

ICC: POWERHOUSE OF CORPORATE-LED GLOBALISATION

“Through membership of the ICC, companies shape rules and policies that stimulate international trade and investment. These companies in turn count on the prestige and expertise of ICC to get business views across to governments and intergovernmental organisations, whose decisions affect corporate finances and operations worldwide”.

- ICC Leaflet

The International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) is the world’s single largest corporate lobby group. The Paris-based ICC was founded in 1919 and has thousands of member companies in over 130 countries. Although the organisation calls itself the ‘World Business Organisation’, it is clearly dominated by large transnational corporations who use the influence of the ICC to promote an international political and economic climate that is favourable to their interests. In recent years, the ICC has increased its political influence by combining formal privileges such as regular access to G-8 Summits and a special position at the United Nations with the access of its member companies and corporate leaders to national and global decision-makers — all this backed-up by a strong retinue of professional lobbyists, academics, legal experts, and high profile corporate leaders.

Access to Global Decision-Makers

The ICC has unparalleled access to many of the most important economic and political institutions in the global economy. It is primarily through these bodies that the ICC’s corporate members seek to influence policy decisions and control the economic and political discourse. Some of the most important institutions which the ICC focuses its lobbying activities on include the:

- **World Trade Organisation**

Transnational corporations continually strive for market access and the dismantling of local regulations that they perceive to be only barriers to trade and investment. It is this pressure from TNCs that propels the type of international trade and investment policies that are embodied in the WTO agreements and many multilateral trade and investment agreements. The ICC has strong links with the WTO secretariat, and ICC representatives meet regularly with WTO ambassadors. In the words of Pirelli Board Member Riccardo Perissich: *“The interests of companies that do business globally are effectively represented by ICC in international fora like the World Trade Organisation. Amid the clamour of the numerous single-issue pressure groups, companies with international reach need a powerful voice.”* The powerful voice of the ICC, backed-up by a chorus of other corporate groupings, echoes loudly in the corporate-biased WTO rules.

- **United Nations**

The ICC’s status as the United Nations’ official business dialogue partner dates back to the founding of the UN in 1946. Over the years, relations between the UN and the ICC have often been tense or antagonistic, but more recently the ICC has found a receptive partner in UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, and together they have forged a new and thriving UN-ICC ‘partnership’. This new partnership helps the ICC gain influence over international policy and helps them to promote the business agenda at the UN level. At the same time, such an alliance prevents various UN institutions to act against the corporate agenda as pursued by the ICC.

- **G-8 Summits**

The head of the government that hosts the annual summit of the Group of Eight (G-8) most industrialised countries, always meets with the ICC president on the eve of the Summit. According to the ICC, “the consultation has proved to be a highly effective means of channelling business recommendations to the Summit leaders.”

THE ICC AGENDA FOR 2000

- **Push Trade and Investment Liberalisation**

After the failure of the Seattle Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation, the ICC's paramount strategic objective is *"restoring the momentum of trade liberalisation."* The ICC wants the WTO to further open markets worldwide, especially for agricultural products and services. It also demands WTO rules to protect and liberalise foreign investment.

- **Sell Economic Globalisation**

According to ICC Secretary General Maria Livanos Cattai, *"growing globophobia and rising criticism of multinational business pose a special challenge to ICC."* The ICC has announced that it will step-up its campaign to 'overcome' the so-called 'information deficit' about the nature of economic globalisation and its effects.

- **Avoid Binding Rules**

The ICC pressures governments and international institutions to install binding global rules to protect corporate interests, while at the same time fighting binding global rules to regulate corporate conduct. Environmentalists, labour rights campaigners and other social activists are to believe that voluntary codes of conduct and market-based mechanisms will solve the world's major social, ethical and environmental problems.

- **Improve the Corporate Image**

The UN-ICC 'Global Compact', a pledge by business to uphold a set of core values in the areas of human rights, labour standards and environmental practice, attempts to reinforce the myth that — if well-managed — economic globalisation is a blessing for all, including the poor of the world. The UN-ICC partnership provides transnational corporations with a UN 'seal of approval' and reinforces the image of friendly, beneficial corporate giants, working for the common good.

Targeting the ICC: Challenging Corporate Power

Transnational business, as represented by the International Chamber of Commerce, has direct impacts on human health, the environment, development and human rights. Furthermore, the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of large corporations and their global representative bodies such as the ICC, poses a direct threat to democratic decision-making.

The corporate agenda of trade and investment liberalisation, as propagated by the International Chamber of Commerce, faces growing opposition by social and environmental movements all over the world. This has been highlighted by the failure of the OECD to agree on a Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) in 1998, and the failure of the WTO Ministerial Conference in the midst of massive street protests in Seattle last December.

To replace the current unfair and oppressive trade system with a new, socially just and sustainable trading framework for the 21st century, corporate political power has to be rolled back. As a first step, governments should withdraw the privileged status they have granted corporate lobby groups like the International Chamber of Commerce to influence policy making on all levels. Simultaneously, the concentration of economic power among a limited number of mega-corporations and their domination of the world economy has to be urgently addressed.



CEO, is a European-based research and campaign group targeting the threats to democracy, equity, social justice and the environment posed by the economic and political power of corporations and their lobby groups.

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