

## RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 393 TRANSCRIPT

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

**David Feldman:** Good morning.

**Steve Skrovan:** Nice to have you here as well as it's nice to have the man of the hour, as always, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

**Ralph Nader:** Hello. Very good to be here. This is gonna shock some people this program, but it's also going to motivate them.

**Steve Skrovan:** Yes. Always very provocative.

And it takes a lot of dirty work to make our modern lives look this clean. Our smartphones rely on rare earth metals that are hazardous to extract. Most of the meat we eat comes from industrial slaughterhouses with brutal killing floors. The natural gas in our stoves and the petroleum in our cars come from fracking and drilling operations. All of these processes do harm – harm to the planet, harm to non-human animals, and harm to the workers who carry them out.

These are the jobs we don't like to think about, but they're all done for our benefit. What harmful systems are we complicit in? How do we stop externalizing these ethically troublesome jobs onto less privileged members of our society? We'll ask our guest, Eyal Press, journalist and author of *Dirty Work: Essential Jobs and the Hidden Toll of Inequality in America*. And if we have time at the end, Ralph will answer some of your listener questions. As always, we'll check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell, Mokhiber. But first, do we have any idea what terrible acts are being done in our name? Do we have the will to know, David?

**David Feldman:** Eyal Press is a journalist and sociologist. He has authored several books, including *Absolute Convictions*[: *My Father, a City, and the Conflict That Divided America*], *Beautiful Souls*[: *Saying No, Breaking Ranks, and Heeding the Voice of Conscience in Dark Times*], and *Dirty Work*. All available at your local bookstore. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Eyal Press.

**Eyal Press:** Thanks so much for having me on.

**Ralph Nader:** Yeah. Welcome indeed. I thought the title was an understatement, Eyal. *Dirty Work: Essential Jobs and the Hidden Toll of Inequality in America*. Readers should know the book focuses on about half a dozen categories of work, which we'll get into, but it has a 15-page introduction which summarizes the book at one level, but you have to read the whole book to get the stories that Eyal tells. I mean, he didn't just rely on reports from OSHA [Occupational Safety and Health Administration]. He traveled to these areas. He talked to people, followed up talking to various people. So it's full of gripping stories about what people go through and the amazing

tolerance they have to harm and risk and deprivation and disruption of their family life, which perhaps some psychologists will get around to explaining.

Now you define dirty work in many places in the book, but the summary place where you define it is on page 252. And here it is. "Dirty work has a number of essential features. One of them is that it causes substantial harm to other people or to the natural world. Another is that it causes harm to the workers themselves either by leading people to feel they have betrayed their own values or by making them feel stigmatized and devalued by others." And for the job to qualify as dirty work, it needs to involve doing something that "good people", the so-called respectable members of society see as morally sully and would never want to do themselves. This is true of the work performed by slaughterhouse laborers, prison guards, by the joystick warriors or the operators of drones in the military, and by offshore oilrig roustabouts that are all discussed in the book. Let me ask you the first question. In all the interviews you've done on this book, what are the kind of questions you wished you were asked that you were not?

**Eyal Press:** Well, I have to say, Ralph, I'm kind of delighted that you took issue with the title as being understated and that it didn't adequately speak to I gather what you feel is the exploitation and brutality of the subject matter of the book. But I think that, for me, the key word in the title is "hidden," because everything about dirty work--whether it we're talking about the dirty work of targeted assassinations and America's never ending wars or the dirty work of hacking apart animals in industrial slaughterhouses or the dirty work of warehousing the mentally ill in jails and prisons--the key feature that comes up again and again is that this is work and activity that is concealed. It is geographically out of the way. It is often hidden because of secrecy laws in the case of the drone program. And yet--and to me, this is the most important thing about dirty work--it's very central to our lives and to the prevailing social order in this country. So it's that combination of dependency on this type of labor and hiding of it that really grabbed me and made me think I have to write a book about this and I have to go and talk to the people on the front lines of the dirty work.

**Ralph Nader:** Which of course is what you did. You should know, of course, that this is just the latest cycle of discovery. When we were pushing through the Occupational Safety and Health Agency in 1970 in Congress, Congress didn't want to have hearings featuring workers you would now call doing dirty work. So we brought some coal miners who were afflicted with coal miners' pneumoconiosis to the Senate hearing. It was chaired by Jennings Randolph of West Virginia. He didn't wanna have that, but we put enough pressure in the press--the *New York Times* and others, so he couldn't say no. And these workers stood in front of the senators with a doctor and the doctor said to him, "Would you please jump up and down for just a few seconds?" And they jumped up and down and totally lost breath. They could hardly breathe because their lungs had been shredded by years of particulate coal dust called coal miners' pneumoconiosis.

And you're right. It was very difficult to get the dirty work that workers do and harm themselves and shorten their lives as well, and get virtually no compensation for their injuries when they can no longer do it before Congress. Congress, even when they went out to the field to campaign, they would never go into these areas where the dirty work was going on. They would go to places where the factories would clean up and the workers would be presentably offered to make some comments to visiting senators and representatives.

