

BASTROP UNDER SIEGE

Bastrop county is changing in ways we couldn't even have imagined a decade ago. Population growth and urbanization are the most visible challenges to our resources. But the impact of this influx pales in comparison to the harm that can be done by a few who would hold private gain over public welfare.

By now, just about everybody's heard of ALCOA corporation's plan to stripmine lignite on nearly 15,000 acres of bucolic countryside in northern Bastrop and adjacent Lee counties. No matter that ALCOA's lignite-fueled Rockdale facility has been polluting Texas air for nearly three decades. No matter that it is the largest single point source of grandfathered emissions in the state. No matter that a stripmine will displace residents, devastate the land and shatter the tranquillity of neighboring communities. For ALCOA it's the most cost effective solution. What about the cost to the environment or the citizens of Bastrop?

Adding insult to injury, ALCOA's sweetheart deal with San Antonio opens the door for massive depletion of the Carrizo-Wilcox aquifer at potentially unsustainable rates. ALCOA gets lignite. San Antonio gets water. And Bastrop gets screwed.

Then, cutting across the middle of our county, Longhorn Partners, a limited liability partnership of oil corporation subsidiaries and affiliates, plans to run gasoline through an antiquated oil pipeline from Houston to El Paso. No matter that pipelines leak. No matter that leaking gas could contaminate water and soil creating an environmental nightmare. No matter that there would be an ever-present danger to nearby residents. No matter that legal maneuvering and limited liability would probably protect Longhorn Partners from financial responsibility. You see, it's all about supply, demand and making the connection. We just happen to be in the way. And we're expendable ... to Longhorn Partners.

Sadly, we have plenty of company. Similar scenarios have been playing out on the world stage to varying degrees for centuries. But recent history has seen an escalation of corporate assaults that squander natural resources, pollute the environment, destroy communities, oppress workers and endanger our very survival. These days, hardly anyone's life remains untouched.

Citizens mobilizing to protect their communities soon find that it is an uphill battle. The struggles are long and the victories are few. It is no accident that sovereign citizens have so little control over harmful corporate behaviors. For over a century, the rich and powerful have designed the corporate agenda to systematically manipulate politicians, the courts and most recently the regulatory arena to ensure rights that protect their wealth and continuance while limiting liability and accountability. Today, the masters of the corporate world are solidly entrenched and in charge.

Increasing numbers of seasoned activists are beginning to rethink their strategies and goals. Instead of addressing one corporate harm after another, they are exploring through history the structure of corporations and their relationship to governance and democracy. Shifting to this new approach, a handful of cities, counties, townships, states and most importantly sovereign citizens are taking the first steps to challenge and redefine the role corporations play in our society.

Since we cannot begin to understand where we are until we know where we've been, it is helpful to revisit the lessons of history. After all, our corporate dominated culture didn't evolve overnight. Having dozed through most of high school history, this has been quite an eye-opening journey of discovery for me. And I hope that it will be for you too. Come along for the ride!

1 of WHOSE DEMOCRACY?
next week: Disclaimer: Proceed With Caution
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DISCLAIMER: PROCEED WITH CAUTION

Before embarking on this journey of discovery, be aware that it might take some unexpected and perhaps, controversial twists and turns. There's too much at stake to play it safe and reinforce clichés that ignore unsettling realities. Are you ready for the challenge?

In the weeks ahead, the influence of wealth and privilege on the promise of democracy will be traced from the birth of this nation to today's transnational empires. It is a story not often examined by textbooks, in the classroom or in our collective cultural memory and it has little to do with the glorified, heroic, persistent myths perpetuated by folklore and yearly holiday celebrations. Yet, to a great extent, it has defined our political, economic and cultural identity.

As the men who initiated representative democracy shared common views and ideals that considered both the needs of society and their own self-interest, the legacy of history expresses all the contradictions to be expected. Bringing these shortcomings to light in no way diminishes the vision and noble intentions of the men who drafted the framework for the democratic experiment or those that followed. Instead, an investigation illuminates the dynamics of power that have repeatedly diminished and frustrated the expression of a truly democratic society.

