

# Capitalism And Global Agribusiness: From Ford To Monsanto, “It’s For Your Own Good”

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Global Research, April 10, 2016

Theme: [Biotechnology and GMO](#), [Global Economy](#)

*“We must... build our own local food systems that create new rural-urban links, based on truly agroecological food production... We cannot allow Agroecology to be a tool of the industrial food production model: we see it as the essential alternative to that model, and as the means of transforming how we produce and consume food into something better for humanity and our Mother Earth... Agroecology is political; it requires us to challenge and transform structures of power in society. We need to put the control of seeds, biodiversity, land and territories, waters, knowledge, culture and the commons in the hands of the peoples who feed the world.”* – Extract from The Declaration of the International Forum for Agroecology, Nyeleni, Mali, 27 February 2015

*The above extract is something that the US government and the agribusiness interests it serves do not want to hear. It represents a grass-root challenge to their intertwined [commercial and geopolitical](#) interests. Rather than wanting to transform society and food and agriculture, these state-corporate interests require business as usual.*

*Global agribusiness is threatening [food security and food sovereignty](#). It has been able to capture government [regulatory/policy agendas](#), important [trade deals](#) and [global trade policies](#). Monsanto itself is a [major player](#) and wields enormous influence and receives [significant political support](#). That company has a [history](#) of knowingly contaminating the environment and food with various harmful substances and engaging in cover ups and criminality.*

*In recent times, much resistance to the power of agribusiness has centred on seed patenting, the deleterious impacts of glyphosate-based herbicide and the [dangers](#) that GMOs pose to human and animal health and the environment. For instance, there is a massive campaign in North America to get GMOs labelled (despite the fact they were put on the market [fraudulently](#) in the first place), and there is the on-going debate over the carcinogenicity of glyphosate.*

*But if mandatory labelling is successful and glyphosate is banned, what next? Years of debate, deception, industry-funded science and PR over RNA interference, synthetic biology or some other ‘cutting-edge’ technological development and regulatory bodies and government agencies colluding with companies?*

That would suit powerful corporations just fine. By the time they surrender ground on one issue (if they ever do), the next technology is ready to be rolled out and be promoted or protected by their army of lawyers, PR departments, front groups, glove-puppet politicians and officials. Then it is left to the public and various civil organisations to fight the good fight all over again and engage in another rear guard action that could take decades to resolve.

In the meantime, profits are secured, while health, agriculture and the environment are further degraded.

In this respect, [Christina Sarich](#) makes a valid point:

“What should be concerning is the money trail supporting the ‘funny’ science that keeps coming out about biotech foods. Or that according to a report that was released last summer, the global elite have up to [32 TRILLION dollars](#) stashed in offshore banks around the globe, which can fund lawsuit after lawsuit against the people who are tired of being poisoned.

### **Power, hegemony and commercial interests**

In capitalism, private commercial entities are legally obliged to maximise profit, thereby serving shareholder interests ahead of any notion of the public good. According to the description of liberal democracy in textbooks, the state will act to protect the public interest.

What is missing from the term ‘liberal democracy’ is the word ‘capitalist’. In capitalist liberal democracies, the state serves the interest of private capital, first and foremost, and does its best to convince the public that commercial interests and the public and national interest are one and the same.

[A recent piece](#) in Truth Out describes how the people at Monsanto work inside a (well-paid) bubble defined by a business model that is aimed at market capture and profit maximisation.

As if to underline this, Jack Kasky on [Bloomberg](#) reports:

“Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Hugh Grant is focused on selling more genetically modified seeds in Latin America to drive earnings growth outside the core U.S. market. Sales of soybean seeds and genetic licenses climbed 16 percent, and revenue in the unit that makes glyphosate weed killer, sold as Roundup, rose 24 percent.”

In the same piece, Chris Shaw, a New York-based analyst at Monness Crespi Hardt & Co states: “Glyphosate really crushed it,” implying its sales a major boost.

