



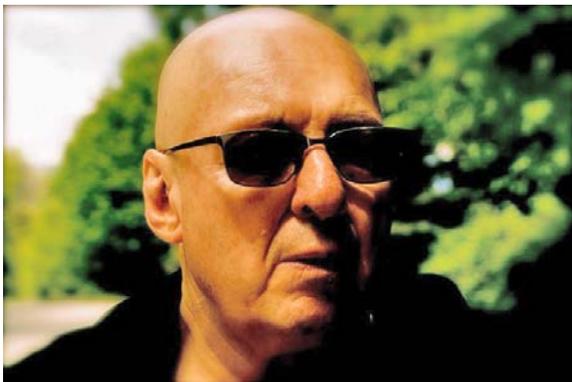
By:  
Frank Pearce

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Interviewed by:  
Steve Bittle

In the face of the massive and ongoing social, environmental and financial devastation and destruction caused by (increasingly) multinational/transnational corporations, and as Western capitalist states continue to support and advance capitalism's imperialist tendencies, Steve Bittle interviewed Frank Pearce (author of the influential *Crimes of the Powerful: Marxism, Crime and Deviance*, *The Radical Durkheim* and (with Steve Tombs) *Toxic Capitalism: Corporate Crime in the Chemical Industry*) about the changing relevance of Marxist scholarship for interrogating crimes of the powerful.

**SB: It's been almost 40 years since you published *Crimes of the Powerful: Marxism, Crime and Deviance*, in which you used Marxist theory to clearly demonstrate how criminology and sociology have failed to study the state and the related activities of the ruling class. Could you provide some context for the development of this work and in particular what led you to commit yourself to Marxist theorising?**



FP: In answer to your question about the context for the development of *Crimes of the Powerful: Marxism, Crime and Deviance*, here I give some sense of the continuity and changes that can be identified in the intellectual, social and political realms in which I was personally immersed. My world moreover in its broad outlines is similar to that of many of the people involved in the critical criminology movement in Britain from its beginnings in the late sixties. In 1950s Britain there were only a few sociology departments and sociology and sociological criminology were as often as not taught in social work or law departments. They were taught in a way that it was hoped would facilitate the workings of the courts and render less intractable the more deviant of the social worker's clients, particularly those families with no interest in education. Sometimes this showed a Fabian sensibility but it was generally theoretically unselfconscious. The exceptions to this rule were primarily influenced by American structural functionalism.

At that time only 6% of each age cohort of young people went to university, i.e. for

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every eighteen year old who became a university student there would be fifteen others who had finished their education between their fifteenth and eighteenth year. Women were under-represented, while obviously being approximately 50% of the population they made up only 25% of university students. Furthermore at that time most of those who attended, 75% of these students came from the 25% of the population who were middle or upper class; 25% were from the 75% of people who were working class; for every middle class person who went to university 5 did not; for every working class person who went to university, 50 did not; the working class student was 10 times less likely to be at university than a middle or upper class student. In the late 1960s enrolment increased in Britain and Sociology, as a new discipline, in particular, benefitted from this increase. Sociology was expanded dramatically in Britain, as was the sociological aspect of Criminology. There were now serious criticisms of orthodox sociology, primarily from a position grounded in interpretive sociology notably symbolic interactionism. Nearly all sociologists made clear their distance from Marxism. In fact Marxism was virtually absent from sociology, economics, law and politics courses and if it existed at all it was often in marginal departments with isolated scholars.

Because of Keynesian policies and a somewhat Fordist economic regime, the universities continued to expand in the 1970s and while the class based comparative advantage remained there was still an

increase in the number of working class students and an intensification and generalization of primarily working class youth cultures, which created greater confidence in the value of these non-dominant cultures, legitimating the skepticism about consensual theories of society, felt by many working class students, including myself. This was a generation radicalized by the threat of a nuclear conflagration, and one, which was deeply anti-authoritarian. In many ways there was a good fit between these sensibilities and the writings of the more radical Symbolic Interactionists like Howard Becker and the British left Weberians, like John Rex, Anthony Giddens and Alan Dawe and these played a significant role in challenging positivistic methodology. Their students were unwilling to sanctify the status quo or to bow down to the sets of complacent judgements, which were suffocatingly dominant.

