

## RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 344 TRANSCRIPT

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

**David Feldman:** Good morning.

**Steve Skrovan:** And the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

**Ralph Nader:** Hello, everybody. Get ready for a good show.

**Steve Skrovan:** That is absolutely correct. Ever since President Trump pulled out of the Iran nuclear deal in 2018, Iran and the United States continue to be stuck in a cycle of brinkmanship and violence. Our first guest, David Barsamian, is a journalist and lead author of *ReTargeting Iran*, who is here to tell us more about America's turbulent history of that very important Middle Eastern country. His book is a facts-only objective account of where America has gone wrong. And that's just the first part of the show.

In the second part of the show, we welcome political cartoonist, Mr. Fish. Mr. Fish is actually the cartoonist who illustrated Ralph's updated book, *The Day the Rats Vetoed Congress*. And I'd like to know how you cartoon when we've been living in a cartoon world. Well, we'll find out all about that. And somewhere in between, we will as always take some time out to check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first, let's talk about the U.S. and Iran's relationship. Dave Feldman?

**David Feldman:** David Barsamian is a tireless and wide-ranging investigative journalist. He has altered the independent media landscape with his weekly radio program, *Alternative Radio*. Mr. Barsamian lectures on world affairs, imperialism, capitalism, propaganda, the media and global rebellions. He's the author of numerous books featuring voices such as Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn. Some of his more recent books are *Global Discontents: Rising Threats to Democracy*, *Culture and Resistance: Conversations with Edward Said*, and *ReTargeting Iran*. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour*, David Barsamian.

**David Barsamian:** Thank you very much.

**Ralph Nader:** Welcome indeed, David, sort of turning the tables on you. You've interviewed me a number of times. Now, I'm interviewing you. And you've come out with this book, *ReTargeting Iran* [which is] very timely because a desperate Donald Trump may want to start some trouble before the election in the Strait of Hormuz or around Iran. Before we get into the book, which is a compilation of insights by people who really know the subject led by Noam Chomsky and some Iranian-American scholars, listeners should know that from the Iranian point of view historically, Iran hasn't invaded anybody for over 240 years. Number two, when George W. Bush called Iran part of the "axis of evil" along with Iraq and North Korea, when the U.S. illegally overthrew the government in Iraq with the devastating consequences to Iraqis to the present day, I suppose the Iranian regime thought they were next, which means that they had to produce a defense system in the circle of influence in the Middle East--something we would have done very, very aggressively if the shoe was on the other foot. At the same time, the Iranian people remember that the U.S. government backed Saddam Hussein in all kinds of ways in his invasion of Iran, which took hundreds of thousands of casualties back when Saddam was an ally of the U.S. And of course, Israel is constantly provoking acts of destruction in Iran from time to time in conjunction with the U.S. And so, people who are running Iran, [which is] a very poor country with a GDP [gross domestic product] less than that of Massachusetts, even though there are about 80 million people, can get a little paranoid, especially since recent provocations have accentuated Trump's focus on an aggressive response to Iran, which is surrounded by the way by U.S. forces in Afghanistan and Iraq and in the Persian Gulf. So with that kind of background, David, why did you put this book out, *ReTargeting Iran*, right now other than the very poor media coverage of all these issues?

**David Barsamian:** Well, to counter the enormous propaganda that has saturated any discussion about Iran in the U.S. corporate media and in the so-called alternative media as well. Look, you know, let's cut to the chase. I mean, Iran is a theocratic regime. Its policies are homophobic, patriarchal. It doesn't have a lot of, you know, really positive aspects to it. And so, it becomes a very convenient punching bag for Washington to ratchet up tensions in the Middle East in order to justify the continuation of its imperial trajectory of massive military bases all over the region, and basically, as you said, surrounding Iran. Now, you know, August marked the 67th anniversary of Operation Ajax, which is something Ervand Abrahamian, one of the contributors to [the] *ReTargeting Iran* book talks about; that's where democracy was destroyed in Iran, the overthrow of a very popular liberal politician, Mohammad Mosaddegh, had enormous consequences. In fact, the CIA report on that coup, organized by Washington and helped by the British, was that it was the first example of what they call blowback, the unintended consequences of U.S. actions. So what happened in '53--the destruction of democracy. They brought back the Shah and put him back on the peacock throne, where he ruled for 26 years setting the stage for the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979. And the hostage crisis, which began

in November of '79 really has jaundiced how many Americans view Iran. They have very bitter memories of what was regarded as a national humiliation at that point. Now, I'm glad you mentioned that the U.S. embraced Saddam Hussein very enthusiastically throughout the 1980s when it was killing hundreds of thousands of Iranians. But, you know, the U.S. and Iran have also moved closer together in the fall of 2001. After the attacks of 9/11, Iran and the U.S. reached a rapprochement. Iran was instrumental in the Bonn conference and persuading its allies in Afghanistan to accept Hamid Karzai as the new president of Iran. So this helped the moderates in Iran, people like the Ayatollah Mohammad Baqir al-Hakim to embrace the U.S. and come closer. So what was Washington's response to what Iran did? It declared the country an axis of evil in 2002 in George W. Bush's State of the Union address, pairing Iran with its enemy, Iraq. I mean, this was a huge blow to any kind of rapprochement with Iran. Now let's fast forward to--I'm collapsing a lot of history here, but to the so-called Iran deal, the JCPOA. We talk about in the book quite a bit, and why that was so significant—

