

Corporate Dictatorship?

As trusts or groups have replaced the theoretically 'individual' capitalism in the United States of America, so will the state capitalism, replace the trusts, to be replaced in its turn by international capitalism.

Science And Sanity, Page 272

As we learned lately, not only human achievements, but also human disasters, are mostly interrelated and international, and are becoming more so every year. Obviously with Aristotelian narrowness, selfishness, shortsightedness, infantilism, commercialism, militarism, nationalism, etc., rampant, mankind, to prevent further major Aristotelian disasters, would have to produce a special international body which would coordinate various structural achievements, strivings, etc., formulate and inform the great masses of the modern scientific Non-Aristotelian standards of evaluation.

Science And Sanity, Page 558

The above predictions, anthropological overview, and suggested interventions were made by Alfred Korzybski -- the founder of the system "General Semantics" -- over 75 years ago.

A General Semantics Approach to Understanding Corporations and Society.

Applying some general semantics principles, and a "calculus approach" (in terms of "recognizing trends), I make this prediction: **If Americans do not exercise care (through appropriate and effective regulations, promotion of ethical principles, human and socio-cultural values, etc.), they will wake up one day to discover that the nation has become a "Corporate Dictatorship".** The nation is already moving in that direction. The clues are there, but not yet recognized by many as such. (For more on a "calculus approach", see the article "A Calculus Approach to Everyday Living" in ETC: Volume 53 Winter 1996-97)

A Corporate Dictatorship is quite unlike a political dictatorship. In a political dictatorship an individual with his (usually a he) accomplices take over the country -- violently if necessary. Ironically, in a corporate dictatorship, the people (not all, but enough) and their elected representatives (not all, but enough) help corporations -- gently and without fanfare -- accomplish the takeover.

Clues

People and their representatives help towards the takeover in this manner (among others): Politicians (not all but enough) invite agents of corporations to help design and make the laws of the country. (Thinking in terms of the general semantics principle "structural similarity") corporations like individuals can (in terms of their survival and expansion) be expected **to act in ways they think will promote their own self interests and welfare.** They will endeavour to introduce terms, modifications, etc, and in effect design laws based on these concerns.)

Politicians help the takeover by giving power to corporations by accepting their campaign contributions and giving audience to their lobbying agents. (If one party refuses contributions (and refuses to see lobbyists), and the other accepts contributions, the accepting party will have an advantage over the one that refused. So politicians (no matter which party) accept contributions and by so doing, give power to corporations. Despite denials by many politicians that lobbyists do not influence their decisions, one can make a reasonable inference that if lobbying was not

productive, or considered productive, corporations would see this as a grand waste of time and desist.)

The tendency for different government agencies to operate as fiefdoms in competition with each other makes it easier for corporations, big business interests, and others, to gain advantage by playing one against the other.

Politicians (keep in mind -- "not all, but enough") move back and forth from corporations to political positions. (Being humans, I assume that politicians will find it difficult to deal harshly with former, and possibly future colleagues and friends.)

The people's representative introduce laws that seem to minimally regulate corporate socially irresponsible behaviour, and sometimes behaviours harmful to peoples interests. This is based on a (stated) financial worldview that "corporations will regulate themselves, and the market will take care of itself"; fear of being perceived as "over regulating"; fear of the word "socialism", and so on. (If the main concerns of corporations involve expanding their sphere of influence, growing bigger and bigger, increasing their financial power, and making more and more profit, it seems unreasonable to me to expect that corporations will regulate themselves. For what reasons would anyone regulate their success or opportunities for success? Furthermore, those few members of corporations who dare to speak out against corporate irresponsible behaviours are usually demoted, or dismissed. This fear of dismissal reduces the number of "whistle blowers" and so maintains the 'integrity' of the corporation and continuation of its practices.)

The people's representatives, by appointing agents who subscribe to a misguided notion that "the market will take care of itself", create a climate of low motivation, low interest and minimal regulatory activity. (The organism-as-a-whole-in environments", and the "field" principle is applicable here: As happens in corporations (not all, but enough), government regulators who attempt to question and raise concerns re. corporate behaviour are sometimes dismissed, transferred, etc. by their superiors. Again, fear of reprisals result in minimal regulatory activities.)

When "health care" becomes an "industry" -- "industry" defined as a "distinct group of productive or profit making enterprises" what can we expect -- emphasis on better care (including preventive exercises) or more profit?

More and more of government public services which elected representatives were elected to 'provide' are being sold out to corporations. More of what was traditionally done by soldiers is now contracted out. (When war becomes a business, we should expect more and more involvement by corporations (benefiting by supplying 'goods' and services), and those representatives who support corporations, to support a war stance -- not explicitly, hardly noticeable, but in creatively subtle ways: "Do not talk to adversaries". We don't want to appear weak, and so on. I ask: Does it make sense as an individual for you to ignore someone facing you with a loaded gun? How much more sense then does it make for one nation to ignore a nation with nuclear capabilities? It makes great sense if war makes one richer.)

