

Subvert - A podcast by Corporate Accountability

Title Episode 5:

Description

In the final episode of Season 1, Lena and Michél talk with Patti Lynn, Corporate Accountability's Executive Director. Patti tells us about the organization's involvement in developing the Global Tobacco Treaty, and how understanding the corporate playbook laid the foundation for decades of campaigning.

Show Notes

In this episode, we mentioned our report, Cowboy Diplomacy, which you can find [here](#).

Michél also mentioned [War on Want](#) and [Third World Network](#). To learn more about Worth Rises, where Michél is now based, visit them [here](#).

Transcript

Michel: The birds are chirping. I forgot that birds exist.

Lena: Well, here they are existing, coming through on spring migration. It's that time.

Michel: Welcome back birds.

Lena: Welcome. You've been missed.

Michel: That they have.

Lena: Yeah. All right. Well, here we are. This is Subvert, a podcast from Corporate Accountability. I'm Lena Greenberg. I use they/them pronouns and I'm our Press Officer.

Michél: And I'm Michél Legendre. I use he/him pronouns and I'm our Associate Campaign Director.

Lena: Today, we're going to do a little bit of time travel and go back to the nineties. And we're gonna speak with Patti Lynn.

Patti: My name is Patti Lynn. I'm the executive director of Corporate Accountability. I use she/her pronouns and I've been organizing with Corporate Accountability for a little over 22 years.

Lena: She really talked us through how, you know, the fight to hold tobacco corporations accountable for, you know, producing and putting, putting a product on the market that's the only consumer product that if used correctly kills people.

Lena: Patti talked us through the work that she and our other organizers did to support the development and implementation of a treaty that would hold tobacco corporations accountable for knowingly

producing cigarettes, which are the only consumer product on the market that if used correctly, kill people.

Michél: Before we jump in. There's some important context for why we're going to talk about this today. All season we've been discussing the power of kicking corporations out of policymaking and making them pay for harms knowingly caused, from Big Tobacco to Big Food, to Big Oil and other Big Polluters.

So much of the strategy and knowledge behind this campaigning originated with our work to support the drafting and implementation of the global tobacco treaty back in the nineties and early two-thousands.

Patti: When I entered into the scene on the tobacco campaign, it was, our organization now Corporate Accountability, at that point, our name was INFACT, um, was running one major corporate campaign and it was challenging the tobacco industry. And we were several years into a US-based corporate campaign, putting a lot of direct pressure onto Phillip Morris and RJ Reynolds.

1994 was the year when seven tobacco industry executives stood up and lied before Congress and said that their products were not addictive or deadly. And that was you know a real, that was a moment of a complete lack of accountability for the tobacco industry, just to be able to stand up in front of US Congress and lie in their testimony, really blatantly.

The impact of the industry's infiltration of the public consciousness around smoking as an act of independence of rebellion was so deep. It took a lot of work to really center the harms of the tobacco industry as not only a public health issue, but a social justice issue.

One of the things that I realized in being an organizer on our tobacco campaign was how insidious the marketing of the tobacco industry was and Philip Morris in particular, and really the use of the Marlboro man was one of the most effective brand icons in shaping the way people think about a product.

And it was designed in the fifties to really conjure feelings and associations of independence and rebellion, and Marlboro as a leading brand of cigarettes really paved the way for an association of tobacco products and people's independence and freedom. And then that was something also that as a US-based tobacco corporation, the tobacco industry exported into other places in the world with particular aggression in the Global South.

But here in the US even, you know, there was the 1970s, Virginia Slims' marketing of tobacco to women as a product that was a symbol of independence as well. So it was a theme that was used, uh, throughout for decades of industry marketing and is still in some ways, plays out today.

Lena: That clip we heard a moment ago precipitated something important called the Master Settlement Agreement.

Michél: The Master Settlement Agreement is the culmination of a windfall of lawsuits in the nineties, brought by states across the country against the tobacco industry for lying about the harmful impacts of tobacco use. Now those states are awarded settlements in perpetuity and acknowledgement of the harms incurred by the tobacco industry's business practices.