**Ralph Nader:** That's called the nuclear accord.

**David Barsamian:** Yes, indeed. And the accord was nullified unilaterally by our great leader in Washington in 2018. But here is a perfect example of what is called "chutzpah". You know, chutzpah, Ralph; it's that Yiddish phrase for unimaginable arrogance. The U.S. pulls out of the Iran accord. And then in September, just a few weeks ago, it goes to the UN demanding that the UN implement snapback provisions in terms of more punitive sanctions on Iran. Now, what was the vote in the UN [that was] barely reported on? I mean, the U.S. was humiliated. It picked up one vote; that is that Caribbean powerhouse, the Dominican Republic. Otherwise, its vaunted allies, Britain, France, Germany, and others all voted against the U.S. proposal in the Security Council.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, The nuclear weapons accord that Obama negotiated with Iran was viewed widely as working. Iran was complying. And under Trump, Secretary of Defense Mattis said the nuclear accord was in the U.S.'s best national interest. So he affirmed it. And then Trump came under the influence of Sheldon Adelson, the multi-billionaire that helped fund his campaign in 2016, who in effect got John Bolton to replace retired General [H.R.] McMaster as a national security advisor to Donald Trump. And Bolton wanted to bomb Iran. He was a hawk. He wanted to bomb North Korea. And then what happened? I think our listeners are also concerned with the horrific sanctions that are coming down hard on tens of millions of impoverished Iranians, which of course is a violation of international law in the Geneva protocols. You can have sanctions on a government, but if it has a disproportionate effect on starving people, on keeping them from getting medical equipment and services and other ways, it becomes an international crime. Can you talk about that part of the Trump administration?

**David Barsamian:** It's extremely damaging to the Iranian people. The average Iranian is suffering enormously under these punitive sanctions, particularly in the time of a global pandemic where medicine is not getting to Iran. Medical equipment is not getting to Iran. Why? Because all transactions are being limited via the banks, which the U.S. influence. So no transactions can be conducted, even if people want to send medicine or equipment to Iran. So it's had a very deleterious effect. Iran has very high levels of the COVID-19. And on a humanitarian level, we should be extending our arms and our welcoming to Iran to overcome the crisis of COVID-19. But what is Washington's position? Bullying, more aggressive talk, bellicose actions and the like, and it reminds me of the Skinnerian approach to foreign policy that this administration seems to have adopted. That is if you keep, you know, screaming and yelling, ultimately, you will get what you want from the targeted person or the country. But that hasn't happened. Iran is a proud country. It's a millennial old civilization. It's not a new kid on the block. And they're demanding, I think quite rightly, to be treated with dignity and respect. And that's not happening because this regime in Washington is all about a lot of aggressive talk and punishing Iran. And, you know, going back on the deal was a huge, I believe, error. And that has been compounded by the appointment of the notorious Elliot Abrams as U.S. special envoy to Iran. Elliot Abrams of Iran-Contra infamy in the 1980s, and you know, well known for his extremist views.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, you know, Noam Chomsky--who has contributed a couple of chapters in this book, *ReTargeting Iran*--called it a state of war--that basically, the U.S. attacks general; they killed the leading general earlier this year, along with a militia Iraqi general, who was at the airport at the time. We're speaking with David Barsamian. They are provoking all kinds of violent actions inside Iran. And Chomsky calls it a state of war. The Congress has not authorized this. This is Trump with one of his lawless wars. He's into nine countries, even though he talks about ending endless wars. And what do you think he's going to do if he's desperate? He's way down in the polls now. What is he capable of? And, you know, he doesn't really have the military on his side. He doesn't have our allies in Europe on his side. The military liked the nuclear accord with Iran that Trump pulled out of, and then imposed these draconian sanctions, muscling the banks and muscling our allies not to sell or buy anything to Iran; not to buy its oil and not to provide it with food imports. What do you think he's capable of? This is why you put out this book. This book is a high alert book. It's got a lot of history, but it's very relevant for the next few weeks.

