

## RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 294 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:** Hello. This is the only show where you can hear the conversation that we have.

**Steve Skrovan:** Yeah, it's a great show. And the man of the hour Ralph Nader is here. Hello, Ralph.

**Ralph Nader:** Hello everybody.

**Steve Skrovan:** On the show today, we're going to talk about unions. In 1955, more than a third of American workers were members of a union. Today, that overall number now sits at around 10%. Union membership in the private sector hovers at around 6% or 7%. What happened? In the first half of the show, we welcome a man who has had a long and distinguished career studying and writing about labor issues. His name is Steven Greenhouse and he has written a book entitled *Beaten Down, Worked Up: The Past, Present, and Future of American Labor*. That's just the first part of the show. And the second half of the show, we're going to talk about something that is not unrelated to the first part of the show, and that's how the 1% rule the 99%. Why does the 99% let them? What can be done about that? Ralph wrote a column earlier this month entitled "The Shame of a Nation" where he lays out 19 points that outline that paradox. So David, Ralph and I are going to have a spirited debate about that. In between, we will check in with our tireless *Corporate Crime Reporter* Russell Mokhiber in his Corporate Crime Minute. But let's kick things off with what happened to the union movement. David?

**David Feldman:** Steven Greenhouse is an award-winning reporter who covered labor and workplace issues for 19 years over at the *New York Times*. He has also served as a business and economics reporter as well as a diplomatic and foreign correspondent. His latest work is *Beaten Down, Worked Up: The Past, Present, and Future of American Labor*. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Steven Greenhouse.

**Steven Greenhouse:** Great to be here. I've long had huge respect for Ralph.

**Ralph Nader:** Thank you, Steve. Well, as you know Steve better than anybody, the number of full-time labor reporters for the media has diminished very significantly. It used to be almost every paper in a significant-size city would have a labor reporter. PBS, NPR would have full-time labor reporters. So it's very important you got this book out because books like this, listeners, don't come out every year. So let me get right into it. Most of the workers in our country are not unionized. I think your figures in your book is if you combine public employee unions and corporate workplace unions, about one out of every 10 workers in this country is unionized. In the 1950s, it was 3.5 out of every 10, thirty-five%. So we're dealing with one of the weakest labor union societies in the western world. So can you tell our listeners--I think they're sophisticated enough to know that without labor unions, we wouldn't have had fair-wage standards; we wouldn't have had healthcare; wouldn't have had our weekends; we wouldn't have had a lot of things, so we don't need to go into that. But, compare the state of labor law and labor unions in this country to Western Europe--what

do workers have in Western Europe whether they're members of unions or not that we don't have here?

**Steven Greenhouse:** Thanks. So I wrote this book because I'm concerned that a lot of Americans, especially young Americans, know far too little about unions and what they've accomplished over the years, over the decades and how they've lifted millions and millions of workers. And you think of that bumper sticker "unions, the folks who brought you the weekend". And a second reason I wrote the book is to shine a light on this huge problem that you raised, Ralph, that worker power and unions are far weaker than they used to be and far weaker than they are in other industrial nations and as a result of that, there's this phenomenon that I call "America's anti-worker exceptionalism." So, what do I mean by that? So, the United States sadly tragically, is the only industrial nation that doesn't guarantee all workers paid parental leave [and] paid maternity leave. There are only a handful of other nations in the world that don't offer paid maternity leave--Surinam, Papua New Guinea, and a few tiny Pacific Island states. In the European Union, generally, women are guaranteed at least six months paid maternity leave. In the United States, they're not guaranteed any. Second, the United States is the only industrial nation that doesn't guarantee all workers paid vacation. In the European Union's 28 nations, every worker is guaranteed at least four weeks paid vacation--in Germany five weeks, in France six weeks. Third, the United States and South Korea are the only industrial nations where every worker isn't guaranteed paid sick days. And I'm sad to say I've written several stories over the years about workers who got sick for a day or two and they got fired or their eight-year-old, 10-year-old son or daughter got sick and had to miss school, and the workers took off a day or two to take care of them, and they got fired. And I say in my book that this is crazy that in the world's wealthiest nation, people don't get these basic protections. A fourth important thing that every American worker doesn't . . . isn't guaranteed and that is guaranteed in every other industrial nation--in the United States, workers are not guaranteed health insurance. And in, again, every other industrial nation they're guaranteed health insurance. So what does that mean--that if you work in a factory with a thousand workers and it closes to move to China or Mexico, all thousand workers might not just lose their jobs, but they and their families might lose health insurance. If you work at a big-box store--a Walmart, a Target--and it closes, maybe the 300 workers there will all lose health insurance and their families, too. That doesn't happen in other industrial nations. And I argue in my book that this is really bad for workers and it's a result of there's so much corporate power in the US compared to worker power that when some lawmakers, who care about workers and propose laws to guarantee paid sick days or to provide universal health insurance or to assure that there's maternity leave for every worker, every mother--corporate America stands up, the Chamber of Commerce denounces it we can't do this; this will be too expensive; this will be a horrendous employer mandate. And as soon as the Chamber of Commerce starts shouting about this, all these folks in Congress from a certain party say, we can't do this; this will hurt business--even though American workers are lacking in so many of these fundamental basic protections.

