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The Axe Files - Ep. 157: Steven Greenhouse

Released June 19, 2017

Axelrod: [00:00:00] Steven Greenhouse. First of all thank you for all your great work at the University of Chicago Institute of Politics. Been great to have you here. It's been a wonderful gig. I feel part of the gig economy. The but I want to talk to you a little bit about how you were for decades the preeminent sort of labor writer in the country working at the preeminent newspaper in the country and working on a subject that you obviously were very passionate about so I want to talk about the beginning and you grew up a mass of people were a Long Island in New York at home of Alec Baldwin and Jerry Seinfeld. So you're the third funniest guy to come out of massive peak we're probably about a thousand funniest guy. We used to call it a pizza because there are so many Jews and Italians and you're. Tell me about. Tell me about your folks.

Greenhouse: [00:01:06] So my folks my father was a high school teacher and he taught math and then economics. He taught community college on the side. He didn't start that in 1960 before he was an independent businessman. He was a dry cleaner. My mother used to work in retail as a sales lady. And then after 1960 she became a social worker for four Nassau County.

Axelrod: [00:01:32] But you know as you and I have discussed your dad was not your usual dry cleaner.

Greenhouse: [00:01:38] No my father. My father grew up very poor during the Depression. His father was a garment cutter was laid off in the Depression and then my father was so poor that his parents had him live with an uncle had more money. And my father told me some days at his house he'd open up the refrigerator and just be you know a quart of milk and he was really poor and was very disgruntled with the system then and he became a real man of the left. He went to City City College where a lot of people became communists and for a while he was a communist and he left the party in the night. I think around 1956 after Khrushchev denounced Stalin and after Hungarian rebellion and I was kind of I rebelled in the family of being the anti-communist because I said communism you know denied freedom of speech tonight freedom of religion denied freedom of the press.

Axelrod: [00:02:36] But he was denied some some opportunities because of his I mean that was a very very difficult period in our history and people who were associated with the Communist Party were obviously more than ostracized as your dad. He he went from these very poor beginnings to becoming a very serious academic and studied statistics right.

Greenhouse: [00:03:05] So yes. So he was you know it's never clear to me whether he's officially blacklisted but at the time in the 1950s if you wanted to get a government job and he had really studied statistics and he was prepared for a government job he would have to sign an oath that swore he had never been a member of the Communist Party and he didn't want to do that. That's why he went into business for himself didn't want to do it because it would have been a lie would have been a lie. Yeah. Yeah. And so after 1960 President Kennedy lifted the requirement for the loyalty oath and most government job so then he was able to get a job as a teacher. My father was a wonderful teacher. He was repeatedly chosen the best teacher at the high school he taught at and he was studying for a doctorate. He was very good at statistics during the war he actually studied here at the University of Chicago he studied physics. He was sent here to work to prepare to work on the Manhattan Project which is kind of in the family the minor league. But by the time he was ready they had already developed the bomb and then he served in Japan.

Axelrod: [00:04:07] That would have been problematical for him probably. Now he was he was extremely well I mean he is a completely anti-Nazi that we don't know but it would've been problematical for him if it

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had been discovered that he worked on the Manhattan Project and then and also I remember kind of.

Greenhouse: [00:04:26] I mean I I don't think so really because you know we were you know our ally was it was Russia was Stalin you know you know if anything the Communists were even more anti-Nazi than many of the many other folks.

Axelrod: [00:04:41] Yeah. I'm talking about Oppenheimer and some of the people who worked on him who ultimately were tried. But you know one thing that interests me about the story is that your dad grew up poor. And he went to City College and obviously City College was kind of an exemplary place. I mean it was it was a really good institution where people could go and get an education essentially for free. And he became a professional that seems like an affirmation. Of you know our system in some ways.

Greenhouse: [00:05:27] Yes. You know he you know he talked about how wonderful the G.I. Bill was that helped pay for him to go to graduate school it helped him buy this little house on Long Island on massive picra and really help social mobility. He had been really poor and then he became you know a successful teacher. He taught community college he got a very good pension. And you know he saw how you know the government the G.I. bill could really help people like him rise. And he you know he very much you know believed in economic opportunity. He believed in dignity for everyone. My mother would always lecture me. You know even the worker with the homeless job you've got to treat them with dignity and maybe some of those life lessons I got from my parents prepared me to be a labor reporter.

Axelrod: [00:06:16] But it was not a direct route. You went off to college and went to Wesleyan. You were the editor of the school newspaper there. What what attracted you to to writing.

Greenhouse: [00:06:31] So I remember when I was fifth sixth grade my father was a teacher. We went to a friend's house and he had this print little Stettner printing press about maybe three feet long and it was you know printing like hundreds and hundreds of copies that I said this is so cool the power of the press you know can think of Gutenberg. And then in high school I was an editor a high school paper and we wrote an editorial against the Vietnam War and the high school administration censored it and we were pretty upset and then we started a little underground paper and like that was such a thrill. You know putting together on paper and you know again the power of the press being able to to write about things that you are.

