

Fires of Rebellion

The powerfully positive Jim Hightower

By Aria Seligmann

Corporations have taken over the world and are running amok with power and corruption. Politicians, eating out of their hands, have stolen the basic rights of citizens around the world. It's a big, bleak mess, but somehow, Jim Hightower, the old-timey Texas Democrat who put the pop in populist, isn't angry or depressed. His newest book, *Thieves in High Places*, outlines the corporate/political quagmire we've wandered into with example after example of greedy corporate underhandedness, yet he writes it with lightheartedness, even offering solutions for a way out. His rallying cry is to become energy independent and to take back our country politically, economically and socially.

Hightower will be in Eugene on Thursday, Oct. 9 to give the keynote speech for the Peace, Justice and Media conference presented by the Justice Not War Coalition, Northwest Media Project and *Eugene Weekly*. Conference events will take place on both the UO and LCC campuses. (See insert this issue.) I chatted with him earlier this week about his book, now in its fourth week as a bestseller, and the future of America.

EW: In your book, you cover some pretty dark stuff, but you write it all with such good

humor. It seems crucial to me that we remain positive and not get angry and send out even more negative energy into the universe. How do you maintain a sunny outlook, and not let anger drag you down?

JH: I'm lucky in that I get to travel a whole lot and so I don't get my perception of America from nightly news or *The New York Times*; rather I'm out in the countryside where I find in every place there are tremendous people and groups lighting little fires of rebellion against political and economic exclusion. I'm much encouraged by the activism, humor, the success of — and plain old pluck of — the typical American.

EW: Where we both live and work, we've surrounded ourselves with liberal people and sometimes it's easy to forget that not everyone thinks the way we do. Do you think middle America is catching on to the corporate domination of the world?

JH: Yes. In fact, at some levels they get it quicker than a lot of liberals because middle Americans are the ones who are experiencing the corporate powers up close and personal. A lot of Bush supporters do not agree with Bush that he should be squishy-soft on polluters, that he should be pursuing more of these global

trade scams that are knocking down our economy; do not agree with the PATRIOT Act, or the underfunding of soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Also, a lot of former Bush supporters have now found the economy is not an abstract discussion but rather a matter of whether they are going to have gainful employment or not, particularly high-tech workers who were told that was our middle-class future. The old manufacturing jobs are now being shipped off to Pakistan, Russia and elsewhere. Now former manufacturing employees are asking how to spell union.

EW: You write, "It's a great time to be alive and progressive in America." But can anyone really make a difference? Are progressives crazy to be working so hard?

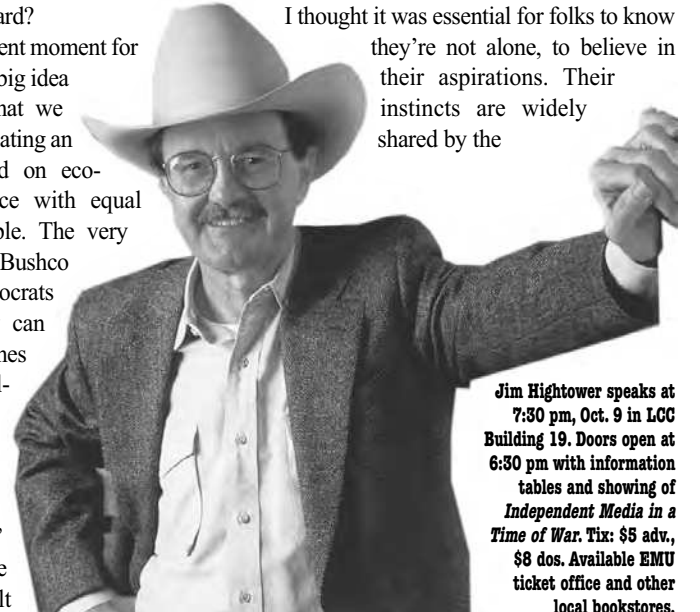
JH: No. This is an urgent moment for America itself — for the big idea of America, which is that we have the possibility of creating an egalitarian society based on economic and social justice with equal opportunity for all people. The very idea is under assault by Bushco and the corporate Kleptocrats who have decided they can separate the good fortunes of the few from the well-being of the many. I believe we're in the middle of one of those "When in the course of human events ..." moments Jefferson wrote about. With the assault

being made upon us by our own leadership, this is the time when the activist citizenship of ordinary people is most required. Only through activism can we ever hope to have a functioning democracy and hope to achieve our egalitarian ideals.

EW: You were the editor of the *Texas Observer*. How do we journalists do a better job in this strange, new political world?

JH: I think continue to do what you do, particularly in the independent media: to bring to the forefront not only problems in the community, country and the world, but also to bring stories of folks who are happily engaged in the battle to take America back from the thieves. And to do that with a sense of optimism and humor. One of the reasons I did the book was

I thought it was essential for folks to know they're not alone, to believe in their aspirations. Their instincts are widely shared by the



Jim Hightower speaks at 7:30 pm, Oct. 9 in LCC Building 19. Doors open at 6:30 pm with information tables and showing of *Independent Media in a Time of War*. Tix: \$5 adv., \$8 dos. Available EMU ticket office and other local bookstores.

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