

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 318 TRANSCRIPT

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

♪ Stand up, stand up. You've been sitting way too long ♪

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

David Feldman: Good morning.

Steve Skrovan: I hope you're doing okay there in New York, really in the hot zone. I was going to say, I don't think we should be too hard on Donald Trump's handling of this crisis because everybody knows that the prefrontal cortex, which controls judgment, doesn't fully develop until you're 75. I think that's correct, right?

David Feldman: Yeah.

Steve Skrovan: It's around that.

David Feldman: He's a kid.

Steve Skrovan: He's a kid. We can't expect much. And we have the man of the hour, Ralph Nader, who has yet a new book coming out. It's called *The Ralph Nader and Family Cookbook: Classic Recipes from Lebanon and Beyond*. Tell us about that, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Well, it's heavily the Mediterranean diet with recipes by my mother, largely, and nutrition, these days, is a good ingredient in improving resistance during this coronavirus crisis. Also, it has very good pieces of wisdom about how my parents raised four children in a New England industrial town and used good judgment and intuition to get us never to complain about the food that they and we ate at the same time so we could have good conversations around the table without distractions and whining. All in all, it's a book for all seasons, but also has some relevance for people who are heavily on junk food and junk drink diets and the need to transition to less expensive and far more nutritious and delicious diets from the Arab lands.

Steve Skrovan: Very good. We'll link to that on the website and promote it again at the end of the show. We have a great show, another great show for you today. I want to start by saying if we were reliant on our devices before this pandemic, it's nothing compared to now. People are using online video conferencing for school, work, socializing, and exercise; the technological landscape has fundamentally changed in the last few weeks, and we are more dependent on big tech companies than ever before. Now more than ever, it's important that we talk about regulating tech companies in a way that benefits us all, especially since taxpayer dollars financed the development of the internet infrastructure they have all used and gotten rich off of.

Our first guest is Ramesh Srinivasan, who is here to talk about how we can make tech more community-focused and the internet more democratic. He's also a Bernie Sanders surrogate, and as we all know by now, Bernie has suspended his campaign. We may talk a little bit about that too. That's just the first half of this show. In the second half, coronavirus has changed so much of our lives as we stay safely sheltered in place, but what about all the people who might lose their

shelter due to loss of income? Some cities have created coronavirus eviction bans, but some landlords are still finding ways around them to demand rent.

Our second guest, Joe Cotchett, isn't requiring his Bay Area tenants to pay rent for the next two months to help them stay afloat during this crisis. We'll talk to Mr. Cotchett about how he hopes his move will inspire other landlords to also help out their tenants. And because even during a lock down, corporate crime never sleeps - in fact, it may even flourish - in between, we will take a short break to check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But let's start by talking about what a democratic internet would even look like. David?

David Feldman: Ramesh Srinivasan is a professor at the University of California, Los Angeles [UCLA], in the Department of Information Studies. He is the director of UC Digital Cultures Lab. His research investigates technology's relationship to democracy, public health, social change, and distance learning. Dr. Srinivasan is the author of *Beyond the Valley: How Innovators Around the World are Overcoming Inequality and Creating the Technologies of Tomorrow*. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Ramesh Srinivasan.

Ramesh Srinivasan: Hello, I'm very honored to join you. I've been such a huge fan and supporter of Ralph for decades now, and it's great to be in conversation and to add some insight and hopefully inspire folks to realize that there's so much we can do to get to a world that's more balanced and progressive and peoples-based.

Ralph Nader: Indeed, Ramesh. Let's get right into it because I think by the time this interview is over, listeners, you're going to be looking at the internet with a much greater sense of empowerment and consequence. Before I ask you the first question, I want to lay the groundwork that you have laid in some of your op-ed articles in recent years, because it shows you that the control of the internet now by companies like Google, Apple, Facebook, Microsoft is heading into very strong winds, and the question is whether we are going to be able to use this technology for the benefit of the many compared to what, now, is the benefit of the few, financially.

There are four crises that we're heading into, one of them we're right in the middle of now--the spread of viral and bacterial pandemics. This is not the first one, and it's not going to be the last one, the coronavirus. The second, of course, is climate disruption and the dramatic intensification of storms, fires, droughts, floods, sea levels, and the effect on the world. The third is what you pointed out, automation, and you point to an Oxford University study that says - listen to this, listeners - "47% of the jobs in developed nations will vanish in the next 25 years as a result of automation." The fourth crisis is what I call "elected dictatorial regimes". That is populism coming under autocratic veneer, Trump-style, and other dictators around the world.

If you put all those four together, you can start, very, very fundamentally, Ramesh, and let me provoke you. What if there was no internet? Would we have been better prepared for the coronavirus or would we have been less distracted, less complacent, and less dependent, and less procrastinating?

Ramesh Srinivasan: What a great question, and really great to tackle this with you in conversation, Ralph. This country has a pattern associated with it, and it's not just this country. It's much of the world after the passage of all so-called neo-liberal reforms, which is the costs, again, and again, and again, are socialized and the profits are privatized. That creates a toxic system scale, and the internet is an example of this. The internet was publicly-funded. The first node of the internet itself, the ARPANET, was right next to where I work at UCLA, just like a five-minute walk from my office.

