

Corporate America's Embrace of Wokism

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This article was one of SCSS President Stephen M. Krason's "Neither Left nor Right, but Catholic" columns that appeared in The Wanderer in 2022. It discusses the increasing espousal of the American corporate community of the views of "woke" left and the reasons why this has happened. This article is reprinted with permission.

We have been observing the striking phenomenon of the American corporate community embracing the woke worldview. These are the corporations that the political left—now so firmly ensconced in the Democratic party, which is perhaps the major institutional advocate of wokism—had for so long claimed were against the people and the good of the country. What has changed the character of corporate America? Why has it embraced wokism and thus seemed to side now with the left that for so long despised it?

While the left likes to think of wokism as being against racial discrimination and what it considers to be social inequalities—without, of course, ever analyzing what the latter means—what wokism means at bottom line is embracing the socio-economic-cultural-political agenda of the left and seeing the world the way it does.

Different writers have identified why wokism has advanced so strikingly in the corporate world. Michael Rectenwald, a former professor who has emerged as a major critic of the present-day "social justice" movement, has said that one of the major reasons is simply to pander to corporate clients. Corporate decision-makers especially want to appeal to their customers with the most disposable income: those between 25 and 54 who live on the coasts. This, of course, includes millennials, who tend disproportionately to lean left. Samuel Gregg of the Acton Institute concurs, saying that corporate executives want to expend their customer base and these leftist younger people are concerned that their consumer decisions should reflect their politics. (Ah, how for the left politics affects everything!) Conservative commentator Ross Douthat concludes flatly that executives conclude that taking the leftist position on social issues is simply a good corporate strategy to please not just customers but also their increasingly leftist employee pool.

Responding to the ideological preferences of clientele and employees is not the only reason for the leftist tilt of corporations. Rectenwald tells us that CEOs and other business executives went to university business

schools that have become more left-leaning as a result of their professors being influenced by their colleagues in the humanities and social sciences who have long been mainstays of the political left. Gregg says that not only were they shaped by their progressive universities, but like so many Americans have been influenced by the monolithic leftist media.

It's not only the executives who are responsible for the woke transformation of corporations, but also according to Dan McLaughlin on *National Review Online* their human resource personnel. He says that leftist activists have been attracted to such positions partly as a way to promote extreme notions of diversity and they have effectively raised the (overstated) danger of lawsuits against their companies as a way to get their executives to let them push their ideological preferences.

Wouldn't one expect that a concern about economic self-interest—i.e., the bottom line—would take precedence over political views for corporate executives? Gregg says not necessarily, that it's not unusual for them to prioritize progressive politics over profits—even if the results are not positive for their shareholders. He says that it's not necessarily just investors, stockholders, and even customers who are the ones to be attentive to; now executives have to be prepared to consult and effectively seek approval from many “constituencies” before acting. That obviously prominently includes leftist elements. They have to act like politicians, checking with the people back home.

Rectenwald says, however, that economic self-interest is not out of the picture for corporate leaders. He says that effectively their embracing of wokeness is a way to buy off—without having to make any financial commitment to do it—their increasing number of leftist employees and customers. Identifying with the woke worldview currently seems to be more important to many in the latter groups than higher wages, increased benefits, and cheaper prices. So, it becomes almost another strategy for businesses to avoid their obligations under the very social justice the woke left claims it is promoting—and also their obligations under commutative justice and distributive justice (which is really what the left means by social justice, since in ethics distributive justice concerns society's duties to individuals).

Then, not surprisingly, there is the desire to satisfy or at least stave off government. Rectenwald says that if corporations try to curry the favor of liberal legislators and government officials they are more likely to get favorable treatment from them. That, he says, might mean that they can avoid excessive regulations or even anti-trust actions. Gregg seconds this and says that companies won't have to work so hard to compete success-

fully in the marketplace if they can get special favors from regulators and others in government.

Finally, Rectenwald reminds us that globalist ideology can't be ignored in all of this. The leftist agenda of extreme internationalism—to the point of the debasement of national sovereignty—gender ideology, anti-family views, and, of course, pushing Christianity out of the picture is in line with what he calls global corporate dominance. I will just observe that it's interesting that globalist corporate ideology wants to eviscerate the foundations of sound culture just as Marxism did.

So, the corporate community has become a major player for an assortment of reasons in the latest—and perhaps most sweeping and virulent—assault on the principles and practices of Western culture (or at least what's left of them) that is represented by wokism. Many corporations have joined the left. Those who are inclined to rally to their side—because of a concern about free market economics and the like—need to wake up and see the realities and consider the serious implications presented by these developments.