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## Review of: Frank Pearce & Steve Tombs, *Toxic Capitalism: Corporate Crime and the Chemical Industry* (Dartmouth Publishing Co. 1998)

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**Review of: Frank Pearce & Steve Tombs, Toxic Capitalism: Corporate Crime and the Chemical Industry (Dartmouth Publishing Co. 1998)**

**Erratum**

The citation for this review is *10 RISK 89 (1999)* in most commercial databases.

Frank Pearce & Steve Tombs, *Toxic Capitalism: Corporate Crime and the Chemical Industry* (Dartmouth Publishing Co. 1998). Conclusions, notes, introduction, preface ISBN 1-85521-950-6 [372 pp. Hardbound \$72.00 Old Post Road, Brookfield, VT 05036.]

*Toxic Capitalism* discusses socio-economic and legal forces that underlay the existence and operation of corporations in the chemical industry with an emphasis on corporate ideologies. The book is heavily annotated and includes a lengthy bibliography.

Pearce and Tombs use a socio-economic and political analysis to sensitize readers to corporate crime in the chemical industry. They focus on the 1984 Bhopal tragedy as a concrete example of an event that has continuing global ramifications in the context of environmental and occupational health and safety. They limit their discussion to the U.S. and British environment. Key issues are the nature of contemporary corporate organizations, corporate crime and the regulation of corporations.

In the first three chapters, the authors elaborate on the nature of contemporary capitalism and the structure of corporations. Capitalist economies are examined under neoliberal versions of society, state, and economy. They argue that neoliberal interpretation obscures more than it reveals. Furthermore, society, state and economy must be viewed in the context of an attempt to construct a new capitalist hegemony.

The book then proceeds to examine the nature of corporate crime, through reference to the structure, functions and activities of capitalist corporations. The book has an interesting section called, *Corporations as Legally Privileged Criminals*, which discusses how corporations share only some attributes of natural persons.

Pearce and Tombs investigate the causes of occupational accidents and recognize two levels of causation: a first order cause (plant design, resourcing communication) and a second order cause (underlying process where safety is compromised in pursuit of profit and government passivity). The authors point out that injury and deaths are more aptly viewed as safety crimes rather than mere "accidents" and distinguish the different treatment between "street" offenders and corporate offenders. Their final three chapters review the forms of

external regulation and categorize these as neoliberal and social liberal. They strongly advocate criminalization of safety crimes and suggest a more punitive regulatory approach based upon deterrence and rehabilitation.

One interesting observation raised by the authors is that the chemical industry, being highly automated, would be expected to have rather low accident rates. With recent technological advances, workers are less likely to experience a traditional industrial accident, such as a fall, severed limb or an injured back. The authors point out that the real problem is not traumatic injury, but the likelihood of illness caused by chronic exposure to hazardous levels of toxic substances, a type of exposure not reflected accurately in current measurement.

The book has some shortcomings. The authors' extensive use of socio-economic jargon (i.e. hegemony, bourgeois and discourse) will slow those who are unfamiliar with the language of economics. At times the writing comes across as dry and academic, especially in the first half. The inclusion of numerous quotes and citations sets a monotonous tone. However, the second half of the book comes alive when the discussion examines six U.K. chemical companies and the Bhopal incident.

The authors are quick to point out that corporations and corporate players consistently avoid responsibility for incidents of illness or injury. They label corporations as aristocrats, with the pursuit of money as their only objective. Although there is mention of marginal progress in "social responsibility", the authors would have painted a more balanced picture if more credit had been given to those companies that are proactive and take expensive risks in order to advance corporate environmentalism.

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