

Discussion Questions & Tips

Structure: Moderator outlines topics to be discussed. She/he then poses questions to participants on these topics.

Topics

1. The Corporation's potential for use as an activists' tool.
2. Flaws in the corporate structure and possible solutions
3. Capitalism and social responsibility
4. Lessons to be learned from Arcata, CA and Licking and Porter townships, PA
5. Role of parents in media-saturated society

Questions

1. In what context can this film have the maximum impact?
 - a. Does the film have a polarizing effect?
 - b. Can it affect legislation and government regulations of business? How?
2. In a poll on our website, a majority of people suggest that the film convinces them that corporate charters need to be revoked and the system rebuilt. Is this plausible?
 - a. Can individuals within an organization overcome its inherent flaws?
 - b. Do you envision a return to earlier forms of business ownership and management, or something entirely new?
3. Can capitalism and democracy co-exist?
 - a. How has the internet reshaped our democracy? How can it?
 - b. How can corporations be obliged to have a stake in the sharing of their power, and in the social quality of their services?
4. In the film, the town of Arcata, CA (pop. 15,000) holds a forum on corporate influence in their community, and they vote to keep all new chain restaurants out. Can this happen in a major city?
 - a. What sacrifices does this action force the town to make?
 - b. What does it mean when a town votes not to recognize a corporation as a "legal person", and what are the implications of this vote?
5. The film depicts advertising companies focusing on efficient ways to manipulate children into nagging their parents into buying their products, in a study called "the nag factor". How can parents shield their children from this manipulation?
 - a. What are the potential dangers of a tv-free household?

Things To Avoid

- Didactic answers and individual agendas. Try to gear them towards suggestions and experiences.
- Questions about stories in the film. For example, “What happened to the Fox News reporters?” Keep focus on topics.
- Blatant attacks and hate speech, even on corporations and governments. For example, “I hate Bush” and “Enron sucks.”
- All forms of straying and digressing. All topics and conversation should spring from the film, and be grounded in the issues it brings up.

If Dialogue Stalls

Ask about what they see as the film’s specific mission, goals, and possibilities. Mention that it’s already been attacked from the right... Can it reach them, especially with its association with Michael Moore’s films?

Propose theory that the corporate model does more efficiently what other institutional models have always done, which is to take power and influence away from the populace and give it to the institution’s leaders.

Ask what they expect from a forum like this. Are they looking for an outlet for anxiety or frustration with which the film leaves them, or for suggestions on how they can work to change the corporate structure and influence?

The Corporation DVD's Topical Paradise (DVD 2)

The following questions are based on DVD 2's Topical Paradise to provoke discussion around some of the issues brought up in the film. Please keep in mind these are only suggestions - feel free to create your own or modify them as you see fit.

The Nature Of The Corporation / Capitalism

1. What role should the corporation play in our lives and society, if any?
2. Should corporations be entitled to the same legal rights as individuals? Where should the line be drawn?
3. How can we ensure corporations are held accountable for their actions? Should individuals (directors, employees, shareholders) bear any responsibility for the actions of a corporation? If so, to what degree?
4. What are the benefits of the corporate form? Could an alternative model offer these as well?
5. Do you think corporations are the root cause of the problem, or is it consumerism, capitalism, or all three?
6. If corporations were more reflective of the world's population (poor, women, ethnically diverse, etc) would that help?
7. Do you agree with the film's diagnosis that the corporation is a psychopath?

Related Resources:

parecon.org (Articles on participatory economics, an alternative to capitalism)

corporatepolicy.org (Organization to curb corporate abuse and make corporations accountable)

consciouschoice.com (Publication to create a sustainable society and promote healthy living)

Branding / Marketing / Marketing To Kids

1. Should there be a limit to the amount of advertising in our public space? Should corporations have the right to commercial free speech?
2. Should schools permit advertising and accept corporately sponsored "gifts" as a source of funding?
3. Consider the Nag Factor study. Is it ethical to do such research and use it to influence children's' behaviour and their parents' spending habits? If not, how would you stop it?
4. In some countries, marketing to children under certain ages is prohibited. Should marketing to children of any age for any product be allowed? What limits would you put in place?
5. Branding connects consumers to a product emotionally and/or intellectually. Has it undermined our ability to connect to non-branded issues as Naomi Klein suggests? If so, is there any way to counteract this effect?

6. What feelings come to mind when you think of different brands? Are they inspired by advertising or personal experience? How does it affect your purchasing decisions?
7. Undercover marketing is a sales pitch without your knowledge or consent. Can you think of any examples where you may have been “sold” a product unaware it was advertising? Should covert marketing be allowed?

