

Chris Hedges Report: How The Media Walked Us Into Autocracy

- By Chris Hedges, Scheer Post.
- March 9, 2025
- Resistance Report

The American corporate coup d'état is almost complete as the first weeks of the Trump administration exemplify. If there has been one person who saw this coming, and has taken courageous action over the years to prevent it, it would be Ralph Nader. The former presidential candidate, consumer advocate and corporate critic joins host Chris Hedges on this episode of The Chris Hedges Report to chronicle his life's work battling the corporate takeover of the country and how Americans can still fight back today despite the growing repression from the White House.

“The sign of a decaying democracy is that when the forces of plutocracy, oligarchy, multinational corporations increase their power, in all sectors of our society, the resistance gets weaker,” Nader tells Hedges.

Nader asks people to look around them and witness the decay through the ordinary parts of their lives. “If you just look at the countervailing forces that hold up a society—civilized norms, due process of law and democratic traditions—they're all either AWOL [absent without official leave] or collapsing,” he said. Civic groups are outnumbered by corporate lobbyists, the media barely pays attention to any grassroots organizing and the protests that do occur, such as the encampments at universities, are brutally suppressed.

It's not an impossible task, Nader says, recalling the precedent of organizing in the U.S. He says the fundamental basics are supported by a majority of people regardless of their political labels.

Host: Chris Hedges

Producer: Max Jones

Intro: Diego Ramos

Crew: Diego Ramos, Sofia Menemenlis and Thomas Hedges

Transcript: Diego Ramos

Transcript

Chris Hedges: The New York Times published a lead column on January 18th, 2025, titled, “Are We Sleepwalking Into Autocracy?” The columnist's answer is yes, unless, and I quote, “defenders of democracy have to stay united, focusing on ensuring that checks and balances remain intact and that crucial democratic watchdog institutions elude capture.” What is absent from the Times article is the complicity of the media, and especially the New York Times, in shutting down coverage of the fight by unions, grassroots movements, whistleblowers, and civic organizations, often led by the consumer advocate and former presidential candidate Ralph Nader, to placate their advertisers. This

decision, made by newspapers such as the New York Times four decades ago, essentially erased these popular initiatives from public consciousness.

This erasure—done to placate wealthy corporations and oligarchs and boost revenue—bolstered the power of corporations and the government to dominate and shape public discourse and in the process saw them become ever more secretive and ever more autocratic. As Ralph Nader notes, the regular reporting about what activists were doing in the 1960s and 1970s made possible the consumer, environmental, labor, and freedom of information laws. Similar efforts now cannot gather momentum with media invisibility. Legislative hearings, prosecutions, and regulatory actions cannot get jump-started just by the people insistent on a just and democratic society. How often do you see op-eds from civic labor advocates, Ralph asks. How often do you read reviews of their books? How often do you see profiles of them?

How often have the groundbreaking studies by Public Citizen, Common Cause, Center for Science in the Public Interest, Veterans for Peace, Union of Concerned Scientists, etc. received coverage? This erasure stands in stark contrast to the coverage given over to those on the far right and corporations. Figures like Donald Trump, Marjorie Taylor Greene, and Elon Musk get plenty of press. The media landscape is siloed. Media outlets, both the legacy media and the digital media, cater to well-defined demographics. But the power of the legacy media, should it decide to use its power, is to help set the agenda through its reporting. Most digital sites feed off of the reporting of the establishment media spinning it left or right. And what it does not cover often does not get covered. Legions of reporters, 500 full-time reporters cover the Congress, hundreds more sit at the feet of the titans of commerce and Wall Street, spit back to the public official communiques, and fawning interviews with the powerful, the famous, and the rich. Unless they are deployed outside the halls of Congress and the centers of power, what is left of our democracy, and not much of it is left, will wither and die.

Joining me to discuss our march towards tyranny, the complicity of institutions such as the media and the liberal class, including the Democratic Party, and what we must do to wrest back power is Ralph Nader, who has been fighting corporate power longer more effectively and with more integrity than any other American. Ralph, let's go back to where we were because where we are now is a reaction to what you, you were at the epicenter of it, built. We can begin with your groundbreaking book, "Unsafe at Any Speed," which should be taught in every journalism school. It is a masterful piece of investigative reporting. But let's go back to what we had and then how they organized to take it away.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, thank you, Chris. It's very well documented, the whole history of it. When I wrote the book, "Unsafe at Any Speed," a reporter for Science Magazine picked it up and then the New York Times picked it up off of Science Magazine and it made page one. And so that was a good start.