Axelrod: [00:07:12] So was this whole was this related to this sort of social justice upbringing of yours that that a free press it was a way of shining a bright light.

Greenhouse: [00:07:24] So you know I grew up caring and you know my parents were concerned about social justice helping the poor. You know I would tell people I went to Farmer's civil rights marches growing up then I went to baseball games seriously. And so one of the reasons I love journalism and I tell students here in Chicago and elsewhere it's a wonderful field if you like writing if you like the creativity of writing and you care about public policy or issues of justice or if you want to write about the arts or if you want to write about you know go to Southeast Asia and write about in Cambodia or Vietnam. I think it's wonderful. So for me I love writing and I there a lot of subjects I care about so I was attracted to journalism and my parents were pushing me to be a lawyer which briefly works. So I was always torn between journalism and law school and I worked for three years after going to Columbia Graduate School of Journalism I worked for three years for a newspaper in New Jersey the Bergen Record in Hackensack. I wasn't usually happy there. I thought you know some of the managers were you know kind of cruel. And I said this is a crazy profession I'm going to go to law school so I went to law school at NYU and did well there got a Federal clerkship with Judge Robert Carter who was Thurgood Marshall assistant in Brown v. Board. But I realized that law school that just journalism is more fun it's more interesting it's more creative. You know if you write a brief you work on it for like two months in journalism you know you could do

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something different every two or three days and you could jump around more to issues you choose the issues whereas in law the issues often choose you. Now you had been a copy clerk at the times right. Like as a kid. So right out of college the editor in chief of the college newspaper at Wesleyan and so upon graduate you know before graduating I wrote to all the Wesleyan grads at the New York Times. There was Ted Fisk the education editor the science editor. Byard Webster a wonderful guy Evan. Evan Jenkins a wonderful news editor and they helped me get a job as a copy boy and a copy boy I sorted mail I got coffee and I ran copy people have no idea what running copy means. There were something called typewriters then a people type of articles one page at a time and after each page they pull out the typewriter and they'd yell copy and you'd have to run over as quickly as you can and take a page from their hand and run it over the desks. And this is the editor finished editing that page. You'd put it in pneumatic tube and it went up to the composing room. Boy oh boy things have changed.

Axelrod: [00:10:05] When I started at the Chicago Tribune read of college we were typing on these carbon books and you know with white. Yellow and pink sheets. And when you know one you kept you kept the yellow one the pink one went to the copy desk in the white one went to the editors and yeah it seems like I think we're dating ourselves here. But it was fun. I mean it was fun. It was. Now did you were you energized by the environment. Did you.

Greenhouse: [00:10:40] I love that you know. You know I grew up my parents have gotten New York Times Like you know Gartside seven eight and morning in the morning you know getting the New York Times. I thought it was so great and so intelligent and so fair and I kind of always dreamt of being a reporter for The New York Times. And lo and behold when I was hired I was extremely happy. I was hired as a business reporter and I remember this wonderfully smart editor from South Carolina John and Lee said this is the seat you're going to set out. This was Tom Friedman seat. You have big shoes to fill.

Axelrod: [00:11:18] And when when you and and so you left the law and you got a job back at the time. Yes. And just on the basis of what.

Greenhouse: [00:11:30] So when I just can't be very good or happy. Fair question. So as a copy clerk I work 20 hours a week as a copy clerk. But then I probably wrote articles 30 hours a week and I and pressed some editors that I was a smart kid. So you know I worked at the Bergen Record. I did very well in law school. You know the area I was closest to when I was a copy boy was this John Lee who had moved up to become business editor and he kind of took a chance on me. He thought you know I could do pretty well. And I started out with the times as covering basic industry the steel industry I spent a lot of time in Chicago. After six months of the times I must've done something right because they said we want you to become our Midwest economics correspondent. And I moved to Chicago. And this was a time 1984 when that Midwest was really struggling to recover from the very difficult 1981 82 recession. And I wrote a lot about some of the problems Donald Trump talks about nowadays beleaguered blue collar workers and what are we as a nation going to do to help them.

Axelrod: [00:12:34] The other guy who arrived here just about that time was Barack Obama who's working as a community organizer in the shadow of those closed steel mills on the south side. He's done better than I have. Yeah. All right so what. You know we speak about. The sort of climate in our country today as if it's it's been it's it's emerged suddenly. But. In your writing you've sort of charted the transformation in our economy that has created winners and losers including people who were in that in those steel mills on the South Side of Chicago and environs. What happened to our income and you. By the way wrote a terrific book called The Big Squeeze Tough Times for American worker in 2008. So this this is now well in advance of Donald Trump. I'd like to say I think he read it but I'm not sure.

Greenhouse: [00:13:43] So in the book I talk a lot about the decline of manufacturing. Dates how globalization has really hurt manufacturing I went out to Galesburg wrote about the closing of the

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refrigerator factory there. President Obama went out there as well. I said I wrote that you know it's doesn't make sense to me that presidents the governors just kind of turn a blind eye when all these companies are moving jobs overseas. And I kind of said you know you know just as President Kennedy is jawboning to discourage the steel makers from raising prices and hurting consumers. I thought you know President Obama President Bush could have done a little jawboning to you know to discourage companies don't don't give him a free pass to move jobs to Bangladesh or China or Mexico. And Donald Trump I say is taking my advice but he has done some of that too he hasn't done it he's done it in an in a haphazard way kind of just focusing on carrier. And he said. You know jobs moving aboard is going to stop on my watch but that it hasn't stopped at all.

