

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 356 TRANSCRIPT

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

*“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 along with my co-host David Feldman. Hello there, David.

David Feldman: Hello.

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

Ralph Nader: Hello everybody.

Steve Skrovan: On today's program we welcome back author and activist David Bollier who has made recovering, expanding as well as vindicating the commons his life's work. Commons is that underappreciated sphere of social and economic life from land, to airwaves, to free software and more, that's crucial to community all over. Mr. Bollier's books include among many others *Think Like a Commoner*, *A Short Introduction to the Life of the Commons*, and last year's *Free, Fair and Alive: The Insurgent Power of the Commons*. Today we'll be discussing the ideas in Mr. Bollier's upcoming book, *The Commoner's Catalog of Changemaking*. That's the first half of the show. In the second half of the show we're gonna bring you the year review. It was a tumultuous year to say the least but three major stories dominated the news. There was of course the 2020 Election. There was the outrage over police brutality sparked by the murder of George Floyd. And there was of course a little thing called a worldwide pandemic. We covered those major issues but also tried to fill in the gaps and keep alive many topics the mainstream media shunted to the side - like the climate crisis and just about everything else. The year began with an impeachment trial and is ending with a vaccine and a messy presidential transition. We've chosen some highlights from past episodes featuring our diverse list of guests from Adolph Reed talking about class versus race to Dr. Bandy Lee explaining the pathology of Donald Trump to Dr. Michael Olsterholm giving us the latest on the Covid-19 pandemic, to the late great David Freeman telling us exactly what we have to do to address the climate crisis. We hope this look backward will also help us look forward.

As usual, somewhere in between we'll take a break to check in with our corporate crime reporter Russell Mokhiber. But first, we start with the commons. “Commons” is defined as the cultural and natural resources accessible to all members of a society including natural material such as air, water, and a habitable earth. But it could be much more than that. Here to tell us more is our first guest.

David Feldman: David Bollier is an author, activist, blogger and consultant who spends a lot of time exploring the commons as a new paradigm of economics, politics and culture. He co-founded the Commons Strategies Group, a consulting project that works to promote the commons internationally. More recently Mr. Bollier has become a fellow podcaster with his new program *Frontiers of Commoning*. Among many other works Mr. Bollier wrote the quintessential book on the subject, *Think Like a Commoner: A Short Introduction to the Commons*. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, David Bollier.

David Bollier: It's great to be here.

Ralph Nader: Well listeners, this is something to be made very concrete--what is the commons and who owns it? Well, the people own the greatest wealth in the United States. The trouble is they don't control it. They own the public lands which is 1/3 of America, not counting offshore. They own the public parks. They own the public airwaves that the radio and TV stations control 24/7 for nothing. They own a huge amount of research and development. They own a lot of what's often called virtual reality. And we are all educated not to know about it starting with elementary school, high school, college. I went to law school [and] we never even talked about the commons. We talked about certain kinds of property held in common, but not the way you're gonna hear it from David Bollier who is one of the world's foremost authorities on this. He's tried to get an awareness of the commons, a stake by the people in the commons, a propriety stake like what are you doing to our public airwaves? Don't we own it and can't we have our own programs and networks on radio and TV? He's been doing this with slide shows, with video shows, with deep-thought books, with clearly written summary books, and here we are today to have him explain his latest form of communication, which can be called something reminiscent of the *Whole Earth Catalog* that came out about 40 years ago. How are you trying to communicate David this whole concept of the commons?

David Bollier: You could say first of all there's really two classes of commons. The commons as assets that we all own, and the state acts as a trustee for which I call state trustee commons. Then there's all sorts of commons that we create ourselves, and it's really kind of a social system--things like open-source software and local food systems, and community land trusts, and community forests and things like that. So there's a lot of commons that we can and are creating ourselves as an alternative economy to the prevailing one. Then there's all these massive assets, the ones you named, that we need to have our government act as a more conscientious steward of. As far as this catalogue that I'm in the midst of preparing, I'm sorry it's not quite ready yet, but it will be out in the next couple of months, we want to take a cue from the *Whole Earth Catalog* [magazine] whose subtitle was *Access to Tools*, and to show the plenitude of tools that are out there for people to become active commoners. And an active commoner means you're reclaiming control over the resources that matter to you outside of the state and market to the extent possible. That's one way to become, let's just say, non-capitalist in trying to escape a lot of predation and extraction that characterizes the capitalist economy.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, you want to give people a sense of ownership like they don't just say what are you corporate polluters doing to this river? You want them to say, what are you doing to our river, our Mississippi River, our Hudson River? Let's see how far you go on this. People have put their savings in massive pension funds and mutual funds. We're talking trillions of dollars, maybe over ten, trillions of dollars of people's pension savings, individual savings like Vanguard, Fidelity and those big companies that pool people's savings. And, technically they belong to the people, but the mutual funds and the pension funds are pretty hierarchical themselves, and they sort of vote the way Wall Street wants them to vote for the stocks they own. I might say the pension and mutual funds probably own over 70% of the stocks of the big corporations on the various stocks exchange, whether it's General Motors or ExxonMobil, or Apple, or Intel or whatever... Pfizer. Would you call them commons David Bollier?