It is misleading to think that democracy was signed, sealed and delivered after the 1776 revolution. In fact, in its infancy it clearly fell short of the promise of equality and popular governance. Since then, the disenfranchised have fought long and hard to be included in the democratic process. But a democracy of, by and for THE PEOPLE remains elusive and might yet go the way of the dinosaur if we're not careful.

Currently the world is on the brink of corporate rule that challenges the sovereignty of nations and individuals. Our own democracy is in a stranglehold of corporate and special interests that mocks the roots of democratic freedoms. Instead of living as sovereign citizens, we have been reduced to the role of consumers or drones in the corporate workplace.

Despite a myriad of distractions and entertainments, the inequality in our social fabric is increasingly evident. And the veneer of political options offers few solutions to the deepening crisis. The rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer and sadly, most everyone is too busy to give it more than a passing thought.

Except for romanticized Hollywood offerings and TV specials, history is not much in the forefront of civic consciousness. And knowledge of the legal framework granting corporate and special privilege remains a mystery to most everyone. That's not too surprising considering the magnitude of the edifice they have created. But it's time to wake up and take a long, hard look. Fasten your seatbelt. Here we go!

2 of WHOSE DEMOCRACY?

next week: In the Beginning There Was Big Money

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IN THE BEGINNING THERE WAS BIG MONEY

The empowering words, WE THE PEOPLE, more than any others embody the promise of democracy. But our collective experience suggests that, in fact, we have very little control over the fate of our communities, our jobs, our schools or even the food we eat, the water we drink or the air we breathe. Our frustration with crumbling communities, plummeting wages, unequal ineffective education and an increasingly polluted and toxic environment prompts us to ask who is really in charge ... and why.

Answers to that question can be found in the history that is all too quickly forgotten or conveniently reinvented. Let's poke around and take a look!

Behind the romanticized myths of Colonial America is the sadly predictable panorama of exploitation of natural and human resources. Great wealth was concentrated into the hands of a few, primarily through the labor of indentured European servants and African slaves. In time, these men of property and privilege wearied of English taxation and sharing the spoils of their exploitations with the English ruling class. Thus, the American revolution was born.

The revolution was promoted primarily by this elite class of propertied, white men who totaled a mere 10% of the population but controlled nearly half the country's wealth. Historian Charles Beard estimates that our legendary first president, George Washington, was likely the wealthiest of the bunch. Then as now, money was power.

The majority of THE PEOPLE, including slaves, indentured servants, women, Native Americans and free-men of insufficient wealth to make the cut, were purposefully excluded from the rights and responsibilities of self-governance. This stunning fact speaks volumes about the intent and purpose of our founding fathers.

Five years after the revolution, the newly independent states ratified the Articles of Confederation. Before long, conflicts that threatened the security of men of property and commerce surfaced in state legislatures, between economic classes and against state authority. The resulting instability was not good for large commercial interests or the accumulation of wealth. So the same propertied, white men organized the 1787 Constitutional Convention to consolidate their power and secure their rights. This meeting was held behind closed doors and the minutes were not made public for 53 years.

The U.S. Constitution drafted at the Convention sparked intense debate, discussion and vocal opposition from the Anti-Federalists. Their words, reaching out over the centuries, speak to issues that still tarnish the promise of democracy today:

“Take the word Federalism directly or indirectly, and it amounts to neither more nor less in its modern acceptance than the conspiracy of the Well-born few against sacred rights and privileges of their fellow citizens.”

“What does this proposed Constitution do? It changes, totally changes the form of your present government. From a well-digested well-formed democratic, you are rushing into an aristocratic government.”

“Upon attentive examination (of the Constitution) you can pronounce it nothing less than a government, which in a few years will degenerate to a complete Aristocracy ... In short, my fellow citizens, it can be said to be nothing less than a hasty stride to Universal Empire in this Western World ... fatal to the liberties of the people.”

In the end, big money had its way. Does any of this sound familiar?

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next week: Working the System

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WORKING THE SYSTEM

People are always talking about money. How there's never enough, how to hold on to it or how to make more. Ever heard anyone complain about having too much?

Folk wisdom has its say in the matter. It takes money to make money. Money is power. Or more philosophically, money is the root of all evil. How about a fusion. Money can buy the power and influence that controls the rules of how to make money. And in the process, a lot of nasty things happen to those lower down on the economic food chain. This story is as old as history.

