

For how long will corporate abuse last?

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As the [Guardian reported](#) yesterday:

The world's biggest ultra-processed food companies have filed scores of lawsuits challenging government policies that tackle junk diets, the Guardian can reveal.

As they added:

Ultra-processed food (UPF) is linked to harm in every major organ system of the human body and [poses a seismic threat to global health](#). Worldwide consumption is rising and UPF now makes up as much as half the average diet in many countries, including the UK, the US and Australia.

To contextualise this, they said:

Governments around the world have adopted measures to fight back and safeguard the health of children and adults. Among the regulations are front-of-pack warning labels, marketing restrictions on unhealthy products to make them less alluring and taxes on junk food.

Publicly, the world's biggest UPF companies insist they support the policies, are committed to helping consumers make informed choices and want to be part of the solution. But an investigation by the Guardian, in collaboration with academics, the non-profit newsroom [Lighthouse Reports](#) and a coalition of media partners across four continents, found many of these same companies are taking governments to court to overturn, weaken or delay the policies.

The result was that 235 lawsuits were identified over health policies targeting UPF in Mexico, Colombia, Brazil, the US and the UK from 2010 to 2025.

None of this surprises me. Over the last 40 years or so, neoliberalism has constructed an international framework of trade treaties and legal protections designed by big business, endorsed by willing collaborators within the institutions of global politics, and supported by governments. Their purpose has been to concentrate an ever greater

share of the world's wealth in the hands of a few, while creating the legal architecture that allows the world's largest corporations to exploit their power in pursuit of ever greater profits, regardless of the consequences. Those consequences now include the destruction of the planet, whether through climate change, the wider poisoning of the environment or the abuse of its people through the sale of ultra-processed foods.

What this article, quite appropriately, highlights is that, in very many countries in the world, including the UK, many secretive structures created by trade agreements, most of which have been subject to remarkably little parliamentary scrutiny, if any at all, are now being used to reinforce the harms that can be deliberately created to undermine well-being.

Can we do anything about this? If many international lawyers are to be believed, the answer is that we can do nothing at all. The structures that now exist have been created to be permanent, and any attempt to change them would, in itself, give rise to claims for damages from the companies whose interests would, in their opinion, be harmed because the well-being of other people around the world might be given priority over the interests of their shareholders.

I hear what is said. I do not believe it. At some point, abuse is always contained, and the power base shifts. Rotten governments have always been overthrown. So too have empires, and if neoliberalism is an economic empire, it too will pass, one day. People never tolerate abuse forever, and the internal contradictions and power struggles of those seeking to exploit often pull down empires long before they are overthrown. Their collapse is built into their destructive DNA of greed.

So, will this exploitation last? I think not. For how long must we suffer it, though? Some time to come, I suspect. And that is why reports like this are important. They not only point out truth, abuse and the consequences of excess power. They also signal pathways to what must happen, which in this case is the restructuring of the architecture of power within our societies so that abuse is not pervasive, and ceases to be tolerated.