David Bollier: Well, I think that to the extent that the assets belong to us but our control has been taken away from us, absolutely. I think part of the challenge we face today is inventing new governance mechanisms, new forms of social participation and practice so that we can actually

retain control so that we can have institutions that respect that and we have laws that recognize that. That's precisely what we don't have in all sorts of areas from taxpayer-funded RND [Research and Development] for drugs to federal information that's often copyrighted or controlled. So that's the challenge we face in all sorts of different domains. And, I see the challenge as trying to connect the dots between a lot of these different domains of dispossession and trying to reclaim control for ourselves.

Ralph Nader: Well you know one of the biggest commons in terms of trillions of dollars is all the money the federal and sometimes the state governments spend on research and development. And the federal government has provided grants and contracts to universities and other institutions as well as in-house in NASA and the Pentagon. They basically have been instrumental in building the major industries in the country--the pharmaceutical industry, aerospace industry, nanotech industry, the biotech industry, the computer internet industry. The internet was developed out of a research unit called DARPA in the [U.S.] Department of Defense. How would you characterize that commons because that's what built these companies and they got all this free from the taxpayer over decades. And, they're paying their executives humongous money. They don't give much to charity. They charge people pretty high prices for a lot of products especially pharmaceuticals for example. How would you characterize that in terms of a commons and governance?

David Bollier: Well I'd like to talk about what I call the market state system, because it's not as if the public versus the private sectors are necessarily at odds. In fact they're joined at the hip and are in a deep alliance in terms of basically feeding the corporate machine. And so often our government colludes with the corporate sector to shovel subsidies, shovel legal privileges, and then shovel the assets that we own, and the social value that we create to sort of tee ~~tee~~ it up for market exploitation and privatization. I think that's a classic dynamic we see everywhere. We saw how for example on the internet, social sharing in a non-market way was the norm until Silicon Valley got wind of it and said, oh let's create the sharing economy, which is really no more than a capital driven, micro-rental economy, and they call it sharing. Well it's not sharing; it's a market. This is again where people come together to create value, and then the corporate sector comes in to try to capture and monetize it.

Ralph Nader: There seems to be no end to it. I mean the corporations want to mine the oceans which is the ultimate global commons. NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration], the space agency is spending over 80% of its money just privately contracting out, and now they're hosting corporations sending vessels into space.

David Bollier: You may have heard about Trump's plan to try to commercialize the moon, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: [laughter] As long as he's given the brand name. [more laughter] So, why don't we ask the real fundamental question--how do we get people right in elementary school and high school to understand what they own and what they should have a reasonable right to control, rather than giving control to big corporations that take government power and use it against the people? Look what they're doing to the public lands, for example. How would you do that?

David Bollier: I have an idea that's a little bit counterintuitive or indirect on that Ralph, which is that I think people protect what they love. And if they have personal relationships and collaborative engagement with a local forest or river, perhaps a citizen scientist. If they are part of a community land trust or a community supported agriculture farm; if they are protecting their water resources near them and they love ~~that~~ that river, that lake, then I think they're far more prone to stand up on their hind legs and defend it, and even get involved in distant forums, perhaps the

state capital or Washington as a commoner to defend something as opposed to saying I'm just a lone individual, how can I possibly influence something so big and far away? So, I think part of it is cultivating this place-based engagement with your fellow citizens around certain, I don't like to call it resources; I use the term "care wealth", because a resource is something you can buy and sell, whereas care wealth is something that's inalienable that shouldn't be necessarily sold on the market. Those are some of the ideas that I have that I talk about and my guests talk about in my podcast, *Frontiers of Commoning*.

Ralph Nader: By the way your point is emphasized by a recent bill that both Republicans and Democrats signed, a 9-billion-dollar bill to refurbish and repair some of our national parks around the country.

David Bollier: That's a fantastic development, a rare development because, perhaps because it was so visible, they could see their way clear to doing that where there weren't perhaps as many entrenched corporate interests, they'd have to ride over to get there. But I'd be curious for example on the availability of the new COVID vaccines, whether they're going to be privatized. Probably, versus Jonas Salk with the polio vaccine, where his response famously was could you own the sun? He considered it a moral outrage to try to privatize the polio vaccine in the late 50's.

Ralph Nader: Times certainly have changed. I might want to inject a personal note here for our listeners. When David Bollier graduated from Amherst, he came down and worked with us for a few months in Washington and published a report called "How to Improve Your Daily Newspaper, A Guide for Consumers". I don't know if you know this David, but the Japanese were quite taken with it and actually translated it! We're very proud of how you've taken the leadership in this massive, massive commons that somehow doesn't get on to mass media, and doesn't get talked about very much, not only in the mass media but in academia, at law schools, business schools. And I might say, it's hardly ever an issue in elections unless we're dealing, say, with a serious problem in a nearby state or national park. Why is that? Why isn't this a big deal?

