



Biz-War and the Out-Of-Power Elites: The Progressive-Left Attack on the Corporation

by Prof. Jarol B. Manheim, George Washington University

(Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc., March 2004, \$34.50; 216 pages)

Reviewed by Neil Hrab

Citigroup, America's largest financial institution, announced earlier this year that it was giving in to demands by the environmental activist group Rainforest Action Network (RAN) to stop funding projects that RAN claimed were harming the environment. RAN's four-year campaign against Citigroup involved campus student rallies and boycotts, anti-Citigroup TV ads, street protests, and even banner hangings in front of Citigroup's New York headquarters. To a casual observer, this might seem like a spontaneous grassroots movement spurred by concern over a financial giant's business practices. But, as a valuable new book makes clear, nothing could be farther from the truth.

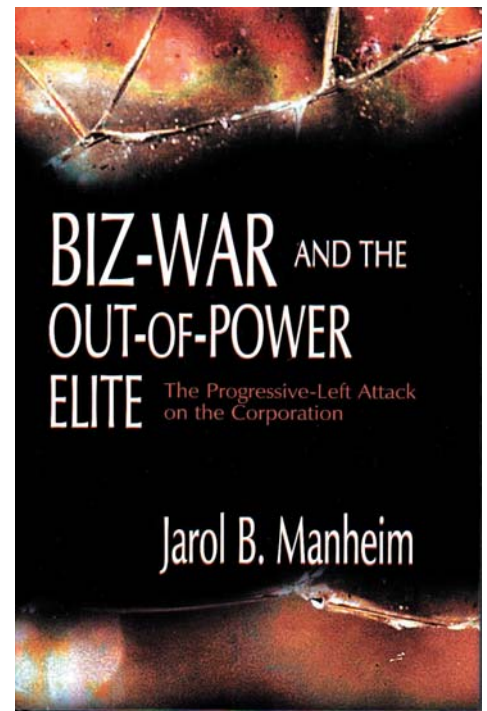
In his new book, *Biz-War and the Out-of-Power Elites: The Progressive-Left Attack on the Corporation*, Jarol Manheim, professor of media and public affairs and political science at the George Washington University in Washington, D.C., documents the rise of the new anti-corporate Left (or progressives, as they now prefer to be called). The book looks closely at the ideology, organizing strategies, and communications tactics that liberal activists are using to challenge both this country's business elite, as well as politically ascendant conservatives.

Prof. Manheim notes that his analysis is not concerned with ideology. His aim is not to analyze "the colorful philosophical banners around which true believers rally," but to study the "strategies and tactics employed by their leaders to attract and mobilize them."

Manheim begins his analysis with the 1980s Reagan Revolution, which he considers crucial to *Biz-War's* story, because it precipitated the fall of a once-hegemonic American liberalism. Some of the liberals who survived the rout began to cast about for ways to take back power. One such survivor group was organized labor, integral to the New Deal coalition that Ronald Reagan shattered. Another was a network of wealthy young liberal philanthropists who, as early as 1981 (as Manheim documents), began to look for ways in which the Left could rebuild.

First, the survivors set out to craft a "guiding empirical theory of social, political, and economic organization" to replace the liberalism that Reagan overthrew. A big part of this theory is an anti-business propaganda tool called "corporate social responsibility" (CSR). They also set out to build a new "institutional counterstructure" from which they could attack their conservative foes. Manheim pays due attention to the rise of ideological leftist foundations like the Threshold and Tides Foundations, which fund the groups that comprise this "counterstructure." Threshold has provided funding for such far-left outfits like the Ruckus Society, Friends of the Earth, Mobilization for Global Justice, and International Labor Rights Fund. Tides has helped launch groups such as the International Rivers Network and the Institute for Global Communication.

