

Commons Sense

by Jan Edwards

We in the Alliance for Democracy are concerned with corporate rule and corporate power not just because corporate managers are greedy, or that corporations should not be considered persons with constitutional rights, or because of job outsourcing and labor exploitation, unfair trade practices, cheating, destroying of small downtowns, or the McSameness of it all. It's not even because of the damaging effect corporate power is having on our democracy. The reason we are working to end corporate rule is because corporations are destroying all life on this planet.

Does that seem like an extreme statement? I am not saying that is the corporate goal, but it is the effect just the same. Not only corporations are to blame here—we are all complicit—but corporate managers and owners are leading the charge into oblivion and concerned citizens (now reduced to consumers) have few choices but to follow or start a movement to reclaim the Commons.



graphic: Kjersten Jeppesen

Education and Actions for Spring Water Days

Water is the essence of life. But, now, because water resources are finite and increasingly polluted, a public resource for the benefit of all has become Blue Gold for corporate profit. Transnational corporations like Nestle, Coca Cola, Pepsi are moving aggressively to make us all dependent on bottled water while other corporations like RWE and Suez want to control our municipal services.

To ensure safe and affordable water for all now and in the future, we must work together to guarantee that water—the most essential of the Commons—continues to be held in the public trust.

The Fourth World Water Forum, being held in Mexico City this year from March 16-22, is sponsored by the water corporations and their financial backers, including the IMF and the World Bank. Activists from around the world will be there holding alternative forums and demonstrations proclaiming that water is a human right.

Join these activists by planning an event in your area on March 22, World Water Day. This is the last day of the World Water Forum in Mexico City. Team up with local churches and labor constituencies to have an event, forum or show movies like *Thirst* (62 minutes) and *In the Light of Reverence* (73 minutes).

Take pictures and write a story of your action for the next issue of *Justice Rising*, which will concentrate on Water for Life. Send them to rtp@mcn.org by 4/15/06. See the AfD "Defending Water for Life" Campaign, www.thealliancefordemocracy.org/water for more information.

While many of us anti-corporate activists study in detail what we are against—memorizing obscure law cases from the 1800's, counting up how much Halliburton has profited from the Iraq war, trying to decipher details of Enron's accounting practices, and assessing the threat of the trade agreements—it is also important to be clear on what we are for. What are our values, visions and hopes for the future?

Humans have struggled with concepts of private property for thousands of years. But what were things like before this tangle of rules? How do indigenous people look at the Commons?

Nature has its own laws and we have been ignoring them at our peril. The gifts of the Commons—air, water, forests, oceans, DNA, etc—are part of a common inheritance of all cre-

ation. They are interconnected, interdependent and designed to be shared. Human beings are part of the Commons, and dependent on the Commons, not rulers of it.

Our human ancestors created a Cultural Commons we also inherit. From the wheel, fire and language to chess and science, we all build on the store of "intellectual property" that is in our common domain. But at rapid speed both the natural and Cultural Commons are being privatized, primarily by corporations, and their resources depleted beyond redemption. The results include species extinction, ozone holes, rising temperature of land and sea, deforestation, pollution, and a grab to patent everything from Basmati rice to our own DNA. Though part of the Commons, the airwaves are, for practical purposes, corporate owned. Corporations are finding ways to take more from the Commons while giving little back.

It's time for a close look at what should be private property and what should not. Are there parts of our world that are not property at all? What can we do to reverse the race toward total privatization? How can we as human beings protect the Natural Commons for ourselves and all the creatures who depend on it? How will we choose to share the Cultural Commons with each other and future generations?

Will it be Nature's Plan or the Corporate Plan? That is why the Alliance for Democracy is interested in the Commons—to save life as we know it.

Jan Edwards is the creator of the "Timeline of Personhood Rights and Powers" and the Tapestry of the Commons. She is working on a book which looks closely at our relation to the Commons. Contact her at janedwards@mcn.org.