It seems reasonable to me to say that politicians (not all) -- our representatives, have in effect qualify themselves as "middle men and middle women".

Corporations are more highly leveraged than governments

Higher salaries and million dollar bonuses will attract the more skilled practitioners (technological, conceptual, organizational, interpersonal, etc.) to corporations than to government jobs. (In terms of "asymmetric relationship": One can expect higher levels of competitiveness and creativity in introducing new products and services, problem solving (in their interest) etc. There will be an ongoing "catch up" situation in that regulations (when designed or applied) will lag far behind the new instruments, creations, etc., offered by and exercised by corporations. In the meanwhile, increments of take over will be in place and more difficult to displace when eventually recognized.)

Corporations, financiers, hedge-funders, and others, hire and pay evaluators (rating agencies) to evaluate their risky ventures and investments. (One can reasonably expect that evaluators are more likely to give a 'good' evaluation than a 'bad' one for fear of being 'de-hired' and earning a "bad reputation" in the corporate, banking, and financial world.)

Corporations come up with creative labels for some practices as means to avoid regulations, regulators, and related costs. Instead of the usual label "insurance", or "bet" they create terms such as "credit default swap", "collateralized debt obligation", "derivative" and so on.

When bets (derivatives) are made about bets, about bets, about bets, we have a financial high order abstraction scheme further and further removed from products and services. This way of doing business, is predictably unsustainable and contributes to a great deal of societal misery.

Corporations own communication systems (radio, television, newspapers, etc.) which they use abundantly to complement and promote their interests while discrediting others. (Visit "Media Ecology" on the web to learn more about the power of media in influencing us as individuals, and the societies we live in.)

Politicians at the state level bid against each other in contributing to the finances of proposed corporate establishments in their state. (What would the corporations do if politicians organized themselves against supporting and continuing this practice, and disallowed themselves from being so used?)

Corporations are allowed to change rules as they feel fit. Insurance companies do whatever they can to avoid payments, sometimes dropping a client for whatever reason. (Here is a small sample of what could be labelled "corporate abuse" from a "phone card": "Rates and minutes are subject to change without prior notice." I don't use credit cards so the reader can apply this to their credit card and other contracts.)

Corporations are now seeking control over the Internet through censorship and broadband access.

Corporations are already organized to do what they do effectively and efficiently. There are some, who in debates and commentaries, let them off the hook: I hear say such things as "These things are so complex, nobody understands what was happening. They talk euphemistically about 'mistakes' made, and so on.

Peoples contributions

We have to work to feed ourselves, take care of families, earn a living, etc. In this area, we cannot but help corporations. But when we fail to protest socially irresponsible behaviours; when we throw away and buy more and more stuff; when we fail to elect representatives who at least claim to recognize and promise to address certain corporate related issues; when we fail to carefully read contracts -- in this and many other ways we all help in our own take over.

There are a few who seem to have begun to recognize the longer cycle and the bigger picture. I have heard said "They (corporations) are arrogant and treat the society with contempt."

As I presently envision this, the problem a society faces in restraining socially irresponsible behaviours and expanding powers of corporations, big business, and others, constitutes an enormously challenging one. A corporation is authorized by law to act as a single person. Any group, to endure as a group, behaves in a manner that 'it' believes will maintain its organizational integrity and extend its power and influence. We should not be too surprised when corporations and big business interests exhibit humanlike behaviours.

The usual political approach to resolving many societal problems involves passing new laws and introducing new regulations. This probably might not be the most effective approach. The situation might be more effectively addressed, complemented by an ethical and moral approach. Ways have to be explored – and *introduced in the schools at all levels*) regarding *how to nurture the emergence of a corporate and cultural ethic*: An ethic founded on respect for agreed on cultural and human values. (Nothing new here) From this there might emerge a general cultural determination to operate in socially responsible ways. Two questions we might ask: What kind of society are we creating? What kind of society *do we want to create*? If you are thinking "Too visionary" --- I would say: So was the idea of traveling to the moon and driving around. And here is another vision: Imagine the evolution of an "Ethics and Morals Court"! This court would address those situations that presently come under "We did no wrong" and "It was a mistake", and other euphemistic bypasses. **Seeking** to achieve higher levels of democracy could be challenging indeed -- but not impossible.

The above is just a brief overview of the clues -- behaviours that I predict will eventually lead to "corporate dictatorship" if not significantly modified. If you have comments, other clues, ideas regarding possible societal reactions, suggestions as to how a society might possibly stave off corporate take over -- Please share.

Milton Dawes/2010