

# Lift the chrome curtain

—Ralph Nader

Fifth Estate Collective

1970

Ralph Nader came to town last week for the Wayne State University Teach-in on Ecology, and left a great number of people wondering if they really know what's going on after all. Speaking before an overflow crowd at the Community Arts Auditorium, Nader called upon the population to achieve a better understanding of the workings of the large corporations that run this country.

Underlining this lack of understanding, Nader compared the present situation with the past by saying that, "The workingman standing in a breadline in the '30s had a better understanding of the forces oppressing him than does his successor."

He called for a lifting of the "chrome curtain" that shrouds the companies in secrecy and a concentrated effort by all citizens and especially stockholders to become involved in the decision making processes. Nader's latest brainchild, Project GM, is designed to help achieve this type of enlightenment. Between now and the next stockholders meeting on May 23, he and his people will contact all major holders of General Motors stock and try to convince them of their responsibility for the preservation of the environment.

Using a toned-down form of delivery and interspersing his speech with witty, pointed remarks, Nader kept his audience's attention and was interrupted by applause more than a dozen times during his hour-and-a-half talk. The biggest disappointment of the afternoon was when the auditorium became so completely full that a large number of would-be listeners had to be removed so as not to obstruct the aisles. A closed-circuit television network was set up to enable the overflow to view the proceedings in the lobby. The university offered the option of holding the speech outside where more people could have seen him, but for reasons of his own, Nader declined the offer.

Not limiting his attacks to the big corporations alone, the maverick lawyer severely criticized the government for allowing a double standard law enforcement to exist. "Why is it that when an individual relieves himself in the Detroit River, he is given a fine while industries are not?" he asked.

In an attempt to dispel the myth that pollution, like cancer, does not discriminate, Nader noted that most of the highest concentrations of pollution exist in inner city and other low socio-economic-group neighborhoods. The fact is that the people who could possibly do the most to bring about pollution control measures, i.e., corporation executives, board members, government agents, et al, are the ones who are the least directly affected by pollution.

It is true that no one in this country is completely immune to the inevitable long run effects of air and water poisoning, but so long as the suburbanites can still see a relatively clear sky at night and do not have to wake up to the stench of inner city pollution, they are not as apt to take any action.

While berating the general populace for letting ourselves be "conned and brainwashed," he assured us that although time is running out, it is not quite too late. He stated that the best ways to combat the problem is by becoming concerned with Project GM and similar projects.

Project GM is a program designed to enlighten the shareholders of the largest corporation in the world. Since its beginning, General Motors has never had to reckon with the people who actually own the operation. The stockholders have remained completely apathetic and apparently content with the fat royalties they earn.

The time has come for this to change. By making people aware of the latent power they have over the giants of industry Nader feels that a great deal can be accomplished. Contrary to popular belief, this does not only apply to a few wealthy blue-chip owners. A large portion of the stocks and bonds are held by publicly-owned institutions, such as universities, which are directly responsible to the people. Wayne State, for example, holds stock in some 41 companies with a total value of over \$1 million. They own 2,907 shares in GM. Until now the University has done absolutely nothing with this stock except make money. If it is truly an institution for the people, something will be done about this.

Nader cited examples of collaboration, lobbying and outright corruption to show that, "The government has destroyed free capitalism and replaced it with an interlocking form of corporate socialism." In most instances where an agency or committee has been set up to regulate commerce or trade, it has usually ended by having big business "regulate the regulators."

He summed up the economic consequences of pollution control by saying, "If it costs more to pollute than not to pollute, they wouldn't pollute." With this being so, it is not reasonable to expect big business to voluntarily give up even a tiny part of their profits for the sake of the environment.

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