Lena: One of the biggest impacts of the MSA was that a veritable treasure trove of tobacco industry documents became available to the public as a result of the settlement. These documents revealed a set of strategies that Big Tobacco had been using for decades to mislead the public, hide from the industry's tarnished image, and prevent meaningful and life saving regulation of tobacco products.

Now, we talk about these strategies as parts of a playbook, which Big Tobacco has turned to again and again, to this day to continue profiting off of deadly products. Since the Master Settlement Agreement, it's also become clear that Big Oil was in on this playbook too. And may have in fact come up with some of the strategies at its core.

We'll talk more about that a little later, but back to what happened after the MSA. In short, the revelations about Big Tobacco's playbook made the public health community's next move very clear.

Michél: Now we have to take you to task.

Lena: So that's what tobacco control organizers like Patti and others from around the world did.

Patti: The global tobacco control movement was already a force in the early nineties. And in 1994, there was, uh, an international convening in Paris called the world conference on tobacco or health where a number of people from all over the world, experts and advocates taking on the tobacco industry, together with some folks from WHO started to have conversation about the need for an international treaty on tobacco control.

Lena: In the next couple of years, the WHO established a tobacco-free initiative and started to call in organizations that could contribute to the creation of a tobacco control treaty.

INFACT, which is what Corporate Accountability was named at the time, got called in because of our work to hold Nestlé, another powerful corporation, accountable for public health harms caused by its infant formula.

Michél: It soon became clear to organizers that it was vital to have a coordinated group of experts from all over the world. And in 1999, we helped form the Network for the Accountability of Tobacco Transnationals, or as we more commonly referred to it, NATT.

Patti: We formed a steering committee of NATT, which was basically, um, a small group of seven or so organizations that were very campaigning oriented, working on environmental rights, human rights in our case, corporate accountability and, um, all of the other steering committee members of NATT were Global South based spanning Africa, Southeast Asia, and South Asia first.

We realized, based on our campaigning history, that this network was necessary to have a really strong public health treaty. And we looked at our campaign and research leadership and took a global view at who are some of the people and organizations that were taking on corporate power that could be really powerful allies in working together toward an effective global tobacco treaty. And the first organization that clearly rose to the top was Environmental Rights Action based in Nigeria, that was born out of the grassroots Shell boycott.

Lena: Environmental Rights Action has since become Corporate Accountability Public Participation Africa, or CAPPA. We still work in deep partnership with them all these years later.

Patti: So this was in '98 and '99. That was just three years after the Nigerian government, the Nigerian military dictatorship executed nine activist leaders, including Ken Saro-Wiwa for taking on Royal Dutch Shell and its devastation of the Ogoni people and the land.

Um, and so we went to Environmental Rights Action and talked to them about the, the treaty and the need for a campaigning network. And Oronto Douglas, who is a human rights lawyer and one of the founders of environmental rights action, enthusiastically jumped in and, and really saw Nigeria had already had staff campaigners on his staff that were concerned about the growing impact of the tobacco industry and setting its sights on the African continent. And so it came together from their concern and this opportunity to, to form NATT.

Lena: NATT got right to work, figuring out what components would be most important in a global tobacco treaty.

Patti: We developed principles in 1999 together that really established the core of what we were campaigning for and the treaty, which was just fundamental protection of human rights and people above trade and corporate profits, and really thought together through how does the tobacco industry get away with marketing a deadly and addictive product and continue to expand markets?

How do they wield their power? And how could some of the elements of a tobacco treaty really reign in and check that power? And that's where the concepts of recognizing that the industry used its political and economic clout in countries all over the world, Global North and Global South to prevent effective tobacco control policy.

Lena: This use of clout that Patti's referring to is an essential part of the playbook.

Patti: One of the core principles was that this treaty was an opportunity to protect public health policy and public policy from the industry. And then also one of the core principles was recognizing that the tobacco industry, one of the methods of the tobacco industry in many industries is externalizing their costs, maximizing their own profit and privatizing that and externalizing their costs.

Lena: This is yet another piece of the playbook and a tactic that Big Oil also uses. By externalizing, the cost of extracting and burning oil, which drives the climate crisis. Then Big Oil is leaving Global South countries and frontline folks to foot the bill of adaptation and mitigation for climate change. This is not to mention the immeasurable costs that cannot be tallied up in dollars.