Axelrod: [00:14:47] Well you know the interesting thing about that carrier situation is that carrier after his job Boeing announced that they were going to keep some operations here but they quickly announced after that that they were also going to automate the the very plant that that he was pointing to. So these are forces that are very hard to control. I mean I wonder now you know I said this before but I. Whether. The you know he talks a lot about Mexico and China less about China now that he's president but it feels like robots and computers and artificial intelligence are the the real the greatest threat to middle class jobs and the greatest depressant to wages because it's cheaper for corporations to automate and have machines do the job that people used to do.

Greenhouse: [00:15:47] Absolutely. One of my big concerns about our nation is you know automation and globalization are you know pushing down wages and making you know corporations now pushing up corporate profits increasing inequality. And wouldn't you think what should we as a nation do about that. You know you know the administration and Congress are cutting taxes and corporations and cutting taxes on the very rich and hardly thinking at all about the millions or even tens of millions people whose jobs have been endangered. And I think that's something we as a nation really should be focusing for much more on. And other thing that I think is one of the big stories out there and just we as a nation are paying nearly enough attention. So we are entering the gig economy. We are in the good economy and there are millions of Americans many also facilitated by technology so by technology. Absolutely. Explain what the gig economy is instead of you know like our parents David we have no jobs that would you know maybe have the same job for 20 30 40 years. And there a lot of loyalty from a company from the employer to the worker and the worker to the employer. Now people often have jobs for six months or a year sometimes you know preparing a website for Oubre. It's kind of a gig year. Uber says you're not a regular worker you're just an independent contractor. Mechanical Turk. You know you go on to this Web site and you do various little jobs that might take two minutes or 20 minutes or two hours and you might get paid five cents or \$5 for them and you're doing all these little things these little gigs and you know more and more Americans are doing good jobs and they provide lots of flexibility and that's great. But if you have these jobs you're not going to get a pension you're not going to get a 401k health cover. I'm not going to get health coverage. And this is a big issue. And instead of doing anything to help these people we seem to be moving away from helping them you know say you know one of the advantages of Obamacare is it's provided some health security to people and get jobs. You know if you work for a big employer say 20 years you normally got health insurance but if you're you know Uber driver or working for mechanical turk or doing all these little gigs you don't have health insurance. And the advantage of Obamacare or the French health system or the German health system is you know they provide more health security people and it you know increases freedom in many ways by enabling people to move from job to job without having to worry whether or not they're going to lose health coverage.

Axelrod: [00:18:25] But you know let me I want to unpack this because you said push corporate profits up. It's increased inequality. Globalization technology and that is absolutely true. But if if corporate. Leader was here they would say they wish they or she would say that is that the logic of business has to be profitable. And in the end following that logic automating exporting operations where labor is cheaper is absolutely rational and probably demanded by shareholders.

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Greenhouse: [00:19:12] Absolutely. What is the counter-argument to that. So first I should point out because some economists already be jumping down my throat globalization has raised living standards for hundreds of millions of people in China and India. So it might have reduced overall worldwide inequality by racing and Bangladesh and Bangladesh blames the Lanka and Honduras. Right. But it's probably I would estimate it's probably increased inequality within the United States. It's really hurt that blue collar middle class.

Axelrod: [00:19:45] And we felt that we felt it here in the industrial Midwest this is one of the things that propelled Donald Trump in his in his election.

Greenhouse: [00:19:54] Absolutely and I'm sure we'll discuss that more. But the answer is yes. You know CEOs are under pressure to maximize profits get their share price up and they'll use you know the the the tools they have and that includes you know you know if you're making garments in the United States and paying workers \$13 an hour and can pay garment workers in Sri Lanka or Bangladesh 50 cents for a dollar die 30 an hour. People often do that and they'll say that's great for shareholders. And ditto with automation and you know certainly a lot of this is good for consumers. It will help hold down costs. But you know Americans are workers and Americans are consumers. It might be good for them as consumers might throw them out of jobs depress their wages you know pull them out of the hard it's actually hard to be a good consumer if you don't have any money. I mean I see in so many cities the decline of middle level stores you know like a Kohl's or Macy's and you'll see Neiman is doing well and you'll see the you know Family Dollar Stores. And it's really interesting you know that there's kind of a polarization in the in the retail market as we have seen a thinning out of the middle class. It's also true that the that here too technology is is having a huge impact because people are no longer going into stores they're sitting at their computers they're ordering stuff and all these retail jobs are disappearing. We're going to take a short break and we'll be right back with Steve Greenhouse.

