

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 345 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: Hello there.

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

Ralph Nader: Welcome, everybody.

Steve Skrovan: You know, a few weeks ago, former President Barack Obama released a video where he references Gen Z favorites such as TikTok dances and “finstas” (the term for fake Instagram accounts) as he tries to appeal to young voters and urge them to vote in this election. He emerged from his relatively quiet post-presidency to come out hard for Joe Biden and the Democratic Party last spring and is on the trail with him during these last weeks of the campaign. But just how much is the Obama legacy and that of the Democratic Party in general responsible for the rise of a neo-fascist like Donald Trump? Our first guest, journalist and historian Paul Street, has written a book entitled *Hollow Resistance: Obama, Trump and the Politics of Appeasement*. In it, Mr. Street talks about the importance of mass direct action to fight against fascism. And he quotes, Howard Zinn quote, “Voting is easy and marginally useful, but it is a poor substitute for democracy, which requires direct action by concerned citizens.”

So we look forward to talking to Paul Street about all of that. In the second part of the show, we're going to continue talking about ways to push for democracy that represents the masses. Back in 2016, after Bernie Sanders lost the Democratic primary, he formed an organization to harness the energy behind his campaign into a movement that would last beyond his political career. The movement was called Our Revolution. And today we will be joined by the chair of Our Revolution, Larry Cohen. In between as always, we'll take some time out to check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mohkiber. But first, let's talk about how the ground for Donald Trump was seeded during the Obama years. David?

David Feldman: Paul Street is a historian, journalist and political commentator. He writes regularly for *CounterPunch* and Black Agenda Report. Mr. Street has a doctorate in U.S. history

from SUNY Binghamton University. He is the author of many books including *Barack Obama and the Future of American Politics*, *The Empire's New Clothes: Barack Obama and the Real World of Power*, and *Hollow Resistance: Obama, Trump and the Politics of Appeasement*. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour*, Paul Street.

Paul Street: Hey, thank you very much.

Ralph Nader: Welcome very much, Paul, to your new book, *Hollow Resistance* by CounterPunch. This is a book I've been urging be written for a long time and I'd just like to frame it a bit. *Politico* on May 16th, 2020 said, "The former president, who did not mention President Donald Trump by name, has generally shied away from weighing in on politics or criticizing his successor since leaving office." His successor has been openly dismantling Obama's accomplishments and legacy with a fervor reminiscent of Captain Ahab and President Obama, after leaving office, retained the highest political polling of any democratic personality in the country. His Twitter following is almost double the size of Donald Trump's. It's over a hundred million. He has all this credibility and all this knowledge and what has happened to his voice, Paul Street?

Paul Street: Yeah, it's absolutely extraordinary, right? It's one of the great ironies of the Obama ex-presidency. I was a little apprehensive at first about doing this book, because I already had Obama in the title of two books I'd done and I didn't want to come off as Obama obsessive, and I was pretty wrapped up in writing at CounterPunch and *Truthdig* and elsewhere about the Trump era. And then I got very intrigued by it in a couple of ways. First of all, it didn't mean I had to ignore what's going on with Trump. The first chapter of this book is all about the Trump era. And secondly, it was kind of interesting story about—as a historian, I got interested in how do ex-presidents behave and there are these norms about ex-presidents. They're supposed to sort of keep their mouths shut and be polite and host fundraisers, you know, and have foundations; that's a big thing and stuff like that. But they're not supposed to be too political. But what are the norms of an ex-president when their successor doesn't recognize any known normal, constitutional, bourgeois, civilizational norm at all. And amongst their norm smashing, we have to include a constant obsessive, maniacal attack on his predecessor, on Barack Obama. And so, you know, what are the norms then. Trump can't go a day—hasn't been able to go a day, I've seen, without trashing Obama and without going out of his way to go after every program that has Obama's name or imprimatur on it. The climate accords, the Affordable Care Act, the Iran nuclear deal--you got to attack everything Obama. And, you know, what are the norms then. It seems to me they would change. You know, and particularly when that new president is kind of a, I don't know, neo-fascist, fascist or arch authoritarian, white nationalist then, you know, and an ecocidal, existential menace to all life on earth. Maybe the norms changed a little bit, but not for Obama. He stayed with this traditional kind of thing of being very, very quiet. He can barely ever say Trump's name at all. Of course, he can never publicly say what he said privately, which is

that Trump is some kind of a fascist, white nationalist authoritarian. Never says that. Welcomed to Trump into the White House and told the whole country the day after Trump was elected that everything's fine; we're all Americans first. And, you know, and on and on and won't say anything. It's funny. One of the things that came up in my research for this book that I had not anticipated was how much reporters at *the Washington Post* and *the New York Times* and elsewhere want to think that Obama has been fighting back against Trump and saying energetic and aggressive and critical things about him; they'll sort of put it in the title of their write-up, you know, "Obama stands up and fights back" and, you know, calls out Trump and all that. And then you look at the primary sources and what the reporters are writing about, and he did no such thing at all!

Ralph Nader: Well, how do you explain it? You think he's afraid of Trump going after him rhetorically, giving him nicknames; you know, Trump has intimidated a lot of people, including generals. Do you think he doesn't want to get into that back and forth, compared to one would expect his duty to be on the ramparts and defend the American people.

Paul Street: Yeah, you would think so. It's funny. I looked at his Twitter account. I'm not much on Twitter, but he has the most popular Twitter account. He did have one mild tweet after Charlottesville, and it was the most popular tweet ever. And yet his use of Twitter just has been really weak during the Trump administration. You'd think that it would be otherwise, and he doesn't do that. He barely says anything except as election cycles get closer, and then he starts to say a little bit. And I do think that David Axelrod and some of his other advisors have sort of come to this conclusion that it would just fuel the fires of Trumpism if he said anything. And I think it's the opposite. I think that if he would use his ex-presidential bully pulpit to call this guy out for what he really is, an arch authoritarian menace, that he had the platform to do that, and it would have been useful to do that. There has been way too much supinity; there's been way too much just taking it and just thinking that, you know, this was Hillary Clinton's mistake. She just thought that she could sort of lay back and not actually say much of anything and let Trump assassinate himself. And I don't know, maybe he is going to do that. We shall see.