David Bollier: Well I think it partly has to do with American culture and I could go into that in a moment. But I'd like to just accent a counterpoint, which is in Europe in the Global South, the commons is a highly developed and popularly known topic. There's lots of activity going on in terms of legal scholarship and networks of commoners in a given field, whether it's digital spaces or land or water or whatever. There are new centers for the commons being developed in universities, and there's a lot of world cities like Amsterdam and Barcelona, a lot of Italian cities and Seoul, Korea that are actively exploring what we call commons public partnerships where commoners, be they neighborhoods or citizen groups, are collaborating with the city government in novel ways beyond the usual bureaucratic ways to meet needs with commoners having some degree of autonomy and responsibility. So I just mention that to say there are other cultures in the world that have embraced the commons as a way to get beyond the ideological spectrum as ordained, and that there are certain bottom-up capabilities that are coming to the surface as a way to deal with these entrenched problems from climate change to wealth inequality, to precarity [persistent employment or income insecurity].

Ralph Nader: There have been international conferences on this where people exchange information and motivation. You've led the way.

David Bollier: I learned a lot in my education about the commons through collaborations with Europeans and people in the Global South who see it as a counterpoint to the standard neoliberal approach that market-based solutions are the only way to solve something. In the commons, there

are ways to meet our needs, our governance outside of the market state system.

Ralph Nader: David tell our listeners how they can connect with all the material you have on your website, and can they get this video program that you've developed and show it to their own clubs, or their own civic circles back home?

David Bollier: My blog is my last name Bollier.org and it's kind of a rich repository of a lot of my blog posts, videos, and publications and many other things. It's easily accessed so people can pull that stuff down from there. It's all creative commons license. I urge people to go there. There's a certain blog rule that itemizes a lot of the other groups around the world that are active in this field, so it's really a developing topic. As I said, I'm doing this *Commoners Catalogue to Changemaking*, which is going to try to basically pull together dozens of different resources in a kind of *Whole Earth Catalogue*-style to help people track into the topics that they're passionate about.

Ralph Nader: Are you gonna try to have some educational project for elementary and high schools?

David Bollier: Well certainly that was one purpose of my book *Think Like a Commoner*, which is a very popularly accessible and shorter book. This catalog will also be useful in that regard. I confess I haven't gotten to the elementary school level of curriculum yet, but there's no reason why the virtues of caring and sharing and the means for doing that in more systematic ways can't be developed and taught. I mean we have all sorts of free enterprise clubs at that level, why not more clubs about communing? You know, in fairness, things like Fablabs and Makerspaces are already doing that. They just need to see that they're really part of a larger cultural phenomena of commoning.

Ralph Nader: Well, I think youngsters naturally come together like that. You don't have to introduce it to them; they naturally come together [for example their] love of nature.

David Bollier: That's one of the fascinating things that evolutionary scientists are discovering, that human beings are more predisposed to cooperate quite naturally, and a lot of this homo economicus, the way economists talk about us as selfish, utility-maximizing materialists, is really kind of an invention of the capitalist system over the past 200 years. Yet we have advanced as a species because we've shared and cooperated with each other.

Ralph Nader: If people around the country, will want you to present this case over Zoom, would you do it?

David Bollier: I've done many webinars like this and had a lot of different conversations with different constituency crowds or disciplines like regenerative economics and climate change people. I think there's a lot of potential for seeing a credible, compelling path forward outside of the impasse or stalemate of a lot of ideologically driven politics. Important as electoral politics and regulatory action is, this is not an either/or. It's more about simultaneously developing an alternative approach that then can come back to displace or challenge the mainstream much as Linux, the operating system, challenged proprietary software and Microsoft; much as local food did the same thing against Big Ag. So, it's about developing an alternative moral and social self-provisioning economy that can then put the fear of God into a lot of corporate players who then are somewhat shaken when they see that people can escape from their dependency on them, and create their own self-sovereign systems.

Ralph Nader: Well said. So listeners, you want to connect with David Bollier, go to Bollier.org and you'll see all these opportunities. If you get a good audience together, he may participate in a Zoom conference with you.

David Bollier: Yeah.

Ralph Nader: Steve and David, do you have any input here?

Steve Skrovan: John sent me a preview of the catalog with just the chapter headings and I noticed under "Food and Agriculture" was the CSA farming and permaculture. We, especially in pandemic times, are very reliant on our farm share, and my wife is a certified permaculturist.

David Bollier: Oh, is she really?

Steve Skrovan: Yes. So, how does that fit in to your definition of commons and what does that mean?

David Bollier: Well, a lot of what my focus on the commons is about [is] getting out of a transactional social space into a relational one. Of course permaculture is all about the interrelationships of elements of ecosystems in our human engagement and relationship with that. I think that's kind of the through-line for so many commons [i.e.,] developing these standing long-term relationships as opposed to [the formula] "Me: individual. That: object. Me: buy it." Getting out of the market transactional mindset into a relational. So I see permaculture and agroecology, CSA farms and the slow-food, and slow-fish systems as attempting to reinvent community control over important resources such as food.

Ralph Nader: All right, I think we've got to conclude now. Thank you, David. To be continued as always. We look forward to your catalog; that's for sure. When it's out we'll have you on again and try to urge other talk show people to have you on. Somehow, we've got to break through [to] bigger mass media on this.