Chris Hedges: Ralph, just want to interrupt for people who don't know, these were cars made by GM that were not safe.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, well, it was a critique of unsafely designed cars, cars without seat belts, airbags, rollover bars, collapsing steering column, padded dash panels, all the things we take for granted now. And I led with a chapter on the Corvair, which is uniquely unstable at cornering maneuvers. At any rate, up until then, the press would never cover criticisms of cars by model or by a manufacturer. They would refer to the Corvair, until we broke the taboo, as a middle sized rear

engine car and they wouldn't mention the name. All right. So we broke the taboo and I began contacting members of Congress because the next step after the book were congressional hearings in the tried and true tradition of Civics 101. So I lived in a boarding house, and I would call from an outside phone to members of Congress. And they would invariably say, when they answered the phone, who are you with?

Well, in those days, the only answer you could give was, I'm with a trade association or a corporation or a union. There are virtually no citizen groups operating at that time. So I would go down to Capitol Hill and I would find the staff that was responsive. And there were, for example, Senator [Abraham] Ribicoff's staff, Senator [Warren] Magnuson's staff, and then we would start having hearings. And before the hearings, I would call the Washington Post, New York Times, AP, UPI [United Press International], Baltimore Sun, and the Wall Street Journal and the Detroit papers because it was on automobiles. And not long thereafter, I had a whole covey of reporters who wanted to cover what I was doing up there, wanted to cover the hearings. They didn't just do a feature hoping for a Pulitzer and then leave the subject entirely the way they do now. They did what was called regular reporting. Beat reporting.

And because I would get in those papers, it'd be a recall, it'd be widely publicized, members of Congress began more and more to open their doors to me and to have hearings in the Senate and in the House. And the press feels more comfortable reporting hearings on corporate misbehavior or corporate crime than if citizens had some sort of rally, even then. So to make a long story short, in a matter of a few months after the publication of "Unsafe at Any Speed," November 1965, by September, the Congress had passed the first bill ever to regulate the most powerful industry in the country at the time for safety standards, pollution control, and fuel efficiency. Three objectives.

And they sent it to Lyndon Johnson, who had a signing ceremony, and he invited me there and gave me one of the pens, which I can't find now, by the way. So I was off to the races. So I figured, well, I don't want to be a lone ranger here. There's too many corporate lobbyists. They started beefing up their lobbying in Washington, including the auto industry.

Chris Hedges: Let me just stop you because Ralph, let's not bypass the fact that GM mounted a pretty intense and dirty campaign against you.

Ralph Nader: Yes, they hired a private detective with several former FBI people. That's what happened to a lot of FBI agents when they retired, they go to work for these large corporations to follow me around the country, try to get dirt on me, to discredit my testimony before Congress. The Detroit paper, Bob Irvin first wrote the article, fingering GM is behind this. And then all the other press jumped on and that's when Senator Ribicoff had his widely publicized hearings. And then it shifted over to Senator Magnuson who reported the bill out to the Senate floor. So that helped, of course. But then I started going after other industries, the pipeline safety issue, the insurance industry and others. And for a while, it worked like a charm. We recruited law school students who just graduated over the summer, and the Washington Post publicized one of their reports exposing the weak Federal Trade Commission. And the Congress had hearings.

There was hearings at the House, and we had five young law students testify. And the Post called them "Nader's Raiders." So that was a very useful moniker for more media. And we did one report after another on the US Department of Agriculture, the Food and Drug Administration, the Interstate Commerce Commission, the FAA, and each one got coverage. Now, when you get coverage in the Times or Post or AP or you get coverage on TV and radio, because the original content comes from

the newspapers and then you know NBC, ABC. So I got on Meet the Press, for example. I got on a lot of radio, I got on the evening news and then we started getting Nader's Raiders major media to broaden the base and it worked like a charm. The members of Congress couldn't shrug us off because they didn't want to be criticized by a columnist like Drew Pearson in the Washington Post or the regular news reporters on Capitol Hill, there would be hearings, there'd be legislation. And we got not just the auto safety law, we got the consumer product safety law, we got the flammable fabrics protection law, we got in the environmental area, the fundamental air and water pollution control acts started the Environmental Protection Agency, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, OSHA, the Freedom of Information Act, on and on. Then something happened.

