

How Corporations Own the US Congress

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With the November elections quickly approaching, the majority of Americans will be thinking one thing: "Who cares?" This apathy isn't due to ignorance, as some accuse. Rather, working people's disinterest in the two party system implies intelligence: millions of people understand that both the Democrats and Republicans will not represent their interests in Congress.

This begs the question: Whom does the two party system work for? The answer was recently given by the mainstream The New York Times, who gave the nation an insiders peek on how corporations "lobby" (buy) congressmen. The article explains how giant corporations — from Wall-mart to weapons manufacturers — are planning on shifting their hiring practices for lobbyists, from Democratic to Republican ex-congressmen in preparation for the Republicans gaining seats in the upcoming November elections:

"Lobbyists, political consultants and recruiters all say that the going rate for Republicans — particularly current and former House staff members — has risen significantly in just the last few weeks, with salaries beginning at \$300,000 and going as high as \$1million for private sector [corporate lobbyist] positions." (September 9, 2010)

Congressmen who have recently retired make the perfect lobbyists: they still have good friends in Congress, with many of these friends owing them political favors; they have connections to foreign Presidents and Kings; and they also have celebrity status that gives good PR to the corporations.

Often, these congressmen have done favors for the corporation that is now hiring them, meaning, that the corporations are rewarding the congressmen for services rendered while in office, offering them million dollar lobbyist jobs (or seats on the corporate board of directors) that requires little to no work.

The same New York Times article revealed that the pay for 13,000 lobbyists [!] currently bribing Congress is a combined \$3.5 billion. It was also explained how some lobbying firms keep an equal amount of Democrats and Republicans on hand, so they can be prepared for any eventuality in the elections.

This phenomenon is more than a little un-democratic: when millions of people vote for a candidate, the outcomes are quickly manipulated and controlled before the election even happens.

Interestingly, the corporate-directed Wall Street Journal wrote a similar article in 2008, as the Democrats had begun to dominate politics in Washington:

"Washington's \$3 billion lobbying industry has begun shedding Republican staffers [politicians], snapping up Democratic operatives [politicians] and entire firms, a shift that started even before Tuesday's ballots were counted and Democrat Barack Obama captured the presidency." (November 5, 2008)

This article was appropriately titled "Lobbyists Put Democrats Out Front as Winds Shift."

The corporate money flows from party to party, so that the same goals are achieved: higher profits for corporations. The sums thrown at these politicians are mind boggling: the Associated Press reported that the corporate-orientated Chamber of Commerce spent "... nearly \$190 million since Barack Obama became president in January 2009." (August 21, 2010)

These numbers explain the "deeper" differences between Democrats and Republicans — money. Each party is a machine that vies for power because this power carries with it vast sums of corporate money. The longer a party is in office and the more connections it makes, the more its net worth to corporations, the more that these rewards can be spread to the different layers of the party. There is indeed a real-life, nasty fight between the Republican and Democratic Parties to dominate this corporate money.

One "interest group" that ex-Congressmen don't work for is labor unions. Unions spend millions of dollars to help get Democrats elected, and millions more is spent trying to get their ear while they're in office.

But unions cannot out-spend the banks; and they can't offer millionaire retirement packages to retired Senators. The corporate retirement plans of Congressmen prove where their minds are while in office, and whose interests are being looked after.

Unions cannot continue to pretend that the Democrats are their "friends." Labor has very little to show for this dysfunctional, decades-long friendship: union membership continues to shrivel as do jobs, wages and benefits for workers – a losing strategy if ever there was one.

A "lesser of two evils" approach to politics equals evil politicians for labor, no matter who wins. In fact, the lesser-evil Democrats have become increasingly evil over the years, to the point where the party as a whole is more Conservative than the Nixon-era Republicans.

The point has been reached where — in various states — Democratic governors are being endorsed by unions after promising to attack the wages and benefits of public workers!

To get out of this vicious, dead-end cycle, unions could unite their strength to form coalitions that promote independent labor candidates: 100 percent funded by labor to govern 100 percent in the interest of working people. All other roads lead back to the corporate lobbyists.

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