

The Corrupt Practices Act of 1912

This month's history lesson let's me stand up on a soapbox and applaud the actions of Montana Supreme Court. They held that the state's history of corrupting corporate manipulation in political matters exempted the state from the federal consent allowing corporations to spend freely in election campaigns. The Corrupt Practices Act of 1912 banning corporate election spending was needed in its time and is still needed today. The history of how corporations gained their "personhood," and thus their freedom of speech is a case of gave an inch, and took a mile.

I personally am okay with corporate personhood to a limited extent. When it comes to political campaign contributions however, a corporation is not a democracy and does not represent all of its shareholders or employees. It truly only represents the tiny number of board members and executives who believe a substantial monetary contribution to a candidate with the "right" ideas will help their bottom line.

Imagine that a corporation could vote for a presidential candidate. Now compare my \$50 contribution to the candidate vs the corporation's five million dollar contribution. Yes, the vote counts, but the influence behind the vote counts more. I say let the individual make that contribution and not hide behind the corporate identity.

I could go on about the negative and attack ads sponsored by superpacs, but perhaps it is once again important for us to hear those who spoke out against the corporate influence in the past;

The Amalgamated Copper Co. has thrown down the gauntlet to the people of Montana. They have presumed to control Montana in the past, always in a covert manner, but now intoxicated with corporate power its political managers have declared that they propose to elect their own officials openly and that they intend to attach Montana as an asset of the company. It is up to the people to determine and if they fail to assert (sic) their rights, when they suffer from the unjust and unequal apportionment (sic) for another ten years, they will have no one to blame but themselves.

From the October 27, 1910 edition of the Three Forks Herald

They'll try to do to me just what they have done to everyone who ever tried to oppose them... They own the state. They own the press.... First I'll be roasted

from one end of the State to the other. Every newspaper will print my shortcomings, real or fancied, in the largest type. They probably won't assassinate me. They use more subtle methods now... If the Anaconda Company prevents my ever returning to Congress, I'll at least have the satisfaction of having done what I could for my constituents while I was here.

U.S. Representative Jannette Rankin, August 8, 1917

Montana is a fat little heifer, milked by outside corporation thieves. The express companies have one teat, the railroads another, the fire insurance companies another, the oil companies another--with many more standing round to finish up the job.

Forsyth Times Journal - January 1910