

Corporate and Community: Polar Opposites?

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Introduction

Whereas a reaction is a response to a stimulus, a reactionary is often considered a response to progress. Bill McKibben postulates the notion that America's capitalistic society has spent its entire existence revolutionizing a country composed of numerous local and regional entities into a nationally (now globally) interdependent society.¹ Subsequently, some local communities are beginning to react to this development of global interdependency by rejecting corporate globalization in an effort to become more and more self-sufficient. Although tremendous obstacles coalesced into America's structural framework must be overcome by local communities in order to achieve more independence, local communities have begun taking initiatives to reverse global trends of interdependency. Moreover, this emergence of community interests is a response to the negation of the rights of many for the benefit of a few.

Today's political structure, which Wallerstein has explained as "dependency theory," can categorize nations into core, semi-periphery, or periphery entities. The most advanced in military capabilities and technology, core countries exploit the periphery countries and their resources in order to gain more power and wealth. The structure of this system, the technologically dominant countries exploiting the dependent ones, is detrimental to the health of the people existing in the peripheral nations. Similarly, the structural system of America, as Saul Alinsky describes, is composed of the haves and the have-nots. The haves possess greater financial and technological capabilities than the have-nots: creating a dominant-dependent relationship between the two entities throughout American society while also endangering the livelihood of the have-nots. Amazingly, these two societal structures are engineered to serve those who designed them: the overwhelmingly wealthy persons of the world.

Politics is the administration and control of an entity's internal and external affairs; subsequently, state politics is governed by the aim to increase a state's sovereignty, fearing that failure to gain power will eventually result in the loss of a state's authority. Historically, communities as a whole have ceded local sovereignty to a more centralized government. However, technological advancements have permitted global

¹ McKibben, Bill. "Small World," Harper's Magazine. December 2003. Pp 46-54.

corporations to enter the political stage: creating an even greater loss of purview for local communities. It is this, the emergence of the corporate development, which has resulted in a polar opposite—the emergence of community development. By examining the historical development of corporations in America and their influence upon American society, this essay will address the emergence of grassroots organizations as a response to corporate power. Specifically, this essay will draw from the roles both dichotomies play on the environmental stage in order to analyze the true effects each entity has in American society today.

Historical Development

Historically, the United States was founded by a corporation, the Massachusetts Bay Company chartered by King Charles I in 1628.² At the time, capitalism was a novel initiative and corporations were a method for the crown to successfully expropriate natural resources from North America to England. Incorporation allowed individuals to combine assets in aim of catalyzing or finding new sources of wealth and prestige. By granting a charter to these corporations, England (as well as Spain and Holland) were successful in increasing their wealth and power at the expense of those across the Atlantic. It is worth noting that American independence was not only a rejection of the English Monarchy, but it was also a rejection of English corporate power in America. The Boston Tea Party was an uprising against the monopoly of eastern trade held by the British East India Company.³ Nonetheless, this initial disdain for corporations soon dissipated with the American government's cry of Manifest Destiny.

The great expansion westward by Euro-Americans witnessed the emergence of what is now known as Corporate America. It was environmental degradation at the hands of this expansion westward that inspired Henry David Thoreau to relocate to Walden Pond on July 4th 1845. Thoreau, who many identify as a source of the modern environmental movement, asserted that mankind is at its best when it is conscious of being part of nature, not the sole proprietor of it. However, corporate expansion was

² Hutchinson, T. 1970.

³ *(The) Columbia Encyclopedia*. "Boston Tea Party." Sixth Edition. 2003 Columbia University Press. Retrieved on February 7, 2004. (www.bartleby.com/65/bo/BostTea.html).

funneling more wealth and power to the White House just as earlier colonizing corporations had increased the wealth and power of European monarchies. In exchange for developing societal infrastructures westwards, the government granted more privileges to corporations. By the late 1800's, corporations had not only gained permanent stature (originally charters had to be renewed every ten to fifteen years), but they also were granted rights once only guaranteed to "persons" of the United States of America.⁴ In the late 19th and early 20th century, the Sherman Antitrust and Clayton Acts were the first Acts passed by Congress limiting corporate power. Still, corporations managed to extend their fingers over all aspects of American society.

