



Northeast Ohio American Friends Service Committee  
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**TESTIMONY ON SENATE / HOUSE BILL 1**

**Greg Coleridge      December 15, 2004**

My name is Greg Coleridge. I am the Director of the Northeast Ohio American Friends Service Committee, based in Akron. AFSC is a national Quaker social action organization. We have 7000 people on our database who support our work on behalf of justice, peace, and democracy.

I have researched the history of corporations and democracy in Ohio and have written a book, *Citizens over Corporations: A Brief History of Democracy in Ohio and Challenges to Freedom in the Future*. I would be happy to supply a copy to any interested member of this Committee.

I had always thought the purpose of legislators is to pass legislation addressing pressing societal problems. If so, then what is the exact purpose behind the provision of Senate Bill / House Bill 1 allowing business corporations for the first time is nearly a century to transfer unlimited amounts of money from their treasuries to groups to run pro-corporate ads during the election season?

What pressing societal problem does this provision solve? Is that that the needs, wants, wish, and desires of business corporations are not being sufficiently heard and responded to by politicians in Columbus? That business corporations don't receive enough tax breaks, abatements, low-interest loans, grants, exemptions, and other favorable measures? Might it be that working people, who have seen manufacturing jobs in the state drop by 118,000 between March 2001 and March 2003 have too much political sway over the Governor? Is it that the 1.3 million Ohioans without health insurance possess too much clout over the Republican-controlled State Senate? Or maybe it's the 12% of Ohioans who live in poverty who wield too much power over the Republican-controlled State House of Representatives?

In 1908, your predecessors in the Ohio General Assembly passed legislation "to prevent the corruption of elections and political parties by corporations" by barring any corporation from directly or indirectly giving any money or property to any political organization, party or candidate. The pressing societal problem that legislation attempted to solve was massive corporate greed, graft, and governance by "robber barons" and by oil, railroad, insurance, banking, food, and other corporations of the time that were perverting public policy for their own welfare at the expense of the public welfare.

The reasons for the 1908 law were clear – to respond to corporate scandals, abuse, and a concentration of corporate power and authority to govern.

In light of recent campaign finance scandals by Ohio politicians and secret expenditure of corporate dollars in Ohio Supreme Court races, the reasons for the extreme provision of SB/HB 1 by the lame-duck General Assembly are not clear at all. Rather than reducing money in politics and eliminating the corrupting and anti-democratic influence of corporate money in politics, you propose just the opposite.

This nation fought a revolution to transfer sovereignty and power from a select few to the many. This provision moves in the exact opposite direction – to shift power further from the human many to the corporate few – specifically to consolidate power in the hands of one party corporate rule in Ohio. My guess is that the democratic architects of the 1908 would be aghast by this provision. So should all Ohioans.

Africa Initiative Program ~ Debra Calhoun, Director  
Economic Justice & Empowerment Program ~ Greg Coleridge, Director

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The American Friends Service Committee is a Quaker social action organization seeking non-violent solutions to human problems through promoting understanding and peace, and helping those ill and oppressed. AFSC is a 501 (c) (3) organization.