In Colonial America, a minority aristocracy called the shots on behalf of English kings and their own best interest. The majority of the populace labored, handled the Indians (who were not pleased to be run off their lands), settled the frontier, paid taxes and made it possible for wealth to flow upward into the pockets of a few. Many of these citizens were themselves a property asset of their owners.

Despite the proclamation that all men are created equal, the revolution was more about the protection of wealth and power than the rights of citizens. Remember that only 10% of the population (propertied, white males) had the right to vote and the privilege of governing.

But these men could not have succeeded without the support of those less privileged. Citizens were enticed, in part, to join their cause by the noble rhetoric of the Declaration of Independence which embedded the promise of liberty and equality in our national psyche.

Initially, the Articles of Confederation defined the relationship between the newly independent states. But when citizens began to assert their rights to protect local businesses through state legislatures by imposing tariffs on interstate commerce, their new-found power was skillfully usurped by those with greater assets and a grander vision.

To insure the flow of trade between states, to open markets and to eliminate tariffs, the most influential citizens of the new republic solidified a strategy to protect themselves. First, shift to a more centralized federal government. Then, create a federal army to handle any rebellions that might interfere with the flow of commerce or profits. And, just in case the legislature and president should ever try to reverse the flow of wealth and power, these clever gentlemen stacked the deck with an appointed Supreme Court that could be their ultimate defender. These are among the protections for the privileged that found a place within the democratic framework of the U.S. Constitution!

On the other side of the equation, THE PEOPLE, sensing a discrepancy between the Constitutional promise of democracy and reality, have been fighting for centuries to claim their democratic legacy. We can do it but the battle is far from over.

Don't think that just because you can go into a voting booth every once in a while that democracy is up and functioning. Big money is always a step ahead working the system to best advantage. Money and favors have flowed to politicians, courts have been corrupted and legislative/regulatory bureaucracy put in place to keep the money machine humming. The current method of choice for exploitation, the transnational corporation, is now tightening its noose around the world economy. Can you say "global empire". Ah, yes, there are so many stories to tell ...

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next week: Corporate Evolution/Democratic Devolution, part 1

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CORPORATE EVOLUTION/DEMOCRATIC DEVOLUTION

Part 1

Corporations are so much a part of our cultural landscape that their influence on our lives is barely noticed. In their visibility they have become invisible. We accept their presence as a given and are brainwashed into believing their domination is inevitable.

They dictate what products we can buy, how we are entertained, how we work, our healthcare choices, what makes the news and what goes unreported. They manipulate capital and production and shape decisions that determine the future of our planet. Their influence on government, policy and politicians affects the most basic of human rights: the air we breathe, the water we drink and the food we eat. The democracy of legend and history and media hype is firmly under the thumb and in the shadow of corporate rule.

While our forefathers may have been a bit myopic on certain issues, they were well aware of the shortcomings of corporate rule having experienced it firsthand. The British empire had been chartering corporations for centuries to support commerce and the exploration and exploitation of distant lands. Several of the American colonies were, in fact, Corporate Crown Charters entrusted with controlling local economies to benefit the king. The revolution was directed as much against oppressive corporate rule as against King George himself.

Once freed from the king and his corporations, the newly liberated aristocracy rejected the corporate structure for their economic organization. It is significant that there is no mention of corporations in the U.S. Constitution. Instead, the chartering process was left to the states where corporations were kept on a short leash.

Not everyone was convinced that the decision to allow corporate chartering within the new republic was a good idea. Understanding the anti-democratic tendencies of corporate power, Thomas Jefferson commented, "I hope we shall crush in its birth the aristocracy of our monied corporations which dare already to challenge our government in a trial of strength, and bid defiance to the laws of our country."

Initially, corporations were granted the privilege of incorporation to "serve the public good". Their charters included a limit on the length of incorporation, specific restrictions and liability of boardmembers and stockholders for damages. It was not uncommon for a state to revoke the charter of a corporation that was in violation of the terms of incorporation.

Until the economic shifts of the industrial revolution, corporations were not a major factor in the American landscape. But with the expansion of industry in the latter 19th century, incorporation became the vehicle of choice for big business to consolidate their empires. And the focus of corporations shifted from public service to selfish private interests. However, the restrictions placed on corporations did not please the new captains of industry. So they began to rewrite corporate law and redefine the role of corporations in our society to benefit their purposes, a process which continues to this day.