Ralph Nader: Well, in talking with people who are in Obama's outer circle, they're admirers. And they all say, well, he doesn't want to get in a pissing match with the commander in chief of pissing matches. But you know, he could snap his fingers and raise a hundred million dollars and start all kinds of watchdog groups or expand existing watchdog groups in Washington to go after all of Trump's henchman dismantling EPA, OSHA NITSA, messing around with social safety nets, cutting children's programs. You know, there needs to be more full-time citizen advocates, and he could have connected them with grassroots efforts. He attracts large audiences all over the country. He could have mobilized people to connect with these groups in Washington. He's raising a billion dollars for his library. His name is magic in terms of raising money. When I asked him, why didn't he do that; he doesn't even think that way. He spends far more time on

March Madness and talking to basketball players, as you mentioned in your book, *Hollow Resistance*. [Paul Street chuckles] He just loves to hobnob, not just with professional sports stars, but with corporate executives as well. You know, he's got to raise money from these people for his library. Is that all part of it?

Paul Street: Well, you know, this is the Obama that frankly, me and a lot of people on the left and I'm from Chicago, and you may have heard in the intro I was the Vice President for Research and Planning at the Chicago Urban League. I was kind of in the arena, so to speak, in Chicago policy and politics in the foundation world, and this is precisely the Obama that I was trying to warn people about in Iowa in '07-'08. Adolph Reed said it very nicely in 1996, "vacuous-to-repressive neoliberal" was how he described Obama, which was just kind of an emphasis on personal responsibility, prone to giving poor black people personal full responsibility lectures on their own response, alleged supposed personal and cultural responsibility for their own poverty. Ten years later, as Obama was, as I predicted, making a presidential run, and I also thought it would be successful [although] no one agreed with me. They thought that race would rule him out, but I thought he was a particular kind of guy who could win.

And as he was making his run, Kevin Silverstein wrote a wonderful essay in *Harper's* that people forget about. It's called "Barak Obama Inc." Obama, Incorporated ["The Birth of a Washington Machine"]. And he quoted some of the funders that were already behind Obama and paying for his Senates and presidential campaigns. You really think he'd have all this money that he could have this money machine if he was the starry-eyed idealist and the progressives that a lot of liberal voters seemed to think he was. No, they wouldn't. I think the line was 'what's the dollar value of a starry-eyed idealist'. And this was the Obama I was screaming about, not just in Iowa, but nationally, in '07 and '08. I wrote a whole book about it called *Barack Obama and the Future of American Politics*. And liberals just wanted him, kind of like the reporters and the ex-presidents, want him to be something he isn't. I love the citizen watchdog idea and the congressional watchdog idea. And Ralph, I read your book, *The Seventeen Solutions*, and the chapter on the need for congressional watchdogs and for civic re-engagement. But you know, if you ask me why didn't Obama do that? Well, you know, I would say it's the same reason he killed single-payer [Medicare for All], the same reason he campaigned and then promised to bring about card check authorization, to legalize union organizing and then dropped it, you know, like a hot potato; the same reason he betrayed Greens in Copenhagen. Everyone talks about the Paris Climate Accord and [that] Trump tore up Obama's Paris Climate Accord. And they forget that Obama destroyed efforts for grinding global carbon emissions at Copenhagen in 2011. Same reason he crushed—

Ralph Nader: Well, you know, elaborate that. He promised the AFL-CIO this card check you mentioned, which would enhance union organizing when he was campaigning in 2008, and he never did anything about it. He promised a \$9.50 minimum wage by 2011; never did anything

about it. You think it's a built-in reticence to avoid conflict with the powers that be? Is that what's is really at the bottom or does he think that this is the way he rose in politics?

Paul Street: Yeah, yeah, I do. And in my last chapter, I sort of wrap this book up by saying, this is the Obama, and incidentally that Obama that you're talking about is precisely the Obama who demobilizes the Democratic Party vote in 2016, and opens the door for Donald Trump, you know, in a sort of almost like a Weimar way. He ushers in the neo-fascist president and incidentally demobilizes the black vote in the battleground cities like Milwaukee and Detroit and Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, because black folks see very little after all this incredibly dramatic symbolic victory of the first black president, you know, in the land of cotton slavery. And actually black life gets worse; net worth declines during the Obama era. So yeah, this is sort of the Obama that always was, but it's like in that last chapter, I sort of engage a wonderful marvelous Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author historian David Garrow on what that reticence is about. And Garrow, who has a lot of interviews with Obama's last significant other, Sheila Jagger, prior to Michelle [Obama] who is now an anthropology professor in Oberlin [College], I believe. And their line is that this is kind of a psychohistory. This is all about Obama's need to be loved and his narcissism and his personal psychological failures. And I suppose that's part of it. But you know, I mean, if Obama wanted it to be loved, if that's what Obama is about, then maybe he should have tried to be the next FDR and actually run in accord with the progressive ideals on which he purportedly campaigned in 2007, 2008. I think it's more about socialization at elite corporate institutions like Columbia University and then Harvard Law. I think Obama came out of Columbia and Harvard Law as a pretty much fully minted, I know you don't like the phrase, Ralph, but a neoliberal, a corporatist and all of that.