Loss of land, life, and culture cannot be undone or repaired. In other words, the financial, social, and environmental costs that Big Oil as well as other Big Polluters, forced onto frontline communities. And externalize, are too big to really be repaid.

Patti: One of our principles was that the industry needed to be held liable for the harms that it caused and couldn't externalize those costs onto governments and people. Another core principle that we all

agreed to from the beginning, which is, it's just so basic that it's, it's outrageous that it even needs to be a principle, but that public health should be prioritized over free trade.

And that was actually a really controversial principle that we as NATT brought into the treaty negotiations. Because there was, there was definitely some movement within the treaty negotiations that worried that if we pushed too hard for broader corporate accountability measures, that we wouldn't succeed.

And that we would be setting the bar too high for what the tobacco treaty could do, that we would ruin our ability to take on the tobacco industry and its deadly impact.

Lena: This is also what happens in international climate policy discussions. Governments more closely allied with corporations and people, like the United States, pressure those involved in developing policy to keep demands watered down using the argument that demands that are too strong will prevent any policy change from happening.

Patti: So there are some pretty heated moments, um, around whether to hold on to things like pushing for the tobacco industry or for the tobacco treaty to prioritize health over trade.

And that, so what it was like, cause like we were the campaigners fighting for corporate accountability in what was really a public health setting and working to advance corporate accountability principles, uh, and really like basic human rights principles into the fabric of this treaty.

Lena: As the treaty developed, we played a big role in pushing for two articles that made it into the final version. One is Article 5.3, which states that there's an irreconcilable conflict of interest between big tobacco and public health policy. It basically creates a firewall between industry and policy, just like Patti was describing. There's also Article 19, which outlines that the tobacco industry must and can be held financially and legally liable for harms that its business causes. This is another point of synergy between tobacco and climate organizing.

Michél: I remember seeing the guiding principles document and it was dated 1999 and then revised in 2001. So even the, the latest revision on that document included Article 19 in liability, which when you look at our climate campaign and you're like reflecting on the history of, of liability in this, this global tobacco treaty is just like, I can't summarize the, all the emotions that kind of rise thinking what could have been if that wasn't included in that original document and how much would we have lost.

Lena: A big reason the global tobacco treaty is such a powerful instrument for protecting people and public health policy from corporate abuse is this article which makes it possible for the tobacco industry to be held liable for harms it knowingly caused.

Now we're over 20 years into international climate policy negotiations and all sorts of industry driven shenanigans, like Shell writing a part of the Paris agreement, or oil and gas corporations sponsoring the climate negotiations, are still happening. Not to mention, we still don't have a binding treaty that will require governments of heavy emitting countries and the corporations that are behind the climate crisis to contribute their fair share to meaningful action on climate.

Part of the reason that's the case is the US government, which has pretty much always been a bad actor in international policy negotiations. This was true at the tobacco negotiations Patti's been telling us about and it's true at the climate talks. Patti talked a lot about the role of the US during the crucial years when the text of the tobacco treaty was still in negotiation.

Patti: It was as, as a younger organizer, seeing the way that the US conducted itself in the global tobacco treaty talks had a really powerful impact on me. I knew from learning about US foreign policy and trade that the US bullies its way around the world to promote economic interests and wealth of US corporations and seeing it firsthand on an issue like tobacco, it was just a really intense experience. that's never quite left me. Seeing the way that our government was conducting itself was a really motivating factor for me to continue challenging the way that that power is abused.

The US over the course of several years of negotiating the actual text of the treaty did all kinds of things to try to weaken the treaty. They would go into rooms and argue that if all of the countries negotiating the treaty didn't weaken the language restricting advertising that the US would never be able to sign on because it was unconstitutional in the US. And they'd have, you know, a number of lawyers making these cases. And it was sort of like room by room issue by issue the US would send people in to weaken language.

And then in contrast, there were delegations like Palau, a small Pacific Island where Dr. Caleb Otto was the sole delegate. He was one person representing his country in this context. And over the course of several years in negotiation, he would show up in room after room and make the moral case of why this treaty needed to be strong, to protect the health and lives of people in Palau and in countries across the Global South. And so the power dynamics, the sizes of delegation and what people were standing for in those negotiations really exposed, um, the US interests in promoting economic interests at the expense of, of people around the world. It was shameful.

