B.B.D. Plans Shadow Boards, Convention

Big Business Day is catching fire across the country. At last, people have a way to express their anger with inhumane economic giants, and to raise the public's awareness of corporate abuses.

But there is another aspect of the Day, besides exposing corporate crime, that activists throughout the nation view with anticipation. "We don't just want to talk about how bad the companies are," explained a Long Island organizer. "What we want to do is talk about how we can correct the situation. That's why we are so excited about the idea of the Shadow Corporate Boards."

The Shadow Boards, in the tradition of shadow governments, will be established as "watchdog groups of consumers, religious leaders, academics, trade unionists, shareholders, minority and local residents to monitor the performance" of ten of the worst corporations in the country, Ralph Nader says.

The staff of Big Business Day is in the process of gathering suggestions for these "Terrible Ten" companies, the corporations that United Food and Commercial Workers president William Wynn calls "socially bankrupt." The ten company names will be released sometime in early April.

The Constitutional Convention of the Giant Corporation, to be held on April 17 in Washington, will inaugurate the Shadow board activities. Some of the events at the all-day conference will include introductory statements by some of the initiating sponsors, a press conference, tours of the "Corporate Hall of Shame," workshops on the Terrible Ten, reports from each Shadow Board, a wine and cheese reception for the delegates on Capitol Hill, and a television-film festival in the evening.

The Convention will be both a learning experience and a participatory process. Delegates from across the country, selected by their own organizations, will have a great deal of material to digest, but will also be able to provide substantial input into the way their own Shadow Board is run.

April 17 will mark only the beginning of the Shadow Board program. After the Convention, the Shadow Boards will attend annual corporate meetings, hold hearings, request meetings with management, scrutinize marketing and labor decisions, review federal contracts, organize within affected communities, analyze investment decisions including pension and stock holdings, seek to exercise proxies for institutional investors, and issue periodic reports and studies.

Corporate Democracy and the Miller Bill

Sponsors of Big Business Day have proposed legislation that would make the Shadow Board model a reality for the country's largest corporations. Called the "Corporate Democracy Act," the proposed bill would make the top 800 publicly held, non-financial companies more accountable to their constituencies of employees, consumers, communities in which they operate, and even their own shareholders.

The Act's primary purpose is to make the giant corporation more democratic. Each huge economic conglomerate now holds the power of a private nation. With billions of dollars and millions of workers, a General Motors controls more lives than many a foreign country. But the corporate giants are wholly unaccountable to anyone but their top management—a top management that runs enormously powerful entities without input from workers, from consumers, or even from the people who invest in the company—the shareholders.

The Act requires these companies to have a majority of board members independent of the company's management and sets up consumer, employee, minority, community and other representatives on the board of directors. Its other provisions forbid plant closings without 2-year pre-notification of the workers and the community involved, whistleblower protection for employees, criminal penalties for managers who commit criminal acts in the name of their company, and increased disclosure of corporate data to the public.

The corporate community has reacted violently to the idea that more people deserve a voice in the ruling of these private governments. Although every provision in the Corporate Democracy Act has been accepted by one or more Western European country with positive results, each of the provisions has come under strong attack in this country from the business community. The Chamber of Commerce, for example, called the Corporate Democracy Act "the corporate destruction act." Such accusations show that Big Business will not willingly loosen its hold on the lives of its millions of employees and consumers.

But the Act has already gained support in Congress. Senator Howard Metzenbaum (D–Ohio) and Frank Thompson (D–N.J.) will sponsor similar legislation in the Senate and House this year, and will probably hold hearings on the proposal on or around Big Business Day.

Part of the Act is presently before Congress. Legislation that would for the first time hold business managers criminally liable for their decisions which seriously endanger human life is being considered by the House Subcommittee on Crime. Called the Miller Bill (H.R. 4973), the proposal would make it a criminal offense for a manager to withhold from employees or government agencies information about serious dangers associated with the company's products.