Ralph Nader: Cornell West who campaigned heavily for Obama in 2008, and then Obama didn't want to invite him to the White House; he preferred Al Sharpton. He says about your book, "Paul Street's courageous truth-telling is a precondition for a massive radical democratic movement." Well, when Obama won in 2008, he had a great majority in the House and Senate, and he could have gotten through enormous changes. He focused on Obamacare and basically turned his back on all the mandates and the hopes of the people who mobilized to put him in office. And I found that members of the Democratic Party in Congress felt that he was a loner in politics, that he was looking out for his own political win in polls. And I was on a radio program with Congresswoman Maxine Waters and she morosely said that he didn't want to campaign with members of Congress campaigning back in their districts, the way some presidents have done. And he paid the price; [in] 2010 he lost it all. And the gerrymandering went on steroids and entrenched a Republican opposition in Congress, which tormented him for the rest of his two terms—assuming he was capable of feeling any kind of remorse about not taking advantage of these huge majorities he rolled up.

Paul Street: Well, you know, Ralph, I knew Obama [and] I think Adolph Reed did too, because he was with Northwestern at the time. I knew the Illinois version; it was before the national phenomenon. There was an Illinois phenomenon; this was the Obama down in Springfield. He hung out primarily with Republicans. These were his best friends. He played poker and played basketball with Republicans and always took everything progressive and tried to water it down, and wouldn't have anything much to do with progressives. When he was in the White House--I'm from Hyde Park down by the University of Chicago neighborhood where Quentin Young, Dr. Quentin Young is a sort of a heroic progressive figure going back decades, and I believe was Obama's personal doctor. Quentin Young also happens to be a major single-payer advocate. And Quentin Young wasn't even invited, had to fight to be invited to Obama's first-year national healthcare reform conference, which was different from, but quite similar to Hillary Clinton's first year, Clinton administration healthcare conference, which was all about taking single-payer [healthcare] to the curb. You know, single-payer right now—the last poll I saw—is supported by seven in 10 Americans [which is] no surprise in the middle of a pandemic. And Obama's handpicked non-Bernie Democratic presidential candidate this year has announced, has suggested at least, that he would veto [chuckle] Medicare for All, which is supported by seven in 10 Americans.

Ralph Nader: It's a major political tragedy in the context of American history. It will be looked on as a tremendously lost opportunity—both when he was in the White House and his enormous appeal after he left the White House, which he didn't form into a mobilization. There were no comparable Democratic leaders to take his place. He didn't have a sense of his post-presidential role. Can we have some input from Steve and David?

David Feldman: Well, what do you think he would say to you, what do you think he knows that we don't know? Because he has no problem sleeping at night. He seems to be relatively happy. So how would he justify all this?

Paul Street: Well, what Obama would say in response to this book would be, “Well, here goes another flaming radical, just going off that doesn't know how real change takes place.” You know, he tried to be a community organizer and didn't get anywhere. And so he went into the system and now he would tell you that he is helping--he wouldn't put it this way, you know, privately-- that he's helped engineer the demise of Donald Trump by taking the high road and advancing a kind of candidate who Trump can't completely beat up and can't quite figure out how to defeat. You know, all this insane claim that Biden is captive to the radical left, just is falling flat; it's absurd. And I think Obama would like that and approve that and say, see, we're going to get Joe Biden. And the problem being that, you know. And at one level, there might be something to that, except that, you know, it's more about Trump just—I don't know what's going to happen. This was an election cycle unlike any other. I have not given up on the threat that Trump is going to try to steal this election and that he actually might be able to do it.

David Feldman: Do you think Obama—I mean, I've heard that political capital is useless unless you spend it, but at the same time, there's a currency to your reputation. If Obama speaks out too much, it loses value. Is he holding his fire perhaps for when it's absolutely necessary? If he speaks out, you know, towards the end of the election or after?

Paul Street: I think that's been a theme under Obama per se. I think Obama and Axelrod and his handlers always had a sense that the mere simple fact of his skin color, that he was black already had a big section of white America freaked out. And one of those subtext ironies and themes in my book and my writings about Obama over the years is actually what the disaster he has been for the struggle for black equality, probably a net negative. And the fact that he's black has always sort of meant that as president, he wouldn't say anything. He'd say less than a John Edwards presidency, or maybe even a Hillary Clinton presidency would have said about the problem of racial inequality at the same time that his skin color was providing deceptive, false proof that the struggle for black equality was over now. I can't tell you how many white people said, "Hey, it's over; there's a black guy in the White House, so don't talk to me about racism anymore."

David Feldman: Is it true that the African-American community was worse off after his presidency than before?

Paul Street: Well, there was an ongoing decline of net worth that dated from the Great Recession. I mean, it's not Obama's fault. And I don't think it ever recovered. I mean, so, you know, you can't just blame it on Obama. You blame it on the way credit and real estate markets work and ghettoization and segregation and all of that. But yeah, he didn't undertake any significant effort to defend black people either in real time during his presidency or against the backlash that was predictably coming against them in the wake of Obama, whose presidency again, I repeat, has been taken by millions of whites to prove that racism is over, which was always a disaster.

Ralph Nader: On that note, this is a very current contemporary book by Paul Street out of Chicago, Illinois. *Hollow Resistance: Obama, Trump and the Politics of Appeasement*. You can get it in bookstores. You can get it online or you can go direct to the publisher counterpunch.org in California. Thank you very much, Paul.

Paul Street: Thank you, Ralph. It was great.

Steve Skrovan: We have been speaking with Paul Street, author of *Hollow Resistance: Obama, Trump and the Politics of Appeasement*. We will link to his book at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Let's take a short break. When we return, we're going to talk to the chair of Our Revolution. Larry Cohen. But first, let's check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mohkiber.

