

Running from one “secret room” to another

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In fear and protest over the [National Security Agency \(NSA\)/AT&T wiretapping scandal](#), and the Bush administration’s spying on US citizens, more than 1,000 individuals have switched their telecom services to [Working Assets](#), according to the [San Francisco Chronicle](#). In addition to probably doing nothing to safeguard their own privacy, switching their long distance and credit cards to “progressive” Working Assets simply moves money from one branch of the established political and economic order to another. In other words, it is a zero sum game.

What electronic privacy?

Although Working Assets deserves credit for publicly denouncing the spying by the NSA, and for joining an ACLU lawsuit against the NSA, Working Assets is, in the end, nothing more than a reseller of Sprint’s telecom network. The service, therefore, *is* Sprint.

Kurt Opsahl, staff attorney for the [Electronic Frontier Foundation](#), which is leading the legal fight against the NSA and AT&T, points out that, regardless of the rhetoric, Working Assets has no power to guarantee its customers privacy, if Sprint decides to share its database with the NSA (or the Bush administration demands that it do so):

“I’m not going to say I’m doubting their (Working Assets’) statements, I just don’t know what kind of assurances they’ve received from Sprint.”

They will likely receive none. Even if they did, it would not matter. Those who understand the true nature of the intelligence world (the NSA, the CIA, the FBI), know that the monitoring of both domestic and foreign populaces has been routine and ongoing. Electronic surveillance, via [artificial intelligence programs such as PROMIS](#), has never been more sophisticated. In the world of the USAPATRIOT Act, given birth by George W. Bush and 9/11, in the era of Total Information Awareness, spying is out in the open, and it is a bipartisan agenda. Alberto Gonzales and Michael Hayden, and the Supreme Court, will do their best to make it legal. There is no Constitution (Alberto Gonzales will make sure of that, too.). This is a police state. A Working Assets account does nothing to stop it.

They don’t need no stinking badges.

Let’s go back a bit further. Sprint, Working Assets’ carrier, was deeply involved in the infamous WorldCom scandal, and the magnificent crimes of its former CEO [Bernie Ebbers](#). The Sprint-WorldCom was, along with Enron, [one of the biggest \(known\) corporate frauds in history](#), and responsible for a \$115 billion stock wipeout, and \$11 billion in cooked books. Ebbers, found guilty on nine counts of conspiracy, securities fraud and lying to regulators, has been sentenced to 25 years in prison. Sprint also defrauded the U.S. Justice

Department, and [the Department of Justice](#) (Sprint ultimately [agreed to pay \\$5.6 million to settle the claim](#)). Yet, throughout these highly publicized mega-scandals, Sprint has remained the carrier for “socially responsible” Working Assets. Why?

Working Assets, and Bush and Kerry

Working Assets is but one company in a large and growing “liberal capitalism” industry, and shares connections and political affiliations with a larger elite Left business and information network. This apparatus is rife with incestuous foundation capital, deep political connections, and ties to US intelligence agencies, as exposed by [LeftGatekeepers.com](#) and the [QuestionsQuestions.net](#) web site.

In [Alternative Media Censorship](#), Bob Feldman wrote:

“Based in San Francisco, Working Assets Inc. is a privately-held, secretive telecommunications company that discloses very little financial information about its for-profit business to either its customers or to U.S. consumers in general.

“One of its founders was Tides Foundation President Drummond Pike. A trustee of Mills College in recent years, Laura Scher, is a top executive at Working Assets Inc. Another top Working Assets Inc. executive, Michael Kieschnick, has also been involved until recently with the board of the National Network of Grantmakers, which also includes representatives of the Funding Exchange and the board of Mother Jones magazine/Foundation for National Progress.

“Kieschnick still sits on the White House Project Advisory Board between folks like PBS CEO Pat Michell and former U.S. Vice President Walter Mondale. The White House Project Advisory Board was set-up to promote the presidential candidacies of mainstream women politicians such as U.S. Senator [Hillary] Rodham-Clinton. Another Working Assets Inc. official in recent years, Lawrence Livak, has also been the Tides Foundation Treasurer in recent years.