Related Resources:

commercialexploitation.com (Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood. Downloadable fact sheets and booklet about marketing to kids; Current news articles)

tvturnoff.org (TV Turnoff Week is April 25 – May 1, 2005)

candystand.com (Downloadable games for kids featuring candy products and advertising galore)

prwatch.org (Publication doing investigative reporting on the Public Relations industry)

[“Every Nook And Cranny”](#) (Current article about the spread of commercialized culture)

Corporate Crime / Ethics And Values / Social Responsibility / Externalities

1. What is your assessment of the current level of corporate crime? What measures would you put in place to combat it?
2. Can social responsibility cure what ails the corporation? Is the marketplace and consumer punishment the best way to ensure businesses act ethically?
3. Who should determine what is socially responsible? How would you define it?
4. What obligation do people have to call attention to unethical practices? Even if it puts his/her job at risk? Can you think of instances where your personal and professional ethics clashed?
5. What safeguards should be in place to ensure consumers are aware of the risks associated with various products? Who should be responsible for testing products and ensuring their safety?
6. Can we hold people accountable to higher ethical standards if their behavior is not illegal?

Related Resources:

multinationalmonitor.org (Bimonthly publication tracking corporate activity)

halliburtonwatch.org (Keeping tabs on Halliburton’s activities)

corpwatch.org (Tracks and investigates corporate abuses)

corporatecrimereporter.com (Print newsletter in its 19th year of publication with some articles available on website)

business-ethics.org (International Business Ethics Institute)

ethicalconsumer.org (UK-based organization looking at the social and environmental records of companies)

corporatepredators.org (Book co-authored by Robert Weissman who appears in the film)

Corporations And Government / The Role Of Government / Regulation / Democracy

1. Should corporations be able to donate to political campaigns? What restrictions would you put in place? Should any organizations be able to contribute?
2. How would you balance the legal weight of trade agreements with a nation's right to sovereignty?
3. What do you think of free trade agreements? Can you describe how they've impacted your life? How about their impact on poor countries?
4. Former members of government are sought after employees for corporations looking to take advantage of their contacts and influence. Can we shut the revolving door between the public and private sectors?
5. The multinational character of large companies allows them to dip in and out of different countries and be subject to different laws. Is there a way to prevent this?
6. Can regulatory control keep the corporation in check? If so, what kind of regulation is required and who would enforce it?
7. How can we bring the corporation under democratic control? What are your opinions on the state of democracy today? How can we improve it?

Related Resources:

maketradefair.com (Oxfam International site promoting fair trade)

POCLAD.org (Program on Corporations, Law and Democracy)

reclaimdemocracy.org (Working for citizen-based democracy and control over corporations)

citizenworks.org (Organization to strengthen citizen-based democracy founded by Ralph Nader; Campaign for Corporate Reform)

policyalternatives.ca (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives)

canadians.org (Council of Canadians, a non-partisan citizens' watchdog organization)

["New Power For Old Europe"](#) (December '04 article discussing the EU's upcoming overhaul of the regulations governing the chemical and cosmetics industry, and its affect on North America)

Labour

1. How can we prevent the corporate use of sweatshop labour without hurting those dependent on the income?
2. Does the outsourcing of jobs empower poorer nations or exploit them?
3. What role can unions play in reducing corporate harm? Should they be more involved in the political process? Should we be encouraging more employee groups to unionize?
4. Are workers' rights adequate to ensure their safety and prosperity? Are there changes to the labour code and laws that you would make?

5. What's the minimum wage in your area? Is it livable?
6. Are there any industries or companies you would cite as particularly egregious in their treatment of employees and violation of labour laws? Are you aware of any campaigns in your area to fight their control?

Related Resources:

laborrightsnow.org (Investigates, monitors and reports brutal acts of labour repression and serious violations)

labornet.org (Global online communication for a democratic, independent labour movement)

nlcnet.org (National Labor Committee)

aflcio.org (American Federation of Labor - Congress of Industrial Organizations)

Selling The Commons

1. Who should make the decisions about ownership of the “commons” and how? Consider natural resources (water, land, air, food, etc) and citizen services (education, health, media, police, etc). How should they be managed and maintained?
2. Should there be an outright ban on the patenting of genes and/or lifeforms? What other limits would you put on patents? What do your country's patent laws allow?
3. Consider the human gene pool, something that transcends national boundaries. What kind of international collective would you form to manage this resource?
4. What ideas do you have for combating the growing agricultural biotech industry and the proliferation of genetically modified foods in stores without our knowledge? Is labeling and more organic options all that's required?

