

## RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 166 TRANSCRIPT

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

**David Feldman:** Hello.

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

**Ralph Nader:** Hello. What an hour we have coming up with Professor Noam Chomsky.

**Steve Skrovan:** We certainly do. It's a special hour for you today. And the full hour will be with our guest, Noam Chomsky, talking about what has happened to the American Dream. So let's get right to it. David?

**David Feldman:** Professor Noam Chomsky is a political philosopher, activist and linguist. He's the author of such works as Profit Over People, Masters of Mankind, Failed States, and many more. His latest work is Requiem for the American Dream: The 10 Principles of Concentration of Wealth & Power, which is also a movie on Netflix. Welcome to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour, Professor Noam Chomsky.

**Noam Chomsky:** Very glad to be with you.

**Ralph Nader:** Professor Chomsky, there's a bumper sticker in Berkeley that's floating around the backs of cars and it reads this way: "The reason they call it the American Dream is because you have to be asleep to believe it." And the theme of your book is throwing facts and realities against myths and structuring of the public debate to serve the power of the few over the many what has often been called "the plutocracy" - controlled by the rich and "the oligarchy" - ruled by the politicians in service to the rich. And this book, which should really be taught in government courses from high schools on up, Requiem for the American Dream, is based on the film that's getting viewed around the world - as is this book. And this book is about 150 pages. It's very clearly printed. You don't have to squint. It has good graphics, and it's broken up into 10 principles of concentration of wealth and power.

In other words, how wealth and power is concentrated. And we're going to do something probably no other interview program has done with Professor Chomsky. We're going to go through each one of these principles. They may be called strategies of the power structure against the people and the serious and damaging results that come from the concentration of power and wealth in few hands. So let's start, Professor Chomsky, with principle number one. It's called "Reduce Democracy."

**Noam Chomsky:** I should say in explanation that the structure of the film came first. The book was based on the film. And the producers of the film did a really very impressive job of taking

many hours of interviews and shaping them into the form that you describe. So they deserve a lot of credit, I think, for the way this appeared - and the publisher as well, Dan Simon and Seven Stories Press did a very good job.

**Ralph Nader:** We might want to mention them. We want to give credit to them, Peter Hutchison, Kelly Nyks and Jared Scott. They are the ones who . . .

**Noam Chomsky:** They really did. They did a wonderful job, so I'm very impressed with their achievement. They're the ones, in fact, who turned it into ten principles. This is distilled from lots and lots of discussion and interviews. The "Reduce Democracy" is quite important because people, if they had the chance, would never accept the programs that are being imposed, so therefore you have to reduce democracy. Now, we have to put this a little bit in context. The 1950s and the 1960s were sometimes called the Golden Age of Capitalism. It should be called "state capitalism." Although it was unprecedented high growth rate, it was essentially egalitarian, so the lowest fifth of the population did about as well in growth as the highest fifth.

There was very high taxation of wealth. There was a lot of government planning and intervention. In fact, the current high tech economy - computers, Internet, satellites, microelectronics and so on - was mostly developed in large part through government coordination and subsidy in the 1950s and '60s. One thing that was happening was an increase in democracy, substantial increase in democracy from the popular movements that were developing during this period. And as you know very well, there was a very sharp reaction to that. The reaction in the early '70s was crucially across the spectrum from conservatives to liberals, the conclusion was "we have to reduce democracy."

There are some quite striking documents that bear on this. One of them from the right was the so-called Powell Memorandum. Lewis Powell - the corporate lawyer working for the tobacco industries and others, later became a Supreme Court Justice appointed by Nixon - he wrote a memorandum to the American Chamber of Commerce, the business world. They were supposed to be confidential, but it quickly leaked. And it's quite interesting. What he was saying is that the whole country is being taken over by left-wing extremists. And he picked two, who were the worst criminals. One of them was Herbert Marcuse, who was running the universities. And the other was Ralph Nader with his consumer safety programs and so on. So these two extreme leftist criminals were undermining the free enterprise system, and the business world, and so on. And it went on with kind of a long screed like this, but then his conclusion was "Look," he said, "We businessmen really own the country. We're the trustees of the universities. We are the people who have the resources. We should strike back and not let these hordes of young people and students and other activists overwhelm us. And so we have to fight back and take control." That was the right wing.

