

Policy Makers

Committed to Public Values or Corporate Agendas?

by Jim Tarbell

Corporate rule depends on government enacting corporate-friendly policies. To achieve this, economic elites use three basic strategies:

- They finance political candidates committed to corporate agendas (see [Money in Democracy Part 1](#));
- They hire former government policy makers to be their lobbyists (see [Money in Democracy Part 2](#));
- They have people appointed to government policy-making positions who are dedicated to corporate agendas.

This last strategy has been entrenched since George Washington appointed his wealthy compatriots to the first Supreme Court and made the scion of big New York and British money, Alexander Hamilton, the first Secretary of the Treasury. Two-and-a-quarter-centuries later, this model's effectiveness is still being demonstrated by the Supreme Court whose corporate-lawyer majority eliminated restrictions on campaign finance; by corporate CEOs Dick Cheney and Don Rumsfeld who privatized the military; and by Tea Party congressmen who hire corporate lobbyists as their Chiefs of Staff and block legislation dealing with the disaster of climate change.

Revolving-door appointments are such an obvious benefit to corporate elites that filling a key government position with a corporate advocate will measurably raise a corporation's stock price. The whole system is so entrenched in Washington that Jesse Eisinger of Pro Publica recently concluded an article in the *New York Times* saying,

Washington today resembles something like the end of Animal Farm. People move from one side of the table to the other and up and down the Acela corridor with ease. An outsider looking at a negotiating table would glance from lobbyist to staff member, from colleague to former colleague, from pig to man and from man to pig and find it impossible to say which is which.

On top of this, corporations use government service as a training school for their future lobbyists. This is particularly obvious when former members of Congress and their staff become highly-paid corporate lobbyists who then get their old Congressional buddies to enact policies favorable to the corporate agenda.

The political culture in Washington DC has failed to institute polices capable of ending the damage caused by this revolving door. In 2009 President Obama tried to prevent corporate capture of federal agencies by proclaiming a screen against appointing representatives of special

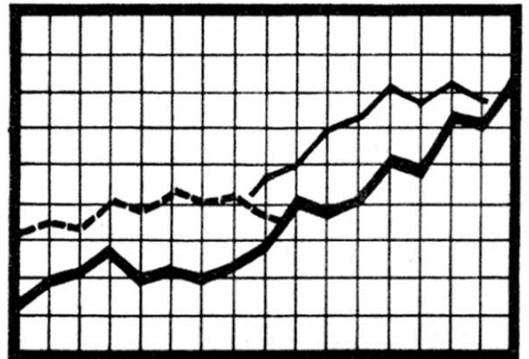
interests to positions within his administration. In his second term, however, these screens — although a beginning in fixing the problem — have not prevented him from appointing agency heads like Citigroup top manager Jack Lew to Treasury; former Wall-Street, corporate lawyer Mary Jo White to the Security and Exchange Commission; Hyatt Hotel heiress Penny Pritzker to Commerce; and corporate energy-funded professor Ernest Moniz to Energy.

How can we make sure that we have public servants who see the forest for the trees and not as a corporate profit line? How can we end the merry-go-round depicted on the cover of this *Justice Rising* where corporate minions stroll around Washington carrying briefcases filled with corporate policies in one direction and policies profitable to their corporate overlords and themselves in the other direction?

Those are the questions and scenarios that we investigate in this *Justice Rising*. We highlight the words of Martin Luther King who in 1967 called for a “radical revolution of values” to “rapidly shift from a thing-oriented society to a person-oriented society.” Our failure to implement such a radical revolution of values over the ensuing 45 years leads Chris Hedges to declare our corporate-driven initiatives “insanity.” He implores our government to stop these policies of “craziness” and move toward a culture that values the sacred nature of life and promotes the ongoing health of the natural world and our place within that great system.

We have to move our political culture away from corporate agendas before it ruins life as we know it. We can do this by creating a corps of public policy makers dedicated to principles that benefit both people and the planet and by instituting a separation between corporations and State. To get this done, we have to exert people power demanding that government be committed to public values not corporate agendas.

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IT'S ALL IN HOW YOU LOOK AT IT... 2008

graphic: John Chamberlin