People invested in the internet, but as the internet followed the model that we see with roads, with National Science Foundation, National Institute of Health research, everything followed the logic of private-accumulated valuation, profitability, and speculated valuation. As a result of that greed and hoarding and the vocabulary of just making as much for oneself as possible, never mind the costs, all the costs got externalized. And they all got dumped back onto us. As a result, we see internet-driven systems that are racist, that are algorithmically inflammatory, where they basically are making selections around what we see based on the idea of riling us up rather than providing us a fact-based, a scientific-based, or even a sort of harmonious kind of way of talking about our differences across different platforms.

The internet has really followed that path, that path that is so unfortunate that it has infected so many of the opportunities for innovations to occur in ways that support [the] public interest *and* business interest, but most importantly, support the interest of common goods and publics. This is something you have spoken about for decades, and this is really no different when it comes to the internet itself.

There is an opportunity right now, and this is really what I see. There's an opportunity to do the inversion of Naomi Klein's [*The*] *Shock Doctrine* to really take leadership in this digital area, but more generally, in a vision that gives people what they're looking for and what they want. People, more than ever, right now, want technology, but they want a world, more generally, where they feel like the basics are taken care of, where they are given healthcare, where they are given universal education, they are given universal income.

These are huge ideas, and so what we're seeing happening is the biggest oligarchs in our world have made their money not necessarily through traditional industries as much these days as through technology. People like Michael Bloomberg are discussed as being big media moguls, but he made his money through technology. Technology is basically the mechanism by which oligarchic power is being established, and people shouldn't be concerned about this simply because of technology in and of itself, but technology as our gateway to everything from healthcare, to criminal justice, to policing, and much, much more, to bank loans, and so on.

Technologies need to be reimagined and regulated and reconfigured in the image of people. We can't allow privatized greed to destroy the 99%, and this is really what I'm trying to fight for in *Beyond the Valley*, my last book.

Ralph Nader: Ramesh, you started your argument with all the people giving their personal data free to Facebook, Google, Apple, others, and the old idea of whenever you get something free, you're the product, [chuckles] and you argued that we should get paid for this personal data, and we should be able to opt in or opt out. If we don't like the situation we're in: invading our personal space, manipulating us, deceiving us, giving this data to very shady operators who use it against us, we should be able to opt out. That's one point, and a very basic point in your reform. I've been arguing about this for years to no effect.

You also say that in order to deal with the worker insecurity and the exploitation that you would like people to have a significant equity interest. That is, they would own part of the capital of the automation that replaces their jobs. Obviously, technology doesn't have its own imperative. It doesn't fulfill its promises to the people if it slides right under a few giant corporations with influence and government. Why don't you talk about how the people can reassert control, and then we can talk about for what?

Ramesh Srinivasan: Yeah, great question. I'd like to start by just a couple little sentences for the listeners to think about. Are we Googling or are we being Googled? When we go onto Facebook, are we socializing or are we being socialized. I think it's just important to think about whether we are users of the internet - I mean, that's the common term that's used - or whether we are being used. My point is there's an invisibility to all of the practices by which not only our data, but our attention, our behaviors, even our psychological states are being manipulated and shaped by private platforms, by private corporations for their own, often hidden benefits.

You can see this game at work in very troubling manners. Take, for example, SEC [U.S. Security and Exchange Commission] filings by Uber. Uber loses money every month, every quarter. Uber is not a profitable business despite being valued over \$100 billion. Uber calls itself a technology company, but it's the biggest taxi company in the history of the world. Uber operates in many, many countries. I was in East and Central Africa doing field work for this book, and I saw Uber in action there. Uber is not accountable. These companies brand themselves as morally and politically neutral, but in reality, they are the engines of accumulation of wealth.

Why is this so important in my mind? This is really, really important because of the transference of wealth and power, and where we all are essentially immersed on the internet, especially these days. Generally, we're finding this to be the case, including with our younger generation--the transference of wealth, the transference of power, the ability to control the attention of so many people. I even talk about Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* in this book. That power is in the hands of so few people in so few locations of the world who represent such demographic homogeneity. We're talking mainly white male oligarchs, younger oligarchs in many cases. That is so troubling because that is the engine that is now amplifying the profound inequalities we see in our country--three people with equivalent wealth to 50% in the world, eight people with equivalent wealth to almost 4 billion people!

That's why what we need to do is not just necessarily give people handouts within a system that's so broken, that's so extractive. We need to figure out ways to rewrite the rules by which technology provides value to all, right? I understand I get some value, I'm willing to admit it,

through Google, maybe a little bit less value through Facebook. At the same time, what is the other side of that ledger? Is that even available or accessible to me as a user?

What I think we need to do is really think about the instruments of equity, the instruments of value that's accumulated through these technologies. The technologies are amazing. People deserve some credit for their innovations with technology, but it can't come in a zero-sum manner where everybody else is essentially screwed.

Ralph Nader: Let's inject some skepticism here. [Ramesh chuckles] By the way, listeners, Ramesh boils all this down in a digital bill of rights in his book, and it's a kind of bill of rights that can come by a public awareness through Congress. You got to pay more attention, Ramesh, through Congress. It's got to be through Congress or it's got to be very powerful, cooperative, organizing efforts by the consumers, which is even more difficult these days.

I always like to look at technology and say, before it came on the scene, did it really improve things? Let's start with this. We have now technology; elections are in a total mess. The software, the automation, the hacking, the proprietary control of the software by the companies that sell the machines to the state governments. Across the border in Canada, they didn't fall for that. They still have paper ballots, and they know, by 11 o'clock, who won and who didn't in a vast land.