**Ralph Nader:** And, you know, in your book you have some heart-rending, right at the beginning, paragraph by paragraph, on how the workers are mistreated. Patricia Hughes, a licensed practical nurse came down with severe pneumonia while caring for a paraplegic in Colorado, coughing, vomiting with the 103 fever. She called her manager to say she needed to miss work for two days. "I told him I was so weak, there is no way I could care for and move the patient," she said. He responded, "If you don't come in tomorrow, don't bother ever coming back." Too sick to work the

next day, Hughes was fired, and as a result of losing her job, she was evicted from her apartment. I mean, there are millions of examples like that. And so the question, to get to the core of it, I don't think the labor unions, weak as they are, Steven Greenhouse, are fighting with the power that they have, diminished as it is. For example, Labor Day used to be a great event with marches--cities, towns, workers marching, discussions--and it's so weak now that I wrote Richard Trumka earlier this year and I said, you know, I've talked to all these international unions. I said, why don't you rev up Labor Day? Because that's the one day that *Meet the Press* or other mass media will give union leaders their due. It's hard to deny them on the one day of the year. He wrote back saying it's a good idea. He agreed with me. But there's something wrong; they're not as aggressive. I remember meeting Richard Trumka in 2011. Steve, you'll like this story. And I said why aren't you coming big on the minimum wage, as you point out in your book, it's \$7.25 an hour, way below what workers are making in 1968 adjusted for inflation; it should be about \$11 an hour. He pointed out through the window to the White House. He said, "I'm not going to lead on this until he, Obama, leads on it." You remember Obama promised \$9.50 per hour in 2008 campaign. By 2011, never talked about it for four years, so what do you think the unions should do now with their members and with non-union people? Because as you point out in your book, the polls are very high by Americans, including young people, supporting unionization of more and more workers. What do you think, say 123, the union should do more aggressively?

**Steven Greenhouse:** Business, business lobbyists, conservatives, Republicans, *The Wall Street Journal* editorial board are always jumping down and complaining about "Big Labor." And I argue in my book, you know, that labor is not nearly as big or powerful as it used to be and I point out that in the 2015/2016 election cycle, corporations gave \$3.4 B/billion donated in the campaign, which is more than 16 times as much as labor gave. Labor gave \$214 million. In lobbying here in Washington, corporations spent nearly \$3 billion--more than 60 times as much as labor. Labor spends \$48 million. And, you know, labor is totally swamped Trump by business and that's why even though corporate profits with record levels, Republicans, and Congress, and Trump rushed to give this totally unnecessary trillion-dollar tax cut to corporations. So, labor is weaker than it has been before, as you say, Ralph, and they have to get more vigorous and more sophisticated in mobilizing members. And one thing I've been saying, you know, is that with the internet, you can do wonders in informing workers. And I think one of the reasons Trump won Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania is that workers were too misinformed, and they thought Trump was going to do wonders for them. And I think if unions did a better job communicating, educating, you know, perhaps a weekly email newsletter about how Trump is hurting workers, how Trump has rolled back all these protections that Obama had provided, extending overtime to millions more workers. Obama issued this very important rule that doesn't get enough attention that he require Wall Street firms to act in the best interests of workers in handling their 401Ks. And Trump, doing a huge favor for Wall Street and really stabbing workers in back, scrapped that rule. So now, it's much easier for Wall Street firms to rip off workers.-I think maybe unions are not doing nearly as good a job as they should be doing at communicating to workers how Trump is, day after day, taking actions that favor big business and hurt workers. So, that's one big thing I think unions should be doing is communicating better. Second, they need to do more organizing. There isn't nearly enough organizing to increase the size of unions. And the good news for unions is that a recent Gallup Poll found that 64% of Americans approve of unions. That's the highest rate in nearly 50 years; that's up sharply from a decade ago when it was just 48%. And also promising for unions is the age group that most approves of the unions is the 18 to 34 age group. And a lot of young people

are feeling good about unions, so we're seeing graduate students, we're seeing adjunct professors, we're seeing a lot of people in my profession, journalists. We're seeing a lot of nurses unionizing and that's very promising. And also there's a recent study by MIT folks that found that 50% of non-union, non-mandatory workers say they would join the union tomorrow if they could. Yet in the private sector, only 6.4 %, only one in 16 workers are in unions, so there's this crazy disconnect. One in two private-sector workers say they'd like to join the union if they could, but only one in 16 is in a union. So, I think unions really have to do a better job shining a light on why it's so hard to form a union, and how corporations, far more than in other countries, fight to oppose [and] crush unions. I have this line in my book that's gotten a lot of attention and it's that "In no other industrial nation do corporations fight so hard to beat back, indeed quash, labor unions." And they threaten to close their plant if workers unionize. They threaten to even cut benefits if workers unionize. In 34% of unionization drives, one study found that companies fire the workers who are leading the unionization drive in order to try to cripple unionization drives. So, unions really need to shine a light on this and we need more labor journalists to also be shining a light on how tilted the playing field is against forming unions when so many workers want to have a union.

