

Let's abolish corporate personhood!

Democracy means that We the People rule. But with the help of corporate personhood, corporations are ruling us! This is not democracy.

Corporate personhood is neither logical nor legitimate. It was invented by corporate lawyers to obtain big advantages for a few people over the rest of us. As a result, giant corporations are able to act with little concern for the future of life. They are doing enormous damage to working people, small businesses, communities, the environment, and democratic processes.

We all want to live in a world that is safe for ourselves, our families, and all living species. By working together we can find sensible, affordable, sustainable ways to provide essential goods and services for everyone without destroying our planet. Corporate personhood is a barrier to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It must be abolished.

Join our campaign!

If people don't stand up for people's rights, then we won't have democracy. Here are a few examples of how you can get involved:

- **Organize a public forum or workshop to explore what is wrong with "corporate personhood."**
- **Ask elected representatives and candidates for office to work to abolish corporate personhood.**
- **Work to have your local government or organization pass a resolution that opposes corporate personhood.**
- **Write letters to your local newspaper.**
- **Sign a declaration opposing corporate personhood.**
- **Start a Challenge Corporate Power, Assert the People's Rights study group in your neighborhood.**

Contact the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) for materials and assistance.

We must crush in its birth the aristocracy of our moneyed corporations, which dare already to challenge our government, and bid defiance to the laws of our country.

—Thomas Jefferson

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Since 1915, WILPF has been working for equality of all people in a world free of racism, sexism, homophobia, poverty, and war; building peace through world disarmament; and changing government priorities to meet human needs.

Abolish Corporate Personhood is a national action of WILPF, part of our Challenge Corporate Power, Assert the People's Rights campaign. For more information on our campaign study groups and organizing materials, visit the WILPF website, call the Philadelphia office, or contact your local WILPF branch.

ABOLISH CORPORATE PERSONHOOD

WHY DO CORPORATIONS HAVE MORE RIGHTS THAN PEOPLE?



In 1886 the U.S. Supreme Court declared that under the law corporations were "persons" and gave them the same rights as human beings. But a corporation exists only on paper. It is simply a legal creation that allows a group of people to engage in activities as a single entity.

**What happened?
Who benefits?**

ABOLISH CORPORATE PERSONHOOD!

What is “corporate personhood”?

In order to make it easy for a corporation to do business, the law says that it is an “artificial person.” Lawyers have argued in court that artificial persons should have the same rights as human beings, and judges have agreed. As a result, corporations have the same rights as people to free speech, due process, equal protection—and more!

But a corporation is *not* like a human being. Unlike people, it can live forever. It does not need clean air to breathe or safe water to drink. It cannot feel pain or joy. It can be many places at once. If it commits a crime, it cannot go to prison. Because of these and many other advantages, corporations have been able to accumulate enormous wealth and power, which is used to influence elected officials to support corporate interests.

Judge-made law is not democracy

Our elected officials write the laws, and if enough people don’t like the way they do it, they can vote them out of office. But non-elected judges can also make law because they have the power to interpret legislation in ways other than lawmakers intended.

This happened in 1886, when the Supreme Court heard a case called *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad Company*. The judges decided that the Fourteenth Amendment, which was ratified in 1868 to ensure the citizenship rights of the newly freed slaves, should also apply to corporations. They gave no explanation of how an amendment about former slaves had converted corporate entities into the legal equivalent of human beings. Nonetheless, corporations have been protected under law as “persons” ever since.

In the following years, through other Supreme Court cases, corporations gained most Bill of Rights protections, including the right to due process, freedom from unwarranted search and seizure, and freedom of the press and speech. Armed with legal personhood status, plus unlimited life spans and limited liability, corporations have become like superhumans with the advantages—but not the limitations—of mere mortals. In fact, corporations have *more* rights under the law than human beings.

Power to the few

In a democracy, every citizen is supposed to have an equal voice in decision-making. But because of corporate personhood, a few corporations have a much bigger voice than all of the people combined. Here are just a few of the ways in which “corporate persons” have advantages over people.

- **FREE SPEECH**—You have the right to free speech, which means you can go to any public place and say what you think. But giant corporations own most TV networks, radio stations, newspapers, billboards, bookstores, and magazines, so when *they* exercise their right to free speech many more people will hear and be influenced by them than by what any one person could say. What’s more, workers do not have the right to free speech while they are on corporate property.
- **EQUAL RIGHTS**—Because of equal rights laws, people cannot prevent others of different ethnicity, skin color, or religion from buying property or moving into a neighborhood. “Corporate persons” get the same protection, so if a big box chain store wants to move into a community, threatening the existence of small, local retailers, the citizens will have great difficulty preventing it.
- **SEARCH & SEIZURE**—The government cannot search people or seize their property without a warrant. For corporations, this means that regulatory agencies cannot make random inspections to determine if they are polluting a river or abusing their workers.

The first U.S. corporations were required to serve the public good. But today current law allows corporations to consider stockholder profit as their only goal, even when their practices are harmful to the environment and to the majority of families, workers, and communities.

We the People

People in the United States embrace the idea of living in a democracy, but how can We the People be in charge when the most wealthy, powerful players in our political system are legal fictions acting as people? Ever since corporate personhood became the law of the land, it has steadily eroded our democratic aspirations. We cannot realize the bold vision of equality in the Declaration of Independence while people of wealth hide behind their corporate shields, wielding the rule of law and governing the nation.

There should be no such thing as a “corporate citizen” or a “socially responsible corporation.” Only living, breathing human beings can be socially responsible citizens and only human beings should have rights. Corporate personhood is an insult to the millions of people who struggled for the right to vote and for equal treatment under the law.

Throughout U.S. history people acquired rights primarily through amendments to the Constitution—a long and difficult but democratic process. By contrast, corporations acquired rights through undemocratic judicial decisions.



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