And one of the really powerful moments and turning points in the treaty negotiations was when we went in, we meaning the whole global community working on the tobacco treaty at that point into the final rounds of negotiations in February of 2003. It was the same month that the US was threatening and building up, um, their own moves to invade Iraq. There was a global resistance that millions of people around the world were out in the streets protesting US bullying. And the US was about to do it anyway, but the global political environment of anger toward the US was very high.

And we walked into the last two weeks of the negotiations with a draft treaty that was not really that strong because, primarily the US there were a couple other countries where, mostly where tobacco transnationals were based, Germany and Japan tended to work toward lower common denominators as well. But the US was the clear ringleader in, um, obstruction. And really, you know, everything was still on the table. And we as a US-based NGO released a report on the second day of those negotiations called cowboy diplomacy.

And the subtitle was "How the US undermines international environmental, human rights, disarmament and health agreements." We basically documented how the US negotiates in all of these settings to the lowest common denominator, and then doesn't ratify the treaty.

Michél: This is basically what the US has done in every round of climate negotiations.

Patti: And so we distributed this to anybody who would take it, our NATT team, we held a press conference, we got global media coverage and it really shifted the tenor of the talks because government delegates who, who were working to advance their country's interests and, and feeling the intimidation of the US suddenly had something that they could hold in their hand and say like, this is actually a pattern of behavior that is playing out in, in great detriment to this treaty. And they're never going to sign that or ratify it anyway.

Michél: Spoiler alert: almost 20 years later the US still hasn't ratified or implemented the global tobacco treaty.

Patti: So that really shifted the tone of the last two weeks. And there were government leaders already like Dr. Caleb Otto from Palau, like Patricia Lambert from South Africa, like Dr. Hatai from Thailand, like Eva Lewis-Fuller from Jamaica. They had been like leading government coalitions over the course of the negotiations. And those coalitions came together more powerfully in that last round of talks with a willingness to stand up to the US government in part, because of that shift and that documentation.

Lena: In its final form, the treaty is a set of scientifically proven policies that save lives from the harms of tobacco use. It's been signed by 182 countries.

Patti: The global tobacco treaty has actually inspired and provided tools for countries all across the world to strengthen tobacco control legislation, to pass, to pass national tobacco control legislation, to keep the industry out.

Michél: On top of the tremendous impact of the implementation of the global tobacco treaty we learned a lot and we have a really powerful treaty to look to in negotiations that are still ongoing like in an international climate policy.

Lena: Today, one of the central struggles of creating and implementing meaningful international climate policy is that there's a huge imbalance that must be reckoned with. The countries in the Global North, like the US, European nations, and Australia are often the biggest emitters and often where polluting corporations are based. Those corporations and those governments profit off of exploitation of people and planet, and extraction of resources in the Global South. Patti talked to us about how this dynamic was present in the tobacco talks as well.

Patti: One of the, the most stark, um, I think experiences of working on this treaty for me was seeing that a US-based transnational corporation would basically go to any length to expand its markets for its deadly products into Global South countries, um, without limits to, you know, its practices.

One of the really powerful things about the organizing that happened on the treaty for example, is that the African region, 41 governments of the African region came together, tend to negotiate as a block on the global tobacco treaty because those government leaders could see that this was a Global North industry seeking to expand its markets for its deadly products into African countries that were already dealing with a whole range of challenges, mostly brought on by colonialism. So it's like, this was one

form of modern day colonialism that African governments could stand up and say like, we've had enough, we can't take the expansion of the tobacco industry.

I think there's both a story of like the deep structural racism of the tobacco industry and Global North transnational corporations expanding into Global South countries. And then there's also a story of people, Global South leadership, really being the force that stopped the expansion of the tobacco industry that made the global tobacco treaty what it is, in concert with North South civil society partnership, which is what we were engaged in.

Lena: Patti told us that at the same time, climate was also a pressing issue, but...

Patti: There wasn't an obvious in-road for us as an organization in the early two thousands, given the landscape and the kind of campaigning that we did that we saw at the time. In the mid-, like around 2013, 2014, um, we started to hear from some of our allies working on the UNFCCC.