Number 2, what has all this internet done for poverty, alleviation of poverty? What has it all done for improving civic empowerment? It was supposed to really revolutionize the power of the many to hold the power of the few accountable. It hasn't done that. What has it done on corporate crime? Has it developed the kind of corporate crime databases? No, because the Justice Department has never done it. Why? Because the Justice Department is under the heavy influence of the corporate law firms and the corporate lobbyists.

Technology has failed miserably. What has it done for public awareness of the military industrial complex, the kinds of upgrades--trillion-and-a-half dollars to upgrade nuclear weapons; stockpiling nuclear weapons, but not stockpiling ventilators, and face masks, and swabs, and hospital facility . Why don't you attack it at its roots in order to destroy its propaganda of credibility that is now imposed by three or four giant companies with government backing.

Ramesh Srinivasan: Absolutely. That's why I believe that we need to give workers and the public greater equity and governance over all these technologies. As you said, technologies themselves aren't necessarily standing for particular aims, or values, or visions. The question is one of governance, and ownership, and equity. I can imagine corporate corruption being completely exposed through visualization technologies, but that can only occur if those holding the instruments of power over that technology are more pluralized.

Imagine at Uber, for example, where the Uber workers, instead of being completely exploited like we see with the gig economy; instead of them making 4 to 5 dollars an hour, less than a third of a living wage, if they actually had equity in the business themselves, they actually owned the business. Those are the kind of alternatives we have to propose. We have to start creating commons in terms of the governance and ownership of technology; otherwise absolutely every single thing you say is absolutely accurate and I completely agree. The question is one of power.

Ralph Nader: Let me interject here. You can't change an entrenched plutocratic, oligarchic, technological system without first delegitimizing it before you even say what the reforms have got to be. We have to delegitimize the supremacy of horsepower and style in the production of automobiles, which are killing people every day and wasting enormous economic resources before people are ready to listen. Most people are under séance; they love the internet. It is entertaining: video games, massive video games. It's informative. Sometimes, it's educational; it can be distracting; it can relieve depression; it connects people with impersonal text messages. They are Pavlovian specimens now. They're Pavlovian specimens. How do you begin to delegitimize it and say that this internet, \$4 trillion, annual industry, as you say in your book, is not solving any of the problems in our country.

I remember giving an address to a technology company in the late 1960s in the Santa Monica area, and the place was full with very optimistic people. It was the early computer age, and I said, "Let's talk about the computer and the consumer. What is the computer going to do to develop rigorous information standards and feedback mechanisms for complaints?" and they said it's going to revolutionize it. Well, we're still waiting. Let me put it this way-- for all the work consumer advocates have done over the decades, the consumers are being financially, economically exploited far more than they ever were, when you consider the fine-print contract developments, the payday-loan rackets, the lack of grievance procedures, the unpaid balances and interest rates. People are just being bounced around. Admitted, the cars are safer; this didn't require the internet. There are other advances; lead is no longer in people's body because it's out of gasoline and paint. I think you need a structural, functional analysis, Ramesh - no one is better able to do this - to delegitimize and wake people up, because if you don't wake people up, if you don't raise their expectations and get them steamed up, they're not going to want to support these reforms because they don't think anything is all that bad.

Ramesh Srinivasan: Yeah, absolutely. I completely agree. I think we have to expose all of the negative externalities and make them really, really visible to people. This is a time, by the way, to actually do that right where we're all, ironically enough, stuck at home looking at our phones, looking at our computers on these technology platforms. We have to make it extremely clear. I try to, in *Beyond the Valley*, show a bunch of examples of the incredible forms of injustice and inequality that are fueled by the internet of today. I do agree with you that we are addicted to and we see the internet as, really, the engine of all our lives. In a sense, consumption, and desire, and even emotion are manipulated, algorithmically, by these private technological systems.

However, I do want to point to one little ray of sunshine that I see, scouring polls and looking at literature, which is there are various polls I've seen. And I was talking to some people in Senator Warren's campaign about this, as well as the Sanders' campaign, which I am very honored to have represented. And we were looking at polls that saw about 75% of Americans are interested in regulatory reform of some kind. Now, that's very vague, and you know better than anybody, that might mean nothing, right? But I do see there's a little open spot. Often, it's for little Trojan Horses, like the Russia thing or the Cambridge Analytica thing, which are meaningful, symbolically, but that don't actually address the fact of systemic structural injustice that is

encoded into the internet today. I say let's go with the Trojan Horse and then open people up to all of the ways in which these technologies are disenfranchising them, especially black and brown people and working-class people. And I give a lot of examples in *Beyond the Valley* of how these technologies are turning out to be racist and classist, and so on.

Ralph Nader: We're going to get to that because Ramesh has gone all over the world, and he has found that the more sensible uses of the internet are taking place in the poorest countries; people in Kenya, a great example we'll talk about in a minute and the area of Oaxaca and the indigenous people in the mountains of Oaxaca, where by the way, my sister did her field work with the Zapotecs and has been teaching anthropology at Berkeley for many years.

Ramesh Srinivasan: I've actually read her book on [Villa] Talea de Castro, and I meant to tell you about that. She's another heroic figure. There are at least two Naders that are like that in my life.

