

**Richard Grossman Letter to Morris Dickstein
on Upton Sinclair and Beef Corporations
co-founder, Program on Corporations, Law & Democracy (POCLAD)
2 January 2004**

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Richard Grossman
email: people@poclad.org
2 January 2004

Morris Dickstein
Professor of Literature
City University of New York
NY NY 10036

Dear Professor Dickstein,

I write regarding your interview today on NPR about Upton Sinclair and beef corporations.

Lyndon Johnson inviting an aged Sinclair to the White House for the signing of an update to food regulatory laws reveals not the "success" of Sinclair's efforts early in the 20th Century. It reveals, alas, a century of failure, diversion and mirage.

In scores of books and hundreds of articles and across a life-time of political activism, Upton Sinclair did not merely complain about "corporate concentration" and a "corporate-dominated" press. Sinclair, as I am sure you know but declined to say, believed in the **public ownership** of life's necessities. He knew this was essential if human persons were to keep the possibility of democratic self-governance alive in these United States. He was, after all, a socialist.

When it came to the meat-packing industry -- or *any* industry for that matter -- he was not an advocate of government agencies regulating corporate behaviors. Over his entire life, he worked for the people's ownership of and control over economic decisionmaking. He sought to enable the majority **to define** all human-made institutions. Like the Populists of the late 19th century -- and like masses of Earthlings born since the 1600s -- he knew that if We the People did not own and control ourselves, others would own and control our thoughts, our work, our food, our government, the planet.

During TR's presidency, a few corporations ran the nation's beef show. TR's pure food laws -- and then LBJ's "update" -- were regulatory bandages upon a system designed and controlled by corporate kings. The regs did nothing to interfere with corporate ownership and control. Indeed, these regulatory bandages helped speedup and strengthen the growing corporate denial of people's basic rights.

What's the evidence? Today, four corporations have a vise-like grip on 80% of beef production. Another four call the shots over 70% of pork production. A handful of corporations dominate sales, transportation and advertising of food. Even more than 100 years ago, human alimentary intake is dictated by guess who?

A century of food, energy, health care, transportation, mining, forestry, etc., regulation *ad nauseum* has demonstrated that Sinclair was on the money, that the Populists were correct. But thanks to corporate-plus-miseducated newshounds -- and to professors who for bizarre reasons hide their knowledge under pleasant flim-flam -- so many people have been diverted by so many grand false regulatory "victories" that corporate managers have walked off not only with our food, the Earth's resources and our liberty, but also with our history.

It would be very excellent if professors such as yourself able to reach millions over the people's airwaves[1] gave those callow reporters -- and eager listeners everywhere -- accurate history. Today, you had the opportunity to identify Sinclair's presence at that LBJ bill signing as evidence that since We the People still do not own and control meat corporations, corporate kings are still calling the shots.

You could have told the future: even if a little civic pressure builds up about mad cow disease, We the People will get no further this time around without knowing our country's history, and without demanding independence and mobilizing for constitutional subordination of all relevant corporations.

You could have said that if we are not hip to the past, we'll end up with yet one more vapid little regulation (like the Sarbanes-Oxley law, also signed with fanfare at the White House no doubt with corporate financial responsibility geezers on show). And you could have described how the corporate press and corporate politicians galore will grandly declare this new law as another great victory for the people.

The Earth needs you to be true to your profession, Professor. Otherwise, bring on that old BSE!

Sincerely Yours,

Richard L. Grossman,
POCLAD Co-Founder

PS: I enclose a little something. If you would like to engage us on the ideas offered therein, or grapple with other POCLAD material, do contact me. And see the letter from Martha Hubbart in Miami to the *NYTimes*: *She* knows what questions to ask.

1. ha

New York Times, 1 January 2004

Mad Cow Disease: Lessons Unlearned

To the Editor:

Re "U.S. Issues Safety Rules to Protect Food Against Mad Cow Disease" (front page, Dec. 31):

*Mary had a little lamb,
And when she saw it sicken,
She shipped it off to Packingtown,
And now it's labeled chicken.*

This bit of verse was written in response to "The Jungle," the 1906 novel by Upton Sinclair that exposed the appalling practices in the meatpacking industry.

Public reaction resulted in the pure-food legislation that (or so I was taught) corrected the abuses. And yet I read that the Department of Agriculture is just now taking new steps to ban the use of sick cows in the nation's food supply.

How did we get here? What has been going on in that 98-year interval?

MARTHA HUBBART
Miami, Dec. 31, 2003