

*June 26, 2003 - Cleveland Free Times article/review of CorpOrNation*

## **THE COMPANY WAY**

**A people's history of corporate power  
by Michael Gill**

*CORPORATION* is not a documentary in the big-budget, highly produced infotainment style, but seems to be a tool designed to educate and motivate activists against corporate power. It's light on fist-pumping anger and heavy on more profound stuff: the evolution of corporate law in Ohio, with specific recent cases that illustrate the effect of certain changes.

Released during the Ohio bicentennial, the film is a Howard Zinn take on one aspect of the state's history. CorpOrNation traces the path of corporations and their powers from an original, constitutionally defined subservience to their current dominance of government and individual lives.

As initially defined by the 1802 state constitution, corporations were granted license to exist for a specific purpose and time period. They were forbidden to fund political campaigns or candidates. One company couldn't own another. Financial books were open to the public. Investors were fully liable for the actions of the company.

The film refers to an early history of corporations whose licenses were revoked for violating their charters. Most of those cases are far back in the past, however, as corporations increased their influence on legislators, and therefore on laws. Over time, one by one, legal constraints on corporations have been loosened. An 1886 U.S. Supreme Court ruling gave corporations many of the same rights as living, breathing humans; equal protection and due process under the law, freedom of speech, freedom from unreasonable searches and seizures.

Unlike people, however, corporations can operate after they are found to have broken laws. They have vastly more money to get their message across than individuals do. And they can live - as long as the money flows - forever.

The tale is largely told through on-camera interviews with students and people involved in cases where corporations have acted the detriment of communities. Randy Reeder, president of the United Steel Workers of America Local 169, discusses the Mansfield AK Steel lockout of 1999, Amy Simpson discusses the "veggie libel" law, which prohibits public criticism of perishable food produced in the state. Sued by Buckeye Egg for informing the public of the company's alleged practice of rewashing and distributing old eggs, Simpson won a minor legal battle when a law firm took her case pro bono, and the egg producers dropped it. Nancy Raeder discuss how concerns of the Ohio Family Farm Coalition are overshadowed by the Ohio Farm Bureau, which represents big corporate agribusiness - and which pad its membership by counting people who participate in a Nationwide Insurance discount.

Greg Coleridge of the American Friends Service Committee bats cleanup with a call to action, encouraging viewers to inform themselves and make their voices heard because "what remains of our democracy is at stake."

The film is an essay with pictures, placing much more importance on information than on production or drama. While its case is reasoned and compelling, it doesn't gain much from its visual imagery. The narrative thread is logical, but not dramatic. Still, it's a film every Ohioan should see - especially those who believe we live in a democracy where people make the decisions.

*CorpOrNation screens Thursday at 7:30 p.m. at Peace House, 10916 Magnolia Ave., University Circle. The film is preceded by a potluck dinner at 6:30 and followed by discussion. Free. For information, call the American Friends Service Committee at 330-253-7151.*