

# People Power Comes Alive

by Jim Tarbell

Events around the world in the past year have demonstrated that people are beginning to push back against corporate power. Suddenly participatory citizens have begun telling the government what to do, putting the dominating roles of corporations, dictators and military tyrants under attack globally. The drive to end corporate personhood has become a central focus of people's demands in the United States.

This drive was central to the great movement in Wisconsin that opposed corporate-financed attacks on workers. Last August, it also instigated the first-ever Democracy Convention in Madison, which declared "A new movement — a democracy movement — was born in the streets of Seattle on November 30, 1999. This movement's early years were not easy. Pro-democracy organizers faced crisis after crisis: the stolen presidential elections of 2000 and 2004; the militarization of America that followed September 11th; the Supreme Court ruling that corporations wield Constitutional rights to buy elections; and today, an economic crisis that is being used to impose fiscal austerity and corporatization schemes on our states and people. Through these difficult struggles, the new democracy movement has taken form, expanded, and matured." Now this movement has come of age and is producing results in cities and states across the country.

In 2011, city councils from Fort Bragg to Los Angeles passed resolutions supporting a Constitutional Amendment to end corporate personhood. After the vote in Los Angeles, Move to Amend organizer Mary Beth Fielder declared "This is an incredibly historic day. Los Angeles is the first major city in the United States to call for a Constitutional Amendment calling to clearly establish that only human beings are entitled to Constitutional rights and that money is not the same as free speech. It provides the basis to overturn the Citizens United decision; to get the money out of politics and put the people back in charge. It's a great day for Los Angeles and it's a great day for the

**"We cannot allow corporate money to manipulate our democracy."**

Caucus of the New York City Council



LA Council President, Eric Garcetti, and Mary Beth Fielder announcing passage of resolution challenging corporate personhood.

United States of America. I hope this is the vote heard around the world that really is a symbol to the rest of the country that they can do the same as we've done and together we're going to develop the grassroots support we need to actually amend our Constitution and that's going to be done sooner rather than later."

Los Angeles City Council President Eric Garcetti added, "Every struggle to amend the Constitution began as just a group of regular Americans who wanted to end slavery, who thought women should vote, who believed that if you're old enough to be drafted, you should be old enough to vote. These are how American amendments move forward from the grassroots when Americans say enough is enough. This becomes the official position of the City of Los Angeles, we will officially lobby for this. I also chair a group which oversees all the Democratic mayors and council members in the country and we're going to share this with all our 3,000 members and we hope to see this start here in the west and sweep the nation until one day we do have a Constitutional Amendment which will return the power to the people."

Meanwhile grassroots efforts took corporate personhood directly to the voters. In Madison and Dane County, Wisconsin, 84% of the voters approved two separate resolutions supporting a Constitutional Amendment declaring that only human beings are entitled to Constitutional rights. Then in November, in Boulder, Colorado, 74% of the voters supported a ballot measure calling for an amendment stating that corporations are not people and rejecting the legal status of money as free speech.

So far in 2012, at a clip of almost two city councils a week, Portland, Maine and Portland, Oregon, Duluth, Minnesota and Pueblo, Colorado along with the Big Apple, New York City, all passed resolutions supporting a Constitutional Amendment ending corporate personhood. A press release from the caucus of New York City councilors that got the resolution through said, "We believe that corporations should not share the same rights as people, that unlimited and unreported corporate donations meant to sway the electoral process should not be considered freedom of speech, and that the government should regulate the raising and spending of money by corporations intended to influence elections. We cannot allow corporate money to manipulate our democracy."