Following the principles that the economic market serves society most efficiently, the American government let the market provide for the welfare of American citizens. This was the case until the Great Depression of the 1930's. The fact that the Great Depression occurred disproved the notion that left unregulated, the economic market would naturally provide for the welfare of everyone involved. The 1930's and subsequent years thereafter witnessed the constricting of the government belt around the U.S. economy. Regulations were enacted to help cede the expansive growth of corporate power. Government intervention initiated an unparalleled amount of universal prosperity for American society—expanding the size of the middle class in America and greatly increasing the standard of living.

During the 1970's and early 1980's the U.S. government deregulated institutions that were originally established to solve the failures of the economic market, institutions that pulled American society out of the Great Depression. Urged by corporate leaders looking to expand their wealth and power, this deregulation has left the populace chasing their American dreams, not achieving them. Since 1974, the gap between the poor and the rich in the U.S. has increased dramatically. The 2002 U.S. Census Bureau reports that the Gini-Coefficient⁵ increased from 39.5% in 1974 to 46.6% in 2001.⁶ This is an

⁴ This was the result of the Court Case Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad (1886). In this case corporations were to be referred to "persons" in the 14th Amendment, which states that "no state shall deprive any person of life, liberty or property, without due process of law." This ruling conceded that California could not tax corporations differently than how it taxed residents of the state (Gathered from Jan Edward's "Timeline of Personhood Rights and Powers," for *Women's International League for Peace and Freedom*).

⁵ The Gini-Coefficient is a measure of income inequality within a country's population. Using the Lorenze Curve to indicate by how much a society's income inequality differs from a society with perfect income

increase of income inequality of 18.0% over the past 27 years, a time span that coincides with the deregulation of government entities in an effort to better serve the American people. However, the American people are not in a better position than they were before. Not only has income inequality become greater over the years, it has grown at a much higher rate than income inequality grew during the 27 years before 1974. The Gini-Coefficient in 1947 was 37.6%, signifying that the growth rate of income inequality in the United States from 1947 to 1974 was 5.1% (compared to the 18.0% over the last 27 years).

This income gap is not solely attributed to the U.S. government favoring big business; it has also arisen from technological advancements. Just as technology amplifies the scope of corporate business, it has also amplified the scope of an entity at the other end of the economic spectrum—the community organization. It is the development of community organizing over the last half of the century that has become a response to corporate America. The societal interdependence constructed by our capitalist society is resulting in communities' rejecting corporate globalization in favor of self-sufficiency.

Community Development

Deriving from the Greek word “fellowship,” community is a group sharing common interests. Through processes, methods, programs, and movements, community development is a planned change empowering marginal groups to participate in community and institutional decision making processes. Community-based Organizations (CBO's) can facilitate the empowerment of people and communities through service, advocacy, and/or resource mobilization. Of these three, the first two do not directly induce community participation. The last is composed of social action and development. Whereas social action is limited to short term issues that are not

equality, the Gini-Coefficient is indicative of the degree of income inequality existing in a country's total population. The measurement ranges from the value zero (indicating no inequality) to the value of one (perfect inequality).

⁶ These figures were gathered from the Historical Income Tables-Households in the records of the U.S. Census Bureau, accessed through its website at www.census.gov. These figures were last update on September 30th, 2002.

structurally altering, social development involves sustainable, long-term structural change. According to Mushi, three models of community development currently exist:

- 1) Liberal-Incremental: change within the system
- 2) Revolutionary-Change: change of the system
- 3) Guided Evolutionary: change where improvements are benefited equally and fairly by all

Political governments often view CBO's Liberal-Incremental organizations as catalyzing change within the bounds of the societal structure. This view coincides with the notion asserting the CBO's role of helping to fill societal voids that for-profit businesses create or, fail to provide. So far capitalism has succeeded because it is able to provide the greatest incentive to the producer who is most efficient: profit. However, the market can be too efficient sometimes, producing inequalities. Subsequently, one role of an efficient, capitalistic government (which aims to retain authority of its citizens) is to assist its citizens so that inequalities do not become too burdensome to the daily operation of society.⁷ Yet because the government's purview is limited CBO's can correct lapses in the system, providing opportunities for everyone in society to improve his or her quality of life.