Ralph Nader: Let me just ask you. I want to ask you this, even in the best of scenarios with the internet, the way you envision, there's one fatal flaw. And that's its all-encompassing interpersonality. It is not person-to-person. It can lead to announcements of meetings, town meetings, marches, rallies, etcetera, but the more people live in virtual reality, the less likely they're going to want to meet. In fact, they don't even have the personal skills now for two-way live telephone calls among young people anymore. How do you deal with that? Because nothing happens without people, and people meeting. You can have all the internet you want, but the jury is still out as to whether it can, alone, make social change without devolving or evolving, contemporaneously, into neighborhood meetings, into the meetings that have built democratic processes and given us whatever blessings we have. How do you deal with this fatal flaw?

Ramesh Srinivasan: Yes, a couple things. First of all, we do see, again and again and again, positive correlations between more and more internet use and more and more mobile app use, and depression, and a difficulty in experiencing intimacy, emotional vulnerability, psychological vulnerability. I do point to some of that research in *Beyond the Valley*. Yeah, that's a huge issue. When I'm texting with someone else, it's not really the same as embodied presence, mindfulness, really engaged, and present communication, so you're absolutely right about that at scale, this can be a huge problem, and this relates to a term that we sometimes use in academia we call slacktivism. That's where you're kind of like an activist, but you're kind of a slacker. You're just passing on a petition or so on. This was an issue that I actually investigated on the grounds for three years, three summers: 2011, 2012, and 2013 in Egypt in the midst of the Arab Spring. And I was looking at how the Western corporate capitalist rhetoric of "these people are saved by our technology" because it's the so-called Facebook revolution, which is total BS. On the ground, you actually find that almost nobody is using these technologies in the context of collective action and large-scale mobilization. Luckily, people who were subversive and tactical, who had access to these technologies, used them in ways to manipulate and shape global journalism and global sentiments. The technologies are not necessarily catalysts for in-person collective action and organizing. There is space for hackers; there is space for media manipulation, and so on. But

it is a huge problem. It makes us feel, in a sense, alone [while] together, and that is a real problem we have here.

Ralph Nader: We're talking with Ramesh Srinivasan, the author of *Beyond the Valley*, published by the prestigious MIT press. He's walking down the street in Nairobi, Kenya, and what do you see?

Ramesh Srinivasan: It's incredible. We often hear the term "necessity is the mother of invention". I like to open up to another word "necessity is the mother of innovation", and this is something you know, I know, and many of our listeners know, that when we go into places and communities not just in our country, but all over the world, where people have less resources, they're not as deluded by this myth of infinite resources that we know is not true; but that's the narrative that capitalism kind of spins upon all of us. The people who have less are able to innovate with less, and this is something I've seen in action not just in Nairobi, Kenya, but actually all over the world. I see it even here in Los Angeles in South L.A., or even in certain areas of downtown all across the world, all across Latin America, which is people are taking whatever is around them and they're hustling. They're hustling. They're figuring out ways to work with scarcity and innovate with those constraints.

Ralph Nader: Using the internet, right?

Ramesh Srinivasan: Partly using the internet, but partly just using detritus, the residue of the internet.

Ralph Nader: What did you find on that street in Kenya?

Ramesh Srinivasan: In Kibera, for example, which is a large settlement community in the middle of Nairobi, I saw people repairing every technology imaginable--from cell phones, to old cathode-ray [tube] TVs, to chairs, to wheels--everything that is designed to die, everything that dies. And we know Apple designs its phones to die. It's called planned obsolescence, much like Monsanto designs its seeds to die. But, everything that's dead is given new life by these innovators. They're literally on the street just figuring out how to fix things. They're just kind of hacking things in various ways, and they're selling repaired devices, repaired technologies of all kinds back in the informal market, and that is what people are able to survive on.

The thing that really blew my mind was that I didn't just see this with things like mobile phones; I didn't just see this with older technologies. I also saw this with 3D printers, and this is something I talk about in the book. People in Kenya, are called Jua Kali, which in Swahili means "hot sun". They literally set up tables underneath the hot sun with a soldering gun and they just learn by doing. They just figure out ways to hack and repair things, and this is what they did with 3D printers as well. They took discarded electronics, electronic waste; this is something we often don't talk about--how the digital world promotes incredible amount of energy consumption as well as electronic waste, massive, massive amounts of waste. This is something that is often another externality that nearly nobody, or very few people, talks about or knows about.

I saw people taking electronic waste: discarded circuit boards, wires, just things that would be treated as junk, and actually building 3D printers out of about 60, 70 percent waste parts, and

they built 3D printers! One of the groups is called Africa Born 3D. They built these 3D printers because they only were able to afford figuring out a way to do that with whatever was considered waste. They built 3D printers that not only outperformed American and Chinese 3D printers, but they're a fraction of the price. They have built an entrepreneurial model from the grassroots, based on notions of sustainability, not of some branding category, but out of reality because you've got to do what you can. You've got to hustle with what you can based on what's around you, an incredible...

Ralph Nader: You're saying these 3D printers in a street corner in Nairobi were making everything from medical devices to household appliances out of all this waste product, and circuits, and wires that they salvaged? Are you serious?