**Ralph Nader:** You know, Steve, the brazen level of greed and power of these CEOs; no CEOs in the world are paid as much as US CEOs. The head of Walmart is making about \$12,000 an hour, eight hours a day plus benefits, while a million of his workers are making less than \$11.50 an hour, eight hours a day if they get a 40-hour a week. General Motors was bailed out by billions of dollars, maybe over \$30/\$40 billion [by] taxpayers after they went bankrupt. And what are they doing? They're trying to freeze the two-tier level auto workers; they're trying to require higher co-pays of insurance by the autoworkers. I know that they've got some sort of tentative agreement after the UAW strike, but they're paying their CEOs enormous money even though the taxpayers bailed them out and the UAW bailed them out by taking all kinds of cuts and restraints that they took to save the company. So let's look at this astonishing thing--I would have thought the labor unions would've been out in the streets opposing Scalia, an anti-union, anti-worker Secretary of Labor, who was confirmed by the Senate, chosen by Trump. That's the one department they should say that's gotta be of, by and for labor. How do you explain the passivity? I know they came out verbally, but they didn't use any street demonstrations and convey to the American people--union or not union--that this labor department is not operating it in their interest?

**Steven Greenhouse:** Again, great question, Ralph. You know, on one hand, the labor movement is less militant than it used to be. Scholars like Staughton Lynd have pointed out when there's some basic, non-militant aspects of the current labor system, like if you sign a three-year contract, that means you can't go on strike for three years and that, over the decades, has helped make labor less militant. And we have seen a resurgence of militancy with the teacher strikes, with the threat in West Virginia, Oklahoma, Arizona, Los Angeles, and now the strike in Chicago. The GM strike is the biggest private-sector strike in decades. In Boston and New England, there was a big Stop & Shop strike with 33,000 grocery workers; there's a big hotel strike by Unite Here against Marriott, so there is some sort of resurgence in the form of strikes and I think labor is much smaller and weaker and less funded than it was years ago, and I think they try to pick their fights about when they're going to really try to get people into the streets. And you're right, Ralph, maybe there should have been a big mobilization against Gene Scalia [Trump appointed U.S. Secretary of Labor]; however, the Republicans are in control of the Senate and even if you launched a big mobilization into the streets, you might still get defeated and you might look weak. One of the

points I've been making is that worker power is so weak in the United States that a president has the gall...chutzpah if you may, to name as labor secretary a guy who was long corporate America's top gun, its chief lawyer in fighting against worker protections and fighting against new worker protections. And what's crazy is that, of course, the main responsibility of the labor secretary is to protect workers, to come up with new worker protections to make better, lives/better working conditions for workers. So yes, I agree that it's pretty outrageous that Trump, who ran as a supposed friend of workers, has named an extremely anti-worker guy to head the labor department.

**Ralph Nader:** And you list this in your book *Beaten Down, Worked Up: The Past, Present, and Future of American Labor*. You show how in area after area--Trump freezing the minimum wage, Trump National Labor Relations Board stacked it; it's against workers; Trump bragging about bringing manufacturing jobs back home. Manufacturing jobs have declined under Trump, not to mention average life expectancy, exposing workers to workplace hazards, weakening the Occupational Safety Act, on and on. That's why I thought it would have been a good focus for them to make Gene Scalia a major issue, because when I talked to labor union leaders in Washington, Steve Greenhouse, they said, "Well, you know, a third of our workers voted for Trump. We have to be careful." Well one way to show those third of their workers they've been betrayed is to raise the issue of Scalia and all the things he represents. For example, he was in back of things like treating workers as independent contractors to deny them benefits and legal protections as you point out in your book. Employers require workers who move jobs not to compete, not to engage in disparagement, which is a violation of the First Amendment rights of free speech. They force them as you say into forced arbitration behind closed doors, which generally tilt more on employers' favor. You know, there comes a time you got to draw the line in the sand. But anyway, what do you think of Staughton Lynd's new way? It's been in the press recently that more and more workers are moving to different models of organization. Can you explain that to our listeners?

**Steven Greenhouse:** So in my book, I explain that unfortunately it's very hard to unionize. And so, yes, it's great when there are unionization efforts; you know, it's good when workers go on strike when they feel that they've been squeezed, abused improperly. And partly because it's so hard to unionize I'm all for other types of concerted worker action. And I write about some great groups like the Coalition of Immokalee Workers in Florida, not a union group but it's an amazing pro-worker group that has done wonders in improving wages and working conditions for 35,000 farm workers, mainly tomato pickers in Florida. And we've seen other things, Ralph, like Google employees are generally very well paid. You know, one could argue they don't need a union. A lot of them [are] making 100,000, 125,000 right out of college, but they were outraged, angry as hell about how Google was hiding, burying, mishandling all these terrible sexual harassment cases at the company, so the workers engaged in the type of independent non-union collective action that Staughton Lynd called for. Staughton, who is a labor lawyer in Niles, Ohio right in Youngstown, wrote a book called *Labor Law for the Rank and Filer* that basically tells workers it might be hard to unionize but there are lots of other good routes for you to protest and here's how to do it without getting retaliated against, without getting fired. And believe it or not, these Google workers turned to the advice of Staughton Lynd, who's kind of a renowned leftist lawyer and professor; he was fired by Yale University because he went with, I think, Jane Fonda and others to Hanoi to try to help negotiate an end to the Vietnam War. And Staughton is really a visionary in many ways on labor issues and a lot of workers who feel that they're being screwed, squeezed at work, might love

