

Democracy and the Transnational Capitalist Class

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ABSTRACT: While globalization means many different things to many different people, there is growing consensus that capitalist globalization is its most powerful contemporary form. This article argues that capitalist globalization, and thus effective power in the global system, is increasingly in the hands of a transnational capitalist class (TCC) comprising four fractions: those who own and control the major corporations and their local affiliates, globalizing bureaucrats and politicians, globalizing professionals, and consumerist elites. The TCC engages in a variety of activities that take place at all levels, including community, urban, national, and global politics, and involve many different groups of actors. Two sets of questions are addressed: (1) What forms do these activities take? and (2) Do they enhance or undermine democracy? The role of the TCC is analyzed through brief case studies on Codex Alimentarius and the global tobacco industry.

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TRANSNATIONAL corporations (TNCs) and those who support them clearly engage in political activities of various types, but the exact forms of these engagements and the roles of the various actors in them have not been subject to a great deal of systematic research.¹ These activities take place at all levels, including community, urban, national, regional, and global politics, and involve many different groups of actors, including those in government, political parties, and what we might call the service industries of politics. In this article, I shall focus on two sets of questions: (1) What forms do these activities take? and (2) Do they enhance or undermine democracy? It is commonplace to argue that in the age of capitalist globalization, in most countries, political parties rarely make any significant differences because no political party that seriously challenges capitalist globalization stands much chance of being elected (or if elected, much chance of hanging onto office). If we accept this argument, then the focus turns to the global political system as a whole rather than the parts of the system described by national politics.

While TNCs have always been political actors, the demands of economic globalization require them to be political at the global level in a more systematic sense than previously. The political action of TNCs at the global level, like most political action, is a mixture of the haphazard and opportunistic on one hand and well-organized and systemic behavior on the other. One way to capture this theoretically is to conceptualize

the systemic organization of politics for global capitalism in terms of a transnational capitalist class (TCC). The material base of this class is in the corporations they own and/or control. In my formulation, the TCC is composed of four main, interlocking groups:

- those who own and control the TNCs (the corporate fraction),
- globalizing bureaucrats and politicians (the state fraction),
- globalizing professionals (the technical fraction), and
- merchants and media (the consumerist fraction).

While each of these groups performs distinct functions, personnel are often interchangeable between them. Key individuals can belong to more than one fraction at the same time, and the transition from membership of one to another group is more or less routinized in many societies.²

Historically, the relationship between the economic power and the political power of TNCs has been very controversial. The involvement of ITT in the bloody coup against the government of President Allende in Chile in 1973, for example, was one of a small number of exceptions rather than the rule in the second half of the twentieth century. Research on organizations influential in regional and global politics suggests that major corporations are currently using more subtle methods to achieve political objectives that will serve their economic interests. The European Roundtable of Industrialists (ERT) is a typical example of how this process operates and how the corporate

interest can shift the emphasis of policy making even in a rich and powerful coalition of states like the European Union, with substantial implications for global politics (Corporate Europe Observatory [CEO] 1997). ERT was founded in 1983 by a group of visionary captains of industry, notably Agnelli of Fiat, Dekker of Philips, and Gyllenhammer of Volvo, and performs an agenda-setting role in European institutions for global free trade and competitiveness. It comprises the leaders of around forty-five TNCs, prominent among which in the 1990s were BP, Daimler-Benz, Fiat, Shell, and Siemens, all globalizing corporations.

The European Centre for Infrastructure Studies, an offshoot of ERT, is said to have been instrumental in persuading the European Commission to establish the Trans-European Networks (a program of 150 environmentally sensitive infrastructure projects), bypassing the European Parliament. Founded by Umberto Agnelli of Fiat in 1994, it brought together regional and national governments, municipalities, European Union institutions, research institutes, banks, and corporations. In a very familiar pattern for globalizing elites, former European Commissioner vice president Henning Christopherson joined the board of the centre when he left the commission. So it is not too far-fetched to argue that corporate interests are, at least, highly influential in the making of European Union transport policy. One central consequence of the political efficacy of the coordinated power of TNCs is the failure of governments everywhere to shift the

balance from private cars and lorries to public transport and rail freight, despite almost universal rhetoric on the need to do this.³ CEO (1997) gave two telling examples: (1) German milk is freighted to Greece to be made into feta cheese and then sent back to Germany for sale, and (2) in the 1960s, Unilever had soap factories in most European countries, but now there is one huge factory in England to supply all of Europe. So dairy products companies in Germany and Unilever in Britain contribute to the enormous increase in long-distance transport of goods through Europe because lean production and just-in-time (key concepts for economic globalization) make production much more efficient for the producers and, in a sense, for consumers if the real price of the products actually falls with no decline in quality, but this is inefficient for essential road users, those who lose jobs, and in the long term, our relationships to the environment. Such practices are, of course, not confined to Europe.

