

Ralph Nader Radio Hour Ep 255 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 there. We have a great show today.

Steve Skrovan: We do. I don't know if you guys heard in the news today that Donald Trump has a new slogan for his wall, which is, "Build a wall and crime will fall." That's how he thinks he's going to push it over the top. I have a different slogan. I would say, "Put Don in jail and crime will fail." Let's just road test that one. And we also have the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Hello. Well, audience--hold onto your seatbelts--this is going to be quite a show.

Steve Skrovan: Appropriately enough, Ralph, with the seatbelt reference. We get it. We get it. [laughter]

David Feldman: How dare you? How dare you?

Steve Skrovan: We have a very interesting show today. We're going to welcome Professor Shoshana Zuboff from Harvard Business School, who has written a book that is hot off the presses, just came out last week. It's entitled, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. Now, surveillance capitalism, I believe is a term coined by Professor Zuboff and she's here to tell us what it means for all of us. And I have a feeling it has something to do with Google, Facebook and other digital enterprises using the information we give them to make money. And as always, we will check in with our Corporate Crime Reporter and find out about the real epidemic in this country, the crime in the suites, that'll be Russell Mohkiber.

But first, let's find out who is watching us and making money off of it. David?

David Feldman: Professor Shoshana Zuboff was one of the first tenured women at the Harvard Business School. She was also a faculty associate at the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard Law School. The author of many books on modern corporate capitalism, her latest is, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. Welcome to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour, Professor Shoshana Zuboff.

Shoshana Zuboff: Thank you. It's an honor to be here.

Ralph Nader: Welcome indeed, Professor Zuboff. This is an encyclopedic book, listeners. It runs 650 pages, and Professor Zuboff has taken the discussion of the virtual reality, internet surveillance economy to very deep levels of analysis. It's actually hard to encapsulate the book, but I've got two little excerpts before we get into the discussion. Professor Zuboff, from your book on page 20, you say, "If industrial capitalism dangerously disrupted nature, what havoc might surveillance capitalism wreck on human nature?" And you elaborate that on many pages. And then on page 21, you say, "Surveillance capitalism is best described as a coup from above, not an overthrow of the state, but rather an overthrow of the people's sovereignty and a prominent force in the perilous drift toward democratic deconsolidation that now threatens Western liberal democracies. Only we, the people can reverse this course, first by naming the unprecedented, (and you emphasize the unprecedented); then by mobilizing new forms of collaborative action, the crucial friction that reasserts the primacy of a flourishing human future as a foundation of our information civilization. If the digital future is to be our home, then it is we, who must make it so." Now, in reading through your book, I said to myself, let's see if Professor Zuboff gets down to the contracts. And lo and behold you did. You want to describe the web of contracts that people don't even read that tie 'em up not just with Facebook and Instagram and Google, but the web that deals with licenses of all these zillions of apps, et cetera, because one of the takeaways from your book is that people have lost the right to object. They've lost the right of remedy, when they are abused in this surveillance capitalist economy. Could you describe how people are tied up by these fine-print contracts instantly?

Shoshana Zuboff: Yes. Well, there are a couple of key things that our listeners should know. One is the so-called "terms of service contracts," the things that we have to click the little box if we're going to use the utility of the application or the website or the product, whatever it may be, the service, whatever it may be. These are fundamentally illegitimate. And despite the fact that most scholars agree on this and have agreed on this for a long time, the courts have upheld these "notice and consent" - so-called contracts - as lawful. But indeed, this kind of structure has a long history and I trace it to the history of conquest. When the Conquistadores first came to the Caribbean, they brought with them an edict that was fashioned by the Spanish law courts. It was called, "El Requerimiento" --'The Requirement'. And they would go to a village where of course people had never seen Spaniards and they did not understand Spanish. They would read this edict and in Spanish they would say, "If you don't agree with us, we're gonna kill you." And no one would know what they were talking about and of course the indigenous people did not want to be subjugated, and they resisted, and in many cases they were killed or tortured or in other ways turned into slaves. This is the modern equivalent of that kind of conflict. We're asked to agree with something that we cannot understand and we essentially have no choice, because there is no way to participate in society today unless we go through these channels. So, all of us click on this little "I Agree" box in a cynical way because we know we have no choice. In the past, we have thought about our participation in private organizations. The great economist, Albert Hirschman, wrote about the ideas in Exit, Voice and Loyalty--that when we're participating in private organizations, we have the option of exit; we have the option of voice, or we can agree with what's going on and be loyal to it. Well, in this case, these so-called contracts do not provide us with exit, because typically we

need to go forth and use the service or product. They certainly don't provide us with voice; there's no way to talk back to these companies and very few of us feel loyalty. We simply feel trapped.