We then put out a book called *The Workers[: Portraits of Nine American Jobholders]*, which profiled workers the way you did. And we profiled, for example, a New York taxi driver. I have no idea what a taxi driver goes through in congestion, in pollution, in sitting hour after hour, the noise of the streets, sometimes the harassment of the customers in the back, the risk at night. And the book was discarded by the very people you're describing now. In other words, people who benefit from all these workers don't want to recognize the costs that these workers are paying and inflicting on nature and their families that the vast bulk of the population benefits from.

So here's my question. I assume you wrote this book not just to inform people and to arouse people, but to get something changed. And I noticed in the index, you don't have much on Congress. And having read the whole book, there isn't that much on Congress and it's periodic attentiveness, however, limited to the problems in the workplace that you described. Do you expect to take this further beyond giving interviews? Do you expect to become an advocate? Would you consider testifying before Congress? I mean, you are one of the experts now in the country. Would you consider writing a letter to the [US] Senate Health, Education, Labor [and Pensions] Committee, which has got plenty of staff? They're not very overworked. Bernie Sanders is on it. Patty Murray from Washington State is the chair. And a similar letter to the [US] House Committee on Education and Labor, which has some pretty progressive people on it? Congress is sort of moribund on this issue. They underfund OSHA. They don't have the hearings that you would like to have. Do you see yourself as an activist and not simply as an author?

**Eyal Press:** I have to say that I very much hope that people like Bernie Sanders read the book and call for and draw attention to the issues that I raise in it. I'd be delighted. And if I were called to talk about it, I certainly would be open to it. But I do think that my particular skills are different and my role for that matter are different from the advocates. I am not a believer in journalistic objectivity. I don't think that journalists and reporters and writers are ever purely objective, nor should they be. But think the skills I bring and the role I play in this is – well, you've touched on some of them, but first of all is to tell a series of gripping stories because stories matter. They matter in how what we consider valuable and what we pay attention to. And they also matter in alerting us to injustices. Without a good story, a statistic can easily be ignored. So this is a book of stories and it is about the workers on the front lines of this dirty work. And that's my, I think, particular skill to try to really humanize and draw a kind of portrait that is multilayered and empathic at the same time that it's in some ways shocking and alarming. And I think that the book hopefully will hit at people on multiple levels.

**Ralph Nader:** Let me disabuse you, Eyal. We want to have a very candid conversation here. We live in a world of golden age of muckrakers. Your book is just one of them. More books come out now in a month--muckraking corrupt companies, industries, worldwide, domestic, local, tearing into government corruption, union corruption in one month than came out in a year or two years in the 1960s. We live in the golden age of exposé documentaries, massive series, wonderful documentaries, and yet very little happens. Very little happens.

The corporations become bigger, more powerful, more monopolistic [with] more control over governments, more control over media, more control over people than ever before. The corporate supremacists have never had it so good and they pay less taxes; they get corporate welfare,

middle class taxpayers cycling into subsidies, giveaways, bailouts, you name it, inflated government contracts. So this is a long way of saying, Eyal, you are absolutely crucial. You are not entitled to the indulgence, which I predicted you would engage in, by saying, "I see my role as an author, a storyteller, a reporter."

When I came out with *Unsafe at Any Speed*, and it got a lot of headlines, I knew nothing was gonna happen in Congress cause I knew congressional history. It's very rare. As you say in your book, Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, the novelist, that came out in the early 20th century did lead to the Food and Drug Act in the first decade of the 20th century. But by and large, most of these books just go nowhere on Capitol Hill. So you have to ask yourself, well, you know, I better enlarge my mission because I know more about this than almost anybody in the country. There are experts in different areas of what you describe, but very few people have woven it together. And we're gonna get to the drone operators in a few minutes because I know listeners are very interested in that.

So I'm asking you, instead of saying, "Yeah. If I'm asked I'll testify," you know you're not gonna be asked. You actually have to ask. You have to get people like [US Senators] Bernie Sanders and Patty Murray and others who are deemed to be progressive, the squad, AOC [Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez], to basically say we wanna have congressional hearings and we want one of our lead witnesses to be Eyal press. What do you say?

**Eyal Press:** Well, you know, I'm not sure that that's the best measure of it. But as I said, if a hearing is called and they invite me I'd be happy to talk about what I know. I think I do know a fair amount about all of these subjects that are in the book, the five or six areas I look at closely. So I don't really see it as, you know...

**Ralph Nader:** Okay. So you you're willing to do it, but you won't take the initiative. You'll have to be asked. Is that what you're saying?

