

Corporate Funded War On Our Democracy and the Planet

by Jim Tarbell

Both the 1980 and 2010 election cycles started wars for campaign contributions. Both followed Supreme Court decisions that dramatically narrowed the definition of political bribery and campaign finance corruption. In both situations the Republicans smashed the Democrats in the first battles of those wars.

In 1976, the Supreme Court decided that money is equal to speech. Two years later they gave corporations free speech rights and suddenly corporate money flooded the campaign finance system. In 1980, Republicans overwhelmed Democratic fundraising by a ten-to-one margin, pushing Jimmy Carter out of the White House and bringing the Reagan Revolution to town.

Now the 2010 results show that, after two Supreme Court decisions once again unleashed corporate campaign money, fundraising in the 2010 election cycle again turned campaign finance on its head. Figures from the Center for Responsive Politics show that in 2010, "Outside interest groups spent more on election season political advertising than party committees for the first time in at least two decades, besting party committees by about \$105 million (and) the amount of independent expenditure and electioneering communication spending by outside groups has quadrupled since 2006." Conservative independent groups outspent liberal groups by more than a two-to-one margin in 2010.

"Independent" campaign expenditures, are supposed to operate independently of official campaigns, but the word "independent" must be taken with a grain of salt. Since they were first established in 1980, they have hardly been independent. Lyn Nofziger, deputy chairman for communications for the Republican National Committee, Executive Director of the California Committee to Re-Elect Nixon and Reagan's Press Secretary, told *New Yorker* writer Elizabeth Drew, "There is no way, if I am running an independent campaign, I'm not going to get the information I need...or talk to the chairman of the national committee." Campaigns share information through pollsters and, as a political consultant pointed out, "The way you get messages back and forth is through the national committee or the Senate or House campaign committees."

Back in the '80's, it was clear where the corporate money was coming from. In 2010, the Center for Responsive Politics estimated that there had been at least \$128 million of undisclosed corporate donations, although the actual amount is unknown.

Election night 2010 made it apparent that once again money power was driving the results and this



time it was secret corporate money doing the deed. One of the fears that night was that this new tsunami of money was ushering in a whole new era of politics. It was apparent that secret corporate money was funding more negative attack ads than ever before, and then Karl Rove, the notorious Republican operative, who was central to the development of huge corporate funded independent political committees in 2010, promised to keep running attack ads even after the elections were over.

The specter of 24/7 political campaigns, 365 days a year, is horrifying for our democracy. Back in the '80s, when this rush for money all began, Elizabeth Drew had noted that the push for money in political campaigns was leading elected officials to spend an overwhelming amount of their time raising campaign funds and giving us "politicians who are exhausted, who can't think clearly, who don't think about the broad questions.... Who don't lead."

Now, Democrats are reacting in the way they reacted in 1981. Then, after being outspent ten-to-one, losing the White House and dozens of seats in Congress, they realized they too had to go after corporate money. Now, in 2011, the Democrats are again playing catchup with a vengeance. So far this year \$1.15 million has been spent on ads targeted at candidates for 2012 Congressional seats. Over one million of that has been spent opposing candidates. The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee has already spent over \$600 thousand attacking vulnerable House Republicans and the newly formed Democratic House Majority PAC has spent over \$263,000 on the same targets. The Democrats also created three more such committees this spring.

In a world of constant campaigns, our "representatives" will become corporate robots. They will carry out an agenda that depletes our diminishing resources and destroys the planetary climate system. The war is on for corporate dollars and our future and that of the planet could certainly be the losers.

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Murdoch & Saudis?

by Michael Collins and Sheila Parks

The Supreme Court decided that US corporations can make unrestricted independent contributions to political candidates. Many US corporations are partially owned by foreign investors. For example, any funds donated by Rupert Murdoch's News Corp means funding, in part, by Saudi Arabian money since a Saudi investor owns 7% of the company. As ridiculous as this sounds, it's true and it didn't bother the Supreme Court one bit. Chief Justice Roberts and his foreign investor-friendly majority literally outsourced democracy.