The liberals are in a way more than interesting. At roughly at the same time, the first study came out from what's called the Trilateral Commission International. It's basically liberal internationalists from the three major industrial democratic centers, Europe, Canada, and the

United States. The American rapporteur was Samuel Huntington, a well-known Harvard professor. And they produce their political complexion as illustrated by the fact that they basically staffed the Carter Administration. So, that's where they're coming from in the United States, similarly in the other industrial countries. Their book is called *The Crisis of Democracy*.

And, actually their conclusions are pretty similar to Powell's. It's much less hysterical rhetoric. It's more muted. It's more scholarly. But the essential is the same. They said, since the 1960s, there's been too much democracy. Large parts of the population that traditionally are passive and pathetic and obedient are starting to be concerned with their own issues and problems, or trying to enter the political arena, or trying to participate more fully. Then they say that's too much pressure on the state. The state can't respond to all these demands. Incidentally, they never mention the pressure from the corporate sector, which of course has overwhelming influence on the state. But that's okay. That's not a special interest. That's the national interest. We don't mention them. But the special interests - young people, old people, women, blacks, farmers, workers - they're getting too much involved in the political arena. So we need more, what they called "moderation" in democracy. They had to go back to passivity and obedience.

And they were particularly concerned with what Huntington called - what the whole group in fact called - "the institutions responsible for the indoctrination of the young." That's their phrase incidentally, not mine. That means the schools, the universities, the churches, they're not indoctrinating the young properly. So, we have to have more discipline and indoctrination in the educational and cultural system to prevent this excess of democracy. This kind of symbolizes the general elite mood from right to what's called left, meaning moderately liberal. That's the basic mainstream establishment. The view is we have too much democracy. It's undermining the business world. And, in fact, the rate of profit was decreasing. And it's necessary to reverse this, to have more indoctrination, more passivity, and to undermine democracy. And pretty much that's what's been done.

**Ralph Nader:** You've covered the first two principles, "Reduce Democracy" and "Shape Ideology," mentioning the Powell Memorandum. And the third one is "Redesign the Economy," where they actually put these strategies into place right down where people live-work.

**Noam Chomsky:** Yeah. Well, the way you redesign the economy was by instituting what are called the "neoliberal programs" - the "Washington Consensus," it was sometimes called. It kind of started in the late Carter years. It took off with Reagan and pursued further by Clinton, expanded and onto the present. And this is worldwide, incidentally. It's an effort to reduce the role of the public, which means through the one institution that the public can participate in to some extent, namely the government. In principle and sometimes in practice, people can influence government decisions. So reduce the role of government and transfer it to what's called "the market," which means in effect, private concentrations of capital, corporate concentrations, a very limited market, but that's the idea.

So Reagan's slogan was "Government is the problem, not the solution." We have to turn things over to private power, in effect, private tyrannies, because the population has no direct input at all into the decision making of the corporate sector - the relatively highly integrated systems of power that constitute the corporate sector with big banks on the boards of many corporations and all sorts of other kinds of integration and relative monopolization, not full of course. Meanwhile, the financial institutions: one of the major features of the new liberal period has been an enormous growth of financial institutions and a change in their character. So, if you go back to the '50s and the '60s, the period of what's sometimes called "regulated capitalism," great growth period, banks were banks. Banks were places where you could deposit some money. They would lend it to somebody for, say, starting a business or building a home or whatever. That's what banks were. They were also regulated by the New Deal regulations, so there were no financial crises. They functioned as the central part of the state capitalist economy. Starting in the early '70s that changed radically. Partly it was the breakdown of whole Bretton Woods system, the so called "Nixon shock." But it all was coordinated. And one of the results was that financial institutions not only grew enormously in size. It just exploded. It also changed radically in character. Instead of being connected to the real economy, more and more were involved in speculation that complicated the financial instruments - all the things we've seen - and of course the deregulation began late Carter, but particularly Reagan and Clinton. Deregulation meant regular financial crises.

Financial crisis means the public bails out the big banks for their predatory activities. And we saw this again in 2007, 2008. The effect of all these policies - we'll just talk about the United States - it was quite similar elsewhere, Britain, Europe, Latin America. But in the United States, which was not the worst hit incidentally, but pretty typical. The effect of these policies was to increase sharply the concentration of capital. The wealth became extremely concentrated. For the general public, there was stagnation or even decline that simply - to take one illustration, just take real wages of working people, nonsupervisory workers. In 2007 - that's right before the great crash - that's the peak of euphoria among economists, political analysts, and so on about the wonderful economy that we have, what's called "the great moderation," everything's been solved and so on. The rate at that point, 2007, real wages for working people were lower than they were in 1979, when the neoliberal policies began. And that's an index of what's happened. Well, one effect of concentration of wealth is that you get concentration of political power - by obvious mechanisms - which means kind of a vicious cycle, which political power being concentrated makes decisions, which lead further to further concentration of wealth and undermine popular participation and results in a sharp decline in democracy.