What is more is the role community-based organizations play in sculpting community locally. By acting as both a generator and a conduit of social capital, CBO's facilitate the exchange of ideas and discourse among people. On page 26 in his piece "Sizing Up Social Capital," Jyri Engeström acknowledges that "social capital can be identified as shared norms and the networks that enforce them."⁸ From these norms, networks of trust develop. Developing at a time when technology has created a greater global interdependence for everyone trying to meet life's everyday needs: reducing the relevance of maintaining local ties and connections. Through mothering local networks of trust, CBO's both encourage business transactions and enhance the standard of living

⁷ Referring to a capitalistic market, economist Arthur M. Okun argues on page 119 that "the market needs a place and the market needs to be kept in its place," referring to the tradeoff in the U.S. market that "efficiency is bought at the cost of inequalities income and wealth and in the social status and power that go along with income and wealth."

⁸ Engeström, Jyri. 2000. "Sizing Up Social Capital." Page 26. Taken from the website <http://www.aula.cc/people/jyri/papers/socialcapital/> on December 1st 2003.

in societies by creating less globally-dependent communities. Not only is the welfare of society dependent upon community organization, it is also dependent on government and its ability to hold corporations accountable to their actions.

Interaction among the Three: Government, Corporations, and CBO's

The government utilizes community organizations to broaden their scope of power; yet the lessening of government size decreases corporate regulation, giving corporations an advantage over financially strapped community organizations by allowing the corporations to make decisions affecting society as a whole. Are leaders of corporations making decisions for the greater good of society or are they maximizing profit, the underlying goal of any for-profit business? If this is the case, does society suffer from this? In no way is the essay suggesting a conspiracy theory. In fact, this essay is suggesting just the opposite. It is a natural western value to always want more of an item. Some would label it as greed, economists would term it as monotonicity, a guiding principle of economics stating that more is always better. Consequently, those who have originated with a lot of possessions from birth naturally want to improve their worth just as any poor person also wants to ameliorate his or her position in society. It is typical to want to demonstrate to one's parents that he or she can succeed, earning his or her parent's approval. Their procurement of wealth means that others must lose wealth because, after all, economics is the allocation of a finite amount of natural resources. Resultantly, the "starve the beast" campaign is not a campaign, it is merely what one will do, and understands that he or she can achieve, in a capitalistic society to maintain one's standard of living.

However, what is efficient for one end of society proves to be unfair to those subsisting at the other end. Thus the need for government in the first place: to maintain a balanced society, where the blind lady of justice faithfully holds the balance of power. Currently, on one plate rests corporate power and on the other plate sits community development. When more chips are stacked onto the shoulders of one (the have-nots), the other group (haves) gains power and distances itself above the rest. The have-nots find themselves closer to the base of the structure of the scales, at the ground level. It is

no wonder the power of the have-nots generates from the grassroots level—this is where it exists on the balance of power—a.k.a. scale of wealth—and consequently this is the only way it can begin to rebalance the scales.

Where the height of the rich is maintained through their wealth; it is the mechanics and the structure of the societal balance that favors corporate power. Society depends upon the rule of law in order to operate. Without the jurisdiction of law, property rights become difficult to enforce. In fact, the only other method to observe one's right to own property in a non-authoritarian society is through the trust shared by the parties involved in a business transaction. Incidentally, trust is a foundation of social capital: the source of power for community-based organizations. CBO's utilize social capital as a tool for inviting financial investment from outside the community, increasing the community's power/weight on the balance of power. Nonetheless, corporations hold much more power than CBO's by the design of American society (scales) in which they have ultimately created. Although governments do not see them so as of yet, CBO's ultimately aim to be technicians readjusting the scales that balance American society. Instead of filling the niches that developed by capitalism, liberal-incremental CBO's, more and more CBO's are improving life for all by challenging the social system.

