

# THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

## IT'S POWER AND GOALS

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June 5, 2002

NewsWithViews.com

Most people, including Chamber Of Commerce members, would be astonished to learn the extent of power that organization exerts over international , national, state and local policies. It is common knowledge that the Chamber has lobbyists in Washington and state legislatures, and that it is active in local communities. These activities are no secret. They can be noticed by the casual observer, and are expected by members. But there is a great deal more which must be understood in order to gain a concept of the real power of the Chamber of Commerce -- not only over commerce, education, religion, technology, industry, agriculture, transportation, medicine, communication, labor and government. To understand this power we have to look beyond the local communities to the Chamber's national and international activities, and to Chamber ties with other organizations, both governmental and non-governmental.

### **The Chamber Is Many Organizations**

The Chamber of Commerce is not one, but many organizations. There are local Chambers of Commerce in thousands of communities. These are blanketed by the United States Chamber of Commerce, and since 1920, an International Chamber of Commerce. Once the United States Chamber of Commerce was set up, individual Chambers of Commerce all over the country were invited to join and allowed it to represent and inform them. Such invitations are usually eagerly accepted. No one likes to be left out, and most people like to feel they are part of a big, important group. Local Chambers joined, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce leaders were able to claim the right to make policy for many individual Chambers.

### **Gaining Power**

The U.S. Chamber leaders suggested they had answers to many problems, the most important being the final answer to the problem of war. There is an almost-universal yearning for peace, so that was taken as good news. The home town folks knew they could not solve the problem, or enforce a universal acceptance. How wonderful, they thought, to be associated with those who claimed they could. (It often seems that the farther away from home policies are set on difficult problems, the easier it is to assume that those who are making decisions have all the right answers.) Home town common sense was abandoned for the sake of an unsupported philosophical dream.

The leaders of the U.S. and International Chambers must have known, even as they made the promise, that they did not have the ability to deliver on it, but they also knew that the mere promise would give them a hold on the emotions of many members of local and national Chambers, and of others who believed in universal solutions.

Another problem Chamber leaders claimed to be able to solve was that of hunger and poverty worldwide. The Chamber had one answer to both problems: "rational" world trade. Allow the trade of the whole world to be carried on under the Chamber's "rational" direction, rather than independently under the supervision of various governments; and the world's two most pressing problems would be solved. Two slogans were popularized in order to gain backing for Chamber leadership: "World peace through world trade," and "More business in government and less government in business."

### **A New Organization**

The Chamber sought to commercialize the world under its own direction. To do this it needed to find ways to affect and bypass operating policies of various states and nations. To change national policies, and even laws, required popular support and collective action. A new type of blanket organization was needed, one that could blanket not only governments, but professions, unions, educational institutions, farms, industries, sciences, religions and even families. An organization was sought which could bring about the cooperation and commercialization of all of these. A strong controllable international blanket organization was needed.

### **Coalition For Change**

By the 1930's plans for the new blanket organization to serve the Chamber's purposes, the United Nations, were already well under way. The Chamber had the cooperation of tax-exempt foundations, some of which, such as the Carnegie Foundation for International Peace and the Rockefeller Foundation, had been set up early in the century. Large banks and trusts could see future profits for themselves if they cooperated with the Chamber; and the cooperation of international corporations was assumed, especially since Thomas J. Watson, President of International Business Machines (IBM) was President of the International Chamber of Commerce and a trustee of the Carnegie Foundation for International Peace. University cooperation was no problem because there were many close ties, financial and otherwise, between the above groups and universities such as Harvard, Columbia, etc. University policy planners, economists, and sociologists were also eager to extend their influences and enlarge their campuses.

### **Wartime Planning**

World War II aided, rather than hindered efforts to establish a "national" international commercial system. Chamber representatives from countries on both sides met and planned throughout the war. They were deciding how the world's resources ought to be controlled and divided after the shooting was over, and how to set up the United Nations. The United Nations organization could be used to gain governments' compliance with the Chamber's plans for a unified, controlled world economy, and also the cooperation of various non-governmental organizations.