Axelrod: [00:21:36] I want to. I want to continue this discussion. But before I do I'd be remiss if I didn't ask you about the labor movement itself. You know I remember when the second day I was an intern at The Tribune. Right after I left school and I was desperately trying to get a job full time job there. I came in one morning and the city editor said the Teamsters Union had just met in Las Vegas and Frank Fitzsimmons who was the president of the Teamsters Union and all the officers had voted themselves fantastic raises I mean just exponential raises and this guy probably trying to test whether I had the medaled to to actually be a reporter said I want you go out and find some Teamsters and ask them how they feel about it. So I was not that thrilled about the prospect of going to ask Teamsters who had a good reason not to want to comment on this given the nature of the Teamsters Union. On the other hand I was even more frightened about not getting a job at the Tribune So I went out and I found a loading dock and I finally found a few people who were crazy enough to comment on the record because I was so angry about the disparity between their wages and what their union leaders were getting. But. Labor is much less. Obvious factor in our lives today. I mean the labor movement is a shadow of what it was even then and tell me why. And tell me what the impact of that is in in this discussion we've been having about the nature of our economy.

Greenhouse: [00:23:32] I could talk to hours about that but we'll try to telescope in. So in the 1990s 30s and 40s and 50s and then in the United States the labor movement was very strong. It was very exciting. People cared about it. A lot of smart kids who graduate from college would decide to join or become labor organizers. And they're kind of the new new thing for a while you know and they really Besley after World War 2 they really help build the middle class. You know this famous Flint sit down strike 1936 37 which is lead story in the nation's papers. Walter Ruther the head of the UAW was one of the great men in the United States. He helped you know he helped fund the 1963 March on Washington. He helped fund the United Farm Workers in the great says Chavez. And labor was exciting and people generally had the sense it was doing the right thing and trying to help build and sustain the middle class in the 1950s about

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35 percent of American workers are in unions. That's down to ten point seven percent. And in the private sector just six point four percent so we went from a nation where one in three workers. Was in a union to now we're in the private sector it's like one in 16. And as you mentioned in your teamster's anecdote unions often shot themselves in the foot. You know they were corrupt. Sometimes they just did a lousy lousy job serving members sometimes they fell asleep at the wheel forgetting that you have to try to grow to remain strong to unionize the new sectors of the economy. And I think that's one of the reasons unions have gotten much weaker in union density has declined is that you know there are whole sectors like retail and banking where they've just done you know they've been asleep at that. I mean it's hard it's hard to unionize finance but retail I think they could have unionized millions and millions of workers and they just have been very slow.

Axelrod: [00:25:18] It's also true that well two things one is from the end of the war to about the mid 70s. You saw the growth of wages and ascend at about the same rate as the growth of the economy. So as the economy grew it really did lift all boats. That's not true anymore.

Greenhouse: [00:25:43] Absolutely so. From our 1946 to 1973 our productivity basically rose at the same rate as hourly compensation it was in hand-in-hand and there are many reasons for that but one was that unions were strong and they helped make sure that employers shared their profits share their prosperity with their workers. After the heyday of American manufacturing and the heyday of American manufacturing and Japan and Europe you know were really knocked out by the war and we weren't feeling much global competition. So after 1973 79 the oil shocks which you know weakened our economy but more than that. You know Europe and Japan became big competitors and that was really the beginning of global competition and automation was taking place too. So a lot of manufacturers really hurt and we as a nation went from like 19 20 million manufacturing jobs now down to about 12 and a half million and manufacturing was the heart of the labor movement and losing so many of so many manufacturing jobs due to globalization. Automation really hurt labor and the. And as listeners know many of the new jobs have been in the service sector like hotels or retail or nail salons or banks or restaurants and they're in ways much harder to unionize. And in a factory.

Axelrod: [00:27:04] But it's still true that the the union that is most dominant in that sector the service employees union is is probably the one growth union in the labor movement.

Greenhouse: [00:27:15] They are they're one of the fastest growing and one of the best jobs in unionizing lots of people the hotel workers have been very good at unionizing various hotels. Another factor which I shouldn't forget is that you know companies have gotten much more sophisticated in fighting unions and also many companies babe pay better and treat their workers better than was the case in the 1930s and 1940s and a lot of people think you know I don't need a union they treat me pretty well. But you know.

Axelrod: [00:27:45] I actually when I was when I was a reporter the Tribune wasn't unionized. The Sun-Times the paper across the street was unionized and the Tribune always paid us as well or better than our colleagues across the street because they wanted to resist a unionization effort and in that sense we were the beneficiaries of the Newspaper Guild. Even though we weren't represented by we were kind of free riders honestly. But there was another factor that we should talk about which is government policies. You know we went through a period of largely I mean in the in the in the 50s Eisenhower was president and there was an interregnum. But you know unions were very powerful politically and very much affiliated by and large with the Democratic Party when Ronald Reagan got elected in 1980. There was a very a concerted effort to cut the power of unions. Certainly public employee unions. But so policies have been have made unionization more difficult Have they not.

