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Chris Hedges: Smart Guy

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BUZZFLASH GUEST COMMENTARY

"Private capital tends to become concentrated in [a] few hands, partly because of competition among the capitalists, and partly because technological development and the increasing division of labor encourage the formation of larger units of production at the expense of the smaller ones."

"The result of these developments is an oligarchy of private capital the enormous power of which cannot be effectively checked even by a democratically organized political society. This is true since the members of legislative bodies are selected by political parties, largely financed or otherwise influenced by private capitalists who, for all practical purposes, separate the electorate from the legislature. The consequence is that the representatives of the people do not in fact sufficiently protect the interests of the underprivileged sections of the population. Moreover, under existing conditions, private capitalists privately control, directly or indirectly, the main sources of information (press, radio, education). It is thus extremely difficult, and indeed most cases impossible for the individual citizen to come to objective conclusions and to make intelligent use of his political rights."

-- Albert Einstein wrote this in 1949 in the "Monthly Review" in explaining why he was a socialist.

The following is an excerpt from Chris Hedges' recent book, "[Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle](#) [1]":

Corporations are ubiquitous parts of our lives, and those that own and run them want them to remain that way. We eat corporate food. We buy corporate clothes. We drive corporate cars. We buy our fuel from corporations. We borrow from, invest our retirement savings with, and take out our college loans with corporations and corporate banks. We are entertained, informed, and bombarded with advertisements by corporations. Many of us work for corporations. There are few aspects of life left that have not been taken over by corporations, from mail delivery to public utilities to our for-profit health-care system. These corporations have no loyalty to the country or workers. Our impoverishment feeds their profits. And profits, for corporations are all that count.

The corporation is designed to make money without regard to human life, the social good, or the impact of the corporation's activities on the environment. Corporation bylaws impose a legal duty on corporate executives to make the largest profits possible for shareholders. In the 2003 documentary film "The Corporation" by Mark Achbar, Jennifer Abbott, and Joel Bakan, management guru Peter Drucker tells Bakan: "If you find an executive who wants to take on social responsibilities, fire him. Fast." And William Niaskanen, chair of the libertarian Cato Institute, says that he would not invest in a company that promoted social responsibility.

A corporation that attempts to engage in social responsibility, that tries to pay workers a decent wage with benefit, that protect workers' rights, that invests its profits to limit pollution, that gives consumers better deals, can actually be sued by shareholders. Robert Monks, an investment manager, says in the film: "The corporation is an external machine, in the same way that a shark is a killing machine. There isn't any question of malevolence or will. The enterprise has within it, and the shark has within it, those characteristics that enable it to do that for which it was designed."

Ray Anderson, the CEO of Interface Corporation, the world's largest commercial carpet manufacturer, calls the corporation a "present-day instrument of destruction because of it's compulsion to "externalize any cost that an unwary or uncaring public allows it to externalize.'

"The notion that we can take and take and take and take, waste and waste, without consequences, is driving the biosphere to destruction," Anderson says.

The film, based on Bakan's book "The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Power" asserts that the corporation exhibits many of the traits found in people clinically defined as psychopaths. Psychologist Robert Hare recites in the film a checklist of psychopathic traits and ties them to the behavior of corporations:

Callous unconcern for the feelings of others;
In capacity to maintain enduring relationships;
Reckless disregard for the safety of others
Deceitfulness: repeated lying and conning others for profit;
Incapacity to experience guilt;
Failure to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behavior.

And yet, under the American legal system corporations have the same legal rights as individuals. They make contributions to candidates. They fund 35,000 lobbyists in Washington and thousands more in state capitals to write corporate-friendly legislation and defang regulatory agencies. They saturate the airwaves, the Internet, newspapers, and magazines with advertisements promoting their brands as the friendly face of the corporation. They have huge legal teams, tens of thousands of employees, and scores of elected officials who ward off public intrusion into their affairs or lawsuits. They hold a near monopoly on all electronic and printed sources of information. A few media giants, such as AOL Time Warner, General Electric, Viacom, Disney, and Rupert Murdoch's NewsGroup, control nearly everything we read, see and hear.

"Private capital tends to become concentrated in [a] few hands, partly because of competition among the capitalists, and partly because technological development and the increasing division of labor encourage the formation of larger units of production at the expense of the smaller ones," Albert Einstein wrote in 1949 in the "Monthly Review" in explaining why he was a socialist:

"The result of these developments is an oligarchy of private capital the enormous power of which cannot be effectively checked even by a democratically organized political society. This is true since the members of legislative bodies are selected by political parties, largely financed or otherwise influenced by private capitalists who, for all practical purposes, separate the electorate from the legislature. The consequence is that the representatives of the people do not in fact sufficiently protect the interests of the underprivileged sections of the population. Moreover, under existing conditions, private capitalists privately control, directly or indirectly, the main sources of information (press, radio, education). It is thus extremely difficult, and indeed most cases impossible for the individual citizen to come to objective conclusions and to make intelligent use of his political rights."

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