

So What's All The Protesting About?

During the 1990's I became aware of a growing divide between the glowing terms used to describe the economic "reforms" that were incessantly championed by government, mass media, and corporate pundits and the dismal results here and around the world. Since the Reagan/Thatcher/Mulroney 1980's the public has been constantly bombarded with the need to downsize government and to free capitalism to produce wealth as part of the new "common sense" reality. We were told that there was nothing government could do that big business couldn't do better and cheaper when the profit motive was unleashed. **Globalization** (outsourcing manufacturing jobs to low-wage developing world countries with little or no protection for workers and the environment), a constantly expanding economy without limits, and **neoliberalism** (allowing an unregulated market to reign supreme with resulting privatization, deregulation, corporate tax cuts, tax cuts for the wealthy, reduction or elimination of government medicare/education/social programs, and the unrestricted flow of capital) were presented as the rising tide that would lift all boats, providing benefits to all. The reality I witnessed indicated just the opposite. Homelessness, poverty, downsizing, stagnating or falling wages, sweatshops, McJobs, cutbacks, environmental degradation, and a growing gap between the rich and everyone else were the new economic order of the day. In an effort to reconcile this contradiction I sought out various mainstream sources but they uniformly acted as cheerleaders for this new business as usual paradigm, demanding more of the same while extolling the coming economic utopia.

It was by accident that I came upon a body of dissenting literature and began to become aware of the extent to which our entire cultural, economic, and political systems and society as a whole have been subverted by the need for limitless profits by a small corporate elite. The neoliberal "reforms", "free trade" treaties, wars and the commodification of every aspect of our lives are driven by the desire of big business to increase its already bloated bottom line regardless of the costs, which it externalizes to the rest of us.

Realizing this, I became involved in the campaign for social justice and resistance to corporate-led globalization as well as the anti-war movement. In my contact with various individuals involved in these struggles to improve the human condition it became apparent that many people were fighting the isolated symptoms without addressing the underlying global disease. Poverty, developing world debt, unsustainable environmental exploitation, war and militarism, rigged trade treaties enshrining big business rights, curtailment of dissent and civil rights in the name of "fighting terrorism", Deep Integration of Canada with the U.S., American **hegemony** (global military, political, and economic domination), and underfunding/privatization of medicare/education/social programs are overwhelmingly the goals or consequences of **corporate rule**. I define this as ownership, control, or undue influence over the economy, mass media, and government by transnational corporations and the wealthy elite who largely own them. This control allows the setting of the agenda and policies for the rest of society and the selling of these policies to the public through the corporate media. This has been the case for several decades but has been shifted into overdrive since the enthusiastic embrace of

neoliberalism by the power elite. What we are left with is a hollowed out formal democracy where people's only participation in their own government consists of voting every few years for a narrow slate of candidates chosen by the party machinery. Any real control over government economic policies affecting their daily lives vanishes with the resulting **democratic deficit** as the elected party pursues a business-friendly agenda. What is left is a depoliticised, disempowered, apathetic electorate more concerned with the latest celebrity gossip or sporting event than with the issues shaping their own future.

Defenders of the established order will deny that corporate rule can exist in a democracy. When this line fails they may admit to corporations setting the economic agenda, but claim that the benefits are worth it to the majority of people. When this too is discredited their final fallback position is that corporate rule is inevitable regardless of the costs and we must simply endure it as the price of living in a globalized world. Economic theory is trotted out to justify all manner of exploitive, irresponsible, destructive business practices in the name of "free markets". Closer examination reveals this to be a self-serving misreading and misapplication designed to rationalize what corporate leaders want to do anyway solely for their further enrichment. It can ultimately be seen more as desperately clung to ideology or neoliberal theology than as a serious, objective "economic science". Apologists for the big business community will denounce statements such as these, labeling them as conspiracy theory, but an honest description would be organized greed. I invite them and everyone else to sample the evidence listed herein. The following books, web sites, magazines, videos, and TV and radio programs are presented as a resource to the Edmonton activist community and to all others desiring an alternative view of the world from that which is usually served up to them.

Free updated versions of this guide can be found at <http://activistresources.raisemyvoice.com> including direct links to the web sites listed in the guide and additional information. Comments and questions can be directed to radicalrandy@raisemyvoice.com Further elaboration of the concepts introduced here can be found in the introductions to the various book sections in this guide.

FEEL FREE TO COPY AND DISTRIBUTE