. Under international law, these people are war criminals. So I don't listen to it much anymore. It's essentially been domesticated by the same forces that have domesticated the commercial media.

Ralph Nader: How did they deal with the tenth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq in an interview with Don Rumsfeld?

Chris Hedges: Well, very respectfully, as if he a wise elder statesperson. I heard it. I couldn't believe it.

Ralph Nader: And who did they used to have in the 1970s? People listening now would be astounded, that they would never have today, their successors, never. They wouldn't have Larry Wilkerson on. They wouldn't have Ted Postol on. They wouldn't have Noam Chomsky on today. None of them. Who did they have in the 1970s, Chris?

Chris Hedges: Well, if you go back certainly to PBS, Chomsky [and] *you* would be interviewed, James Baldwin. These are figures that were not beholden to centers of power, which is why public broadcasting exists, or should exist. They've all been blanked out. When was the last time NPR interviewed you?

Ralph Nader: ...Howard Zinn, Angela Davis.

Chris Hedges: Yeah, yeah.

Ralph Nader: Well, give us your reactions, listeners, to your view of NPR. Last time we talked about it, we got some very, very good reactions, very short type reactions to the excessive commercialism, who is getting censored, the massive focus on race without going to the causes of racial exploitation, which would be corporatism, redlining discrimination, lower services in healthcare, on and on, people reacted. So we want your reactions. Send your reactions to us. Well, you were on RT, Russian television. It's a Russian government media operation. We have our Voice of America, and earlier, Radio Free Europe, but you had a program. Tell us what the program was about. You've had it for a couple of years or more now, and what's happened?

Chris Hedges: So it was on for six years. It had previously been a program on teleSUR, and then teleSUR with collapse of the Venezuelan economy and shift to a right-wing government in Argentina, lost its funding. It was a consortium of Latin-American stations. And RT asked if I was interested in moving the show to RT and just rebranding it under another name, primarily interviewing authors. And I agreed as long as I chose the guests and had editorial control, which I did. I was on RT, because that's the kind of show that should be on PBS, probably at midnight or something, with people who read books. But because of my position, my critiques of the Democratic Party, my support of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanction movement against Israel, I've become unpalatable within the mainstream. So I was on RT for the same reason Vaclav Havel, who I knew, was on Voice of America. If you wanted to hear Havel in Czechoslovakia, you had to turn on Voice of America. And what they do is they push you out into these marginalized spaces and then they demonize the marginalized spaces.

So we knew from the Director of National Intelligence report in 2017 why they hated RT. There were 7 pages of that 25-page report dedicated to RT. And while they complained about Russian propaganda, every example they cited was about giving a voice to critics and dissidents . . . this is their language . . . to third-party candidates, to anti-fracking activists, to Occupy activists, to anti-imperialists. And so RT was clearly targeted and had already been removed without any warning from cable channels. It was the second most watched foreign news broadcast, after the BBC, in the country but it was just summarily disappeared from cable channels in New York State and California where it had a wide following. And then, of course, Putin's invasion of Ukraine gave them the excuse they wanted. So six years of my shows, not one of which had anything to do with Russia, were just instantly disappeared with no inquiry, no warning. And you could say that it wasn't over the content but in fact, of course, it was over the content. Those were

the kinds of voices that this increasingly discredited corporate state doesn't want heard. You were on it. Noam Chomsky was on it. Slavoj Žižek was on it.

Ralph Nader: Larry King was on it.

Chris Hedges: Larry King had a show on it. He mostly interviewed celebrities but yeah, he was also on our team.

Ralph Nader: Well, this brings us to the Julian Assange situation. He did the WikiLeaks situation where he exposed government crimes in Iraq and elsewhere, US government crimes. So he's been persecuted for years in London. He is now in jail. The US is trying to extradite him the way Republican presidents and Democratic presidents agree on. They want to extradite him and try him here as a violator of the US espionage law. What was his crime? His crime was he disclosed massive documents showing criminal violations, unconstitutional criminal violations of federal statutes and criminal acts by US wars in the Middle East, among other things, and he is being persecuted. Tell us your take. You know him. You visited him. Tell us your take on what he did and what's the likelihood of him being extradited?