**Ralph Nader:** Which gets us to your fourth principle, "Shift the Burden." And you contrast that with how Henry Ford, back about 100 years ago, doubled the minimum wage. He paid his workers, because you wanted them to have money to buy automobiles. And then you contrast it with what's going on now. So in the redesign of the economy, they basically shifted the burden so that even though people had trillions of dollars of mutual funds and pension savings, that they had no control over these huge monies. Those were controlled by the Wall Street banks and insurance companies. And that's what they're speculated with. They speculated - as

Brandeis once said - these banks speculate with "other people's money." So talk about how they then shift the burden.

**Noam Chomsky:** Well, the neoliberal programs do radically shift the burden. By now especially since the Occupy Movement put it on the public agenda- it's familiar: the 1% to 99%. There's been a sharp increase in concentrated wealth for a very small part of the population, while the general population has either stagnated or in fact declined, as I mentioned. And that has an immediate effect on the political system through the mechanisms that I mentioned, including the huge increase in the role of the financial institutions.

What Brandeis warned about was very small as compared with what's happening today. We see that in - just to mention some figures – there's substantial research in academic political science, which compares people's attitudes with public policy. So it's fairly straightforward public policy. You see there is extensive, pretty reliable polling information on people's attitudes. So you can compare them. And the results are quite stunning. Some of the best work was done by Martin Gilens, Larry Bartels, Benjamin Page, and others. What you find is that about maybe 70% of the population, the lowest 70% on the wealth income scale, are essentially disenfranchised, meaning their own representatives pay no attention to their opinions. There's no correlation between what they want and what their own representatives act their legislative function. Well as you move up the income wealth scale, you get somewhat more influence. The very top policies are basically set.

That's a very sharp decline of democracy that shows up in many ways. One of the respects in which it shows up is what today is called "populism" - strange use of the word. But what it means is tremendous anger, disillusionment, contempt for institutions, public attitudes towards Congress, the presidency, almost any institution you pick are very low. You see these centrist institutions that has been running the country in concert for a long time are collapsing. We just saw that in the last election here in the United States in the November election. The two major forces: one was the Trump campaign, the other was the Sanders campaign. I mean the Sanders campaign was in many ways much more remarkable. It broke with over 100 years U.S. political history. Throughout this whole period, elections are pretty much bought. You can predict the outcome of the election pretty much by just taking a look at campaign spending. And that means predicting policy.

Well here came Bernie Sanders, no support from the concentrated wealth, from the corporate sector, from the wealthy, the media either disregarded or ridiculed him, mostly unknown, even used the scare word: "socialism." He would've won the Democratic nomination if it hadn't been for the shenanigans of the Obama-Clinton party managers. On the other side, the Republicans - which was a pretty awful sight altogether I should say - but someone came out who represented the popular taste, and the Republican establishment couldn't stop him.

The same thing is happening in other countries. The election in France just a couple of days ago, the two major political groupings didn't even participate. They had been wiped out. They

had two candidates, who came from the outside: one with a neo-fascist background, the other an independent neoliberal, who most of the public didn't like very much. But that was it. The same thing is happening country after country. This anger and disillusionment, fear, and scapegoating, hatred of others, and so on are reflecting the fact that there have been socio-economic policies put in place which have had the explicit objective of undermining democratic participation and were designed in ways that insured huge growth of mostly predatory financial institutions and high concentration of wealth and stagnation or decline for the majority.

Ralph Nader: Which brings us to your fifth principle, "Attack Solidarity", what do you mean by that?

**Noam Chomsky:** Well, the way in which individuals without enormous wealth can defend themselves and protect their rights and advance justice and freedom is by acting together. If you have an atomized society with each person where the social unit is a person and his iPad or his television set or whatever it may be, and people are separated from one another, then they're easily controlled. The crucial part of this is labor unions. The labor unions historically, way back to the 19th century, have been provided the means by which people can get together to learn, to exchange ideas, to produce programs, to act in concert, to carry forward progressive steps towards greater freedom, justice, and democracy. The labor unions have been in the forefront of these popular struggles way back to the early Industrial Revolution.