Ralph Nader: You quote a prominent law professor who is the expert on all this, Margaret Radin, [who] taught at University of Michigan Law School. She's now at University of Toronto Law School, and here's what she says: she calls these 'click-on contracts', which people not only don't read, they often can't even get to read, they're so voluminous. She calls this "private, eminent domain--a unilateral seizure of rights without consent. To regard such contracts as a moral and democratic degradation of the rule of law and the institution of contract, a perversion that restructures the rights of users granted through democratic processes, substituting for them the system that the firm wishes to impose. People enter a legal universe of the company's devising in order to engage transactions with the firm." I've called this incarceration. So, you know, this is such a deep book, Professor Zuboff, that I have to try to enlist the interest of the listeners by citing how you talk to your children about this, and on page 525, and permit me to read a section here. Here's how Professor Zuboff talks to her children, "When I speak to my children or an audience of young people, I try to alert them to the contingent nature of the thing that has us by calling attention to ordinary values and expectations before surveillance capitalism began its campaign of psychic numbing." This is what you say to your children. "It is not okay to have to hide in your own life. It is not normal. It is not okay to spend your lunchtime conversations comparing software that will camouflage you and protect you from continuous unwanted invasion--five trackers blocked, four trackers blocked, 59 trackers blocked, facial features scrambled, voice disguised. "I tell them that the word search has meant a daring existential journey, not a finger-tap to already-existing answers; that 'friend' is an embodiment mystery that can only be forged face to face and heart to heart, and that recognition is the glimmer of homecoming we experience in our beloved's face not 'facial recognition'. I say that "it is not okay to have our best instincts for connection and information exploited by a draconian quid pro quo that holds these goods hostage to the pervasive strip-search of our lives. It is not okay for every move, emotion, utterance, and desire to be catalogued, manipulated and then used to surreptitiously herd us through the future tense for the sake of someone else's profit. These things are brand new, I tell them. They are unprecedented. You should not take them for granted because they are not okay". Well, how many parents talk to their children that way? How many parents are afraid of their children when it comes to this new technology?

Shoshana Zuboff: Yes. Well, part of the problem is we're all so busy; we're all working; we are harried, we have so many responsibilities. And for folks who are older--my age/your age, Ralph, some of this stuff may seem just so distant that we don't feel authoritative about it. But I want parents to trust their instincts. I want parents to demand that their children be present and I want parents to read about what is this frontier that we've sent our children to. We've allowed our children to be the pioneers of this digital frontier that is now owned and operated by private capital. That was not the intention at the beginning. We thought that the internet was going to be an empowering place of voice and connection and the democratization of knowledge. And for many of us as parents, we just haven't been able to keep track of what it really is and what it really means and the effect that it really has on our children. I do have a chapter in the book called, "Life in the Hive" where I write extensively about all the research that's been done to show exactly how this is affecting our kids. And it's not pretty. It's not pretty

because our children should be developing their own inner resources and their own sense of identity and their own sense of a unique self. And those are precisely the kinds of inner-experiences that are inhibited in the social network that encourages kids to compare themselves to one another and to see themselves through the other's eyes. Here's something for parents to remember. We've heard people like Eric Schmidt, the former CEO of Google, to say you know "If you have something to hide then maybe you shouldn't be doing it". And my response to that is anyone who has nothing to hide is nothing, because what we have to hide is the inner resource, the sense of our inwardness, the sense of our own identity where we develop our understanding of right and wrong, where we develop our moral sensibility and our judgment and our courage. These are things that are hidden because they are inward and they are meant to be inward. That's what makes us strong. That's what makes us autonomous. That's what makes us able to participate as true citizens in a democratic society. Hiding is not a bad thing in that sense; it's a good thing. And we should not have to hide from the watchers.

