

Corporate Child Abuse: The Unseen Global Epidemic

By [Prof. John McMurtry](#)

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“There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul”, Nelson Mandela says, “than the way in which it treats its children”.

Who would disagree?

Yet today children may be assaulted, diseased, or killed by pervasive corporate drugs, junk-foods and beverages, perverted by mindless violence in multiple modes, deployed as dead-end labour with no benefits, and then dumped into a corporate future of debt enslavement and meaningless work. How could this increasing systematic abuse be publicly licensed at every level? What kind of society could turn a blind eye to its dominant institutions laying waste the lives of the young and humanity’s future itself?

The abuse is built into the system. All rights of child care-givers themselves – from parent workers to social life support systems – are written out of corporate ‘trade’ treaties which override legislatures to guarantee “investor profits” as their sole ruling goal. Children are at the bottom, and most dispossessed by the life-blind global system. The excuse of “more competitive conditions” means, in fact, a race to the bottom of wages and benefits for families, social security, debt-free higher education, and protections against toxic environments to which the young are most vulnerable. At the same time, escalating sales of junk foods, malnutrition, and cultural debasement propel the sole growth achieved – ever more money demand at the top.

The mechanisms of abuse are not tempered by reforms as in the past, but deepened and widened. Omnibus Harper budgets stripping even scientific and social fact-finding bodies and transnational foreign corporate rights dictated in the name of “Trans-Pacific Partnership” and “Canada-Europe Trade Agreement” advance the Great Dispossession further. An unasked question joins the dots, but is taboo to pose. What war, ecological or social collapse is not now propelled by rapidly creeping corporate rights to loot and pollute societies, ecosystems and – least considered – the young?

I explain the entire system in the expanded second edition of the *Cancer Stage of Capitalism*. Omnivorous money sequences of the corporate rich multiply through their life hosts overriding social life defences at every level and silencing critics. None are bound to serve *any* life support function but only to maximize profits. They surround, they intimidate, they bribe and threaten with corporate lobby armies to overrun legislatures and launch attack ads and wars with the mass media as their propaganda vehicles. All the classical properties of bullying abuse are there – pervasive one-way demands, ganging up, threats of force, false pretexts, weaker opponents picked on and exploited, and brutal attack of what resists. Yet bullies are seen only among the young themselves, while government in the interest of children’s well-being is increasingly sacrificed to the fanatic doctrine that the market God’s “invisible hand” is Providence and all commodities are “goods”.

How Corporate Abuse Moves to the Insides of Children

Recall General Electric frontman and U.S. president Ronald Reagan broadcasting the post-1980 war against unions, peace activists, environmentalists, and any community not subservient to U.S. corporate rights. Tiny and starving Nicaragua which had arisen against U.S.-backed tyranny by bringing public education and health benefits to poverty-stricken children was singled out for example. "All they have to do is say 'Uncle', Reagan smirked to the press when questioned on what Nicaragua could do to stop the U.S. attacks. They did not and the U.S. mined their central harbour and financed Contras with drug money for weapons to attack and burn the schools and clinics. The Reagan government and the media then ignored the six-billion dollar judgement of the International Court of Justice against the war crimes and the false claim of "self defense". Abusers always continue if not named and children are always the primary victims.

With now the bank-engineered collapse of social-democratic Europe, oil-rich opponents cleared for corporate looting across the Middle East, and the Earth's primary life support systems in slow motion collapse, we are apt to overlook the direct corporate invasion of the minds and bodies of children. As elsewhere, "giving them what they want" is the justification. And all the buttons are pushed to hook the young to addictive corporate products - child and adolescent fear of being left out, addictive desires for more sugar, salt and fat, primeval fascination with images of violence and destruction, craving for attention in stereotype forms, inertial boredom with no life function, the loss of social play areas by the great defunding, restless compulsion to distraction, and black hole ego doubts. All the enticements to addictive and unhealthy products form a common pattern of child abuse, and it is far more life disabling than any in the past. Beneath detection, a pathogenenic epidemic grows.

In response to commodity diseases from skyrocketing obesity and unfitnes to unprecedented youth depression and psychic numbing to violence, almost no public life standards of what is pushed to the young are allowed into the super-lucrative market. Even while children's growing consumption of multiplying junk foods, pharma drugs, and life-destructive entertainments addict them to what may in the end ruin their lives, preventative life standards are furiously lobbied against. As Joel Bakan's *Childhood Under Siege/ How Big Business Targets Your Children* shows, the systemic abuse is ignored, denied and blocked against public regulation. Even with deadly diabetes by junk foods and beverages and hormonal disruption and body poisoning by the countless untested chemicals, materials and drugs fed into their lives, the young find no protection from this systematic and growing corporate abuse, not even mandatory package information to prevent their still rising profitable disorders of body and mind.