The New Deal was a striking example. The labor movement in the United States had pretty much been crushed in the 1920s, in part by Woodrow Wilson's Red Scare. But they reconstituted themselves in the 1930s, the CIO organizing militant labor actions, sit down strikes, and so on. And they were the spearhead for the development of the New Deal policies, which didn't do everything, but they had a very beneficial effect. And it lasted into the 1950s. For example, Dwight Eisenhower, representing what was then conservatism - not today - held that anyone who questions New Deal policies doesn't belong in the American political system. He made very powerful statements in support of labor rights and union organizing. Again, he said that you simply you don't belong in the American political system unless you strongly support the right of workers to organize and associate with one another. At that time there already was the beginnings of the post-war corporate attack on unions with some state participation.

**Ralph Nader:** Imagine that being said now by any Democrat much less Republican. They hardly mention unions. And this gets us into principle six in your book, Requiem for the American Dream, "Run the Regulators." You've already touched on that, but isn't it amazing phenomena that they moved from weakening regulation of corporations over the years to deregulation to taking law and order off the backs of these corporate predators, health, safety, economic regulations, banks, and auto companies and mining companies. Now under Trump, they have systematically appointed to head the EPA and the Food and Drug Administration and other departments, people whose record and mission is to shut down the very agencies and departments that they take an oath of office to run under the law.

I mean this is clearly the most extreme. And that, of course, reflects your seventh principle which is "Engineering Elections." It's very important for these corporations in the plutocracy to control the main outlet of the democratic priorities of the people. Can you go into that a bit?

**Noam Chomsky:** Well, in fact the Trump Administration is a kind of a caricature of the policies that have been pursued throughout the whole neoliberal period. Deregulation was pursued extensively. It began in the late Carter years, took off under Reagan, and was even more extreme under Clinton, and then on. And it did have the natural effect of increasing corporate crime, increasing financial collapses, one after another. Under the Reagan Administration, there was the Savings and Loan catastrophe. At the end of the Clinton Administration, another collapse of the tech boom, then of course the huge Great Recession of 2007-'08. And it's worth remembering, as far as criminalization is concerned, that's been declining. So, the savings and loan catastrophe, plenty of people were punished for their basically criminal activities. The much worse 2007, 2008 crash, nobody was punished. There were fines - in fact big fines like the J.P. Morgan Chase, the biggest bank - I forget the number, maybe \$13 billion fine. But when you take a look at, first of all, it's tax deductible. Secondly, they have all kind of ways around it. And their profits are huge. And the banks that were responsible for the crisis ended up richer than they were before. Now there was an attempt that some kind of control afterwards, the Dodd-Frank legislation to try to prevent, at least limit the next major crisis. But that's now being dismantled by the Trump Administration, which as exactly as you say, is the kind of caricature of the deregulatory efforts to free the corporate sector from any kind of constraints so the wealthy can continue to enrich themselves beyond the dreams of avarice.

And of course it's exactly, as you said, the cabinet appointments. It would be almost comical if the consequences weren't so awful. But each one is in the hands of someone who wants to undermine the functions of that cabinet. We see it already in the legislations and executive orders that are being sneaked through. A lot of Paul Ryan's initiative - the more savage fringe of the old Republican Party, policies which are undermining what's left of workers' rights, occupational safety rights, the horrible health program that they're pushing through - basically amounts to a big tax cut for the rich at the expense of the most vulnerable parts of the population, who, by design of the program, will be thrown out of the health system. These are systematic policies to try to carry the more savage fringe of the neoliberal programs into affect, into implementation.

Incidentally with regard to the financial institutions, it's worth mentioning that they survive a public subsidy. There was a very significant study of the International Monetary Fund a couple of years ago, which investigated the profits of the major U.S. banks, J.P. Morgan Chase, Goldman Sachs, the others. And what they found is that their profits almost entirely rely upon a tacit government insurance policy what's was called informally Too Big to Fail. Now that doesn't just count the periodic bailouts, it means all sorts of other things. Like for example, they were able to get cheap credit. They get inflated credit ratings, because it's understood that if they get in trouble, they will be bailed out by the taxpayer. There's an incentive to undertake risky and

hence - at least in the short-term - profitable transactions in the knowledge that if they collapse, which they will, the taxpayer will be called upon to bail them out.

