

# PIBCI - Monthly Perspective

## 2024 Summer edition

### Corporations: the silent takeover

*Corporate control is well established, we have just failed to realise it.*

As 2024 settles in, it is nice to know that we live in a nation blessed with natural wealth and abundant resources supported by a progressive democratic system of government that enthusiastically advances the notion of a fair go for all its citizens. This is the rosy picture that oozes out of the mainstream media for the mindless consumption of the majority of Australians. However, a peek behind our nation's impressive line-up of democratic institutions and much lauded civic freedoms is a corporate slaughterhouse that operates 24/7 gutting our democracy and undermining our values. The corporate machine sedates the public with a rich diet of propaganda that depicts a world that bears little resemblance to life on the streets. In reality, a corporate takeover of society has already occurred, and this calamity was kept out of the headlines in the mainstream media. It avoided sparking public anger and mass demonstrations in the streets. It managed not to raise the ire of governments. The silent corporate coup d'état seamlessly took place by keeping the major political parties in place. It preserved the façade of all the democratic institutions and kept using the language of individual freedom and rights. Meanwhile, it succeeded in dismantling and reconfiguring the spheres of politics, economics and culture in its own image. How did this happen and what can be done?

#### Corporate puppet masters

It may seem surreal that we live in the year 2024 which quite easily could be the title of a sci-fi movie based in a world like our own being cruelly ravaged by an alien invasion, a zombie takeover or in the throes of an environmental or biological disaster. Despite Hollywood's endless attempts to desensitise the public with dystopian and apocalyptic scenarios, a silent calamity has taken place. At the behest of the world's most powerful oligarchs, a collection of global corporations has seized the levers of power. They are ruthlessly exploiting large parts of the human population, hell-bent on plundering the earth's finite resources whilst poisoning our life systems. Given the gravity of the situation, governments and the mass media have barely raised an eyebrow to this catastrophe. The endless promotion of corporate culture on our screens and in our workplaces has spread

into our homes and has found a place of residence in our consciousness. This is why the public is yet to wake up and take notice that the coup d'état has already taken place.

A handful of the world's most powerful oligarchs such as Amazon's CEO Jeff Bezos, founder and CEO of Tesla and SpaceX Elon Musk, co-founded of the Oracle Corporation Larry Ellison, Meta's (Facebooks) Mark Zuckerberg and co-founder of Microsoft, Bill Gates form the jagged apex of global corporate rule. They are flanked by a secretive army of oligarchs that stretches across the world who maintain constant communications with governments and global institutions. Within ivory towers and plush boardrooms located in exclusive destinations and in national capitals, private armies patrol high security walls that protect the most wealthy and powerful individuals from the public whilst they exert their influence over governments and key institutions. Through their corporation's, oligarchs maintain a tight grip on the levers of power and mould our collective future. Meanwhile, the bottomless appetite of corporations continue to search for more growth and more profits that ultimately empty out into the clandestine bank accounts of the world's most rich and powerful individuals.

Back Down Under our home-grown oligarchs know what it is like to live in the lucky country. Guided by self-interest, Australia's cabal of oligarchs have thrived by undermining the values of 'egalitarianism' and 'a fair go.' They have strived to replace such values and aspirations with greed and selfishness. This has enabled them to grow obscenely rich and prosper during the Covid years when the majority of Australians were struggling to keep afloat. The corporatisation of Australia is everywhere to be seen. On one hand, we have a bloated class of oligarchs who dominate business, and continue to inflate their net worth regardless of rising living costs. On the other hand, the public is reliant on a handful of corporations for a broad spectrum of services. Why are there so few options when seeking services? Why do our towns and cities look the same, colonised with the same rabble of business chains and service providers? Why is it that our main streets and shopping centres look like a 'cut and paste' job filled with identical corporate icons? Where have small businesses and community spirit gone which are the key ingredients for building diversity and a vibrant culture? Why is it that we are living in a monoculture? Clearly, these are the hallmarks of corporatisation.

Australia's bloated oligarchs continually reap the abundant wealth from the nation via their corporations. This has been fostered by the prevailing neoliberal system that promotes the

corporatisation of society. The neoliberal order ensures the billionaire class have access to key decision makers. The corporate owned media creates the illusion that the neoliberal system is the 'only way' and needs to be kept in place so 'we' can all make a profit whilst giving the impression that it can solve the world's problems.