Shortly before his death Abraham Lincoln observed: "Corporations have been enthroned and an era of corruption in high places will follow and the money power of the country will endeavor to prolong its reign by working upon the prejudices of the people until all wealth is aggregated in a few hands and the Republic is destroyed." And a few years later President Rutherford B. Hayes complained: "This is a government of the people, by the people and for the people no longer. It is a government of corporations, by corporations and for corporations."

In a relatively short time corporations metamorphosed from public servants to public obstructors. Just how did this happen? To be continued ...

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CORPORATE EVOLUTION/DEMOCRATIC DEVOLUTION

Part 2

So just how did corporations manage to dismantle the constraints intended to make them accountable to THE PEOPLE? And how did they involve the Federal government in their quest to redesign the rules of corporate privilege? Every which way they could!

For more than a hundred years, corporations have trained and retained lawyers to manipulate the courts to their advantage at every opportunity. And the umbilical cord attaching corporations to political candidates and legislators has been responsible for not only political careers but for legislation, regulation and even the current corporate money-making scheme of deregulation.

Initially, corporations, chartered by the individual states of the new republic, were kept under close scrutiny. But through political influence wielded by corporations, especially in the late 19th century, protections in the chartering process that benefited THE PEOPLE were decreased while those that benefited corporations were increased. Some states, seeking to attract revenue from substantial incorporation fees, were willing to sacrifice more control than others. Revisions to the chartering codes included redefining the 'lifespan' of corporations from a specified time limit to 'immortality', shielding corporate assets, officers and stockholders through limited liability and weakening control of THE PEOPLE over corporate structure, governance, production and labor.

At the Federal level, several key Supreme Court decisions completely altered the relationship between public and corporate rights. In 1819, the Court, relying on the "contracts clause" of the U.S. Constitution, ruled in *Dartmouth College v. Woodward* that a charter was, in fact, a contract and therefore could not be taken away by the state. Instead of a subordinate entity under control of the laws of THE PEOPLE, the corporation and the chartering state became equal parties in a protected private contract between 'individuals'.

Then in the 1886 *Santa Clara v. Southern Pacific* case, the Court elevated corporations from the status of artificial entities to that of legal 'persons' entitled to all the protections of the 14th Amendment. Yes, the same 14th Amendment that was intended to secure the rights of slaves freed after the civil war. Now, corporations were guaranteed equal protection and due process of the law including the Bill of Rights! Immediately, corporations began using their newly bestowed 'personhood' to advantage. Of 307 cases dealing with the 14th Amendment brought before the Supreme Court between 1890 and 1910, 288 dealt with corporations and only 19 with African-Americans.

Keep in mind that at the time the *Santa Clara* opinion gave corporations the legal rights of "personhood", women and other citizens of the republic did not yet have the right to vote. And ten years after corporations gained the rights of legal 'persons', the Supreme Court, in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, put its official seal of approval on segregation, thus denying African-Americans their newfound rights under the 14th Amendment. How could this happen in a democracy of, by and for THE PEOPLE?

The Supreme Court Justices, often, themselves, former corporate lawyers, are appointed for life by presidents beholden to special interests. Not unexpectedly, the Court has all too often come down on the side of wealth and privilege. In 1895, a New York banker toasted the Supreme Court: "I give you, gentlemen, the Supreme Court of the United States - guardian of the dollar, defender of private property, enemy of spoliation, sheet anchor of the republic." And there it is, folks.

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next week: The Regulatory Charade
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THE REGULATORY CHARADE

Not satisfied with gutting state chartering laws and making Constitutional law the cornerstone of corporate privilege, corporations devised another tactic to protect their rising dominance: the regulatory system. Today we are all too familiar with the alphabet soup of acronyms like FDA, USDA, EPA, FCC and even Texas' own TNRCC to name a few. Over a century of clever public relations has convinced us that they are protectors and watchdogs of the public's interest. We look for their approval on labels in the marketplace and assume they are stewards of our common resources and defenders of citizen welfare. They're on our side, right?

