Nader tells problems of sellers’ market

By Edward Whang

“We have a seller-sovereign economy,” declared consumer advocate Ralph Nader at a lecture held Sunday at Northeastern University.

“We grow up learning how to sell, not how to buy,” he said. Schools offer numerous subjects in business, but provide few classes in consumer education. The schools expect people to know instinctively how to buy, he added.

Consumers are abused as a result of their ignorance, he said, as government establishes regulations to protect corporations, including exclusive licensing, price fixing, and subsidizing.

“What’s at stake here is the environment, the distribution of wealth, and who rules — the political or economic government,” he said. Thomas Jefferson once noted the purpose of government is to limit the power of money, Nader said.

Economic policy starts and ends with the seller, according to Nader. Sellers decide what they want people to buy and what people should know about products. “This problem is due to consumers’ lack of organization,” Nader said.

Distribution of energy resources is an example of this situation, Nader said. “There are two kinds of energy. One is expensive, requires much capital to obtain, and one group can get control of it. The other is renewable, superabundant, and is accessible to all kinds of people.

“The problem with solar energy, however, is that it is available to too many people for Exxon [Corp.] Exxon has no patent on the sun. It is more profitable for Exxon to sell non-renewable forms of energy,” he said.

Many homes used solar energy during the 1920s, but lack of consumer organization has allowed fossil fuels to remain the most widespread form of energy, Nader claimed.

Had consumers organized during the 1920s and 1930s and studied energy efficiency, “the cars of today would not exist,” Nader claimed. “The new cars would get 70 miles per gallon, and 80 percent of car-related deaths would be avoided.”

“In the future we can look forward to more waste, more manipulation, and more poor distribution,” Nader said. The Rengan administration, for example, recently approved use of crushed homes and raw shreds in Frankfurters, he said.

Corporate crime abuses more people than does street crime, he continued. Consumer organization is the only solution to such abuse, he said.

Nader’s lecture, part of the Ford Hall Forum series, was held at Northeastern’s Alumni Auditorium. Richard Neely, attorney general of West Virginia, also spoke Sunday on judicial activism.

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