The bottom line is sales and profit maximisation – and the unflinching defence of glyphosate. Monsanto might like to think all of this forms a good business model and that a ‘good business model’ and what is good for the public is one and the same, whether the public likes it or not. This is clearly deluded thinking, given the health impacts of glyphosate and, for example, the overall impacts of GMO crops [throughout South America](#).

But through massive PR and advertising, this warped mindset or ideology is perpetuated not only within the confines of the company but is also rolled out to try to convince the public of the same. And through political influence, policies are put in place on Monsanto’s behalf. The public is expected to sit back and take the poison. It’s for their own good!

But this is the nature of hegemony: power holders strive to manipulate beliefs, explanations, perceptions and values so that their imposed worldview becomes accepted as valid, which

in turn justifies the social, political, and economic status quo as natural, inevitable and beneficial for everyone. So Monsanto and other powerful corporations are regarded as acting in the public interest (although in Monsanto's case, at least among the more informed members of the public, that belief died many years ago).

With the nominations for the US election upon us, much is being written about commercial influence that determines the structure of power in the US (not least [Monsanto's role](#)). However, things are not too much different elsewhere.

In 2012, British Labour MP [Austin Mitchell described](#) the UK's big four accountancy firms as being "more powerful than government." He said the companies' financial success allows them privileged access to government policy makers. Similar sentiments concerning 'privileged access' could also be forwarded about many other sectors, not least agritech companies which armed with their poisons, unsustainable model of industrial agriculture and bogus claims have been [working hand in glove](#) with government to force GMOs into the UK despite most people who hold a view on the matter [not wanting them](#).

The impact and power of [think tanks, lobbying and cronyism](#) means that the major political parties merely provide the illusion of choice and democracy to a public that is easily manipulated courtesy of a [toothless and supine](#) corporate media. All the main parties have accepted economic neoliberalism and the financialisation of the British economy and all that it has entailed: weak or non-existent trade unions, an ideological assault on the public sector, the offshoring of manufacturing, deregulation, privatisation and an economy dominated by financial services.

The economy is now based on a banking and finance-sector cartel that specialises in [rigging markets](#), debt creation, [money laundering](#) and salting away profits in various City of London satellite tax havens and beyond. Despite his sound bites about cracking down on tax avoidance and tax havens, PM David Cameron is also implicated in offshoring his wealth to avoid taxes. [This article](#) in The Ecologist shows he and his political cronies are up to their eyeballs in such practices. The banking industry applies huge pressure on governments and has [significant influence](#) over policies to ensure things remain this way.

But the mainstream political narrative concerns itself with welfare scroungers, immigration, terror threats or personality politics. Anything to divert attention from the tax-avoiding super rich, the destructive neoliberal agenda they have forced on people and the pushing of policies that would guarantee further plunder, most notably the [Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership](#) (TTIP). Anything to avoid discussing profiteering cartels, how taxpayers' money was turned into corporate welfare for the banks or how the richest 1,000 families in the UK having seen their net worth [more than double](#) since 2009, in the worst recession since the Great Depression, to £547bn, while 'austerity' is imposed on everyone else. Again, the media, politicians and commentators try to convince this is all for their (the public's) own good.

In India, the links between the Monsanto-Syngenta-Walmart-backed Knowledge Initiative on Agriculture and the associated US sanctioning and backing of the opening up of India's nuclear sector to foreign interests indicate the type of pro-corporate 'development' being pushed through.

The [combined wealth](#) of India's richest 296 individuals is \$478 billion, some 22% of India's GDP. This is larger than the GDPs of the UAE, which stood at \$402 billion, South Africa (\$350

billion) and Singapore (\$308 billion).

While the state facilitates the enrichment of a wealthy elite, the plight of ordinary Indians is summed up in this quote from a piece by [Sukumaran CV](#) on the Countercurrents website:

“We build cyber cities and techno parks and IITs at the cost of the welfare of the downtrodden and the environment. We don’t think how our farmers on whose toil we feed manage to sustain themselves; we fail to see how the millions of the poor survive. We look at the state-of-the-art airports, IITs, highways and bridges, the inevitable necessities for the corporate world to spread its tentacles everywhere and thrive, depriving the ordinary people of even the basic necessities of life and believe it is development.”