Ralph Nader: When I hear people say they have nothing to hide during the NSA [National Security Agency] scandal when they violated the Fourth Amendment and put basically everybody in the United States under surveillance so powerful are these intrusive computers. People would say, Well I have nothing to hide; it doesn't bother me. [to that] I'd say, well, let's examine that. Last time you talked to your doctor about an intimate personal problem, did you have nothing to hide? You want that all over the internet? Do you want your conversations with your clergy, with your spouse and partner, do you want that? Do you want some interactions with your children? You want that to be out in the open? So, once you get concrete, they start realizing what you have written which is, "If democracy is to be replenished in the coming decades, it is up to us to rekindle the sense of outrage and loss over what is being taken from us. In that, I don't mean only our personal information. What is at stake here is a human expectation of sovereignty over one's life and authorship of one's own experience." Let's talk about who can do something about this. Let's reminisce here. Nancy Reagan once told people who are addicted to drugs "just say no". Well, to what extent can people just drop out? I'm not on the internet. I don't have a Facebook account. I don't have an email. It's very hard to do a profile for my credit score with that information. So, talk about the dropping out phenomena and we'll talk about another Achilles Heel of Facebook, Google and the electronic marauders which is their advertising revenue. Let's start with dropping off.

Shoshana Zuboff: Well, dropping off, there's certainly some things that we can do pretty easily. I have never been on Facebook and would not be for the reasons I write about in this book. But for most of us, the things that we have to do to be effective in our everyday lives, just basic participation in society, whether it's organizing, interactions with other people. I mean you don't have email, you're not on the internet, Ralph, but you have other folks around you who are buffering that and people contacted me by email for appearing here with you today. And so most of us we have to go through these channels in order to participate effectively whether it's applying for a job or interacting with the IRS.

Ralph Nader: Let's examine this. Do we have to do this or are we forced to do it? The IRS, for example, now doesn't want to send you a Social Security check. They're forcing you to go to a bank or a credit

union and open up an electronic account to the profit of these institutions. There's "coercion" everywhere. For example, when I say to people, why don't you pay cash or check? "Well, we can't because we can't rent a car; we can't use FedEx. The companies force us to do this". And so, there's a coercion here that is increasing in intensity to a point where it's clear what these credit corporations want done is to eliminate cash and checks so they can have you completely incarcerated. Once they have you in the credit/debit economy, you've lost your freedom, I mean in a very concrete sense. You've lost the ability to say no. You've got to pay \$35 for a bounced check which costs them a buck, the bank. You've got to pay all these penalties, late fees, all these fine-print contracts can be changed unilaterally without your consent. They block you from going into court, which we have as a constitutional right but we're deemed to give it up because we've signed on to these contracts that nobody reads. I think there is a coercion here; there's a complicity, to be sure; there's a heightened awareness of overvaluing convenience, but they're creating facts on the ground, Professor Zuboff.

Shoshana Zuboff: I couldn't agree with you more Ralph, and that's precisely why it is so difficult for the average person who's trying to get through their lives--drop the kids off at daycare and get to the job and get all the other things done and manage the household. It is almost impossible to effectively participate right now and not go through these channels. But the thing is that even if that were to be the case, even if we were shunting people as we've seen in the airline industry for example. You used to be able to talk to a person and figure out your trip and so forth a long time ago. You're shunted to the internet and you got to do it that way because that's the low-cost solution. Even if we were coerced because of cost, that doesn't necessarily mean that we're coerced into these channels that have now become channels of surveillance for the growing power of knowledge and power of the surveillance capitalist firms. Were it not for surveillance capitalism, this would not be as dire and dangerous as it is in your description. There are two separate issues here. One is we're forced onto the technology because it's less expensive, but the other is in being forced into the technology we're also being forced into the arms of a unique economic logic that thrives on the unilateral claiming of our experience for its behavioral data to create predictions about our behavior that it sells to business customers; that's how it makes its money. So, we're being forced into the arms of private capital as well as into the arms of this technological apparatus. And one of the key messages of my book is that these are not the same thing. Surveillance capitalism is not the same as digital technology. We can imagine the whole digital architecture without surveillance capitalism. But we can't imagine surveillance capitalism without the digital. That's why I believe we have an opportunity as citizens to interrupt and outlaw surveillance capitalism as the dominant economic logic. Whereas, if we did that that would create a different kind of space for us to have true competition using digital technology in ways that we're comfortable with and that we're even happy with and that truly do enrich and empower us.

Ralph Nader: Well, in your book you talk about a proposal to do that like a co-op. They can take people and protect them from Facebook, Microsoft, Google. We're trying to get congressional hearings in the House of Representatives on all of this and I hope you'll be one of the star witnesses, Professor Zuboff. We're talking with Professor Zuboff who is the author of *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*. It's impossible to do justice to this book in a half hour but we're trying to hit some of the high points. And Congress has rendered itself ignorant. They got rid of the Office of Technology Assessment under

Gingrich in 1995. The Democrats, when they controlled Congress and the Whitehouse in 2009/2010, refused to reinstate it. It's like they don't want to know and the poor-quality [of] their questioning of Mark Zuckerberg and others at the hearings showed the deficiency. But at what point is the dread, anxiety and fear of young people and the way they are being manipulated, threatened, intimidated, bullied on the internet going to tip the balance against the narcissism that leads them into this bull pit?