“Because Working Assets Inc.’s stock is not sold on the stock market, it is not legally obligated to post much financial information about its business operations onto the Internet. In addition, executives at Working Assets Inc. have been reluctant to reveal to Movement writer-activists what kind of salaries it is presently paying its top executives.”

In its marketing materials, Working Assets touts donation-linked products and services that help build a better world, “making it easy to make a difference.” The company claims to have raised \$50 million for progressive groups and causes through their services, which include credit cards, long distance, shopping, and investments.

All this feel-good begins to evaporate with a closer look at the groups and individuals that partner with Working Assets, as well as those chosen to for donation links.

The Working Assets credit card is issued by MBNA, which has been one of [George W. Bush’s top campaign contributors](#). On MBNA’s board is Charles Cawley, a long time Bush family friend who is not only a [George Bush “pioneer”](#), but also sits on the board of the [George Bush Library](#).

Those who use the Working Assets credit card are essentially putting money directly into the pocket of a bank, and a man, who have been pouring money directly into the Bush

family's coffers, and were instrumental in putting George W. Bush into power, and keeping him there. Do the progressives and liberals who are gleefully shopping with the Working Assets card realize this? A few have figured it out, and [they are outraged](#).

In [response to questions received about their MBNA relationship](#), Kieschnick clarified that Working Assets did not choose MBNA. The credit card service was originally through Fleet Bank (FleetBoston Financial), which was later acquired by MBNA. Fleet was a [major contributor to the Democratic Party, and the biggest donor to John Kerry](#) throughout his political career.

Translation: if Working Assets had its druthers, it would be funneling customer credit card money into John Kerry's bank war chest, not George Bush's — the neoliberal wing of the war/globalization/corporate establishment. The neoliberals share similar (if not identical) views about militarization, war, the "war on terrorism," and globalization. Does this make progressives happy?

Why does Working Assets insist on working with corporations that are members of the New World Order, instead of untainted companies, groups and individuals that have no elite ties (and are genuinely starving for funding)? Working Assets claims it is stuck with MBNA because of an existing contractual agreement. Is that the best excuse they can come up with?

Honey pot for the manufactured Left

Every year, Working Assets selects a list of nonprofit organizations to receive grants, the list reportedly culled from nominations of Working Assets customers themselves. [The 50 recipients for Working Assets grants](#) this year includes a number of interesting groups of various sizes, in four categories. On the surface, the list appears to be a creative and eclectic collection of Left causes and activism. A little homework, and some context, exposes the more odious aspects.

Amnesty International, one of many organizations whose funding and origins are [associated with George Soros and his Open Society Institute](#), which, is a multinational intelligence operation connected to the CIA.

In the recent past, Working Assets has funded the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, [headed by Washington and business bigwigs](#), with ties to the Rockefeller Foundation and Hill & Knowlton (both long tied to Washington and the intelligence community) and others. Another recent recipient was the Natural Resources Defense Council, [on whose board of directors](#) sat Laurance Rockefeller, now deceased, along with dozens of big corporate CEOs.

[Human Rights Watch](#), another former recipient, is a joint venture between [George Soros and the U.S. State Department](#). Global Exchange has enjoyed an affiliation with Working Assets for years. GX has received funding [from the likes of Soros, as well as the MacArthur Foundation](#).

Possibly the most pernicious names found on Working Asset's donor list have been media nonprofits with overlapping memberships and alliances, run by premier Left political consent manufacturers. (For a full analysis, read "The Gatekeepers of the So-Called Left" By Charles Shaw, [Part One](#) and [Part Two](#), and go to [LeftGatekeepers.com](#) and the [Left Gatekeepers](#) article archive.)

