RESEARCHING CORPORATIONS

By Mike Clark and Valerie Heinonen

In the work that we all do on a wide range of issues, it is usually quite obvious who is being hurt or threatened or imprisoned or starved or discriminated against or impoverished or killed or oppressed or laid off. The victims of war and injustice are many and obvious. War and injustice are crimes with victims. As with other crimes, if one looks for the perpetrators, one most usefully begins by asking *cui bono*—who benefits? The primary purpose of corporate research is to find out *cui bono*.

In doing so, we isolate the most formidable obstacles to our work. In some cases, this is a handful of individuals, in most cases, an iron-clad interlock between individuals and organizations whose interest is in maintaining the *status quo*.

We do so, not because we expect immediate management conversions when corporations are put on notice, but as one effort to sensitize and organize people against whose interests the corporations function and without whose acceptance and support that functioning cannot continue.

The power of the transnational corporation surpasses any accumulation of economic power in previous history. There is scarcely an issue, domestic or international, in which there is not a corporate role. For this reason it is important for organizers to know how to find information about transnationals, the organizations that work on corporate issues, the history of the corporate responsibility movement, print and media resources, and some current issues in corporate responsibility.

Having a corporate component to our ongoing campaigns is important for a number of reasons:

- *It concretizes the issues.* Injustice is not something that results from implacable fate or impotent deity. It results from decisions made by individuals within institutions. When 5,000 people are laid off and a plant closed down, that is not "just the way things are," that is the way that some people defend and extend their interests at the expense of other people.

- *It localizes the issues.* The apartheid system and the human suffering that it creates are 5,000 miles away. It is difficult sometimes to feel close to the struggle of the Black majority there. It becomes easier when one realizes that banks and corporations with branch offices in one's own community are involved in supporting racism in South Africa.

- *It familiarizes the issues.* Through advertising, the corporate mentality and its varied product lines are numbingly pervasive. We need to help people see that the company which manufactures components for nuclear warheads at Oak Ridge, Tennessee, (Union Carbide) also makes Eveready batteries, Glad bags, Prestone antifreeze and Simoniz car wax.

Highlighting the role that private corporations play in fostering militarism and injustice also makes possible a new dimension to principles that we would be struggling for in other aspects of our common work:

- *Democratizing decision-making*—The management of transnational corpora-
The bottom line of the transnational corporation is sacrificing people to the maximization of profit.

We cannot expect major changes in corporate practices without major changes in the US political and economic system.

There is a great deal of information readily available in certain magazines, newspapers, books, and from some organizations, and the companies themselves.

Information Sources

While much the transnationals decide to do is done behind the closed doors of corporate boardrooms, there is a great deal of information readily available.

Magazines and Newspapers

The first place to look is the business press. Become a regular reader of the following:

*The Wall Street Journal*—the daily which covers the corporate world

*Barron's*—the weekend equivalent

*Business Week*—the *Time* of the business world

*Fortune*—the organ of philosophy and ideology

*Forbes*—which advertises itself as "the capitalist tool!"

*The Multinational Monitor*—tracks big business across the globe, offering a citizens perspective on corporate power in the international arena; can be ordered from P.O. Box 19312, Washington, D.C. 20036

*The Corporate Examiner*—provides information on the social performance of major US corporations; it’s available from the ICCR, Room 566, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10015

*Business and Society Review*—the liberal critique of business ethics and practices; available from Warren, Gorham & Lamont, Inc., 870 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019.

Most of the above are available from public or university libraries. They present the way the business community thinks about itself.

Books

While you are in the library, check out these books in the reference section

*Standard and Poor's*—this directory has every major corporation in the US, its annual sales, its product lines, the address of the corporate headquarters and the names of the Board of Directors

*Moody's Manuals*—provide basic financial business information, together with historical data, location, management and security descriptions

*Who's Who in America*—once you’ve isolated a particular company’s directors, look in this volume to find where they live, what their families are like, the schools they attended, the com-
panies they are involved with, and so forth.

The Companies

From the companies themselves you can get additional information by writing to the corporate headquarters directly. Also, every company publishes an Annual Report, which is the company’s way of letting shareholders know the good things about the company’s performance over the last year. Furthermore, each year a company must file a detailed report with the Securities and Exchange Commission in Washington, DC, called 10-K. This report contains detailed additional information but is usually only available to shareholders.

Organizations

It is important to learn what the corporate community thinks about itself, how they articulate their ideology, how they package it for public consumption. When you are interested in analyses and critiques of the corporate role there are a number of organizations waiting to help you.

The Council on Economic Priorities. CEP does basic research on a variety of corporate issues. They publish a monthly newsletter, periodic reports and at least one major study each year. CEP is well respected, and can be relied upon for accurate information. Of special interest to organizers is their Corporate Information Center, which can help with data on military corporations, and their impact in your own community. CEP’s address is 84 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10011.

The Corporate Data Exchange. CDE does a specific task of research into the ownership of US corporations, the interlocking network of institutions that actually hold the power. Their studies are expensive and can best be found in public or university libraries. For more information about their work write 198 Broadway, New York, NY 10038.

The Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility. ICCR is a coalition of church agencies who use stock holdings to pressure transnational corporations to change their policies. ICCR does research on corporations which it publishes in its monthly newsletter, The Corporate Examiner. ICCR can also respond to questions about particular corporations involved in abusive practices. You may write ICCR at Room 566, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10015. ICCR continues to be the main actor in the corporate responsibility movement and will be the primary organization that local organizers will be relating to. For that reason it is important to sketch out the scope of its work. For ten years church agencies have been using their investments to obtain change by challenging policies and practices of US-based transnational corporations. ICCR began with a concern for US investment in southern Africa. It soon became clear that while investment in apartheid presented a serious moral challenge to the West, the activities of transnational corporations in other countries followed similar patterns of exploitation and domination. The next step in ICCR’s development was to appreciate that the transnational behavior elsewhere was rehearsed first in the United States. Churches began to see that nearly all aspects of life (and death) are touched by transnational power. Because of this, ICCR’s current agenda now reads: southern Africa, Guatemala, plant closings, community reinvestment, dumping of prescription drugs in Third World countries, affirmative action, nuclear weapons facilities, economic conversion of military factories, OSHA, nuclear energy, infant formula, genetic engineering, chemical dumping and agribusiness.

National Action/Research on the Military-Industrial Complex. NARMIC developed as a project of the American Friends Service Committee to explore the connections between the Indochina War and US corporations. NARMIC has produced a number of excellent slide shows; the latest two deal with nuclear power/weapons, and US corporate involvement in the Third World. NARMIC’s address is 1501 Cherry Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102.

Stockholders Resolutions

ICCR has developed a method for raising issues, engaging in discussion, filing of shareholder resolutions and presenting the corporation with its demands. The instrument which churches have chosen is the shareholder resolution. Any person or group owning one or more shares of common stock can bring a resolution before the annual shareholder meeting of the company. A resolution must not be longer than 300 words, but it can be on any significant aspect of the company business. It can be a simple request for information, to be made available to all shareholders, or ICCHR continues to be the main actor in the corporate responsibility movement.
Audio-Visual Aids

Obviously, when taking on the power of the transnationals, we are at a lethal disadvantage so long as we are few. The most useful thing to do in your own community is to educate people about the role of corporations in determining their lives and the lives of billions of other people. Audio-visual resources are helpful in this effort. Some of the best are:

Guess Who's Coming to Breakfast? Perhaps the best introduction to the ways in which corporations abuse and exploit people in Third World countries. This 20-minute slide show focuses on Gulf & Western's involvement in the sugar industry in the Dominican Republic. It can be ordered from Packard Manse Media Project, Box 450, Stoughton, MA 02072.

Controlling Interest. A 60-minute film linking the overthrow of the Allende regime in Chile with plant closings in Massachusetts. It demonstrates the ability of the multinational to create havoc domestically and internationally, and suggests the potential alliance of all those whom the transnationals threaten.

Formula for Malnutrition. Details the danger inherent in marketing infant formula in underdeveloped countries where it is both unnecessary and cannot be used properly, but does provide corporate profits.

Banking on South Africa. Examines in a 25-minute slide show how US investments and especially US banks give indispensable support to the racist system of apartheid. The lessons described here can be applied elsewhere. It also is available from the Packard Manse Media Project.

As with most aspects of working for peace and justice, no single act is going to be enough. Tackling the power of the transnational corporation is not easy. We must not match their budgets dollar for dollar or their staffs, person for person. We must get our facts straight and help people to see why exploiting others is, in the final analysis, not in their interest either. In researching and organizing around the corporate role and the problems we address, Gandhi's advice to his followers is still appropriate: "Never let them rest."

The most useful thing to do in your own community is to educate people about the role of corporations in their lives.

We must not match their budgets dollar for dollar or their staffs, person for person.

"Never let them rest."
Three percent vote of the shareholders shows a significant level of shareholder interest.

it can be a strong demand for some policy to be halted or changed.

If the shareholder resolution is debated at the annual meeting and receives more than 3% of the vote, it can be brought back a second year. Three percent is no mean achievement, and, in fact, shows a significant level of shareholder interest. If 6% is achieved the second year, the same resolution can be brought back yet a third time. And if 10% is achieved that year it can be brought back indefinitely. The goal of ICCR is severalfold: to reach sympathetic management and shareholders, to educate the public about corporate issues, to get the minimum vote necessary to continue to raise an issue, to make a media event of the annual meeting, and to achieve change in corporate policy. ICCR members over the last 10 years have played an important role in challenging corporate practices.

Local Organizing

There are handles for local organizers to be involved in this work. Once you’ve done your homework and plugged into a particular organization or campaign, you can do any one of the following:

- write letters to management
- buy a share of stock and attend the annual shareholder meeting
- hold an action in your own community at the time of the annual meeting in another city
- boycott the company’s products
- pressure institutions of which you are a part to vote their stock in favor of church-sponsored resolutions
- take any action which helps build the climate in which one day the transnational corporations will be controlled.

Current campaigns which are of special interest to War Resisters League organizers would include: 1) the campaign which would get universities to sell their South Africa-related stock; 2) the boycott of Nestle products to protest the sale of infant formula in Third World countries; 3) efforts to get nuclear weapons manufacturers to stop their production (there are a lot of local campaigns on this issue); 4) attempts to get military corporations to consider economic conversion of particular facilities, and 5) boycott of Coca-Cola products, because of the company’s brutal labor policies in Guatemala. Inquiries to ICCR can get you information on the current

Demonstration in front of ITT headquarters in Manhattan, May 10, 1972.
Photo by Karl Bissing.