In 1995, the European Union and the U.S. government in consultation with more than 1,200 corporations active in the United States and the European Union, established a transatlantic business dialogue (TABD) to pursue globalization-friendly policies. According to its U.S. business coordinator (cited in CEO 1997), "TABD is a private-sector force designed to respond to the new reality of trade; namely that companies are functioning globally and their involvement in the making of international trade policy is a natural outgrowth of such globalization" (p. 28). This is, of course, one small

organization among thousands of others, but its leading personnel included one European Commissioner (Sir Leon Brittain), senior executives from major European and U.S. corporations, high officials from the U.S. Treasury and State Department, and the former GATT secretary-general, Peter Sutherland. Organizations such as these can be found in many parts of the world, for example, within the networks of the International Chamber of Commerce and the many overseas branches of national Chambers of Commerce, the World Economic Forum, and now the United Nations system (see Karliner 1999).

This article discusses two spheres of TCC activities. These are the Codex Alimentarius Commission, where corporate power is exercised in the global politics of food, and the ongoing struggles of the global tobacco industry to resist the coalition against it, a vivid illustration of the global politics of regulation (with a strong dose of cultural politics intermingled).

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS

Codex was established in 1963 with the express purpose of facilitating both world trade and consumer protection in foods through the establishment of international standards. Clearly, under some circumstances, this could result in food standards (for hygiene, nutrition, safety and so on) being raised all over the world to those of the strictest regulatory authorities or, conversely,

reduced to some set of lowest common denominators (see Public Citizen 1997, 38-42). One of the key issues that has exercised Codex over the years is the fact that countries that impose the highest standards of food safety and quality and those with the lowest standards are both accused of unfair trade practices. Potential conflicts between the safety and quality regulatory tasks of Codex, on one hand, and the facilitation of global trade tasks, on the other, are endemic to the organization. Thus, it is important to know who, exactly, makes the policies that governments and intergovernmental organizations generally take as their benchmarks for food.

Codex is an intergovernmental body run by the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO), and they take turns hosting biennial commission meetings in Rome and Geneva. According to the official guide to Codex history and practices,

representation at sessions is on a country basis. National delegations are led by senior officials appointed by their governments. Delegations may, and often do, include representatives of industry, consumers' organizations and academic institutes. . . . A number of international governmental organizations and international NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] also attend in an observer capacity. Although they are "observers", the tradition of the Codex Alimentarius Commission allows such organizations to put forward their points of view at every stage except in the final decision, which is the exclusive prerogative of Member Governments. (FAO/WHO 1999, 13)

Much play is made of the openness of Codex procedures (notably country Codex Contact Points and National Codex Committees), and the overall impression is of commendable transparency, joined-up intergovernmental thinking, and genuine representation in this most vital area of public policy. However, when we probe beneath the surface, a rather different picture emerges.

A first clue that the system is not as evenhanded as it appears comes from Codex USA (located in the Department of Agriculture—a case, some might argue, of poacher turned gamekeeper). While observer status is important, membership of the official government delegations is the key to understanding the decision-making process. Guidelines issued by the U.S. Codex office explain the process of the selection of delegates to Codex meetings in more detail. U.S. delegates to Codex are government officials from the lead agencies involved (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Drug Administration, Environmental Protection Agency, and Commerce).