## **The global elite**

Taking this discussion to a global level, [Andrew Gavin Marshall](#) states that at the top of the list of those who run the world, we have the major international banking houses. He adds that these dynastic banking families created an international network of think tanks, which socialised the ruling elites of each nation and the international community as a whole, into a cohesive transnational elite class. The foundations they established helped shape civil society both nationally and internationally, playing a major part in the funding – and thus coordinating and co-opting – of major social-political movements.

The model of neoliberal state-capitalist development being imposed on the world effectively serves the vested interests of an increasingly globalised and integrated elite.

To underline this point, [David Rothkopf](#), in his book ‘Superclass: The Global Power Elite and the World They Are Making’, argues that the world’s superclass constitutes approximately 0.0001 percent of the global population. This class comprises the money-encrusted, megacorporation-interlocked, policy-building elites of the world: people at the absolute peak of the global power pyramid. They set agendas at the Trilateral Commission, Bilderberg Group, G-8, G-20, NATO, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization and are largely from the highest levels of finance capital and transnational corporations.

Further [evidence](#) indicates that a relatively small group of companies, mainly banks, hold disproportionate power over the global economy. This elite ensures the [corporate media](#) says what it wants it to say, [opposition](#) is controlled, wars are fought [on its behalf](#) and the corporate control of every facet of life is increasingly brought under its influence – and that includes food: what is in it, who grows it and who sells it.

Aside from outlining how the Rockefeller-backed green revolution reshaped agriculture, which has been [documented](#) elsewhere, [this film report](#) by James Corbett also describes how Rockefeller, Ford and Firestone conspired to destroy aspects of US transport infrastructure and rebuild it for their own financial gain. It is but one example from the many that Corbett presents to show that, from WW1 to the Arab-Israeli War in 1973 and from the 1979 Iranian revolution to Syria, powerful oil and associated financial interests have had a hand in recasting the world in their own image, regardless of loss of life, environmental degradation or the wholesale destruction of economies.

## **Transformation**

Transnational agribusiness is very much [embedded](#) within the power structures outlined above and plays a key role in determining [global](#) and [regional](#) policies. While tackling agribusiness on an issue by issue basis is necessary, there is a need to appreciate the nature of capitalism, power and neoliberal globalisation itself.

The more this is understood, the more urgent the need becomes to establish societies run for the benefit of the mass of the population and a system of food and agriculture that is democratically owned and controlled. This involves encouraging localised rural and urban food economies that are shielded from the effects of [rigged trade and international markets](#). It would mean that what ends up in our food and how it is grown is determined by the public good and not powerful private interests, which are driven by commercial gain and their compulsion to subjugate farmers, consumers and entire regions, while [playing the victim](#) each time campaigners challenge their actions.

There are enough examples from across the world that serve as models for transformation, from farming in [socialist Cuba](#) to grass-root movements centred on [agroecology in Africa](#) and [India](#).

But in finishing, let us return to where this article began.

The 2015 Declaration of the International Forum for Agroecology sets out a framework for action. The Declaration emerged from a meeting of delegates representing diverse organisations and international movements of small-scale food producers and consumers, including peasants, indigenous peoples, communities, hunters and gatherers, family farmers, rural workers, herders and pastoralists and fisherfolk. These diverse constituencies provide 70 percent of the food consumed by humanity, and, as such, are the primary global investors in agriculture, as well as the primary providers of jobs and livelihoods in the world.

The Declaration can be read [here](#). The delegates regard agroecology as being the answer to how to transform and repair a food system and rural world that has been devastated by industrial food production and the green revolution.

While agroecology may not be where transformation begins and ends for everyone, it must at least be regarded as a key form of resistance by food producers and rural communities to an increasingly globalised economic system that puts profit before the environment and puts the [needs of agribusiness](#) ahead of life itself.

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