Well, not exactly. Here's how it all started. In 1887, just one year after the *Santa Clara* opinion granting corporations the status of legal 'personhood', the first federal regulatory agency, the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC), came into existence. The idea was hatched by supposedly 'concerned citizens' seeking to control, through federal intervention and assistance, ruthless business practices among railroad corporations.

So exactly who were these citizens and whose welfare was at stake? The engineers of the plan were none other than the culprits themselves, railroad men and other corporate executives with a stake in the economic benefits of a regulated industry.

Their goal was to fix and enforce rates to protect themselves against maverick rate-cutters in the industry and, in effect, eliminate competition. It was a match made in corporate heaven. The federal government, i.e.: the taxpayers, would foot the bill for the costs of administering the program while the corporations were guaranteed a fixed rate of return. They were laughing all the way to the bank.

The ICC also improved corporate public relations. The bureaucratic machinery deflected citizen outrage, kept THE PEOPLE at a safe distance and soothed public perception. A future president of the Union Pacific Railroad wrote, "What is desired ... is something having a good sound, but quite harmless, which will impress the popular mind with the idea that a great deal is being done, when, in reality, very little is intended to be done." The ICC was so successful that other industries soon jumped onto the bandwagon and the regulatory era was born.

Despite ongoing criticism of the regulatory system and sporadic attempts at 'reform', regulatory 'law' continues to be an indispensable tool of corporate domination. Regulatory agencies determine the allocation of natural resources, set guidelines for environmental degradation and even decide the limits of 'acceptable' mortality in the name of corporate profits. In 'cooperation' with trade associations and corporate research and development, they determine what products will come to market and which technologies will shape our collective future. The revolving door between corporate executives and governmental regulatory boards guarantees an official stamp of approval for corporate agendas.

Anyone who has ever tried to address harmful corporate behavior through the regulatory system soon learns the intricacies of the corporate designed rules of engagement. The process is labor intensive, can drag on over years and in the end, is unlikely to make any significant difference. Though a branch may get trimmed here and there, the truth is that corporations have deep roots that will never be unearthed through the regulatory process.

And their roots are now beginning to entangle the world economy through unelected, undemocratic bodies such as the WTO that are dedicated to corporate economic expansion at all costs. The regulations that sovereign nations, including the United States, have put in place to protect their citizens are already being challenged and dismantled in the name of 'free trade'. But that story is for another day.

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next week: Why It's In Your Food

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WHY IT'S IN YOUR FOOD

The regulatory era may have started with industries manipulating the government in their own best interest but regulatory legislation has also been initiated through public pressure for the government to curtail harmful industrial practices, set safety guidelines and protect natural resources. When WE THE PEOPLE demand it, surely, those regulatory agencies serve the public's best interest. Don't count on it.

In 1907, after 25 years of public agitation over harmful food adulteration and misbranding, the Bureau of Chemistry, precursor of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), was officially put in charge of policing the food supply. Bureau Chief Harvey W. Wiley, the Ralph Nader of his day, took on the food processing industry with a vengeance.

The Coca-Cola corporation was at the top of his hit list. But any hopes that enforcement could become reality were quickly put to rest. Political influence worked its magic and Coca-Cola flourished with impunity. His efforts to restrict use of the sweetener, saccharin, met with similar misfortune through savvy industry maneuvering that played on President Teddy Roosevelt's personal use of the substance. Gradually the Bureau's activities were restricted into impotence and those substances that Dr. Wiley fought so hard to remove from the food supply were instead removed from the Bureau's consideration.

Dr. Wiley's 1929 book, The History of a Crime Against the Food Law detailed and exposed the dealings that had scuttled the Bureau's effectiveness. Copies flew off bookstore shelves and mysteriously disappeared into oblivion. Even those donated to libraries intending to preserve the sordid history vanished. Hardly a one can be found today. You follow the dots. So much for freedom of the press in corporate America.

The Bureau of Chemistry was replaced by the Food and Drug and Insecticide Administration which eventually evolved into the Food and Drug Administration. Along the way, the watchdogs of food safety were transformed into cheerleaders for the processed food industry turning priorities upside down. Industry no longer had to prove additives safe BEFORE entering the food supply. Instead Generally Regarded as Safe (GRAS) substances were allowed UNTIL evidence proved them harmful. Sixty years after Dr. Wiley's crusade, saccharin was finally removed from the GRAS list. But the loophole allowing its use in diet food left the victory hollow.