Understanding Corporate Child Abuse as System Pathology

Bakan's classic film and book, *The Corporation*, has revealed step by step the "corporation as psychopath". Professor of law as well as parent, he recalls the "overarching idea" of modern civilization which has been aggressively pushed aside: "that children and childhood need the kind of *public* protection and support that only society could offer" (p. 164). Now he observes, the big corporations are "free to - - pitch unhealthy ideas and products- - to pressure scientists and physicians to boost sales of their psychotropic drugs - - - to turn children's environments - indeed their very bodies - into toxic stews - - and to profit from school systems increasingly geared to big business" (p. 164). Horrendous hours and hazards

of child labour are what has long attracted attention, and Bakan reports that these are returning today (e.g., pp. 129-38).

R.D. Laing's classic Massey lecture, *The Politics of the Family* goes deeper than issues of child labour by arguing that the young are made to live inside a dramatic play whose roles are mapped from one generation to the next. They are "good" or "bad" as they follow or resist the roles imposed on them. The sea-change today is that the stage and script are dictated by the pervasive marketing of big-business corporations (pp. 3-5 and *passim*). They set the stages and the props of youth activities and dreams *across domains of sport, peer play and relations, identity formation, eating and drinking, creative expression, clinical care, increasingly schooling, and even sleeping*. Their ads condition children from the crib onwards and hard-push harmful addicting substances. This is why, for example, "only 1% of all ads for food are for healthy nourishment" (p. 210). Selling unhealthy desires through every window of impressionable minds has multiplied so that almost no region of life including schools is free from the total agenda.

All the while corporately-controlled governments abdicate an ultimate obligation of modern government - enabling protection of the young's lives and humanity's healthy future. On pervasive corporate violence products, for example, the American Medical Association reports: "Aggressive and violent thought and behaviour are systematically induced in virtually all children by corporate games" (p. 201). The occupation of childhood and youth has now reached *9 to 11 hours daily* for ages 8-to-18-year-olds who are glued to multi-media orchestrated by commercial corporations (p. 207). Children are motivated by unneeded desires and adaptation to a surrounding culture which has a "panopticon marketing system" to hook into their "deep emotions" (pp. 17-27). Non-stop repetition of slogans and false images substitute for reason and life care, and the logic of ads is that you are defective without the product. In essence, addictive dependency to junk commodities of every kind drives the growth of corporate sales and disablement of children's life capacities follows. What greater abuse of children could there be?

Bakan reports copious findings on Big Pharma buying doctors with favours, planting articles in name journals, inventing child illnesses to prescribe medications to, and drugging the young from infancy on with the unsafe substances they push (pp. 65-114). Along with the corporate invasion of children's healthcare goes the invasion of public education (pp. 139-71, 245-56). Administrators with now corporate executive salaries for no educational function collaborate with the agenda, and mechanical testing devices closed to independent academic examination are the Trojan horse for a mass lock-step of miseducation (pp. 140-62). Bakan is aware that the whole trend of corporatization of the classroom and educational institutions "undermines the role of education in promoting critical thought and intelligent reflection" (p. 47). Indeed it wars against them in principle. For reasoning and critical research require learners to address problems independently of corporate profits and to penetrate behind market-conditioned beliefs. Big-business demands the opposite. It maximizes money returns as its first and final principle of thought and judgement, and selects against any truth or knowledge conflicting with this goal.

Corporate child abuse, in short, far surpasses all other forms of child abuse put together. But in a world where both parents are at work to survive and big money always wins elections, the life interests of children are bullied out of view. "Corporations [are] large, powerful and dominating institutions", Bakan summarizes, "deliberately programmed to exploit and neglect others in pursuit of wealth for themselves" (p. 175).

So what is the resolution? Bakan emphasizes the pre-cautionary principle and laws against clear harms to the young. He emphasizes “values” and “teaching what is good for them and what is not” (pp. 49-50). Yet we have no principled criterion of either. They are self-evident once seen. The good for children is *whatever enables life capacities to coherently grow, and the bad is whatever disables them*. Corporate dominion goes the opposite direction. Thus unfitness, obesity, depression, egoic fantasies, aggressive violence, and aimlessness increase the more its profitable child abuse runs out of control. This is the heart of our disorder. Public regulation of corporations by tested life-capacity standards is the solution.

John McMurtry is an elected Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and author of What is Good? What is Bad? The Value of All Values Across Time, Place and Theories UNESCO Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems (EOLSS). His expanded second edition of The Cancer Stage of Capitalism: From Crisis to Cure has just been released across continents.

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