The delegates develop U.S. positions on issues to be considered. All interested parties are invited to provide information and comments on the issues. As the delegates prepare for the meetings of their committees, they form delegations comprising individuals whose support they think necessary at the meetings. *These individuals participate as members of the official U.S. Delegations, at their own expense* [emphasis added]. (Codex USA n.d.)⁴

The maximum for each delegation is twenty-five persons per committee,

and the criteria that govern selection of nongovernmental members to delegations are (1) obtaining informed views, (2) determining whether opportunities to provide written comments would be an adequate alternative, and (3) providing balanced representations of all interested parties. Individuals and representatives wishing to become members of the U.S. delegation are invited to contact the U.S. delegate or Codex manager, who will consider all requests, may seek volunteers, and “may identify and solicit for membership . . . from labor groups, the academic community, trade associations, specific business firms, public interest groups, and from other sources, including the public at large” (Codex USA n.d.). Nongovernment members of the delegation are expected to attend all Codex committee sessions, be available to assist the U.S. delegate, and attend meetings called by the U.S. delegate. Thus, being a nongovernment member is an expensive and time-consuming responsibility.⁵

In the only systematic study of Codex to date, Avery, Drake, and Drake (1993) documented the affiliations of the 2,578 people who participated in the 1989-1991 session of Codex. In the twelve specialist committees in which the work of this session was conducted, 105 governments and 140 food and agro-chemical companies were represented. In addition to those representing national governments, there were 660 industry representatives, compared with a mere 26 from public interest groups. One of the largest food corporations in the world, Nestle, had 38 representatives, more than most countries. At

the two meetings on food additives and contaminants, 41 percent of those present were from TNCs and industry federations; at the meetings on pesticide residue levels, 127 (33 percent) were from TNCs, compared with 80 from all the developing countries.

In the 1989-1991 session, the U.S. policy for selection of delegates produced a total of 243 delegates, of whom 2 came from nongovernmental organizations, 10 were consultants, 112 were from the U.S. government, and 119 (49 percent of the total) came from industry. Overall, industry supplied 35 percent of the membership of the ten largest national delegations and 22 percent of all delegates. Only eight nongovernmental organizations provided members of delegations, four in the Canadian delegation and two each in the U.S. and Netherlands delegations. Industry supplied 61 percent of the delegation from Switzerland, 44 percent of the Japanese, 40 percent of the French, 34 percent of the German, 31 percent of the British, 23 percent of the Canadian, 22 percent of the Italian, and 21 percent of the Dutch delegations, reflecting the global importance of food industry corporations domiciled in these countries. Most of the major food TNCs (led by Nestle and including Philip Morris/Kraft, Unilever, Pepsico, Coca Cola, Heinz, and CPC International) and agrochemical TNCs (including Ciba Geigy, ICI, Rhone Poulenc, Bayer, Dupont, Dow, Monsanto, Hoechst, Shell, and Sumitomo) were represented on Codex committees, some of them as official delegates (see Avery, Drake, and Drake 1993, Tables 5.1.1, 5.3.1,

5.4.1, 5.5.1, Appendix Tables 5, 6, and 7).

Rather disingenuously, the official Codex guide informs us that “a feature of the committee system is that, with few exceptions, each committee is hosted by a member country, which is chiefly responsible for the cost of the committee’s maintenance and administration and for providing its chairperson” (FAO/WHO 1999, 15). This system generally results in most of the meetings’ being held in and financed by groups in First World countries in which major food industry corporations are domiciled. Examples of this are clearly to be seen in the commodity committees, for example, at the 1999-2000 meetings. The Fish and Fishery Products Committee was hosted by Norway; Milk and Milk Products, and Meat Hygiene by New Zealand; Cocoa and Chocolate, and Natural Mineral Waters by Switzerland; Processed Meat and Poultry Products by Denmark; Fats and Oils, and Sugars by Britain; and Processed Fruits and Vegetables, and Cereals by the United States. The only exception was Mexico, which hosted Fresh Fruit and Vegetables, of which it is a major exporter to the United States. While Codex gives some prominence to the role of consumers and their organizations in formulating policy on food, it is very wary of encouraging this role at the global level. Indeed, the guide specifically states, “The Commission has continued to involve consumer interests in its work while recognizing that it is at the national level that consumers can make their most valuable and effective input” (FAO/WHO 1999, 22). The Codex

strategy is one of ensuring that consumer input is safely channeled through national governments.

