

yes! magazine

Published by
Positive Futures Network
P.O. Box 10818
Bainbridge Island, WA 98110-0818
206/842-0216
www.yesmagazine.org

FAX: 206/842-5208
subscriptions: 800/937-4451
email: yes@yesmagazine.org

Building a Just and Sustainable World

DISCUSSION GUIDE | ISSUE 43 | CORPORATE POWER

YES! Discussion Guides are designed to help you explore your own experiences, opinions, and commitments as they relate to material found in YES! magazine. Use them in group discussions, classrooms, or study circles. We believe that when people discuss with mutual respect and caring the critical issues of our time, they create a powerful avenue for constructive social change.

You can find the articles mentioned below on our website at www.yesmagazine.org. You are welcome to download and photocopy them free of charge. If you'd like to purchase multiple copies of YES! or subscriptions for your class or group, please phone 800/937-4451 and ask for the Discussion Group Discount.



By Zach Kyle and Catherine Bailey

Our society faces numerous crises. Global warming, a shrinking middle class, a compromised democratic process, and exploitation of the developing world are challenges we must overcome if we are to live as responsible members of a peaceful global community. Reducing the power of corporations is part of the key to solving these problems and setting us on a better course. This issue of YES! shows how people are taking on corporations, and in doing so, building a more hopeful and just future.

This discussion guide focuses on the following articles:

- Michael Marx and Marjorie Kelly, “Who Will Rule?”
- David C. Korten, “Better Than Money”
- Doug Pibel, “Communities Take Power”
- Gar Alperovitz, Steve Dubb, and Ted Howard, “7 Cool Companies”

Who Will Rule?

By Michael Marx and Marjorie Kelly

For decades, people have worked to reduce corporate control over their lives, communities, and resources. Independent campaigns have won major victories in the fight to protect the environment, secure labor rights, block unjust trade agreements, and defend against corporate encroachment. Yet it has become apparent that without unified, collective action, and a firm plan for change, “we may win many battles, but will lose the war.” Marx and Kelly of the Strategic Corporate Initiative (SCI) explore the dangers of corporate governance, the possibilities of a better system, and how we can get there by eliminating corporate domination within our society.

- What are some of the arguments for and against preventing corporations from lobbying or financing campaigns?

- The Telecommunications Act of 1996 deregulated the media industry, allowing for massive consolidation into the hands of five owners. How has news coverage has changed as a result?

- Are corporations serving the common good? If so, how? If not, how can we encourage corporations to adopt more responsible business practices?

- Marx and Kelly believe that we should limit the areas of society in which for-profit companies can operate. What would be the advantages and disadvantages of this? In your opinion, from which areas of society should corporations should be banned?

- Consider the historic scorecard on pages 20 and 21. Which examples of people's victories, and which examples of corporate victories, most surprise you? Why?

Communities Take Power **By Doug Pibel**

Corporate power often trumps community decision-making. Corporations set up shop in communities that don't want them, and they take advantage of public resources. The residents of Barnstead, New Hampshire attacked the "settled law" of corporate personhood by asserting that only humans have constitutional rights, and they have the final say on what is good for their community. Barnstead joined a movement of communities that passed ordinances protecting water sources and banning sewage dumping and mining. Across the country, people are proving that common sense can prevail.

- Consider the article, "Democracy Unlimited," by Kaitlin Sopoci-Belknap, on page 29. The citizens of Humboldt County rallied to protect their election system from corporate money. What difference does it make to involve the entire community in limiting the power of outside corporations instead of just letting the city commission handle it?

- Many of the people fighting hardest to maintain local autonomy are not activists, or even self-identified Liberals. What is the effect of having a politically diverse anti-corporate movement?

- Do you know of any natural resources that are being exploited or controlled by corporations in your community? If so, how do you feel about this? If not, can you think of what resources might come under corporate control?

- Pibel compares the anti-corporate movement to uprisings of the past, like the abolitionist and women's suffrage movements. What similarities and differences do you see? Do you think the anti-corporate movement will achieve the success of these others?

Better Than Money **By David C. Korten**

The structure of constant-growth economies pits the future of humans against corporations. Efficient companies cannot simply replicate huge profit of the year before, they must increase profits to appease stockholders. The result is corporate corner-cutting, such as stripping employees' pensions and benefits, using money to influence political deregulation and tax breaks, and polluting public resources. Korten envisions a new model of prosperity, one centered around human well-being. Making the shift requires sweeping change, he says, but our collective survival depends on our ability to transform the values driving the economy.

- Korten says we must move away from a system that values only money to a system that values well-being. How might this idea into change day-to-day life? How can you begin to remove money from your concept of prosperity?

- Korten says the government can rein in corporate abuse by rewarding responsible business practices with subsidies, tax exemptions, and contracts. He says the government should also punish irresponsible practices with taxes and penalties. To what extent do you think such measures would succeed? What other incentives and punishments would persuade businesses to serve the public?

- Korten challenges prevailing definitions of prosperity. What does prosperity mean to you? How does your idea compare to Korten's?

- What might an alternative prosperity standard look like? What factors would measure nations' economies

of well-being? In what ways, if any, would poor people benefit from such a shift? Middle-class people? Wealthy people?

- Do you think that those invested in corporate rule can be persuaded to accept a new set of values when the current system gives them so much?

7 Cool Companies

By Gar Alperovitz, Steve Dubb, and Ted Howard

In the United States, worker-run companies and alternative business models are becoming increasingly common. These new alternatives to corporate power distribute wealth more equitably among their employees. They use profits to benefit workers and communities, not just shareholders and executives. Companies blend economic interest with social responsibility, proving that mission-driven work and a bottom line are not mutually exclusive.

- What are some of the pros and cons of a worker-run business?

- California’s Public Employees’ Retirement System (CalPERS) uses public pension funds to invest in low-income communities and challenge excessive CEO pay. Its direct investments create high-wage jobs where there would otherwise be none. Do you think this is an appropriate use of pension money? How would you feel if your pension funds were used for similar purposes?

- How do you think personal motivation and overall work ethic differ in a for-profit, investor-owned company compared to an employee-owned company?

- Some of these alternative companies have annual revenues or assets worth millions or billions of dollars, suggesting alternative business models can thrive on any scale. Do you think your workplace could function under one of these alternative models? Would you welcome such a change, or would you be skeptical? How would it change your work life? How would it change your behavior in your workplace, and that of your co-workers?

SUBSCRIBE!



- One Year for \$24
- Two Years for \$38

Sustainer contribution \$15 \$25 \$ _____

We appreciate the extra support!

- 3 or more subscriptions \$16 each
(list on a separate page)

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____

ZIP _____ COUNTRY _____

E-MAIL (OPTIONAL) _____ PHONE _____

YES! subscriptions\$ _____
*Canada/Mexico add \$5/year,
 other non-U.S. add \$9 postage.....\$ _____*

YES! issues \$6.50 each* for 1-4 copies
(list issues).....\$ _____
 *+ shipping and handling:
 U.S. \$2 + 5% of order,
 non-U.S. \$3 + 10% of order\$ _____
(call us for discounts on larger quantities)

Total enclosed\$ _____

- Check
- VISA
- Mastercard

CARD # _____ DG33

EXPIRATION DATE _____ NAME _____

Please send in U.S. funds, payable to **YES!**
 P.O. Box 10818
 Bainbridge Island, WA 98110-0818, USA
 FAX 206/842-5208 or call toll-free 800/937-4451