Extracting from Arthur Okun's notion that there is an economic tradeoff between equity and efficiency, failure in government policy often occurs when a careful balance of these two characteristics does not exist in society. Through the temerity by which those who possess continue to hold onto their possessions while simultaneously open-armed embracing all that is around them, society inures both their puissance and their wanton harnessing of power that is pejorative to mankind: a result of society's docility. Herein lies the dichotomy of American society: corporate against communal; right versus left; conservative versus populist; consumerist against conservationist; the haves and the have-nots. This conflicting paradigm between community development and corporations can be viewed when addressing the appropriate allocation of natural resources. By examining the roles of community organizations, corporations, and government on environmental issues, this essay will further illustrate how community development has

emerged as a response to the irresponsible (to society) and unchallenged exploits of corporate power.

A Case study: the Environment

Protection of the environment from pollutants has become a global concern over the last two decades. Pollution is the contamination of soil, water, or the atmosphere by the discharge of harmful substances.⁹ Although it is a natural cycle of life, pollution can be categorized as either natural or man-made. Anthropogenic pollution is not a novel phenomenon; however, the amount by which we pollute has magnified exponentially since the industrial revolution. Coupled with our technological advancements, mankind has become a much greater threat to the environment than Mother Nature.

Understandably, mankind has also become the greatest protector of the environment (a rather mute argument when considering that we are the only species with the capacity to administer protection). It is the environment from which natural resources are extracted by firms and industries in order to provide a marketable service to society. Yet contamination of the environment destroys these finite natural resources, decreasing the amount of resources available to man. Subsequently, the allocation of these scarce resources—economics—is a guiding influence between the interactions of man and the environment. Within economic theory lays the dichotomy of the economist and the environment. The principle of economics balances on the notion of opportunity costs: the cost associated with the opportunities that are forgone when resources are not utilized to the greatest potential.

Unfortunately, the ability to place an economic value on certain natural resources can become extremely fastidious. As a result, firms and industries have misallocated economic values to natural resources day in and day out. So far, the economic market has not efficiently accounted for the price of natural resources, or the degradation of the environment. Particularly, this notion that degrading the environment has no cost is the reason people continue doing so. The inability to properly measure the value of the

⁹ *The American Heritage College Dictionary*. 2002. 4th Edition. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company. Page 1069.

environment's natural resources continues to threaten the health of the environment on which human society depends. From this peril has emerged an environmental movement which aims to amend the economists' assigned values of the environment's natural resources in their ledgers. What are the roles of the government and of local community organizations in monitoring the interactions of firms and industries with the environment?

Locally, the coalescence of community and national organizations working together and advocating for more government intervention in American society composes the U.S. environmental movement. Whereas the government is a target of the national movement, internationally the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is a conduit of American ideas of how to protect the environment from anthropologic pollution and environmental degradation globally.

Regulation by the EPA

The greatest advancement to date of the environmental movement occurred in 1969 with the passing of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). This Act declared:

“...that it is the continuing policy of the Federal Government, in cooperation with State and local governments, and other concerned public and private organizations, to use all practicable means and measures, including financial and technical assistance, in a manner calculated to foster and promote the general welfare, to create and maintain conditions under which man and nature can exist in productive harmony, and fulfill the social, economic, and other requirements of present and future generations of Americans.”¹⁰

Since this Act, more environmentally-focused legislation has been passed: The Water Pollution Act of 1972, the Endangered Species Act of 1973, and the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980. Still, none of these Acts hold the regulatory authority that the NEPA granted. Although the EPA's mission to “protect human health

¹⁰Excerpt taken from the National Environmental Policy Act, found at the website:
www.ecotopia.org/ehof/timeline.html.

and to safeguard the natural environment—air, water, and land—upon which life depends”¹¹ is commendable, it is also quite ambitious (if not misleading).

The Environmental Protection Agency’s newest administer Mike Leavitt walked through the doors on November 6th, 2003, becoming the tenth head of the department in its thirty year history. On September 30th of this year, the EPA submitted its 2003 Strategic Plan to Congress, road mapping its goals for the next five years. The fact that the plan coincides with political election dates is discouraging. Policies of regulation for environmental polluters should not be centered around politics but rather on the consistent enforcement and encouragement of entities to adhere to identified standards that minimize environment degradation if not completely eradicate it.