to form a union but realize it's very hard, so they're following Staughton's advice about this is what we can do to protest; this is what we could do to sit-in; this is what we could do to try to make things better at work without a union and without getting retaliated against. And I think a lot of workers are frustrated and they want to stand up because they feel that things have been unfair. Uber and Lyft drivers, they're told, you know, the Trump Administration says you are independent contractors, not employees and if the federal government considers you not employees, then you really can't unionize, so Uber and Lyft drivers are following this advice of Staughton and others. They demonstrated; they pressured city councils. In New York City, the Taxi and Limousine Commission did a study finding that 90%/95% of Uber and Lyft drivers are making less than the minimum wage. And the Uber and Lyft drivers, tired of working 60/70 hours a week, struggling to support their families, demonstrated, pressured government, and lo and behold, the New York City Taxi And Limousine Commission issued this rule that requires that all Uber and Lyft drivers receive at least \$17.22 an hour after expenses. And that's greatly going to improve the lives of these Uber and Lyft drivers. And in California, the state legislature just enacted this important law that declares that in California, the tens of thousands of Uber and Lyft drivers shall be considered employees, not independent contractors. And again, that happened partly because the Uber and Lyft drivers are following Staughton's advice in demonstrating and protesting and contacting legislatures and things are happening!

**Ralph Nader:** Which points at the local city ordinances on minimum wage [and] state legislation on minimum wage, where the state doesn't preempt the way it does in Texas, is pushing the move forward for workers. You know, my classmate at Harvard Law School was Paul Tobias. And when he got out of law school, he noted that most workers weren't unionized and something had to be done for them, so he started this group you're probably familiar with that has over a thousand lawyers. It's called the National Employment Lawyers Association, [nela.org](http://nela.org), "N" as in "Nancy," E-L-A .org. And they're saying, you know, we just can't wait for the right NLRB [National Labor Relations Board], the repeal of Taft/Hartley restricting unionism, all the obstruction of the workers. We're going to try to fight for them in the courts in other ways. Are you familiar with that? What do you think of that movement, National Employment Lawyers Association?

**Steven Greenhouse:** I think National Employment Law Association and National Employment Law Project, you know, these are terrific groups of lawyers who see how strong corporate power is, how corporations often squeeze and push around workers and how weak unions are, and they really form to try to help workers in many, many, many ways. A lot of workers are fired improperly and don't have unions to protect them, so these lawyer groups often go to bat for workers. There was this terrible Supreme Court decision earlier this year, the Epic Systems Decision that basically said that corporations have every right to prohibit workers from bringing class actions and instead can be required to file complaints for forced arbitration. And if workers who face sexual harassment or racial discrimination or sex discrimination, can't bring class actions and instead have to bring individualized arbitration cases, it's going to be humongously harder for them to vindicate their rights, to enforce their rights, especially because as you said, arbitration cases are behind closed doors and the employers have huge say in picking the judges and they overwhelmingly favor . . . they usually favor employers. So groups like the NELA and National Employment Law Project, you know, they do a very good job going to bat for workers fighting against forced arbitration, fighting against racial discrimination, fighting against sexual harassment. And at a time

when unions are so weak, workers need all the help they can get and it's good that there are these lawyers stepping up to help them.

**Ralph Nader:** Yeah. And Steve, do you support the Universal Basic Income movement, which is being picked up and people like Senator Sanders and Senator Warren are speaking about it in a presidential race? And what about worker-owned businesses, has that got a future in this country?

**Steven Greenhouse:** I think . . . so Andrew Yang is the main champion of Universal Basic Income. And I've written some articles. I'm not a huge fan of the idea. So, Yang calls for providing \$1000 a month to every American over the age 18 . . . over 18. And he says we need that because in theory, automation and artificial-intelligence robots are going to cause the loss of tens of millions of jobs.

**Ralph Nader:** Which, by the way, you point out in your book that McKinsey Global Institute. . . so by 2030, not far away, automation will destroy more than 39 million jobs in the United States alone, 39 million jobs! Go ahead.

**Steven Greenhouse:** So we we've been hearing that for several years now, Ralph, and yet the unemployment rate is at 3.5%, the lowest it's been in 50 years. So people say, well maybe technology won't destroy all these jobs. And I fear that . . . and I think Silicon Valley is really behind this Universal Basic Income because they worry that they'll be huge popular pressure against automation and artificial intelligence and robots, so they see this as a way to reduce the opposition. But I fear that if you have people receiving just \$1000 month, \$12,000 a year, are they just gonna sit and rot, and become couch potatoes. And Yang says, "Well, a lot of them can go into business for themselves, can do arts and crafts, can become furniture makers, can become carpenters, I don't know. And that he might be right, but I fear that a lot of people are not going to become entrepreneurs and that living on \$12,000 a year is very, very hard. And I've argued that one of the problems in this whole discussion of technology in the future of work is that there isn't nearly enough input from workers on what they want. And second, I think it would be very good if instead of companies laying off 20% or 40% of their workers and having them end up on Universal Basic Income, that you have work sharing. So instead of laying off 20% of people, you have people working four days a week instead of five and you share the work so people don't become couch potatoes and unemployed for years. You have them as gainful participants in society.

**Ralph Nader:** You know, Steve, the unions sometimes don't know who their best friends are. Senator Sanders running for president four years ago, the biggest union guy that's ever run for president since Eugene Debs, and the unions endorsed Hillary Clinton--predominately Hillary Clinton who couldn't figure out whether the minimum wage should be increased or not for years. So last question, Tony Mazzocchi, he was in my mind, one of the great labor leaders even though he'd never ran a big union, but he was everything you'd want. He read books, he connected workers with scientists, he focused on the shop floor; he believed in demonstrations, he believed in repealing the bad labor laws, and you'd written a couple of articles on him before he passed away. Can you give our listeners a description of someone they probably never heard of?