**Eyal Press:** You know, I'll stand by what I said before that I think there's a role for advocates to play. There's a role for people like myself to play. And I think that it's not just the gripping stories. It's also the analysis because this is a book in which I try to put those stories into an analytic framework. And I don't think it's that familiar. I actually think there's something new I'm trying to say here. And what I'm trying to say is that the delegation of dirty work in this country, the organization of this work, both mirrors and reinforces inequality, and inequality is something that we talk about all the time in terms of the distribution of wealth and income. At least we talk about it now. We didn't 20 years ago. But thanks to actually a lot of advocates and a lot of people gathering for things like Occupy Wall Street, inequality has become something that Americans are aware of. But I don't think they're very aware of the fact that inequality also shapes who does the dirty work in this society and who doesn't do it and who doesn't see it. And I think that to the extent I can contribute to a deeper and richer conversation about inequality, I'd be very pleased.

**Ralph Nader:** Or in your book, you have a very brief section on sounds and the sounds of the kind of work that's done. I once visited Iowa Beef in Dakota, Nebraska – you mentioned that in your book. I went right after it opened in the early 70s and the sound was overwhelming of the animals moving to their slaughter, of the machines tearing the hides off. Have you thought of

another added dimension to try to get the sounds? And sometimes it's not sounds. The silence of the drone operator pushing a button and evaporating a group of young men in Yemen on a dirt road whose names they don't know and on which they have really no intelligence other than a profile; that's called the signature strike. Tell us more about that--since you did visit a lot of these places--the power of sound, which is hard to convey, obviously in a book. How would you go about it?

**Eyal Press:** Yeah. I mean, well, I think that one of the things I discovered is that when you walk in through the front door to a place like a jail or a prison, or for that matter, an industrial slaughterhouse, you do hear things, you do see things, but it's filtered, it's stage managed, or for that matter, onto a drone base. Because you're walking in through the front door and if you have a reporter's notebook or a tape recorder in your hand, then you're obviously not going to be just watching things unfold as they naturally do. You're being presented with a particular filtered and stage managed picture of what goes on. And so I described that in the book because I think it's quite different from what I heard from the workers, right? So the reality, the prison that I write about in depth was a place where abuse is no less severe than those that took place at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq were taking place. This was torture. This was in some cases murder. And yet when I visited and was shown around, everything looked very clean and nothing looked awry. And so, to me, one of the challenges of writing this book and writing about dirty work is that you have to somehow get inside to get the real picture, and you can't do it just by taking... and I see media doing this all the time, right? They'll send a camera to a drone base and have a little conversation, but you don't get from that the vivid violence and horror that was described to me by several of the drone operators that I interview in the book.

**Ralph Nader:** And in addition, a nice thing about the book is you don't just do a one spot interview. You follow these people's lives. For example, on page 121 in your book, you describe a drone operator whose name was Andy. And when he was invited to speak at the VA Medical Center in Philadelphia, he told the audience, and I'm quoting from the book, "that he grew up in a violent home where he watched his older brother and baby sister endure abuse, which made him want to "protect the defenseless." After high school, he enlisted in the military and became an intelligence operative in Iraq. One night on a mission near Samarra, a city in the Sunni Triangle, a burst of sustained gunfire erupted from the second story window of a house. Andy said he called air to deliver a strike. When the smoke cleared from the leveled home, there was no clear target inside. "I see inside the wasted bodies of 19 men, eight women, nine children," Andy said, choking back tears. "Bakers and merchants, big brothers and baby sisters. I relive this memory almost every day," he went on. "I confess to you that reality is the hope of redemption that we might all wince and marvel at the true cost of war." And that's what I mean. You say you follow three people through in a number of pages. So it isn't just a snapshot of what they tell you in a sort of scripted interview. Could you describe the drone operator scene that you depict in your book?

**Eyal Press:** Yeah. I mean, I think that we just got a very brief glimpse into the reality of the drone program very recently when as [Joe] Biden was pulling out of Afghanistan and getting criticized for it, a drone strike was carried out. It stands out to me because it got a lot of media attention. And as we now know, the targets were not involved in terrorism. There was not an ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria] operative, but rather a family. And I think ten civilians

were killed. And this was all over the news recently, mainly because of the withdrawal and the context. But what I want the audience to know is that that's the kind of thing that people in the drone program see and do all the time. And it's not that every strike is like that one--hits the wrong target--but it is very much the case that they are seeing graphic violence, buildings exploding, folks in villages picking through rubble, trying to see if someone they knew made it out or didn't. That is happening in our never ending wars. And it is the drone operators on these bases who are seeing it, but it is the rest of us. It is the society they live in that really bears the responsibility in a wider sense. Because after all, the drone program and these drone strikes were a very convenient way for the United States to continue extending a kind of unlimited military power, basically assuming the right to carry out these strikes, even in countries with which we're not formally at war in the aftermath of Iraq and Afghanistan, which cost a lot in terms of both treasure and in terms of American lives. And so I think that it's very important when we read headlines, like the recent ones, that we know that that's not exceptional. That is what is happening. That is part of what I say is the dirty work that's being done in our name.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, back to Christopher Aaron who had graduated from [College of] William & Mary and came from a progressive household. He had a rather thorough analysis of what he went through even though it was extensively traumatic in his subsequent life. And I thought there was a little passage in your book that would answer some people who would say, "Hey, this is after 9/11. We gotta get the bad guys over there. So they don't have to do it again." And drone operators in Virginia and Nevada, hundreds of them, sort of a nine-to-five job then they go home and have dinner and come back the next morning. They gotta do it. And it saves the lives of US soldiers. And it's thousands of miles away and it's cheaper and better and more humane.

