



Aim and Demand: More Corporate Responsibility

The Public Eye Awards is the Davos counter-event to the World Economic Forum (WEF). It illuminates for the general public the shadowy side of globalization and calls on transnational corporations to display at least a minimum of social and environmental commitment. The conferring of these “worst of” awards takes place each year at the end of January, parallel to the summit of business elites. It is a joint project of two Swiss non-governmental organizations (NGOs): the Berne Declaration (BD) and Greenpeace Switzerland.

Substantiated criticism of a purely profit-oriented globalization as advanced by the WEF members - the world's 1,000 largest corporations - takes centre stage at the event. In Davos, corporate leaders have an annual opportunity to network with each other and with government representatives, under the pretense of improving the world. The Public Eye organizers use this occasion to denounce the massive negative consequences of a mentality obsessed with rate of return, and insist on humane working conditions, comprehensive product responsibility and the ecological sustainability of corporations.

The tenth “Public Eye” takes place on January 28rd in Davos. Berne Declaration will present the awards for the most irresponsible corporations in various industries – the first time together with Greenpeace. In addition, for the first time, the most courageous individual or group of individuals will be honoured for exemplary action that successfully changed their company from the inside. Candidates are nominated by both Swiss and non-Swiss partner organizations. First-hand reports will be given on the winning corporations by the NGOs that nominated them.

History and Experience: Close Scrutiny of the WEF

At its launch in 2000, the Public Eye attempted a dialog with the WEF by organizing a meeting between NGO representatives on the one hand, and WEF founder Klaus Schwab and Göran Lindhal (ABB boss at the time) on the other. The NGOs called for more transparency and the involvement of critical voices. This contentious meeting was exploited by the WEF to present itself as a pioneer for human rights and environmental sustainability.

The Open Forum, introduced by Schwab and Co. in 2003, is another attempt to divert attention from the fact that like any organization, the WEF acts, in the end, primarily for the (in this case business) interests of its members. Accordingly, the annual Davos forum, subsidized by the Swiss government to the tune of millions of francs and thousands of soldiers, was and is less about “improving the state of the world” (self-declaration), and more about being the mother of all lobbying organizations: The WEF woos global leaders while pushing for comprehensive financial and trade liberalization.

As the “WEF watchdog,” the Public Eye followed the WEF to New York for an “away game” in 2002. Back home in Davos, the first Public Eye Awards were conferred in 2005 on corporations exhibiting particularly irresponsible social and environmental behaviour. The “winners” often stand as prime examples of the misconduct of an entire industry, such as textiles or mining. Since 2007 these “worst of” prizes have been complemented with a Positive Award.

Protests and events critical of globalization, such as the Public Eye, transported the WEF from the back rooms of power into the spotlight for the general public to see at the end of the 1990s. Hardly 10 years later, the WEF is attempting to make a return to discrete “business as usual” in Davos. The Berne Declaration and Greenpeace will respond on January 28rd, on location, with a counter-gala featuring its most prominent cast ever. Because nothing has changed, not with the WEF's problems of legitimacy, nor with the misery of the victims of corporate arrogance.

A project of the Berne Declaration (coordination) and Greenpeace Switzerland

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