Regulatory enforcement of environmental legislation is limited. Many of the laws are not stringently enforced, either because authoritative organizations are under-funded, under-staffed, or both. Oftentimes, inappropriate or insignificant fines enforced by the EPA do not deter firms or industries from damaging the environment because the payoff from violating the infringements and paying the fine are greater than the company or industry adhering to the legislation, avoiding the fines, but not earning as much profit. Moreover, the idea that businesses are being forced to oblige to a piece of legislation rather than choose the best allocation of their resources is not inducing as much public buy-in to environmental concerns as the EPA could encourage.

This lack of success can be attributed to the EPA’s traditional governmental approach of wielding a large stick to deter harmful interactions with the environment by firms and industries. So far the fines and regulations administered by the EPA have been so minute that the government’s use of deterrence resembles a needle more than a large stick. When pricked by the EPA, it does cause an acute pain (greater production costs for firms and industries), but it does not overwhelmingly succeed in deterring environmental degradation. This is apparent by the major environmental catastrophes that have occurred since the EPA’s inception: Three Mile Island, The Valdez Oil Spill, and the Love Canal Scandal. Nonetheless, community organizations can participate in the amelioration of the environment’s health by utilizing market values to influence business behavior desirably while also raising awareness locally and encouraging voluntary action

¹¹ Mission Statement taken from EPA website: www.epa.gov/epahome/aboutepa.htm.

towards preserving natural resources. If opportunity costs of environmental degradation were adequately valued, businesses would make more environmentally friendly decisions rather than trying to duck and avoid taxes and levies.¹²

Community Participation

From the previous section we understand that the authority of regulatory institutions for enforcing environmental legislation is limited; subsequently, community organizations can assist organizations like the EPA by initiating efforts to influence firms and industries to make more environmentally friendly decisions. One of, if not the greatest dilemma of protecting the environment is identifying the opportunity costs of either extracting a natural resource or polluting the environment. Community-based organizations (CBO's) can assist the EPA and similar regulatory agencies both by being able to explain the economic effects of local pollution on the environment and by knowing how to appropriately value local resources. By possessing this capacity to become an active participant in the decision making process, community organizations can assist regulatory agencies and industries to appropriately value the true costs of interactions with the environment.

This process requires CBO's to first identify the environmental-economic objectives that it wishes to address. By identifying the uses and functions of the ecosystem in question, a CBO can develop a direct cause and effect relationship between the interactions of the environment and society. Once these links have been identified by the CBO (most likely the organization will need to enlist the assistance of area specialists), it can proceed in determining the best approximate value of the resources in question. Resource valuation should be based on both active and passive benefits. Where the former accounts for those benefits directly received through interaction with the environment, for example: fishing, coal mining, or deforestation; the latter encompasses intrinsic values, such as the knowledge that a healthy environment will

¹² Note: I will insert more information and statistics concerning the EPA, its use of insignificant fines to appease the voters, subsidies to encourage environmentally-harmful business practices rather than seeking safer alternatives, the structure of the EPA, and the recent fluidity of the staff of the EPA. I will not include these figures in this paper because it is a lot more material.

support future generations and lineages. Several different techniques of market value assessment exists, such as measuring: the actual market value of the extracted resource (productive approach); the value of the increase in production by the use of a specific resource (intermediate good approach); the amount people will spend in order to prevent damage to either the environment or themselves (preventative expenditure approach); the cost of replacing the benefit enjoyed by the use of the environment for the next best alternative (alternate cost method); the use of a survey to determine the value of a resource (contingent valuation); and the amount people are willing to pay to use the resource—measuring recreational value (access cost approach).¹³

Amazingly, out of all six of these techniques only the contingent approach allows us to measure both the active and passive significance of natural resources. Sometimes this is a short-coming of economics, applying intrinsic costs to the overall cost function. Perhaps an easier way to understand this dichotomy of active and passive benefits is by looking at the scheme as the appraisal of resources by assigning monetary values to both tangible and intangible aspects of nature. It is the role of the CBO to ensure that firms, industries, and the government appraise the planet's natural resources appropriately, but how can one be sure that all of the intangible aspects are evaluated? This is why caution by all parties involved should be applied when harming the environment is at stake. Local communities have echoed this idea since the days of Henry Thoreau; now their voice can resonate more loudly through using economic assessments in lobbying for the lone-participant that does not have a human voice, Mother Nature.

