



"I think the whole economy has to be evaluated overwhelmingly from the consumer standpoint because that is who it is for."

just as many consumer complaints as private utilities generate in the United States.

You have got to be careful about favoring something that is just form and not a substantive change.

Question: Do you think the government should move into the private sector?

Nader: Well that is certainly the trend. The corporations, when they have something they don't like, are willing to sell it off to the government. We call that 'lemon socialism'. So gradually the lemons get sold off to the government. The railroad lemons, a nuclear power plant lemon in New York was sold to the New York State Government. Almost inevitably the dregs and the derelicts from the private sector get thrown over into the public sector.

Question: Don't you think that the "non-dregs" will also become part of the public sector?

Nader: In Canada I don't know. I don't think anything short of a major collapse of a major corporation in the United States will permit the government to have any power in the private sector of the economy.

Question: Should the government have any say in the private sector?

Nader: I don't favor that. I favor more consumer and worker owned enterprises. With a greater emphasis on consumer owned enterprises because worker owned enterprises can often have the same momentum to produce cars regardless of need for them that investor owned enterprises have. I think we need that kind of economic system much more than the traditional government and corporation system.

Question: You have spoken out against nuclear power. Is it totally unviable?

Nader: It is a total disaster. One that is economically pricing itself into the stratosphere. The cost of these plants and the price of uranium are going sky high. A nuclear plant now costs five times what it cost less than ten years ago. And uranium has gone up from \$8 to \$25-\$30 in just the last three months in the US.

Then there is the most awesome, serious question of a nuclear reactor containing prodigious amounts of deadly, cancer causing, radioactive

material. If there is one major catastrophe, either by accident or sabotage, you can have the greatest civilian catastrophe in the history of Canada, making the Halifax explosion feel like a firecracker in comparison, in the same sense of casualties, in the sense of land area contaminated with radioactivity for years - if not decades.

So I think it is a fundamental technological blunder for Canada to go along with the US. Headlong to nuclear power will be technological suicide. Particularly since Canada has a great deal of energy it wastes, so that you can go along way just by being more energy efficient. And it has enormous amounts of waste wood, which can produce great gobs of electricity with minimal pollution and develop employment at home. Not to mention solar energy, fossil fuels, and all the rest of it.

Question: What can the American consumer do about power, where in the US rates are much higher than they are in Canada?

"I think we are moving into a period when we are going to have to ask ourselves: Why not more consumer enterprises, consumer coops, foodstores, banks, insurance companies, and service outlets? To give the consumer a neighborhood community base for aggregate bargaining, as well as, political power."

Nader: Its of very great interest for US consumer organizations. In fact it is now leading to one of the most innovative consumer proposals in many a year; which is now being considered in ten State Legislatures. That is a consumer checkoff on the monthly gas, electric, and telephone bill. Where everytime you receive a bill you get a little square on the bill which invites you to make a contribution to your own consumer action group Province-wide which would have investigators, lawyers, engineers, scientists, economists and accountants to tackle the problems you incur, whether before the Legislature, or the Court or before the utility commission; connect up with the contributors to become a potent voting and political force as well. It is now before the New York State Legislature, the Maryland Legislature. I understand Governor Brown of California has just lent it his support as he sent the proposal to the State Legislature in Sacramento.

You see it is an extremely powerful proposal. First, it doesn't cost the taxpayer anything. Second, it is voluntary to the consumer. Third, it doesn't set up another

government agency, it sets up a civic institution, a consumer organization. The idea has gotten some interest in Japan, as well as Canada. It is adaptable to any place in the world where monthly bills are sent out. You simply piggyback the monthly utility bill and make the utility the collector of the consumer contributions. Each contributor having one vote to elect the counsel of directors of the consumer group that the contribution is going to the support of.

The time is ripe. It is really a very simple proposal. You see it overcomes that great hurdle of prompting consumers to have their own communication network.

Question: A few years ago there was a group of people in Antigonish who were very strongly in favor of education for the people, in the development of cooperatives and in the development of credit unions. One of the leaders of this group saw the possibility of the cooperative as a check against the big corporation in the free enterprise system. These

people developing these structures had difficulty in developing management skills and there were great inefficiencies there from the start. Do you see this kind of a problem and how do you see it being overcome?

Nader: That is a problem. That has always been a problem in the consumer cooperative movement in the US. That is what the National Consumer Co-op Bank proposal would combat. It would, in effect, provide training, as well as credit, for new or emerging consumer cooperatives.

Eventually, once you get a certain number of consumer cooperatives in auto repair, and food, and health, and housing, and finance, and energy they will be able to set up their own training skills and they will be able to produce their own managerial talent. Where as now you get a consumer cooperative foodstore and where are they going to get their managers? From a Safeway or an A&P, with all the mental attitudes that carry forward there.

Also the consumer co-op should only sell to their members. If they sell to anyone who comes in the door they will be pushed to a lower common denominator and become more like A&P and Safeway. In

Vancouver there is an exceptionally good cooperative, Naniemo 70 miles north of Victoria. They are now selling food 16% below their competitors, meat 23% below their competitors. And they have a long waiting list of people who want to become members. In Ann Arbor, Michigan they have an auto repair co-op that just got under way with 400 families. Its marvelous the way it is operating. The work is competent, there is a personal relationship, people are friendly. There is a place for motorists to fix their own cars, they are provided with the tools and they can just have a mechanic look over their work. If they want, the mechanic can do the whole job. And it is cheaper.

But again your point was cardinal, they had good management. Thats what made the difference-management.

Question: You mentioned consumer owned enterprises versus worker owned enterprises. Where does the labour movement fit into the picture?

Nader: Basically by trying to get the labour movement to realize that they have two jobs: 1) to improve working conditions and wage conditions on the job site and 2) to make sure that money the workers earn gets the maximum return in the marketplace. That is where the consumer movement comes in. There is no reason why they should be at odds at all, when they are at odds it is largely because corporate management has turned the workers against the consumer movement.

Question: Getting off the subject a bit, what do you think of a planned, fairly efficient, socialist economy like they have in China? Which, although poor, has no unemployment or inflation.

Nader: Seems to be working economically quite suitable for China. For here the model is not applicable. You see I make a very strong distinction between democratically owned economic institutions out of government and government owned institutions. I don't see the advantage of government owned institutions, except in certain areas such as offshore oil which belongs to the Federal Government and the idea of giving that away to Exxon is absurd, or timber resources. But when we're dealing with the retail area, which has always been given a low priority in economic theory which always emphasized production and factories, we're dealing with an enormous organizing instrument at the grass-roots community level for neighborhood advancement as well as the economic bargaining tool of consumer cooperatives; the political tool of consumer cooperatives.

You see take Switzerland for example, the largest co-op in Switzerland has the second largest daily newspaper; it has adult education classes.

Once you get the cash flow circulating in the community, more than it is now before it shoots off to the money sector, you can develop a lot services. There is a food co-op in Berkely, California that now provides pre-paid legal insurance for their members. They don't have to not go to a lawyer because the price is so high. That came about because of the cash flow generated by the large number of members of the co-op.

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Mr. Nader invites you to contact a Canadian organization dedicated to investigating consumer issues. For information, write to: Public Interest Research Group, c/o University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario.

Public Interest Research Groups are basically student organizations. They are currently operating at U of Toronto, Waterloo, McMaster, and Guelph. These have been organized by lawyer/goalie Ken Dryden.