Ramesh Srinivasan: Blows your mind when you see it. It's a heuristic process. It's a process of learning by doing. It's a little bit of trial and error. People are trying to figure out what works with what. These are not people with fancy degrees from MIT, or all these schools in the West that we think of as the producers of elite engineers. These are people who learn by doing, learn by playing, learn by creating, learn by repairing, learn by recycling. It's not because they're noble environmentalists, even though the crisis of environmental injustice hits them in a very real and material way. It's because that's all they have to work with, and that is really incredible.

Ralph Nader: These medical devices and household appliances, you say, that comes out of these 3D printers on a street in Nairobi are, "Not only are they a fraction of the cost of Chinese and even American printers, they're also far more robust and resilient, able to withstand the heat, noise, and elements of this East African country. Why? Because, they were designed by Kenyans for their local environment and federal countrymen." Let's go to Oaxaca's mountains [Mexico]. What did you discover there?

Ramesh Srinivasan: What we see happening in Oaxaca, and we've actually seen this all over the world, is there is a technology that exists that really has served and supported communities, meaning communities as people living in places with actually real ideas of interdependence, and governance, and traditional histories, and so on. And that is the technology of community radio, and that is the model. The community-radio model has influenced innovators in places like Oaxaca to build community-owned cell phone networks and community-owned intranets networks, which are basically local communication networks and pathways to access the wider internet. While this is a movement we see happening all over the world, but in Oaxaca, we see across dozens of indigenous Zapotec, Mixtec, and Mixe communities. We see communities owning and building collectively. They collectively own and design their own digital cell phone networks, meaning that any value that is provided out of the network is redistributed in the community; employment is local. People together make decisions in very directly democratic ways. They call them "ensembles" or assemblies. They come together and make decisions about what kind of network they want and why. People are able to take power over technology truly in a community-based way, and there are dozens of these networks that exist now not just in Oaxaca, but we see this model spreading. It's the rise-o-matic model. The project is called Telefono Indigena Comunitaria, Indigenous Community Telephony, but they are really influenced by the concept of the rhizomatic learning, the political philosophy that, almost in a subversive, decentralized way, anybody anywhere can do it themselves. They can create their

own networks. We see this happening now in Colombia; we see it happening in West Papua, which is fighting for political sovereignty; we see this happening in Brazil; we see this happening in Argentina; we see this happening in Catalonia. These are models that exist where people are able to take power over technology in resilience ways. We even saw this happening in Red Hook in Brooklyn during super-storm Sandy where the community was able to keep its own communication network alive amidst the climate crisis. We see it happening in Detroit with the Detroit Community Technology Project's Allied Media [Project AMP]. Those guys have been doing a lot of great work in this area. I just want to make the point that the game is not over. It just depends on what scale. The game is not over when it comes to technology serving peoples-based interests. I know you can see a little bit of optimism and progressivism in my writing and my speaking. It's because I really believe that there's an opportunity. We've got to fight to transform technology in the image of people.

Ralph Nader: We're obviously not seeing it adequately reported in this country. Far more attention is given in the mass media to the latest techno-twit app that comes out of Silicon Valley [Ramesh laughs], and then all this remarkable innovation born out of poverty, born out of desperation, born out of the inability to buy a planned-obsolescence Apple phone to give Apple enormous profit margins. We're going to have another program with you on, Ramesh, to talk about the "Digital Bill of Rights"[bipartisan bill proposed in 2012] in Congress that's got to have much more focus on those 535 members of Congress to make this all happen, and we can make it because, back home, we certainly outnumber corporations in terms of aroused and committed voters. You were a surrogate for Bernie Sanders. Let's have some of your brief thoughts before we have to conclude on his suspending his campaign and whether it's just another strategy or throwing in the towel to Delaware Joe Biden.

Ramesh Srinivasan: [laughter] Well, nothing but love and appreciation that I have personally and that many of my compatriots have for what Bernie represents and has represented in our country. I feel, in many ways, he took the mantle that was kind of put out into the public sphere with the Occupy movement that I was involved with. With the Arab Spring, I was involved with more as a scholar and in solidarity. His positions, I believe, have been mistakenly portrayed as radical. The term "socialist" is a bad word in this country because of the history of propaganda.

Ralph Nader: Not anymore. Socialism is king out of Washington, Trump style, bailing out big capitalism.

Ramesh Srinivasan: Yes, and that's why I feel that it's a huge opportunity right now where Americans really see the value of universal healthcare or socialized healthcare, of socialized employment guarantees and work guarantees, and being paid amidst this crisis. It's time now for some real leaders. We have to step up, and workers need to take power right now, otherwise we're going to have the inversion. We're going to have the *Shock Doctrine* all over again. This is what I've been trying to say. I'm really hopeful that, out of our movement, out of Bernie's leadership, even with him stepping down today, that something is going to emerge out of this vacuum, because we are in this liminal [transitional] space right now where I feel it's time for people to really step up to support what Bernie has proposed in terms of policies, but actually say, "Hey workers, you need to take power and demand these kinds of changes."

Again, I am an optimist, so I feel like that can really happen. Noam Chomsky has pointed out that, in the past, with the original New Deal, remember there was that second New Deal, that second Bill of Rights that FDR proposed that never came to be, right? The way we can get that to happen is there has to be coordinated actions with workers, and all of these work acts like the killing of unions, like the Taft-Hardley Act, have really harmed worker power.

I feel like here's an opportunity. Now is this time. We're all stuck at home; we're all glued to the internet. Let's move now. Let's figure out ways in which people can fight, and mobilize, and take power around these issues. Bernie stepping down is sad, but at the same time, I understand his service and I appreciate it.