### **The Organization Is Born**

After the war was over, the system was ready to be put into operation. Through the efforts of the Chamber coalition the United Nations was born. And through the United Nations, the Chamber gained for the first time in history, a permanent vehicle for prescribing policy for governments. It is a crushing dominating type of power.

### **Economic And Social Council**

How could the United Nations be used to increase Chamber of Commerce power and help the Chamber throw its blanket over other activities? It was done largely through what the Chamber regarded as the most important element in the United Nations Charter: the setting up of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Such a council was the one thing that had been lacking in the old League of Nations. But when the United Nations was set up, the Economic and Social Council opened the way for the Chamber to have direct and continuous influence upon international affairs, even though it was a non-governmental organization. The Economic and Social Council was placed beside the Security Council. George L. Ridgeway said in his *Merchants of Peace*: "...The world of economic and social enlightenment beside the world of force..." The important thing about the Economic and Social Council was that it made provision to include representatives from non-governmental organizations in its discussions. The Chamber of Commerce was immediately included as one of the most important advisory organizations.

### **Chamber Power With ECOSOC**

With the birth of the United Nations, the Chamber had a vehicle subject to its influence, which could gather under its blanket not only governmental, but all types of professional and other non-governmental organizations. This put the Chamber of Commerce at the center of policy making for every governmental and non-governmental organization that is in any way associated with, or dominated by the United Nations.

Including representatives from non-governmental organizations in its deliberations may seem on the surface to be a way for the Economic and Social Council to learn the needs and wishes of the people, and to allow them to participate in policymaking decisions., but this is not the case. What most people do not understand is that the United Nations is not an open forum, offering opportunities for unlimited discussion on public matters. It is a goal-centered vehicle, dedicated to accomplishing the purpose for which it was founded: that of putting control of all the world's political, social and economic activities under one Chamber of Commerce-dominated blanket.

### **Goal-Centering Means Behavior Controlling**

Because the United Nations is goal-centered, it is also a behavior controlling organization. Chamber coalition leaders know that those who set the goals for others control the behavior of others. Those who participate in the United Nations must support UN goals. Participants must dedicate themselves, their efforts, their personalities, and their resources to the United Nations. They must give up their individuality. The United Nations does not exist for the sake of individuals. From the United Nations point of view, individuals and groups exist for the sake of the United Nations. It is an organization of organizations, dealing only with groups. It

works through groups - those groups which gain consultative status and which are recognized as worthy of participation in the Economic and Social Council.

### **Consultative Status**

To gain consultative status with the Economic and Social Council organizations must:

- 1) Make application to the Economic and Social Council's Committee on Non-governmental Organizations.
- 2) Be willing to submit reports on its own operations and activities to the Economic and Social Council on a regular basis.
- 3) Be eligible for one of the categories set up for participation.

### **Categories Of Participation**

Non-governmental organizations having consultative status with the Economic and Social Council are divided into three classifications:

Category I is for those organizations, such as the International Chamber of Commerce, that are closely involved in the economic and social life of the areas they represent, and which are said to have marked and sustained contributions to make to the achievements and objectives of the United Nations.

Category II is for those organizations, internationally known, having special competence in and specifically concerned with only a few of the fields of activity covered by the Council.

The Roster is for those organizations able to make occasional and useful contributions to the Council's work. In 1979, the most recent edition of the United Nations Yearbook which is available, 30 international organizations were listed in Category I; 206 organizations were listed in Category II, and 357 organizations were on the Roster.

### **Organizations Included**

Some of the organizations having status with the Economic and Social Council are organizations which have been in existence long before the United Nations was born. Others seem to have been concocted for the purpose of organizing people to serve the United Nations. The following were listed in 1979 in Category I, the most important Category: International Alliance of Women - Equal Rights, Equal Responsibilities; International Association of French-Speaking Parliamentarians, International Chamber of Commerce, International Confederation of Free Trade Unions; International Cooperative Alliance; International Council of Voluntary Agencies; International Council of Women; International Council on Social Welfare, International Federation of Agricultural Producers; International Federation of Business and Professional Women; International Organization for Standardization; International Organization of Consumers Unions; International Organization of Employers; International Planned Parenthood Federation; International Social Security Association; International Union of Local Authorities; International Youth and Student Movement for the United Nations; Inter-Parliamentary Union; League of Red Cross Societies; Muslim World League; Organization of African Trade Union Unity; United Towns

Organization; Women's International Democratic Federation; World Assembly of Youth; World Confederation of Labor; World Federation of Democratic Youth; World Federation of Trade Unions; World Federation of United Nations Associations; World Muslim Congress; World Veterans Federation.