Lena: That's the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Patti: That who we had not worked closely with on the global tobacco treaty, but had, um, sort of shared analysis around the importance of the global tobacco treaty and the precedents it could set for international policy on corporate power and abuse. Um, we began to hear from some of our allies that there's a need to bring the precedents from the global tobacco treaty into the climate space, given that it was really overrun by fossil fuel industry interests.

Lena: This is what we've been hinting out throughout the episode, the lessons we learned, namely, partnering deeply with folks most impacted by corporate abuse to craft international policy that specifically addresses components of the corporate playbook. This was really powerful in tobacco treaty negotiations and could be useful as well and climate negotiations.

Patti: Article 19 of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control says that the tobacco industry should be held liable for the harms that it causes. The US government, for example, was like wildly opposed to having the word "liability" included in the text of the global tobacco treaty.

So it's not spelled out that far, but even having it included as a provision in the global tobacco treaty was a huge win and, um, one of the big fights of the negotiations and the reason that we as NATT prioritize liability is because it goes to the heart of the business model of the tobacco industry, right?

So that the tobacco industry produces and markets a product. That causes incredible societal harm and huge healthcare costs. And doesn't take the responsibility for any of that. So they're maximizing their profit and externalizing all of the costs of their business model and recognizing that for a transnational corporation, their bottom line is ultimately what's going to shift their practices.

Our analysis was that by building into their costs, more of the full costs of their business, making them liable for the harms that they were causing, instead of being able to externalize those costs onto governments and taxpayers around the world, um, that that could cause, cause a major shift in their assessment of the profitability.

Lena: This is present in climate negotiations today, as well as the broader climate justice movement. As we heard about in episode two and the phrase we've been saying throughout the season, "make them pay," or the work of shifting the cost and other burdens back onto corporations is front and center. When cities and countries and groups of young people and Indigenous people around the world start suing the fossil fuel industry to hold those corporations liable for climate damages, the profitability of continuing to extract fossil fuels is very much called into question.

Patti: There are some basic principles of effective policy to shift the abusive and extractive practices of transnational corporations. We know that from the global tobacco treaty and other spaces.

We're at a point on climate where there's a growing global climate justice movement that's really powerful. And there are a lot of people that are concerned about climate change that haven't yet stepped in to join.

And I think part of the opportunity and challenge of organizing on climate right now is to align as much power as humanly possible behind some of those basic principles that we know to be effective around liability, around making sure that the fossil fuel industry and Big Ag are not at the table in any form, whether it's directly or through their trade associations, when climate policy is being crafted. That's simply not going to address climate change. It's going to continue to perpetuate profitable models for the industries that are driving the problem.

Michél: In short, we've put the tools and tactics we developed for the global tobacco treaty to work in service of climate policy and action.

Patti: We do know both how to hold the industry to account and then the solutions for how we actually have a just energy future also exist. It's all there. And it's about political will and removing the obstacles and diminishing their power. The fossil fuel industry right now is one of the major, major obstacles. And it's on us as organizers to continue to campaign, to neutralize the impact of the fossil fuel industry. To diminish their power so that the solutions that are already there and that have been crafted by people most impacted by climate change can advance.

I do believe it's true that we have the tools we need. To address climate change effectively, and to have really strong international policy, a global climate treaty that would set the bar for national policies and countries around the world, very similar to how the tobacco treaty has played out.

Lena: So wildly enough, this is the end of the first season of Subvert, a podcast we made while learning how to make a podcast. Figuring out what it means to be in a global pandemic. Where in your house is quiet enough to record audio, how to organize when it's not safe to go outside, but here we are. Michél, looking back, what has really stuck with you over the last many episodes?

Michél: When we first started this, I couldn't imagine how many people we've spoken to and how many different topics we've covered. And I think for me, it always just comes back to just we as people in this world have so many incredible leaderful movements that are showing us the way forward that are inspiring us, that are holding on to rage and hope and joy and struggle all at the same time.

And I think that the pandemic has given a lot of distance to that for us, but it was really our way of connecting back to that, the heart of the movement for the entire season, which was really dope. Um, I don't know if you felt like the same way or if you had other things that came up.