**Steven Greenhouse:** Tony was a real visionary. And in my book I say we need more people like that--leaders who are visionary, who are fearless, who know how to step up and step out and build huge solidarity around him. And Tony was a huge champion of doing more to protect the health and safety of workers and he is often considered the founder/parent of the Occupational Safety Act. He said the Democratic Party isn't doing nearly enough for workers; it's too pro-corporate, and he pushed to form a labor party as a way to press the Democratic Party to move in a more pro-worker direction. And maybe belatedly, Tony's message has really gotten out, because in the debate, the Democrats spoke far, far, far, far more than I've ever seen in my 25 years writing about labor. They talked about the importance of unions in lifting workers. So Tony was really a prophet in his own way and his message is really still out there and is really affecting how unions act and belatedly the Democratic Party.

**Ralph Nader:** Well I can attest to that because in 1970, I worked shoulder to shoulder with Tony Mazzocchi to get OSHA enacted, led by Congressman Burton from California, to get enacted into law. And Tony was always complaining that except for the United Steel workers, the main unions were not really pushing hard because they were run by bureaucratic leaders who sometimes didn't even want to get in touch with their rank and file. They had their own cushy situation. We've been talking with Steve Greenhouse--brand new book, *Beaten Down, Worked Up: The Past, Present, and Future of American Labor*. He reported on labor for the *New York Times* for 19 years; he knows what he's talking about. Get this book for your local library; get this book for local discussions. The book is in bookstores all over the country, independent and chain. Thank you very much, Steven Greenhouse.

**Steven Greenhouse:** Thanks very much. And get it for your children who don't know enough about unions and what they've accomplished. Thanks, Ralph.

**Ralph Nader:** Touché. Thank you, Steve.

**Steve Skrovan:** We have been speaking with Steven Greenhouse. We will link to his work at [ralphnaderradiohour.com](http://ralphnaderradiohour.com).

**David Feldman:** Can I ask Ralph about the Department of Labor, if you don't mind?

**Ralph Nader:** Yeah.

**David Feldman:** The Department of Labor is about as old as the Federal Reserve. It started under Wilson. What was the Department of Labor initially supposed to do? And other than say, the first Secretary of labor maybe, Frances Perkins, has there ever been a Secretary of Labor who had the best interest of labor heading it--an organizer? Has there ever been a union organizer heading the Department of Labor?

**Ralph Nader:** Willard Wirtz was a very good Secretary of Labor under Lyndon Johnson. But in most cases, the Republicans, when they are in power, they appoint toadies to the corporate state. When the Democrats are in power, they push very moderate pro-labor people because they're afraid of the Republicans in the Senate fighting the confirmation. And heaven forbid that the Democrats make this a big issue like they should've with Eugene Scalia. Early on, the Department of Labor

started with the mission of studying workers, labor statistics, reports. And as the years passed in the 20th century, the Department of Labor started getting more statutory authority to work in fair labor standards. For example, the pension . . . labor pension area. But by and large, it doesn't enforce the laws on behalf of workers against corporate outrages. I mean, the Economic Policy Institute in Washington, epi.org, has estimated that workers are cheated out of \$60 billion a year from employers who simply don't pay. They just say get lost; we're not going to pay you; we dare you to sue us. And these are usually low-income workers. At \$60 billion a year, you'd think that would be a major issue among the Democratic candidates, so good question, David. There are other points that Steve Greenhouse made in the book we didn't have time to talk to him about. And I know some of the listeners we have will say why not? Well, we didn't talk about the Right-to-Work states. You know, over 20 states say that workers can refuse to join a union in a union workplace and not pay dues, but they can take all the benefits of collective bargaining with management. I think the Right-to-Work states should be called the "Right-to-Shirk" states in the sense that they allow workers to get the benefits without participating with other workers in supporting the union. Second, we didn't get into some of the nitty-gritty that Steven Greenhouse got into, and I'd like to just describe part of his book on the tomato pickers in Immokalee, Florida. The tomatoes you eat come from this area in Florida. It's called the Winter Tomato Capital. Workers arrive at 7 a.m. They have to wait up to four hours unpaid for the sun to dry the plants before they start picking and start getting paid. For many, the goal was to earn \$60 a day, which meant picking 4800 pounds of tomatoes in the blistering sun without any breaks or shade. Steve Greenhouse writes in his book that "crew leaders regularly cheated pickers out of \$10 or \$15 of their wages or withheld pay altogether. When workers complained, the crew leaders sometimes beat them or fired them. Female workers had it the worst of all. Crew leaders frequently groped them or demanded sex if women wanted to keep their jobs." This is how your tomatoes get to market, listeners.

**David Feldman:** Wow.

**Ralph Nader:** And I know that some of the union organizers, they couldn't organize a union there because there are a lot of undocumented workers and they were frightened, of course, hired by the growers. But they did go to some of the big customers like the fast food chains that buy a lot of tomatoes and they said give a penny or two per pound or whatever, and have it go to the workers and some of that worked. But basically, that area of Florida is the closest to indentured labor as you can get in the United States.

**Steve Skrovan:** We're going to take a short break, but when we come back, David, Ralph and I are going to talk about the "Shame of a Nation." If you want to find out what that's all about, stay tuned after this message from our *Corporate Crime Reporter* Russell Mokhiber. You're listening to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, back after this.