With four decades behind us, it is evident that neoliberalism is a failed ideology. We can see that corporate culture is the very antithesis of human values and democracy. In effect, the failures to tackle the climate emergency, to stem inequality, to reverse the obscene levels of wealth held in the hands of the richest 1% and the drive to war can be traced back to corporatisation which is protected by the neoliberal order. Corporatisation has one goal, and that is to make profit. The consequence of this mindset is the undermining of democracy, stripping back political agency and the advancement of privatisation, deregulation, commodification and militarisation whilst paying little or no regards to the human condition.

## Seizing power

The corporate takeover of Australia mirrors similar takeovers that have occurred in other nations. For decades, large corporations have infiltrated governments with the aim of manipulating public policy. Through armies of corporate lobbyists and a steady stream of political donations that filter into the coffers of the major parties, corporations have been effective in manipulating policy makers. This has translated into legislation that has decreased corporate taxation and led to the support of corporate welfare that comes in many guises. These factors alone have enabled corporations to avoid contributing to society whilst extracting more funds from the public purse. Through their power and influence, large corporations have been effective in watering down legislation making it easier to exploit the natural environment. Corporations have been vocal cheer leaders calling for workplace deregulation which has facilitated the exploitation of workers. Corporations have cut back the workforce, called for increased productivity and have set the stage for stagnant wages despite securing massive profits in the face of the rapidly rising cost of living. To add insult to injury, the revolving door between politics and corporations is kept oiled by the neoliberal order as 'retiring' politicians seamlessly transition from a seat in parliament to a seat in a corporate boardroom.

The corporate takeover of our democracy has been an assiduous process that has been in motion for decades and continues every day. Corporations have nurtured a sophisticated support network that extends from the corporate owned media through to well-financed political thinktanks. Celebrities are paid to lend corporations a trusting face whilst oligarchs maintain direct lines of communications with prime ministers and presidents.

## Normalising corporate culture

The corporate coup d'état could not have been successful without capturing the spheres of economics and politics. However, its ongoing dominance hinges on the cultural sphere. By modelling mass culture in its own image, corporations seek to produce a docile and compliant public that is willing to serve the political and economic objectives of corporations by subordinating their own individual needs and desires.

Corporations view democracy, civic agency, cooperation, community, solidarity, creativity and human imagination with hostility. Hence, for decades corporations have used all the weapons in their arsenal to transplant human culture with corporate culture. They have employed legions of foot soldiers in the ranks of advertising and media, industrial psychologists through to researchers in neoliberal thinktanks to wage war against democracy and human culture. Their objective is to replace it with a mechanistic, arbitrary and profit driven way of life that pays little or no regard to human needs. In essence, corporations gain sustenance from privatisation, commodification, deregulation, globalisation and militarisation, all of which work against human progress.

The corporate assault on culture occurs on a daily basis. For decades, the public have endured a regular diet of restructures, downsizing and right sizing. Corporations have groomed the workforce with the need to raise productivity, increase efficiency, cut costs and drive for more profits to satisfy shareholders. Governments have supported the pivot to corporatisation inflicting numerous rounds of privatisations and ushered through a wave of deregulation. As the corporate takeover has established itself, we have learned how disposable people have become in the shadow of corporate rule. The casualisation of work, the gig economy and the rise in the 'precariat' have become a new reality which permanent jobs have become a thing of the past and planning the future is a luxury for the few. Unions have been emasculated as workers' rights have been eviscerated. Corporate culture has blurred the line between public and private whilst privacy infringements and the surveillance of customers and workers by corporations goes unchecked.

## **Toxic symptoms**

The noxious symptoms of corporate control are far from unambiguous and they do not merely exist in the shadows. The sickly byproducts of the corporate takeover include unstable and unforgiving work conditions, stagnant wages and financial instability which place significant pressures on workers and their families. The lack of purpose and meaning in jobs coupled by the casualisation of work has demoralised the workforce. Working beyond 'normal' hours is expected. Taking work home is a must. Climbing the corporate ladder is demanded and making a profit for stakeholders goes without question, despite the negative ramifications on workers and the public. The symptoms of the corporatisation have manifest themselves in rising levels of stress, anxiety and depression.

The hypocrisy in our corporatised society is clearly evident. We expect democracy to operate in the sphere of politics. Yet, raising the idea of democracy in the workplace remains taboo. The mere thought of workers self-managing a business, collectively making decisions on the direction of operations and fairly distributing the profits amongst the workforce are viewed as heresy. Democracy may be a minimum expectation in the political sphere, but a hierarchical class system and inherent inequality remains the foundations for the corporate world.