Lena: Yeah, I definitely felt that. And you know, this has been my first year and change on staff at Corporate Accountability. So I haven't been to policy negotiations, I didn't go to in-person shareholder meetings. So for me, I think it's been really special to be able to engage with our campaigns and all of the people we are in movement with in this way, even though I wasn't able to go places and, and do stuff.

Michél: Yeah and I think that that's, uh, both like a good thing and a bad thing as with, with everything is that, uh, you won't get that surprise when you go into those rooms and experience what, you know, it has been like to organize in the climate space or in treaty and policy organizing. Um, but it is also really fun when you just, you think that you're going into a space and it's going to be one way, and then you find all these really great humans that are making it worthwhile to be there. And it shifts, it shifts the dynamic.

And I think that we've learned a lot from folks this entire season about. Shifting the dynamic of what you expected would have happened in any particular circumstance or situation, whether it was the TNC treaty and Kea bringing the local to the international level or a Bert talking about, you know, doing census organizing and then having to shift it all the way up and do tenant organizing.

It's really cool that we've gotten that experience and have been able to share it with all of you that are listening.

Lena: Yeah, I feel like I have talked to so many people who've been on the ground in all the places I thought I was going to get to be on the ground and haven't, and you know, even though experiencing and talking about experiencing are different.

We've had so many, so many moments of real talk with people who are like, yeah, treaty negotiations are weird and also this is how we bring our movement to the international kind of stage. And this is, this is also a big part of how we build those movements. One of the things that we've been talking about so much in the last few episodes is, you know, how unfriendly those spaces can seem from the outside.

Like most people don't go fight for their right to exist at the UN every year or every other year. And the conversations that we've had have really made it clear to me why that is so integral to movements at home all over the world. And also kind of illustrated for me, how global movements build. You get to meet people from all over when you all come to, you know, Geneva or wherever the climate talks are to, you know, see what the fight for liability looks like in the Philippines when you're based in Brazil.

Michél: Yeah, and I guess the other thing that's been really interesting is that, you know, I've been really stuck at, at home and organizing from a place. And there's still people that have to organize in person because the situation is so dire. And I think it's really easy to take your circumstance and then copy and paste it to everyone's circumstance.

But even as organizers each organizer has a different way of the work that they're, they're going forward with. Um, and, and that was just like a helpful reminder for me, even as an organizer here in, based in New York, that my circumstance and like kind of a lot of the privilege that I get to organize with is from being able to, to just do everything I can from here. Where some others have to go to Southern towers and speak to people in person and show them humanity so that they, they know that they can trust them.

Or, you know, in, in the other places where the pandemic is hitting way harder and you still have to be out in, in physical space, otherwise the government won't recognize your demands. Um, So that's, that's definitely been kind of hitting home for me in a way that I didn't expect.

Lena: Yeah, and it also is a reminder, we also have to remember like climate disaster is happening all over the world and you generally cannot stay home for that. And, you know, even if our, even if our movements have been reoriented to exist in much a virtual space. The real events that are driving the urgent need for movement are still happening in real time, out in the world, no matter what we do or how we organize.

So for me, it has felt really important to have that reminder that, you know, this organizing is still happening in, as you said, such a broad range of ways to rise to all of the challenges that people are facing all over the world. You know, largely because of corporate abuse, it's almost always corporations, obviously. It's not always, but in so many cases there's just, there's so much that looks like real impacts in the day to day that we can trace back to corporate abuse. And this season has been such a crash course in that.

Michél: Yeah, it absolutely has. Connecting the dots on like, you know, the organizing tools sometimes are the demands that we put forward too. So, kicking corporations out and making them pay, which is why it's so, so important for us to be talking about corporate abuse all the time. Because at the center of it all, it's been corporate abuse.

Uh, you can almost always trace it back to this, whether it's like the moneyed interests or the actual just operations of, of some of these corporations relies on, uh, these abusive practices. And unless we tool up and organize against it, they're going to continue to operate in these ways and in different communities, in our communities.

Lena: Yeah, and I think a lot of that was kind of coming from a place that I think many folks were in at the, at the beginning of the pandemic, which was kind of like, what do we have? What can we work with in the face of many challenges that stem from very long histories of abuse of power and people and the planet.