The business press, Bloomberg, Business Week, using this study, estimated the annual subsidy at about maybe \$80 billion or more. These are really predatory institutions. And we should add that that subsidy is peanuts as compared to the taxpayer subsidy for the energy industries for agribusiness and other major industries. So all the talk about free market and so on is substantially a joke when you actually look into how it works. This is the taxpayers subsidizing their own repression by supporting predatory institutions, who act for their own benefit - of course that's what they're for - in ways which often harm the public, as these statistics on income distribution show on declining wages, on declining democracy, and so on. And it's not just the United States.

**Ralph Nader:** That's true. I noticed that principal seven, eight, and nine, have a very logical link. "Engineer Elections," Principle 7. "Keep the Rabble in Line," an old-fashioned words for the masses or the people, Principle 8. And "Manufacturing Consent," Principle 9. And what you see around the country is not only are the candidates in the pockets of the paymasters, mostly from the corporate world, but they've gotten the people to vote against their own interests. Because the choices are so narrow between the Democratic-Republican Party that people end up, for example, if they can't stand Hillary Clinton, they vote for Trump often in a very impulsive manner. And the worst example of that Manufacturing Consent that is hardly ever mentioned is access to the courts. They've actually persuaded a majority people that there are too many frivolous suits and wrongfully injured people get too much money when the facts are, that less than 2% of wrongful injury ever get into the court to begin with, and that we're using the courts at a lower level in terms of civil lawsuits than was the case per capita in 1840. And so part of the manufacturing consent is, I guess, turning people against their own interests by throwing them up against the wall and having a media, a mass media system, that does not demonstrate what's going on in the country, in effect, entertains and deceives. So how do you weave all that together in terms of a controlling system by the few over the many?

**Noam Chomsky:** Well there's an interesting image that's been proposed by some of the analysts and investigators ,who've done the most significant study of this paradox – as it's sometimes called - the people who are being undermined by political decisions are voting in favor of the candidates who are undermining them. Arlie Hochschild is one of those who's studied this in some depth in...

**Ralph Nader:** Strangers in Their Own Land, that's her book. And that's what's going on in Appalachia now, yes.

**Noam Chomsky:** Yeah, same thing. And the image that comes up, which the people themselves accept, is an image of people standing in a line, we're standing in a line, behind us are our parents and our grandparents who worked hard and tried to fulfill the American Dream. We had traditional families. They did the right thing. They were religious. And they got ahead.

They were moving along ahead in line. That's the American Dream. But all of a sudden the line had stalled. And we're standing in line and it's stalled, or maybe even declined. Up ahead of us, there are people who are flying into the stratosphere, unbelievable wealth. But that doesn't bother us, because the propaganda system which we internalize tells us, "Okay, that's the American Dream. They're working hard and getting ahead." Mostly a joke, but that's the image.

What worries them is the people behind them. And now we get the scapegoating aspect of the propaganda system. Ronald Reagan and his fairytales about welfare mothers, by implication black, rich women driving in limousines to the welfare office to pick up your hard-earned contributions into Social Security or whatever, that story. So the people behind us, according to the imagery, are worthless, they don't work hard, they're the wrong color, and so on and so forth. And what does the federal government do? The role of the federal government is to help those worthless people behind us get ahead of us with food stamps, with affirmative action, with welfare programs.

So that's the role of the federal government. So therefore we should hate the government and not hate the concentrated wealth, which is corporate power, which is determining these policies. We don't see them. They're not part of the system. We see the federal government helping the worthless people behind us get ahead of us while we are stuck in the line. That's the imagery. And that's a pretty effective way of controlling people. And I suspect we're going to see more of that in the near future. Trump's promises, "I'm going to bring jobs back. We're going to have a steel industry," of course they're not going to be realized. And what happens when they're not realized? We should remember that quite a few of the working class Trump voters have voted for Obama in 2008. They believed - or at least put faith in his promises of hope and change. Well, they pretty soon found out there was no hope and no change. So they were disillusioned, angry, ended up with their voting for their class enemy who is shafting them at every possible moment.

Well, what happens when these people realize that the promises once again were a delusion? At that point, the government, the ruling powers, private and state, are going to be forced to turn to more extreme scapegoating to direct the anger and disillusionment somewhere else. Not to us, but somewhere else. Who's the someone else? Well, there's a long history of this, the most vulnerable parts of the population or even of vulnerable foreigners. And that could turn out to be pretty ugly.

I mean this is the moment to act constructively to try to prevent all of this. And there are ways of doing it. Again, the Sanders phenomenon was pretty remarkable. As I say, it broke from over a century of political tradition. And in fact, thanks to Fox News, we know their polls they ran that the most popular political figure in the country by a huge margin is Bernie Sanders. All of this indicates opportunities that are available to turn the tide, if those opportunities are taken. You have to understand this it's happening and then act.