The vast network of corporate tax havens that are permitted to thrive unhindered by governments highlights a deeply troubling symptom of corporatisation. Such tax havens facilitate oligarchs, corporations and shady criminals alike. They are able to sidestep paying tax, siphon off public funds into dubious offshore bank accounts and accumulate wealth at the expense of society. The lowering of corporate tax rates and persistent loopholes in tax legislation enables corporations to minimise or avoid making a contribution to the society that has assisted their growth and prosperity. While the public pays taxes to maintain essential infrastructure and keep basic services afloat, corporations exploit widening loopholes and abuse the government's soft approach on corporate taxation.

The corporate takeover has resulted in the existence of unimaginable levels of wealth. It has enabled the ultrarich to accumulate levels of wealth that overshadow the once dizzying levels of wealth in past centuries. The richest individuals and the largest corporations have strategically used their power and influence to justify their greed. Through the corporate owned media, wealth accumulation has been glorified despite its deleterious impact on society. The mainstream media has made greed palatable, and turned it into entertainment as demonstrated by oligarchs battling it out to get into space which was turned into a sporting event. The mainstream media parades the richest oligarchs with celebrities paid to endorse their latest ventures. Corporations are promoted as leaders in social responsibility, tackling climate change in partnership with world leaders whilst they continue to mine for coal, drill for oil and gas and pollute rivers in the quest to secure precious metals in developing nations.

The corporate takeover has presented humanity with rampant inequality, which is borne out in rising levels of homelessness, child poverty, the reduction in life expectancy, and limiting potential and opportunities for individuals and communities alike. Diminished employment prospects and poor educational opportunities adversely impact people's ability to earn a decent income which ultimately leads to poor material and health outcomes. We

need to understand that inequality is not just a word but has multiple dimensions which corporate culture creates and exacerbates. Corporations do not factor in the negative impact they have on humanity or the natural environment that sustains life on earth. Corporate logic simply considers growth and making profit which come at the expense of humanity.

## **Corporate profits and Conflict**

Corporations make profit through deceit, deception and at the end of the barrel of a gun. Via their power and influence over governments, corporations have established a deep history promulgating uprisings and coups to install governments and dictatorships aligned to their objectives. A key pillar that has enforced corporate rule across the globe and guaranteed massive profits has been through the international arms trade. Ruled by large arms companies, this breed of corporations generates enormous profits through the industrialisation of death and destruction. Such profits run parallel with the rising number of deaths and injuries, which is sustained by the perpetual cycle of conflict that we have been witnessing for decades.

The intertwined world of government and arms companies leaves little to the imagination as the delicate world of international relations is no longer governed by peace and diplomacy. In its place, escalation and belligerence have taken over. Diplomacy has been relegated to a past era as western governments opt to increase the supply of weapons as a means to bring about peace. Today, container ships in the Red Sea (many of which are carrying dubious supplies) are protected by western led naval armadas. War torn nations such as Yemen are pummelled with highly expensive western made cruise missiles. Via the US government, arms companies supply 2000-pound bombs to the IDF that indiscriminately pulverise civilians that are boxed in the world's largest prison camp. Setting aside the important issue of global politics, immense profits continue to be generated by arms corporations in all conflict zones. War is good business and confidential arms deals continue to be brokered by democratic governments lacking transparency. New and old military alliances need to be stocked and supplied by the most profitable arms corporations on the planet. As the public is primed for war, stocks in arms companies continue to rise. Alongside immense corporate profits is the rising levels of human carnage which is the ultimate byproduct of corporate arms production and sales.

## Corporate omnipresence

Regardless of where we live, work, receive education and where we seek entertainment and respite, corporations now touch every aspect of our lives. The ever-expanding tentacles of corporations has given them control of the supply of the energy that we need to heat and cool our homes. Their tentacles have branched out into large sections of the health care sector and the education system. Corporations run our telecommunication systems, news outlets and media channels which we rely on to understand our world and communicate to others. Through substantial political donations, corporations garner the support of the major political parties, regardless of whether they are in government or not. Armies of corporate lobbyists meet with policy makers, all of which ultimately influence the decisions that impact on the public.

