
REGARDING “THE JOURNAL OF CORPORATE CITIZENSHIP”

by Jim Price

I RECENTLY RAN ACROSS a flyer advertising *The Journal of Corporate Citizenship*. Such terms as “corporate citizenship” and “corporate responsibility” reflect a deference to corporate language that I find disturbing.

Corporate executives like to throw around terms like “corporate citizenship” and “corporate citizen.” Corporations cannot be citizens. Only natural persons can be citizens. Corporations are artificial entities created under the authority of laws enacted by natural persons—We the People—acting as citizens. Corporate officials also like to talk about “corporate responsibility.” That term implies that We the People should leave to corporate managers the right to define what constitutes responsible corporate behavior. I believe that such determinations are solely the right of We the People, not of corporate officials.

We natural persons should determine the standards to be met by all economic enterprises whether those enterprises are organized in corporate, partnership, cooperative, or any other form. We the People, not corporate officials, should determine what constitutes “responsible” corporate behavior. Then corporations and their officials should be held accountable to the environmental, workplace

safety, community health, worker rights, human rights, and other standards established by We the People.

We set the bar, we govern, not the corporations. We define the privileges which we will allow corporations to exercise, and the limits to those privileges. We hold them accountable to *our* defined standards, not *theirs*. This is the origin of the concept of “corporate accountability.” This is why I think the language that is used in communicating about corporate abuses of wealth and power is very important.

Terms like “corporate citizenship” and “corporate responsibility” are corporate inventions; terms implying a deference by We the People to corporate officials of our right to define what constitutes citizenship and responsibility. “Corporate accountability” on the other hand retains that power in the hands of We the People, where it belongs.

We must be careful to not allow ourselves to become captive of corporate language, and to help others understand the distinctions among and the implications associated with the use of such terms as “corporate citizen,” “corporate responsibility,” and “corporate accountability.” ■