David Bollier: Well that's one reason I was doing it, and I hope that it can sort of open up the space a little bit more by consolidating what *is* going on. It is about connecting the dots in an accessible, digestible way.

Ralph Nader: Right, okay. Thank you very much David.

David Bollier: Thank you so much Ralph, I appreciate you having me on the show.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with David Bollier. We will link to his work at RalphNaderRadioHour.com. Let's take a short break. When we return, we're gonna put the tumultuous year of 2020 in perspective. 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, January 1, 2021. I'm Russell Mokhiber. Members of the wealthy Sackler family, owners of Oxycontin producer Perdue Pharma, have long denied that the ten billion dollars they transferred from their company over the course of a decade was an unlawful attempt to shield assets in anticipation of their role in the opioid crisis. But a review of emails, memos, depositions, legal motions and other documents unsealed last week in Perdue's bankruptcy proceedings show Sackler family members discuss potential litigation exposure at least

as early as 2007, a full decade before they faced a wide-ranging legal attack and a significant transfer of stock. That's according to a report from Reuters. The Sackler family's estimated wealth is 10.8 billion dollars. 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. We're gonna close out this program with a year-end review featuring highlights from past interviews. It's not like it's a year we want to re-live, but we think it would be interesting to look back on how it all unfolded, especially since so many of our guests and so much of Ralph's commentary has been ahead of the curve, and much of what bad has happened was predictable and preventable. Starting a full year ago in January 2020, we welcomed back psychiatrist Dr. Bandy Lee, who has had a difficult time getting her message out on more mainstream outlets. We'd had her on the program two years previous to speak about the book she edited *The Dangerous Case of Donald Trump: 27 Psychiatrists and Mental Health Experts Assess a President*. This is an excerpt from the first week of January where she updates that assessment. You'll hear why on our website, that this particular episode was entitled "The King of Everything."

Ralph Nader: All people live by myths, they live by fabrications of their leaders, or they live by refutation of these fabrications, or they live by the truth and by logic and reason. So, he's affecting millions of people. And I just want to end this comment by replaying a quote I heard by an Ohio worker. He was a blue-collar worker, 52 years old; he moved from Ohio to Georgia. And he was asked by a reporter about his views on Trump and here's what he said, and I'd like you to analyze that. He said, "They all say that Trump is crazy, but he's saying what I'm thinking. Does that mean I'm crazy?" Your reaction?

Dr. Bandy Lee: A lot of what he's saying is actually his sensing of others' fears, others' wishes, fantasy thinking and conspiracy theories. In fact, when someone is cognitively compromised or compromising their higher functioning, we tend to think that they will simply be debilitated, but that's actually not true. The mind is of many layers and when the higher functions are compromised, the lower functions actually increase in their power; these we call the primitive brain or the primitive impulses. And his primitive desire, to be the king of everything, best in everything and admired by everyone, allows him that emotional drive to have that status drive him to sensing the primitive thoughts in other people far more effectively than any conscious mind or strategy could. So, it's very dangerous indeed, because he will be echoing those thoughts and people would mistake that as being empathy or understanding other people. He is not doing it to understand other people; he is doing it for his own purposes, for overpowering them, for using them, deceiving and manipulating them and preying upon them. And so those skills are increased in an impaired individual. That's why an element of pathology is far more dangerous than someone simply being evil and ill in intent.

"Stand up, stand up, stand up"

Steve Skrovan: Regular listeners might remember that we first spoke to Dr. Michael Osterholm two years ago in 2018. He had written an op-ed in the *NY Times*, entitled "We're Not Ready for a Flu Pandemic." And the slider on our webpage featured a graphic of a round, spiky virus that looks eerily familiar to Cov SARS 2. That was a full two years ago. Even though Dr. Osterholm has become quite a busy man and a ubiquitous figure on mainstream media, he always returns to our little program because as usual, Ralph was ahead of the curve. We spoke to him in the first week of February, the same week Donald Trump told Bob Woodward that - unlike the more common annual influenza - "It's also more deadly than even your strenuous flu."

Ralph Nader: So, it's not going to fade off the way the annual influenza epidemic fades off in March and April.

Dr. Michael Osterholm: It isn't. Yes, we're in uncharted territory right now. You know, no one has ever experienced a global epidemic like this of a Coronavirus in the sense that says, "Okay, what's going to happen?" So clearly, if enough people get infected there will at least be some short-term immunity so it won't continue to transmit in that population. But that has all the makings of another 6 or 12 months of widespread activity around the world.

Ralph Nader: It could well go into the summer and the fall.

Dr. Michael Osterholm: Absolutely. And some people said, well, but it probably won't do well in the summertime because of the fact that warmer temperatures and SARS [Severe Acute Respiratory System] ended in the summertime in 2003. And I would just say SARS ended not because of the weather, but because of the control measures we were able to bring to a disease that was not nearly as infectious as this one. I remind people that we see lots of MERS [Middle East respiratory syndrome] in the Arabian Peninsula in temperatures of 110 degrees, so you can't say that in fact it's just temperature. So unlike seasonal flu, which tends to follow the winter months of Northern and Southern Hemispheres, I think this is going to be more like a pandemic strain of influenza where that can, for the first year, be a problem year-round. And I don't see anything that's going to change this from doing the very same thing.