Russell Mohkiber: From the National Press Building in Washington, D.C., this is your Corporate Crime Reporter Morning Minute for Friday, October 16, 2020; I'm Russell Mohkiber. Executives and employees at the nation's biggest banks are giving a boost to former Vice President Joe Biden's campaign for the White House. Contributions from individuals affiliated with the six largest banks total \$907 thousand for Biden and \$293 thousand for Trump, according to a *Politico* review of campaign finance data. Biden has a significant fundraising advantage at every one of the banks: JPMorgan Chase, Bank of America, Citigroup, Wells Fargo, Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley. *Politico* reported that Biden is a known entity to Wall Street and benefits from his longtime closeness to the financial industry. While representing Delaware in the Senate, he supported bankruptcy legislation that made it harder for consumers to escape credit card debt. For the Corporate Crime Reporter, I'm Russell Mohkiber.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you, Russell. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour*. I'm Steve Skrovan along with David Feldman and Ralph. Despite Bernie Sanders's loss in the Democratic primary, he has a massive number of people behind him. One continuation of Bernie's movement is the organization, Our Revolution. They're organizing for Medicare for All, working on strengthening climate protections, as well as supporting true progressives for elective office. David?

David Feldman: Larry Cohen chairs the board of Our Revolution, the successor to Bernie 2016. He was the founding chair of the Democracy Initiative, a coalition of more than 50 membership organizations working together on securing voting rights and removing big money from politics. Mr. Cohen was a member of the Democratic National Committee and was appointed by Senator Bernie Sanders as vice chair of the Unity Reform Commission. From 2005 to 2015, Mr. Cohen served as president of the 600,000-member Communications Workers of America [CWA union]. He also spent nearly all of his adult life as a member, organizer and officer of the union. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour*, Larry Cohen.

Larry Cohen: Pleasure, David.

Ralph Nader: Yeah. Welcome, Larry. You're one of the few heads of major labor unions, who after they retired, plunged into the civic movement, which means that you really mean what you say and what you believe. [Ralph laughs] There's no retirement for you. For people who want to know more, Larry, before we get into worker issues that should be front and center for this election, what's your website? How can people find out more about Our Revolution?

Larry Cohen: Just ourrevolution.com. It's also on Facebook and Twitter. Just search for Our Revolution either place.

Ralph Nader: Okay. ourrevolution.com, listeners. Okay. Let's talk about worker issues. It's my judgment, and others share it, that the Democratic Party has lost election after election at the national [and] state level because they turned their back on a lot of blue-collar workers. What's the problem on minimum wage? We wouldn't have [Brett] Kavanaugh; we wouldn't have [Neil] Gorsuch; we wouldn't have Judge [Amy Coney] Barrett to worry about. They could have won all these elections. What is the problem with the Democratic Party on FDR's minimum wage?

Larry Cohen: Well, I think, first of all, you gave the solution as well as the problem. And when we look at the referenda, in many states that did raise the state minimum wage, because this is an area where you can go on a state-by-state basis and there's been progress there. And Obama did raise the federal contractor wage to \$10.10 when we were campaigning for 15. In fact, the executive director of Our Revolution, Joseph Geevarghese, ran what was called Good Jobs Nation aimed specifically at the Democratic White House during those years to go to \$15 there, and also the right to form a union. These were jobs that government directly controlled during the Obama White House. So, we've inherited, and not just inherited, we embraced all those issues. "Fifteen Dollars and a Union" was the slogan. And obviously, the union isn't happening at all thanks to corporate America and the electeds who let them slide even when they are doing public sector work as private employers. But when you look at states like Missouri and the Dakotas that passed the referenda, it wasn't the 15, but there was significant increases as well as many other states that I'm not remembering right off the top here. But it's very clear; you're right. These are the kind of very concrete things that we need to be leading on.

Ralph Nader: The best slogan, Larry, and it's authentic, is "go vote yourself a raise." Can you imagine a better authentic, for 30 million people who have their wages repressed [who are] working their heads off and not making enough to pay the rent or put food on the table, never mind health insurance? I don't understand. I had a high person of AFL-CIO tell me two years ago, when I said, "What is the problem here with making this front and center and holding

Obama to his pledge to Richard Trumka, the head of the AFL-CIO, for a card check to facilitate forming unions, which 10s to millions of Americans in polls say they want to join. He lowered his voice and he said, "You know why, Ralph?" I said, "Why?" He said, "Because they don't really want to win. They got their secure seats; they got their jobs. They don't really want to win; it's too unsettling." This is one of the most highly thought of thinkers in the labor movement in the AFL-CIO. So I'm very puzzled. Card check, minimum wage, 15 bucks. Is it all in the ads of these political consultants who charge horrible fees to the Democratic candidates and don't deliver?

Larry Cohen: Well, so I would say in general, again, you know, as David mentioned in the intro, I worked for two years on some of the reforms, like keeping super delegates like me from having a say in the nominate. So I sort of work in the weeds. There's 57 parties and the ones here on the East coast--all the way down the East coast from Massachusetts, you know, through Florida and then along the Gulf--are largely to blame for any kind of failure to stick on issues versus for too many of them, it's just like a sports team. You know, did my team win or lose instead of people are in politics or, you know, I'm talking about voters, as you just said, because they actually want to be happier. And that's lost on many of these people. Second of all, they reject economic issues; they much prefer social issues. So they can go to wealthy donors and say, hey, Democrats are there on the social issues, and they're no threat to you, even as sadly Joe Biden said, I guess when he was still campaigning against Bernie in a donor meeting that got recorded, "don't worry, nothing much will change for you when I win." So I think that it's up to us, working-class people—black, brown, and white—to change these parties, and when appropriate, run as independents, support things like ranked-choice voting and other things that allow for a much better democracy; and to put, to join together, again, as you've done your whole life. So, I'm speaking, not to you so much, but to put issues like racial justice directly connected to economic justice. I am encouraged, Ralph, because I think that the movement for Black Lives - and I'm close to several of those people that help lead that - do get this connection.