Well, Christopher Aaron, I think, confronted this directly when he said, in your book, "At one interfaith meeting, Chris mentioned that he and his colleagues used to wonder if they were playing the game of Whack-A-Mole – killing one terrorist to only see another pop up in his place. He had come to see the drone program as an endless war whose short term successes only sowed more hatred in the long term while siphoning resources to military contractors that profited from its perpetuation. On other occasions, Chris spoke about the diffusion of responsibility, the world of agencies and decisionmakers in the drone program that made it difficult to know what any single actor had done. This is precisely the way the military wanted it. He suspected enabling targeted killing operations to proceed without anyone feeling personally responsible. And yes, if anything, Chris felt an excess of remorse and culpability convinced that targeted killings had very likely made things worse."

Now, as you point out, [Barack] Obama increased the number of drone attacks tenfold from George W. Bush. I think the estimate was 600 of them during his terms. Tell us what the *New York Times* meant in its exposé of what it called "Killer Tuesday" in the White House, where Obama was asked to make thumbs up, thumbs down decisions as to who was going to be subsequently evaporated thousands of miles away. What was Killer Tuesday all about?

**Eyal Press:** Well, I think, Ralph, if you will, I want to just go back to what you said earlier because you addressed people who say, Well, we have to do this because it saves lives and it keeps our soldiers out of harm's way, and you know, it's cheaper and more precise and so forth. And what I wanna say to those people, if they're out there thinking that, that is exactly what

Christopher Aaron thought himself. And in fact, it was after 9/11 that he felt a surge of patriotism. And he thought of his grandfather who had served in World War II and he wanted to do something similar. He wanted to help protect his country from the folks who were responsible for 9/11. But what ends up happening, if you follow his story as I do, is that this impulse leads him actually into the drone program. And he becomes an analyst, counter terrorism expert, and an analyst and sees these strikes being carried out. And then he goes to Afghanistan at one point, and this is the key turning point in Chris's story because he goes there believing that the mission is working and that the terrorists are being defeated and that everything that inspired him to do what he did was the right thing. And what he discovers is that not only is there not the kind of progress he assumed going on the ground, but actually it's in reverse, that things on the ground in Afghanistan are getting worse. And keep in mind, this was 12, 14, 15 years ago. This was not 2021. Though as we all know, in 2021, the United States withdrew its forces finally. And lo and behold, the Taliban took over the country instantly. But Chris had a glimpse of that years ago. And what happened is his belief that we were actually winning this war was shattered. And out of that disillusionment, he starts to ask questions [like] who are these strikes actually hitting? What does that do in the villages we're supposed to be winning over hearts and minds in? What is the long term effect of all of this going to be? And his belief in what he's doing unravels. And as it unravels, he starts to have a physical breakdown and eventually actually is diagnosed with PTSD [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder]. And what I show in the drone section of the book is that even though these drone strikes are hidden from the public and we very rarely see the footage; we don't see it on television; we don't talk about it. You don't hear candidates for president debating whether these strikes should happen or not. The people in the drone program do see the consequences. And that is one of the reasons there is a very high rate of burnout in that program even though these are soldiers who are never actually setting foot on the battlefield.

**Ralph Nader:** And you know, the good thing about the way you portrayed this, you describe what it felt like on the ground for the Afghan people. Most people don't know that these drones are 24 hours a day with that whining sound of terror. They just terrorize the children. They keep people awake at night. They don't know when a missile is gonna strike. And to make this point more memorable, on page 151, you cite a report that came out of New York University School of Law based on 130 interviews in survivors of drone strikes in an area of Pakistan, including Khalil Khan “who rushed to the scene of a missile fire,” I'm quoting from your book, “from a drone that slammed into a meeting of suspected militants in the town of Datta Khel. Khan spent the rest of the day ‘gathering pieces of flesh and putting them in a coffin,’ he told the researchers. One of dozens of coffins paraded through the streets by grieving villagers after the attack on the meeting, which turned out to be a gathering of tribal elders who had come together to resolve a mining dispute. ‘They are always surveying us,’ said one villager quoted in the report.” This is referring to the drones. “‘We're scared to do anything,’ complained another. The ceaseless buzzing of the eyeless planes circling overhead precipitated emotional breakdowns, running indoors or hiding when drones appear above, fainting, nightmares, and other intrusive thoughts, hyper startled reactions to loud noises. Some villages were so frightened they refused to send their children to school. Others avoided crowded places.” And probably the most poignant example in your book was when a drone operator after the missile was released and blew apart a father, the little child was seen collecting the pieces of his father and putting it together, his arms and leg and head.