This year's recipients include AlterNet. According to Al Giordano (of the truly independent and powerful investigative web site NarcoNews.com), AlterNet allegedly has been guilty of numerous [ethical violations](#). Not surprisingly, there is a [George Soros/Open Society connection](#) to AlterNet as well.

Another grant recipient is Mother Jones, a longtime Working Assets favorite. The elite connections behind this publication is analyzed in ["Mother Jones/Foundation for National Progress"](#) by Bob Feldman.

Muckraker.org, the web site for the Center for Investigative Reporting (CIR) is a strange beast. This Working Assets recipient supports the work of established mainstream-type journalists and reporters, including Seymour Hersh, Bill Moyers (whose Schumann Foundation also funds the same liberal media apparatus), Daniel Schorr, and Mike Wallace, who funnel mainstream news stories back to mainstream networks, such as CNN, ABC, and nearly-mainstream Salon.com.

While CIR is perhaps of some value (at a time when mainstream corporate media is almost completely bereft of substantive investigation and reporting), one must ask why well-heeled, personally wealthy, and deeply-connected celebrity journalists need, or deserve, additional funding from grassroots "progressives" to write the stories that they should be writing and selling anyway. And why don't sources of truly independent and alternative "muckraking" (such as Online Journal) get showered with the same largesse? Because certain publications and groups that refuse to carry water for elite Left aren't invited into the club.

In the past, the [National Radio Project](#), connected to Norman Solomon's [Institute for Public Accuracy](#), and [David Barsamian](#), received Working Assets funding. So did the [Progressive Media Project](#) (PMP), on whose board we find Jeff Cohen of FAIR, Sam Hussein and Robert McChesney (of the Institute for Public Accuracy again), Matthew Rothschild, Laura Flanders (formerly of FAIR and Pacifica, Air America Radio host, former host of Working Assets' own radio program, and niece of Alexander Cockburn), and Andrea Lewis of Pacifica Radio/KPFA, Salim Muwakkil of *In These Times* and Holly Sklar (now a Knight-Ridder columnist, best known for disavowing her book, "Trilateralism"). The PMP receives additional funding from the Ford, Rockefeller, MacArthur, Tides and Carnegie Foundations. The Ford Foundation and many elite foundations [are well-established CIA fronts](#).

Working Assets also runs its own a media operation, [Working For Change](#). Among its contributors are, to name a few of the usual suspects, Norman Solomon (again) Laura Flanders (again), Alexander Cockburn (again), Greg Palast, and Bill Moyers (again).

Working Assets creates, as well as continuously finances, a brand of propaganda and carefully limited and inculcated analysis and thought.

Directly to the heart of neoliberal power

According to Bob Feldman, recent activity on the part of Working Assets brass should have all progressives alarmed. Feldman reported that Working Assets CEO Kieschnick has shifted about \$100,000 of his Working Assets, Inc., surplus profit during the 2006 election year cycle to the Democratic Party-oriented 527 group, the [New Democratic Network](#) (NDN), according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

The NDN is a “21st Century Progressive Advocacy and Political Organization,” and a “national network of citizens using modern means to advance a 21st century progressive vision for America.” The NDN is rife with ties to the conservative Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), and former members of the Clinton White House, including former White House Chief of Staff, Mack McLarty, who is the partner of Henry Kissinger (the “strategic advisory firm” [Kissinger-McLarty Associates](#)), and Dave McCurdy, former DLC Chairman. As it turns out, McLarty is personally connected to spying, surveillance and [Homeland Security](#).

Quoting Feldman: “The NDN was given \$150,000 in 2004 by, among others, [defense/space/weapons manufacturer] Loral Space Communications Ltd. head Bernard Schwartz, according to the book *The Buying of the President 2000* by Charles Lewis and the Center for Public Integrity:

“Loral and Schwartz have contributed at least \$1.9 million to the Democratic Party since 1991 and are No. 7 on the Center’s *Top 50 Patrons* list of soft-money donors.”

Is the funding of the NDN, a neoliberal version of the neocon People for the New American Century (PNAC) “progressive”?

What is your money really paying for?