Ralph Nader: There are groups who really are getting out the vote on their own in Milwaukee, in Georgia and elsewhere [like] Black Voters Matter and Neighborhood Get Out The Vote; that's very encouraging. It's not quite clear how much it adds up in quantitative, decisive vote turnout. But I was appalled in a way by the debates of Joe Biden's so-called debates and Kamala Harris. They didn't give a nod; they didn't give any recognition to Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren's tens of millions of votes in the last year during the primaries. What other party would ignore such an expanding wing, the progressive wing of the Democratic Party? Did you catch that?

Larry Cohen: If Bernie was on here with us, he would say, so I'm sort of saying what he would say. I haven't, you know, mostly a similar opinion anyway. He would say that when he withdrew or suspended on April 7th, he got certain commitments. Included there was the task forces, the

seven task forces that were, you know, mostly on economic issues plus immigration plus criminal justice reform. So five were economic and that that led to certain things in the platform that wouldn't have been there. I'm not saying they're our platform for Larry and Ralph Nader and Bernie, but it wouldn't have been there, and that it's up to us, which believe me, Our Revolution is absolutely ready to do. It's part of our four-point program: Defeat fascism, defeat Trump, elect a better Congress, elect people where you live who are progressive and number four, build the movement on the critical issues, like the ones you're mentioning, and fight for those issues--not just on November 4th, but now through as long as it takes and one day longer.

Ralph Nader: Well, as you know, as well as anybody, Larry--we're talking with Larry Cohen, who is the head of Our Revolution, which comes out of the Bernie Sanders political movement and is all over the country. You go to ourrevolution.com to find out more about it and to be part of it. But I've always said lip service is the first step toward reform and planks in Democratic Parties are lip service, and they're not going to do anything about it in Washington, D.C., unless there's a huge grassroots effort, which you are a part of, you know. What is it about these corporate Democrats [that] they can't mouth the words "card check". They can't mouth the words "we need more unions". They can't mouth the words "even \$15 an hour"; they'll just say we need a better minimum wage. And they're in charge! Let's face it, for this election coming up November 3rd, it's the corporate Democrats in charge of the Democratic Party.

Larry Cohen: Correct, on a national level; I have to say that in some states, that's no longer true. We work along with other groups, very hard on changing. There's about 10 states that are very different, like Nebraska, but that's right. And on the national level, the Biden campaign from the start was funded by wealthy donors. It is more grassroots now because people realize we're fighting fascism and you need a united front to do it. But in terms of what's inside, that's absolutely right.

Ralph Nader: What's your reading on whether the votes are going to count? Everybody's worried that they've got so many in the swing states, Florida and Michigan, these ways of shaving off 5 or 10% of the Democratic vote or the Green Party vote or whatever. And are you worried too? Do we have enough poll watchers? There's going to be intimidators from Trump's hench people all over, glaring at people.

Larry Cohen: Yeah. So I always, you know, I used to drive people crazy with this in CWA; I always assume the worst, so then I'm never disappointed. And it's better to prepare for the worst case. The encouraging thing would be, you know, which I also believe is critical to encourage each other is that, you know, Trump is destroying himself more than being beaten by Biden and Harris. And I don't think he can help himself to continue to do that, and as you said now, less

than three weeks away. So, that's what would encourage me; you know, the way he mishandled the pandemic. And, you know, a lot of that is the disaster of our healthcare system. But he took it far beyond that, with the highest death rate of any similar country in the world and on and on. He's losing marginal votes based on that. And when I say fascism, a lot of that is his style. He embraces the style, you know, not necessarily of a Hitler with concentration camps. I'm not really saying that, but the nature of a kind of dictator style, and as you've just mentioned all over again, the rules in this country are bad enough. And again, to me, it's the issues and the rules. If we don't change the rules and just keep focusing on the rulers, we're never going to have a democracy; we're never going to have the things that working people should have and do have in every other similar country in the world.

Ralph Nader: We know on the other side, they're trying to depress the vote, make sure it's not counted, distort it, do everything, intimidate it. What is the expand the vote people doing at the grassroots, because they're all on alert this time unlike 2016?

Larry Cohen: Yeah. So first of all, you know, obviously focusing on the election because that's only three weeks, but secondly, you know, something like a hundred groups, we've all signed on together to mobilize, you know, in the streets. And, you know, I would say if it goes further, in workplaces, to shut things down, if there's not a fair count. I would also say Keith Ellison is one of our 10 board members of Our Revolution. He's the Attorney General of Minnesota, as you well know. He and other, not necessarily most, but he and other state attorney generals, as well as you know, in certain cities and counties are ready to go legally. That won't be enough. But I think there's many parts to this in terms of a deliberate strategy by Republicans for decades now. It goes back to the 1950s when they realized that their values were not majority values. So they could only win by making sure that voter turnout and voter eligibility was increasingly crushed.

And that's what we've seen for, you know, really since the 1950s and the Koch Brothers and others investing in every one of these schemes to hold down voter registration. No other country—I was on a Zoom meeting yesterday with progressives in Germany, [and] they couldn't believe that even in Maryland where I vote, voter registration ended yesterday. They said what's voter registration, you know, and it goes on and on. So the Republicans figured this out. *Brown v. Board of Education*, and after that, hey, segregationists and Republicans joining together; again, you know this better than I do. But, you know, the people listening and that's what they've turned into. You know, there used to be a time where some of them, you could talk to. You know, now, they are—if not clearly a fascist party, they're on the way to a fascist party. It's all about markets; it's all about deregulation. And it's all about, you know, the people who control the markets controlling the political system. This is what the Koch Brothers and you know, I would call them neo-fascist front groups funded by corporate America are dead-on. They focused on the judiciary, as again, you know; for the last 40 years when they couldn't control the legislatures; oh, we can control the judiciary. And that's what we're getting with the Supreme Court. You got Republican senators running for re-election, putting her confirmation, Barrett, ahead of their own election, because to them, the control of the Supreme Court is more

important, like for a Corey Gardner, whether he wins or loses. He's likely to lose, and again, not a great candidate running against him, but that's what we get.