The last point to be made about the Codex process as an exemplar of how the TCC works in global politics concerns the role of the globalizing professionals, the food scientists and technologists on whom the whole activity is said to rest. "From the very beginning, the Codex Alimentarius has been a science-based activity" (FAO/WHO 1999, 27). This is, of course, not quite as simple as it sounds. The history of the links between science, big business, public policy, and in particular, the cheap-food policy on which most capitalist industrialized societies are based suggests that science-based corporations are sometimes reluctant to err on the side of caution (the precautionary principle) at the expense of their short-term profits. Governments always have to balance out the interests of consumers in the safety and quality of what they consume, the interests of food industry workers, and the interests of those who own and control the food companies. The scientists (the technical fraction of the TCC in this case) provide the technical basis for decisions, but when the scientists differ (as, e.g., was for many years the case in the debate over the health risks of smoking; see below), governments, industry, and consumers in the main tend to accept the least costly and most reassuring conclusions (at least until it is too late).

Preliminary evidence from the 1999-2001 round of Codex deliberations suggests that despite some very well-publicized and costly failures in

the global food system (in terms of both human and animal health and industry profits), nothing much has changed in the past decade. The Food Labelling Committee that met in Ottawa in May 2000, for example, consisted of more than 200 official participants attached to member country delegations and more than sixty observers, five from international governmental organizations and about fifty from nongovernmental organizations (including industry groups). Of the official country participants, 48 were from TNCs and/or industry associations, while only 4 were from nongovernmental organizations (mostly consumer protection organizations). Of the nongovernmental organizations, 13 were from citizens or consumer groups of various types while at least 35 were industry associations. Codex produced a list of observer organizations participating in its activities in June 2000 that shows a similar distribution. In addition to intergovernmental organizations (including United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the World Trade Organization), almost 150 international nongovernmental organizations were listed. Of these, more than 80 were clearly industry associations. There were perhaps 10 consumer groups, and the rest were technical organizations of various types, some of which may be controlled by corporate interests.⁶

Precisely the types of disasters (BSE, food poisonings, and contamination) and ongoing problems (pesticide residues, inadequate and

misleading food labeling) that Codex was established to prevent are still with us (Public Citizen 1997). The next big battle will be over genetically modified organisms, and while Monsanto and other major biotechnology corporations suffered setbacks to their plans in the late 1990s, genetically modified organisms are still very much on the agenda. Despite campaigns by consumer groups and professionals independent of the TNCs for reforms to the Codex process, there are no signs that World Trade Organization procedures will diminish the ability of food and agrochemical TNCs to cut corners with nutritional quality and food safety to increase profitability.

BIG TOBACCO

The tobacco industry presents challenges, at both the theoretical level and the empirical level, to the thesis presented in this article. Real curbs on the freedom of tobacco companies to advertise their wares wherever and however they wish and bans on smoking in public places in some countries, restrictions that apply to very few legal products, suggest that the unity implied by the concept of the TCC and thus the concept itself are flawed. The empirical evidence presented in this brief case study, however, demonstrates that far from challenging the concept of the TCC, the case of the tobacco industry provides telling evidence for the existence of a TCC and shows that its members continue to play an important role in serving the interests of global capitalism through building the economic power of their

corporations, the political power of their industry, and the culture-ideology of consumerism.⁷ The ongoing struggle of the major tobacco companies all over the world to market their unhealthy products illustrates well how corporate interests affect the global politics of regulation.

The global tobacco industry at the turn of the century was dominated by four firms. Largest by a long way was Philip Morris, which ranked 31 on the *Fortune* Global 500 in 2000, with revenues in excess of \$61 billion; Japan Tobacco and British American Tobacco ranked 221 and 226 (with around \$20 billion in revenues each). RJ Reynolds Tobacco ranked 436 with revenues of more than \$11 billion.⁸ Outside the Global 500, American Brands (acquired by British American Tobacco in 1995), Rothmans International, the German firm Reemstma, and several state monopolies, notably the Chinese, made up the strong second tier. Widely publicized events since the mid-1990s have led some to believe that the tobacco industry in the United States, and perhaps the rest of the world, is on its last legs. My analysis predicts that the industry, supported crucially by some state agencies despite attacks from other parts of the state apparatus, and the promotional culture of cigarettes (see below) will continue to sell cigarettes and make good profits while the TCC retains its powers within global capitalism.