**David Barsamian:** Look, we have a rogue regime in Washington that is capable of literally anything--of fabricating a Gulf of Tonkin type of incident to justify a military attack on Iran to distract the American people. You know, I think it was Huey Long is attributed to have said that when fascism comes to the United States, it will be wrapped in a Bible inside an American flag. And so, by creating a crisis in the Gulf and saying that this is a matter of national security, Trump could try and pull a rabbit out of the hat and distract the American people from the abominable policies, which have led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people in this country and expanding military action. So it's a very dangerous moment. I think we have to be

highly alert to being manipulated by calls, patriotism and rally around the flag and support our brave men and women in uniform who are in harm's way and all of those other clichés and slogans that are marshaled out to subdue, to limit thinking and critical discourse. So it's up to us; it's up to the American people to stay alert and to prevent any kind of military action.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, you know, this little book is very timely, David. It should be sent to members of Congress who should send warning signals to watch out for a late October surprise, as the saying goes. It's been given admiring quotes on the back. You have an admiring quote by Seymour Hersh. You have a quote by Stephen Kinzer, the author of *All the Shah's Men*. And he says, "This little book contains more wisdom about Iran than exists in the White House, Congress, State Department, and the Pentagon combined." Are you getting press coverage on this [on] NPR, PBS, the commercial stations? What kind of attention is this book getting?

**David Barsamian:** Well, we just did a webinar yesterday with two of the books' contributors, Nader Hashemi and Trita Parsi. That was organized by the Institute of Policy Studies in Washington. I'm doing interviews with Sonali Kolhatkar's *Uprising [Rising up with Sonali]* and other interviews as well. So there's been some coverage, but NPR and PBS are nowhere to be seen or heard on this particular issue.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, this is a book for *Democracy Now!* and Amy Goodman. The treatment of Iran, you know, they try to justify beating up on Iran by saying it's an authoritarian regime, it suppresses women, et cetera. But actually, there's a lot more dissent going on in Iran. It's sort of an escape valve by the rulers. They allow demonstrations and marches and objections up to a limit. But the point is that if we were surrounded like that in the United States by giant powerful forces, you think there'd be anything left of our democracy and dissent? That's what's so good about Chomsky's contribution. He says, if the shoe was on the other foot and some foreign power overthrew our president in 1953 and installed a dictatorship and encouraged a neighboring country to invade our country and impose all kinds of horrific sanctions and blockades, what do you think we would do? Just before we close, David, I want to give Steve and David an opportunity pitch in here.

**Steve Skrovan:** Yeah, David, obviously, a lot of our policy twitter on is in relationship with Israel. How real or how credible is Israel's fear of Iran? Do they really have something to fear from Iran?

**David Barsamian:** I don't think so. Israel is an extremely powerful military force. It has weapons of mass destruction, several hundred nukes by the latest count. It has a very sophisticated air force. What goes on in Iran around Israel and, you know, chanting of “*Death to Israel*” is basically political theater for hardliners in Iran to keep their base kind of placated and satisfied. There's no Iranian leader that would risk the destruction, not only of their regime, but of the country. I mean, Israel can simply wipe out Iran with its military force. So people should understand, that's what's going on with “*Death to Israel*”. You know, it's almost like political theater that plays out every Friday after the prayers.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, it's all part of the giant American empire dominating the world and costing the U.S. people enormous prices. All empires eventually devour themselves, and given the starved public budgets in this country for domestic necessities so that the swollen, bloated, gigantic military budget can continue, is one of the price of empire. So, people listening to the program, it's not just what's happening over there to the Iranian people, to our soldiers, to our allies, et cetera. It's what's happened here as well. And this book, *ReTargeting Iran*, is a real compendium. It's well written. It's a short paperback published by City Lights Books in San Francisco, the progressive publisher out there, and brought together by David Barsamian. Thank you, David.

**David Barsamian:** Thank you very much, Ralph.

**Steve Skrovan:** We've been speaking with journalist David Barsamian about his newest book, *ReTargeting Iran*. We will link to that at [naderradiohour.com](http://naderradiohour.com). Now let's take a short break. When we return, we're going to welcome the man who illustrated *The Day the Rats Vetoed Congress*. But first, let's check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber.

**Russell Mokhiber:** From the National Press Building in Washington, D.C., this is your Corporate Crime Reporter *Morning Minute* for Friday, October 8, 2020. I'm Russell Mokhiber. JPMorgan Chase [& Co.] will pay \$920 million and get a deferred prosecution agreement to settle criminal charges related to two fraud schemes--the first involving tens of thousands of episodes of unlawful trading in the markets for precious metals futures contracts, and the second involving thousands of episodes of unlawful trading in the markets for U.S. Treasury futures contracts and in the secondary (cash) market for U.S. Treasury notes and bonds. Kelleher said, “The settlement was grossly inadequate in light of JPMorgan Chase’s two prior multi-year criminal activities and a 20-year-long rap sheet that includes at least 80 major legal actions.” 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. The antics of the Trump administration have provided political cartoonists and comedians in general with a cornucopia of material. Let's welcome a guest who knows that more than just about anyone else. David?

**David Feldman:** Mr. Fish a.k.a. Dwayne Booth is a cartoonist and freelance writer whose work can be seen regularly at Harpers.org [*Harper's Magazine*] and the *Scheerpost*. He publishes both under his own name and a pen name of Mr. Fish. In addition to numerous essays, interviews and critiques, he has written two novels, *9,8,7* and *The Prick*, as well as several volumes of political cartoons. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Mr. Fish.