And yet, you know, I, I found myself kind of grasping, like what's good that's happening? Where are we still moving? You know, we, we can read about the tools all we want and we can, we can make websites and we can, you know, write papers, but actually hearing about people using these tools is such a crucial part of having hope in these movements.

Michél: Yeah, and I think, whether or not we're using the tools is really important as people that are gearing up for social change. And I think equally important is to remind folks, especially folks that are listening, that these don't, these demands and these tools that are being utilized, aren't coming out of thin air. They're almost always coming from the directly impacted communities, the folks that have been harmed and the ones that are facing down corporate abuse.

And that's why they're focused on these actors because they see the abuse really clearly, they feel the abuse really clearly. And they're saying, you know, we don't have time for some compromised belief system of how we get out of this. We are desperate for change. And so this is the highest level of demand that we can possibly have.

And I, and I'm seeing some of that playing out in the broader realm and not to bring in too much of like the current news or the Biden administration, but there's, there's two really major things that have happened in the past month that I think we get to take credit for as, as people centered movements. One is the waiving of the intellectual properties when it comes to vaccines. That would have legitimately never happened if people didn't like, call in all of the power...

Lena: Demand that it happened.

Michél: Yeah, exactly, demand that had happened. And then you had Biden announce a 2030 timeline for the climate action. And as someone who has been in the UN climate space and has heard from US delegations saying they would never ever agree to anything before 2050 hearing anything related to 2030 is, oh my gosh. I think about, I think about Asad, um, over at War on Want, I think about Meena Raman at, uh, at Third World Network. Like all these incredible organizers that have been putting on the table a timeline that actually made sure that Global South folks would survive climate catastrophe.

Lena: Yeah.

Michél: And it might not be the bar we wanted, but it's our talking points that they're now using. And I think that, that's a certain level of how the demands themselves can become tools, is that there are tools for change because they can be co-opted. But even if they're co-opted, you've made some steps in progress. And so...

Lena: The narrative has changed.

Michél: The narrative has changed. Yeah, exactly. And I hope that people are finding a little sense of hope in that, and also are realizing why it's so important to listen to people on the frontline, um, whose demands might seem really out of this world. Uh, but they're actually grounded and rooted in reality, which is that if we don't meet those demands, a lot of people are gonna lose their lives. And we honestly can't have that.

Lena: And I think just to reiterate Michél the 2030 timeline is still not really good enough and is not aligned with what frontline movements are calling for, but it is a sign that organizing works and folks are genuinely pressuring the powers that be to change the frame of what they're willing to do or consider.

We are in a moment of frontline movements, getting more access to the halls of power. And on the one hand, like, as you've just said, like, yes, the table we need folks at the table, then what's going to happen? Is it going to be action, or is it going to be a bunch of PR? That's like, oh my God, we invited frontline communities to the table. Then we didn't do anything folks recommended we do.

So I think, you know, back to our toolbox, we have the tools, leaderful movements around the world are developing these tools and developing demands that become forces for moving our movements along. And then, you know, in addition to those, we need the people to, to use the tools and then we need the political will.

Michél: I think what, what then gets co-opted on the other side is, well, you need everyone in the conversation. And I'm like, no, you don't need the people that have been fine with letting millions of people die...

Lena: We don't need the fossil fuel industry in the conversation.

Michél: Don't need the fossil fuel industry. We don't need their skills. We don't need the researchers that have been bought out. We don't need any of those folks. What we need is people that are committed to the same values and mission. And what we're seeing right now is a concerted effort to connect to the communities that matter most in terms of bringing all of those people together.

Michél: This episode was co-hosted by me and Lena Greenberg. Lena also wrote the show.

Lena: Eric Johnson and I co-produced and edited the show. Eric mixed the show and also wrote our music.

Thank you so much to Patti Lynn for taking the time to chat with us. I also want to say a big thank you to Michél who is moving on from Corporate Accountability and will now be a part of the powerhouse team at Worth Rises, which is dedicated to dismantling the prison industry and ending the exploitation of those it touches.

I can't imagine having made the season without you Michél. You will be missed. We hope to see you back here in some capacity soon. This may be the end of our season, but you can listen to all of our episodes at corporateaccountability.org/subvert. We'll be back soon. Stay tuned in your podcast feed and be sure to follow us on social media @stopcorporateabuse for updates.

That's all for now.