

Hit and Run: The Rise and Fall of Ralph Nader

Patricia Flynn

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credit user. The major reasons given for default were loss of income due either to misfortunes in the job market or illness. Debtors who bought from direct sellers and used automobile dealers reported deceit in the original transaction much more frequently than did other debtors.

When the various debtor and creditor characteristics are correlated to each issue, some unexpected findings occur. Race and income are only slightly related to whether a person reported actual receipt of a summons, while general quality of the neighborhood in which he lived and type of dwelling unit were more highly related to service. It was also found that the three most frequent creditor plaintiffs in New York, a bank, a direct seller, and a finance company, all had much lower rates of reported actual service than other similar creditors. The lowest rate went to the finance company, only 32% of whose customers reported actual receipt. Excellent tables are used throughout the volume to summarize these and other relationships.

For the law student or the attorney the book is of limited value, especially as a research tool. While some citations to both cases and other materials are included, other cases, studies, or projects are mentioned with no useful citation. As a source of actual law, it cannot be relied upon, since even Professor Caplovitz was careful to explain that there have been changes on both the national and local level since his study was done. As a general introduction to the area of consumer credit problems, it is useful, but the statistical data and analysis might discourage a novice. As a contrast of what has happened under four local legal systems, it is illuminating, especially since Philadelphia, a city in which garnishment is not an available remedy, is compared to other systems where that remedy is allowed and often used. Perhaps the most appropriate audience for this book are the legislators who have opposed reforms of consumer credit laws over the years. It might convince them of the need for change, even though it does not itself propose easy or effective alternatives.

Lee Ann Conti

HIT AND RUN: THE RISE AND FALL OF RALPH NADER by
RALPH DE TOLEDANO. New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House
Pubs. 1975. \$7.95 cloth.

In *Hit and Run*, Ralph de Toledano purports to objectively examine Ralph Nader's record and to critically evaluate the Nader Reports. Instead, the author uses undocumented statements and inaccurate conclu-

sions to launch a vicious personal assault on Nader and his supporters.

Throughout the book de Toledano characterizes Nader as "Savoranola," "paranoid" and a "political man, an operative of considerable dimension through murky sensibility (p. 141)." In amateur psychologist fashion he says:

There is no question of Nader's consuming hatred for the business and industry . . . a hatred which, perhaps, should be submitted to the analysis of Freudian psychiatry since, as so many observers have noted, there is some sexual twist to the propelling force in Nader's psyche (p. 132).

The author accuses Nader of hypocritical conduct, remarking that Nader stays at expensive hotels and drives at eighty miles an hour through New York. However, the author does not document these damaging statements and accusations.

De Toledano prides himself on being a good newsman and dislikes Nader's Raiders because of their shoddy research methods and penchant for sensationalism. There is considerable doubt in the author's mind about the Raiders' ability to investigate and report fairly and accurately. In describing the Raiders he says:

They were motivated by the same implacable hatred of American industry, the same intolerance, the same conviction that ends justify means, the same airy belief expressed by Nader that "if a job is worth doing, it's worth doing badly." They were also suspicious, cantankerous and full of the sense that they were, if not God's anointed, at least minor league saviors (p. 57).

In fact, de Toledano uses name calling tactics frequently when describing people with whom he does not agree. Scientists and groups concerned about ecology who support Nader's position on nuclear power are referred to as "extremist eco-freaks (p. 113)." He tries to explain the favorable media treatment which Nader has received by saying that for these "advocacy journalists" Nader is the voice of all they believe, because "he stands four square against American business and industry, against the advertising which keeps the media in groceries (p. 16)." He often describes Nader supporters as "left" or "extremist," but never admits that many of Nader's critics, from whom he quotes extensively, are considered "right-wing" or "reactionary."

What about "those Nader reports?" De Toledano concludes that they are "a fraud perpetrated on the American people (p. 67)." He bases this statement on a rather simplistic analysis of a few of the reports. At times his statements, if not completely false, are at least misleading. In describing Nader's attack on the Corvair he says, "Why Nader singled out the Corvair is anybody's guess," (p. 35) and he describes the car as "what experts and ordinary drivers considered one of the safest and most satisfy-

ing cars on the road (p. 47).” He implies that there was absolutely no reason to question the ability or safety of the Corvair. However, de Toledano’s “experts” were a few racing car drivers, and it is important to note that an independent study conducted in 1971 by the Highway Safety Research Center of the University of North Carolina supports Nader’s contention that the Corvair had a greater tendency to become involved in certain types of single automobile accidents than did other cars.¹

De Toledano is also highly critical of the Nader Report on the Federal Trade Commission, the first report prepared by the Raiders. He claims that the Raiders did not intend to report accurately on the agency, but wanted to draw up an indictment against it and “their major weapon was to impute base motives where others more experienced would have seen bureaucratic sloth and little else (p. 58).” The author neglects to point out that a separate report on the FTC by the American Bar Association also took the “bureaucratic sloth” seriously and made substantially the same recommendations for reform as did the Nader report.²

De Toledano concludes his book by saying that Nader’s popularity is declining because of two factors: first, Americans have short attention spans, and secondly, because “prophets of doom, particularly those who upbraid men who are presumably about to die, who live on locusts and bile and demand that others follow their example, soon find themselves alone in the wilderness (p. 152).” He also claims that Nader has fallen from influence and warns, “The hit and run driver, when he is discovered, has few friends in these United States (p. 153).” After reading this book, perhaps de Toledano should be reminded that the “hit and run author,” the author who makes misleading and false statements, will also have few friends, or readers, in these United States.

Patricia Flynn

1. 1971 STUDY OF THE HIGHWAY RESEARCH CENTER OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA, in C. MCGARRY, *CITIZEN NADER* 11 (1972).

2. ABA COMMISSION TO STUDY THE FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION, *REPORT OF THE ABA COMMISSION TO STUDY THE FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION* 34-36, 82-84 (1969).