Ralph Nader: And one of the ways consent is manufactured is to divide and rule so that people turn against each other, red state, blue state, left, right, conservative, liberal, and don't focus on the oligarchies and the plutocracies, who are basically focusing people's attention on where they disagree with each other like reproductive rights, school prayer, gun control, and not where there's a huge left, right consensus on many of the economic issues, the civil liberties issues, the cracking down on corporate crime, the opposition to crony capitalism, what we call corporate welfare, even criminal justice reform.

So this divide and rule - I saw how this worked, Professor Chomsky, once when I read that Senator James Inhofe - Republican of Oklahoma, who thinks climate change is a hoax and now has enormous influence in the Senate and over the EPA on climate change policy - he was once asked, "How do you win these elections, Senator Inhofe, in Oklahoma?" And he smiled and he said, "Simple. It's God, gays, and guns." And that sort of sums up that divide and rule situation which distracts people away from, let's face it, the few who are oppressing them economically and all other serious ways that impair a decent livelihood, fulfilling their human potential and passing on something better to their children and grandchildren.

So on your last principle 10 is marginalizing the population. Could you elaborate on that?

Noam Chomsky: Yeah. You're exactly right. The problem for concentrated power, corporate and state power, the problem is the general public. The general public is always an enemy of concentrated power. We saw that for example in discussing the quite similar Powell Memorandum and the Trilateral Commission Crisis of Democracy, they're concerned with the public. People aren't being indoctrinated enough. They're getting too active. We have to marginalize them somehow. We have to break up the kinds of institutions, like particularly labor unions in which they can join together to act, to pursue their own interests. Incidentally, the same is true of political parties. The United States doesn't really have political parties. That's been true for a long time. It has candidate-producing elites. So you can't be a member of the Democratic Party the way you can be a member of the Labor Party in England for example. What you can do is show up every once in a while and put a mark in a ballot where they tell you, "Here's a possible candidate." That's quite different from a political party in which people actually participate in forming the policies, in advancing them and so on. There's a little of that here but not much. But any organization that brings people together is dangerous. They have to be separated and marginalized.

And your point about the common beliefs across the spectrum on crucial issues, that's essential. So for example, the things you mentioned are quite accurate and there are plenty of others. Like for example, raising taxes on the rich, that's been a popular demand for as long as polls have been taken, 40 years, more. Right now, it's the same across the spectrum. Meanwhile, taxes on the rich go down. And that's one of many indices of the separation of state-corporate power from the popular will.

And the same is true on a host of other issues. So take one that's really primary in people's lives and is right on the front pages now: healthcare. Take a look at polls over a long period. There's been very substantial support for what every other developed country has, some form of national health care. The U.S. healthcare system is an international scandal. I mean it's over twice per capita costs of comparable countries and some of the poorest outcomes. And mainly because it's privatized, highly bureaucratic, inefficient, very costly, in the hands of institutions like insurance companies, which are not concerned with health but with profit, and so on.

**Ralph Nader:** It's basically, Professor Chomsky, a pay or die situation. Look at the drug price escalation in recent years. I mean far higher than any place in the world, and we're the ones who subsidize these drug companies through the National Institutes of Health and give them all kinds of free clinically-tested medicine with no royalties and no reasonable price provisions. As you say, a majority of the people, latest Pew polls show they want full Medicare For All, everybody in, nobody out, free choice of doctor, comes in half the price per capita. That's what the previews are in Canada, and save tens of thousands of lives.

**Noam Chomsky:** Yeah, that goes way back. So at the end of the Reagan Administration for example, about 70% of the population thought that the right to public health care should be in the Constitution and about 40% thought it already was in the Constitution. People don't know what's in the Constitution. They just assume it's whatever makes sense. And this makes so much sense, it must be in the Constitution. When Obama put through the Affordable Care Act, of course there was some talk about a public option, meaning essentially Medicare for all, about almost two-thirds of the population supported that but it was just dismissed.

The United States is I think the only country where the government is forbidden by law from negotiating drug prices. So, say the Pentagon can negotiate for paper clips or whatever, but the government cannot negotiate with the pharmaceutical companies for drug prices outside the Veterans Administration. That's one reason why we have highly inflated drug prices way beyond other countries. There are public attitudes on this. There was a Kaiser poll right at the time of the Affordable Care Act, which found that about 85% of the population were opposed to this, but it didn't matter. It didn't enter the discussion and debate. I mean those are crucial issues and these are things on which if you take, say, many of the Trump voters and many of the Sanders voters, you'd find that they have pretty similar concerns.

