

Rights of People over Corporations

"We reject trade agreements negotiated in secret . . . [such as] NAFTA, GATT, and its progeny, the WTO. They threaten . . . local sovereignty, and they effectively limit the participation of citizens in decisions.

. . . We demand that these agreements . . . include more specific environmental, worker, health and safety standards in the text itself, not as "side agreements".

. . . We reject any agreement which threatens the authority of states and local communities to establish more stringent health, safety and environmental standards.

. . .

As stated in the United Nation's "Universal Declaration of Human Rights - Article 25", the U.S. Green Party, one of more than eighty Green Parties internationally, calls for the global adoption of basic human rights:

"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of [themselves] and of [their] family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond [their] control."

. . . We believe in the core RIGHT of SELF-DETERMINATION; of the special character and needs of INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

From Green Party Platform — www.gp.org

Green Party calls for a Living Wage, Citizen Participation and an end to corporate welfare.

RE-ASSERTING LOCAL CITIZEN CONTROL OVER CORPORATIONS

Currently, corporations possess more rights and freedoms than natural human persons. Through a series of judicial rulings, and by virtue of their ability to control governments and economies by virtue of wealth, corporations have judicially rewritten our Constitution and have emerged as unaccountable, unelected governments. The Greens, therefore, support all reforms that seek to supplant governmental regulation of corporations with communities that seek to define corporations. In the interim, Greens support measures that hold executives and officers of corporations directly liable for harm that results from their decisions.

When we look at the HISTORY OF our states, we learn that citizens intentionally defined CORPORATIONS through charters – the certificates of incorporation. In exchange for the charter, a corporation was obligated to obey all laws, to serve the common good, and to cause no harm. Early state legislators wrote charter laws to limit corporate authority, and to ensure that when a corporation caused harm, they could revoke its charter.

In the late 19th century, however, corporations claimed special protections under the Constitution. Large companies used legal power to assert legal authority over what to make and how to make it, to move money, influence elections, bend governments to their will. They insisted that once formed, corporations may operate forever, with the privilege of limited liability and freedom from community or worker interference in business judgments.

It is inappropriate for investment and production decisions that can shape our communities and lives to be made essentially from afar, in boardrooms, closed-door regulatory agencies, and prohibitively expensive courtrooms.

It is unacceptable to have the level of influence now being exerted by corporate interests over the public interest. We challenge the

propriety and equity of "corporate welfare" in the form of tax breaks, subsidies, payments, grants, bailouts, giveaways, unenforced laws and regulations; and historic, continuing access to our vast public resources, including millions of acres of land, forests, mineral resources, intellectual property rights, and government-created research.

We call for revisiting what one Supreme Court Justice called, when referring to the history of constitutional law, "the history of the impact of the modern corporation upon the American scene." We believe that corporations are neither inevitable nor always appropriate. Judicial and legislative decisions that have made it possible for big business to stay beyond the reach of democracy need to be re-examined.

Legal doctrines must be continually revised in recognition of the changing needs of an active, democratic citizenry. Huge multi-national corporations are artificial creations, not natural persons uniquely sheltered under constitutional protections. It is time to support local government and state government attempts to DEFINE CORPORATIONS and to prevent these entities from exercising democratic rights which are uniquely possessed by the citizens of the United States.

One point remains unequivocal: Because corporations have become the dominant economic institution of the planet, they must address and squarely face the social and environmental problems that afflict humankind.

LIVABLE INCOME

1. We affirm the importance of access to a livable income.
2. Job banks and other innovative training and employment programs which bring together the private and public sectors must become federal, state and local priorities. People who are unable to find decent work in the private sector should have options through publicly funded opportunities.
3. Workforce development programs must aim at moving people out of poverty – a "living wage" campaign and "living wage" standard will go a long way toward achieving this goal.
4. We urge that a national debate be held and broad public mandate be sought regarding (fiscal and monetary) economic strategies and policies as they impact wages. This debate is long overdue. The growing inequities in income and wealth between rich and poor; unprecedented discrepancies in salary and benefits between corporate top executives and line workers; loss of the "American dream" by the young and middle-class – each is a symptom of decisions made by policy-makers far removed from the concerns of ordinary workers trying to keep up.
5. A clear living wage standard should serve as a foundation for trade between nations, and a "floor" of wage protections and worker's rights should be negotiated and set in place in future trade agreements. The United States should take the lead on this front – and not allow destructive, corporate predatory practices under the guise of "free" international trade.

From Green Party Platform — www.gp.org

“All of Humanity has a shared interest in opposing trade agreements that threaten to exacerbate rather than eliminate the great global threats to our human well-being—reckless exploitation of people and environments.”

— Ralph Nader

“Corporations have perfected socializing their losses while they capitalize on their profits.

A growing and grave imbalance between the often-converging power of Big Business, Big Government and the citizens of this country has seriously damaged our democracy.

It's time to end "corporate welfare" as we know it. The power of "civic action" is an antidote to abuse. As we look at the dismantling of democracy by the corporatization of society, we need to rekindle the democratic flame."

From Green Party Platform — www.gp.org

Free Trade and the Decline of Democracy

—excerpt from book Introduction* by Ralph Nader

Citizens beware. An unprecedented corporate power grab is underway in global negotiations over international trade.

Operating under the deceptive banner of “free” trade, multinational corporations are working hard to expand their control over the international economy and to undo vital health, safety, and environmental protections won by citizens movements across the globe in recent decades.

The megacorporations are not expecting these victories to be gained in town halls, state offices, the U.S. Capitol, or even at the United Nations. They are looking to circumvent the democratic process altogether, in a bold and brazen drive to achieve an autocratic far-reaching agenda through two trade agreements, the U.S.-Mexico-Canada free trade deal (formally known as NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement) and an expansion of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), called the Uruguay Round.

The Fortune 200's GATT and NAFTA agenda would make the air you breathe dirtier and the water you drink more polluted. It would cost jobs, depress wage levels, and make workplaces less safe. It would destroy family farms and undermine consumer protections such as those ensuring that the food you eat is not compromised by unsanitary conditions or higher levels of pesticides and preservatives.

And that's only for the industrialized countries. The large global companies have an even more ambitious set of goals for the Third World. they hope to use GATT and NAFTA to capitalize on the poverty of Third World countries and exploit their generally low environmental, safety, and wage standards. At the same time, these corporations plan to displace locally owned business and solidify their control over developing countries' economies and natural resources.

* The Case Against Free Trade: Gatt, Nafta and the Globalization of Corporate Power (An Earth Island Press Book), Ralph Nader, ed.