Shoshana Zuboff: Well, that's an interesting question. I think that part of this is that we've allowed the Facebooks and the Googles and the surveillance capitalist leaders to dominate the conversation. And it's been their values and their propaganda, their euphemisms, their misdirection that has really defined the situation. That's another reason why parents think it's okay and kids follow one another. I think one of the things that's happening now, Ralph, is that I wonder if you sense this, because I do even before the publication of my book. And I hope that my book contributes to this. But I sense that perhaps we're at the beginning of the sea-change in recapturing the narrative about what all this stuff really is and what it means. There's a much greater sense of cynicism today. There's a much greater sense of articulating our mistrust. There's a much greater sense that somehow the internet and the digital in general has been hijacked by forces that are not aligned with our interest, do not have our interests at heart, do not have the interest of democracy at heart. For me, as I write in the book, my theory of change begins with changing the public conversation, changing the narrative, changing the discussion so that we have new words, new vocabulary, new lenses with which to see what is being imposed upon us. And through this we feel the indignant outrage that these impositions really deserve, because they are a threat to human autonomy; they take away decision rights outside of our awareness and therefore, as you said, the privacy of the right to combat, the right to object, and ultimately, they are corrosive to democracy.

Ralph Nader: And also, a lot of intangibles that you're grappling with in this book. Look what it's doing to familial conversation, inside homes. I mean the parents are almost as guilty as the children. They're all looking at their iPhone, their cell phone, less and less conversation. I know some parents who are banning cell phones from the kitchen. I guess that's just a start, so when they're eating, they're looking at each other and the food and maybe some normal conversation. This is a huge addiction that's going on. I call these corporations electronic child molesters because they make these children, Professor Zuboff, sign fine-print contracts. Professor Robert Felmeth at the San Diego School of Law in California sent me a contract for nine- and ten-year-olds where they're supposed to sign that they've gotten the agreement of one parent to send all this information to the Facebooks that can be sent all over the country and the world without any kind of accountability or restraint. They're preying on these children at a very, very young age which goes to your point, [which] is we have to develop a more cultivated sense of indignation here for some trivial reason we'll say to people, get off my back. How many are going to say to Facebook and Google and Microsoft get off my back? And where it's going to start. I think a lot of their positive assurances are not working. We're not getting a stronger democracy because of the internet. It's harder and harder to develop mass demonstrations through internet communication like in front of the White House, demanding Trump resign for shutting down the government and violating his constitutional oath of office to faithfully execute the laws. We can't get the kind of mass rallies we got in the 19th Century led by Eugene Debs and the early 20th Century. The advertisements are more deceptive and more intrusive on the internet than ever; the political

fabrications more than ever. On the other side, it's a great way to retrieve information fast; there's no doubt about that. I mean the information you want to retrieve that's accurate but on balance, where do you come out here and where do you think the resurgence is going to start from?

Shoshana Zuboff: Well, Ralph, I have a bookshelf at home. I don't think I've ever told you this, but I have a bookshelf at home that's my Ralph Nader bookshelf. And I wrote about some of the things I learned from my Ralph Nader bookshelves in my former book, *The Support Economy: Why Corporations are Failing Individuals and The Next Episode of Capitalism*. And one of the things I learned from you, Ralph, is that with your resistance to General Motors, when you began, you were kind of an outlier, shall we say. But you were dogged and intrepid and your indignation eventually affected our society and indeed the world. And you and your eventually many, many allies changed the conversation; you changed the perception of these corporations as aligned with their customers' interest. And in that, you made history. I think we're at that kind of perhaps the beginning of that kind of sea-change right now, Ralph. I noticed there is recent research from Pew, the Pew Research Organization, that indicates right now that one out of four Americans--they're extrapolating from their surveys--has done something to change their relationship with Facebook. Stopped visiting it; delete their account, take a break--something to change their relationship with Facebook. And largely that was triggered by the Cambridge Analytica revelations. I hope that with my book and with other contributions, people will come to realize that the things that made us feel so much revulsion when we learned about Cambridge Analytica's political manipulations--those methods and methodologies are simply a day in the life--an ordinary practice of surveillance capitalism on a daily basis.