**Russell Mokhiber:** From the National Press Building in Washington, D.C., this is your *Corporate Crime Reporter* "Morning Minute" for Friday, October 25, 2019. I'm Russell Mokhiber. The corporate experience of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's top official for the New England office [Region 1] will disqualify him from working on more than a score of Superfund sites in the region. That's according to a report from Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility [PEER]. In addition, he will be barred from working on new matters arising from

14 chemical companies in his new capacity at EPA. EPA announced the appointment last month of Dennis Deziel to serve as Regional Administrator for New England. Deziel worked for Dow Chemical as its Director of Governmental Affairs. Dow is one of the leading chemical manufacturers in the world. Under ethics rules, due to his role at Dow, Deziel is forbidden from participating in any EPA matter involving his former employer for two years after his start date. For the *Corporate Crime Reporter*, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

**Steve Skrovan:** Thank you, Russell. Earlier this month, Ralph, you wrote a column with the provocative title "Shame of a Nation: The 1% Rules. The 99% Lets Them." You sound frustrated.

**Ralph Nader:** How can millions of Americans take all this injustice, brutalization, deprivation, exclusion, rip-offs, denial of health benefits, denial of inflation-adjusted benefits, and so on and so forth. How do they do that? How do parents of children, who they can't earn enough money to feed them, and 16 million children go to bed hungry at night in the land of the free, home of the brave; 20% of community college students are experiencing "food insecurity." That means they have to go to pathetic pantries at community college with some old canned goods to make it through the day and have huge problem getting housing as well. And the student loan now is \$1.6 trillion. There's no student loans in places like Germany and Sweden and France and Italy because tuition isn't impossible, the way education [is] free, like high school through college in a lot of these countries. What's going on here? Never have there been higher corporate profits, yet staggering amounts of poverty and near poverty remain along with stagnant wages. Never have there been more medicines to alleviate pain, yet far too many of these pain killers have caused massive fatalities and addictions; four hundred thousand Americans have died from these opiates in the last 10 years. Where are the regulators here? Where are the parents of lost children to mobilize and demand that their members of Congress, state legislatures do their job? We outnumber these crooks, corporate crooks, political crooks; what's going on here? Never have there been more tax breaks for big business, yet big business uses so little of the windfalls for productive investments, creating good jobs and for shoring-up underfunded pensions. Never has there been more free access to information, yet so little retained knowledge. Never have there been more impressive muckraking film documentaries and books that expose corporate and government crimes, yet this media attention produces less impact and reform by the citizenry. Where do we go here? Never has technology made it so easy for heads of government to meet, yet fewer international treaties like on water, environment, labor, consumer, cyber are made between countries. Never has there been such an outrageous corporate-crime wave, yet law enforcement budgets have actually decreased! The more big CEOs are paid, the worse is their management of their companies. The big banks, for example, 12 years ago, collapsed under the highest paid CEOs in banking history. The same for General Electric, is in very bad shape, and they paid their CEOs enough money. Never have there been so many wrongful injuries, yet the court budgets are becoming tighter and the law of torts is being restricted. Without the defense and use of our civil justice system, wrongful injury cases cannot go to court with a trial by jury to compensate the injured or the next of kin. Never has the drug industry accumulated more profits and taxpayer subsidies, yet so many patients, millions of Americans cannot begin to afford lifesaving medicines. Never have the under-taxed/super-rich been so rich, yet on average give a smaller proportion of their money to "charitable good works." Actually, Steve and David, middle- and lower-income people give more proportionately of their income than do the ultra-wealthy, and I end this column this way. I could go on and on, readers. Pick up the pace, readers. Senator Elizabeth Warren has called correctly,

for "big structural changes", that are long overdue and adopted by many other countries who aren't any smarter than we, but they're more active in their pursuit of their rights than tens of millions of Americans are. Take it from here, Steve and David.

**Steve Skrovan:** So Ralph, okay, so I'm Donald Trump. I'm debating you. I'm saying, I'm tweeting out, "Hey, the statistics just came out, unemployment is at its all-time lows, people; median income is actually going up. Everything's going great, what are you complaining about?"

**Ralph Nader:** It's total nonsense.

**Steve Skrovan:** What . . . how do you square . . . how do you square those statistics that come out with what you just said?

**Ralph Nader:** It's very simple. What happened is that he ignores real income, adjusted for wages. He has frozen the minimum wage at seven and a quarter; no one can argue with that. Therefore, there are tens of millions of workers that are making less than 1968. So a few workers are making a little more but, 80% of the workers are making less than workers made in 1973; he ignores that. There are tens of millions of workers cannot afford housing. He doesn't talk about rising cost. They can't afford healthcare. He doesn't talk about pushing legislation, Trump that is, that would have stripped 20 million workers of healthcare under the inadequate but better Obamacare than anything he has yet proposed in healthcare. And he is not paying any attention whatsoever to stripping workers of their rights to bargain under the labor law, exposing them to horrendous workplace hazards and injuries--like a 100,000 workers are being exposed as we speak on their job to silicosis, a deadly disease. He's actually weakening the federal agency that's supposed to do something about it. So, he's picking and choosing based on the Wall Street bull market, which was created by taking a trillion and a half dollars that could have been collected from the super-rich by Trump and sent back to create jobs that don't exist--improving our schools, highways, bridges, public transit--and gave that amount of money for tax escapes to the super wealthy. I mean do you want to go on and on?