"Stand up, stand up, stand up"

Steve Skrovan: In March of last year, we welcomed documentary filmmaker, Robert Greenwald, to speak about his film, *Suppressed*, which described the 2018 midterm elections in Georgia and outlined the many ways Republicans try to keep people from voting. And as we know now, Georgia, has become a crucial battleground and many of those obstructions were overcome.

Ralph Nader: Some of these obstructions that you're talking about can be overcome if we start the get-out-the-vote movement in July, not in October, not in November, because there are all kinds of deadlines--students are discriminated against in terms of where they can vote when they're in college. You have to start much, much earlier. And some enlightened billionaires better put a lot of money into getting out the vote, starting in August, September, October [for] people [to] have meetings in neighborhoods, [helping people think about things like] what would you get if you voted? What do you want in terms of your family and what do you want the government to do [about] all the things like living wage and universal health insurance and prosecuting people who obstruct the right to vote? And there are other countries besides Australia that have universal voting as a legal duty. When you have universal voting as a legal duty, Robert, and someone like Kemp, [former Georgia] Secretary of State, obstructs you from obeying the law and voting, that's a much more serious criminal offense. Your take on all this?

Robert Greenwald: Well, I think that's absolutely true. And what it goes to, Ralph, what it goes to basically is it's fundamentally, and this is where I hope the film can be a piece of helping, it's fundamentally arousing the electorate to correct this, because there are numerous, numerous policy ways, and they're not all that difficult. As you said, there's many possibilities and ways we can learn from other countries. There's lots of things that can be done in our country. But the political will from the Democratic and the progressive and the liberal side has not been there. Look, the conservatives and the right wing and Republicans have spent millions and millions of dollars and years and years designing smart and legally defensible, but morally and totally indefensible, ways to suppress the vote. We know what they're doing. We show the tactics; we show it. Now it's

on us to come up with, and there are lots of grassroots groups. And as I've said, Stacey Abrams with Fair Fight and Fair Count, is connecting both to the census and to voter suppression today. So, there's lots, but it requires people being angry, being upset, and that's why we make the film available for free. That's why we provide study guides with it for schools. That's why we provide reflection guides with it for communities of faith. And our goal is to have 2020 free screenings before the 2020 election. And every screening has a discussion afterwards, and the focus of the discussion is, what can be done?

"Stand up, stand up, stand up"

Steve Skrovan: At any other time, the fiftieth anniversary of Earth Day would have been a glorious celebration. However, under pandemic conditions, it was rather muted. On the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, we had our own celebration, featuring the last appearance of the late great Green Cowboy, David Freeman, where in his inimitable way, he makes a distinction between what he calls "the dumb climate deniers" and "the intelligent climate deniers."

Ralph Nader: You've been pretty critical of the big environmental groups. They're current litigation-oriented, properly; you know, that's where their expertise is. But they're not really mobilizing apart from Lois Gibbs and her group. These big environmental groups don't have the kind of grassroots momentum that they could even generate something like Earth Day 1970, with 20 million people participating in generating a rumble that was heard all the way to Nixon's White House who signed all these bills into law because he feared the rumble of the people.

David Freeman: Yeah, I don't go out on my way to pay you a compliment, but Nader's Raiders knew what the hell they were talking about. And even the so-called activists nowadays, I mean, and I have great admiration for the Sunrise Movement and the young people that are talking good about climate, but they don't have a program. I mean, Green New Deal is a terrific slogan, but there isn't anybody advocating anything to implement it, that I see. I mean it's easy to talk about getting clean in 2030 and 2040. You know, how much political courage does it really take to go to Paris and have a nonbinding agreement and come back here and say in 2030 or 2040, we're going to be net 100% renewable? And they put the word net in front of it, that means they're going to have an offset. And so, if you're clean in Africa, you can pay for it. And you're okay in America. I mean it is an embarrassment to me to hear what the good guys have been saying. So, I do kind of divide the world up to now into two categories. There are the dumb deniers that just don't believe in the science or don't care. And then there are the intelligent deniers that talk a good game, but they hadn't done a damn thing that Mother Nature notices. I mean, we were burning as much gasoline until the virus hit us as we were 20 years ago, because we've got about double the number of cars, and they're all burning gas, but with the virus showed us that we can probably get by with half the transportation. And when we start giving these big companies billions and trillions of dollars, can't we attach some conditions to them? I mean, the automobile industry, I don't know if they're getting money out of this or not. They probably will, but even in the last recession, I mean we had a chance to tell the automobile industry, "Yeah, we'll bail you out if you start making only zero emission cars." And we didn't do that. We haven't exerted the leverage that we have. My criticism, frankly, Ralph, is more of the good guys than the folks that are just emotionally incapable of accepting the fact that we have a problem or intellectually incapable or just incapable. But now, it's a whole new ball game and rather than criticizing, my purpose is to try to get the mayors--big city mayors and governors are among the best public elected officials we've got--so why, in the name of common sense, can't they bring some people who know something about the subject into their offices and build a climate action? Not talk, but [build] climate action into the recovery plan? You know, if everybody had the option of staying home and working at home half

the time, I just think a lot of people would take it. Why not propose changing the tax laws so that business travel is not tax deductible? If you put your mind to it, there's a hundred things that can be done that could just knock the hell out of the amount of energy we're using. When would be a better time to have a massive energy efficiency program in which you require these utilities to invest in efficiency? I mean one of the ways to bring greenhouse gases down is just not burn as much. And then what's left, we can electrify.