**Mr. Fish:** Thank you. Happy to be here.

**Ralph Nader:** Welcome indeed. Well, you've collaborated with me, Mr. Fish, brilliantly by illustrating this book that was published by Fantagraphics very recently, *The Day the Rats Vetoed Congress*. And this is a book for citizen action, even though it's fiction. If there were a million people who had this book in congressional districts around the country to get through Congress long overdue, progressive agendas that will improve the livelihood and opportunity of American people, we'd really have some action. You illustrated the dynamics of the book with its disgusting beginning on Capitol Hill, and then went on to illustrate the dynamic mobilization of people and the great leaders that came out of nowhere to participate in a swarm of intelligent and mass rally encirclement of Congress and changing the whole dynamics and cleaning up politics. So it sounds euphoric and it is. But it's very, very real. And I'm wondering if you could just share for the first time, what kind of challenge this was when you went through the book. It has a lot of my experience on how to influence Congress and mobilize grassroots support and the incredible importance of Congress given its primary authority under the Constitution.

**Mr. Fish:** Right. I think you and I fit together so nicely, because my approach to political cartooning and to satire, I think is very similar to your activism and your progressive ideals-- meaning that you have an understanding of where power truly resides. And I think that it was my mission, as it is even outside of being your illustrator, the Sonny to your Cher, to illuminate the basic understanding that you and I have, and that many people in the movement have, which is that power is systemic. And we have to not just attack personalities and think that we're doing a good job. It's very important to attack the basic, cruel arithmetic that determines how power victimizes the common citizens. So going through your book, it was very easy to be in sync with you and to basically just encapsulate your larger wisdom into a single page illustration. It is really—

**Ralph Nader:** Illustrations are really classic, listeners. They could be posters. And in another world, this book would have been a bestseller were it not for the lack of attention by the media of the absolutely critical role that Congress should play. I mean, it could change the executive branch, the judiciary. You know, it has the taxing power, the war making power, the spending power, the investigating power. It's the smallest branch of government. People back home know their names. 535 senators and representatives. And I've talked endlessly on this program over the years of the simple need to set up Congress watchdog groups in all the congressional districts and they could transform Congress. And this book, of course, does not neglect that the generic power outside of Congress is in Wall Street and the giant corporations. And so we have this dynamic between the politicians, the mass mobilization led by a retired stonemason, Doug Colebrook, and the Wall Street barons and the trade associations in Washington, trying to deal with the Wall Street barons. So there's a lot of tension, a lot of conflict, a lot of humor. And it's broken up by these wonderful illustrations that you've put in the book. You caught the whole spirit of the book. People who want to get it, you know how to get it online, but you can also get it by going to [ratsreformcongress.org](http://ratsreformcongress.org). It's a hardback. And I submit that if you start reading this book, which is not that long, you'll know more about Congress than 99% of the people in this country, and you will be motivated to do something about it. You will no longer feel powerless, because it goes through all of these symptoms that people have, these excuses they make for themselves about why they're not influential over Congress and why the big boys always win. And the ending is really spectacular. I mean, you have to be really proud of the last two illustrations, [laughter] which we will not disclose on this program in order to enhance the interest in people getting the book. But more than ever, when I looked at your illustrations, I said, this has got to be a movie. This could be really a dramatic movie and a relatively low-expense movie as well.

**Mr. Fish:** Well, one of the things too, one of the things that you're really saying, and I just wanted to pull this out of, you know, the conversation, is that what makes this an important read and a fun read is that it's just in very plain language. Yes, you talk about how government is constructed and how to infiltrate the system in a way that is empowering. But by and large, you're just, you're arguing for common decency and justice and you're doing that in the face of politicians. And for me, always, when I engage with political cartooning or satire, my basic understanding is politicians are really just brokers, business and consumers. That's not even citizens. So if you can talk about the humanitarian responsibility we have to recognize each other's personhood, then just as you were saying, Ralph, it's really, you're flipping a switch on that is already inside everybody. You don't have to educate them. You're giving them permission to give a crap about the democracy and wanting to do something about it.

**Ralph Nader:** And the changes they got through Congress and how they moved fast. See, the conventional wisdom is you can't move too fast. It's a slow process; [that's] nonsense. Harry Truman proposed universal healthcare in the 1940s and we're still waiting. If you move slowly,

you give the opposition corporations too much time to game the system and to produce delay. So in a coordinated series of congressional hearings led by about 110 progressive members of Congress that basically went down to the huge crowd surrounding Congress and joined up, most of the major changes that are on the progressive agenda that are on people's minds were enacted. In order to make the point is change can happen quickly if it represents majority public opinion, sound research by the advocates and they know what they're talking about, and it represents good timing, strategy and tactics on what? You know, you need two thirds of 535 men and women who put their shoes on every day like we do. [chuckle] I mean, it's amazing how we grow up in elementary school and high school learning how to be powerless, learning how not to challenge, how not to dissent. As a result, we're not told that we've got this tool called Congress and we got this tool called the people's votes, and we've got this tool called most people want the same things in life and stop allowing the powers that be to divide and rule us. We don't come out of school like that. So I really hope that social studies teachers and students will pick up this book, because the thrust of the book is to make people laugh themselves seriously. So it starts out on a light, but some people think disgusting note with the rats infiltrating the pipes up through the plumbing into the offices of the members of the Congress. But it does have a level of levity to it, although it is extremely serious in terms of what people in this country want now for the United States of America and its relations to the world.