**Steve Skrovan:** But you see how those numbers are very effective because they're simple and median income is going up, unemployment for the African-American community, he says, has never been lower. And how do you break through? How do you get those numbers to sit . . . how do you say that that's a lie.

**Ralph Nader:** It's simple, black workers have never been in greater debt. He forgets the other part of the ledger. He forgets that they can't afford health insurance, that 40,000 Americans, many of them minorities, die every year because they can't afford health insurance to get diagnosed and treated in time. Nobody in Canada, Luxembourg, Taiwan, Japan, France, Norway die because they can't get health insurance. It's typical Trump. He uses very selected average-type figures that don't include the actual livelihood situation of tens of millions of workers. For example, he says, "Look, unemployment is down." But child poverty is up. Isn't that what counts? It's not just what you get paid, by the way, it's what you have to pay out for your living expenses, something he doesn't have to worry about. Forty percent of the people surveyed by the Federal Reserve said they couldn't afford an emergency claim on their budget of \$400. They wouldn't know where to get \$400 [that] suddenly was inflicted on them. That's 40% of 150 million workers and he's talking about this is

the best of times? He's a corporate crime aider and abettor. He's allowing corporations, credit card industries, banks, insurance companies, you name it, payday loan rackets, rent-to-own rackets, loan sharks to rip off more Americans than ever before because he's taken the federal corporate crime cop off the corporate crime beat. Does he talk about that?

**Steve Skrovan:** Well, there you say, now as I'm listening as just an ordinary person out there and I want to get a message across, the idea that people don't have \$400 for an emergency--that would resonate. That to me would be the counter to all of this, hey, "unemployment is at an all-time low; median income is going up." The counter to that that I think would resonate with people on a very personal basis is what you just said. And I think candidates need to say that, okay, you see all the statistics that are coming out of the stock market, in *The Wall Street Journal*, or whatever, the labor department, wherever they're coming from out of the federal government; do you have \$400 if there's an emergency? That I think would resonate with people.

**Ralph Nader:** What also resonates is workers today, do you know that you're making tens of millions of workers. Listen to us. You're making less today than workers made in 1968 adjusted for inflation, even though, because of automation, etcetera, you are twice as productive! One worker at Walmart produces as much as two workers at Walmart in 1968. You're getting zero benefit; all the productivity gains are going to pay Walmart's executives and top managers and not to you who produce that productivity every day. And in sheer dollars, you're making less than workers in 1968 adjusted for inflation while your boss at Walmart is making \$12,000 an hour plus benefits and he keeps a million of his workers making less than \$11.50 an hour--some of them as low as \$10.50 an hour, if they're lucky to get a 40-hour week.

**David Feldman:** So Ralph, the richest 1% and *Fox News* would say, you want to unionize? You want to drive up our costs? We'll, just take our ball and go to another country.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, if you go to another country, we will impose a social tariff if you try to sell back to the communities that you abandoned. That's very easy. And you can also change the tax laws so they can't escape taxation, even though they live here, by having a haven in Luxembourg or some other tax haven. There are all kinds of ways you can deal with the unpatriotic super-rich abandoning the country that provided them with their immense wealth.

**Steve Skrovan:** And you just said social tariff. Explain what you mean by that term; I've not heard that term, social tariff.

**Ralph Nader:** Social tariff is when a company that employs, let's say, 40,000 auto-parts workers in Michigan or Ohio, goes to China. They are exporting jobs/capital to China. The head of that company does not take a pay cut. The Chinese workers are lucky if they make \$2 an hour instead of \$20/\$25, or whatever the unionized autoworkers make. And then they ship these products back to the US. So the US says unless China moves toward greater equalization of wages, instead of slave wages, fighting unions all the way, you are not going to sell back into this country without paying a tariff, which will go to support those communities that you abandoned back in Michigan and Ohio. That's what's called social tariff, because the argument is that under international trade, countries like China, Vietnam, Thailand, India, Bangladesh, by pressing down on their workers' wages, which aren't living wages even in those countries, are engaging in an unfair, anti-

competitive practice against more developed countries. Now this is what the International Labor Organization [ILO] of the U.N. [United Nations] has written about repeatedly, but the unions don't grab this. They don't talk about social tariffs. All we talk about is 'oh workers in US have to give up their benefits, take pay cuts in order to meet the global competition'. What global competition? --of serf labor, of corrupt countries that press down on their consumer rights and allow US corporations to go and pollute the air, water, and soil at will in order to get a competitive benefit against our higher-environmental standards in this country?

**David Feldman:** I think the Republicans would say, for the past 45 years, we've deregulated the economy; we've seen our economy grow to be the greatest in the history of civilization--even poor people are living better than a pharaoh, than King Louis XVI. A person who can't come up with \$400 still lives better than Louis the 16<sup>th</sup>.