Ralph Nader: He's going to continue to the convention with his candidates. He has hundreds of candidates, and his name will remain on the ballot in upcoming primaries, so we'll see what negotiating power and leverage he and the movement behind him continues to have.

Ramesh Srinivasan: My hope is that we can build, though, off of this, that there's an opportunity to build and fight, and I feel like now's the time to make some moves. That's what I feel; at the minimum, I'm going to be writing. But I want to speak out in public as much as possible, whatever public means right now. That's why me joining you today, you've been a hero to me for decades, Ralph, is an opportunity for me.

Ralph Nader: Thank you, but we do have to pay attention to the serious problem of lack of civic motivation, to mobilize in the interest of the citizens themselves, and focus on Congress. That's got to be the next trajectory. Unfortunately, Ramesh, we're out of time. We've been talking with Ramesh Srinivasan, who is the author of a really powerful book called *Beyond the Valley*, meaning beyond Silicon Valley, which studies the relationships between technologies, politics, economics, and societies across the world as if people matter, first and foremost. Thank you very much, Ramesh. To be continued, for sure.

Ramesh Srinivasan: It's a huge honor, and I can't wait to join you in conversation again. Please let me know, any time, how I can support you and what you stand for. Thank you for all your leadership.

Steve Skrovan: We have been speaking with Ramesh Srinivasan about his new book, *Beyond the Valley*. We have a link to that at RalphNaderRadioHour.com. Now, we're going to take a short break. When we come back, we will hear from attorney and landlord, Joe Cotchett, about what he is doing to help out his tenants during the lockdown.

Russell Mokhiber: From the National Press Building in Washington, D.C., this is your Corporate Crime Reporter Morning Minute for Thursday, April 2, 2020. I'm Russell Mokhiber. Stanley Sporkin, the crusading chief enforcement officer of the Securities and Exchange Commission in the 1970s, died last week in Rockville, Maryland. That's according to a report in the *Washington Post*. At the SEC, where he spent seven years as the agency's director of enforcement, Sporkin led lawyers, whom he called the finest law firm in the country, in bold actions against such well-known companies as Gulf, Exxon, Mobil, Lockheed, R.J. Reynolds, and 3M for trying to bribe political figures in foreign countries. One of Sporkin's first major SEC

cases resulted in the 1974 conviction of George Steinbrenner, a ship builder and owner of the New York Yankees for illegal campaign contributions. The chairman of Lockheed was ousted after admitting to funneling \$22 million in payoffs to foreign politicians. For the Corporate Crime Reporter, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you, Russell. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. I'm Steve Skrovan along with David Feldman and Ralph. San Francisco has started moving homeless people off of the streets and into the city's now empty hotels. This lets people self-isolate and not infect others. With this particular crisis, it's more important than ever to keep people housed. Another thing that is helping people stay housed is stopping evictions. That's what we're going to talk about with our next guest. David?

David Feldman: Joe Cotchett is a prominent lawyer who built his career by representing the underdog against powerful interests. Mr. Cotchett is a property owner in Half Moon Bay in the Bay Area. He is waiving two months' rent for his 65 Half Moon Bay tenants to help keep these businesses afloat during the pandemic. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Joe Cotchett.

Joe Cotchett: Thank you very much. Very nice to be here, especially given these incredible times we're going through.

Ralph Nader: Thank you indeed, Joe. People should know Joe's not just a lawyer and a landlord. He is an author. One of his books is called *The People vs. Greed: Stealing America: Main Street vs. Wall Street: The Continued Erosion of Ethics in Our Professions, Business, and Government*, and this is full of facts that affect you every day, people. Joe, this isn't the first time you've done this. As a landlord, you have properties, 65 retail tenants in Half Moon Bay in California, and this isn't the first time you've done it. Tell us about the last time and why you've done it this time.

Joe Cotchett: I did it in 2008 when we went through the last crisis, and let me just back up and say this. I'm a lawyer, and that's my primary occupation, but as people know, who know me, I'm involved in a lot of civic and community activities. I really think of myself as someone who would like to change the way this economy is functioning. The book you just mentioned, *People vs. Greed*, what we do in my law firm is we basically take on Wall Street and the greed of corporate America who takes advantage of people.

The fact that I'm a landlord came about in the '70s when some people over in Half Moon Bay, which is the Bay Area of San Francisco, small community. They were having some economic problems with the building. I represented one of them; I went over and helped them through their problems with the building. They eventually paid me back and asked me if I would take the building. I took it, reluctantly, and then following that, I just got active in Half Moon Bay, which is a fabulous little community, like many communities across America. As a matter of fact, its main street is called Main Street. [Ralph chuckles] I acquired other buildings, and what I have in there are little restaurants, little shops. It's right on the ocean. These people work like many Americans do, month to month, make their earnings. I don't want to give the impression I own major, major commercial buildings. I do not. I own a number of buildings with all small retail restaurants, merchants. I have some doctors; I have some accountants; I have some professional

people in offices. And to be brutally candid with you, in 2008, that recession hit. I wasn't about to say to a small little restaurant, for example, Alright, terminate your dishwashers, your service people, your cooks. Instead, I said, Look, let's all get on our feet here and keep Main Street Main Street.

