

**Mary Zepernick**

Coordinator, POCLAD

## **REGULATION > Regulating Vs. Defining**

People do assume that the regulatory state, the agencies, the regulatory laws and their enforcement keep corporations, or at least they have in the past, I think, more assumed that they were effective or at least available to citizens for remedy or redress of harms. In fact in the United States regulatory agencies were actually created at the behest of large corporations more than a century ago.

The Interstate Commerce Commission was really the first and largely it was railroad barons who saw, as their power and wealth increased, that there was going to be an effort to exercise control over them. So better that they participate in setting up the means of control. So regulating with agencies at best that are unelected and unaccountable to the people.

Regulating is not the same as our, as citizens defining. And those are kind of opposite or at least terms in opposition to each other. Regulating versus defining. So we have settled wittingly or not for regulating. And it's not the right relationship.

Defining the corporation, the corporate form and instructing it. What it may do, what it may not do. Corporations should not have rights, only privileges that we people grant them. And that's pretty much the way it was set up in early United States history. And to a great degree, for about a century it worked fairly well.

Regulatory agencies deal with, not the relationship between citizens and corporations, not the fundamental relationship of authority and the people. But rather harms and abuses that toxic by toxic, harm by harm are supposedly regulated.

And there are ostensibly penalties. As we know, those who worked in the environmental movement in the seventies for instance know what it was like to just work on one issue. And one set of regulations. And it took up to a decade or more to even get them passed by which time the situation has probably changed. So it's not an effective means of exercising the proper authority.

## **DEMOCRACY > Property Over People**

It does seem a contradiction to ask the very legal system and political system, that gave away the store to corporations, to fix it. And I'm not sure that's exactly what POCLAD is doing. What we're saying is that we the people are to be the sovereign authority. And that means we need at every point and at every level of government to challenge public officials to do their job. To do our will as we also try to find better mechanisms, more democratic processes.

So in the United States for instance what passes for legal and political systems today is very undemocratic and always has been. And what we're coming to believe, and have for some while now, is that this nation was never designed to be a democracy. And that's a very different thing from trying to recover something lost.

So if one acknowledges that the constitution was essentially set up by propertied white men to protect their property. And that the great majority of people in the United States had to struggle and continue to for full inclusion, full person hood. And then you can understand the primacy, the primary importance of property and it's protection over people.

## **STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE > Changing Relationships, Changing Language**

POCLAD is a small group of individuals across the country and one in London, not a membership organization but we have a mailing list. And we put out a publication and other information. We do workshops and talks. And we work closely with people we consider allies. Who want to work in their organizations, in their communities to try to put into action the belief, the analysis that human beings belong in charge of the decisions that affect our lives. Who want to work to create democracy which must include subordinating, putting under our control all institutions we create.

And we believe that simply working on single harms, on one toxic, or one labour exploitation, or one campaign finance issue. Standing along is not really addressing the power structure and the wrong relationship. It's a relationship issue between human beings and our institutions. So it isn't that we would ask people to stop doing that organizing. To let the toxic dump come into their neighbourhood, no. But to try to organize within the context of a people who mean to be in charge.

So how does that change your language, your demands, even the arenas you work in. You go most likely to public officials rather than corporations themselves.

Corporate social responsibility is an oxymoron. It's a contradiction in terms. Not because they're irredeemably bad across the board. It's not about behaviour. It's about the nature of corporations. They're not set up to be responsible, they're legal fictions. They're a form; human beings are responsible. We are responsible including for the entities we create supposedly to serve us.

So that that's a term even though the effort to bring control over corporations is a worthy one, the language is not the language of a sovereign people. We do not beg or beseech or plead or ask them to do a little less harm. Or to reward them when they behave well. It's not about that, it's about the right relationship that we need to bring about.

## **STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE > Challenging Patriarchy**

One very, very large context for POCLAD's work in more recent years has been the idea of patriarchy. And that comes back to who we are as human beings. What forms us? What are cultures and institutions reflecting? And patriarchy is many millennia old system that has prevailed in much of the world that takes human differences and assigns to them unequal value. Dominant and subordinate. And on the basis of that hands out privileges and goodies accordingly.

It's a male word linguistically and historically it was men who set up these categories. However, as we use it and there are other terms; a woman named Rhianne Isler calls it the dominator culture to avoid it only sounding male. I for instance am conscious of the need to struggle with my own patriarchal behaviour. I was raised in this culture. I have tendencies to dominate with my strengths. So it's not about men/women, although that gender differential remains. It's about any struggle for equity. And even more than that, the notion of a hierarchy of human beings.

So that the modern corporation - and as we know it today it's different in scale and in very many ways - the modern corporation is the quintessential patriarchal institution exercising power over. That's the hallmark of patriarchy, or a dominator culture. It's exercising power over based on wealth, based on human difference whatever. So that any kind of vision of democracy, of peace, of justice must whatever terminology people use, look at this larger framework and recognize that it's completely different behaviours that we need to call forth in ourselves. Again of mutuality, cooperation, all the relational. And I'm just conscious of how important that relational relationship word is in all this work among people, with our institutions, with the earth.