### Our resources, their profits

Corporations have established a tight grip on the extraction and sale of natural resources. Despite corporate rebranding and advertising campaigns that paint resource companies as socially responsible, and 'help' the environment, mining and oil corporations continue to extract and burn natural resources. Behind the green veneer (i.e. greenwashing) oil and mining corporations continue to generate immense profit from directly and indirectly polluting the earth. Behind the greenwashing, resource corporations have little or no regard to community concerns, the damage to the environment nor the climate emergency. Making profit is the simple calculus applied in corporate boardrooms.

### Public services in their hands

Under the guise of privatisation, corporations have been in the process of swallowing up public services. Brought about by the neoliberal revolution, governments have wilfully leased, contracted out and sold large portions of public services to the private sector. As governments have crowed about the impending benefits and the few dollars they have made by selling off precious public assets, reality has finally caught up. The colossal error on the part of successive governments has been unfolding with the irreparable damage that has been done over the decades. The transfer of assets to the private sector has resulted in the loss of internal knowledge and expertise within the public sector. The quality of services provided to the public via the corporate sector has drastically deteriorated as staff numbers have been cut back and automated to the point of being useless. The costs of providing public services have continued to rise, as quality falls. In many instances, the government has dipped into taxpayer funds to prop-up ailing and failing private sector companies so that

essential human services (once owned by government) can continue to operate. The sale of public assets has left subsequent governments in a weakened position as their control over public services has largely slipped into the hands of corporations.

The reality is that governments of all political shades have shamelessly sold off key public services and critical assets. They have wilfully entered into 'public private partnerships' and signed over public services in decades long leases or undertaken wholesale transfers to the private sector. Telecommunications, ports, airports, the education system, healthcare, aged care and much more have been transpired to the private sector who have one overriding objective. Making a profit for shareholders is the bottom line, regardless of the cost and detriment to the public. The upshot of the privatisation of public services has resulted in government's heavy reliance on the corporate sector to deliver essential public services that once were the exclusive domain of government run by the public service.

## Promoting an illusion

The public's general failure to recognise that a corporate coup d'état has taken place highlights the high level of sophistication and the amount of resources corporations have employed in planning and executing the silent takeover of society. Maintaining corporate control is sustained by pumping the public's consciousness with a fantasy world that promotes an addiction to consumption and consumerism. Via the corporate owned media and the government-controlled media, the illusion that the neoliberal ideology is 'right way' and the 'only way' is permitted to manifest. This narrative presents a view that corporations are here to help and that they alone can deliver services more efficiently and more effectively. While the mainstream media selectively broadcasts news items and promotes a specific agenda, it concurrently excludes facts from the public and restricts the public from getting a fuller picture of our world. This intentional practice limits the public's ability to have all the facts at hand thereby undermining the public's ability to make the right decisions that promote human needs ahead of corporate interests.

## Reversing corporate dominance

The corporate takeover of society may have occurred, and at first glance it may appear irreversible. Yet, nothing is set in concrete and given the right conditions change is always on the horizon. The ongoing success of corporate control depends on a public that is docile and compliant. It requires collective resignation to a life based on competition,



consumption, compliance and conflict. This is precisely why corporations depend on the mass media's ability to dupe the public into believing in a false narrative based on a fantasy world in which there is only 'one way.' However, the past few years have unleashed multiple disasters that have challenged neoliberalism's ability to keep afloat and questioned its capacity to navigate through the multiple crises that have presented themselves. The pressures of such disasters have forced the prevailing neoliberal system to reveal its true nature as an anti-democratic system that has enthusiastically aided and abetted the corporate coup d'état. The corporate takeover may have been silent and may have appeared benign, yet the conflagration of crises are revealing the potential of authoritarian corporate rule that is opposed to protecting the natural environment and human needs.

To reverse the corporate takeover, the public needs to build an effective movement for social, political, and economic transformation. This movement needs to encapsulate individuals, families, and communities by establishing alternative institutional frameworks that run parallel to those that are owned and/or controlled by corporations. The public needs to develop a new ethos that is relevant to our daily lives and serves human needs whilst preserving our precious environment. Only by building parallel social, political and economic systems can the public collectively establish a robust framework that is able to counter corporate power, and is ready to replace the failing neoliberal order.

Ultimately, the burden of social, political, and economic change inevitably lies with the public. It is everyone's responsibility to challenge corporate interests by breaking away from the dominant neoliberal ideology and unchaining ourselves from corporate culture.

It's time to kick off social transformation and reverse the corporate takeover.

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