Related Resources:

reclaimthecommons.net (Movement to bring the commons back under democratic, community control)

bustpatents.com (Legal resources and tools for surviving the patenting frenzy)

biotech-info.net (Resources on agricultural biotechnology and genetic engineering)

Strategies For Change

No matter what your party chooses to focus on, we'd like to hear your thoughts on what should be done with the corporation. Should we REFORM, REGULATE, or REWRITE the corporation?

Saturday, May 7, 2005 is the official House Party Day! Join us for a special live webcast where high-profile guests will debate the three "R"s!

The REWRITERS: Overthrow. Change the actual legal constitution of every corporation. Eradicate corporate "personhood". Change the entire DNA of the corporate animal. Anarchism & new experiments in democracy.

The REGULATORS: More democratic governmental controls. Hold corporations accountable. Make corporations really pay for their planetary misdeeds. Worker control. Bigger bars on the corporate cage.

The REFORMERS: Make corporations run better. Reward good management. Hold corporate "heroic" leaders up as a testament that better people can run better companies. Make better business practices "good business."

We've been inviting feedback on the three "R"s since last year. Here are some of the ideas we've heard so far:

- Revoke the legal personhood status. Change the law to subordinate corporate rights to those of the people.
- Overhaul the corporate structure and its constitution mandating it pursue profit at any cost. Shareholders need to be more concerned with the ecological and human costs and not just maximizing their return on investment. In the US, reformed corporate lawyer Robert Hinkley is fighting to add 28 big little words to corporate law: *the duty of directors henceforth shall be to make money for shareholders but not at the expense of the environment, human rights, public health and safety, dignity of employees, and the welfare of the communities in which the company operates.* To find out more, check out Citizens for Corporate Responsibility at www.c4cr.org.
- Shift power from shareholders to stakeholders so they have direct and influential decision-making power.
- Use regulation as the carrot AND the stick. The amount of regulation is subject to behaviour where good gets less and bad gets so much more.
- The corporation separates liability and ownership to avoid individual prosecution. Lack of ownership ensures a lack of responsibility. Business

should be run as a cooperative, owned by the employees, with shares available to investors who only own their investment.

- Use the resources of resistance already in place: participate in rallies and protest corporate policies; complain loudly and in writing; support activist groups such as POCLAD (Program on Corporations, Law & Democracy – www.poclad.org); keep watching, keep thinking, and keep fighting!
- The creation of protective agencies and regulatory bodies, ones with enough power to keep the corporation in check. Watchdogs with sharp teeth who aren't afraid to bite down hard when need be.
- Disallow the corporation from making financial contributions to political parties. No more corporate sponsorship of government representatives and hijacking democracy.
- Revert back to the idea that the corporation is a sacred trust with a set time limit of existence, owned by a limited number of partners.
- Limit the amount of profit being pursued. Enforce profit capping so that profit beyond your allowable limit be given to the producers (not directors), charity or the government.
- Stop rewarding CEOs with obscenely high pay-offs and see workers as an essential part of production also deserving of a piece of the pie. Get rid of executive perks and treat all employees equally regardless of company status, whether it's in regards to benefits or mandatory drug testing. The escalating pay scale differential needs to be addressed at the very least.
- Tax companies that outsource and exploit cheap labour markets in poor countries. Give tax breaks to corporations who remain in their home country.
- Fines should be more punitive and actually enforced.
- Make companies accountable for the harm they do. Enact harsher, more punitive laws against corporate malfeasance. If the corporation is a person, perhaps they should be tried as such for committing crimes against the public. Punishment could include dissolution of the company or jail time.
- Re-nationalize essential public services at least, and even more sectors of the economy. Privatization has not resulted in the consumer gains we were promised.
- Mandate companies to put their production information on their products, just as food products must list nutritional content.

- Corporations should not be able to sell products in countries where their production methods have violated the laws of that country, such as using child labour in other countries.
- Use the market to sell a new brand and a new kind of corporation with a philosophy that pursues human benefit, not profit. Create a model based on a new way of thinking with universal appeal and people will buy it.
- Withdraw from NAFTA and WTO agreements that violate the best interests of the public.
- Create a process that sets and grades standards of business practices so consumers can make choices according to their personal values.
- Buy locally and fairly traded products whenever possible.
- Lobby your government and embrace democratic structures. We need participatory governments that engage citizenry, not isolate and disenfranchise them.
- Reform the media and the rules for ownership. The media is relied upon to be the watchdog of democracy and no society can afford to have its journalistic ideals supplanted by other interests.
- Rebuild unions and create more worker cooperatives.
- Live simply, buy less. The corporation is driven by consumerism and as long as people look to buy their happiness, no amount of reform or regulation will matter.