

A SMALL GROUP OF DEDICATED PEOPLE MIGHT ACTUALLY DO SOMETHING



DRAWINGS BY ANDY SINGER

BY DORIS HADDOCK (AKA GRANNY D)

(The following is from a speech Granny D gave in Hood River, Oregon on August 16, 2003)

You've heard that wonderful Margaret Mead quote about how you should never doubt that a small group of dedicated people can change the world, and that, indeed, it is the only thing that ever has. I think it's time we stopped repeating that quotation and came to some agreement about what we happy few might do over the next five years or so.

There are two kinds of politics in the world: the politics of love and the politics of fear. Love is about cooperation, sharing and inclusion. It is about the elevation of each individual to a life neither suppressed nor exploited, but instead nourished to rise to its full potential — a life for its own sake and so that we may all benefit by the gift of that life. Fear and the politics of fear is about narrow ideologies that separate us, militarize us, imprison us, exploit us, control us, overcharge us, demean us, bury us alive in debt and anxiety and then bury us dead in cancers and wars. The politics of love and the politics of fear are now pitted against each other in a naked struggle that will define not only the 21st century but centuries to come.

This struggle is real. A very close friend of mine, a college student, spent this summer in Guatemala to help small communities prosper in ways that support their local environments. Those villagers and their environments are under siege by international big business, using a captured U.S. government to push through damaging treaties such as the proposed Central America Free Trade Agreement and the hemisphere-wide Free Trade Area of the Americas. The villagers of Guatemala want global fair trade, but the corporations and their captive governments want free trade. If fair trade wins, a global middle class will arise, as farmers and craftsmen are paid fairly for their work, and as they gain a voice in their governance and their environments are protected for their future generations. If free trade wins, it is colonial exploitation, torture and murder written in blood across another century.

Or do you wonder if it is really an honest difference of opinion as to which policies are best for the people? On July 24, three armed gunmen broke into the home where my young friend was staying in Guatemala, dragging her and another young woman to the ground, covering their heads with blankets. These young women began to count their lives in seconds. For three-quarters of an hour the gunmen went through the biodiversity files in the home. Big business interests in Guatemala, in league with elements of the military, are trying to push through the passage of free trade agreements and to do that they must suppress all dissent. Their partner and blood brother is the U.S. government. Not the U.S. government that we see, but the U.S. government that much of the rest of the world sees: a world of CIA treachery, the training of death squad leaders in our own Army facilities within the U.S., and a big business-friendly White House that winks and nods as great injustices continue.

The two women survived, but tens of thousands have not because they are in the way of big business. It is not an honest difference of opinion; it is a global struggle of people versus a global crime syndicate that counts taken-over governments and multinational corporations as its members.

There is a term now in common use in Latin America that is confusing to us Americans. It is called neoliberalism and it is a very dirty word indeed among the brave pro-democracy and fair trade groups throughout the Americas. "Neoliberal" sounds like the happy return of the Kennedys, but it is not. Nor is it about some resurgence of the liberal values of the Square Deal or the New Deal or the War on Poverty or any of those great moments when we called upon our best instincts to cooperatively address our largest needs as a free and self-governing people. The liberation that we meant when we used the word "liberal" was the liberation from poverty, despair and ignorance, the liberation of the mind through public education, the liberation of the citizen through universal voting, equal rights and equal opportunity, and the freedom to prosper from the fruits of our labors. But that is not the liberal that is meant by neoliberal. It means newly free to rampage. It means free of government constraint. It means free trade over fair trade.

"Neoliberalism" refers to the liberation of a giant beast that we, the ordinary people of America — the farmers, the townsmen and townswomen, the trade unionists — tied down to the earth early in the 20th century and it is that beast that has now gotten itself loose again to do great damage to us all. The deadly meanderings of this beast are most apparent in the most labor-intensive regions of the world, but the beast is here too, and he has brought misery and suffering to your life and mine, stealing our water, blowing up our mountains, fouling our air and seas, and stealing our lives and our future at every turn. Neoliberalism is the colonialism department of neoconservatism.