Chris Hedges: Well, I was just in London. I was one of six guests that he and Stella invited to his wedding at Belmarsh Prison. Of course, when we got to the prison, the prison exhibiting the kind of institutional sadism of all prisons, denied him his guest list. He didn't commit a crime. He did what any good reporter did, including myself. I published classified material on front page of the *New York Times*. But he exposed the inner workings of the centers of power in a way that we've not seen, going all the way back to the Pentagon Papers. So yes, the Iraqi War Logs 2010, this included the collateral murder video. He made public the killing of nearly 700 civilians that had been hidden, that had approached too close to US checkpoints. He exposed Vault 7, the CIA tools that can compromise cars, smart TVs, web browsers, the operating systems of smartphones, operating systems such as Microsoft Windows, macOS, et cetera. He exposed the more than 15,000 unreported deaths of Iraqi civilians. He exposed the torture and abuse of 800 men and boys between 14 and 89 at Guantanamo. He exposed the duplicity of Hillary Clinton, including her orders when she was secretary of state, that the US spy on Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and other UN representatives from China, France, UK. And she wanted their DNA, their iris scans, their fingerprints, their personal passwords. He exposed the 2009, the way the Obama administration orchestrated the 2009 military coup in Honduras that overthrew the democratically elected president, Manuel Zelaya, the \$657,000 that Goldman Sachs paid to Hillary Clinton to give three talks, as well as her speeches where she promised corporate leaders that she would do their bidding at the same time as a candidate, she was promising financial regulation reform. So on and on and on, just a massive trove of material for which the elites were for the first time exposed for the kinds of activities that they seek to have . . . sought quite successfully to hide from the public. And they won't forgive him for that.

Ralph Nader: Chris, you're a cultural critic. You went to divinity school. Let me ask you a question that maybe you haven't been asked. We have organized religion. We have the National Council of Churches, the Baptist Convention and other religions. Why aren't they speaking out against these crimes, against these lies? We are now in a country where lies get mass media and the truth get marginalized media, at best, if not censorship. This is systemic, no longer just one or two people being shut out. Trump made a major contribution to this kind of paradox as well. But I'm always looking for organized religion spokespeople to call out these politicians and these

corporate crooks, and you don't hear anything. Is it because they're not being reported, or they're no longer taking their religious principles seriously?

Chris Hedges: Well, they're not because the mainstream church is in such decline and has atrophied in the same way that of course news organizations have. And they're terrified of offending anybody within those organizations, especially those who have the capacity to give money. So they've retreated into this kind of boutique activism, and "how is it with me" spirituality, which is really just narcissism, and squandered whatever moral authority they have in the society. So that's what's happened.

Ralph Nader: On the other side, you have the Republicans using the more militant evangelicals as warmongers, as supporters of the Trump's mendacity, his self-enrichment, his misogyny, his massive daily violations of the law when he was president, brazenly bragging, saying "With Article II, I can do whatever I want as president." Constitutional law expert Bruce Fein said *that* alone was an impeachable offense. But actually he [Trump] was telling the truth. He was doing anything he wants in domestic and foreign policy. And now he's running neck-and-neck in the polls with Biden. We eventually have to get back to the people. They got to start doing their homework. They got to start understanding that if you give dictatorial forces a foot, they're going to take a mile, and then it's going to come back against them on where they live, work and raise their families. That's the history of autocratic and dictatorial movements abroad, and people have got to stop reacting viscerally to a few misogyny slogans or other statements that may connect with their latent prejudices, and look out for their families, look out for their community, look out for their country, look out for the world and how we're impacting it. So what are your further thoughts on the countervailing forces that should be standing up to these situations?