Environmental degradation is not a novel phenomenon; it has existed as far back as human records can note. However, technological progress and global population growth have amplified the footprints mankind leaves on nature, making the environmental degradation of our planet an issue that can no longer be ignored. The fact that the environment's size can absorb (or hide) many of mankind's impacts allows polluters to contaminate natural resources without directly suffering the consequences. Moreover, the inability for the economic market to value natural resources appropriately has resulted in the overall deterioration of society because the opportunity costs have not

¹³ *Handbook on Environmental Economics*. 1996. Prepared by Sawyer EnviroEconomic Consulting and Resource and Environmental Economics. Halifax, NS. Retrieved Nov. 9th, 2003 (www.ec.gc.ca/community/acap/pdf/handbook_e.pdf). Page 1.

been correctly calculated. However, with the improvement of communities being able to measure the value of local natural resources, society can improve how it manages the environment. The U.S. agricultural industry is a good example of this.

A Structural Problem

Farming is an environmental field where corporate interests collide with community interests; meanwhile the government adopts more of a facilitator's role than that of a regulator. According to them, corporate farming is the future because it yields the most produce for the dollar. By corporations renting arable land to tenant farmers, they control the decisions of what to farm and how to farm it while their tenant farmers supply the labor to yield a product. Such practices provide economies of scale in obtaining input commodities to till the land for the corporate farmers. However, lower input costs allow corporate farmers to sell at lower prices. This is a disadvantage for the family farms which do not experience the economies of scale that corporate farmers enjoy. Consequently, corporations argue they are better for America because they are able to provide a product at a lower price. Yet, is the corporation providing the same product at a lower price?

In an effort to minimize costs and maximize production, it is commonplace to witness large corporate farms till as much land as possible without utilizing local farming practices and techniques. Such practices of disregard endanger the environment of the community that is being farmed. Crop farming today applies an average of 2.7 pounds of pesticides per acre, per year.¹⁴ This figure does not include other chemical compounds such as fertilizer that are also applied in tremendous amounts. The application of these chemicals needs to be scrupulously monitored; however, they are not. Currently, a “dead zone” exists in the Gulf of Mexico as a result of agriculture fertilizers emptying into the Gulf via the Mississippi River. This region, which during the summertime can stretch to over 7000 square miles (the size of New Jersey), is the result of chemicals draining into

¹⁴ Taken from the “Matters of Scale” article on the online version of *World Watch Magazine*. This figure on average amount of pesticides used per acre was acquired at www.worldwatch.org/pubs/mag/mos/ on March 1, 2004.

waterways which eventually drain into the Mississippi.¹⁵ In addition to agricultural chemicals, wastes produced from animal stocks also deserve careful monitoring which are not of concern to the absentee landlords of the corporate farming industry. Corporate farms' production amplifies the dangers to the environment due to the magnitude of the operation and the lack of close supervision that accompanies economies of scale production. With this in mind, are corporations still providing the same product as family farmers at a lower price?

Besides accountability, family farms also help support local communities by investing locally. On the other hand, corporate farmers purchase their input goods at a lower wholesale price and ship the products to their farmer tenants from outside the local economy. Similarly, just as corporate farmers buy their goods from outside the community, they spend their profits outside of the community. Corporate farming exploits the most valuable natural resource of most communities—land—and leaves the communities to fend for themselves. This structural exploitation of community resources by corporations seems to fit all too well into the political structure lobbied for by corporate leaders in order to serve their self interests most.

One method to “ensure” that corporate farming is better is through lobbying the government and securing large government subsidies doled out in proportion to the farmer's yield: the larger the quantity, the larger the subsidy. By doing so, corporate farmers sit at an advantage because they are receiving more money than family farms and consequently can reinvest their subsidized earnings into expanding their businesses at a more efficient cost while also charging lower prices of goods than family farms can charge. The lower food prices enjoyed by city folk are provided by subsidized farming. This situation produces a cyclical pattern of driving rural food producers out of business; these farmers immigrate to urban areas looking for work, giving more land to be stewarded by corporations while the immigrating farmers become another strain for the societal structure to support. The result of corporate lobbying, subsidized farming allows corporations to saturate the global food market with low cost goods, making it

¹⁵ The dead zone is a result of algae that feeds on the agricultural chemicals flowing into the Gulf from the Mississippi River. This algae bloom starves water of oxygen, producing an area void of life, a dead zone.

unprofitable and impossible for local farmers of developing nations to sell their goods at the market.

