

Something seems to be broken in our democracy. Citizen voices are not being represented. Our government is instead being run by big corporations for big corporations. As a result, corporate rights and interests are continually expanding and citizen rights and interests are constantly shrinking. An ill-advised war that will cost American lives but benefit numerous corporate interests is just one of many consequences of a corporate-led war on democracy. Here's a look at some of many the ways that corporations are waging war on democracy and taking citizen rights as their spoils.

## Big Business Day 2003

### Corporate Media

Only a handful of companies control almost all of what we see and hear. Just 10 corporations own a controlling interest in the more than 11,000 radio stations, 2,000 television stations, and 1,800 newspapers in North America. In 1984, 50 companies held controlling interests. The result is that dissent is now easily silenced and programming is homogenized. For example, Clear Channel, which owns 1,200+ radio stations, is using its market control to silence protest music and other forms of dissent and local opinion. If only a handful of corporations can monopolize information, democracy will suffer.



### Trade above all

Corporate-dominated trade agreements continue to subvert democracies at home and abroad by promoting trade and corporate profits above all else. Corporations can challenge local rules that interfere with trade before an unelected and unaccountable secret tribunal. Under NAFTA, for example, Canadian company Methanex has sued California for \$1 billion in lost profits over an environmental regulation that bans Methanex's gasoline additive. As journalist Bill Greider has written, NAFTA "hobbles the authority of government to act in the broader public interest. And, in fact, that was the idea in the first place." International trade agreements are making democratic self-governance increasingly irrelevant.

NAFTA



### Vanishing Privacy

The Bush Administration has shamelessly used the War on Terrorism as an excuse to operate a secret government that restricts every American's civil liberties. The proposed Total Information Awareness program will contract with private corporations that have already been profitably compiling and selling records about everything Americans buy and do for years. Corporations continue to push for reduced privacy in areas such as medical records. But while citizens have surrendered their privacy, corporate disclosure laws are severely lacking. For example, consumers and investors do not have adequate access to companies' social and environmental track records.



### Constitutional Rights

Although the Constitution and the Bill of Rights were intended to protect only real people, corporations acquired the rights to equal protection in 1886 as a result of a Supreme Court decision. Over the years, corporations (artificial persons) have claimed constitutional protections time and again to assert their freedom of speech, their right to privacy, and their freedom from discrimination, all the while drowning out individual speech, restricting employee privacy, and dominating almost every aspect of our lives. As long as corporations can use the rights intended for citizens to dominate citizens, equal participation can only be a myth and democracy will suffer.

### Corporate Congress

The ideal of elected officials representing the people has been perverted by a campaign finance system where getting elected is merely a matter of raising the most money. In the last congressional election, the candidate that raised more money won 94% of the races. The average House seat cost \$965,289, while the average Senate seat cost \$5,006,807. Roughly 75% of all campaign money comes from business interests. This means that candidates who want to get money are forced to take pro-business positions in their campaigns and then stick to those positions to get money for re-election. Citizens, however, can't afford to influence the process in the same way, so their voices rarely get heard.

**Want to fight back?**

Visit [www.citizenworks.org](http://www.citizenworks.org) or call 202-265-6164 to learn how you can challenge corporate power.

April 5, 2003

# Stop the Corporate War On Democracy: Big Business Day 2003



## A guide to current and upcoming battles



### MEDIA CONTROL:

In the 1940s, the United States enacted media ownership rules after witnessing how totalitarian regimes used their news media to move the world to war. But over the last 20 years, those rules have been relaxed, and now just ten companies control the vast majority of what we see, hear, and read.<sup>1</sup> Worse, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is considering relaxing those rules even further. But chances are you haven't read about this dangerous deregulation in your local paper or on your evening news program — because chances are your local news provider is busy lobbying the FCC to ease ownership restrictions. This news blackout offers a perfect example of the danger of media concentration: when

only a handful of companies control the media, citizens lack the information they need to participate in democracy. In 1996, the FCC weakened rules on radio ownership. As a result, there are 34% fewer radio owners.<sup>2</sup> In 1996, the largest owner, Westinghouse, held 85 stations. Today the largest owner, Clear Channel, owns more than 1,200 stations.<sup>3</sup> The result has been a disaster: local voices have vanished and programming has become homogenized. Democracy requires multiple voices in order to thrive.