**Mr. Fish:** Yeah. And you don't have to ask for permission to engage. I mean, that's one of the lessons with this too, is that if you recognize that there is a problem and that the problem actually comes out of the fact that you're not being asked to participate in the democracy, you don't have to ask permission from the people who are empowered to. And to your point about what you keep calling the disgusting beginning of the book, I think it's really a great metaphor in many ways of how unpalatable politics is presented to us. We don't want to enter into it. So I think that getting used to recognizing what might be perceived as being disgusting is actually a truth that we need to engage in, and we don't have to ask permission to engage in. And as you said, there's humor; there's humanity inside of this. And that should be the guiding force that gets people politically involved because we actually absolutely deserve it.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, you know, I sent this book to members of Congress. They haven't responded yet, but the book is dedicated to Mark Twain and Voltaire in addition to Jim Hightower and Molly Ivins, because they tried to use humor in order to get people to focus on serious matters. And one thing I would say, Mr. Fish, that one small reason why I did the fable is not just that people are overloaded with nonfiction stuff. But there are tens of thousands of neighborhood book clubs all over the country. And most of them don't want to deal with political books. So 90% or more only deal with fiction books. And so this is a fiction book, listeners. If you belong to a book club, you can meet your guidelines and end up being much more empowered than you started. Did you get any reaction from your fellow colleagues in political cartooning?

**Mr. Fish:** With regards to your book?

**Ralph Nader:** Yes.

**Mr. Fish:** I haven't heard anything from anybody. And that speaks to, I would say, the state of satire in this country. Because I think that you can look at the state of satire and it really parallels the state of democracy. I think that people tend to not understand how to read irony or to experience the kind of ridiculous, as I've used the word before, but the metaphor reading with your book. It seems like it is too dangerous. I think that people have forgotten that you cite Mark Twain; you cite some of these other fiction writers from the past. Satire used to actually be part of the political discourse inside this country. Steve, something is amiss toward bottom of prior page re: "metaphor reading"

**Ralph Nader:** You're right. You know, satire is at a low point in American history apart from some political cartoonists. I remember once I was visiting the Soviet Union and I wanted to visit the magazine *Krokodil* [pronounced crocodile], which was a satiric magazine allowed by the Communist regime as a sort of way to make criticisms in a humorous manner. And it turned out that *Krokodil* was the most popular magazine in the Soviet Union, millions of copies. And its satire was far superior to that of the satire in the U.S. Maybe it's because it was about the only way you could criticize the regime in the Soviet Union. But, you know, I don't confuse satire with humor. What do you see as the difference between comedy, humor and satire?

**Mr. Fish:** Well, I think that humor, the mission of straight humor is to get a laugh. And I think that the mission of satire, I see it as a kind of journalism/activism. I think that for satire to function and do what it's supposed to do, it can use humor and there can be uncomfortable laughter inside of it. But I think that after you look at a good piece of satire, you're enlightened about an injustice and you're actually, you're allowed to remain pissed off about it. And then you're politicized and you're going to do something about it. Because satire, much more than just straight humor, relies on the audience having some knowledge of history, some knowledge of how the hierarchical system functions in the society and why it might not be fair. And to your point about *Krokodil*, it's using that form to enlighten people to the illogic of how many societies are structured. If there's fiction and there's some humor in it, people love to share jokes. People love to share stories. And so in that way, it can become much more viral and much more embedded in the human experience versus just more argumentation on the intellectual level, which is how politics more and more tends to circulate among people, which is a disservice, because you really need to involve both your head and your heart if you're going to be truly politicized in a meaningful way.

**Ralph Nader:** For sure. And you know, there's this mantra that goes on among millions of people in this country when you start talking about political matters and they say, well, I'm not into politics. And I usually say, well, that's unfortunate because politics is into you in all kinds of disagreeable ways, don't you think--with all these politicians taking orders from giant corporations who don't have much concern for you and community and exporting jobs and escaping taxes. So satire may be a bridge for that. I don't know if there's a video component on social media that could express the storytelling in this book, which is when the rats invade Congress, the citizens revolt. But I hope that creative people will pick up on this idea and start putting it in different forms of media. We have some professional comedians here, Steve Skrovan and David Feldman, who are probably straining at the bit to make a comment, but I'd like them to talk about what kind of censorship is coming in on political cartoonists from the politically incorrect folks, Steve?

**Steve Skrovan:** Well, I'm actually gonna push back a little bit here, because I think there's something going on, especially in the last four years of the Trump administration, where you could make the argument that satire has been ruined because you cannot get any more outrageous than what's really going on.