Chris Hedges: Any authoritarian government or regime is built on the foundations of a failed liberalism. And that's what's so dangerous. So I look at the Biden administration the same way I look at 1932 in Weimar, Germany when you had von Papen and the old ruling aristocrats who were frightened, as they should have been, of the Nazis, creating a government that tries to bring back the ancien régime when nobody wants it. And that's exactly where we are in the United States. So even the very tepid campaign promises [like] raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour and forgiving student debt, have been thrown out the window. The actual assistance that was provided by the Trump administration, the \$2000 checks, the \$600 supplemental to unemployment, the moratorium on evictions and foreclosures, have extended a little bit, the moratorium on student debt, that's all disappearing at a time of 8% plus inflation. And the Democrats know full well they're going to get shellacked in the midterms. They're walking around talking about it. So they are culpable. This was our moment. The problem is that when Trump or a Trump-anointed figure comes back, they're going to be engaging in a very vitriolic campaign of vengeance. It will be very, very ugly. So at that point, American democracy is finished. It's already largely symbolic. It's a system that Sheldon Wolin called inverted totalitarianism. I think you may have given me the book, *Democracy Incorporated*. But that's where we are and it's a very dangerous moment in American history. And the self-identified liberal class is deeply culpable because, of course, they orchestrated so much of this stuff-- the trade deals, the NAFTA, the deregulating the FCC, destroying welfare, ripping down the firewalls between commercial and investment banks, Glass-Steagall Act; that was all Clinton and Tony Coelho because they knew that if they did corporate bidding, they'd get corporate money, and they did. But they sold out the American working class, and all of this is blowback. And the

Democratic Party is unable to engage in any kind of meaningful self-criticism or to hold themselves culpable. Instead, they are still running around, saying that Putin elected Trump. This is as ridiculous as Trump saying he won the election. Neither are reality-based belief systems. And this is very dangerous.

Ralph Nader: Well, you're a student of Howard Zinn's works in terms of how things can be changed. What was his view on how progress has been made in our country in the past for justice and what is needed to be done now?

Chris Hedges: Well, Zinn got it. All of the America was founded not as a popular democracy. Read the *Federalist Papers*. That's what they were guarding against. That's why we got senators appointed. That's why we have the ridiculous Electoral College. I think five Supreme Court justices were appointed by presidents who didn't win the popular vote. So all of the openings, as Zinn points out in *A People's History of the United States*, came through struggle--the Labor movement, the suffragists, the abolitionists, the Civil Rights movement. We had the bloodiest labor wars of any industrialized country. Hundreds of workers were murdered, probably thousands, tens of thousands were blacklisted. The gun thugs, the Pinkertons, so the reign of terror against Blacks after Reconstruction in the south, we've always had to fight to open up that space. And then we saw with the rise of mass movements in the 1960s, the Black Power movement, the Anti-War movement, the Women's movement, et cetera, that there was consolidation of power, the famous Powell Memo in 1971. But they moved to essentially deal with what Samuel Huntington called our excess of democracy. And we've been rolled completely backwards. You were a victim of this. You were actually named by name in the Powell Memo. So we're almost beginning from scratch, but what hope we have comes through that organizing--the Amazon workers in Staten Island, although I can assure you that Amazon is hardly done with trying to break that union; they may not even recognize it, and it was vicious fight. They poured millions of dollars into trying to defeat it, through character assassination that they engaged in against Smalls and the other organizers. So history shows that it's a battle with costs.

Ralph Nader: Just making your point, the movements to organizing in Starbucks and Amazon, which are underway now, are all grassroots. They're not being led by the international or the national unions whose offices are in Washington. They're not being led by the AFL-CIO. In fact, organized labor is astounded, surprised, and astonished at how this happened by a number of workers who started talking union. A lot of them were fired. They came back. They organized their compatriots. And I think it's not going to be long before Amazon and Starbucks are going to have to recognize unions. Of course, once the union is recognized, you have to complete a contract. And that's where Amazon and Starbucks gets another opportunity to delay, obfuscate and try to atrophy the efforts of these organizers. But it can go very, very quickly. It's already moving fast in Starbucks coffee shops. It's too bad they can't organize at the national level. They got to do it one at a time; thousands of Starbucks shops got to do it one at a time.

But what's your view of the situation on campuses, the way campuses spawned, helped spawn the Civil Rights movement, going down into the south and civil rights summer advocacy, the way they sparked Earth Day and the environmental movement in 1970, women's rights movement, consumer movement. That's where a lot of the young advocates came from. And speakers like yourself would go around and mobilize them and talk to them. Well, you've had your share of speeches recently on campuses in US and Canada. What's your read? Are we in a dead civic zone here?