There is a real possibility of putting together a progressive coalition, which will be concerned with rights, justice, access to the courts, decent jobs, progress, creating, not fulfilling the partly mythical American dream. That can be done. We have the resources for it, and we have opportunities. And there's a enormous struggle to prevent it from happening by atomizing people in a huge number of ways. One of the ways incidentally is just by fostering kind of an extreme consumerism, trying to drive into people's heads the idea that the only thing that matters is how many commodities you have, nothing else matters. Huge amounts of effort are poured into hundreds of billions of dollars a year to try to create this imagery.

These are major efforts, all aimed at manufacturing consent, subordination, atomization, marginalization, preventing people from joining together to pursue the goals that they do, in fact, want but aren't being offered to them in the political system whilst the main actors are being hidden from concentrated wealth and power.

**Ralph Nader:** As a matter of fact, in spite of the propaganda and manufacturing consent, there are huge areas of support from people of different political labeling, conservative or liberal, for civil liberties for example, for changing the war on drugs, for example, for changing the corporate tax system and those tax havens. Even Ron Paul and Barney Frank got together in the House on the bloated military budget. Polls always start out against these wars of aggression before the soldiers go over there and dissent is shut down. I found in the consumer and environmental area, huge. When you get down off the abstraction ladder, Professor Chomsky, you can see where people live, work, and raise their families, the ideology tends to dissipate and they focus regardless of whether they're conservatives or liberals, wanting their children to have good schools, drink pure water, breathe clean air, eat safe food. And that's what we've got to provide a cutting-edge movement for. Because once that consensus breaks 70% and is supported by left and right, it's politically unstoppable in Congress and state legislatures. And the nature of elections begin changing.

Well, before we conclude, we've been talking with Professor Noam Chomsky of MIT, author of many books on power, structure, abuse of foreign and military practices, as well as the need to build our democracy. He's the author of Requiem for the American Dream. And it's based on a film that's getting widespread attention here and abroad. It's also called Requiem for the American Dream. I wanted to get your take on an issue that's reached topical tension, and that is the use of hunger strikes as forms of effective dissent. Obviously, Cesar Chavez used that on behalf of the migrant workers in our country. It was used in Ireland. And now, there are 1000 Palestinian prisoners, who are in their third week or more of a hunger strike which is disturbing the Israeli jailers no end as they try to force-feed them.

How effective are hunger strikes? I remember once talking with Cesar Chavez when he was in one of his later hunger strikes, which are basically used to try to attract public support and attention around the country and the world. And I said to him, "Cesar, there's only one Cesar Chavez. You're damaging your health." And he said, "It's the only way I can get attention in the media and in government to my people, the farm workers." And well, he did damage his health and it shortened his life. What's your view historically and with this Palestinian hunger strike?

**Noam Chomsky:** Well, what Cesar Chavez said is of course exactly correct. The effectiveness of a hunger strike is essentially measured by the moral and cultural level of the general outside population. If people ignore it, if their moral and cultural level is so low - to put it frankly - that they simply ignore this act, then it's not effective. If the moral and cultural level is such that you can appreciate the reasons for it and be concerned about the people who are suffering and vulnerable, which is not just the prisoners undertaking the hunger strike in Israel, but the Palestinian population, who they represent.

The leading figure, Marwan Barghout, is probably the most popular figure in the Palestinian community. For him to undertake a hunger strike is like Cesar Chavez and other leader. And they're representing, as Chavez put it, the population, in his case, the farm workers, who were under the duress and attack. And the hunger strike can be effective if the general population outside comes to appreciate the reasons for it, to support it, and in fact even to perceive it. So the strike of the Palestinian prisoners, there's very little reported. Now that should be a major issue here. We should understand that we have a very large share of responsibility in the deprivation and suffering that these people are being subjected to. We provide the military aid, the economic aid, the diplomatic support, even the ideological support - here I mean the U.S. government - for the pursuit of the policies, of Israel's policies in the occupied areas which are quite brutal and savage and illegal but continue thanks primarily to our support. So the hunger strike is something that we should be looking at. It's directed to us, just as Cesar Chavez's hunger strike was directed to the American people. The question then is do we perceive it and do we react?

