



Globalizing the Company Town

by Ravi Logan

In a company town, who employs the workforce? Who hires, fires, and retires workers? In a company town, who runs the merchandise store where people get their commodities? Who controls the water system and the electric system? Who runs the school? Who runs the town clinic? In a company town, who brings in the Pinkertons when there is labor unrest? In a company town, how empowered are people who live in the town? How much say do they have in how the town is run? And in a company town, whose interests are paramount?

Under economic globalism, the company town model is getting writ large. In the global economy, who provides the jobs? Who outsources the jobs? Who runs (and ruins) retirement programs? In the global economy, who owns the resources, and who plunders the resources? Who decides what factories get built? Who decides when they get moved, where they get moved? In the global economy, who runs the hospitals; who controls the energy grid, the media, the currency?

The world is becoming a company town. Transnational corporations thrust into every sphere of life – including those once firmly a part of civil society or of government. They are contracting to run prisons. They are taking over municipal water supplies. They are privatizing education. They run the cable systems. They underwrite (and they constrain) public broadcasting. They handle military logistics.

They are thrusting just as forcefully into political life. Agents of transnational corporations draft legislation. Government officials come from the ranks of corporate executives, or from corporate lobbies or councils. The selection and funding of candidates for elected office is dominated by corporate money. And now electronic voting machines are manufactured, programmed, operated – and rigged – by big corporations.

The world is becoming a company town. The power once invested in people, in local communities, to decide their destinies, to shape their collective life, is being usurped by the metacorporations.

In a company town, when the coal plays out, when the timber's all cut, what happens to the company? What happens to the town? And what happens to the mill tailings, to the clear-cut forests? In a company town, what responsibility does the company take for the people or the land – for the fabric of culture and life?

In the global economy, what responsibility do the globe-spanning metacorporations take for the well being of species, of ecosystems? Or of communities, cultures, and families? What care do they take to maintain the purity of the water or the air? Save for the pressure of regulations, of boycotts, of maintaining their public image, what responsibility do they willingly embrace in the service of life? Damn little.

So why should we cast our future with the global company town?

I'm not a political activist; I'm a spiritual teacher. Spirituality is that which uplifts the human spirit; it is that which gives us vibrant connection to all life, to all being. Spiritual life speaks to the deep desires of humanity to feel joy, to feel oneness with all existence, and to its source.

In a company town, spiritual life is impoverished; in the global economy, it is impoverished. Without spiritual life, the core of our humanity goes unexpressed. This is too steep a price to pay for a paycheck.

But without a paycheck, it's damn tough to pursue spiritual life. Without a vital economy, spiritual life does not flourish.

Many now struggle to curtail the excesses of the metacorporations. Their struggle can attenuate the oppressiveness of life in the global company town. But it is not sufficient for spiritual life to flourish.

What additionally is needed is for humanity to embrace an abundance-creating paradigm of development that operates as if living beings mattered, a life economy that devolves economic power to people and communities, that promotes equity, and that seeks sustainable balance with the biosphere.

This is the project of the Progressive Utilization Theory, of PROUT.