Chris Hedges: It's pretty dead. I don't know that it's going to be spawned on campuses. I just came back from Drury University in Missouri, and I don't draw a lot of students. I can fill the hall but there's a lot of grey hair out there. And I think it's going to come from the kind of grassroots organizing that we saw again at Amazon in Staten Island which, as you correctly pointed out, really did it alone with no support from any major labor organization. And in fact, we saw with strikes, the teachers' strike in West Virginia, they defied their own union leadership. So I think that's where the hope lies. Of course there are fast-food workers attempting to organize and the nurses' union. We are seeing movement. They're going to have to begin to use the weapon of the strike and they're going to have to use it often because that's the only weapon they have to really cripple and push back against the business elites who have seized control of just about every institution and every center of power.

Ralph Nader: They better hurry before the robots take over and replace them [Chris chuckles] more than even now. Let's talk about your books, Chris. Before we get to your books, your most recent book, which is on a prison whose prisoners you taught in New Jersey, a marvelous person-to-person story, what are some of the books that you think our listeners should read that you've already written?

Chris Hedges: I would look at *American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America* because I think coming out of seminary and my father was a minister, I saw very early on that this was a political movement and a very dangerous movement. It filled the ideological void that Trump has. Trump has no ideology of course. And if these forces come back into power, it will be the veneer of a kind of Christian fascism that they will use to justify their assault against our democracy and against the working class and against civil liberty. So I think that book is important to understand them. The *Death of the Liberal Class*, of course regarding what happened to our old traditional liberal establishment within the Democratic Party; you know that better than anyone. *Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle*, *Days of Destruction*, *Days of Revolt* written out . . . a book that I relied on your advice for quite extensively, written out of the poorest pockets of the United States, which the sacrifice zones which will show you how far corporate capitalism will go in terms of orchestrating an environmental catastrophe for profit. And of course, the whole planet has become a sacrifice zone. And the last book, I find my heart's on every page of that book, *Our Class: Trauma and Transformation in an American Prison*.

Ralph Nader: Well, before we get to that briefly, the one you did that had a lot of photography, you went to Camden, New Jersey; you went to some of the poorest areas in the country. Which ones were they?

Chris Hedges: *Days of Destruction*, *Days of Revolt*. That was 50 pages of illustrations by the cartoonist Joe Sacco.

Ralph Nader: And what were those areas you visited? You picked about four or five of them.

Chris Hedges: Yeah. So I picked the poorest pockets of America--Camden, New Jersey, per capita, the poorest city in the United States, Pine Ridge, South Dakota, the second poorest county where an average life expectancy of a male is 48. That's the lowest in the Western Hemisphere.

Ralph Nader: That's Native American, the Sioux Reservation.

Chris Hedges: Native American, yeah, Lakota. And then the coalfields of southern West Virginia, which everyone should go look at because that's what they'll do to the rest of the planet. You can't drink the water there. You go into the nurse's office in the elementary school and there's just rows of inhalers for all the children. Cancer is an epidemic. The produce fields in Florida where we interviewed people who at night were chained inside of trucks as slavery; there's no other way to put it. And then of course they're undocumented; they don't have rights. And they're told that if they go to authorities, their families back in Honduras will be killed, or Guatemala or wherever they're from. The last chapter is out of Occupy. That's a revolt that happened while we were writing the book. So yeah, that was the book.

Ralph Nader: Let's talk about your book on the prison in New Jersey.

Chris Hedges: So this was . . . I teach, and through Rutgers in the college credit program, a few years ago I helped a class write a play about their experiences in and outside prison that was eventually published and staged at the theater in Trenton. And I used that process of writing the play. There were 28 students in that play and everything in that play happened to one of those students, including stuff you couldn't imagine, like a guy getting to Trenton and his first night being locked in his cell, he is told by the guard that that was the cell his father was in. But it really exposes the horror of mass incarceration, what happens within our internal colonies, militarized police, poverty; it's all there, and humanized through their stories.

Ralph Nader: And you found them quite impressive once they were given an opportunity to speak.

Chris Hedges: Right. Because it's hard to get into that college program, I teach real intellectuals. Gramsci would call them organic intellectuals. These are people who've turned their cells into libraries, who read, and they make \$22 a month working in the prison. For them to buy a book, that's a huge expense. One of my students, I met him at the gate was in for 11 years. He got out and the first words he said to me was, "I have to rebuild my library." Those were the first words after 11 years in prison. A lot of these guys go on and are doing really well. They graduate summa cum laude from Rutgers and they're very, very bright. And that's the tragedy of our educational system because they never had a chance. They were in dysfunctional inner-city schools; they were forced into the illegal economy because there's no jobs, that kind of tension and stress of growing up in a culture with that kind of violence. So it's a really inexcusable because as a society, we invest not in people, but in systems of control. And these people have so much to contribute. They're really some of the most amazing people I've met. If you don't walk out of a prison angry, then you don't have a heart.