Chris Hedges: Ralph, let me just stop you there to make two points. One, what you did was create organizations, Common Cause, all these organizations which you then spun off. They became kind of autonomous consumer agencies, environmental agencies. So you created a counterweight to corporate power, number one. And number two, I think we have to delineate the relationship you had with the press then and now because these reporters, there was an alliance between your work and those reporters. Is that correct?

Ralph Nader: Yeah, but we weren't asking for favors, Chris. We said to them, hold us to the standard of newsworthiness. That's all we ask of you. And so they did. And we were very newsworthy. So much so that Ben Bradley, the celebrated editor of the Washington Post, charged out of his office into the newsroom one day holding up the Washington Post that covered one of our reports. And he said, why aren't you guys digging in like Nader is? What's going on here? So that launched even more investigative reports that had nothing to do with us. And then the television began picking up and saying, you know, this is good for ratings. Let's have an on-site consumer reporter for the evening news. And that spread around the country. Yeah, I started the Center for Auto Safety, Public Citizen, the Pension Rights Center, the public interest research groups around the country and many other groups because again, I didn't want to be a lone ranger. We had to have much more resources, many more people to counter the hordes of corporate lobbyists and their PACs. So this went on until probably 1974, '75.

Chris Hedges: Let me just stop you because 1971 is a pivotal year. That's when you get the kind of corporate blueprint for the blowback for, you know, the [Lewis] Powell memo. And you're the only person named, to be targeted in that memo. So corporations feel heat from grassroots, civic, popular movements, unions, and they react but let's just briefly raise the '71 Powell memo because they kind of followed it to the letter, what corporations proposed doing, and then the effects of that.

Ralph Nader: Well, Lewis Powell was a corporate attorney in Richmond. He represented utilities and other companies. And he was asked by the U.S. Chamber Commerce for advice on what to do with the rousing activity on campuses, the students, the anti-war, the civil rights, women's rights movement, criticism of big banks and other corporations, the eruption of resistance to pollution and at that time the early Earth Day mobilization.

Chris Hedges: I'm sorry, Ralph, I don't want to... You started Earth Day. That was your idea, right? Yeah. I believe.

Ralph Nader: Yeah. And he wrote a memorandum, about 33 pages, just read it recently, and he basically said, hey, we've got to wake up, we're the business community. These people, they're not just radicals, they're regular people that are very turned off, and they want to regulate us, they want to tax us, they want to sue us. And we've got to beef up our lobbying, we've got to have a good

presence on campus. We've got to do much more media. They listened, and they did beef up. But the pivotal change was not that. The pivotal change was Abe Rosenthal, the new managing editor of the New York Times. And he was what we would call now a neoconservative. And he was a foreign reporter for the New York Times in Poland and elsewhere, and then they made him managing editor. And did not like us. He was opening suburban additions to the New York Times. He wanted more ads. He thought we were bad for business. And he basically started to shut us down.

The first thing he did was he told the Washington Bureau that if we come out with a critical report of a corporation and the corporation does not respond, they are not to report on our findings, on our revelations. Well, you know, that doesn't take long for corporations to find that out. And so they didn't respond. So the Washington bureau would send the article up to New York for publication and it wouldn't get in. He then didn't like Arab Americans, particularly. He was a staunch supporter of the Israeli government can do no wrong in those days. And there was not a little bigotry here involved as people told me at the time. And so he wanted basically to shut us down and the coverage began to decline in the Times.

Chris Hedges: Ralph, let me stop you there. First of all, people don't know or may not know you're of Lebanese descent. But secondly, we also, that was a moment when the New York Times had severe financial distress. It was not bringing in the ad revenue. And what Abe Rosenthal did was create all the sections that we now see today, style, know, business, all this stuff, which were just magnets for advertisers, high-end advertisers. And so, Abe used to walk around and say, you know, I saved the New York Times. Well, many of us would argue he destroyed the journalistic integrity of the New York Times, but he did so by catering to these advertisers. And part of that catering was one, to create these special sections that have nothing to do with journalism at all. Many of it was, in fact, paid content. And secondly, it was to erase the kinds of reports that you were doing and both the kinds of investigative reports that these big advertisers didn't want.