Listeners, you should know that these are undeclared wars. They're unconstitutional. They violate international treaties. They violate federal statutes. Congress turned itself into an inkblot in all of these wars as they were called endless wars. And the buck has to stop in the White House and Congress, Eyal. And that's why I want you to describe what I don't think any president before or since has ever done--literally look at the targets in the White House brought to him by his military advisors and make the decision of who gets evaporated and who doesn't in places like Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia, et cetera. And that was Barack Obama. Killer Tuesday is what the *New York Times* said his advisors called that day in the White House. What can you tell us about that?

**Eyal Press:** Well, I think what I can say is, and it actually applies to all of the different forms of dirty work that I look at in the book, which is that these are not policies and practices for which one party is responsible. They actually are things that by and large had a fair amount of bipartisan support or that were carried on under both Democratic and Republican administrations. That's true of the drone wars. It's also true of mass incarceration, which was a decades long endeavor, multiple decades, in which Democrats like Bill Clinton played a crucial role. It's also true of the section of the book on dirty energy, where I talk out our dependence and addiction to fossil fuels and the degree to which Congress, but also multiple presidents over administration after administration, authorized offshore drilling. In the case of the Biden administration right now, you have on the one hand the climate crisis being elevated to a national security issue and a priority for the country and at the same time pressure being put on OPEC [Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries] to lower prices.

So the point of the book is not to point a finger at one party or the other. It's to say that these things have deeper roots and have been supported much more broadly across the political spectrum often. I guess just to finish on the drone thing, to me, the real problem is the fact that we don't even talk about it as a society. We don't even debate it anymore. I kept waiting for just one question about this to be raised at any of the debates in the primaries on either the Democratic or Republican side, through not only the last presidential cycle, but the previous one. And at no point was it raised.

We had all this conversation about Black site prisons and Guantanamo and torture that was authorized under President Bush. And that did lead to a kind of national reckoning – at least to some extent, of talking about whether this should be done or not. But drone warfare really took it off the table and removed it from public discussion. And to me, that's the biggest problem. That's the violation of integrity, that as a society, we're not actually saying, yeah, this is what we do; this is what we're behind, and we're okay with it.

And you mentioned that description in that report. The reason I included that in my book is that we have to think about drone warfare not just as a strike that happens once in a while, but as the constant surveillance and the constant fear. What is it that frightens people about suicide bombings? It's not actually the statistical likelihood that you might actually be in a cafe when a bomb explodes and you'll be there. It's the total randomness and the idea that it could happen at any time that really is terrifying to people. And I think with drones, it's very similar at least to the people who live under them, right? That's ceaseless buzzing that you mentioned. So I think that it's the hiddenness and the lack of conversation, that to me, is the most troubling thing.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, there's one thing more troubling, at least in my view, it's that there's not enough finger pointing at the institutions of government that should be enforcing safe workplace practices law, protecting the environment, and making sure that laws are applied to military force abroad like Congress in the White House. And that's where the greatest silence really is and the greatest complicity. As you indicate, Congress has hardly played a role in any of these areas that you describe other than to let it happen, even though they're supposed to be overseeing the enforcement of these laws, like occupational health and safety, like water pollution prevention laws. And of course the White House has taken and a lot of congressional authority and now regardless of Democrat or Republican in the White House, they can start any wars they want anywhere, kill anybody they want, just accuse them of imperiling the national security--prosecutor, judge, jury, executioner--mostly in secret. So I really think you do have to hold the people who take oath of office to enforce the laws of the land under our Constitution and statutes and treaties responsible and accountable. Otherwise, you know what's gonna happen is people are gonna be so overwhelmed with dismay and the fear of what you describe in this book, they just withdraw into cynicism instead of coming down hard on Congress and the White House. But I want to get you describing the slaughterhouses and the mental health brutality in our prisons. Why don't you start with the slaughterhouses.

**Eyal Press:** Sure. Let me just respond, though, to one thing you just said. I think that's a fair criticism. This is not a book that's heavy policy and naming the names in Congress who passed laws and so forth. But I do want listeners to know there is a chapter of the book about the failure, the abject failure of OSHA to protect the lives, health, and safety of America's workers, and particularly, during the pandemic, in the case of slaughterhouses where one or two slaughterhouses where multiple workers died were slapped on the wrist. And I mean really slapped on the wrist, you know, \$13,000 fine. And I do point the finger quite explicitly at the then [US] Secretary of Labor, Eugene Scalia, the son of late [US] Supreme Court Justice, Antonin Scalia, and a man who came to the Department of Labor with a well established reputation, not as an advocate of worker safety protections, but rather as a friend to corporations that have tried to roll them back. And the chapter details the role he played in doing so. And then the results we saw during the pandemic as workers in slaughterhouses were forced to go back to work, pressured to go back to the lines, and not protected, where we called them essential workers, but in fact, they were expendable. So I just wanna say that there is some policy in the book and there is some finger-pointing

**Ralph Nader:** Well said. Let me just interject here. The annual budget of OSHA, which is supposed to do with workplaces, 60,000 work related deaths a year, all kinds of diseases and injuries; \$500 million, which is about the budget that the Congress allocated for the US embassy in Baghdad--just to show the proportionality here. And you're quite right about Scalia and what he got away with. And OSHA's derelictions have been basically the result of the White House's derelictions over time. Describe the situation. People who eat meat, chicken, beef, pork. You have some very memorable descriptions of what it's like in the slaughterhouses. Why don't you tell our listeners a little bit of what you found out.