Ralph Nader: It's amazing that the energy of the right wing and the Koch Brothers compared to say George Soros and other progressive billionaires, liberal billionaires. They are a minority party as you pointed out, yet they've won more of the elections in the last 20 years at the national, state and local level than the Democrats have. They made sure that lifetime judges, unelected, can be nominated and confirmed to entrench corporations over workers, corporations over consumers, corporations over the environment. You have to hand it to them. What you're trying to do, Larry, is build an energy level, not just an agenda, not just a lot of people, but an energy level that can combat this kind of deliberate determination, no-holds-barred that Senator Mitch McConnell exhibits constantly overwhelming the Democratic opposition. It's really—I watch Congress very closely and go into offices a lot, and the Democrats just don't have the energy that the Republicans have.

Larry Cohen: Yeah. Well, again, you're talking about the Democrats that are elected. Those of us who are in the streets, consider ourselves, you know, issue focused; we have a lot of energy. We don't have the money that the corporate Democrats get from these people. And you know, again, that's part of the rules, not just the rulers, you know. Our part of the Democratic Party, you know, I am on the DNC, and I admit to that. But you know, we could ban that big money in the nominating elections. But no, no, no, we don't want to do that. We want to copy; we want to benefit from Citizens United [2010 Supreme Court decision on campaign finance], even when we nominate our candidates. So we have self-funders and people that don't stand for economic justice, all the time being recruited by the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee [DSCC], the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee [DCCC], [and] the Democratic Governors Association [DGA]. The number one thing they care about is can these people raise money, and even better, if they are people that have money, like my member of Congress, David Trone in Western Maryland, you know, he doesn't even live in the district by the way. But you know, he can spend--he lost the Jamie Raskin the first time he ran, and he lived in that district. And then he runs in my district without even living there, and just buys his way through it. And they gerrymandered the district; it's the most gerrymandered Democratic district in the country. So the rules to apply within the 57 Democratic Parties as well, not just criticizing Republicans for being the party that supports big spending in elections. Eleven billion dollars, Ralph, is the estimate for this election. 50% increase from the last \$7 billion election.

Ralph Nader: It's staggering, but at least Bernie showed you could raise a lot of money with \$27 per person contributions.

Larry Cohen: That's right.

Ralph Nader: That is a great contribution of Bernie Sanders. But you mentioned the DNC. I spent two years trying to get a hold of Chairman Perez, who I worked with when he was [US] Secretary of Labor. Never would return [my] calls, nor would any of his subordinates return calls. We had all these materials for a progressive agenda, and we were trying to get them to pay some attention to something you can get, listeners, on our website. Go to nader.org and you'll get a memorandum called "Suggestions for Successful Elections in 2020 at All Levels." And we want to get this in the hands of everybody who wants to get progressive voters out. So feel free to distribute it. It has a lot of practical suggestions, but the DNC until very recently, a couple of weeks ago, showed no interest in whatsoever, even if it was sent by people close to the DNC. So once again, it's got to be the people; it's got to be the marches, the demonstrations, the neighborhood activity to displace the corporate Democrats. I don't think they're capable of reform. They never look in the mirror after they lose elections and blame the third parties.

Larry Cohen: No, that's right. And again, you know this, but we backed—Our Revolution—in many, many cases that the congressional and other levels backed insurgents against incumbents and get a lot of criticism for that. And I say to them, you know, boldly and on the floor of the DNC, these are one-party districts; it's not a baseball team that we're endorsing here. For those of us who actually want to improve our lives and be happier, of course, we're going to challenge people like [Joseph] Crowley, defeated by AOC [Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez] and people like Elliot Engel [defeated by Jamaal Bowman]. And I could go on and on and on. We didn't win all of them, but we won a lot of them more than ever this year in 2020 in these primaries. That's the only way there's a path to change. We can't just make it about one party. When you have this kind of two-party system, you have to fight for change inside the party in order to get any change, and then fight for rule changes like Maine with ranked-choice voting, so that, you know, there's more opportunity for people to express themselves politically like every other democracy in the world.

Ralph Nader: Well, you know, I've often thought that the theme of corruption is very underestimated by the Democratic Party. Some cynics have said, well, they don't go after the Republicans, especially Trump, the most corrupt president in American history. I mean, he's really diversified corruption [with] self-enrichment, cronyism, contracts shoveled to people who are Republican loyalists, corrupting the Post Office with Mr. DeJoy, a big contributor to Trump. And people have said, when I asked, you know, polls all over the world, Larry, corruption comes in almost number one in terms of what people hate about their governments. And where are the Democrats, and the cynical response, maybe it isn't cynical is, well, they've done a lot of the same stuff. Well, so what? Why don't they turn over a new leaf? I think they could get a lot of votes just stressing Trump corruption. Trump is corrupting the government; he is corrupting

businesses; he is dispensing favors. He's violating criminal statutes. He's violating the Campaign Finance Act. Why aren't they making corruption right at the top?

Larry Cohen: Good rhetorical question there that I think the even better one though, is what you said at the very beginning of our discussion, which was I'm voting for a raise. I'm voting for \$15. I'm voting to get pharmaceutical prices cut by 40%, which is in the platform that our people fought for. You know, I'm voting to bring down the age of Medicare to 60, so I might get healthcare when I retire. You know, I think it's all of that as well as most corrupt president at least since Andrew Jackson. We've had some pretty corrupt presidents, you know, Herbert Hoover, et cetera, but certainly, a corrupt president; most corrupt, who knows? And I must say, Ralph, that, you know, in my 40 years in CWA, we have to be willing to fight corruption inside the organizations where we're active, not just fighting it somewhere else. And I think that fighting corruption and money-grabbing control of parts of the Democratic Party has got to be front and center there, including the DNC itself [that] allows people who are political consultants to be on the DNC, the 450-member DNC. Obama got rid of that for four years and then caved in on it. That was one of the few party reforms that he implemented. And now they're all back with a bigger voice than ever. So, I think fighting corruption or even the appearance of corruption and fighting the notion that big money and fundraising is the substitute for building a grassroots party has got to be at the front end of what we do, particularly after November 3rd. We're not going to do much in the next three weeks on that.