Although big business publicly endorsed the legislation as a "law and order" bill, the corporate giants are working behind the scenes to kill the proposal. Supporters of the Miller bill, including Public Citizen, and many other sponsors of Big Business Day, are calling for concerned citizens to write Congressmen who are on the Subcommittee or the full committee and express their support for the proposed legislation.

The following Members of Congress are on the Subcommittee: Robert W. Kastenmeier (D–Wisc.), Don Edwards (D–Cal.), Lamar Gudger (D–N.C.), Harold L. Volkmer (D–Mo.), Michael L. Synar (D–Okla.), John M. Ashbrook (R–Ohio), Henry J. Hyde (R–Ill.), John Conyers (D–Mich.), and F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr. (R–Wisc.).

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ORGANIZATION NOTES

Are you looking for ways you and your organization or community can participate in Big Business Day? Every issue of the *Big Business Day News* will take a detailed look at what several communities are doing on April 17. So keep your eyes on this space!

PUT "BIG BUSINESS ON TRIAL"

B.B.D. activists on Long Island have an entire day of activities planned for April 17, climaxing with an evening that will guarantee a major headache for a half-dozen major corporations.

The evening event is a trial of big business- a trial with real witnesses, who have real grievances to air against corporations that operate on Long Island. The trial is being organized by the Long Island Progressive Coalition, an umbrella organization of about 50 citizens action groups and unions.

Harry Fleischman, a member of the Coalition, is running the Big Business Day events on the Island. He says organizing the event has been surprisingly easy. "What we discovered is that people are so angry at the shenanigans of Big Business that it is easy to bring them together to expose what Big Business has done."

Harry says that the coalition has already targeted three companies for B.B.D. hearings. The Coalition of Labor Union Women and the National Organization of Women will testify against *Newsday* because of its discrimination against women. The Machinists Union locals will be witnesses against Grumman Aerospace Corporation for their virulently anti-union policies. And several citizens groups will present evidence on the irresponsibility of the Long Island Lighting Company.

The Progressive Coalition will lead up to the trial with teach-ins and conferences in the afternoon. At Adelphi University, for example, Progressive Coalition member Long Island Coalition for Full Employment is sponsoring a three-hour conference on the problems Big Business causes the Long Island community.

To get the word about Big Business Day and the April 17 events out to other activists in the community, the Coalition is asking affiliated organizations to run articles in their newsletters, to take out ad space in area newspapers, and to adapt Big Business material into leaflets that can be passed out as April 17 approaches. Harry explained that often the local papers are the most successful in stimulating interest and participation, so the group is planning advertisements in some of the smaller periodicals.

Long Island is going to be a very unpleasant place for the corporate biggies come April 17. Call or write our national office for more information on this program and others.

THINK BIG—GO STATEWIDE

The examples of injustice and harm perpetrated by corporate giants in each community are so numerous that it's easy to forget people in other cities in your state who are vitally concerned about corporate power, and are also trying to do something about it. Get in touch with them; hold a joint press conference at the state capitol on the pattern of corporate crime in your state.

The Regional Central Labor Council of the AFL–CIO is doing just this in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, on April 17. Unions throughout the state are organizing to target specific companies, but in Harrisburg all the wrongdoers will be tied together with a press conference on the Business Roundtable. The Roundtable is a big business lobby that both represents the Fortune 500 in Washington, and undermines unions in hundreds of communities across the nation. The press conference will allow local people to voice their concerns about vast power of this big business group—and will let big business know that Pennsylvania activists will fight anti-union, anti-consumer, and anti-environmental organizations on a statewide level.

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Yes, I want to help fight Crime in the Suites.

- ☐ Let me know how I can participate in Big Business Day.
- ☐ I want to be a local coordinator.
- ☐ Here's my check for _____ to make Big Business Day a success.
- ☐ Enclosed is my $4.95 for *The Big Business Reader*.

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Do you want more information about Big Business lobbying, inside and outside the nation's capital? Big Business Day and Public Citizen just released a comprehensive, two-year study on the Business Roundtable and the Chamber of Commerce of the United States. For a copy of *The Corporate Lobbies*, send $10.00 to Public Citizen, 133 C St., S.E., Washington, D.C. 20003.