Ralph Nader: Before our time elapses, I want to talk about the advertising because without the advertising revenue, these companies cannot dominate us the way they do--80 to 85 percent of all their revenues, Google and Facebook and its subsidiaries come from these ads. And we've had people on our program who know what they're talking about saying these ads really don't work very well; that most of the people who buy have already made up their mind to buy before they see the ad on Amazon, for example. Have you looked into that because you taught at the Harvard Business School for years. Are the business schools looking into that? Why don't they do studies, more studies on the inefficacy of internet advertising?

Shoshana Zuboff: Well that's a great question. And I guess it's like the point in what people might call the value chain, the point where it's deemed ineffective because if you judge from the point of view of, for example, the two big players in online advertising, Google and Facebook, if you judge from the point of view of their revenues, it's very effective, very effective for their market capitalization; very effective for their revenue and almost all of their profits derive from this. The point I try to make, Ralph, is that what is this online targeted advertising? Really what it is, is it started with Google--the idea that they could get all these data from us; they could apply their machine intelligence, they could come out with predictions, in this case predictions of what ad we're likely to click on; they could sell those predictions to business customers, in this case advertisers who have a vital interest in knowing what we're going to do in the future. Now, the same structure--data analysis, prediction products, sale to business

customers and these new kinds of markets that trade exclusively in predictions of human futures. The same structure is traveling all across the economy. It's no longer just Google and Facebook. In fact, right now you can read about Ford Motor Company, the birthplace of mass production where the CEO is now saying, hey we want to have price earnings ratio that looks like Google and Facebook. So, forget about trying to sell cars in this global slump. We're going to turn our vehicles into full surveillance pods and we're going to get all these user data and we're going to monetize that and that's going to be our new road to profit margins. So, this is toothpaste out of the tube, Ralph, it's everywhere, it's the insurance industry, finance, entertainment, transportation, every product that has the word smart in front of it, every service that has the word personalized in front of it. That's why I think the thing that we'd rather get out in front of now is the economic logic itself--that it is illegitimate to unilaterally take people's experience and turn it into data; that it's illegitimate to turn those data into predictions of what we're going to do--that it's illegitimate to sell those predictions, that indeed these futures market that trade exclusively in predictions of our behavior are themselves illegitimate and a gross disfiguring of the whole idea of capitalism and what it has traditionally been and how it has managed to establish an equilibrium with democratic societies over the past century.

Ralph Nader: I think one advantage to the extremism that you've talked about in your excellent book, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, is that these companies don't know where to stop. And there are two forays that are one here and one on the way. That is, as you might have seen, the New York Times had this huge spread on how the surveillance capitalists know where we are. As long as you have that cell phone, they know where we are, where we walk, who we talk to, what corner we turn. And that's going to upset people as the abuses begin to be made more concrete in people's everyday lives. The second one is called augmented reality. This one is about three years away from mass marketing and it's being pushed by Facebook. And Mark Zuckerberg said, it's going to "change everything". How many times you heard that phrase from Silicon Valley? And that means that our youngsters will have these goggles where they can attack unfriendly students a few blocks away and dismember them or they can climb Mount Everest and jump off into the snow and completely lose their connection with nature and with reality and with their immediate friends and relatives. And there's no technology assessment of this. Professor, there's a book coming out on globalization and technology and sustainability by Professor Nick Ashford at MIT. And I spoke to him recently and he said that the problem with all this technology is we have virtually destroyed critical thinking. It's not coming out of our schools, it's not coming out of our legislative institutions, it's not coming out of our regulatory agencies, it's not coming out of our law schools. I can assure you that. And with the destruction of critical thinking and what you call in your book automating human beings; they're not just automating our personal data. They are automating us!

Steve Skrovan: What about our government contracts? Edward Snowden was working for Booz-Allen when he got his hands on all that NSA material. What about a bill outlawing companies like Booz-Allen from doing surveillance for the government?

Shoshana Zuboff: Well, as important as that may be, I've been trying to draw a line here a bit to help us focus on the private side of the surveillance. By private, I mean the private companies, the private capital, the market side of surveillance, and not because government surveillance is less important, of course not, but simply because we have had so many opportunities to pay attention to the issues of government surveillance and it's an ongoing issue. But private surveillance, coming from private capital, has really been allowed to kind of glide along in the shadows growing and growing and growing. One reason that it's gotten such a free pass over the past two decades is precisely because in the wake of the 9/11 tragedies, our government other Western governments felt that they were going to need the surveillance capabilities being developed in Silicon Valley.