**Ralph Nader:** Like you can't satire a satire.

**Steve Skrovan:** Yeah. It's a hat on a hat. It's like almost not worth saying because it's out there every time. You know, just recently Trump coming back from the hospital and acting like he was Jesus Christ. I mean, you can't... he just ruined that joke for me because he did it.

**Mr. Fish:** I would push back against that slightly because I think that the problem with that is that you're focusing... in that situation, you're focusing too much on Trump. Meaning that, you know, if you're just ridiculing the personality, sure, it's attached to policy decisions and certain things that are done to the society. But if your idea of satire is simply ridiculing the person who Trump is, which is very easy because it's very easy to frame him as a monster. I think that true satire, the job of true satire is to expand the target in a much more honest way, because Trump is there because of, you know, we could spend hours talking about why he's there, but generally speaking, he's surrounded by enablers. He's surrounded by people who are there to protect the office of the presidency, which is where he now sits. So I think a true satirist and real satire has to continue targeting the system, not just—

**David Feldman:** Yeah. They chill the real comedy because as Ralph points out, they all have corporate paymasters. So you cannot, if you're writing for a newspaper, you're not really allowed to go after the sponsors who are also sponsoring Congress. So they become convenient targets. It's easy to pick on Trump, but you can't go after Exxon.

**Mr. Fish:** Right. And just, there's a favorite quote of mine, it includes the F word. So, but I won't use it, but it's from Lenny Bruce. And it says, take away the right to say F and you take away the right to say F the government. And I think that that's a real—that is a mantra to me, that is a piece of philosophy that guides my satirical principles every single day because it is about what kind of language you're allowed to use. And it is about attacking all these different platforms of corporate power and political power that minimize the voice of the citizen.

**David Feldman:** Well, don't you think that too many humorous and comedians are worried more about the language than what they're saying?

**Mr. Fish:** Yeah, absolutely. And I think that one of the reasons that is, is because several decades ago, the artistic community was not allowed into the public conversation anymore. And as a result, people do not understand irony. They do not understand using art and satire as theater, which will educate you into how, what the human experience is really about. You know, it's just like, you can scream fire in a crowded theater, but only if you're on the stage and people understand how to interpret that. But if you scream it off the stage, you're in trouble. And so then you have people who are eavesdropping, listening through the doors of a closed theater and hearing somebody scream fire, and saying, you know, that's dangerous. Even if the artist on the stage said that, we've got to sort of put limits on that because it's way too dangerous. And I think that's where we are now, this muddying of lines and what the responsibility and obligation of satirists and artists are to tell the truth.

**David Feldman:** I think a lot of artists, especially comedians, should spend more time evaluating what they're trying to tell an audience instead of trying to shock them with foul language.

**Mr. Fish:** Agree. Totally agree. If you want to just think about, just compare somebody like Lenny Bruce, who I've mentioned, or even Bill Hicks, or even Mort Sahl to a degree, some of these things that they were saying, even if there was no profanity used, the concepts that they were communicating were considered obscene. You know, so you have to pay attention to what is considered obscenity now. Because sometimes it's not just words. Sometimes it is ideas that as comedians, you must recognize that if you're going down a certain path and it does involve

implicating the audience to some degree and being complicit in how screwed up things are, you know, by keeping their mouth shut when it comes to, you know, screaming against nefarious powers. But you have to recognize when you are pulling your punches. I mean, is that a thing that I would just ask you if that is how... is that a line that you find yourself walking in this particular day and age?

**David Feldman:** I think you're more likely—I hate to repeat myself, but I think there's this self-censorship especially on television where the producers don't want to offend anybody who pays the bills.

**Mr. Fish:** So you can't have anything that says F corporations.

**David Feldman:** Anything that would be... if you were to point out that McDonald's and Burger King are destroying the planet, by how they purchase meat and, you know, clear cutting the Amazon for cattle, you're not allowed to do that on television.

**Mr. Fish:** And so the question that begs is what has happened to the many venues where you can say that, you know, and support yourself? Are there places where you can actually engage in this material in a way that allows you to make a living doing it?

**David Feldman:** Well, certainly not on television, not the PBS, not NPR. They're funding. McDonalds funds all this stuff that I think it coarsens politics because late night hosts and sketch comedy mock politicians because that's deemed okay.

**Mr. Fish:** Yeah.

**David Feldman:** And so what's happened over the years is the American people have been trained to believe that government is made up of fools because they're the only ones being mocked on television.

**Mr. Fish:** Right.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, that's one of the reasons why right-wing talk show hosts dominate radio, like Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity. Government doesn't advertise; corporations advertise. That's how Limbaugh makes almost \$1 million a week. So it's just a more extreme example daily beamed to millions of people by Hannity and Limbaugh of what you're saying, David. But I'm wondering whether this self-censorship is extending to political cartoonists, Mr. Fish. Are you seeing, for example cartoonists pulling their punches or not having certain themes robustly treated because of the censorship that's coming in, that's called politically correct?