Ralph Nader: Yes, and at the same time the companies hired a firm called Wilmer, Cutler and Pickering and Lloyd Cutler would go and have meetings with editors of the New York Times and Post and saying, what are you guys doing giving this guy so much print? Don't you know he's bad for business? And the inference was that they were going to lose advertising if they didn't shut us out. Once the Times started scaling down, then the Washington Post took note because they were of the same mindset and both of them were about to go public and sell stock on the stock exchange, which gave them even more vulnerability to suppression. And then that dried up more and more of the evening news. We used to get on the network news.

It's almost impossible to get on the network evening news now. And the same with radio. At the same time, there emerged public radio and public broadcasting, and they were scared from the get-go that the companies would go after their funding on Capitol Hill and crimp their style. And so they covered us very little as well. And who took notice? Obviously, members of Congress. And it broke the cycle of civics 101. You put the truth and the facts out, the public gets informed because the press covers it. The legislators or regulators see the press covering it. They begin to rise to their responsibilities. They have hearings. They take action. People's lives are saved. Health is advanced. Their economic well-being is protected.

And then the cycle starts again against the whole set of new injustices. But all these forces I've just mentioned started shutting us down. We were saved for a short period by the Jimmy Carter administration. He appointed very good people to the regulatory agencies, the auto safety agency,

the job safety agency, the EPA, and so on. But that was just a four-year reprieve and they were still counter-attacking. More lobbyists, more political action committees, more indignant calls to reporters and editors and publishers to shut us down. So, you know, that was their golden age, the mass media, what we call now the corporate media. And it's completely changed now. And I say to reporters or editors, or publishers that I can manage to reach. It's not easy. What are you ashamed of your golden age for? Look what you did for the country, just exercising your duty and professional responsibilities for newsworthiness. And now you don't do it.

Chris Hedges: Ralph, there was another factor too, and that is the infusion of corporate money into the Democratic Party because you could not have held these hearings or passed this legislation, many of which you wrote, unless you had a viable liberal wing of the Democratic Party willing to take on corporate power. And that was eviscerated in particular during the Clinton administration, led by a California Congressman named Tony Coelho.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, Tony Coelho was in charge of fundraising for the House Democrats. And around 1978, '79, when Carter was president, he managed to get the party to accept the following proposition. Why are we letting the Republicans raise all that money from the business community? We can raise money from the business community. And they started going to these dinners in Washington, PAC dinners they were called, and making the pitch for money. And that was the beginning of the end because it coalesced with the defeat of Jimmy Carter by Ronald Reagan. And once Reagan took over, well, you know, he gave wish lists to companies. So you go to the oil and gas company, the banks and the insurance companies and so on and say, what do you want us to do for you in terms of getting rid of regulations, the tax cuts, appoint, nominating conservative judges to the federal bench and so on. It was all downhill. You could see the correlation between the campaign money pouring into the Democratic Party coffers and the decline in regulatory action and congressional hearings when they controlled the House or the Senate.

Chris Hedges: And I know when you first ran for president, I think it was you, I remember you telling me that it was done essentially because Congress had become completely captive, that all of those Congress people, [J. William] Fulbright and others, that you were once able to work with had been essentially pushed out of the Democratic Party, that it had been seized, the entire party and the Congress had been seized by corporate power. Is that correct?

Ralph Nader: Yeah, that's right. Especially in 1980, the landslide against Jimmy Carter by Ronald Reagan, a grade B actor who spent some years as governor of California. We lost Senator Magnuson. We lost Senator [Frank] Church. We lost Senator [Bill] Nelson. These were the champions, and others were about to be defeated. We had strong, progressive, Democratic senators from North and South Dakota. Jim Abourezk, for example, we had Senator George McGovern, two progressive senators, and now they're all Republicans. There was hardly a shred of the Democratic Party in four mountain states and the two prairie states. So now, having abandoned them, they start with a handicap of 12 senators that don't even compete to challenge in the U.S. Senate. It's pretty hard to control the Senate when you start with 12 down from the get-go.

So, yeah, what you said was the trend, and just got worse and worse. Instead of getting a stronger Democratic party, a stronger progressive movement, it got weaker. The sign of a decaying democracy is that when the forces of plutocracy, oligarchy, multinational corporations increase their power, in all sectors of our society, the resistance gets weaker. Now, in a healthy democracy, the resistance would get stronger. There'd be more marches, demonstrations, litigation, candidates

running for office, and of course, more lobbying groups by new citizen organizations. We saw just the opposite. And the price we're paying, right now the end product of all this is Donald J. Trump. Der Führer, the voters in this country, seeing just two alternatives, the Republican Party and Democratic Party, on November 5th narrowly elected a lawless dictator who is now at large in our White House, dismantling what's left of the Democratic accountability, the role of Congress, and dictating anything he wants to do. In fact, in July 2019, he said, with Article 2, I can do whatever I want as president. And he's proving it, both in his first term and even on a more greater rampage in the last few days, starting his second term.