Greenhouse: [00:29:02] Absolutely. So when Ronald Reagan ran for president he courted unions he wanted just like Donald Trump he was trying to show I'm not only trying to attract you know that you know

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business executives and the rich. I'm trying to track you know blue collar folks. And he won. He won the support of several unions including the air traffic controllers. But then the air traffic controllers union went on this you know big nationwide illegal strike in 1981 and Reagan you know got very tough with them. On one hand he is you know he used to boast I'm pro-union. I was the president of the screen actors guild when I was president I led them out on their very first strike. But then the air traffic controllers confronted him with this illegal strike they tried to shut down the airports to get you know what were fairly exorbitant wage demands and he decided Gronau to crush them as my time to be a strong leader. They broke the law and he fired eleven thousand five hundred air traffic controllers. He says I wasn't trying to put unions on the defensive I was just trying to get the airports open again and show you know no one could push us around. But he really set a tone. I think that emboldened a lot of corporate leaders that saying it's now time to get tough on unions. But when President Reagan did this the nation was in recession. And so corporations are really hurting. You know we're really feeling the beginning of global pressure from Europe and Japan. Japanese cars are starting to stream in steel from Russia Brazil Romania Belgium are starting to stream in and then manufacturers just felt we have to really take tough steps to become competitive. And part of that was to get become much much tougher toward unions in the 1950s and 1960s when the United States was you know the king of the hill and there was very little competition from Japan and Europe. It was easy for companies to pay a lot. And they felt you know unions could work hand-in-hand with them. But starting in the 1980s the whole attitude chose changed. And in many ways you know the corporate fight against unions was helped by you know various labor laws. You know people don't realize that if you're a union organizer and want to unionize say a factory of five hundred people you're not allowed to set foot in that in the company parking lot. You can be arrested and at the same time the company can show you videos you know nonstop or have one on one meetings with you to tell you you know union sucks they just want your money. I did a story a few years ago about the largest employer in Pennsylvania UPMC United University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. And on the screen savers at each person's desk there was an anti union message. So employers in many ways you know have a big advantage they have the upper hand.

Axelrod: [00:31:57] What about race as a element of the division of the labor movement. You know in the 60s there was a great book that David merriness wrote recently and he was he was here once in a great city and it was about Detroit and the auto workers. And you know you mentioned Walter Ruther and his involvement in the in the civil rights movement and so on and he talked about the sort of fissure between white ethnic. Autoworkers and ruther over over civil rights. It was you know these divisions were showing up in our cities. But it's it seems it feels as if politicians since that time politicians on the right have exploited these tensions and this notion that you know we're working hard in our hard working dollars are going to support people who are working at it. You know in many cases in their interpretation minorities and you know Trump there's a version of that in what we see today. How much is that sort of divided in and harm the the labor movement as a as a political force.

Greenhouse: [00:33:33] So on one hand you know unions perhaps of all institutions of society do more to bring you know people from different races together. I think more so than churches maybe more so than schools probably certainly more so than housing. And I know Walter with the tried very hard to bring white workers and black workers together and move you know hesitant white workers to be more favorable to the civil rights movement and he succeeded in large part but not fully. Maybe David merriness disagreed. So and the union movement was you know became a champion of Hispanic workers it thought you know it you know it saw this huge influx of of Hispanic workers. And so how they were often exploited and under unsafe conditions under unfair wages I'm champion movement some sort of big industrial unions less less so than some of them might. But the AFL-CIO the the Federation of the unions adopted you know by basically by consensus you know to be in favor of a pathway to legalization for it you know the labor movement used to be very nativist and you know want to keep out Chinese keep out you know people from Southern Europe and under John Sweeney and the lady who is with the president of the AFL-CIO on the late 1990s and the 2000s he decided you know that he saw that his bank workers were

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being badly exploited. He saw that they might be the future Union members of the future. So he swung and he and John Wilhelm had the hotel workers who really swung the labor movement behind Hispanics and a pathway to legalization. So. And they were big supporters working with Republic when he came from the Service Employees. Yes. And so he represented a lot of SANTICH were. Absolutely. Yes. So you know that you know you look at the votes. I mean I you hear this all the time.

Axelrod: [00:35:28] A lot of Democrats voted against during the Bush administration one version of the legalization because they were worried about the influx of of workers threatening so threatened.

Greenhouse: [00:35:47] It was you know they those who were those who were worker regiments those who were here they wanted to help because they thought you know if you're undocumented it's very easy to exploit you. They want to keep out guest workers because they get truckers. And one of the interesting things is you know labor and the business community working very closely on a lot of this is interesting to see this cooperation cooperation and there was some real bipartisan cooperation between you know Republicans and Democrats. And so but things have greatly changed over the past five six years since Republicans in Congress blocked President Bush's And then President Obama's proposal to reform immigration and create a pathway to legalization. And Donald Trump when he was running for president you know clearly thought one way to win to attract blue collar white voters and he clearly was you know aiming for them. Yes. Was to you know when in his initial announcement speech you know he talked about Mexican rapists and he was talking forever about undocumented workers who committed murders and well and about expelling undocumented workers.

Axelrod: [00:36:59] Building a wall and it was a successful strategy for him.

Greenhouse: [00:37:02] Yes it was.