“Stand up, stand up, stand up”

Steve Skrovan: It was a hot summer with not only a pandemic raging, but the streets were on fire with protests over police brutality. We invited activist and broadcaster Glen Ford from the *Black Agenda Report* to give us his take.

Glen Ford: On a moral level, in some ways, the battle against the cops has been won, but not in terms of all the substantive changes that have to be made in order to dismantle that warrior cop and to undo the armed occupation of Black America. But in a moral sense, the inviolability of the warrior hero cop has been shattered and that has been a beautiful thing to see. There is no profession in the United States that has been [more] glorified by the masked genius and mischief of media than the cop. The cop dominates popular television and movies. And to bring that hero down from his/her pedestal is a lot harder than pulling a statue of Columbus down from his.

Ralph Nader: Well, the hardline elements in the police and the police union are helping what you're just saying because they're pushing back. They don't want any accountability, literally. I mean, they've stated it in more extreme positions--we don't want accountability; we don't want effective citizen review boards; we don't want people to tell us not to do chokeholds. We want to do what we want to do. And so, in the movement to defund the police/to change the police, there's a lot of nuance here in terms of the kind of changes that are needed, the kind of activities that shouldn't be part of the police in the first place. The issue of community policing, the issue of prosecutors fronting for the police. They can never get any action against these terrible homicides that are going on around the country; the police get off. What's your characterization of the role of the police? What would you do ideally here?

Glen Ford: Well, the police have impunity and they have been afforded impunity, because there was a consensus belief by the wider American public--that means White people--that the police were not abusing their impunity from prosecution. They were using it against the right people. That is, they were using it against Black folks and a criminal class that deserved no quarter. Well, all of that's been shattered, and we see in cities all across the country these special protections for police are now on the block. But it must be said that the Congressional Black Caucus has been as protective of the impunities of the police and as protective of the militarization of the police as any other block of legislators on Capitol Hill. Back in 2014, when the whole Congress had a chance to repeal, to get rid of the infamous 1033 Program [LESO--the Law Enforcement Support Office] that allows the Pentagon to distribute billions of dollars in military weapons and gear to local police departments. In 2014 that 1033 program was up for repeal, but 80% of the Congressional Black Caucus voted to continue the militarization of local police. And then in 2018, there was a vote on a bill, the Protect and Serve Act, that made police a protected class. And this is already the most protected group of citizens in the United States. But this bill made them an even more protected class and made assault on police a federal crime. Assault on police is what happens to you; that's what you're charged with every time they kick your butt. Seventy-five percent of the Congressional Black Caucus voted for that, so the police have a chokehold on Black democratic politics as well.

“Stand up, stand up, stand up”

Steve Skrovan: All throughout the election season, we heard the word “socialism” used as both a cudgel and a magic wand. In late summer, we spoke to Nathan Robinson, the author of *Why You Should Be a Socialist* to explore if anyone really knows what the word “socialism” even means.

Ralph Nader: We should start with the definition of socialism, because as you know, it’s in the eye of the beholder. The classic definition, back over hundreds of years, is socialism is government ownership of the means of production. I don’t see anybody who calls themselves a socialist or a democratic socialist, whether it’s Bernie Sanders or AOC, [Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez] or yourself, who express that broad-gauge definition. So, what do you think of socialism in the US? What’s your definition?

Nathan Robinson: Well, I think, yeah, I think government ownership of the means of production has never been a definition that self-described socialists have embraced. Because if we think about it, a monarchy could have government ownership of the means of production, but it wouldn’t be anything that would be associated with the goals and values that the socialist movement has pushed for. In fact, even on the sort of ownership of the means of production definition, we should be clear that it’s about public ownership which is quite different. The reason I bring that up is because socialism has always centered [around] the public, the commons, the workers. It’s always been a movement that has started off foundationally, oppositional to a class system, right? You ask ten socialists for a definition of socialism, you’re going to get ten different answers. The same is true with democracy. The same is true with justice, right? That doesn’t make it a meaningless concept, but it does mean that there’s a lot of internal debate. In writing this book, I tried to figure out well what are the threads that are common among people who use this term and people who have used it historically? Really, most socialists begin with a sort of revulsion at hierarchy and class. Ownership is a big part of it; who owns, right? Who gives the orders and who takes the orders? The socialists foundationally have seen the narrow concentration of ownership as something that is revolting to the sense of justice. The reason that public ownership has always been such a big part of what socialists have pushed for is because it’s not just government ownership, right? Because it’s democratizing ownership. It’s making sure that, the classic definition is the people who work in the factories ought to own them. There ought to be a democratic economy. Democratizing the economy has really been the foundational principle of socialism. That’s something you do hear running through today.