Chris Hedges: But all of this was the rot that preceded, of course, Trump, even from the first administration, the destruction of civil liberties, including our right to privacy with wholesale surveillance, the destruction of due process. And you have been very critical of the liberal class, the Democratic Party, for either being active or complicit. I remember you once saying, where are the heads of all the law schools? Well, why aren't they speaking out? And even before Trump ran, when you were running I remember you telling me once you know all a dictator would have to do is flick a switch it's already there it's already been arranged.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, if you just look at the countervailing forces that hold up a society—civilized norms, due process of law and democratic traditions—they're all either AWOL [absent without official leave] or collapsing. For example, there are over a million lawyers. They're called part of the legal profession. Where have they been? The bar associations don't speak out. The American Bar Association, the biggest bar association in the world, they don't take a stand. They're the first responders. They're supposed to be our sentinels. They're AWOL. The organized church used to sustain the norms. They collapsed. Gambling is everywhere now right down at fingertips for a teenager in his or her bedroom can gamble. That's collapsed on many fronts. They were in the forefront of the civil rights movement, the peace movement. Where are they now? In fact, the evangelical groups in the South are just opposite. They're for war, they're for destruction of Palestinian rights. They love Donald J. Trump. It's just the opposite.

The labor unions have never been weaker. There's a few surges in partial organizations, Starbucks and Amazon and others, of course, but the number of unionized workers is still going down, down, down. It's the lowest in 80, 90 years. I think only about 10 % of all workers now, public and private, together are organized and they're headed by often very cautious leaders who every time we propose to them to join with consumer environmental forces pass it by the Democratic Party apparatus that turns it down. So they're like a tail of the Democratic Party. The civic groups, they're totally outnumbered. They can't keep up with all the opposition just in terms of people, you know, number of lobbyists on Capitol Hill, litigators, they're struggling for funds. So you can see the media, of course, who just finished talking. They have cut the ground under the citizen movement and the citizen community. And that's basically why the Democrats lost election after election, including the one last November, because the civic groups are groups that know how to talk to people at the grassroots.

They don't differentiate between conservative workers and liberal workers for health and safety or conservative patients and liberal patients for health and safety, or consumers, they don't do that. They talk to all people and they know the language, they know the strategies and the tactics. They were completely blocked by the Democratic Party from any input. Why? Because, few people know this, the Democratic Party not only is wallowing in corporate PAC money, they have contracted out their campaigns to corporate conflicted political and media consultants who raise the money,

develop the strategy, generate the taboos and block us from input into the Democratic Party at the national, state and local level. And that blockage kept the Democratic Party from taking the most obvious positions that could have won easily the House, Senate, and the presidency last year. For example, they could have made a big deal out of a frozen federal minimum wage of \$7.25. That's 25 million workers who would get a raise to 15 bucks an hour, and they didn't do it. Kamala Harris just made a throwaway line. They didn't listen to Bernie Sanders, for example.

They could have increased benefits of Social Security, which have been frozen for 50 years. Instead, they said, we'll protect Social Security as it is now. About 65 million people would have gotten higher Social Security benefits. They could have defeated the Republicans on the child tax credit extension. 61 million kids from conservative, liberal families were getting an average of \$300 a month. It cut poverty almost in half among children in the United States, and they didn't do that. Instead, Kamala Harris sent her brother-in-law to Wall Street to talk to Goldman Sachs and corporate law firms to advise her on her economic and tax policy. And her most memorable phrase is opportunity economy. Boy, that really spells specifics to put food on people's table. So basically, the Democratic Party owes America a huge apology in maybe ten installments of how they sabotaged the only party that could have saved the republic from the fascism and the corporatism and the militarism of the GOP. Instead, the Democratic Party became part of the problem. They also were militaristic, they were corporatistic, and they weren't all that great in terms of opening the channels of government to civic input. And so they had an autocratic dimension as well.

Chris Hedges: I just want to, before we go on, talk about the conspiracy or the collusion between the two parties to shut down third parties. I mean, you were a victim of that.