**Ralph Nader:** David, even Triumph wouldn't try that kind of argument. Well, give me a break. I mean you want to talk about the poor in this country have plumbing and the richest kings a thousand years ago had to go out and crap in a pit in the ground or in a bowl taken away by a servant? I mean, let's look at it comparatively. In 1980, we had the highest average wages in the world. We are now maybe 23rd of countries in the world. In 1980, we were the creditors to the world. They owed us. We now are the biggest debtor with our trade imbalance, etcetera, to the world. We owe them. In terms of housing, we're far worse than at least 35 countries. You heard Steven Greenhouse say that 99% of all countries, including dictatorships, provide paid maternity leave. Only Papua New Guinea and a couple other small countries don't do that, except the US doesn't provide paid maternity leave. We have, unlike all other western countries and some nonwestern countries like Taiwan and Japan and Israel, we leave 85 million people with no health insurance or grossly underinsured--85 million people! We have some of the worst public transit in the world requiring people to get up at 4 in the morning to go to work in a suburb cleaning houses by 8 o'clock. We have some of the worst educational infrastructure. Teachers have to pay to buy materials for the kids from their own pockets. Teachers are striking to get another buck an hour. [Some] Teachers are denied unions. We have the worst union laws, anti-labor laws in the western world by far. We have the highest infant mortality of 24 nations. Highest infant mortality in this great, rich, capitalistic economy? I don't want to keep going and demolishing your arguments, David, because you still have to live with Triumph [laughter] who somehow has embedded himself in your brain for purposes of these kinds of questions.

**David Feldman:** Well, let me respond to that because you've cited some statistics. My question is, but other than that? [laughter]

**Ralph Nader:** Yeah . . .

**David Feldman:** Nevertheless . . . [laughter]

**Ralph Nader:** As Steve would say, well, you know the usual response to that kind of comment. The Lincoln Theatre response, remember?

**David Feldman:** Yes.

**Ralph Nader:** Yeah, go ahead.

**Steve Skrovan:** Yeah. "Other than that, Mrs. Lincoln, how was the show?"

**David Feldman:** You started this segment off by asking why do we allow this? And as you were rattling off those statistics and numbers and facts, I kept thinking we allow this because we live in a culture where Ralph Nader gets interrupted. Where if you were to go on any television show or radio show, except this one, you couldn't get that out without somebody stepping on you and it's more about the argument in America than it is the truth. I blame lawyers quite frankly.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, corporate lawyers are far under-scrutinized in this country; they are the architects of corporate crime, fraud, abuse, tax evasion, tax avoidance, regulatory evasion [and] regulatory violations. I mean, that their function, fine-print contracts, block the courtroom door to injuries caused by their hazardous products. David, I just sent an email to Chuck Todd, Chris Wallace, and Jake Tapper. And I said, why don't you have some civic leaders on your show? Why are you excluding all civic leaders who really know what they're talking about? And I gave some examples. So it is true the mass media is not very helpful. On the other hand, the people of this country know far more about how they're being screwed than they're mobilizing to do something about it. That's the apathy gap. That's the gap I find inexcusable when all it takes is 1% of organized people--two and a half million adults in 435 congressional districts--to grab control of Congress on highly popular measures like living wage, full healthcare; you know the usual list. And they're not doing it because those two and a half million people, almost by definition, don't have to worry about daycare; they don't have to have two-low paying jobs and commute two hours a day. They're not doing it. What's their excuse?

**Steve Skrovan:** Well, is it the situation where people are doing . . . just well enough that they're not going over the edge; they're not going out into the streets. And there's also a psychology of oppression which leads to depression. People working two to three jobs don't have time to suss all of this out. One of the greatest advantages is the fact that people just don't have, you know, they're too busy scrambling to make a living; they don't have time to . . . or the luxury, so to speak, that we have to think about these issues deeply.

**Ralph Nader:** Two answers. Number one, we're not talking about those people; we're talking about 1% of fairly middle, upper-middle-class people who have discretionary time. They don't have to have two jobs, and they're not picking up the oars of the democracy boat. Number two, what about those people in the 1930s? They didn't even have jobs and they sat-in, they marched, and they formed labor unions.

**Steve Skrovan:** That's what I'm saying. There was a tipping point there. They didn't have jobs. These people still have jobs, but they're low-paying and they've got to hustle two or three ways, different ways to get them and they're driving Uber and Lyft just to make it up and they don't have the time.

**Ralph Nader:** So we're not talking about them. We're talking 1% of people who do have the time; they have a fairly decent, middle-class income, but they are the contented classes that Kenneth Galbraith pointed out. Without the contented classes mobilizing, the lower-income people don't

get anywhere. So that's why we're focused on the 1%. They know what the score is; they know how to mobilize, get their members of Congress back to town meetings that we've talked about in this program, ad infinitum. They know how to organize manuals that are all over the internet--how to hold press conferences, how to get out the vote. But you still, Steve, cannot excuse tens of millions of low-income people who decide not to vote. If they voted at a higher level than, say, 30%/40%, if they voted at a 70% level, you'd have never heard of Donald Trump, you'd have never heard of George Bush, you'd have never heard of George Herbert Walker Bush. You know we can do everything we can; we can put progressive candidates up; we can try to nudge the two parties with third parties, but we don't have a votes. It's the people out there who got to heed their pastors, heed their neighborhood leaders, however low income they are, and get out to vote every two years.

**Steve Skrovan:** This has been a great discussion. But we got to close up shop now. I want to thank our guest again, Steven Greenhouse. For those listening on the radio, that's our show. For you podcast listeners, stay tuned for more of this discussion in the Wrap Up.

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

**Ralph Nader:** Thank you everybody. Why are debates for politicians top down? Why don't you, the citizenry, organize and demand they come to your debate stage?