“Stand up, stand up, stand up”

Steve Skrovan: In late fall, Professor Adolph Reed joined us to talk about his controversial ideas about emphasizing class over race in the fight for justice. He talked about the distinction between the term “racial democracy” for those who emphasize race and the term “social democracy” for those who emphasize class.

Adolph Reed: While it’s certainly true that the different metrics of equality or social justice aren’t mutually exclusive, they do stem from fundamentally different normative presumptions, right? And it’s possible to hold both certainly, but one of them is a standard of justice that some of us have described as racial democracy, right? That is to say that the ideal is that Blacks or other non-Whites would be distributed up and down the hierarchy of American capitalist society in rough proportion to their percentages in the overall population. And that’s a legitimate standard of social justice or of racial justice, certainly. But it contrasts with the principle of social democracy, which focuses more on overall inequality, like from top to bottom across groups. And what we’ve seen

over the last 40 years is that the U.S. has certainly made some progress more than is apparent from sort of crude measures like median Black versus White income or wealth. But the society has made significant progress along the lines of the principle of racial democracy since the mid-1960s. But it's happened, and one of the dynamics that has obscured the extent of progress; and by progress, I mean, in particular, you know, opening up of occupational categories and the jobs and occupations, improved income, progress in terms of racial democracy, right? How many Black Ivy League professors were there in 1960, for instance? But it's occurred at the same time that the society has become more and more starkly unequal on the standard of social democracy. And while it is in principle possible, in fact, most Black racial advocates or civic elites from the mid-1930s through the 1960s embraced both norms, they aren't necessarily joined, right? And it is possible to stress one or the other. And one of the things that my colleagues and I, comrades and I, have been arguing, is that in what currently passes for a left in the U.S., the principle of racial democracy has vastly overwhelmed the principle of social democracy. And in fact, people who embrace the former tend to denounce the latter. I mean, that's what leads to contentions like the New Deal and other universalistic programs are racist because Blacks don't benefit. In the first place, that's a caricature of what happened in the New Deal, but it also points to the degree to which racial democratic discourse has been mobilized against the social democratic discourse. And frankly, nothing has spoken more clearly to that effect than the responses of the political elites to the two Sanders campaigns, where in each case, Bernie was attacked from the nominal left by people who contended that his programs weren't race-first enough. But somehow a corporate shill like Hillary Clinton, and now even Joe Biden, are considered preferable to Sanders.

Steve Skrovan: And then Professor Reed and Ralph discussed the protest movement and how protests is good at mobilizing people. But for the left and social justice advocates to achieve anything lasting they have to move from mobilizing to organizing.

Ralph Nader: They have to find a way to step it up is the way I would say it. I mean Trump comes in and he turns on the throttle toward deepening fascism. And they haven't figured out a way to step up their confrontation and their mobilization against Trump; even their language is wonky. It's not up to Trump.

Adolph Reed: No, exactly. That's exactly right. Yeah. And I mean, part of it too, and that's quite an important perspective, Ralph. Because part of it too is that the nostalgic of new reflections, and I think people from our era are as guilty of this as anybody else, the tendency to look back nostalgically on the youth mobilizations in the sixties, around the civil rights movement or around the war, and to expect too much from protests. I mean, we were able to win what we won partly because the demands didn't fundamentally challenge the system, partly because with respect to the anti-war movement, I think Ho Chi Minh and the anti-war movement inside the military made it easier for us to win there. But we were able to win ultimately because there was a center of gravity or because the center of gravity among the governing elites was open to a kind of liberal reformism that has not been the case since Reagan and especially since Clinton. But the practice continues. So protest has to presume some kind of neutral-to-sympathetic ear among the ruling class; we don't have that anymore. So protest can't do that work by itself anymore. Jane McAlevey, the long-time organizer and now a sociologist also makes a crucial distinction between what she calls mobilizing and organizing. And mobilizing comes down to marshaling the constituencies that you have to do stuff. And the focus of organizing is on creating a constituency that you need through deep connections with people. I mean, you know, our work with the Debs-Jones-Douglass Institute like in South Carolina, particularly, but elsewhere also, is focused on the premise that we don't have the base that we need to make the change that we want. We can't count on a sympathetic ear

from the governing elites of whatever party. So one of the objectives has to be to take the approach of connecting with people who don't already agree with us to try to broaden the base to meet the challenge. But I'm sure that all of us on this call have the experience of going to the protest rallies where we see the same 200, or if you're in New York, 2000 people, whom you see over and over again. And everyone feels better about it, but we don't have any impact on anything, because we don't have like the sympathetic or open voices within the governing institutions anymore.

Ralph Nader: Well, you know, there's a certain pleasure that progressives get out of brilliant diagnosis of injustice, systemic injustice.

Adolph Reed: Right. No, that's true. And they will diagnose over and over and over and over.