### **Indirect Influence**

One of the advantages the Chamber of Commerce is able to realize through United Nations is the advantage of anonymity. Policies it promotes do not have to bear the Chamber of Commerce label. They can be presented to governments as United Nations' policies. When the United States and local Chambers of Commerce support these policies, few of the local Chambers or their members are aware of the vital links between the Chamber and the United Nations, or that much of the legislation United Nations representatives suggest to national and state legislatures was actually originally brought to the United Nations by the Chamber of Commerce. The steps in the process that can be followed are:

- (1) Planners, perhaps at a university or Chamber-supported think tank, develop legislation.
- (2) The Chamber of Commerce accepts the legislation as in keeping with its goals.
- (3) The Chamber of Commerce suggests it to the Economic and Social Council.
- (4) The Economic and Social Council promotes it through the United Nations.
- (5) The United Nations pressures someone in each national or state government to introduce the legislation in that area's legislature.
- (6) The United States Chamber (and Chambers in other countries) suggest and/or pressure local Chambers to support the legislation.
- (7) The National League of Cities, National Municipal League, U.S. Conference of Mayors, Association of Counties, National Governors' Conference, International City Managers' Association, Advisory Commission on Inter-Governmental Relations, Urban Action Clearinghouse, International Labor Organization, etc....add their weight.
- (8) Local Chamber officials get instruction on how to "educate" their members to favor the policy or legislation.
- (9) Chambers' paid lobbyists pressure legislatures for passage.
- (10) Local Chambers work in communities for more support.
- (11) Federal legislation is passed.
- (12) Enabling legislation at state and other levels is passed.

Few members of local Chambers are aware of any but the last three or four steps. Even among those who know that local Chambers take positions on legislation, there are few among the members who know what position the Chamber lobbyists actually take on specific legislation.

### **Chamber-Supported Legislation And Policies**

The Chamber of Commerce and the Chamber coalition have supported much legislation which has not only been extremely costly, but which has served to transfer power, responsibility and resources from independent nations, local communities, local businesses, and private professions to the universal system coordinated by the Chamber of Commerce coalition. It has supported measures harmful to many of its own members. The following are some of the measures the Chamber of Commerce has supported to aid in the transfer of power from individuals and independent governments, groups, businesses and professions to the Chamber-advocated management system:

- (1) Creation of the United Nations.
- (2) Creation of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.
- (3) Regional government or "New Federalism."
- (4) Medicare (Commercialization of medical professions.)
- (5) Postal reorganization.
- (6) Organized Crime Control Act.
- (7) Contracting for school services with private industry.
- (8) Voucher system for education.
- (9) Management and human relations techniques for handling personnel in industry.
- (10) Health care planning councils.
- (11) Prepaid medical practice (HMOs).
- (12) Federal land use planning.
- (13) Federally-imposed career education.
- (14) Equal Rights Amendment.
- (15) Cross-town busing for desegregation.

These and many other measures have been, or will be, extremely costly. Yet, when the Chamber of Commerce calls for decreases in federal spending and speaks out about the costly federal bureaucracy, its sincerity is seldom questioned. Its goals and power are not well enough known and understood.

### **Use Of This Document**

A single document, such as this, may not affect that Chamber of Commerce power, nor diminish the crushing effect of its system to a noticeable degree. But it may encourage some citizens, government officials, professionals, and perhaps even Chamber of Commerce members to look more closely, investigate more diligently, direct their own actions more intelligently, and respond more aggressively against efforts to diminish their personal responsibility and confound their independent judgment.

## Major Sources:

Merchants of Peace - The History of the International Chamber of Commerce by George L. Ridgeway, Little Brown & Co., 1938, 1959. Washington Report - Weekly newsletter published by the Chamber of Commerce of the United States. Issues from 1968-79. Think - International Business Machines' in-house publication. Issues from 1937-1970. The United Nations Yearbook, 1979

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