How did we handle this evil giant before? The Teddy Roosevelt progressives, and the William Jennings Bryan populists before him, were part of a successful effort to tie down the giant. After the Civil War, at the high point of the Industrial Age — the age of railroads, oil and steel — great corporations and trusts were created that towered over the human-scaled businesses of America's Main Streets and cast dark shadows over human liberty and happiness. These monstrosities treated humans as slaves. They robbed the public wealth and were properly called the robber barons of the 'Gilded Age'. These giants freely stalked, destroying the economics of family farms and family businesses, corrupting our governments with great

bribes and corrupt deals, and polluting our food, our land, water and air. They tore our families apart and dragged us into the hardest of hard times, as they have been liberated to do once more.

I am not talking about all corporations or all big business — corporations of reasonable size are but groups of people. Beyond some point, however, the humanity falls away from an organization and all that is left is the will to power and profit. These bloating corporations care not that our seas and atmosphere are rapidly changing in ways that may lead to disaster and famine of unimaginable scale. They care not because they are not human and they have moved beyond human values. They do not need the fresh air or the water or the mountains or the birds. They are a kind of virus or a cancer, all prettied up with a nice logo and television commercials to tell us the most outrageous lies, one after another. For in reality, they crush us under their boots and they pay off our political leaders with campaign contributions and other bribes. They trample on diversity of all kinds, including human personality, as fewer and fewer kinds of people can prosper in the world they are casting, and more and more of us are marginalized.

The big corporate empires would be powerless if they were not in league with crooked politicians. I do not mean the politicians necessarily know what they are doing. The corruption is so immense they cannot even see it, even when it pays their spouse and finances their reelection. These, the happily blind, populate Capitol Hill and our state capitols like vermin who have been for generations in deep caves where they gradually lose their vision and other senses.

Two and a quarter centuries was a good run for this democracy, but a rebirth is long overdue, and it is indeed necessary if we are to save our freedoms and human values here and abroad, and if we are to protect the beauty and sustaining graces of nature, including the positive sides of human nature.

What that Republican Teddy Roosevelt understood at the beginning of the 20th century was that, if the rights and fortunes of the human scale are to be protected — if the rights and fortunes of average Americans, small businesses, family farms and Main Street are to be protected from the ravages of overscaled business giants, then government must grow in size and power to protect us all. The big business wing of the Republican Party, under William Howard Taft, defeated the family business wing of the Republican Party and their leader Teddy Roosevelt. It would take another Roosevelt (Teddy's cousin Franklin) and another Party to turn the Square Deal into the New Deal, under which government greatly expanded to protect the people.

That has not been altogether a happy strategy, as large government has its own costs to us and its own abuses. The Libertarians are our new and brave allies in defending the Bill of Rights from George Bush's anti-American attacks through his henchmen Attorney General Ashcroft and Homeland Security Czar Ridge. But our friends the Libertarians would have us do away with most all of our government. Anyone who has paid too many taxes or dealt with too many rude and overly powerful bureaucrats understands the Libertarians' feelings, but I ask at least the intellectually honest Libertarians — and there are many of them — to wisely see that government, which is indeed a system of restraint, must be matched in strength and scale to the corporate monstrosities that now have the ability and the willingness to destroy us — to blow up the entire Appalachian Range for the profits of coal, for example, as is now happening; or to steal for profit the water supply of whole regions; or to enslave whole regions at low wages rather than allow fair trade; or to move every one of our good jobs overseas. These inhuman and inhumane organizations are stealing our lives and all nature around us.

Only government is large enough and powerful enough to reign in the corporations whose cold heartedness trades lives for profits all over the world. Teddy Roosevelt began the buildup of big government to protect us from overlarge corporations so that they might not overwhelm us human beings. In doing so he created a split in the Republican Party and big business interests won. Perhaps the rational solution is to scale them both back — corporations and government — and let individual enterprise and individual freedom, its many middle class treasures and blessings, blossom in the old battlefield. But there is no leadership for that and governments are being stripped of all regulatory powers by the false religion of a new deity, the unfettered, liberated market. So, no longer protected by governments, we must fight the battle that is before us: human versus monstrous corporations and their bodysnatched government puppets. It is a battle of human scale versus monstrous scale, love versus fear.

What is happening now, of course, is that the neos in the Bush administration (you can call them neoliberals or neo-conservatives, though they are neo nothing except perhaps colonial and lithic) are starving government very much on purpose, and they tell us as much in their writing:

KNEE DEEP IN BOOKS
1052 COMMERCIAL
ASTORIA, OREGON
(503) 325-9722

THE COMMUNITY STORE
ASTORIA, OREGON

**BILL'S TAVERN
BREW HOUSE**
Cannon Beach, Oregon