And they were going to need to import those and integrate them into government operation, something in the book I call "surveillance exceptionalism". So, the surveillance capitalism was made an exception. It was allowed to root and to flourish, because in a certain way, governments needed it to. They needed to avail themselves of its skills and capabilities.

Ralph Nader: Another, by the way, another price we're paying for the National Security state, and people will recall that Silicon Valley applied science and engineering is based on basic research funded by the federal government from the Pentagon, NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration]. You taxpayers have paid to enable outfits like Intel, Cisco, Facebook, Google, Microsoft to expand their power and their skyrocketing profits. So, the state and the large corporations are very much in a constant interchange here not just the personnel, but in terms of funds, technology, subsidies, consultantships. We didn't get to the response from the people on the shows you've done. You want to talk a little bit about that? Your interviews on this book and what call-ins kept you hopeful?

Shoshana Zuboff: Well, between the call-ins on the shows, what one can see on Twitter, the constant stream of mail landing in my inbox, I have to say that the experience I'm having is very consistent with all the surveys that we've seen on this subject in the past decade at least, perhaps more than a decade. As people become exposed to the facts about what's really going on, they do feel outraged and they want nothing to do with it. And so, if we give people choice, they don't want to be entangled with any of these channels, with any of these practices. They don't want anything to do with surveillance capitalism. Literally, hundreds and hundreds of messages every day of people thanking me for writing this book and saying I want to become one of the indignant ones, I want to take this indignation and spread it and have conversations with other people and we can take this back. We can reestablish democracy and reestablish our own authority. I'm very heartened by the public reaction, which is the book has had some wonderful reviews, had a couple of nasty reviews, but for me it's really what's coming from just folks who are reading the book and the sense of empowerment--that it's getting them to think critically as you are talking about before, because naming is essential to thinking. Unless we can put something into words and clarify the framing, it's very hard to think critically about it because it's like in water but we don't know the name of water.

Ralph Nader: Google has a lecture series. And are you heading to Silicon Valley?

Shoshana Zuboff: Well, I have not been invited to Google lecture series.

Steve Skrovan: I can understand that. Why would they not want to have you there?

Ralph Nader: They're supposed to do no evil, Steve.

Steve Skrovan: Yes. But they also see no evil, too.

Shoshana Zuboff: I actually just read the other day a really lovely review by an English professor, written in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, and forgive me I'm forgetting his name, but it was a lovely review. And in the review, he imagines myself in dialogue with Mark Zuckerberg about why we don't like Facebook anymore. It gives me cause, it gives me a sense of the deep public anxiety that's just under the surface. And you know better than I that sometimes it just takes a few matches to light and illuminate that underlying latent anxiety and bring it into words and bring it into action. I write at the end of the book about being a student, I used to go and sit in on Milton Friedman's seminars, his graduate seminars when I was 19 years old. I would just sit in the back and try to figure out what was going on here. And one of the things I learned from Milton Friedman, he used to say that public opinion today is law in 20 years. He had the long view. And that's why I keep bringing history into this. And I think it's the case in much of your work, Ralph, that if we can really change the tide of public opinion, give people the tools through naming and an evaluation and critical thinking that we need that perhaps it won't take 20 years in the internet age. Maybe it'll take 5 or 10. But this shift in public opinion is going to be critical because ultimately our public officials, even in our current state of a dysfunctional government which will also will not last forever, our public officials cannot ignore public opinion. And as we shift and make new demands, ultimately, they will too and we will see new laws and we will see different kinds of judicial opinions. This really is a long game. I learned that from Friedman, who by the way was a frenemies and kind of a love and also competitive relationship with Hayek, you know, both the great architects of neo-liberalism, and they both shared very explicitly this perspective of the long game. They played it very well and the last several decades are the result of that in our economies and our societies. Now, this is another long game. I think that's just another reason not to lose heart. It's not going to be overnight change but that doesn't mean it's not going to be fundamental change.

Ralph Nader: The only difference is that the technology is a supersonic speed of change and that wasn't true decades ago. There was more time decades ago, but with artificial intelligence and nanotech and biotech and all these things that are happening with climate disruption, there's a very serious problem of the people on this planet being confronted with cognitive dissonance and a complete fracture of any ability to frame and push back; that's what I see is a danger now. You mentioned Albert Hirschman who wrote this book *Exit and Voice* [Exit, Voice and Loyalty] and I used to apply it to the stock market. The

reason why shareholders don't demand more voice over the companies they own is because it's too easy to sell the shares and get out. And the work that you're covering, it's increasingly impossible to exit.

Shoshana Zuboff: Yeah. Impossible. No exit.