Axelrod: [00:37:03] And and he got his share of labor vote.

Greenhouse: [00:37:07] He got he got a lot of labor votes and you know and I think a lot of labor leaders were surprised and disappointed that they saw that a lot of their members are backing Trump. I think more of the members ultimately voted for Trump than they expected. And you know they felt real frustration towards Hillary they felt she wasn't you know pushing jobs nearly enough she wasn't pushing ways to strategies to increase wages nearly enough. I think she really hurt her by giving this \$250000 a pop. Speeches to Wall Street I think labor leaders want the Democrats to make clear that they're the party of the middle class or the moderate income person of the blue collar worker and not holding hands with Wall Street. And you know Donald Trump in ways portrayed himself more than Hillary did as I'm the friend of the beleaguered blue collar worker. And he said I'm going to bring back the jobs are going to build the wall and you know you know kick China are going to kick Mexico I'm going to you know stop factories from leaving. And you know I was you know in the Midwest doing some interviews during the campaign and I interviewed some blue collar workers and they say you know I realized that Trump is in ways part my friends bullshitting us. But he shows he cares about our issues. He shows that he's wants to help us. And you know my sense then and my sense now is that Trump is making promises that he could not deliver on and perhaps never intended to deliver long. Now he boasted that he saved 730 jobs at Carrier. Well Kerry is still in Indianapolis is moving 500 jobs still in Mexico. And Kerry's parent United Technologies has a second factory in Indiana they're moving 700 jobs to Mexico so while trying we talked about the radiation issue. Yes. So Trump trumpets that look I say the 700 jobs but don't look. Twelve hundred jobs.

Axelrod: [00:38:57] But but nonetheless My point was that there's been a divide and conquer strategy. Aimed at these blue collar white blue collar workers and it's been a success.

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Greenhouse: [00:39:12] You know I think you know Donald Trump saw things that the Democrats if they wanted to win should have seen that a lot of workers fairly or unfairly actually accurately or inaccurately thought that NAFTA was horrible. And you know was the main reason all these jobs left the Midwest. A lot of jobs were leaving the Midwest before and after and after had an effect but I think the humongous effect people thought. And Trump said well I'm going to stop TPP and you know we will debate endlessly whether you agree the way you know people in Asia with Asian people with 12 countries in the Pacific and people will debate for years whether President Obama may be going to push push forward right then and there because it is going to hurt the Democrats so much. But you know Trump killed TPP and that's going to go in many ways helped China become the main economic force to China is the big beneficiary of that.

Axelrod: [00:40:10] We're going to take another short break and we'll be right back with Steve Greenhouse. Let me ask you about public employee unions there.

Axelrod: [00:40:17] They are the most viable in certain ways in the labor movement now because of the decline of heavy manufacturing and you do unionization of that sector. You know Franklin Roosevelt was a skeptic about public employee unions. He felt that you know it created an inherent conflict of interest that's the argument that Republicans make now. How do you how do you see that.

Greenhouse: [00:40:51] I think President Roosevelt saw that when you become a public worker you know it's like joining the army. You know you're part of this important cause of government and helping people. He thought they should unionize. That's like you know soldiers unionizing and fighting and they. So in the 1960s. There was an increased movement among public sector workers and teachers who felt were. Usually underpaid. And we have to do something to improve. Our lives get better pensions. They also argued that you know unionizing would reduce turnover and that would help schools and would help government agencies. And many states led Wisconsin gave public sector workers the right to unionize. A little history of the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 gave private sector workers the right to unionize but didn't touch public sector workers so if public sector workers were going to be able to unionize they needed individual states to give them the green light. And most states did. But then in 2010 when the Republicans no clean the Democrats clock in state after state and one of the member. Yes. And one of the governor's mansion in state houses a lot of Republicans decided to try to weaken public sector unions. And they said we're doing it to help the taxpayer that you know public sector unions they argued are too strong their pensions were more generous than many private sector workers.

Axelrod: [00:42:26] You know Illinois is a good example of that we've got a tremendous budget crisis here because of. And this isn't just because of union I mean labor leaders were pushing for their members but politicians wanted labor support. Republican and Democrat by the way. Now there's a bill to be paid. That's substantial and creating a huge crisis here. So there they are playing to and in the midst of the recession you know which exacerbated concerns about.

Greenhouse: [00:43:00] I'm not I'm not nearly as expert on Illinois as you are. My sense is you know some governors didn't make pension payments into the fund for several years. And the unions offer to contribute more but that was rejected. And instead they decided to cut future pensions. But let's go back for a second to Scott Walker. So to 2010 January of 2011 Scott Walker is inaugurated as governor of Wisconsin. He says We face big budget deficit. It's all the unions fault their pensions are too high their health coverage is too generous. They don't pay enough in premiums. So let's you know let's go after them. Let's you know make them pay more for the pensions. Make them pay for health care more for health coverage. And not only that let's essentially take away their right to bargain collectively. And he he and the Republican dominated legislature passed a law that was generally popular with the public that you know greatly weaken public sector unions and there were these huge protests in the street and where you know teachers and social workers and you know graduate students who were who were