Though cigarette sales in First World countries declined in the 1990s, premium price brands, notably Marlboro, increased their market share all over the world, thus making

up for some of the lost revenue in volume. The situation in the Third World and the New Second World of eastern Europe and the former USSR is more complex (see INFACT 1998, 76-83). Industry sources (see annual reports of tobacco industry companies) and critics (Frey 1997) alike have documented the targeting of Third World (and increasingly New Second World) consumers as a deliberate strategy to compensate for the decline in revenues anticipated in the First World. Philip Morris, RJ Reynolds, and British American Tobacco brands in 1995 had more than two-thirds (often more than 90%) of the market in Barbados, Ghana, Honduras, Hong Kong, Kenya, Morocco, Nicaragua, Sri Lanka, and Turkey and more than one-third in Pakistan, Slovak Republic, and Zaire (see the October 1996 issue of *Tobacco Reporter*). Marlboro is the top selling imported brand all over the world. Whereas in the mid-1980s the global tobacco companies had legal access to less than half of the potential world market for cigarettes, by the mid-1990s this had risen to around 90 percent. The reasons for this dramatic increase were the trend to deregulation of foreign investment and trade in general, strategic alliances between local and global cigarette companies, and the decline of government monopolies all over the world. Social factors like increasing prosperity of the new middle classes and the drive to upgrade their consumption patterns, which often means preference for expensive imported cigarettes over cheaper local cigarettes, the growing freedom for women to indulge in previously

male-dominated pastimes like drinking alcohol and smoking cigarettes, and massive advertising and promotional campaigns by the global corporations (INFACT 1998), have all contributed to the rapid increase in sales of globally branded cigarettes in the Third World and eastern Europe.

The reason the global tobacco companies are increasingly targeting the Third World is that there are, relatively speaking, fewer smokers of cigarettes there, though this pattern is changing. The WHO estimated that in 1995, the average number of cigarettes smoked per day was 22 in industrialized countries and 14 in developing countries, mirroring a decline in the habit of 1.4 percent per annum in the former but an increase of 1.7 percent in the latter. The WHO has documented the rise in cigarette smoking per person per year in key Third World markets from the 1970s to the 1990s. In most of the largest countries (China, Indonesia, South Korea, Bangladesh, India, and Thailand), per capita consumption has increased. Gender, class, age, and ethnic and religious variables would undoubtedly give a sharper picture, but the brute fact remains: the potential for cigarette industry growth lies not in the First World where fewer and fewer people are smoking and restrictions on smoking and marketing tend to be more strictly enforced but in the Third World where groups that previously were outside the market for manufactured and particularly globally branded cigarettes are rapidly being brought into its orbit. Given the health risks of cigarette smoking, which are widely known, and the increasing levels of

local campaigning against these risks, for the industry to be surviving, let alone thriving, suggests that it has managed to assemble a powerful coalition of support over a wide range of social groups and institutions.

The global system theory outlined above and its central concept of the TCC suggests how we might fruitfully analyze the promotional culture of cigarettes and the social forces that support it. TNC executives, globalizing bureaucrats, politicians and professionals, and consumerist elites all play their parts individually and in concert to bring this promotional culture of cigarettes and smoking into as many institutional sectors of all societies as they can and to create a dependency on both the drug (nicotine) and the money (financial dependency of many types) that the tobacco industry brings with it.

The global tobacco industry is supported by a corporate elite, drawn from a wide spectrum of prestigious institutions, interlinking the corporate and the noncorporate worlds. Most major corporations have networks of connections from the corporate center through joint ventures, strategic alliances, and other business links to local and national government agencies and the people who run them, to the advertising and media industries, to the retail and entertainment sectors, and to many other social spheres (particularly those who come to rely on their largesse for sponsorship money) wherever they do business in the world, effectively all the inhabited parts of the planet.

