

The Corporation: A UFPPC Study Circle — Begins May 16!

Corporation, n. A legal entity that exists independently of the person or persons who have been granted the charter creating it and that is invested with many of the rights given to individuals: a corporation may enter into contracts, buy and sell property, etc. — *Webster's New World College Dictionary*, 4th ed. (1999).

In the late twentieth century, in the aftermath of World War II, human societies began to make halting progress toward greater democracy and humanity. But that progress has been reversed in the course of the last generation by a concerted and well-organized worldwide campaign organized in the name of freedom and prosperity but orchestrated by the partisans and beneficiaries of a single dominant institution: the corporation. As a result, inequality has increased, “externalities” like climate change and war have been ignored or even exacerbated, and liberal and left conceptions of the public good have been stigmatized. **Digging Deeper V**, UFPPC’s book discussion group, will conduct a study circle to investigate the nature of this institution, the character of its excesses, and the prospects for reform.

For economists, the corporation is a morally neutral, highly rational “firm.” As one economist writes, “The ‘firm,’ usually treated as an output-generating ‘blackbox,’ is a contractually related collection of resources of various cooperating owners. Its distinctive source of enhanced productivity is ‘team’ productivity, wherein the product is not a sum of separable outputs each of which is attributable to specific cooperating inputs, but instead is a non-decomposable, non-attributable value produced by the group” (Armen A. Alchian, “Property Rights,” in *The World of Economics*, edited by John Eatwell, Murray Milgate, and Peter Newman [New York & London: W.W. Norton, 1991], p. 585). But in the social and political realm — the real world — the corporation is anything but a “blackbox.” The corporation is the institutionalization, through state charter, of an obligation to pursue unbridled self-interest. Goodyear CEO Sam Gibara summed it up: “If you really did what you wanted to do . . . you’d act differently. But as a CEO you cannot do that” (Joel Bakan, *The Corporation* [New York: Free Press], p. 51).

Beginning on May 16, 2005, you are invited to participate in a study circle to discuss five recent books about the social and political aspects of the dominant institution of our time, the corporation:

- *The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power*, by Joel Bakan (Free Press, 2004)
- *Gangs of America: The Rise of Corporate Power and the Disabling of Democracy*, by Ted Nace (Berret-Koehler, 2001)
- *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry*, by P.W. Singer (Cornell Univ. Press, 2003)
- *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business*, by Roland Marchand (University of California Press, 1998)
- *Natural Capitalism: Creating the Next Industrial Revolution*, by Paul Hawken, Amory Lovins, and L. Hunter Lovins (Back Bay Books, 2000)

UFPPC has copies of these books **available for borrowing or purchase** (contact Mark Jensen at jensenmk@plu.edu or 253-756-7519, or Ted Nation at tedn5@yahoo.com or 253-983-8997). **Participants will read one or more of these four books in the course of the month.** Monday evening meetings will consist of brief reports from participants on their reading and discussion of points of difference and convergence that emerge. **There is no charge for participation, but a purchase from the Mandolin Café, which supports this activity, is kindly requested.**

Four additional books are also recommended:

- *The Selling of Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945-1960*, by Elizabeth A. Fones-Wolf (University of Illinois Press, 1994)
- *When Corporations Rule the World*, 2nd ed., by David C. Korten (Berret-Koehler, 2001)
- *You Don't Always Get What You Pay For: The Economics of Privatization*, by Elliott D. Sclar and Richard C. Leone (Cornell University Press, 2001)
- *Dismantling Democratic States*, by Ezra N. Suleiman (Princeton University Press, 2003)

MEETING SCHEDULE — Mondays from 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. in May (May 16, 23, 30, and June 6) at the Mandolin Café, 3923 S. 12th St., Tacoma.

Regular meetings of UNITED FOR PEACE OF PIERCE COUNTY are held on 1st & 3rd Thursdays at First United Methodist, 423 MLK Jr. Way, at 7:00 p.m. — See UFPPC’s web site for more information. — www.ufppc.org

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