

# Children's health: stranded between corporate power and corporate powerlessness

## A response

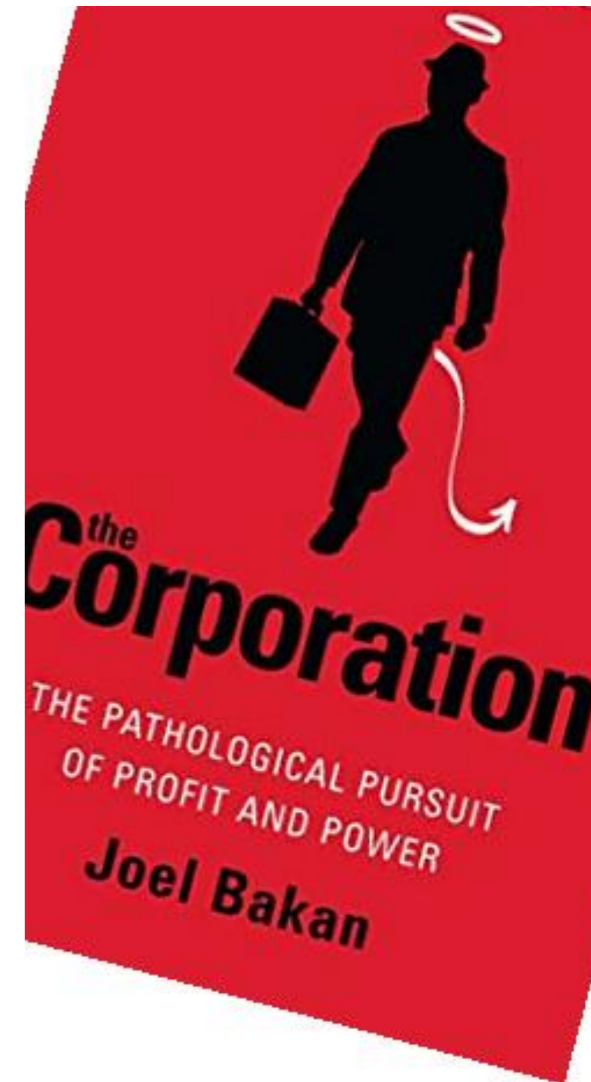
# Corporations are psychotic?

**Bakan's verdict: If corporations are legal 'persons' then they tick all the boxes as corporate psychopaths.**

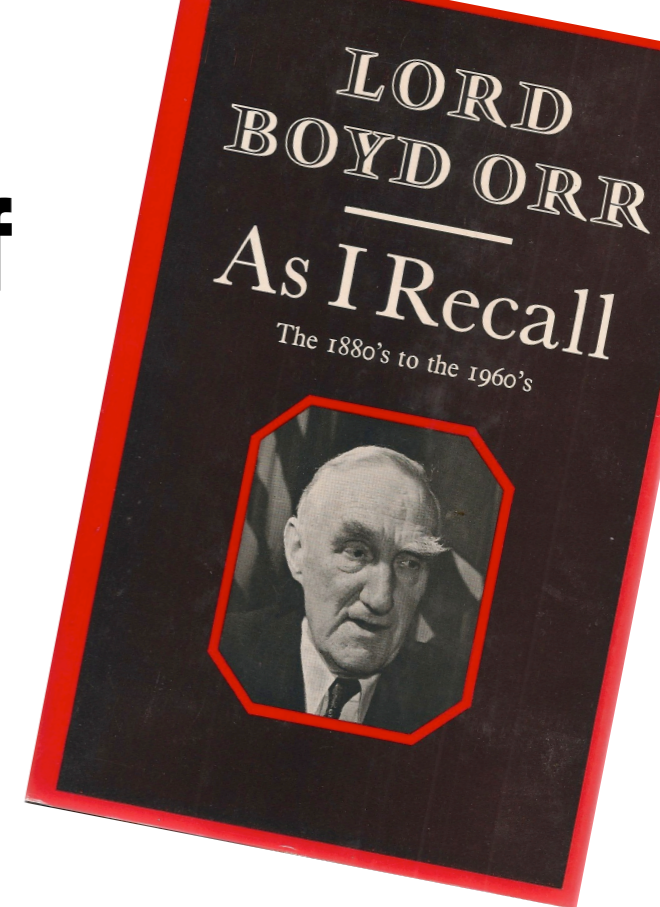
The legal imperative that puts the 'pathological pursuit profit and power' before all else creates leviathans with an insatiable greed.

Although some court judgements are relatively recent, the malevolent or entirely self interested exercise of corporate power and the reality of big business lacking in humanitarian, health and compassionate concern is not.

Corporations are immensely powerful, but does that really mean they are powerless to change?