Ralph Nader: Well, not only that, but when they get out of prison after serving their time, they're discriminated against, they can't get credit.

Chris Hedges: Yeah.

Ralph Nader: They can't get a job, and so they go into even more depression, start taking things they shouldn't take, and their families are disrupted even more. It's almost like the prison industrial complex, about 10% are corporate prisons; Biden fortunately said he's not going to support any more corporate prisons. The prison industrial complex is ridden with the same profit motive and the same outcome as the military-industrial complex. It's profits first; any kind of

rehabilitation, any kind of civic values are subordinated to the imperative of endless profit acquisition. We're running out of time, Chris. We've been talking with Chris Hedges. I'm sure most of you have read his articles and some of his books. How do they keep in touch with you now? You're off RT.

Chris Hedges: Like Matt Taibbi and Glenn Greenwald, I can be found on Substack. That's chrishedges.substack.com.

Ralph Nader: Very good. Thank you very much. Steve, do you have any compelling questions? Hannah?

Steve Skrovan: Well, I don't know if I have anything compelling, but I'll ask a question. Chris, I know you're not a fan of the Democratic Party. Do you see any possibility in the progressive wing of the Democratic Party--the Bernie Sanders, the Squad people--or is that just a stalking horse with no value?

Chris Hedges: I wouldn't say "no value" but the party has them completely under control. They've engaged in all sorts of nefarious moves to prevent Bernie from being the nominee. Let's remember, with corporate money, people like Pelosi, Schumer, Hillary Clinton wouldn't exist politically. They have essentially delivered the message to the Squad and AOC [Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez] that if they defy the Democratic leadership, they won't hold their seat anymore. Bernie has always caucused as a Democrat, so I don't find any hope in . . . I don't see the Democratic Party as being reformable. I think history bears that out. I think we have to build our own movements to begin to put pressure on centers of power. I was an early supporter of Ralph when he ran because I think Ralph was right that if you pull 5, 10, 15 million people into a third party, the Democrats will begin to respond. Politics is a game of fear, and you can see how viciously they went after Ralph. And I think that illustrates how frightened they were.

Ralph Nader: Hannah?

Hannah Feldman: Thank you. Briefly, would you mind speaking a little bit about your Substack? Direct subscription to journalists I think has been a really exciting development for me trying to get real news lately. If you wouldn't mind just speaking on . . .

Chris Hedges: Well, the walls have closed in. There are fewer and fewer places people such as myself, can go. We have to pay the rent or the mortgage. And Substack is a subscription service and it works; you get enough subscribers, you can do your work. I write for Bob Scheer's post, his site, Scheerpost, but Bob doesn't have any money. They're running that thing from his Social Security check virtually. And then of course, I don't have RT. So I've reconstituted my show at the Real News [Network] and I will continue to publish my columns but I'm funded by the subscribers. So it's a godsend. I don't know after RT where I would have gone. And it does give us the freedom to continue to carry out the kind of critiques and analysis that allows us to retain our integrity.

Ralph Nader: Well, we're out of time. Thank you very much. We've been talking with Chris Hedges, author of many books, articles, speaking all over the country, Canada, going overseas, and continuing the tradition of resistance to injustice, and being a motivator for a lot of young people around the country. Thank you very much, Chris.

Chris Hedges: Thanks, Ralph.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Chris Hedges. We will link to his work at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Now 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, April 15, 2022; I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Amazon will block and flag employee posts on a planned internal messaging app that contain keywords pertaining to labor unions. That's according to a report from the *Intercept*. An automatic word monitor would also block a variety of terms that could represent potential critiques of Amazon's working conditions, words like slave labor, prison, plantation, as well as restrooms presumably related to reports of Amazon employees relieving themselves in bottles to meet punishing quotas. "Our teams are always thinking about new ways to help employees engage with each other," said Amazon spokesperson, Barbara Agrait. "This particular program has not yet been approved and may change significantly or even never launch at all," she said.

