

Ralph Nader on 'Simple Capitalism' and Coexisting With the Tea Party

By Jeremy Quittner

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The well-known gadfly says big companies rule the roost, but they don't have to.

Want to upend inequality and quash corporate cronyism for good? Unsurprisingly, Ralph Nader has some ideas.

We have more in common with each other than we know. And despite all the division--religious, political, and otherwise--we're going to have to work with each other if we want to change things in the U.S.

That was the message from [consumer activist](#) and presidential nominee [Ralph Nader](#), who spoke this week in New York City at a crowded and policed event in Union Square for his new book [Unstoppable](#).

Many of Nader's themes small, [fast-growth companies](#) might find interesting, since they deal with anger about business regulations, the nanny state with its big giveaways to large companies, and the untapped rage of the [Occupy Wall Street](#) and [Tea Party](#) movements, which Nader says have more similarities than differences.

"What the corporations have done is destroyed the principles of simple capitalism, that if you own something you have some control over it," Nader said in a hulking, stentorian voice, belied by his now-stooped shoulders and 80 years. "Managers control the process and define their own mergers and acquisitions and corporate strategy without any shareholder rights, as well as how much they pay themselves."

Only by putting aside our bitter anger and acrimony that forces us to take sides can we break the corporate stranglehold over government and the economy, Nader said.

'In Nader's World'

In Nader's world, Republican conservatives, whom he calls "corporatists", are responsible for much that's wrong with the U.S. economic system. These corporatists bear almost no resemblance to classic fiscal conservatives such as the 18th century economist Adam Smith, and Friedrich Hayek, a member of the Austrian School of economics. Nader said he read both of

their work, along with numerous other conservatives stretching back 200 years, in order to write his current book.

"You see complete contradictions in the way they are distorted now in editorials of *The Wall Street Journal*, and through conservative ideology and electioneering," Nader said.

For example, Smith was against amalgamations of corporations working together, which he feared would allow them to twist regulations to give them more power. Instead, he favored giving workers a living wage and spoke about the importance of public works and involving people in government processes. Similarly, Hayek objected to Medicare, not because it represented a socialist overreach of the state, but because it only covered one segment of society.

Even conservatives from not that long ago--including former President Richard Nixon and Senator Robert Taft--had more compassion toward the masses, Nader said. Nixon attempted to push through guaranteed annual income legislation, but failed. Taft attempted to water down aspects of the anti-union Taft-Hartley Act because he thought it was too tough on unions.

Nader also reserved some of his criticism for congressional Democrats, who he claims failed on health care not because they were unable to enact universal coverage but for laziness. They "decided in 2008 and 2009 that it was too much trouble taking on the health insurance giants and the drug companies," Nader said.

A Way Forward

Ultimately, Nader said he's looking to opposing organizations outside Congress to give legislators a push. One example is the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street, which have met in recent months to discuss ways they can work together. Another is think-tanks, such as The Heritage Foundation, the Cato Organization, on the right, and the Progressive Policy Institute and the Economic Policy Institute, on the left, which have both put out reports condemning corporate handouts, bailouts and giveaways.

"This is not going to happen unless we drop our animosity on the left and on the right in those areas where we really disagree, and say families don't agree on everything, but they coexist," Nader said.