Globalizing bureaucrats, politicians, and professionals have long

been friendly to the tobacco industry, and very few have taken the real risk of public and militant opposition to it. The reasons are obvious: the tobacco lobby is rich, well organized, and well connected in most countries;⁹ there are many more smokers than active antismokers; and those who stand for public office or who depend on the state or the business community for their prosperity generally avoid antagonizing such interests. The major exceptions to this rule in the case of the tobacco industry are those public health officials and medical researchers who have campaigned against the health risks since the 1960s (the major medical associations have mostly come off the fence on the issue), those antismoking politicians whose secure electoral bases have saved them from the revenge of the industry (e.g., President Clinton in 1996, though some tobacco money went to the Democrats too), and those lawyers who have taken on the task of suing the tobacco corporations for destroying the health of their clients (often on a no win–no fee basis). This certainly appears to be a formidable coalition, but in the context of the majority of local and national politicians who stay neutral and the other massed professionals working directly and indirectly for the smoking interests—lawyers, advertisers, business consultants, and industry-funded medical researchers—the sides look less evenly matched.

It is also important to balance out the picture of smokers under continual social pressures to give up or to indulge their habit in private rather than public spaces with the

continuing actual and iconic presence of the cigarette in most societies. There are very few countries where nonsmoking regulations are strictly enforced. In the 1990s in the United States, where the antismoking movement has gone furthest, although there were widespread advertising bans in the media, characters still smoked in films, plays, photographs, and other representational forms, and this may be increasing as part of a new hedonistic culture. The sight of small groups of smokers huddled together outside buildings is now common in many countries, no doubt for some people adding to rather than detracting from the attraction of the habit.

Globalizing bureaucrats who promote the interests of the tobacco industry are opposed by those, mostly in the health and education spheres, who are part of the antismoking movement. Indeed, the struggle between protobacco government agents and agencies in revenue and industrial departments and antismoking activists in health and education appears to be an increasingly global phenomenon. The cases of the United States and the United Kingdom are now well documented, and evidence from other places is also building up (see Sklair 1998).

Disagreements at the local and countrywide levels between groups for and against the tobacco industry have been paralleled internationally through the United Nations system by conflicts between the Food and Agriculture Organization—supporting the interests of tobacco growers—and the WHO—in the interests of disease reduction—on the role of

tobacco in development.¹⁰ Nevertheless, despite all this practical and ideological mobilization by the antismoking movement during at least the past three decades, more cigarettes are being smoked globally than ever before, the tobacco corporations continue to make substantial profits, most of their shareholders seem content to take their dividends, and the promotional culture of cigarettes shows no sign at all of abating.

CORPORATE POWER AND GENUINE DEMOCRACY

Much of the research on corporate-state connection is in the form of obscure reports from and about obscure lobby groups. This perfectly illustrates my thesis that the TNCs do work, quite deliberately and sometimes rather covertly, as political actors and often have direct access to those at the highest levels of formal political and administrative power with considerable success. The research of CEO and INFACT could, I am sure, be replicated for most countries and many cities in the world. Everywhere, we find corporate executives, globalizing politicians and professionals, and consumer elites (merchants, marketers, and advertisers) telling us in public and doing their best to ensure in private that the globalizing agenda of contemporary capitalism driven by the TNCs and their allies is inevitable and, eventually, in the best interests of us all. They would see the corporate lobbies working effectively within the European Union and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, within Codex,

and for the tobacco industry globally as doing a fine job in paving the way to universal prosperity.¹¹

I have argued that the TNCs and their allies are political actors and that they do achieve significant success in getting across their message that there is no alternative to global capitalism. The route to prosperity for all, the corporations argue, is through international competitiveness decided by the “free” market and “free” trade, institutions and processes that they largely control themselves or through their friends and allies in local and national governments and international organizations.

Does this present a problem for democracy? In one sense it does not. TNCs are legal bodies with every right to act legally to further their interests. They are formally owned by millions of individual shareholders whose main interest is in seeing the value of their investments increase, though effective control is usually vested in small groups of owner-executives and institutional shareholders. The other side of the matter is that all major trade and investment treaties are profoundly undemocratic in structure and process. In 1994, just before the U.S. Congress was due to vote on the Uruguay Round of GATT, the Washington-based organization Public Citizen offered to donate \$10,000 to the charity of choice of any member of Congress who had read the 500-page agreement and who could answer ten questions about it. Only one member, a “free-trader,” eventually accepted the challenge, and as a result he changed his vote from *for* to *against*