# Would the world be different if Boyd Orr had got his way?



## His World Food Plan 'blasted' in 1948

*".....the policy of the big newspapers [was] to support big business which seemed to be against this idea of international co-operation. Since America and Britain, the two most powerful Western nations, were determined to squash the plan, any further effort to promote it seemed to me hopeless."*

*First Director General of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization*

*As I recall - Lord Boyd Orr 1966 Macgibbon & Kee*

# **WHO, the sugar conglomerates and 'big food and soda'**

In 1990 when WHO first produced its first scientific report on diet and health, Geneva was swamped with industry lobbyists.

In 2002 when WHO produced its second scientific report on diet and health, Geneva was swamped with industry lobbyists who went further.....

Big food and soda, hiding behind the coat tails of the sugar industry, pressed the USA to cut funding to WHO if the report was accepted.

# The lure of the revolving door or corporate capture?

The corporate campaign was truly global, mobilising and manipulating governments worldwide against WHO's diet strategy.

In a low profile manoeuvre, the retiring WHO director general - Dr Gro Harlem Brundtland - accepted an advisory role with PepsiCo.

Not long afterwards the architect of WHO's global strategy on diet, Dr Derek Yach, was hired by PepsiCo to be its director of Global Health and Agriculture Policy.

# Corporate lobbying condemned

“Lobbyists for tobacco, sugar, and other food interests have **diverted attention** from the need to address consumption patterns that drive chronic diseases, and their views have become the accepted position of many policymakers. Some companies and their trade associations have **actively tried to thwart introduction of regulations and effective advocacy** in advancing tobacco control. **Sugar lobbyists have been effective** in having their messages that “sugar doesn’t harm health—but less sugar consumption harms their economies” accepted by some governments despite evidence to the contrary.”

Derek Yach et al, WHO, JAMA 2004

# Corporate lobby - no problem

“There is no longer a need to make the case for food and beverage companies to change. Leading food companies accept the need to:

- remove trans-fatty acids from the food supply;
- reduce the levels of salt, sugar and saturated fat in their products;
- increase the availability of products based on fruit, vegetables, nuts, grains and legumes;
- ***use their marketing excellence to promote more physical activity and fruit and vegetable consumption, especially among children.”***

**Derek Yach, PepsiCo - PHN 2008**

# Corporations are run by people - so what's their motivation?

## PepsiCo Chair and CEO Indra Nooyi says:

*"I'm trying to take the products and make them healthier. And guess what they tell me? "Don't be Mother Teresa. **Your job is to sell soda and chips.**"*

She was rewarded with a \$26.5 million package in 2015 - a 17.6% increase on 2014. This includes a \$1.6m salary that made her top earner in the food and soda sectors and a \$13m 'non-equity incentive plan'.

Her vice chair and chief scientist Dr Mehmood Khan says: *"I might be a health care professional [Khan is an endocrinologist], but that is **not my job now.**"* (His remuneration package was a mere \$7m in 2013.)

[<https://www.fastcompany.com/3066378/how-pepsico-ceo-indra-nooyi-is-steering-the-company-tow>]  
[<http://www.fooddive.com/news/14-food-and-beverage-ceos-compensation-for-2015/416427/>]



# Will enlightened self interest turn in favour of improving public health?



**WHO DG highlights conflicts of interest and formidable opposition from ‘Big Food and Big Soda’**

***“Efforts to prevent noncommunicable diseases go against the business interests of powerful economic operators.***

***In the view of WHO, the formulation of health policies must be protected from distortion by commercial or vested interests.”***

**Dr Margaret Chan, Director-General, WHO June 10 2013 [http://www.who.int/dg/speeches/2013/health\\_promotion\\_20130610/en/](http://www.who.int/dg/speeches/2013/health_promotion_20130610/en/)**

# EU Platform pledges

Much is made of the voluntary EU Pledge - which in my view is a mere smokescreen for corporate duplicity using weasel words about not targeting of under 12s

The various components of the Pledge are often vague and not honoured by all sectors of the industry

The most recent assessment of the Platform's activities reiterated previous critique of the lack of evidence of any effective impact

“....members are reminded that the 2012-2013 external evaluation of the Strategy on Nutrition, Overweight, and Obesity-related Health Issues, underlined that the Platform should generate better evidence of the efficacy and impact of its commitment....” Monitoring Report 2016

[http://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/nutrition\\_physical\\_activity/docs/2016\\_report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/nutrition_physical_activity/docs/2016_report_en.pdf)

# Conflicts of interest?

Corporations that claim they are exercising 'social responsibility' are usually pursuing a programme of self interest.

Anyone lulled or gulled into believing in 'no strings attached' sponsorship or donations.

Some scientists in the nutrition field depend on attracting private sector funding for research, and corporate funded research is often found to be favourable to the sponsor.

Selected private research funding can limit areas research programmes cover.

Corporations have demonstrated that they seek to infiltrate the corridors of power and influence health agendas - with some success.

# In conclusion

As has been made clear, decisions that frame the fundamentals of public health and nutrition strategies, are determined by a handful of major corporate players who control most of the food supply.

In the post-fact/fake news era of Trump and Brexit, the prospects for effective public health policy look bleak.

If appealing to the better nature of the leaders of global corporations is the only option - then I fear things can only get worse - much worse.