**Eyal Press:** Yeah. I mean, I tried to focus attention on what the workers go through. I think that there have been plenty of books written, very good books, about the brutality of the industrial food system when it comes to the treatment of animals. And I felt like where I could add to the

literature in a significant way was by bringing people up to speed on what the workers go through. And I focus in particular on undocumented immigrants who work in a poultry slaughterhouse in Texas. And at that particular poultry slaughterhouse, for quite a while, these workers, because of the speeding of the lines, which have, again, we talk about the role of the government. Well, the government has authorized that these line speeds can get faster and faster because of corporate pressure, and the result of that is repetitive strain injury and all kinds of physical impairments for the workers on the lines. But in this particular slaughterhouse, it went beyond physical impairments. The female workers at this slaughterhouse were denied bathroom breaks because this would have to slow things down. And everyone did get a break at a certain point in the day for lunch. But because everybody went to the bathroom at that time, you had to wait and you often didn't have time to go. And so what happened? You have workers going to work with an extra pair of pants or sometimes with sanitary napkins so that they will literally be going to the bathroom during their work shift without a break just to avoid being screamed at, just to avoid being reprimanded. That kind of indignity, there really should be no tolerance for it. And yet it's not an isolated case as I researched the meat industry. So talk about an industry that is both hidden from view and yet so connected to the American way of life. It is after all cheap meat and the demand for fast food that is integrally connected to the conditions of both the fast line speeds, the lack of safety precautions, the brutality to the animals and the amount of antibiotics that are pumped into the system and into the factory farms. So all of this is sort of laid out, but I really do focus on these workers. And again, many of them are undocumented.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, one of the things that comes from this book is that people who do the most critical work, which would make possible daily life in America, are paid the least. And people who do the paper pushing, the speculating in Wall Street, people who are just moving daily through bureaucracies that don't produce anything of value, get paid the most. And so in reading your section on slaughterhouses, I was looking for something that was very memorable, because what you described is easily forgotten. For example, when you say the speed of the inspection line, the speed is so fast that a lot of cancerous chickens pass beyond the gaze of the USDA [US Department of Agriculture] inspector and into the stomachs of people back home.

So I wanna read a passage. Listeners, you won't forget this one. It's on page 159 and it's about a worker whose name was Flor, and "she was assigned to 'live hang,' where workers hoisted live chickens out of crates and hooked them by their feet onto metal shackles that were fastened to the conveyor belt that circulated throughout the plant. Once attached to the belt, the birds passed through an electric current, which stunned them, an automated throat slitter, which sliced their necks, and a tank of scalding water, which loosened their feathers. If a chicken somehow emerged from the tank alive, which happened on occasion, a worker wielding a knife would slash its neck manually. The first time Flor saw this, she cried and vowed never to eat chicken again. Most of the time, though, she was in too much agony to think about the chickens. Live hangers, (that was the name of her job) had to put (listen to this) sixty-five birds on the belt per minute." Sixty-five birds per minute. It's actually higher now due to the meat industry pressure at frenetic pace that required lifting the chickens up two at a time, one in each hand, and then immediately reaching down to grab the next pair. All this is supposed to be watched by a USDA inspector who if he or she protests too much is given a reprimand by the politicians who the industry reach in Congress or in state legislatures. So are you eating chicken these days, Eyal?

**Eyal Press:** You know, I have to tell you that I wrote this book because of my own feeling of feeling implicated in all of this and what I used to do is buy the chicken that was labeled organic and humanely raised and so forth. There's a particular company actually, Murray's [Chicken], that sells a lot of that chicken in the Northeast. It may be sold where you are, Ralph. Well, I was satisfied with that until I started learning that, in fact, the conditions can often be even worse in some of these small "humanely raised" places. And in fact, because the line speeds are so fast and the inspectors can't see the defects, what they have increasingly done in poultry is spray chemicals to supposedly to disinfect, to take care of things like salmonella. Well, in a Murray's plant, it was in a Murray's plant that they sprayed the chemicals in such a way that an inspector developed a lung infection and actually died. And the company of course disclaimed responsibility and said it had nothing to do with the spraying of these chemicals. I interviewed this former inspector's wife, who believes to this day that her late husband - José was his name - died because of inhaling these chemicals. And that, too, is not an isolated thing. And it speaks to, if we just think about it, those chemicals are sprayed without any regard for what the workers inhaling them, how it will affect their health over time. That is not regulated. And I found that stunning.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, you also quote Jonathan [Safran] Foer's bestselling book, *Eating Animals*. And he talks about factory farm meat was what he called "tortured flesh, carved off the bones of grossly overfed, genetically engineered chickens, cows and pigs that were crammed into filthy, disease-infested sheds, deprived of sunlight and subjected to untold cruelty and suffering all to maximize the profits of a handful of giant corporations." I'm quoting from your book. So the conditions in the workplace affect the safety of consumers as well, right?

