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1

Introduction

'Who the hell is going to be in charge? A handful of corporate greed-heads, or we the people?' That's what it comes down to. Who's going to be making the decisions in a society that supposedly is self-governing?' – Jim Hightower, writer, editor, and former Texas Agricultural Commissioner¹

This is a book that shouldn't need to be written. If we lived in a sane country, at a sane period of time, what I am about to write would all be commonsense.

I should need only to write that dousing 97 per cent of our food with highly toxic chemicals is stupidity beyond belief; and that it is inconceivable that we should then want to genetically tinker the food that has served us so well for tens of thousands of years, when the only beneficiaries will be the multinational corporations who invented this so-called technology. End of book.

But sadly, we live at a time when the all-pervading Big Business lobby, and its huge influence on the media, has shifted received wisdom far away from commonsense and brainwashed us with half-truths, bad science, and outright lies. Nowhere have they done this more effectively than the GM debate, where the biotech lobby has poured colossal resources into its aggressive and proactive PR machine. Those scientists who have the temerity to oppose GM crops are set upon with insults and vitriol, often losing their reputations, sometimes their jobs.

This book, therefore, is written in large part to counter this campaign of misinformation. But it is also much more than that. If Big Business is up to all these dirty tricks in the GM arena, it is almost certainly doing the same thing in all areas of our lives. Therefore, I would like to propose a more radical hypothesis, which is that the world is run by the rich and powerful for the benefit of the rich and powerful – essentially an amalgam of state and corporate power. The rest of us are useful only to the extent that we create and consume their products.

Only when all the inconsistencies of modern life are viewed from this angle do the horrors of the world begin to make any sense. When we understand that what suits Big Business is generally

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what goes, everything then starts to slot into place. It explains why apparently simple and commonsense decisions like disallowing GMOs (Genetically Modified Organisms) are made so complicated. Or why the net destruction of the environment grows each year and yet we do nothing, because we are told 'we need more studies'. Or why the growing cancer epidemic, which kills 40 per cent of Britons, is never discussed in terms of being a disease of industrial chemicals and pollutants.² Or why the US spends \$360 billion a year on 'defence',³ when more than 25 million Americans depend on charities to eat⁴ and food shortages affect 800 million in the poorest countries.⁵ Or why SARS received endless coverage and killed only 774 people in 2003,⁶ yet AIDS killed 2.4 million Africans in 2002 alone and is largely ignored.⁷ Or why we have endless media coverage of plane or train crashes, murders, sport, and celebrity prittle-prattle, but virtually nothing on the really big issues.

The hypothesis I am proposing will, however, require that we let go of the comforting notion that those in power are essentially acting in our best interests – give or take a few colourful indiscretions here and there – rather than doing what is best for a small, powerful elite. Or as leading American playwright Arthur Miller once said: 'Few of us can easily surrender our belief that society must somehow make sense. The thought that the State has lost its mind and is punishing so many innocent people is intolerable. And so the evidence has to be internally denied.'⁸

This book gives enough evidence, I believe, to put this hypothesis on a pretty strong footing. And, hopefully, it might in some small way help to shift some of that internal denial and allow the average person to make more sense of this ever more nonsensical world we live in.

The struggle between people and corporations will be the defining battle of the twenty-first century. If the corporations win, liberal democracy will come to an end.⁹ – George Monbiot, author, environmentalist, and Visiting Professor at the Department of Environmental Science, University of East London

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