#### RESOURCES:

Media Access Project: [www.mediaccess.org](http://www.mediaccess.org); Center for Digital Democracy: [www.democraticmedia.org](http://www.democraticmedia.org); Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting: [www.fair.org](http://www.fair.org)

### TRADE ABOVE ALL:

International trade agreements are making democratic self-governance increasingly irrelevant by creating supranational structures that put trade on a pedestal above democracy. Current battles are being fought over the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). The FTAA is an attempt to extend the corporate-tilted North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to 34 nations in the Americas. The FTAA, negotiated behind closed doors, will force privatization and deregulation and empower corporations to trump democratic governments when it comes to setting standards for public health and safety, workers rights, and environmental protection. The next round of negotiations

is set for Miami, November 20-21, 2003. The GATS agreement, being pushed by the World Trade Organization (WTO), is an attempt to force countries to open up their basic services to increased privatization, allowing foreign corporations to make a profit off water, health services, and education in developing countries. The next WTO meeting is in Cancún, Mexico from September 10-14, 2003. Both these agreements will trump democratic laws of individual nations and states, making a mockery of democracy.

**RESOURCES:** Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch: [www.tradewatch.org](http://www.tradewatch.org) The Mobilization for Global Justice: [www.globalizethis.org](http://www.globalizethis.org); Global Exchange: [www.globalexchange.org/economy](http://www.globalexchange.org/economy)

### VANISHING PRIVACY:

The latest threat to privacy comes from the Justice Department's new legislative proposal, the so-called Domestic Security Enhancement Act, which, among other dangerous civil liberties rollbacks, would give the government the ability to strip citizenship from anybody who provides support for any group designated as a "terrorist organization" and to wiretap citizens

without court order. The corporate threat to privacy, taking the form of workplace surveillance and buying and selling of consumer records, continues unabated.

#### RESOURCES:

Electronic Privacy Information Center: [www.epic.org](http://www.epic.org); The American Civil Liberties Union: [www.aclu.org](http://www.aclu.org); The Center for Public Integrity: [www.publici.org](http://www.publici.org)

### CORPORATE CONGRESS:

If you're wondering how corporations can get away with all this nonsense, the answer is easy: they dominate the process. Elections tend to be little more than a contest of who can raise the most corporate money. And once elected, candidates are faced with an army of roughly 20,000 corporate lobbyists (about 38 per legislator) to remind lawmakers of all the corporate donations that helped them get where they are and can help them stay there when they are up for re-election. Money buys access, which influences votes and, even more dangerously, influences below-the-radar insertions of special

provisions and loopholes into legislation. Citizens simply can't afford to compete. While the recent campaign finance law is a step in the right direction, only public funding of elections can level the playing field and create true democracy where citizen voices matter. So far, Maine, Arizona, and Vermont have held successful publicly-funded "clean" elections. More states are considering the switch.

#### RESOURCES:

Public Campaign: [www.publiccampaign.org](http://www.publiccampaign.org); The Center for Responsive Politics: [www.opensecrets.org](http://www.opensecrets.org); Common Cause: [www.commoncause.org](http://www.commoncause.org)

### CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS:

As long as corporations can claim constitutional protections, corporations will be able to challenge laws that rein in their bad behavior. For example, the Supreme Court will soon decide whether a California consumer protection law violates Nike's purported First Amendment right to lie in a public relations case. The case should bring into question whether Nike, as a corporation, should even enjoy First Amendment protec-

tions intended for people. As long as an artificial entity can claim the rights of citizens in the process of abusing the rights of citizens, democracy is at stake.

#### RESOURCES:

ReclaimDemocracy: [www.reclaimdemocracy.org](http://www.reclaimdemocracy.org); Program on Corporations, Law and Democracy: [www.poclad.org](http://www.poclad.org); The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom: [www.wilpf.org](http://www.wilpf.org)