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unionized at the University Wisconsin. They said you know we need unions to bargain for us you know to have better class size. You know to you know to have decent pensions and then there are all these studies that said public sector workers generally earn less than private sector workers. But there are benefits to Helfand and pension benefits are better. I remember my mother said at the time that when I was growing up when she was growing up in the Depression people would say look at those union workers. Look what the unions achieved. I want to have what they have. And my mother you know when I was on the phone with her from Madison Wisconsin covering the protests there. My mother said Boy things have changed. Now people look at unionized workers and say I don't have as much as they have they have too much. Let's knock them down a few notches. Let's take away what they have. And you know I thought what she said was really profound just a sense of the social solidarity and the change of view towards unions. And since Wisconsin we've seen various states take actions together have been organized efforts to promote that on the right.

Axelrod: [00:45:10] So it's been a very sophisticated effort. Some of it is philosophical. Some of it is political because these public employee unions generally have been a major donor to Democratic politicians so it's a way of decommissioning one of the funding sources of Democratic candidates.

Greenhouse: [00:45:30] Absolutely. So you know when I said covering labor from their times in 1995 1996 there are a lot of pro labor Republicans in Congress. And it's you know there are hardly any left. It's really interesting. And Republicans in Wisconsin and pushing for right to work in West Virginia recently Missouri recently in Wisconsin a few years ago in Michigan a few years ago say you know workers should not be required to pay union dues they should be have the right to opt out. Unions would still have to represent them still have to bargain for them still have to handle grievances for them and they'll say we're just trying to give workers freedom to opt out of paying union dues and the unions would say that's outrageous. You know they're getting all these union services for free and the unions would argue the real reason the Republicans are pushing for this was to deplete union treasuries. And Republicans don't like big union treasuries because much of that is used to help the Democrats. So you know when you weaken unions in the private sector that's great for patience and it's in many many ways great for the Republicans because the unions are the less they can do to help the Democrats. I think one of the reasons you know Donald Trump won so he won narrowly won Wisconsin and in 2010 15 1 5 percent of Wisconsin workers were in unions and now it's down to 8 percent. And I would submit that if without the 2010 changes that the. I shouldn't let you go without talking about journalism and how that's changed since you began. Other than the fact that people are no longer using typewriters. It's a different world than when you and I began in journalism. Tell me what is what is for the better and what is for the worse what's been gained and what's been lost in this new Internet era. I think we were Watergate babies in ways you know we got really impassioned by you know about journalism in 1973 1974 when we saw the Create were in Bernstein really uncover these misdeeds by Nixon and his aides. And I think we went into journalism because we thought it can it you know it's not only fun but it could pursue truth and justice. And now you know you newspaper finances are really hurting newspapers by and large across the country have greatly shrunk their newsrooms. Lot of once terrific papers you know are not what they used to be I think the New York Times The Washington Post The Wall Street Journal are still excellent papers but many papers and this because this is another manifestation of technology the the information that newspapers used to impart the classified ads and the listings and so on that were sort of mainstay of their advertising base is no longer necessary because people can go online and get all that information. So. So you know newspapers made tons of money on auto ads and real estate ads and those disappeared from newspapers and newspapers. You know we had a financial crisis. They laid off a ton of people. And that's really hurt a lot of you know the second you know the second third fourth rank cities in terms of population. Remember David Simon you know who wrote the wonderful HBO show The Wire and directed said this is the best time in American history for you to be a corrupt mayor a corrupt state lawmaker because there are so few journalisms that are kind of minding the store and trying to prevent corruption. I think at the national level you know the New York Times Washington Post Wall Street

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Journal Pro Publica you know I think they're still doing a very good job covering national issues. But I worry much more about local coverage.

Axelrod: [00:49:22] Mm hmm. And do you I mean one of my concerns is that one one strata that has been erased as a result is is this the resources invested in editing and so you have a lot of journalists out there with the who are now filing perpetually when you and I started there were these things called news cycles where you could actually take time and report and edit right and have your piece edited and have the right questions raised and so on. Now reporters are under enormous but you know this from your time at the times your colleagues your old colleagues at The Times have to file perpetually because there are no. Deadlines anymore. Whenever you get something you're expected to throw it on the web page immediately.

Greenhouse: [00:50:17] So I began at the times in 1983 and left 31 years later in 2014 well into the elect. You know electronic news not digital newspapers. And when I started and in for and for decades and with you too David you know there was like one deadline a day say 6:30 and you try to do your reporting and write your masterpiece by 6:30 then you could go home now and this is the way three years and four years and five years ago when I was still working at the New York Times you know if there was a breaking story at you know 10 a.m. you know you had to get something up on the web in the next half hour hour and then maybe do a new make it better for all you know. And we post by one o'clock and we still had the great write your great polished piece by 5:30 or 6 or 6:30. So you're working much much harder. And I you know and I think there's just in many ways much more stress than they used to be and there's probably less editing. Sometimes I read these fifteen hundred word stories on the web that should be you know 750 words. And you know I think a lot of these places don't have the money for editors they don't have the time to really you know spend to get and.