**Ralph Nader:** Well it's now moving into its fourth week, which becomes very serious to the survival of these prisoners on their hunger strike. And still it's not reaching the mass media in the country. Amy Goodman had Marwan Barghout's son on a few days ago, but pretty much it's been a black out.

Before we conclude, let's talk about Trump in an interesting manner. Sometimes the plutocrats and the oligarchs go too far. They cross certain lines that are insufferable even by the established legal order, much less the mass media. What do you think the prospects are of Donald Trump's regime imploding on itself, because of its extremism, number one, and its bizarre style as well?

**Noam Chomsky:** Well, so far, what's been happening is whether planned or not, I don't know, I presume it's planned. But what's happening is kind of a charade which is going on at two levels. At one level, Trump is making one outrageous claim or move after another. So the millions of illegal immigrants who voted for Clinton, Obama wire tapping his phone, whatever it may be, it's kind of like the birther business in the past. So one after another, the major media, CNN, the New York Times, what are called the liberal media - I don't think it's the right term but that's what they're called - they go after him. And so if you look at CNN, it's almost entirely going after the latest crazy thing Trump did. That's what people pay attention to.

Meanwhile, that's used to strengthen his base. They've got Steve Bannon, the guys running this stuff can say, "You see the liberals are trying to attack our guy." Matter of fact, support for him among his base is actually increasing, because they see themselves as under attack from the liberal elites who are trying to undermine their spokesperson or their spokesman by demonstrating the absurdity and falsehood of his claims. At the same time, at another level, we have Paul Ryan and his gang pushing through legislation of the most extreme savage end of the Republican establishment. Step by step, that's what they're doing while attention is focused -

and here the Democrats are potentially to blame in my opinion - attention is focused on other things which are the one or another outrageous act. Now it may be that the outrageous acts will be so extreme it'll implode. But so far the game is working pretty well.

**Ralph Nader:** Well on that note, we have to conclude, unfortunately. We've been talking with Professor Noam Chomsky, author of the book *Requiem for the American Dream: The 10 Principles of Concentration of Wealth & Power*. And implied in that is opportunities to recover our country and our Constitutional pretensions. And our motto in our circle is "Readers think, thinkers read." And apropos, an old Chinese philosopher, who once said, "To know and not to do is not to know." If we read, we think, we're going to act. It never takes more than 1% of the people and all congressional districts spending a few hours a week connected to one another to take back Congress. If you take back Congress and the state legislatures, then you have taken back a good pillar of democratic action to deal with the concentration of power.

Thank you very much for the hour you've spent with us, Professor Chomsky. And I believe that this book is being obtained by many people here, and it will be translated around the world, and along with the film that was produced by Peter Hutchison, Kelly Nyks and Jared Scott. Thank you again.

**Noam Chomsky:** Thank you. Good to talk to you.

**Ralph Nader:** As always.

**Steve Skrovan:** We've been speaking with political philosopher, activist and linguist, Noam Chomsky. His new book is *Requiem for the American Dream: The 10 Principles of Concentration of Wealth & Power*, which is the companion piece for a documentary of the same name directed by Peter Hutchison, Kelly Nyks and Jared Scott, available on Netflix. We will link to that, plus Professor Chomsky's other work at [ralphnaderradiohour.com](http://ralphnaderradiohour.com). For those of you listening on the radio, that's our show. For you podcast listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material we call *The Wrap Up*, where among other things we're going to talk to Ralph more about the Powell Memorandum.

**David Feldman:** A transcript of this episode will be posted on [ralphnaderradiohour.com](http://ralphnaderradiohour.com).

**Steve Skrovan:** For Ralph's weekly blog, go to [nader.org](http://nader.org).

**David Feldman:** We didn't have time for Russell Mokhiber but for more of Russell Mokhiber, go to [corporatecrimereporter.com](http://corporatecrimereporter.com) and remember to visit the country's only law museum, the American Museum of Tort Law in Winsted, Connecticut. Go to [tortmuseum.org](http://tortmuseum.org).

**Steve Skrovan:** The producers of the Ralph Nader Radio Hour are Jimmy Lee Wirt, Matthew Marran.

**David Feldman:** Our executive producer is Alan Minsky.

Steve Skrovan: Our theme music, Stand Up, Rise Up was written and performed by Kemp Harris.

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

**Ralph Nader:** Thank you very much Steve, David, Jimmy. And for the listeners, go to [rowecenter.org](http://rowecenter.org), [R-O-W-E](http://R-O-W-E), [center.org](http://center.org) to see about a workshop of action and training in an era of Trump.