Now, let me take off my hat just for a moment of my heart, and put on my economic hat. This is what I try and stress to people all over California. Look, if you own a building and you have tenants in it, the math and economics are very simple. Now, I'm talking throw away the heart and just put the economic hat on. If you own a building with some small tenants in it, and they go out bankrupt, whatever it may be, they close, what do you think happens to the value of your building? It goes to nothing, because a commercial building without tenants, as we all know, is worth nothing. If you put the heart aside just for a moment, even economically, it is important that people that own commercial buildings realize that we're all in a boat together and you must row that boat. If you do not row that boat with the little retail or whoever it may be--I keep using the word "retail" as little, and I'll come back to that--if you do not row that boat, the value of your buildings, whatever they may be, is going to be nothing. You are going to lose in the big picture, so my suggestion is for everybody to think about their heart. Get in the boat, row it together. Everybody, at the end of the day, will then be in a better position than they were being put out on the street. It's not rocket science; it is not being a big-hearted person. It is common sense. It is common sense what we have to do all over America today.

I am absolutely dumbfounded to see, recently, some commercial tenants in both Los Angeles and San Francisco not only not reducing rents, but increasing rents. The folly, the craziness, and of course, being the type of person I am, I point this all back to the Trump administration.

Ralph Nader: There are people who agree with you. The *New York Times* report a few days ago, Joe, about Mario Salerno.

Joe Cotchett: I read that article. God bless that person.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, he is a Brooklyn landlord and he has forgiven the rent in April to hundreds of his tenants, and he announced it by putting a sign on all the buildings that quoted this way, they woke up one morning, they saw the sign, "Stay safe, help your neighbors, and wash your hands, and you don't have to pay April rent," and then he said, "Thank you, Mario." As you say, most of the landlords are either charging the same or charging more, taking advantage of it. There's a corporate crime spree springing up with all this \$2.2 trillion being shoveled out. There's going to be a lot of defective products, a lot of wrongful injury, a lot of commercial scams, and the companies are pushing for legal immunity, Joe.

Joe Cotchett: I see that, yes.

Ralph Nader: What's your view of all this? Because, this may be a terrible backfire against existing rights that wrongfully injured people have today.

Joe Cotchett: Let's go back just one minute to the gentleman in Brooklyn. I wrote him a note. I was so proud of what he did, and I hope his conduct forces others to think the way he did. Now,

talking about where we're going in that direction, it is clear that Nancy Pelosi and others saw that, under the, I think it's called the CARES Act.

Ralph Nader: That's right, it's called the CARES Act, C-A-R-E-S.

Joe Cotchett: Yeah, I think they saw, under that, there could be wild, wild exploitation of the money going out. I don't want to be so harsh, but I read an article in the paper that some of that could be going to the Trump Hotel organizations. Look, Nancy and her cohorts in Congress are now going to deal with that, and have dealt with that, partially. I say partially because it's not clear to me yet who is going to run and oversee the distribution of that money. You know and I know there's going to be phony medicines put out there on the street. There are going to be all kinds of phony issues surrounding the whole virus problem. We're seeing it daily. You go into stores and you see toilet paper went from what? 76 cents average a roll to \$14 a roll here in the Bay Area. It is extraordinary, the rape and pillage that is going on, and that our so-called government, whether they be local, state, or national, are not cracking down on that. It is outrageous. You see it going on, you know. What are we talking about? We're talking about 2 trillion right now? Is that the number?

Ralph Nader: Yeah, and there's more trillions coming.

Joe Cotchett: You know, as shown in 2008, how many executives of corporate America bought back stock and paid themselves bonuses. It is scandalous; it is outrageous. Thank God for people like Nancy Pelosi that recognize that and took a hard stand against it. The problem we're faced with is I'm not so sure how hard that is going to be policed--policed meaning how clearly they're going to watch for the rape and pillage that's going on to get their hands on that money.

Ralph Nader: It's a corporate crime spree; it's going to be up to the attorney generals of the states. The Justice Department is talking big time, but they're not going to do anything. This may be a very serious adverse effect to the Trump campaign, come November, Joe, because people are going to see how they're being ripped off at skyrocket-gouging levels in the stores when there are temporary scarcities.

Joe Cotchett: Yeah, I hope you're right, Ralph. Here's my comment to that. As a lawyer, we do know that it may be that the attorney generals of various states, the attorney general of California, for example, the attorney general of New York, two fabulous people, are not going to have the opportunity, because we're talking about economic dollars and we're talking about federal law. It may be that it's only the Department of Justice that can crack down, and we sure as hell know that Barr is not going to put that memo out.

Ralph Nader: That's for sure. I think what we're seeing here is a real crisis, where, out of it, the corporations can become more powerful than ever. They can become immunized from more lawsuits than ever. Or, we can have a democratic resurgence, progressive style, where we cut back on their power, hold them accountable, and change the type of people who represent us in Washington and other state capitals.

Joe Cotchett: Go back just for a minute, and here's the problem. That's very nice to say, Ralph. I'm glad to hear those words come out of your mouth, but the practical aspect is the law is

moving forward. As we speak today, CARES, the coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security Act is moving forward as we speak, and who is policing that? That's the problem. That money is going to get out, and to be brutally candid with you, the average person on the street, 60% live month-to-month, paycheck-to-paycheck. Let's be clear about this. You don't really think that that person on the street who's living paycheck-to-paycheck is going to have any in-depth knowledge of the new CARES Relief Act. They are not. It goes back to our elected officials, and the fact of the matter is that there's only so much they can do. What I'm saying to you is that, unfortunately, I don't think the state attorney generals are going to have much say in that, Ralph. I would love to see them step up to the plate and look at this carefully. I don't know that the law provides for that.