The corporate/FDA partnership continues to this day. In recent years, their enthusiastic support of food irradiation, despite public opposition, has been blatant evidence of their lovefest. Irradiation, they say, is the solution to an increasingly contaminated food supply. Instead of addressing the economic and labor practices responsible for creating a filthy, industrialized food processing industry, they have cooked up a 'bandaid' solution that will only compound risks to consumers and endanger hundreds of irradiation facility sites with the possibility of nuclear contamination. Produce, grains, spices, pork, poultry and beef have already been approved for irradiation.

By the way, another player, the Department of Energy's (DOE) Byproduct Utilization Program (BUP), is in on this one. They have decided that a cost effective solution to their radioactive waste disposal problem is to privatize it for corporate profit and let the public bear the health, environmental and negative financial consequences.

At one time, prominent labeling with the radura symbol, a visible deterrent to wary consumers, and the words 'treated by irradiation' was required. Now, thanks to their congressional buddies, labeling will only be required in the fine print on the back of a package. Irradiation may not even be mentioned by name. Be on the lookout for euphemisms like 'cold pasteurization'. Have you lost your appetite yet?

CORPORATE 'PERSONS'? GIVE ME A BREAK!

It's no secret that corporations are always looking for creative ways to manipulate the judicial system. And in 1886, they hit the jackpot: corporate Constitutional rights!

The story of this addition to the list of corporate privileges begins in 1868 with the 14th Amendment to the United States Constitution which was intended to protect the rights of slaves freed after the Civil War:

SECTION 1. All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any **person** of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any **person** within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

Corporate lawyers quickly realized that corporations could challenge many legislative and legal constraints if the courts determined that the 'persons' protected by the 14th Amendment included corporate 'persons'. By 1870 this rationale was being presented before the courts and quietly gaining acceptance. Before long, the idea of expanding corporate rights through corporate 'personhood' blossomed into a national campaign.

At the top of the judicial pecking order, the U.S. Supreme Court was well aware of the push for corporate 'personhood'. Finally, in 1886 Chief Justice Waite made corporate Constitutional rights an official reality. By uttering just a few sentences before oral argument was presented in *Santa Clara v Southern Pacific*, the legal fictions known as corporations were granted the same equal protection of the laws as living breathing persons under the 14th Amendment:

"The Court does not wish to hear argument on the question whether the provision in the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which forbids a State to deny any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws, applies to these corporations. We are all of the opinion that it does."

These few words, uttered by a Chief Justice lost in the anonymity of history, turned the relationship of corporations to sovereign citizens upside down. And things have not been the same since.

A few years later in 1889, access to due process of law under the 14th Amendment was added to corporate privilege. As a result, corporate 'persons' were able to evade responsibility and accountability even more effectively. In time, corporations were given the right to lobby congress and to contribute to political candidates because the 1st Amendment grants 'persons' the right of free speech. And under the 4th Amendment, corporate 'persons' gained protection from unreasonable search and seizure even in the face of flagrant safety, environmental and human rights violations. Currently, corporations are seeking to expand their arsenal of privileges through the 1964 Civil Rights Act which was intended to protect minorities. And, by the way, when working on corporate property for corporate 'persons', natural persons may lose many of their Bill of Rights protections! Wielding the hammer of 'personhood', corporations have gained the power to, in effect, run our government, disregard the welfare of persons and the environment with impunity, dictate the terms of our freedoms and thumb their noses at us in the process.

The corporate lobby has maintained the precedent of 'personhood' in congress and the courts for over a hundred years. But there have been critics. Two well-respected Supreme Court Justices, Hugo Black (in 1938) and William O. Douglas (in 1949), wrote opinions opposing corporate personhood. And in the 1930s, Edward T. Lee presented a Joint Resolution to the U.S. House and Senate to reverse the interpretation that corporations are entitled to the rights of natural persons under the 14th Amendment.