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 Hannah Feldman and Ralph. So Ralph, what do you think about Russell's report about the Amazon app?

Ralph Nader: Well, it's part of growing corporate censorship. They first trademark words you can't use, like priceless. And the second is they're now basically saying to their workers, if you use the Amazon app, you can't use words like wages, slavery, or other provocative words that Jeff Bezos and his colleagues don't like. So let's start using words like corporate control, corporate censorship, control coercion, corporate crime, corporate welfare, and stop using words like neoliberalism or ruling elites. Most people don't interact with ruling elites. They interact with big corporations to their adverse disadvantage.

Steve Skrovan: Here are some of the other words, Ralph, that are banned, and phrases even. "I hate," "union," "terminated," "compensation," "pay raise," "rude." "This is concerning" is a phrase that is banned. "This is dumb" is a phrase that is banned. "vaccine" is a term that is banned [along with] "grievance," "petition," "injustice," "diversity," "ethics," "fairness" and "accessibility"; these are all banned words from the Amazon internal app.

Ralph Nader: What's next, the Golden Rule?

Steve Skrovan: Right. It's just about we're going to ban anything that is good [like] "unity," "unite," "unfair," "favoritism," "restrooms." "Restrooms" is on the list [chuckle]. It would be incredibly funny if it wasn't also incredibly sad.

Ralph Nader: We got to get this guy in Amazon who decides what words are going to be banned on the Amazon app. I'd love to interview him. Wouldn't you, Steve?

Steve Skrovan: Oh Yeah. Yeah, because this is crazy. "Master" and "plantation" are not allowed to be used. It's quite a list. And we're getting all that from the *Intercept*, which wrote an article about this. So we'll give them credit where credit is due. Here's something in the news,

Ralph, I want you to comment on. Last week, a group of progressive senators secured funding to prevent massive layoffs among the Senate cafeteria staff. Their employer, Restaurant Associates, notified more than 80 senate cafeteria workers, that's 46% of the workforce, that they would be laid off. The workers voted to unionize last year after working through the pandemic and the January 6th riots, and have seen their working conditions deteriorate under new private management. What's up with that?

Ralph Nader: Shame on the US senators. For years, the cafeteria was run by the US Congress. They corporatized it and the company running it is strip mining the workers, reducing the number of workers, making it very difficult to get benefits. That's why I want a bill in Congress that says all benefits that accrue to senators and representatives will not accrue unless all workers in the United States have the same category of benefits. What a shameful process. It's right under their nose. It's where they eat. And they let this kind of sweatshop condition deteriorate.

Steve Skrovan: And it also got no coverage in the *Washington Post*. So we're kind of coming full circle with the *Washington Post*, owned by Jeff Bezos, who owns Amazon, tries to crush unions. That's the circle.

Ralph Nader: Yes. Well, this is something that can be changed. Just shame, shame on the senators and plaudits to the few senators who are trying to turn it around. But it's not enough just to restore the jobs of these workers. What they have to do is get rid of the contract and have the US Congress run it as it has been running it for decades.

Steve Skrovan: All right. Very good. I want to thank our guest again, Chris Hedges. For those of you listening on the radio, that's our show. For you podcast listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material we call "The Wrap Up". A transcript of this program will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* website soon after the episode is posted.

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

Steve Skrovan: The American Museum of Tort Law has gone virtual. Go to tortmuseum.org to explore the exhibits. Take a virtual tour and learn about iconic tort cases from history. And be sure to check out their latest program on how litigation on brain trauma is changing the future of football. All that and more at tortmuseum.org.

Hannah Feldman: Ralph wants you to join the Congress Club. Go to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* website and in the top right margin, click on the button labeled "Congress Club" to get more information. We've also added a button right below that with specific instructions about what to include in your letters to Congress. The producers of the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* are Jimmy Lee Wirt and Matthew Marran. Our executive producer is Alan Minsky.

Steve Skrovan: Our theme music "Stand Up, Rise Up" was written and performed by Kemp Harris. Our proofreader is Elisabeth Solomon. Our associate producer is Hannah Feldman. Our social media manager is Steven Wendt. Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. Thank you, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you, everybody. And the response from the Congress Club to get a copy of the *Capitol Hill Citizen* has been very encouraging. Keep it up and join the Congress Club.