



Ralph Nader

TALKS BOTTOM LINE

Wealth for Justice

There are signs that some super-rich are revolting against their “wealth fraternity.” Last fall, mega-billionaire, Warren Buffett, traveled to Washington to meet with Democratic Senators and urge them to raise taxes on the wealthy like him. He pointedly said he pays at a lower rate than his secretary.

The liberal Senators were either bemused, or moved away from him as if he had a contagious disease. Buffett is not deterred. Earlier in this decade, he joined with a thousand other rich Americans led by lawyer William Gates, Sr. and Chuck Collins (founder of United For a Fair Economy) to successfully block the repeal of the estate tax (applied to 2% of wealthier decedents) by a Republican-controlled Congress.

Mr. Gates, father of Microsoft’s Bill, Jr. launched an initiative campaign in Washington state to impose a progressive income tax on the wealthiest citizens (over \$200,000 income) and roll back taxes on property and small business revenues. Initiative 1077 would net \$1 billion a year for education and health care. Unlike most states, Washington has no state income tax at present. Any later downward expansion of such a tax would have to be decided by a vote of the people themselves, stipulates I-1077.

The “yes” on 1077 Initiative organizers has to collect 241,153 valid signatures by July 2nd, to get on the November ballot. This is a huge hurdle for a relatively small state, but when the super-rich are on board, the money will be there for the petitioners. Several megamillionaires held a conference call with reporters to express their desire for high taxes on people like them. “I would with pleasure sacrifice the income,” declared Jeffrey Hollander, CEO of Seventh Generation. Eric Schoenberg, possessing investment banking riches, bewailed his “absurdly low tax rates.”

According to the Washington Post, paper-mill heir Mike Lapham stated

that “We’re calling on other wealthy taxpayers to join us, send the message to Congress and President Obama that it’s time to roll back the tax cuts on upper-income taxpayers.” He was referring to the Bush-Cheney tax cuts which saved the then-White House rulers hundreds of thousands of dollars, personally, over the near decade of cuts. At the time, I requested that Bush and Cheney have the decency to exempt themselves from their own tax cuts, but they declined.

According to a Quinnipiac University poll in March, a solid majority of Americans favor raising taxes on those earning more than \$250,000 a year.

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Then there is Dieter Lehmkuhl. Last October, he delivered to German Chancellor Angela Merkel a petition signed by 44 rich Germans urging a 5% wealth tax for two years to fund economic and social programs to aid Germany’s economic recovery. The petition asserted that “the path out of the crisis must be paved with massive investment in ecology, education and social justice.”

Megabillionaires in our country are encountering their peers here and around the world to commit fifty percent of their estates to “good works.” They will grapple with the definition of “good works” as to whether that means charity or justice.

The difference is important. For example, soup kitchens are a necessary and human charity. Whereas jus-

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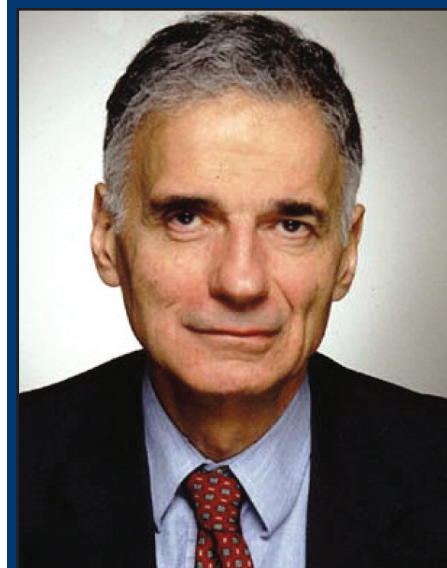
With some super-rich thinking about moving from soft philanthropy to advocacy, or to shifts of power, I hope that my recent work of political imagination—“Only the Super-rich Can Save Us!” will spark their interest. Drawing on seventeen wealthy Americans in fictional roles, led by Warren Buffett and including George Soros, Yoko Ono, Bill Cosby, Ted Turner, Peter Lewis and others of an advanced age and broader perspectives, a massive, fast, well-funded campaign is launched in January 2006 to galvanize millions of Americans to restore their sovereignty over their government and the large corporations that have captured Washington, D.C.

One of the inspirations for this book was the history of the abolitionist movement against slavery—ably funded by rich Bostonians and New Yorkers—and the early civil rights movement in the Fifties and Sixties—significantly funded by rich people like the Stern and Currie families.

Justice movements need a lift, a shoehorn, resources to pay for organizers, facilities, transportation, litigation and media.

Today, with corporations able to amass trillions of dollars to advance harmful corporate interests, a small number of enlightened mega-rich elders putting their money and smarts behind broad redirections in our country supported by majorities can generate very compelling dynamics for a functioning democratic society.

If you want to see what I mean, just read my book (onlythesuperrich.org) and see if you agree with Lesley Stahl of CBS’ Sixty Minutes who read and found “Only the Super-Rich Can Save Us!” “engrossing, creative and funny.” Lesley, I’ll take all three.



Named by both Time and Life magazines as one of the hundred most influential Americans of the twentieth century, and by The Atlantic as one of the hundred most influential figures in American history, Ralph Nader takes his ongoing fight for truth and justice right to the top of the political and judicial systems. For years he has brought to the strong arm of justice issues that have been pushed under the carpet. He does this on behalf of all working people, the ongoing betterment of the environment, consumer rights safety, and so that each and every citizen in the United States, regardless of race or religion receives what is due them—a fair and concerned government. Nader is a best-selling author, renowned speaker and newspaper/magazine contributor.

“Mr. Nader has produced a wonderful piece of fiction that I’d love to see become nonfiction.”
—TOM PETERS



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