**Mr. Fish:** Well, it's even uglier than that, because if you look at the profession of political cartooning, there are fewer and fewer political cartoons every single day. Where at one time it was one of the most important pages inside of a newspaper, at the turn of the beginning of the 20th century, The Herb Block Foundation did a report and it was determined that there were around 2000 cartoonists, editorial political cartoonists working in the United States, which means it was a real job. And the study concluded in, I believe it was either 2012 or 2014. I can't remember, but it was determined that there were, at that point, fewer than 40 cartoonists. And [now] it's less than that. As part of this community, you see these obituaries for jobs, I mean, constantly. So as far as what a political cartoonist is allowed to do anymore, as far as pulling punches, they can't feed themselves. You know, it's the job that might as well be buggy whips. You know, we might as well be making buggy whips. Nobody knows exactly; people are becoming more and more illiterate in this country to how to read a good political cartoon. And political cartooning is, in many countries alive and well, including Iran. And so you look at some of these other nations where you would think that freedom of speech was definitely going to prevent cartoonists from engaging and the quite the opposite issue; it's actually very vibrant, I would say, almost everywhere else outside of the United States.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, we've been talking to Mr. Fish who illustrated my book, *The Day the Rats Vetoed Congress*, published by Fantagraphics Press. It's a fable of citizen action, listeners. It's in your hands. You can make all the difference. Nobody can stop you. Less than 1% of the people in congressional districts pulling together, reflecting public opinion, majority public opinion, about many changes and Congress is the tool from which these changes can get underway and implemented. Thank you very much, Mr. Fish. And we should have another program on humor and political satire because we hardly scratched the surface here.

**Mr. Fish:** Here here.

**Steve Skrovan:** We've been speaking with political cartoonist, Mr. Fish. We will link to his work at [ralphnaderradiohour.com](http://ralphnaderradiohour.com). Okay. Let's jump into some listener questions. We had a lot of response to our interview with Dr. Bandy Lee, who I believe was making her third or fourth appearance on the show. And I wanted to kind of respond to some of these. We got some pushback; we got a lot of support, but we also got some pushback. And I want to deal especially with the pushback here. And I'll try to summarize basically what is being said. For instance, regular listener, Don Klepack said, "Dr. Bandy Lee should lose her medical license. Of course, you should be shut down. This is obscene similar to USSR during the 1960s, with the exception, it's not promoted by the government." And Barb Sliger says, "I sort of agree with Don Klepack. Sociopathy is very probably genetic. Sociopaths lack of capacity to empathize with others. They lack everything that comes with having a conscience. Donald Trump perpetrates crimes, should be arrested, brought to trial, but she thinks psychiatrizing him depoliticizes the situation." Mark Hughes says, "On the other hand, the timing of this podcast with Dr. Lee is, oh, so impeccable considering the pervasive news that Trump, his wife, and at least one staffer and well actually a lot more by now have contracted COVID-19." And Dale West says, "With the mental health status as Senator Mitch McConnell parallel Donald Trump, he appears to be dangerous to democracy and his denial of reality as well. How many of our elected officials of Washington, D.C., are suffering mental health issues? Corporate lobbying has to create a toxic mental health culture in Congress." So Ralph, let's deal first with the pushback about saying people are essentially "crazy" and this is what the USSR did in the sixties. And why the push- back?

**Ralph Nader:** I think Dr. Lee tried to address those criticisms, because she's heard them before in the two or three years she's been working with her colleagues around the country. Number two, she doesn't go deep into the psychiatry the way psychiatrist Mary Trump did in her book, because Mary Trump interacted with her uncle on many occasions and observed him and spoke with him. I thought she was mostly taking his wild positions, his zigzags, his ego-obsessed filters for everything he does as a mentally unstable personality. So it's the unstable personality of a very powerful political figure, the President of the United States that she was really focusing on. And she was trying to put some distance from a face-to-face psychiatric profile that some of her critics are trying to attach her to. But if you go back and look at the podcast and see how she explained herself in the two interviews we had, I think she's quite sensitive to that distinction.

**Steve Skrovan:** Right. All right. Very good. David, take the next one from Demetrio.

**David Feldman:** This question comes to us from Demetrio and yet, despite the charade that the present electoral system is, Nader advocates for obligatory voting.

**Ralph Nader:** Demetrio, you remind me of the observation that it's not what a person says, it's what the other person hears. First of all, I recommended a political system where people are not elected by a minority of the voters. Right now, half the voters or so don't vote. And a plurality of

the remaining half elect our political representatives. That is not a democratic process in my view. So if everybody votes, there is more legitimacy given to the winner. The second is I've advocated for ballot access so people would have a larger choice of candidates and third parties, and fourth parties and independent candidates, and a larger choice of agendas in policies to deliberate and decide who to support. Third, obligatory voting sounds a bit too domineering. You'll recall I was very careful to say that voting would be a legal duty as in Australia. You could vote for the candidates on the ballot, or if you don't like them, you could vote write in, including voting for yourself. That would fulfill the legal duty, or you could vote for binding none of the above, which by the way, is very popular when it's explained. So I don't see it in any way contradictory to the realities of today, but [rather] fully recognizing what the promise of tomorrow should be like.