**Eyal Press:** Absolutely. And yet I think that one of the important takeaways, I hope, from my book will be to get people to think about, you know, I just talked about those labels and how deceptive they can be, but let's also note what the labels tell you nothing about. There's nothing that says the workers were humanely treated, right? There's something about the chickens being humanely raised, but there's nothing about the workers.

And that point is not lost on people like Flor Martinez, the worker you described, who I profiled in depth. They're very aware of the fact that consumers out there want in a sense to eat what they eat without feeling bad about it and without feeling like they're eating something that's unhealthy, but also without feeling like they're eating something that where some form of inhumanity was involved. But let's go back to those workers on the line being denied bathroom breaks, or workers who in some plants, the repetitive strain injuries are so great that there's a 100% turnover every year. Those kinds of conditions ought to trouble the conscience of everyone. And yes, they certainly don't serve the interests of consumers.

**Ralph Nader:** Also, there is a pending class action brought by George Farah, who has been on this program on other subjects, against some of the big poultry processing firms for the way they're handling pay, employee pay, and cheating employees. And of course, as you pointed out, a lot of these are undocumented workers who fear to speak up. I'm sure there are some listeners saying right now, where are the unions? What happened to the unions? If they're not unionized, what about the union movement moving in on some of these plants? What's your response? What have the unions done about this?

**Eyal Press:** Well, I actually go back and sketch out historically what unions did in meat packing. And in the 30s, 40s and 50s, the unions were really impressive. And the meat packing union played a very important role, not just in improving conditions for workers, but also in combating racial segregation and racism in places like Chicago. But as I show in the book, and as unfortunately is the case, the industry led by IBP [Iowa Beef Packers, Inc.] and a bunch of others, they fought back against this and adopted what some scholars have called the low-wage strategy. And that is moving the slaughterhouses away from big cities where unions were strong, building plants in remote areas, and then recruiting a very malleable workforce very much by design. And so now, in meat packing, you do have unions, but they don't have the kind of power and clout that they used to have. They're generally on the defensive. In fact, in that poultry slaughterhouse I wrote about, there was a union, but none of the workers I interviewed actually belonged to it. And as they told me, when I interviewed them, they just felt like, you know, they really didn't do much. Now, maybe that was a problem in their own sort of imaginative understanding. A lot of them were Mexican and came from a country where unions generally have been corrupt and on the side of the government and not on the side of ordinary workers. But it's also a reflection of the fact that unions have been severely weakened in this industry.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, one of your most original chapters around chapter one is basically on the main institutions harboring mental health patients in this country are not community mental health centers or hospitals, they're prisons. And you focus in great detail on the Dade [Correctional Institution] prison, which is a state prison 40 miles south of Miami. And this is really one of the most gripping parts of the book because you trace one of the workers, Harriet Krzykowski, through what she went through trying to do the right thing in the prison and how the guards basically told her, "This is our prison. We run it." And the level of sadism and incarceration, solitary incarceration, and mistreatment, and literally deliberately starving the mental health patients by giving them trays without any food on them day by day.

Is there a way to convey this in the time remaining? We're talking with Eyal Press, author of the book, *Dirty Work: Essential Jobs and the Hidden Toll of Inequality in America*. There's no way, listeners, you can do justice to this book. It has this kind of gripping detail and nuance and it keeps challenging you and making you ask yourself the question: "What am I gonna do about this as a citizen, as a consumer, as a taxpayer, as a community participant? What am I gonna do about this?" Describe our prisons here.

**Eyal Press:** Well, I think that, again, it's out of sight, out of mind. But as I show in Dade - for listeners out there who followed the story of Abu Ghraib and the torture and the abuse that took place there - I think I can say without any exaggeration that the things that were going on at the Dade Correctional Institution in the mental health ward were every bit as disturbing and cruel and really unconscionable. And unfortunately, it is when you have a system that has effectively been turned into--these jails and prisons have effectively been turned into mental health asylums, it's not as surprising as we would like to think. Because the guards I spoke to and interview in the book, receive no training in how to help people with psychiatric problems. The mental health aides, as you just noted, Ralph, feel beholden to the guards. They don't run the institution. They're under the guards' control and depend on them. And so it's almost like we've created a system where everything is set up to make abuse and cruelty and mistreatment happen. And then when it does happen and it eventually hits the newspapers on occasion, as the story I wrote about

in Dade did, we're somehow surprised. And I think that if there is a point of the book, it's that we really shouldn't be surprised. What we really need to do is remove the hiddenness and start talking about what is happening in these institutions and what is really being done in our name.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, we're running out of time. We've been talking with Eyal Press who is the author of *Dirty Work: Essential Jobs and the Hidden Toll of Inequality in America*. He is also the author of a previous book called *Beautiful Souls*, which also got very good reviews, and it's a book that challenges the conscience of all of us and reflects, I think, something that we may call introspection. Millions of these workers do the work. If they didn't do it, the economy, the society would collapse. And yet we do not protect them. We do not facilitate their organization. They are underpaid. They have very low, if nonexistent, benefits and the impact on their families and children are horrendous. Thank you very much, Eyal.

