

Corporations have become the dominating influence on the lives of all Americans.

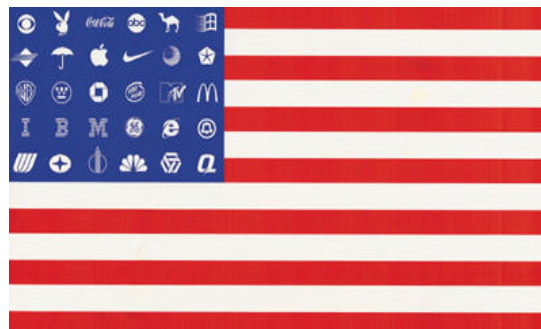
The influence of corporations is creeping into every facet of our lives. Even mainstream business magazines like *Business Week* have noted that corporate power is soaring to astronomical levels and that there is growing discontent among the American population directed towards corporations. The power of corporations has grown at such a rapid pace that of the Top 100 economies in the world, 49 are corporations and only 51 are countries. Corporations are making so much money that the average Fortune 500 (the top 500 companies) CEO is paid 475 times more than what the average worker is paid. The problem with the growth of corporate power is that the average person has no control over it. Corporations are relentlessly marketing their products to us, lobbying our legislators, destroying our environment, and making massive amounts of money doing it-all without our input.

The influence that these corporations have on our lives is not consistent with the ideals on which our country was founded. Corporations are dominating the legislative process through lobbying, creating a pro-business version of the news with their extensive media holdings, preparing our children for lives of consumerism by marketing to children in the public schools, making money off of putting people in debt, or selling us untested genetically modified products. Furthermore, these corporations are owned by a relatively select group of people, yet they dominate the lives of the entire population. The wealthiest one percent of the American population owns 42.1% of the stocks, mutual funds, and retirement accounts, while controlling 38% of the wealth in the United States, giving them an immense influence over our lives. When corporations control the government and are only answerable to shareholders primarily made up of the upper strata of the population, we have an undemocratic system. The Declaration of Independence eloquently stated that all men are entitled to "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness-That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the Consent of the Governed." yet when we have a government dominated by corporate lobbyists these ideals are not being attained.

This year we are calling for a new vision, a break from the corporate powers that control our lives. We want to recapture the spirit that this country on which this country was founded, that of liberty and democracy rather than the domination of our lives by corporations. The first step in declaring independence from corporations is realizing the immense influence they have over our lives. Within this pamphlet, there are examples of how corporations dominate our lives, aimed at proving that this assertion that corporations are controlling our lives is not just rhetoric, but an actual problem. Once we take the first step of realizing the problem we can begin to address it through analysis and action, striving for the ultimate goal of lessening the power corporations have over our lives



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of Happiness.

# How Corporations Negatively Affect...

## Labor

As the second biggest employer in the United States after the federal government, Wal-Mart exemplifies the negative ways in which large corporations impact our working lives. The average Wal-Mart employee earns only \$11,700 per year which is \$2,000 dollars below the poverty line. Wal-Mart has a high enough volume of sales to pay their employees more, yet they chose to pay the CEO \$7.5 million per year while, like many corporations, they pay their employees only an inadequate salary. Wal-Mart also typifies the low-paying service sector jobs that are many former factory employees must work after their parent corporation, for example Converse, moved their production overseas in order to increase profits and pay less money.

## Government

Corporate influence over politics is perhaps the most blatant example of corporations behaving in an undemocratic manner. Both the state and federal legislatures have become dominated by corporate lobbyists donating money to candidates in exchange for "special consideration" for their positions when legislators vote. Legislators are supposed to be representing the people yet they tend to listen to the corporations that donate massive amounts of money and as a result they ignore individuals who can possibly give as much money. This problem is not confined to one party; often times money is donated equally to both parties—huge financial corporations such as Citigroup and Ernest and Young gave nearly equal amounts of money to George W. Bush and Al Gore, making sure that they were covered no matter which party is in office. Who is a legislator going to listen to, a person that is sincere about an issue or a lobbyist that can donate thousands of dollars? Regrettably they listen to the one that can provide the most money.

## Money and Finance

Putting people into debt is big business in the United States. Consumer credit in the U.S. has reached the unprecedented level of \$1.23 trillion. Credit card debt alone amounts to \$528 billion of that total. Creditors are peddling credit to people who are on shaky financial ground. Credit card companies thrive on deceptive marketing practices—marketing people the power to purchase whatever they want, concealing the fact that these purchases are going to incur high interest rates. Financial corporations are consistently among the top donors to political campaigns, as they were in the 2000 presidential elections, when they sought to pass "bankruptcy reform" legislation, making it more difficult for families and businesses to declare bankruptcy and thus ensuring that financial institutions will continue to earn money from placing people in debt.



## Transportation

Since their invention automobiles have been marketed as independence. However this sense of independence comes at a great price—dependence on huge multinational oil corporations. While cars give us independence we have become dependent on an industry that makes its money exploiting and destroying our environment in pursuit of more precious oil. Corporations such as Exxon have dumped millions of barrels of oil into the oceans and Shell has even gone as far as paying people to kill villagers in Africa who refused to give up their right to land containing oil. In addition, automobile emissions are the main source of air pollution in the United States.

## Food

When we purchase food, we are placing a tremendous amount of trust in the corporations that process the food we buy. Yet, these corporations often violate this trust, marketing unhealthy products to the population through relentless advertising. McDonalds, markets their food as healthy, yet their high fat and low fiber food is incredibly unhealthy, in addition to the fact that the production of meat is incredibly damaging to the environment. Producing one pound of beef requires 100 pounds of grain and fifty times more water is needed to produce meat than grain. Corporations have also started to create genetically engineered food and are selling it to the population, often times without proper testing. Recently a brand of corn, Starlink, was found in Taco Bell taco shells, despite the fact that it was only approved for use on animals. This further illustrates that corporations only care about the profits they make, not the safety of the products they are selling.

## Health and Medicine

Within the past couple decades; the power of the pharmaceutical industry has been steadily rising. Drug companies have surpassed almost all other Fortune 500 companies in profit. The root problem is that the corporations pushing these drugs into the market are focused primarily on making money. If a drug sells but does not cure anything – or even causes harm – it is still good business. The marketing campaigns of the drug companies are very influential. They push \$30 - \$40 billion a year worldwide to the effort, or top put another way, big pharmaceutical corporations budget their direct-selling marketing efforts at \$16,000 - \$26,000 per physician.

## News and Entertainment

Approximately six corporations control the majority of news that we watch or read each day. These corporations do not dominate one type of media exclusively, but rather they control many different types. For example the massive AOL Time Warner conglomerate owns AOL, CNN and many other channels, Time magazine and other magazines, and record labels. Corporations can then promote their movies or other products on their news channels, magazines, and Internet services, creating a constant barrage of advertising for their products with different types of media. In Grand Rapids our "local" channels are not really local, as they all are owned by huge corporations, like Clear Channel who owns WBCT-FM, WOOD-FM, WVTI-FM, WCUZ-FM, WOOD-AM, and WTKG-FM, or Gannett who owns WZZM TV-13 and hundreds of other stations across the country. This gives an incredibly homogenized version of the "news" and a highly selective view of news, in which the news is occasionally self-censored in order to avoid offending parent corporations.