

Thinking for Corporations & Revolving into Government

by Sharon Beder

For each new administration, think tanks provide a source of "experts" for senior government positions, government department staff and advisory councils.

Think tanks have become essential vehicles of business propaganda and policy marketing. Rather than just react to proposed government policies, corporate-funded think tanks enable business interests to initiate policies and shepherd them through the policy-making process until they become government policy.

An important function that think tanks provide in the US is facilitation of "elite transfer." For each new administration, think tanks provide a source of "experts" for senior government positions, government department staff and advisory councils.

Presidents since Jimmy Carter have made wide use of think-tank personnel to fill high-level government positions. For example, 150 of Ronald Reagan's Administration came from the Heritage Foundation, the Hoover Institution and the American Enterprise Institute.

Think tanks provide a fast track to a political career and a public profile in the policy arena for corporate-aligned individuals. They also provide a place for discarded government officials to go when there is a change of government. While in the think tanks they can have some influence over public policy while they are waiting for a change of government that will restore them to office.

The circulation of personnel suits the think tanks well. Recruiting ex-government officials gives a think tank access to members of Congress and others in government and attracts the funds of corporations who want access. When a think tank's personnel or members are taken up by a new administration, the think tank has its best chance to have its corporate backers' ideas and agenda adopted by government.

According to *Foreign Policy* magazine, the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) is one of the top two think tanks in the US in terms of influence. Unlike many think tanks,

CFR is based on an invited membership of "the most prestigious and best connected of the nation's financial and corporate institutions, universities, foundations, media and government bodies," rather than the employment of "scholars" and former government personnel. Its aim is to build an "elite consensus on important foreign policy issues" through meetings, networking and publications. Thomas Dye wrote in 1990 that, "every person of influence in foreign affairs" in the US, including presidents, had been members of CFR and that is still the case.

CFR is considered non-partisan because it does not favor either the Republicans or the Democrats; however, its partisanship lies in its links with the corporate class. Its corporate members include Alcoa, American Express, AIG, BP, Citigroup, Coca-Cola, Exxon Mobil, Ford Motor, General Electric, GlaxoSmithKline, JP Morgan Chase, Lockheed Martin, McGraw-Hill, Nike, Pfizer, Shell Oil and many others. CFR is funded by donations, the largest of which come from corporations, foundations based on corporate money and individual endowments.

The revolving door between government and the CFR has included some notable people including:

- Former US Presidents Herbert Hoover, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton and George H. W. Bush;
- Former Secretaries of State including Cyrus Vance, Edmund Muskie, Lawrence Eagleburger, Henry Kissinger, George Shultz, James Baker, Alexander Haig, Warren Christopher, Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice, Hillary Rodham Clinton and Madeline Albright, who is now on the Board of Directors of CFR;
- Former Secretaries of Defence including Robert A. Lovett, Frank Carlucci, Caspar Weinberger, Robert McNamara and Robert M Gates;
- US Ambassadors to the UN including Zalmay Khalilzad, Vernon A. Walters, Jeane Kirkpatrick and Richard Holbrooke.

Think Tank Watch counted more than 90 members or personnel of CFR who had gone into the Obama Administration. It remains one of the most influential think tanks in government today.

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Long time impresario of the American Empire, Henry Kissinger began his career as an associate of the Rockefellers. His international, corporate consulting firm is a corporate member of the Council on Foreign Relations.