Axelrod: [00:51:29] There's a sense of this looseness that says well we'll go back and fix that later. But once it's in the public sort of space it's hard to it's you know that's a hard thing to do. So you know I just don't I think there are really a lot of great reporters today and I see a reinvigorated news media because of the events in Washington the approach of Trump and the Trump administration. But there is also the competitive pressure is enormous the pressure to. Produce rapidly I just don't know how you how you have the same level of assiduousness with the absence of you know the time and space to do the reporting.

Greenhouse: [00:52:23] And you don't have the same level of insidiousness but just to be clear you know people try every bit as hard as they did 10 and 20 or 50 years ago to get things right.

Axelrod: [00:52:32] Oh yeah there's no doubt. And like I said I mean I'm I am in awe of some of the reporting that's been done by the Times by the post by the Journal and other outlets pope pro-public as you mentioned. There's a lot of great reporting being done you know out there but I just as an old reporter you know I I I am concerned about the kind of pressures that these reporters are working on in the summer.

Greenhouse: [00:53:00] But the other thing that really worries me is there's an effort to deliberate de-legitimize the press and I think the New York Times The Washington Post The Wall Street Journal you know they try to do a great job every day and get things accurate and not slant things. And you know Donald Trump you know has been criticized a lot by the press. You know what is that what does the press attack politicians for when they lie when they don't make good on promises when their math doesn't add up. When they when they write a book attack a press a fake news an enemy and attack the press as enemies of the people. So you know Donald Trump is the type of politician that the press is going to be tough on.

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Axelrod: [00:53:48] And let me just to respond to that because I would agree with everything on your list. I don't think it's up to the media to respond to Trump when he calls them enemies of the I mean people will make that judgment. I think the one place where I think the media should should be I just do your jobs. You don't have to engage with you. You don't have to engage with the president on whether you're an enemy of the people or whether you're a fake news or just do your jobs. And sometimes the media can be you know a little thin skinned.

Greenhouse: [00:54:24] Yes absolutely and the media sometimes makes mistakes. You know Donald Trump even sometimes makes mistakes and makes inaccurate statements. But you know my concern is that there's you know a significant chunk of the nation now that gets its news from sources that are you know deliberately slanted politically and don't believe the New York Times and The Washington Post and CNN and CBS and ABC and NBC and partly the Wall Street Journal and I worry that if there are tens of millions of people who Jack the accuracy and the truth that are published in what the British call the quality media and the media really have to somehow work to break through of that.

Axelrod: [00:55:05] And well this is part of a larger part of their silence because a lot of the people who are suspicious are also people who feel deeply affronted by the coastal elites. And so when you say the quality media it sort of plays into into that and it's difficult. But you know one of the things that we didn't have to contend with early in our journalism careers was this free flowing discussion on the Internet and social media and are legitimate fake news. And this notion that rather than seeking out new sources to affirm to inform our point of view we look for sources that will affirm our points of view. It's a much more difficult and challenging environment and for that reason I actually admire these young journalists more because there's a lot of static that they have to navigate. Listen I can't let you go without a word about your son because everyone who listens to this podcast or. Follows my. Tweets. I'm embarrassed to say. Knows that I love baseball and I've written a lot about the Cubs and spoken a lot about the Cubs and their amazing rise. Your son is is one of the most valuable players for the Chicago Cubs. But he never picks up a baseball or at least that is not part of his job. Tell me about him.

Greenhouse: [00:56:50] Before I sing the praises of my son I should say I have a wonderful wife and a wonderful daughter too.

Axelrod: [00:56:54] Yes yes. And your daughter is the managing editor of The New Yorker. Yes so she's followed in your footsteps your daughter Emily.

Greenhouse: [00:57:01] Yes. I feel very blessed. And so does my wife so my son is a statistical analyst for the Cubs. He's a sabermetricians for those of you who have seen Moneyball he does with the Jonah Hill character does he study statistics analyzing statistics. Get that gene for you or your father. Yes yes and yes. And so he will study statistics to figure out you know whom. Whom to draft or whom to put on waivers or whom to take waders or to suggest lineups or to suggest less match ups. Yes. You know what's the best matchup between Schwarzer and in this pitcher or. Or you know how should Lester pitch to this person. You know there's a he's one of five or six members of the research department of the Cubs. He was always the first the first member of that department if I understand correctly and refereed by Theo Epstein and he loves it there. He feels blessed. There you know. You know he tells me one of the biggest stories of his life was not just when the series was going on the team bus during that huge parade when there are five million people and it was you know it was astounding for him. And so it's it's you know I think my father was here you know during the war and now my son is here helping the Cubs.

Greenhouse: [00:58:26] Well you know there's those who can play play and those who can't become saber sabers saber-metricians exact saber magicians. Well in this case yes because those guys did incredible stuff. Steve Greenhouse thanks so much for being here and for being here at the Institute of Politics and parting so much to our students here.

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Axelrod: [00:58:49] It's been wonderful to be here and thanks very much.