Ralph Nader: Yes. Well, you know, it's what I call the two-party duopoly, which has been picked up as a phrase. And if you don't have a competitive democracy, you don't have a democracy. And if they shut off third-party efforts by huge ballot access barriers, an avalanche of frivolous lawsuits, diverting resources and time from these little parties, you're not going to get what you got in the 19th century, where you had the Liberty Party created in 1840 against slavery, you had the Women's Suffrage Party, you had the Labor, Progressive, Farmer parties. They all pushed the two parties into taking up these positions after some years or decades, even though they never won a national election. It was much easier in the 19th, early 20th century to get on the ballot.

But when the Communist Party started running candidates in the US, the ballot barriers by state law after state law became horrendous. In fact, in one state of California, there's more signatures required to get on the ballot to run for president than in 10 Western European countries. In Canada, it's very easy to get on the ballot. So what happened was that they violated a law of nature. Imagine if seeds were not allowed to sprout in nature, what would be left of our biosphere? What would be left of our biota? And that's what they've done. And as a result, the corporatists found that they could make the two parties come to become more and more alike and to have one party justify doing bad things by saying, don't you know how bad the Republicans are? What are you criticizing us? The Republicans are worse. So they define each other by who's the worst instead of who's the best. And we're paying the price now in wars of empire, in the domination of corporate supremacists over everything.

They're raising our children with that iPhone five, seven hours a day, undermining parental authority, separating these children from family, community, nature, harming their health with junk food and sedentary living, with very little kids playing outside anymore. There isn't anything that

corporate commercialism now has not invaded. They've commercialized the churches. They've commercialized the academic world. They've commercialized almost everything outside the marketplace they see as a profit center. So they want to corporatize the post office. They want to take over public drinking water departments and corporatize them. They want to corporatize the public school system. One way or another, they want to corporatize the public lands or take the public lands. And they've never been more aggressive, never been more successful. And the civic community, which used to be relied on to resist, can't get any media. And we have tried. Last year, we made a major effort to turn Labor Day into a real workers day with events all over the country. We got the unions behind us.

The AFL behind us, they're ready to roll out in July. It would have been a tremendous phenomena. It would have energized the people that go to vote in November. And it was based around a compact for American labor, protecting their pensions, living wage, health insurance, right to organize and so on. And just as we were going to get underway, Liz Shuler and others passed the proposal by the Democratic National Committee, and they shut it down saying you couldn't control what was going to be said or done at these local media events and gatherings. And Mark Dimondstein, the head of the postal workers union, who was very excited about this idea and persuaded the FFL council on 16th Street next to the White House to pick it up. He said, that's what the unions do all the time. Anything that deals with political, they just write blank checks to the Democratic PACs, no strings attached, they don't demand anything, and any proposal by an outsider is passed by the Democratic National Committee. Well, that alone elected Trump and the Congress. Just that shutdown of the civic community alone, and I include the labor unions as part of that, would have made the difference.

You know, Trump was elected by a margin of 235,000 votes just in Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin combined. In other words, if there was a 240,000 vote switch, he would have been defeated. So that's just one example. And in 2022, we mobilized 24 national citizen groups for a Zoom conference of six hours for candidates running for office at the national and state level, and they all delivered 10, 15 minute concise presentations. They know what they're talking about, strategies, tactics, language, rebuttals, slogans, and ways to get out the vote. And it was almost entirely ignored. Nancy Pelosi couldn't be bothered to tell her legions in a Democratic party to show up on the Zoom conference in July 2022. Anybody who wants to see what we did, it's on winningamerica.net. And again, that would have broadened the progressive participation and majority in Congress and would have set the stage to defeat Trump in 2024. So basically when you shut out the civic community, Chris, you shut down democracy. And I placed the responsibility not just on the Democratic Party, but first and foremost on the mass media.

And it was impossible to get any coverage of the July conference. These are major groups represented, didn't get any ink whatsoever, couldn't get anybody other than Dana Milbank, he wrote a column for the Washington Post to cover our nine-month effort to inject the civic community into the dialogue and into the discussion of the 2022 elections. And the same thing happened. We couldn't get a single column on this effort on Labor Day. Not a single column in any of the mainstream press. And by the way, Chris, the independent press is not such a hot shot either. The magazines like In These Times, Washington Monthly, Progressive Magazine, The Nation, they don't cover civic community activities. They just pontificate. They do have some good articles, and they have their columnists, many of whom are getting very tired and repetitive. They don't cover what Public Citizen, Common Cause, Pension Rights Center, Center for Science in the Public

Interest, Union of Concerned Scientists, Veterans for Peace especially gets completely blacked out regardless of their demonstrations and non-violent civil disobedience all over the country against the military machine, the empire, the weaponization of the genocide in Gaza. They haven't had a single article, they had to put out all kinds of great material people go to veteransforpeace.org and see for yourself.

