GOODBYE INC.

Tom Bender • 12 October 2007

Someday we'll look back, and ask in wonder why we ever thought that a viable democracy could exist allowing organizations of unlimited size and power based solely on greed. No responsibilities other than maximizing what they can take from others. Any parent knows that doesn't work! The imbalance of power inherent in such concentration of wealth and control effectively destroys democracy.

Just as the unmasked realities of these organizations appear to be winning supreme power, their foundations are buckling below. The fossil fuel glut required to feed their inefficiency is being sucked dry. The hidden vulnerabilities of complex largeness was forever exposed on 9/11. The diseases of the spirit resulting from that imbalance have become undeniable. There's no pretending anymore.

The benefits of lives based on corporate-fueled consumerism have proved illusory. Possessions have proved an inadequate substitute for feeling our lives are worthwhile and that we are of value to our community. The huge costs of debt, advertising, environmental pollution and destruction of the webs and wonders of community have clearly revealed themselves in myriad ways.

Alternative cooperative informational structures are proving more effective in sharing optimization in production of goods and services. People are daring to ask what our real goals are in life, and forging new and more direct ways to achieve them.

Ironically, no governing body ever approved giving corporations "personhood". Since the mid-1990's, groups have been sprouting up across the US and Canada, saying this isn't working, and we need to invent something better. It's happening. Here's what you probably won't see in the headlines of corporate-controlled media:

• The 'Wayne Township Ordinance' (Mifflin County, PA) was enacted into law in 1998. It prohibits any corporation from doing business in the township (even those that are already located there) if it has a history of consistently violating any regulatory laws (environmental, labor, etc), and further prohibits any corporation from doing business there if any of its current directors sit on other corporate boards that consistently violate regulatory law.

• In June 1999 the City of San Francisco passed the Commercial-Free Schools Act. The Act requires all long-term corporate sponsorships to be approved by the Board of Education. It also prohibits teachers from using corporate sponsored educational materials, including Channel One and ZapMe. It also forbids San Francisco from entering into a district-wide exclusive contract with a soda or snack food company.

• In March 2004, Mendocino County, CA became the first community in the US to ban the farming of genetically altered crops and animals. Even though corporate agribusiness poured $621,000 into the opposition campaign, the measure passed with 56.5% of the vote.

• Nine states have now banned non-family-owned corporations from engaging in farming or ranching, or owning farmland. Similar measures have been achieved by Pennsylvania townships through ordinances passed by township governments.

• Historically, penalties imposed on corporations that broke the law were rightfully more severe than for individuals. Revoking a corporation's charter was the most severe action, and common during our country's first hundred years. Charter revocation means that the corporation's assets are divided amongst its chief creditors and stockholders, and the corporation is dissolved. Each state has its own charter revocation process. In California the state Attorney General files the revocation on behalf of the citizens (keeping citizens from bearing the costs of confronting a huge corporation).

The New York Attorney General's office has shown surprising leadership in challenging corporate charters. The previous Republican AG (Dennis Vacco) successfully revoked the charters of two non-profit tax-exempt front groups for the tobacco corporations, and seized and distributed their assets to two public institutions.

• Former corporate attorney Robert Hinkley has drafted a proposed "Code for Corporate Responsibility" to expand the legal purpose of corporations to include responsibility to employees, communities and the environment. The proposed Code mandates that a corporation "not cause damage to the environment, violate human rights, adversely affect public health or safety, damage welfare of communities where the corporation operates, or violate the dignity of the corporation's employees." The Code gives legal status to challenges that a corporation fails to meet these requirements.

• The City of Point Arena passed a 'Resolution on Corporate Personhood" in April 2000. The resolution disavows the personhood status of corporations and encourages public discussion on the role of corporations in public life. So far five other northern California communities are working toward Corporate Personhood resolutions – San Francisco, Berkeley, Willits, Arcata and Ukiah.

• In the townships of Porter and Licking, PA, elected officials passed ordinances stripping corporations in those communities of Constitutional protections. These laws were a successful strategic move to stop toxic sludge corporations from dumping waste in their communities, and have paved the way for other communities to pass similar democratic ordinances.

• In 2006, Humboldt County, California, became the latest jurisdiction to abolish the legal doctrine known as "corporate personhood." Measure T successfully bans non-local corporations from participating in Humboldt elections. It also asserts that corporations cannot claim the First Amendment right to free speech.

• A "Model Brief on Corporate Personhood," was written in 2003 by public interest lawyers to help citizen groups create winning organizing strategies-by stripping constitutional protections from corporations and preventing them from governing their communities. Richard Grossman, co-founder of POCLAD, authored the brief with Thomas Linzey, president of the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund, and Dan Brannen, a Santa Fe attorney.

• At least 21 cities have successfully enacted and defended restrictive ordinances on formula food restaurants and other businesses, including big box retailers.

• And over 100 cities and counties have passed laws to raise minimum wages to a "living wage". Fears that businesses would suffer from paying fair wages have proven unfounded.

When corporations are going to court claiming that bribing politicians with vacation

junkets is "permitted free speech", it's time for change. Want more info? Check out the <www.newrules.org> and <www.duhc.org> websites.