Ralph Nader: We need private civil action too that your firm is so well-known for. We need more class actions [lawsuits]. We need massive infusions of small claims court, and we need to prosecute some of the big fat cats, put them in black and white stripes, and make an example, which was not the case in 2008. Nobody went to jail from these Wall Street speculators and rip-off artists.

Joe Cotchett: Quite to the contrary, they were able to sell stock back and gave themselves bonuses. But going back to the point you just made; you're right. Let me tell you some of the cases we're just filing that you'll find of interest. For example, we're going after several insurance companies that have taken premiums for years and years, especially in the recent five or 10 years when the economy has been moving. They've been taking premiums for "business interruption". Now we have business interruption. Every other store that you look out at and see plywood on has been interrupted by this virus. They're taking the position, all these insurance companies nationwide, that that is not covered by business interruption. We're filing lawsuits against some of the biggest insurance companies in America to get the courts to rule that, yes, it certainly does. What is more of a business interruption than you are told by your local authority that you must close your store? I don't care whether it's a fire, whether it's a leaky pipe, or whether it's a virus. The fact of the matter is you're told to close. That's called a business interruption. How about all the people that buy tickets through entities for event all over the country? They've now bought tickets, by the way, for the baseball season; they've bought tickets for the basketball season; they've even bought tickets for the Tokyo Olympics. And they are being refused money back from airlines, from everyone, for their deposits that they put up. Who is going to go after these people? Do you think it's going to be the federal government? I doubt that, and therein lies the problem, and that's why private law firms have to get involved representing individuals in class actions. By the way, a very prominent lawyer, I wouldn't mention the law firm, just referred to class actions as another method for communists to take over our judicial system. Can you imagine that?

Ralph Nader: People are becoming alert to asking the following questions: "If there's less traffic, there are fewer traffic accidents. Why aren't we getting a rebate on insurance, on our auto insurance?" Well, Allstate Insurance company is one of two or three already, who said they're going to give rebates back to their policyholders. You pay for your cable, monthly fee, and there are no sports. Why aren't you getting a rebate? Be very demanding, consumers. Every area that you're paying your bills, you may be able to get a refund or a rebate, and if you can't, be alert to

these class actions that are being filed all over the country. Steve, David, any final questions or comments?

Steve Skrovan: Joe, as a practical matter, how long can you afford to go on like this and forgive rent?

David Feldman: Yeah, I was just going to ask that.

Joe Cotchett: Is this Steve or David?

Steve Skrovan: Steve.

Joe Cotchett: Look, I've been blessed in my practice; I've done well. I'm going to go on as long as we have to go on that's reasonable. By reasonable, I mean, wait, and I told all the tenants in our buildings we're doing no rent for April and May, and I said, specifically in writing so there can be no doubt, and if this lingers into June, July, we will further consider that. I'm saying this openly, publicly, when these people are in trouble, we're going to help them, and that's all I can say in the sense that your heart is going to decide that.

Ralph Nader: We're out of time. Thanks very much, Joe, and if you think we can help spread what you're doing, just give us the information, because landlords like you and Mr. Salerno in Brooklyn really throw the other landlords up against the wall with the question, "Well, what about you?" And 40% of the renters in New York City couldn't make April rent, which was due on Wednesday. That's how bad it is in New York City. Thank you for your example, Joe, and your advocacy behind the example, giving interviews from media who call you from the Bay Area and around the country. Thanks again, Joe.

Joe Cotchett: Steve, David, Ralph, thank you for what you are doing.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Joe Cotchett about his efforts to help his tenants stay afloat during this crisis. I want to thank both our guests again: Ramesh Srinivasan and Joe Cotchett. For those of you listening on the radio, that's our show. For you podcast listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material. We've got a lot of it, and we call it the "Wrap Up". A transcript for this show will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* website soon after the episode is posted.

David Feldman: Subscribe to us on our *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* YouTube Channel, and for Ralph Nader's weekly column - it's free - go to Nader.org. For more from Russell Mokhiber, go to CorporateCrimeReporter.com.

Steve Skrovan: Ralph has got three books out: *A Fable: How the Rats Re-Formed the Congress*. To acquire a copy of that, go to RatsReformCongress.org. *Fake President: Decoding Trump's Gaslighting, Corruption, and General BS*, co-written with Mark Green, and the one we talked about at the top of the show, *The Ralph Nader and Family Cookbook: Classic Recipes from Lebanon and Beyond*. We will link to that also.

David Feldman: The producers of the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* are Jimmy Lee Wirt and Matthew Marron. 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 intern is Michaela Squier.

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

Ralph Nader: Stay safe, everybody, and start demanding your rebates.

♪ Listen to me, people. Do you understand? ♪

♪ We got to (stand up) ♪

♪ Oh, you've been sitting way too long (oh stand up) ♪

♪ You know what's right and you know what's wrong (rise up) ♪

♪ Don't let the system pull you down ♪

♪ Stand up, stand up. You've been sitting way too long ♪

♪ Oh, stand up. Oh, you should stand up ♪