**Eyal Press:** Thank you for having me.

**Ralph Nader:** I hope have many more interviews on this book and I hope your publisher sends some of these books to some key members on the two congressional committees that I mentioned.

**Ralph Nader:** Thank you very much. I enjoyed the conversation.

**Steve Skrovan:** We've been speaking with Eyal Press. We will link to his book, *Dirty Work*, at [ralphnaderradiohour.com](http://ralphnaderradiohour.com). Let's take a quick break. 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, September 17th, 2021; I'm Russell Mokhiber. Plaintiffs in mass tort cases are generally **not** happy with their lawyers. That's according to a new study by University of Georgia Law Professor Elizabeth Burch and Margaret S. Williams, a visiting scholar at the Federal Judicial Center. The authors surveyed more than 200 plaintiffs in mass tort cases in which the defendant targeted its product toward women. "Lawyers did little for the clients they stockpiled," Burch and Williams write. "When it came to their attorney experience, 64% of participants were somewhat or deeply dissatisfied; 50% did not feel that they could trust their attorney; 59% received few or no status updates, and 67% did not understand what was happening with their lawsuit." For the *Corporate Crime Reporter*, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

**Steve Skrovan:** Thank you, Russel. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. I'm Steve Skrovan along with David Feldman and Ralph. All right. Let's do some listener questions, David.

**David Feldman:** This first one comes to us from Dale West. "Ralph, the end of negotiations announcement by Ryanair [DAC] and [The] Boeing [Company] is in relation to a potential new large order for [Boeing] 737 Max 10 variants. This appears to be just another cynical negotiating tactic by Ryanair top executives and free publicity for the airline. Ryanair CEO, Michael O'Leary, is regularly generating controversial headlines for free PR and government subsidies for the airline. Ryanair was Boeing's biggest passenger carrier sympathizer during the 18-month

grounding of the Max. Ryanair is still purchasing. 210 [Boeing] 737 Max 8-200s. Deliveries to Ryanair began in June of 2021. It does not appear that this Ryanair announcement is much of a threat to Boeing's 737 Max 8 or 10 production lines.

**Ralph Nader:** Thank you very much, Dale West, for clarifying that. Yeah, there is this kind of game that some of the airlines are playing to get bigger discounts by Boeing on their planes. But it certainly didn't please Boeing to have the kind of headline that came out regardless of the accurate motivation you described behind Ryanair's announcement. They're still customers of Boeing.

**Steve Skrovan:** All right. This next question comes from Paul Cohen and he's referring to the episode we did a while back about the Electoral College. And Paul says, "As a strong advocate of states taking seriously their responsibility to experiment with improving democracy, I do worry about the danger of a constitutional amendment that would take away state control of the electoral process. Our political systems are a mess today and the two-party duopoly is responsible for much of that problem. Adopting the right alternative to plurality voting, which is my preference, (would be balanced approval voting), could go a long way towards eliminating that problem." What do you think Ralph?

**Ralph Nader:** Well, it's not clear, Paul, whether you're arguing for proportional representation. But the states will still have control over the electoral rules in their state under the National Popular Vote movement led by Steve Silberstein, who was on our show. That doesn't take it away from the state. It actually reaffirms the state control in developing this state interstate compact, whereby the states agree with one another that they will give the Electoral College votes to the winner of the presidential national popular vote. I wish we could try to simplify this process because the more complex voting is, the more regulations and details of things that the Texas and Georgia governors have been trying to do, the more people just get so confused and they just turn off. So I like the clarity of the interstate compact.

**Steve Skrovan:** All right. Very good. Thank you for that question, Paul. Thank you for your questions. I wanna thank our guest again, Eyal Press. For those of you listening on the radio, that's our show. For you, podcasts listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material we call "The Wrap Up." A transcript of this show will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* website soon after the episode is posted. For a copy of *The Day the Rats Vetoed Congress*, go to [ratsreformcongress.org](http://ratsreformcongress.org). And also check out *The Ralph Nader and Family Cookbook: Classic Recipes from Lebanon and Beyond*. We will link to both of those on [ralphnaderradiohour.com](http://ralphnaderradiohour.com).

**David Feldman:** 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.

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

**Ralph Nader:** Thank you, everybody. Appropriately responding to the Congress Club proposal we've had underway, my most recent column is on "Congress, [Collectively] Less Than An Inkblot," a vacuum. Thank you.