Ralph Nader: I thought it's an important distinction between mobilizing and organizing. Another one is discriminatory injustice gets people very angry who are at the brunt of the injustice. But indiscriminatory injustice, which global corporations are very good at on climate disruption with floods and hurricanes. And who do you think is the brunt of that--usually lower-income people. That doesn't get as much attention. And indiscriminatory injustice, to me, is a very neglected mobilizing and organizing concept.

“Stand up, stand up, stand up”

Steve Skrovan: After the election, we spoke to David Dayen of *The American Prospect* where he and Ralph talked about why progressive issues won but many down-ballot Democratic candidates lost.

Ralph Nader: You see, they don't learn from their own history; that's why they lost in 2016. They didn't have a ground game; they didn't have an organizing game. Hillary was very smug and complacent and spent all the money on TV saying Trump was unfit to be president. There was no bread and butter agenda, no answering to especially white male blue-collar workers, what does a Democratic win mean to them. She downplayed the minimum wage issue.

David Dayen: And I'll tell you what, Ralph, I have a piece actually this week. When you look at the bread and butter issues that were on ballots across the country, they all did extremely well. The minimum wage, \$15 an hour minimum wage, was on the ballot in Florida and it needed 60% and it got over that threshold. This is the 23rd straight minimum wage increase ballot measure that has passed all across the country including in very conservative states like South Dakota and Alaska. And so the minimum wage increase gets 60% in Florida and Joe Biden gets, I don't know, 47%, 48%. So, if you actually look at, divorced from candidates, the issues that passed all around the country, and there were more than just minimum wage. There was a tax increase on the rich for education in Arizona. There was a paid family and medical leave system put in place in Colorado and on and on. And I did a piece at prospect.org about it. The issues, when people are going to get something tangible out of it, people are on board with that. It's when it filters down and the candidates just decide not to foreground those issues that they run into problems.

“Stand up, stand up, stand up”

Steve Skrovan: And we want to end this year in review on an upbeat note. In late November, we spoke to young activist Katie Fahey from Michigan. Katie was angered by the water crisis in Flint, and realized that gerrymandering in her home state was skewing the priorities of the people. So, at age 26, with no previous political experience or even interest, she launched a grassroots referendum campaign, got support from the both the left and the right to create a non-partisan

commission that would draw more representative districts. And guess what? She won.

Ralph Nader: You know Katie, I listened to you being interviewed by Michel Martin on NPR, and something was very, very compelling that you said, and I want to quote it. You said "We live in communities. Our neighbors could be Democrats, Republicans, Independents, people who vote [or] people who don't vote, but we all care about our local community--our water, our schools, our safety, our ability to make a livelihood, and that's the last thing politicians are thinking about when they're drawing these lines," meaning the gerrymandering lines. Any last things you want to tell our listeners who by now are exhibiting symptoms of enthusiasm?

Katie Fahey: [laughter] I do think that all of us probably have so many things that we care about and it can feel really overwhelming to figure out where is the best place that you can put probably the little energy you have on top of everything else going on in your life. But I just want to emphasize that in years ending in zero, 2020, redistricting is going to happen whether we like it or not. And it is going to impact - these election maps are going to be drawn this year and are going to be stuck in place until 2031. So, anything you can do to try and make that process more fair, more transparent, make sure that your voice is at least being heard, has such a higher chance of having an impact that will guarantee future generations of voters have more equitable elections, I would just say it is so worth the investment. And if you're looking for any way to do that, there are so many places that can help, but thepeople.org is one of those places. And you won't regret it, too. It seems a little wonky; it can sometimes be hard to happen to something you know about, yet you haven't been in the process. But it will be worth it and I do think your community deserves it.

Ralph Nader: And Katie, I assume that The People, the organization that you head, that people can go to thepeople.org [and] you're willing to help people from all over the country, so if some of our listeners and others contact you and say can you give us some advice, you'll be perfectly willing to do that I take it?

Katie Fahey: Yes, 100%. We focus on helping people figure out their path to action as well as connecting you to other people where you live who also care about it.

Steve Skrovan: I want to thank our guest again David Bollier and all the great guests we've had throughout the year. For those of you listening on the radio that's our show. 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. For Ralph's weekly column, it's free, go to Nader.org. For more from Russell Mokhiber go to CorporateCrimeReporter.com.

Steve Skrovan: For a copy of *The Day the Rats Vetoed Congress*, go to RatsReformCongress.org. Also check out the *Ralph Nader and Family Cookbook: Classic Recipes from Lebanon and Beyond*. We'll link to both of those. The producers of the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* Jimmy Lee Wirt and Matthew Marran. Our Executive Producer is Alan Minsky.

David Feldman: Our theme music "Stand Up, Rise Up" was written and performed by Kemp Harris. Our proofreader is Elisabeth Solomon. Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. Thank you, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you everybody and help the grieving but organized families in their fight for airline safety and to keep the 737 Max grounded. You can go to Nader.org to get buttons

described as Axe the Max to support and spread the idea of a consumer boycott. You won't fly that plane if it's allowed to get into the air.