Ralph Nader: Well said, you know, Trump has turned the White House into a business opportunity and he actually hands the Democrats daily evidence. He doesn't hide it like Nixon. He hands it to them, and they still don't use it. So it's still not too late before the election to do the things, listeners, that need to be done. You don't want any election to spin on less than 1%. I was told, Larry, long time ago, apropos your point about political consultants. I was having a conversation with Elizabeth Moynihan, the spouse of [New York Senator] Daniel P. Moynihan. And I said, "How's the re-election for Daniel P. going?" And she said, "It's going well, because I fired all these political consultants and I'm running his re-election campaign." [laughter] And I said, "Why did you do that?" She said, "Because the political consultants are destroying the Democratic Party. Flat out; they're part of the corruption And they make more of their money by their corporate clients *between* elections than they do [from the political clients]... until recently.

Larry Cohen: Absolutely right.

Ralph Nader: That's right. So they ought to be named and they ought to be held accountable and they ought to be replaced. That's what Bernie's contribution was. Bernie Sanders proved you could have a grassroots effort. He could have won, but it was stolen from him 2016, by the

corporate Democrats. And he proved that you could raise over \$200 million in small campaign contributions. So there's a lot of optimism on the horizon, Larry, in all kinds of ways that you're working, and others are working. You beat some of these corporate Democrats in the primaries, and the boy are they shaking on Capitol Hill, because they got these safe seats against Republicans in the general election. But they don't have it in the primary elections. So before we close, Larry--we're talking with Larry Cohen, who is the head of Our Revolution, a very collegial head and who ran the Communications Workers of America for many years with 700,000 members in Canada and the United States. I want to give Steve and David a chance to pitch in here. Steve?

Steve Skrovan: Yeah. Larry, I think most people are voting for Biden-Harris because they hate Trump. It's a real anti-Trump vote. Your organization has worked with the Biden campaign on these task forces and gotten some good, progressive things in the planks. Say, Biden-Harris wins, how are you going to hold their feet to the fire on those? How are they not going to just say, okay, we did our job. We beat be Trump. Now we're going to be surrounded by lobbyists and bankers who are going to tell people who to put into different agencies. How do you hold their feet to the fire after the election?

Larry Cohen: So, first of all, Steve, I think we need to realize, because, you know, from our frame, we are fighting fascism. That's going to be difficult, number one. I don't want to give easy answers. Number two, pushing for critical legislation that can be adopted. You know, a lot of our program in Our Revolution won't get adopted, but I'm talking about things like Medicare, buying all the pharmaceuticals for the U.S. and cutting the cost by 40%. We fought [and] got that in the platform. Now we got to go to the progressive caucus, my friends, Jayapal and Pocan, and say, hey, you guys need to lead on that now, and I mean, in three weeks, not even waiting until January. And there are a dozen issues like that. And we have a big base now in the Congress, not a majority, it's majority of the Caucus though. And they need to step out on issues and fight to adopt them in the next Congress. They won't get them all, but they can get a bunch; that's one. Two, our friends, Bernie, Elizabeth, Jeff Merkley, and others need to say to the Biden transition group, and Bernie has said this: if you give us candidates to confirm in the Senate that are there for corporate America, like [Ernest] Moniz, who was the [U S] Secretary of Energy under Obama, who is on the board of the Southern Company, makes a quarter of a million dollars a year for a handful of meetings, runs a for-profit institute where he just gets well-paid and I could go on and on about him. But if Ernest Muniz comes up, I'm pretty sure Bernie has already said, I'm voting no. And if you want that kind of fight right off the bat, go ahead. So I think it's twofold. One, in the House, we need to pass legislation; we're talking at the federal level. There's a lot you can do at the local and state level. And in the Senate, you know, the few champions that we have there and need to be clear, we're not giving Biden a pass to corporate Wall Street or anybody, fossil fuel or pharma people getting these key jobs. We will vote no and we will organize to vote no. And you know, Republicans may put them in because obviously it only takes a majority to confirm these people, but we're going to raise hell!

Ralph Nader: And you want to get rid of the filibuster.

Larry Cohen: I do want to—well, yeah, because first of all, Ralph, McConnell got rid of it on every issue that he cared about.

Ralph Nader: Even the tax cut for the rich and corporate.

Larry Cohen: Yeah. Every single issue, he changed the rules. Two tax cuts, totally violated what reconciliation is. His vote to repeal the Affordable Care Act was a majority vote. He lost by one vote when McCain switched. He changed the Supreme Court confirmation to 50 from 60. He changed the number of hours of floor time for confirming a nomination to 2 from 30 and confirmed over 200 federal judges and everybody else that Trump put forward. So every time—and there's more than that, but every time he wanted something done and Republicans don't want federal laws, they basically want to get rid of government. But every time, he used the majority. So yes, we have a big coalition on this. We had a call with Merkley and Warren leading at a town hall Zoom meeting with 100,000 more than—actually, 200,000 people including Twitter. And we're saying to Governor Newsom right now, you're going to replace Harris; hopefully she wins. We need a champion for rules reform, not another Feinstein, who is one of the four worst in the Senate on this and the Senate Democrats. Yeah. I want this. We're going to say to Democrats in the Senate, you better govern here, not just tell us “Here's the platform; we did the best we can, but we don't have 60 votes.” They're not going to get 60 votes on a single thing. Nothing.