Consequently, these farmers do just as family farmers in America do, they move to the city in search of employment. Not only is such urban growth in developing nations which do not have the capacity to handle it detrimental to the environment, this societal strain increases the developing nation's government dependence on outside help, assistance often granted by the U.S. in the form of financial grants as well as the supply of food. Herein lays the crux of the system. Not only is the American government paying tax dollars to corporate farmers to yield as many crops as possible, it is also paying tax dollars to developing nations who are using this money to buy among other things food from American corporate farmers. Cleverly, the flow of money is drifting in one direction, downstream from American communities and into the pockets of American corporations. Tracing the flow of money from collected taxes to granted subsidies to fewer financially independent farmers, the fact that corporations charge a lower price for a homogenous product does not translate to society receiving a product at a lower cost. In fact, it is just the opposite. Holistically we are paying much more for the few dollars you and I may save at the grocery store.

Why then in the agricultural industry is the government a facilitator and not a regulator? In this case, the latter is much more cost efficient for a deficit-building federal government. Not until the issue becomes one of national priority, where votes are at stake and jobs on the line, will structural changes transpire in the industry. However, national media conglomerates will not bite off the corporate hand that feeds its advertising department.¹⁶ The problem manifests itself in the structure of the game. Nobody wishes to slap the dealer dealing the cards.

Regardless of the chips stacked against it, the solution begins with your participation in solving the problem, then your friend's participation, and then his friend's participation, and then her friend's participation. Although this sounds hokey, eventually an entire community will be participating with other similar communities in an effort to change the system, not simply fill a niche. As is the case in corporate farming,

¹⁶ This essay will not address the association between the media and Washington. For more information on this subject, see Noam Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent*.

communities have begun organizing as a reaction to their exploitation by corporations. It is not a conspiracy of the rich trying to keep the poor marginalized. In fact the rich want the poor to become richer. With the system as it is, the rich will become just that much richer. Seemingly, it falls in the hands of those without to empower themselves and mind their own self-interests, just as corporations have done.

Conclusion

The idea of sustainability is to leave future generations as many, or more, opportunities as we ourselves have had. However, the current economic principle of consumption championed by corporations threatens the sustainability of our natural resources. From this peril has emerged a grassroots environmental movement that aims to prevent environmental degradation by assuring that institutions assign appropriate economic values of the environment's natural resources in their ledgers. It is this inability for the economic market to value natural resources appropriately that has resulted in the overall deterioration of society because the opportunity costs have not been correctly calculated. Moreover, the fact that the environment's size can absorb (or hide) many of mankind's impacts allows polluters to contaminate natural resources without directly suffering the consequences. Those who are directly effected by the misconduct of corporations—communities—have begun responding to the widespread scope and abuse of corporate power. The emergence of community empowerment is directly correlated with the rise of corporate power at the expense of the welfare of the American people.

As history has demonstrated, the market is not always the most equitable provider for the welfare of its people. At times, the government's regulation and preservation of property rights is necessary in order to keep the market equitable. On the grassroots level, repeated interactions among groups develop a trust that can help fill societal voids. This interaction among grassroots organizations, society, and businesses encourages "associations (to) reduce opportunistic behavior by creating repeated interaction among

individuals, which enhances trust.”¹⁷ Nonetheless, as long as the structure of society is designed to funnel the wealth to a select few, CBO’s will continue working to change the system. No matter how effective CBO’s are, the ultimate determinant of issues in a capitalistic society is the consumer. The producer will produce whatever it is that the consumer demands. If the consumer demands a more conservationist approach to business practices, businesses will have to become more environmentally friendly in order to capture the consumer’s preference. Consequently, the best medicine is merely to be aware that there is a problem in the first place. By making the consumer aware of the consequences of his or her actions, CBO’s can rescale the balance of power in American society to a more equal footing for all.

¹⁷ Grootaert, Christian. “Social Capital—the Missing Link?” Page 5.

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