Ralph Nader: That's a serious problem. It's too bad Professor Hirschman is not here to write a second edition to his book.

Shoshana Zuboff: I agree. I agree, although that no exit, Ralph, as we begin to give voice to outrage and to give voice to resistance, that no exit becomes—we haven't talked much about competitive opportunities here, but that no exit becomes a massive competitive opportunity for a group of other companies to come in and become the hub for an alternative ecosystem that is not surveillance capitalism, but it returns us to a reasonable equilibrium so that the digital is actually realigned with our interests, so we get back to that vision of the digital empowering and pro-democratic. The alliance of companies that does, this perhaps led by someone like Tim Cook and Apple, not that they are without fault, but they have the capability to do this, should they really choose to step into history this way. This is a competitive opportunity that actually offers those companies who were to step into this challenge, offers them every person on earth as a customer, certainly every person on earth who has to deal with the internet in any kind of way. Everyone would want to be their customer. Everyone will choose the alternative, because when people understand surveillance capitalism, they don't want anything to do with it. There are huge competitive opportunities here and that's the other thing that this conversation can achieve, which is to really sort of attract new competitors and new kinds of solutions that harness the technology in ways that not only can we live with but that actually help us flourish.

Ralph Nader: And actually, you described a proposal to develop some sort of a co-op here that has been put into practice, isn't it? Isn't there an alternative that was described?

Shoshana Zuboff: Well, I talk about the need for new forms of collaborative action that kind of parallel the breakthroughs in establishing the legitimacy and institutionalizing collective bargaining in the early 20th Century. I talk about some of the work that Max Schrems is doing in Europe to bring people together to use the new regulations of the GDPR, the General Data Protection Regulation, in ways that will establish new legal precedent and really force the courts to hold companies to account under this new regulatory regime. And there are other things like that that are afoot with people who have companies that are privacy respecting companies are writing to me every day. I think many of these things are percolating right at the edge. And the question is, how do they come together under new leadership, new framing of capital—of how we do capitalism in the digital era that can really make this coalesce as a powerful alternative.

Right now, things are pretty fragmented, it's what I'm saying. They're kind of small scale and fragmented but all of this and more can come together to really create an alternative. And as the big surveillance capitalists like Google and Facebook and increasingly Microsoft and Amazon, as they come under pressure, these competitive opportunities are going to become very attractive and compelling, I think, because that's the way markets work.

Ralph Nader: By the way, just in case our listeners think that there's a different situation in China and Russia and other socialist and communist countries--the same type of surveillance operates there. And also, for profit in China, isn't that the case?

Shoshana Zuboff: Yes. Well, it has operated for profit in China, and increasingly as I write about in the book, the Chinese government is moving to integrate those for-profit services into the functioning of the government itself. And I talk about what's happening in China is kind of the apotheosis of a nightmare end-game scenario here, should surveillance capitalism have its way and kind of power. I call it "instrumentarian power" that it creates to not only know us but also control us, should that power continue unimpeded, what's happening in China is one example of the end game where private surveillance and public surveillance are integrated; not only are citizens' behaviors completely known in exquisite detail, but they are controlled according to the principles of behavior modification that we're seeing here.

For example, you behave the way we want you to behave, we give you rewards, you get a discount on your insurance policy or you get a discount on your retail shopping or your child gets a preference in the educational system--rewards for correct behavior that fit what the Chinese government, the kind of behavioral norms that the Chinese government is trying to impose. Then the punishments rain down on you. You may not be allowed to buy an airline ticket or you may not be able to buy a ticket for a first-class seat on a train or you may not be eligible for certain kinds of loans.

Ralph Nader: Isn't it true, they're starting to give people in China numbers, compliance numbers. You have a certain high compliance number or low compliance number. So, they're putting numbers on people now.

Shoshana Zuboff: Yes. So, it's this credit system evaluates people and rates them and gives them a metric and people have to be very vigilant about how they're being evaluated in what their metric is. For example, let's say you're on the Chinese equivalent of Facebook and some of your friends that you communicate with a lot are people who have low social credit scores. This is social credit, remember, not financial credit. Low social credit scores, then you yourself will have your credit score diminished because you have low scorers in your personal network. So, that means that you have to drop those friends at least in the network, any public way. You have to drop communicating with those friends. You have to take them out of your network so that you can preserve your own rating, so that you get access

to these participation opportunities. This really is, from the point of view of a democratic society and a normal human person, born and raised in a democracy, this really is a nightmare. But when you decode so much of what's going on in our societies, in our lives, we really are not that far away from it. It's just that it's happening in these private commercial spheres. The insurance company who monitors your behavior as you're driving and will give you discounts, if you drive the way they want you to, which is the way that will cost them less money, and also punishments; they'll raise your premium rates if you drive in a way that costs them more money. This is already happening all around us. But it's so far pretty much contained in this massive private sphere of surveillance capital.