Ralph Nader: It's not going to be a repeat, you're saying, of 2009, 2010, when Obama had huge majorities in House and Senate and didn't do much with it.

Larry Cohen: No, that's right. And if we had another hour, you and I could recap that. That's how we started Democracy Initiative, [which] was called Fix the Senate Now. We only got one small change made, but that spirit is alive and well and those allies, and many more are going to work together with Merkley and Warren leading, and of course, Bernie. But for Elizabeth in her campaign, she made this an issue all the time--like no one else did. And so, you know, don't lead, but if we don't fire up people around this, we're going to get an exact repeat of what you just said, 2009, and we won't have 60. 2009, 2010, and then boom, no longer is there 60, and then boom, no longer is there 50. And then everybody says, well, like you just said, on the \$15

minimum wage, “well, that's what we said, Larry, we just couldn't get it done.” Oh, you couldn't get it done because you don't have the conviction that *they* have about *their* agenda. And if you don't have the conviction, move over, we'll get people elected, or if you don't move over, we'll move you over so that people can get elected who have some conviction, who feel like they're fighting for the future of working people.

Ralph Nader: It's the Congress. I've said that many times on this program. I'm still waiting for a million people to rally all around the Congress and basically say, “It's our Congress. We're here to take it back.” If you get Congress, you can change the executive and judiciary. It's the most powerful branch under the constitution, 535 people, and what are we waiting for, for heaven sakes? We know their names and we've got to have more of our own convictions and turn us into active citizens as part of daily life. David, do you have any question for Larry?

David Feldman: Yes. What do you say to people in the Democratic Party that Biden's ascendancy shows that there really isn't an appetite in the party or the country for Medicare for All and all the left-of-center policy that want, that we think is a slam dunk, is a no brainer? What do you say to people who say there isn't a political appetite for all these things?

Larry Cohen: Well, so first, and it's a great question. First, David, I say, let's look at the exit polls from the South Carolina primary, which is what catapulted him ahead of Bernie. And it was overwhelming; I don't remember the number now, but it was way more than a majority for Medicare for All in South Carolina among the Democratic Party primary voters. Secondly, I say, okay, let's get ready right now, as I said, a few minutes ago, David, with the platform plank that Medicare is going to buy all the pharma for the country. That's not a spending bill. That will save every government that provides healthcare 40% on their pharma. That'll save the country \$400 billion a year; that's a real number, 400 billion. And progressives, that's an expansion of Medicare. Medicare, Medicaid services will be buying it the same way the VA buys it now at 40% less. So let's lead with that—a direct attack on the greed. It's beyond greed, the corruption of the pharmaceutical industry in this country. And then I say also, we got support for bringing the Medicare age down to 60. Now that's expensive compared to Medicare for All would be far cheaper. Medicare for All saves money. We pull the age down to 60, we're going to have to spend more money. So we have to either do it with deficits, which is fine with me, or do things like close the loophole on fossil fuel subsidies that would pay for Medicare for everybody under 60--literally dollar per dollar would pay for it. And that's supposedly is something the Biden campaign supports. And the fossil fuels subsidies.

Ralph Nader: Another way of saying, Larry, justice is efficient.

Larry Cohen: There you go.

David Feldman: I think Bernie made a really great case for all these things. But the American people, is there a character flaw to the American people?

Larry Cohen: Yeah, we get divided up. And again, Ralph Nader could be a lot more eloquent on that than Larry, but we get divided up and that's what Republicans figured out. To get their economic agenda, they have to divide us up based on racism and anti-immigrant bashing and make sure 20 million immigrants can't vote, et cetera. And you know, again, somebody who spent 40 years in the union, people claimed I was an organizer even when I left at age 65, five years ago, you know, that's what all organizing is about in unions. It's about building a majority and not letting people, the blessed, divide us up as we're trying to fight to build a union where we work. So, you know, that's a bigger challenge in this country probably than almost anywhere else, maybe anywhere else, uniting us no matter where we came from or what we look like, our gender, our sexual preference, our sexual orientation. And that's our challenge is to build that kind of unity out of diversity.

Ralph Nader: Well, on that note, we have to conclude. We've been speaking with Larry Cohen, who was the former president for many years of the Communication Workers of America with 700,000 members in Canada and the United States. And now he heads the organization Our Revolution. You can go to ourrevolution.com, pick up all kinds of information, become part of this grassroots effort. It's one of the legacies of the Bernie Sanders campaign. And while you're at it at your computer, you can go to nader.org and pick up just on the website today and my memorandum, "Suggestions for Successful Elections in 2020 at All Levels". It's not too late to get more votes out for progressive America here and around the world. Thank you, Larry.

Larry Cohen: My honor to be with you, Ralph. Thank you for all you do.

Ralph Nader: Thank you. Stay in touch.

Larry Cohen: Yes.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with the chair of Our Revolution, Larry Cohen. We will link to Our Revolution at ralphnaderradiohour.com. I want to thank our guests again, Paul Street and of course, Larry Cohen. For those of you listening on the radio, that's our show. For you, podcasts listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material we call "The Wrap Up". A transcript of this show will appear on the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour* website soon after the episode is posted.

David Feldman: Subscribe to us on our *Ralph Nader Rader Hour* YouTube channel. And for Ralph's weekly column, it's free, go to nader.org. For more from Russell Mokhiber, go to corporatecrimereporter.com.

Steve Skrovan: For a copy of *The Day the Rats Vetoed Congress*, go to ratsreformcongress.org. And also, check out *Wrecking America: How Trump's Lawbreaking and Lies Betray All*, co-written with Mark Green. We will link to both of them. Producers of the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour* are Jimmy Lee Wirt and Matthew Marran. Our executive producer is Alan Minsky.

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

Ralph Nader: Thank you, everybody. And get out to vote, folks.