the agreement (after having voted for NAFTA, which, presumably, he had not read). Congress approved GATT in December 1994, the inference being that most U.S. legislators voted for an agreement that would fundamentally change the global economy without knowing what was in it in any detail.¹² Neither do most legislators in the member countries of the European Union appear, on the whole, to be better informed than those in the United States on such matters. So apart from the very big issues about whether to join or accede to treaties, which are very occasionally put to the vote in a referendum, our elected representatives appear to nod through, on a regular basis, legislation that affects our daily lives in many different ways. As the evidence from Codex and the tobacco industry suggests, the interests of global capital are generally better represented because the TNCs have the resources and the commercial motivation to see that their interests are fully represented. Even such a relatively well-endowed organization as Greenpeace Germany had only one Brussels-based lobbyist in 1997: “In comparison with the swarms of industry lobbyists to be found in Brussels corridors, environmentalists are an endangered species” (CEO 1997, 57).

The political activities of the TNCs and their allies, therefore, raise serious doubts about how well our democracies are working with respect to everyday economic issues, global trade, foreign investment, the environment, and health and safety of workers and citizens in general. Attempts by bodies like the Inter-

national Labor Organization and the now-dismantled United Nations Centre on Transnational Corporations to develop universal codes of conduct to encourage the best practices of TNCs and to outlaw their much-documented bad practices all over the world have come to very little, and though the rhetoric of stakeholders and sustainable development is all the rage in TNCs and governmental organizations (see Sklair 2001, chaps. 6-7), capitalist globalization generally promises more freedoms to the TNCs without imposing many compensating responsibilities. This is all in the name of globalization, free trade, international competitiveness, and the hope that somehow it will make poor people better off. As I argue elsewhere (Sklair 2002), the crises of class polarization and ecological unsustainability that are direct consequences of capitalist globalization make the search for alternatives to capitalist globalization urgent.

Notes

1. The major exceptions have been the study of lobbyists. See, for example, Jacobs (1999) on the United States, Pedlar and van Schendelen (1994) on Europe, and Gierzynski (2000) on Political Action Committees in the United States.

2. For an extended analysis of the transnational capitalist class (TCC) based on *Fortune* Global 500 and similar corporations, see Sklair (2001).

3. The wave of protests that swept Europe in 2000 over rising fuel prices is only one serious consequence of the failure of national and Europe-wide governments to work out sensible, environmentally sustainable transport policies. The role of oil, automobile, road-building, supermarket, and other industries in this

quasi-conspiracy against sustainability urgently requires systematic research.

4. I am grateful to Codex officials in Rome and country offices in the United States (U.S. Department of Agriculture), United Kingdom (Food Standards Agency), and Australia (National Offices of Food Safety) for providing the documents on which this section is based and comments on this section.

5. Avery, Drake, and Drake (1993, 38) reported that pressure from the International Organization of Consumers' Unions resulted in Codex's agreeing in July 1991 that "governments should encourage funding for consumer experts and representatives to participate in Codex and other food quality and safety work." So far, only Norway and India (some time ago) appear to have actually done this.

6. The affiliations of some participants were difficult to identify, and time and resources did not permit a finer analysis. Lists of participants can be found on the Codex Web site by clicking on the ALINORM boxes for the dates of meetings.

7. For a more extended discussion of the global tobacco industry and the TCC up to 1997, see Sklair (1998), where copious references will be found.

8. This is the tobacco arm of what had been RJR Nabisco. For a variety of reasons, RJR was demerged from the parent company, and its overseas tobacco business was sold off to Japan Tobacco. Nabisco was later acquired by Philip Morris.

9. See Sklair (1998) for details of and references to these connections.

10. In 1999, the World Health Organization (WHO) began a serious campaign to control the "smoking disease epidemic" globally, details of which are available from the WHO Web site.

11. For a theoretical discussion that attempts to provide a Gramscian basis for the argument that global capitalism needs to be politically active to sustain its project and creates elite social movements based on the transnational corporations (TNCs) for this purpose, see Sklair (2001, chap. 2).

12. For details, see Nader and Wallach (cited in Mander and Goldsmith 1996, chap. 8). The book as a whole, an early manifesto for the International Forum on Globalization, provides many good examples of the political actions of TNCs and the growing opposition to

them. For a systematic analysis of antiglobalization movements, see Starr (2000).

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