



Ralph Nader on Left and Right

Guest: Ralph Nader

July 18, 2014

Ralph Nader, featured in Time magazine's list of the 100 most influential Americans of the 20th century, is a consumer advocate, political candidate and author—most recently of [Unstoppable: The Emerging Left-Right Alliance to Dismantle the Corporate State](#).

WOODS: I'm very glad to have you here. I'm very ecumenical in the sense that I want to work with people who agree with me on really, really important things, and in your new book, *Unstoppable*, you are indeed talking about very important things. But let me insert a note of caution right from the start. In my experience there are a lot of libertarians, and I represent a libertarian audience, who really do want to reach out to the left and work together against the warfare state and the corporate state, and yet we don't find a lot of reciprocation, present company excepted. I know, for example, Justin Raimondo at Antiwar.com says that some of the antiwar people just do not want to work outside the left. What can we do about this?

NADER: Well, I think that's largely true. I think the hands stretched from the libertarians on the antiwar are more numerous than the ones from the liberal intelligentsia. And one reason for that is that a lot of people on the left are single-issue people, and they don't care that Left/Right agrees on A, B, C, D, E, F, G issue if they disagree on reproductive rights or if they disagree on school prayer, or if they disagree on a constitutionally required balanced budget. And that's very unfortunate, because nobody agrees with everybody else, even people inside families, and it's clear where the left/right disagree, but as you pointed out, the areas of agreement are really very fundamental to our democratic society, to our Constitution, to our sense of civil liberties and civil rights, and above all, to the balance of power between real people and the giant, multinational corporations who have no allegiance to our country other than to control it and ship jobs and whole industries to fascist and communist regimes abroad to maximize their profits. So the left-right agrees that the Patriot Act has to be revised because it's engaging in authorizing or allowing the dragnet snooping by the NSA of all Americans' emails, telephone numbers and calls. They are opposed to empire and bloated military budgets that are just getting us in worse quagmires abroad. It's not that they're succeeding. They're opposed to corporate welfare, Main Street against Wall Street and a huge corporate welfare government, the corporate state handing out subsidies, giveaways, quotas, market-restricting

advantages to powerful interests, and of course, all the bailouts of Wall Street and tax-funded stadiums and ballparks owned by rich sports billionaires. So those are just a few of the numerous areas that we agree on, and they're pretty fundamental.

WOODS: I think another area we agree on is that the parties that we are supposed to identify with—you are supposed to identify with the Democratic Party, and I am supposed to identify with the Republican Party, and I find that at every turn, on everything that matters most to me I get sand kicked in my face. The bailouts are the most extraordinary example. The people were, I don't know, 100 to 1 against it, and the House originally voted against it, and then it was rammed down our throats.

But the issue that I'm just the most passionate about is: I can't believe, when it comes to foreign policy, the lie factory that we live in, that emerges from Washington no matter which party it is. I know that whatever they're telling me about what's going on internationally, I know the opposite is the truth. And they exploit people's natural patriotic instincts in the service of imperial ambition or heaven knows what it is. Now, at the time of World War I, which was 100 years ago this month that it got started, when Woodrow Wilson eventually took us in in 1917, there were a handful of progressives who made this a populist issue and said, look, a lot of people are going to get rich from this thing, and it's not you. But most progressives, like *The New Republic* magazine, which was as bad then as it is now, went along with it. Most people went along with it. They supported it. Even today on airplanes there are three soldiers on board, so we're all supposed to stand up and cheer. Do you see any hope that maybe we can crack through the mainstream on this issue and reach people to realize that you are not benefiting from the warfare state?

NADER: Well, I think you're right. We have one giant, corporate party with two heads—Democrat, Republican, and it's amazing how similar they are, whether it's on the Middle East, whether it's on endless weapon development that's bleeding the taxpayers and producing no benefit, whether it's on invading all kinds of national sovereignties overseas with drones and special forces. There's really no difference. Hillary Clinton never saw a weapon system she didn't like. She never saw a war she didn't like. She actually dragged the Republican Secretary of Defense, Gates, into the Libyan attack, which has now disastrously metastasized into chaos in Libya and central Africa. So we really don't have two parties on so many issues.

But I don't think it's fooling the American people. Even with one-sided, massive media propaganda according to what you've been describing over half the people oppose it, and I am sure that if there was a competitive democracy, and the truth was part of a politician's inventory, and the other side of story, so to speak, got out to the people, it would be overwhelmingly against it, even the invasion of Iraq, which Democrats and Republicans toadied up to George Bush and Dick Cheney. Even at the peak that was opposed by a small majority, 55 or so percent of the American people. But you're right: they put the soldiers out there. The minute the soldiers go over there all dissent is supposed to be suppressed—no examination of the lies, the propaganda, the cover-ups, the deceptions that have become normal now for

Washington, D.C. and the profiteers in Wall Street. I think Eisenhower was so right when he warned us in very, very sober terms in his farewell address to the American people after he finished two terms as president, and he warned us about the military-industrial complex.

WOODS: When I think back on what Ron Paul accomplished, apart from talking about the Federal Reserve, the key thing for me that he'll be remembered for is—it's easier for him as a Republican than it would be for a Democrat to say that maybe the U.S. is being attacked because we have stirred up hornets' nests all over the world and bombed people and imposed rotten regimes on them, and maybe they don't like that. Maybe they are responding to that. Now, a Democrat saying that would be dismissed as a pinko commie who hates America. They tried to do that to Ron, but it was a little tricky to make that stick. He's an obviously traditional bourgeois family man who served in the military. It's a little harder to make that stick, although they tried. I think that was such a breakthrough moment in American history when he said that.