These are veterans who've known wars and they can't even get any coverage. And you can't get any coverage of the lack of coverage. You can't get the journalism publications to do any coverage of the censorship. So this is the ultimate censorship, the shutdown of the First Amendment. When the press, which is given a cachet in the First Amendment, there's no other industry mentioned by name in the Constitution, are abusing their privileges for a mess of prodigies. They're abusing them for the profits they want to make from advertising, which of course begins to replace journalists and editors who want to do the right thing with journalists and editors who got their finger to the wind and are worried about the money before reporting the truth in an equitable fashion. It even gets worse. The Times created Trump. They kept giving him more and more publicity. They created JD Vance. Whoever heard of JD Vance? They kept writing about his book. They kept writing about his Senate race more than the opponent, Tim Ryan, and the US Senate race in Ohio.

The same with all these other people. 11 pages and three editions to Tucker Carlson. They gave Tucker Carlson more ink and didn't lay a glove on him by the way. All they did was publicize who he was. He loved it, he held up the papers to promote it and they gave him more space than any figure in the history of the New York Times. And whoever heard of Majorie Taylor Green from an obscure district in Georgia until the Times started reporting her every ugly utterance and put her on the cover of the New York Times Magazine?

Chris Hedges: Before we close, I want to end by talking about what we have to do. I just want you to talk about the crackdown on college campuses, including your alma mater's of Princeton and Harvard Law School. I find it quite disturbing. Universities should be sacrosanct in terms of free speech. And having covered despotic governments all over the world, once they shut down that university space, it's quite, quite ominous.

Ralph Nader: Yes, it was made even worse by the October 7th and thereafter, where the attack on October 7th was a homicide-suicide mission. They lost 1,600 Hamas fighters, more than the alleged number of Israelis who were killed, 350 of whom were soldiers, by the way. And that was a raid into Israel that can't compare with the raids into Palestine for 60 years, slaughtering from the air all kinds of civilians and civilian infrastructures again and again and again against the defenseless population, as Gideon Levy, the columnist in Haaretz, wrote about again and again, among other columnists in that newspaper in Israel. Then the eruption of protest on college campuses, I would never have guessed the level of suppression, suspending students, discharging students, shutting down events, suspending potential grants, blocking professors from moving from one university to another, including one of the nation's leading experts on genocide, Professor [Raz] Segal from Stockton University, had a post at University of Minnesota, which was turned down because he was outspoken about the genocide in Gaza. The law schools are following suit. The law firms, some of them have announced they will not hire or they will reject job offers of law school graduates who are involved in pro-Palestinian rights activities at law school opposed to genocide.

Who would ever dream something like that? Even critics of universities never dreamed the level of cowardliness, the level of receptiveness to a few large donors who were pro-Israeli government can

do no wrong enthusiasts, and it cowed Harvard University, Princeton, and others decisively, just proving our point that at academic institutions, money talks more than truth more than freedom of speech. And the answer to it is just better organizing on campus with smarter strategies. I wouldn't have spent all that time on disinvestment. There are other ways that can affect universities much more deeply that have to be considered. And these students need a few full-time people helping them at these large universities because these students got to deal with classes and grades. So there needs to be more resources around and brave faculty have to be defended. You have to have pro bono lawyers with the right tactics and strategies, you can tip the balance in favor of freedom of speech developing the civic refinements for justice as part of the educational process itself.

Chris Hedges: Well, I know you've, I want to move on to what we have to do, but I know you've talked about mobilizing alumni as kind of a key aspect of pushing back against the suppression of free speech and the suspension of students and the kind of blacklisting of those who speak out on the campus. But let's just close by, what do we do now? We are on the cusp of an American fascism. There's just no way around it. You know, reading these executive orders, everything from education to revoking student visas for foreign students who have participated in protests against the genocide, I mean, it's a long list. What do we do now to save what's left of our open society?