**Steve Skrovan:** All right. Very good. Thank you for the question, Demetrio. This next one comes from listener Kimberly and the subject line is excessive oversize political mailings prevent my real mail from fitting in the mailbox. And she's tried 10 years to remove her name from what she calls this bipartisan practice. "Early on at my current address, after my removal request, my first name was even altered, and I received more mailings. One week in February, I received 14 oversized cardstock pieces—five and one day. This September, I received 19 plus. I think I recycled some in the beginning of the month. It's bad enough [that] Xfinity, internet and AARP send mixed media--paper, plastic, and rubber cement, so you can't recycle the item. And also to avoid ID fraud, you need to open each piece. Your personal information is listed multiple areas. Chase Bank sends thick multifold cardstock mailings. Please help or give insight." She's had a post office box for 32 years and she canceled this year because she just receives a tremendous amount of junk mail.

**Ralph Nader:** Kimberly, I think you can tell the post office to delete commercial third-class mailings that you don't want to receive. But I don't think that applies to political messages, which are protected by the First Amendment and are excluded from this right of the resident not to get commercial mailings. Secondly, I know what you can do with the stacks of these oversized postcards puffing a particular political candidate, bundle them up, [and] send them to the local social studies teacher who is trying to teach children about political advertising.

**Steve Skrovan:** Interesting. [chuckles] Yeah, you're recycling them in a different kind of way.

**Ralph Nader:** Yes, in an educational manner.

**Steve Skrovan:** Right. Very good. David, take the next one from Patricia.

**David Feldman:** This comes to us from Patricia. “There are a few of us here in a mostly Republican state that want our voices heard in regards to points Joe Biden desperately needs to emphasize in his plan after he becomes president. We've searched for contact avenues but are not confident they reached the intended eyes. We specifically want to contact Greg Schultz and/or Jennifer O'Malley Dillon. Bottom line, we want Joe to know we support him, but need specific plans for his goals during his presidency [i.e.,] what's he actually going to do in the first month, first year. If you have a way of reaching those two, would be much appreciated. Thank you, Ralph.”

**Ralph Nader:** Well, what you do is you contact groups that are going to put forth definitive proposals for a Biden administration right after the election. So you can contact Common Cause. You can contact Public Citizen. Contact People for the American Way. Contact American Civil Liberties Union. That's what these groups usually do. When a democratic administration prevails, they tell them what they should be doing in Congress and in the White House, so you can get your proposals considered.

**Steve Skrovan:** Alright, well, very good. So contact those groups. They are groups that you can go through. This next question comes from Eva David and she says, “Nestle has been robbing California of our precious, diminishing water for 30 years on an expired permit. And we just offered another permit. How would they not be penalized for their 30 years of unpermitted theft and terrorizing of our ecosystem? My faucet water averages over 500 PPM TDS.” I'm not sure what that means, but it's some measurement that seems like a lot. “Nestle should be forced to upgrade city-provided systems as indebted contracts what they owe and stealing our water then bottling it in toxic plastics to pollute our seas. How are no California officials holding them accountable?”

**Ralph Nader:** Well, talk to the environmental head of the department in Sacramento about this. I've had other complaints similar to yours, Eva. And I just heard recently that Nestle is actually going to sell its drinking water subsidiary to anybody who wants to buy it.

**Steve Skrovan:** All right. Well, thank you for your questions. And finally, we just want to acknowledge all the listeners who have taken upon themselves to take Ralph's action item seriously and contact their auto insurance companies to find out about the rebates. We've had a

number of listeners do that, and we've gotten some feedback on the answers and Ralph, would you like to comment?

**Ralph Nader:** Just keep it up. Get some more policy holders, people who own cars and will pitch in to help you complain to the insurance commissioner of your particular state and call up some of the press. This is an easy one for the press. They own cars too; it's a self-interest, because there are billions of dollars more that have to be returned. Some insurance companies are doing that more faithfully; some states are doing it more rigorously, California being one of them. But other insurance companies are playing a deceptive game. Instead of rebating you what they owe you, they say they're going to give you a credit if you sign up for another year of their policy, which is really, you know, off the wall. So just keep the pressure on. If there's a local consumer group in your community, get them galvanized and keep looking at the website [consumerfederationofamerica.org](http://consumerfederationofamerica.org) for all kinds of updates on the 50 states and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

**Steve Skrovan:** Very good. Thank you for your questions. Thank you for your activism. I want to thank our guests again, David Barsamian and Mr. Fish. For those of you listening on the radio, that's our show. For you, podcasts listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material we call "The Wrap Up".

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

**Ralph Nader:** Thank you, everybody. And urge your non-voting friends to vote. This is a key year.