Ralph Nader: And what's your last glimmer of advice to our audience who now may be excessively discouraged?

Shoshana Zuboff: Well my advice is that it helps me to think historically of a longer timeframe. There were terrible atrocities during the Gilded Age, but the Gilded Age had a beginning a middle and an end. Our societies know how to tame raw capitalism. We've done it in the Gilded Age, we've done it during the depression, we've done it in the post-war years where we institutionalized collective bargaining and a living wage and so many laws from child labor, safety regulation, so many laws that tethered the raw excesses of industrial capitalism to the well-being of people and society and democracy. Our societies know how to do this. We've done it before, we can do it again. We've had a few decades now of regulatory captures. People call it the idea that, we don't want a regulation, we're supposed to have free enterprise, nothing is supposed to get in the way. But that's really never been a viable alternative for society. We need laws, we need regulations, we need democracy and it is citizens who are going to drive this. We've done it before, we'll do it again. The age of surveillance capitalism will also have a beginning, a middle and an end. That's how I see it and that's what I'm hoping to contribute to, as I hope this conversation will.

Ralph Nader: Well, there you are, listeners, again and again, it never takes more than one percent of the people organized in congressional districts to require Congress to wake up to this problem in all its dimensions and to start doing something by empowering you as well as establishing these rogue surveillance capitalists under the rule of law and our democratic framework. In fact, Professor Zuboff, calls Surveillance capitalism "a rogue economic mutation that thrives at the expense of human nature and threatens to cost us our humanity." And if you think that's an exaggeration, listeners, you're the problem. You're in complicity; you are rationalizing your narcissism and you are placing in an arena of maximum supremacy, a strange concept of convenience and speed of message. Thank you very much, Professor Zuboff. Read this book, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, talk about it in living room discussions. Get some of your book clubs to stop this rule that they only talk about fiction books, not nonfiction, because they don't want to be political. Political/corporate, it's a seamless web unless we bring it to accountability under "We the People". Thank You, Professor Zuboff.

Shoshana Zuboff: Thank you so much, Ralph.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Professor Shoshana Zuboff, Author of *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. We will link to that and more of her work at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Let's get the latest from our Corporate Crime Reporter, Russell Mohkiber.

Russell Mohkiber: From the National Press Building in Washington DC, this is your Corporate Crime Reporter "Morning Minute" for Friday January 25, 2019. I'm Russell Mohkiber. US agri- business is poisoning drinking water for rural Americans. That's according to a report in the Wall Street Journal. The Journal reported that one in seven Americans drink from private wells. Nitrate concentrations rose significantly in 21 percent of the regions where the US Geological Survey tested groundwater from 2002 through 2012 compared with the 13 prior years. The greatest increases were in agricultural areas. More recent sampling shows the pattern is continuing. Meanwhile, more than 16% of ground water from wells sampled between 2002 and 2012 topped the federal nitrate limit of 10 parts per million versus 12 percent in the 1990s. "The worst kept secret is how vulnerable private wells are to agricultural runoff" said University of Iowa's David Cwiertny. For the Corporate Crime Reporter, I'm Russell Mohkiber.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you, Russell. I want to thank our guest again, Professors Shoshana Zuboff. 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. A transcript of this show will appear on the Ralph Nader Radio Hour website soon after the episode is posted.

David Feldman: For Ralph Nader's weekly column, it's free, go to nader.org. For more from Russell Mohkiber, go to corporatecrimereporter.com.

Steve Skrovan: And Ralph has got two new books out, the fable: How the Rats Re-Formed the Congress. To acquire a copy of that, go to ratsreformedcongress.org and To The Ramparts: How Bush and Obama Paved the Way for the Trump Presidency and Why it Isn't Too Late to Reverse Course. We will link to that also.

David Feldman: The Producers of the Ralph Nader Radio Hour are Jimmy Lee Wirt and Matthew Marran, our Executive Producer is Alan Minsky.

Steve Skrovan: Our theme music, "Stand Up, Rise Up" was written and performed by Kemp Harris, our Proofreader is Elisabeth Solomon.

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

Ralph Nader: It's the Congress, people, as I've said again and again. You want to do something, go to ratsreformedcongress.org.