To assure some minimal unity among its various factions, the reconstituted Left settled on an identifiable and easily demonized "enemy" figure: private, for-



profit American corporations, which Manheim describes as "the perfect foil" for the Left's agenda. This is because corporations "determine the scale, nature, and quality of employment; the types of goods and services that are produced...; the form and extent of the exploitation of natural resources, and the balance between economic production and environmental quality; and other similarly significant outcomes...[P]recisely because they are the repository of so much economic, political and social authority, they are widely distrusted, disliked, and in some quarters even reviled." For liberals attempting to rise, phoenix-like, from the ashes of the New Deal coalition's collapse, "[c]orporations are the perfect enemy."

Finally, this new anti-corporate movement crafted tactics of political confrontation, articulated in the rise of radical, tax-exempt environmentalist groups like the aggressive Rainforest Action Network, which is now trying to duplicate its successful, boldly disruptive anti-Citibank tactics in campaigns against other banks. During the summer of 2004, RAN launched its "BBQ the Banks" campaign, designed to turn up the heat on "The Liquidators," or "America's most environmentally destructive banks." The activists at



these events shouted questions at bank executives—while grilling tofu—in an effort to shame these executives into becoming more “eco-friendly.” (Manheim’s previous book, *The Death of a Thousand Cuts*, provides an excellent survey of the tactics used by groups like RAN.)

Biz-War explains how the new liberal Left—a loose alliance of liberal foundations, labor unions, religious activists, environmentalists, activist pension funds, and CSR boosters—came together to take back the power and authority they believed was unjustly taken from them by the Reagan Revolution. It also provides a picture of the activists, organizers, and various tax-exempt institutions involved. The analyses of the aforementioned Tides and Threshold Foundations are particularly insightful.

The book looks not only at the evolution of the post-Reagan Left, but also at the little-known history of how the movement revitalized itself. The Left’s revival, Manheim notes, “was not the result of a single decision by some maximum leader or leadership cabal... Rather, it was a bit of a messy process... [first,] key individuals and groups on the Left struggled for a time to overcome their shock at what had befallen them... Coming from a variety of directions and with varying pace, the policy activists, the ideologues, the social philanthropists, and the altruists who compose what we now think of as the Progressive Left slowly converged on their new language and on the strategy it opened up for rebuilding their movement.”

While the anti-corporate Left may have evolved into its current form without any central direction, in recent years it has been remarkably well-coordinated in the pursuit of its goals. Anyone who wants to understand the ferocious campaigns now being conducted by liberal and left-wing groups against corporations should read this book.

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Meet CEI’s Experts: Hans Bader



Hans Bader, CEI’s Counsel for Special Projects, joined CEI in 2003. His prior casework has included suits involving the First Amendment, federalism, and civil rights issues. Hans graduated from the University of Virginia with a B.A. in economics and history, and later earned his J.D. from Harvard Law School. Just before joining CEI, he was Senior Counsel at the Center for Individual Rights. The editors of *Monthly Planet* recently asked Hans to tell us more about himself.

How did you become interested in cases dealing with the issue of federalism?

While at a prior employer, the Center for Individual Rights, I worked on cases limiting the reach of federal power. One stopped the Justice Department from using the Voting Rights Act to force a Louisiana school board that already had black members to create racially gerrymandered districts. The other invalidated a Violence Against Women Act provision that federalized domestic violence cases, treating them as “civil rights” violations. The Supreme Court held the provision exceeded Congress’s power under the Commerce Clause and the Fourteenth Amendment. While working on these cases, I saw how the blurring of lines between state and federal governments promotes silly laws and a lack of accountability.

What do you believe is the biggest difference between public interest law and private practice?

Working in public interest law gives you more discretion to pursue interesting cases and avoid disagreeable clients.

Where could you be found when not at CEI?

At home or with family. Even when I travel, I typically stay with family members, such as my wife’s family in Nice, France. I spend a lot of time reading, especially constitutional cases and history books.

Do you have any advice for someone considering entering law school?

Don’t go to law school to make a lot of money. If money is what interests you, become an investment banker instead.