Today after over a century of exploitation by corporate 'persons', citizens, waking up to the reality of impending global corporate rule, are finally beginning to say, "ENOUGH!" Want to get in a corporations face? Tell them you don't recognize their right to 'personhood' under the 14th Amendment. That's exactly what the city council of Point Arena, California did on April 25, 2000 by passing a resolution rejecting the concept of corporate 'personhood'. While the resolution has no legal standing, it does send a message: Corporations have abused their illegitimate Constitutional rights for too long. And WE THE PEOPLE are going to do something about it!

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next week: Thanksgiving

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THANKSGIVING

Traditionally, this is the season to reflect on our good fortune and blessings. This year let's take a moment to assess our lives on the background of a larger canvas. Is it really liberty and justice for all?

The discrepancies between popular myth and reality, indicate that the government designed by the Founding Fathers favored specific economic interests in the new Republic. And history supports that a wealthy and privileged elite has to a great extent determined the course of our nation from its infancy, despite the illusion of public self-determination in the voting booth. Today, it is increasingly clear that, in the shadow of corporate rule, the current dynamics of governance are serving the majority Americans less and less. Those at the top of the economic food chain are still running the show and WE THE PEOPLE are still paying the price. Whose democracy, indeed!

* Today less than 1% of the U.S. population owns over 40% of the wealth. The average citizen, on the other hand, is working longer hours for less pay than a few years ago. Our illusion of freedom guarantees complacent support of the corporate agenda.

* Corporate movers and shakers have unlimited access to and influence over politicians. Corporations are granted favorable legislation (often penned by corporate lawyers!) and exorbitant financial benefits (corporate welfare). Average citizens pay taxes and are likely receive form letters of political rhetoric for their attempts to influence the democratic process.

* Election reform is desperately needed. **All voices need to be heard in a democracy.** The stranglehold of special interests on the political process virtually eliminates any opposition to the status quo of two party clones.

* Justice is for sale in America. Corporate 'persons' can always outspend and outlast ordinary citizens in a legal battle.

* The wonders of medical research are touted in the media but the skyrocketing costs of the for-profit health care system slip out of reach for more Americans every day. The solution to exploding cancer and chronic disease is not more for-profit pharmaceuticals and protocols but in requiring corporations to clean up and eliminate the toxic technologies that are assaulting our health and environment.

* The corporate-owned media filters the news to suit their interests in a manner that verges on censorship. As a FOX TV station manager said in 1998, "We (the FOX TV network) paid \$3 billion for these television stations. We will decide what the news is. The news is what we tell you it is."

* The corporate co-optation of the UN is reducing that organization to little more than an international chamber of commerce. The rest of corporate global colonization is being accomplished by trade agreements such as NAFTA and unelected, anti-democratic bodies like the World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund, and World Bank that are orchestrating the foundations of a corporate world government.

Unlimited economic growth is a doomsday machine. We are on a treadmill to nowhere following the illusions hawked by corporate spinmeisters. Our insatiable desire for techno gizmos, entertainments, recreations, gas-guzzling SUVs and a whole galaxy of consumer delights has us locked in an out-of-control cycle of consumption and debt. Our pseudo-freedom, which amounts to nothing less than economic servitude, is the motherlode of corporate profits.

Attempts to regulate or reform corporate behavior through the available, corporate-friendly channels is a sham. What is needed is a fundamental rethinking of corporations, of their dominance in our society, of their intrusion into our lives and of their usurpation of the democratic process. Despite its imperfections, the adaptable, self-regulating system of representative democracy does contain mechanisms to reshape the course of history. If WE THE PEOPLE wake up to the possibility of a truly self-determining, democratic society and use our heritage wisely, corporations may once again become subservient entities and our freedom from corporate rule regained. Now, that would really be something to be thankful for!

REALITY CHECK

The days are getting shorter and cooler as winter approaches. For those of you who might want to curl up by the fire with a good book and venture into territory not likely to be covered by corporate controlled media, here are some suggestions that will educate, challenge and hopefully, inspire your involvement. After all, that's what democracy is all about!!!'

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Suggested web sites:

Program On Corporations, Law & Democracy (POCLAD): www.poclad.org
Woman's International League for Peace and Freedom: www.wilpf.org
Redwood Coast Alliance for Democracy: www.iiiipublishing.com/alliance.htm

Freedom of the press still does exist and thankfully is very alive and well right here in Smithville! And please consider the following: 'If you don't like the news, go out and make some of your own!'

Happy Holidays one and all!!