NADER: Yeah, and he got a chance to reach several million people when he was part of the Republican primary. But you notice how the war hawk, McCain, jumped on him.

WOODS: Oh, yeah.

NADER: When they were debating. The facts are overwhelmingly on the side of the anti-empire position. What is all this hundreds of billions of dollars of armaments and bases in over 120 countries? What has it got us? Al Qaeda is metastasized all over parts of Asia, north Africa, central Africa. They now have offshoots, ISIS and others, that are even more devastating to our interests. That's what we got for 5,000-plus U.S. soldiers—100 in Iraq, 100,000 seriously sick, maybe for the rest of their lives, traumatized—trillions of dollars, and the same is true for the Afghan war, which is now in a perilous state of instability. So we don't know what we're doing over there. We don't understand tribal politics. It's the mark of empire—arrogance, the use of brute force for foreign policy. That's why in my book *Unstoppable*, I highlighted the fundamental agreement between large numbers of American people against these wars of aggression, against the bloated military budget, against the whole idea of trying to be the policeman for the world. It doesn't work. People don't like it. They fight back. Then we call them terrorists.

WOODS: Yeah, of course. In that book you also mention, just to talk about some good news, you talk about the Anti-Imperialist League of over 100 years ago at the time of the Philippine insurrection. Andrew Carnegie was joined with William James. People across the spectrum came together and said, whatever disagreements we may have, it is un-American to do this to these people abroad.

Now, today there's another nice coalition that's forming around the NSA I am happy to see among Left and Right. There is an effort at a website called OffNow.org. The idea of it is to shut off the water to the facility, the NSA facility in Utah that needs 1.7 million gallons of water a day to cool the machines. If they can't do that, we'll say that any information that's gathered through this program will be inadmissible in any court in Utah. We can't control Washington,

D.C. right now, but we can do things at the local level, and you've got people all over the spectrum working together, so what you're talking about in *Unstoppable* is not just a pipe dream. It really can happen.

NADER: Oh, yeah, and once you have a left-right tidal wave heading toward Washington from around the country, the politicians run for cover. When Obama and his buddies in Congress from both parties were ready to invade Syria a year ago, they got a landslide in Congress of emails, and calls, and protests that were coming in 60 to 100 to 1 in senatorial and congressional offices, and the good guys won.

WOODS: That amazed me.

NADER: Otherwise, people were saying, no, we don't want to get in another quicksand quagmire in Syria and all the blood and tax dollars and more boomerang against our national security. Isn't it amazing that they are smarter—these people around the country are actually smarter about national security than the so-called professionals in the military-industrial complex. Why? Because it's about money in the military-industrial complex, huge contracts, Lockheed, Grumman, Raytheon. This whole Iron Dome that's going in Israel and in Gaza now. They are watching it very carefully at Raytheon and the Pentagon because they're testing these weapons as part of a \$9 billion missile defense program. They don't tell the American people that these missiles are knocking down extremely wobbly, low-level rockets and not intercontinental ballistic missiles, because if they did tell the American people that, the American people will say, well, why are you spending \$9 billion a year for the last 25 years, and you haven't had a successful test against an intercontinental ballistic missile? So it's all spending time to get the facts out to talk among ourselves as citizens, but there's a reason for democracy, and that is it usually comes to better results. There's a reason for the free marketplace of ideas because it comes to better results. There's a reason that there are 12 people on a jury because they come to better results. And that's what we've got to do. We've got to become much more self-confident. Why, the people protesting Congress almost got a left-right coalition over a year ago to pass a bill blocking the NSA dragnet snooping on the American people, and this was a left-right coalition inside the House defying their own leadership—Speaker Boehner and Minority Leader Pelosi. So it's already starting to succeed, and we can see it across the board. It just has to get—left-right coalition has to get more confidence, which is why I wrote this book. This book is a confidence inspirer. It gives a lot of historical examples of which you are very aware, of successes in the past, or at least mobilizations, and it shows the strategy for the future. I have 24 areas where there already is public opinion convergence—60, 70, 80% between left-right in the United States or it's starting to go operational, like juvenile justice reform for reducing sentences, these long sentences for teenagers caught with a little marijuana or heroin possession. That's passed in 15 state legislatures, could only have passed with left-right legislators banding together.

WOODS: Well, the book is *Unstoppable: The Emerging Left-Right Alliance to Dismantle the Corporate State*. Before I let you run, Mr. Nader, I just want you to take a minute to tell people

about how you've actually gotten into the podcast world as well. It's doing quite well. You have the Ralph Nader Radio Hour now.

NADER: Yeah, it was proposed to me, and I said, well, why not? And it's signing up more radio stations, and it's with David Feldman and Steve Skrovan, and it's all unscripted, and I think that's why people like it. It evaluates the news of the day and also gives people a sense of empowerment into the kind of information and citizen tools they can use to recover what the Founders meant when they started the Constitution with "We the people." They did not start the Constitution with "We the corporations" or "We the government." They started it with "We the people." By the way, if you want an autographed copy to send as a gift of the book *Unstoppable*, just go to Nader.org, and if you want my weekly column, all you've got to do is sign up free. You'll get it electronically at Nader.org.