Ralph Nader: Well, there's a lot that has to be done in order to create the brooks that feed the streams that feed the tributaries, that feed the Mississippi River, to take a metaphor to its limit. For example, there's nothing stopping students from organizing their own full-time groups with full-time staff. They can assess themselves 15, 20 bucks a student and do what the public interest research groups have done on domestic issues all over the country with full-time staff. We have to expand our language. We should never use words like white collar crime. It's corporate crime. We should use words like corporatism, not private sector. We've got to organize, as you say, the progressive alumni. There's always significant percentages of progressive alumni of these schools, but they don't know each other, and that has to be connected. We've got to beef up the student press, which is very heavily...

Chris Hedges: In a broader sense, outside of the universities.

Ralph Nader: In a broader sense, all it comes down to are two things. Trump will self-destruct because he knows no boundaries. So his greatest enemy is Trump. And you will see the unraveling of Trump in the succeeding weeks. I would not be surprised that if he continues his bull in the China shop, illegal, wild, flailing, affecting tens of millions of people in terms of their dire necessities of life in favor of his corporate supremacist, that he will be impeached and convicted in the U.S. Senate. His own party will turn against him because when they see the polls, which are already dropping since January 20th, by the way, when they see the polls and they realize it's either them or Trump, they will always take their own political survival.

Just as a few senators did during the Nixon-Watergate scandal when they got into a limousine and went to the White House and basically said to Nixon, your time is up. You've lost your base in Congress. So the second is we've got to focus on the Congress. That is the leading fulcrum for turning around the U.S. government, foreign, domestic, and affecting state and local. That's what the founders believed when they gave the most powerful authorities by far, not to the executive branch or the judicial branch, but to Congress, exclusive power to declare war, to exercise the taxing power, the spending power, the nomination confirmation power, and the investigative oversight authority. And so we're down to 535 men and women.

Probably 20% of them are already on the side of truth and justice and peace. And we've got to organize back home. My best guess is 1% of the people organized in congressional districts, that's two and a half million in progressive districts who represent public opinion, who know what they're talking about, who are willing to put in say, 500 hours a year of volunteer time, about the time people put in on a hobby, and who will raise enough money for an office with two full-time staff in each congressional district, can defeat the corporate supremacists and take control of Congress and turn the country around. That is quite a bit of organizing, but most people would not believe that 1% can do it. We did it in the 60s and early 70s with far less than 1% to regulate these companies.

Remember, when it comes down to the brass tacks, the members of Congress want your vote far more than they want money from commercial interests. They want money from commercial interests in order to defeat their opponent, put ads on TV. Why? Because they want to get votes. But if the votes are conditioned and focused, and if members of Congress are regularly summoned to town meetings back home where the citizenry sets the agenda and asks the questions and the senators and representatives respond and listen and go back to their instructions, the country can be changed. We should always remember that when it comes down to where people live, work, and raise their children, there are not the kind of polarizations that the rulers try to inculcate on the public. Divide and rule goes back over 2,000 years as a tactic. Most of the necessities of life are supported by an overwhelming number of Americans, regardless of the labels they put on themselves—conservative, liberal, or whatever.

Living wage is one. Universal health insurance is two. Crackdown on corporate crooks is three. A fair tax system is four. De-bloating the military budget and coming back home to repair and modernize infrastructure and public services in every community. Creating a lot of jobs is five. And empowering people so they can take back their sovereign power and condition it before they give their instructions back to their senators or their state legislators or their city council person. So it's not an impossible task. It has precedence in American history. And it's surprising when people realize what a tiny percentage of active engaged citizens representing public opinion, knowing what they're talking about and making direct contact with town meetings with their representatives, no flags, no intermediaries. We have all kinds of books that show how this can be done, how it has been done. One of them is called "Breaking Through Power: It's Easier Than We Think," and I wrote that. Another one is called "Unstoppable, the Emerging Left-Right Alliance to Dismantle the Corporate State." It's good to know history and the successes from history so we don't get discouraged and demoralized as we see so much of that today in the U.S.

Chris Hedges: Great. Thank you so much, Ralph. I want to thank Sofia [Menemenlis], Diego [Ramos], Thomas [Hedges], and Max [Jones] who produced the show. You can find me at ChrisHedges.Substack.com.

Ralph Nader: And I might add, keeping it up to date, I have had a weekly column since 1971. You can get free electronically at Nader.org. Just go to it, sign up, and you'll be kept up to date on what we're doing and thinking.