For all its feel good appearances and creative marketing and sales promotions, Working Assets swims in a large political pool that ultimately supports (either by design or unintentionally) a wing of neoliberal power, disguised in hip progressive trappings. The same applies to other Left groups, from MoveOn.org and Air America, to The Nation and Pacifica Radio.

What Michel Chossudovsky writes in *America’s “War on Terrorism”* applies to what passes for a Left in this country, from the Democrats to “progressives”:

“The militarization of America is a project of a the US corporate elites, with significant divisions within the corporate establishment on how it is achieved . . . the Democrats’ ‘Progressive Internationalism’ is viewed by these sectors as a more effective way of imposing the US economic and military agenda worldwide.”

“The Democrats are not opposed to the illegal occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan. Nor are they opposed to the militarization of civilian institutions. Moreover, their perspective and understanding of 9/11 and the ‘war on terrorism’ is broadly similar to that of the Republicans.”

Is it “progressive” to cancel your Citigroup, Chase, or Bank of America credit card (for “ethical reasons”), only to hand your money to George W. Bush’s major contributor, MBNA?

Is it “progressive” to “punish” AT&T and the NSA for invading your privacy under the pretext of the “war on terrorism,” only to hand your electronic communications to a reseller of Sprint, which will, like AT&T, comply with the NSA and the Bush administration (and its eventual successor) the second they demand records?

Is it “progressive” to fund a brand of media that, while different in tone and pet issues, is as protective of government power as the mainstream corporate media, and functions [like a classic foundation-funded CIA proprietary](#) to control dissent and pacify political thought? Is it “progressive” to hand your money to one of the many apparatuses created and supported

by George Soros and the Open Society Institute?

How clean is socially responsible capitalism?

There may be nothing wrong with the Working Assets *concept*. There is something very wrong in the *execution*. It does nothing to truly sap the Empire of what it feeds on: the money and minds of gullible citizens.

Its defenders of Left capitalism argue that “some good comes of it all,” “it’s still better than nothing,” or the current favorite, “well, anything’s better than Bush and the Republicans.” That is the same logic behind the repeated insanity of voting for so-called Dem/Left candidates, and supporting corporations that contribute to the Democrats, as means to end war, globalization and corruption. Good luck and good night.

Indeed, the entire industry fails to provide a means by which consumers can avoid corrupt companies and individuals contributing to global devolution and deteriorating systems, globalization, war, the “war on terrorism,” censorship and more. Ultimately it is a red herring, but one that earns profits for an incestuous network of political players and not-as-alternative-as-it-seems product.

Consider the industry standard for socially-responsible investing (SRI), the [Domini Social Index of “socially-responsible” companies](#). The index contains the New World Order’s worst offenders: J.P. Morgan Chase, Merrill Lynch, Bank of America, AIG, AOL Time Warner, the New York Times, the Washington Post, etc.

Until progressives and organizations like Working Assets, and their many fans and users, honestly and directly address deep systemic problems at the heart of the American empire, such as (1) how power works, (2) [how money really works](#), (3) the criminality at the core of governments, Wall Street, and the world economy, and (4) major overarching planetary crises such as world energy depletion (Peak Oil), there can be no remedies.

Admittedly, “purity” is extremely difficult given the many societal constraints of modern life, even for those who put in superhuman efforts. But only through such these efforts can a criminal system be truly opposed and fought. Nevertheless, outfits such as Working Assets, that claim to be champions of reform and “clean” capitalism for progressives, offer no solution and, at the very least, fall well short of the ideal.

Propping up alternative elite structures assures no change. Every telecom company in the world may have a secret room from which some intelligence operative is happily collecting data on you. The NSA and the CIA are still listening, watching and taking notes on you. No matter how many Working Assets telephone calls you make, or how much Ben & Jerry’s ice cream you consume.

Final note to the peeved: out of fairness, this writer attempted to contact Working Assets for a chance to provide input for a previous article along the same lines, and got no response

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