In the USA, the violent repression of opponents of American imperialism, many of whom experienced police illegalities, from brutal beatings to Cointelpro, and many of whom collectively reflected upon these experiences and revised their view of the social order. In the USA, Marxism was only one among many strands of radicalism. But in Italy and France militants had somewhat similar experiences but they were already well versed in Marxist and other revolutionary literature. In, what was known somewhat wistfully, as “Great Britain” or, increasingly, oxymoronicly, as the “United Kingdom”, during the 1960s and 1970s, there were four different challenges to the

hegemonic system. One was the anti-imperialist and radically democratic student based movements that I have already mentioned. Second was the anti-imperialist movement in Northern Ireland; there, Her Majesty's unwilling Catholic subjects began an intensified campaign to contest the privileges of the dominant Protestant majority and to try and achieve a united and independent Ireland. The third was the growing unrest in immigrant communities about their marginalization, exploitation and their subjection to racist policing. The fourth was militant trade union forces which, both in the factories and in the streets, fought for higher wages, better conditions at work and for the protection of their livelihoods and, for some at least, a socialist future. One response to all of these was a suspension of many civil liberties, a militarization of the police and the development of plans to enact and, if necessary, declare a form of martial law.

As radicals became more and more aware of the structures of dominance and began to think through how class privilege and class exploitation worked, individually and collectively many turned to Marx's account of class exploitation. There was a tremendous increase in the knowledge of his writings and a new awareness of, and some reconnection to, a long revolutionary tradition. This inevitably had consequences in the academy. The Symbolic Interactionists were criticised for being at best, radical pluralists. The Weberians were challenged for their avoidance of Weber's marginalist economics and his authoritarian and nationalist politics. Let it not be

forgotten that in January 1919, Weber denouncing the Spartakists, asserted [Karl] "Liebknecht belongs in the madhouse and Rosa Luxemburg in the zoo." There is little doubt that his comments contributed to the poisonous atmosphere, which contributed to their murder the following week.

Ironically, Criminology was not very affected by critical currents; it was still dominated by psychologists such as Hans Eysenck and Gordon Trasler, by lawyers and by eclectically trained Criminologists. Moreover, the Home Office largely funded research. Interestingly enough the critique of this area when it came immediately went deeper than was true of much of the critique of mainstream sociology. Jock Young's earliest writings "The Zoo-keepers of Deviancy" had been in the journal *Anarchy* so it was not surprising that his imaginative deployment of labeling theory in *The Drugtakers* (1971) was explicitly radical as was Stan Cohen's *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1972), although to a lesser extent. But in 1973, Ian Taylor, Paul Walton and Jock Young published their sophisticated sociology text, *The New Criminology*. Less well-known but of particular importance for me were two articles by W.G. (Kit) Carson: "White Collar Crime and the enforcement of Factory Legislation" published in 1970 in the very mainstream *British Journal of Criminology*; and "Some Sociological Aspects of Strict Liability and the Enforcement of Factory Legislation" also published in 1970 but in *The Modern Law Review*. No Marxist would mistake either of these for a Marxist text, they were closer to a radical pluralist or Weberian conflict theory

– and drew on Gilbert Geis’s classic collection *White Collar Crime* (1968) – but they were based on superb research. However, there was little doubt that my 1976 book, *Crimes of the Powerful: Marxism, Crime and Deviance*, was a Marxist text.

In the U.S. many activists belonged to Sociology and Criminology Departments and some of these took up the question of white collar and elite crime. While much of this work is interesting it generally remained in a framework, which did not attend to the specificity of ‘crimes of the powerful’, and in particular the significance of corporations as legally constructed entities with many privileges as legal subjects and as providing astonishing legal protection for their owners and executives. I have no desire to make exaggerated claims for *Crimes of the Powerful*, but I do believe that its orientation was far from typical at that time. What the book made unusually available was the theoretical grounds for the position that it argued. Its object was the corporation in a global corporate capitalist economy and required a theorization of the nature of the state, economy and society relations both nationally and internationally. Corporate capitalism, like all capitalisms, is based upon the extraction of surplus value but it is much more efficient at doing so than family businesses or those based upon partnerships. There is also an impetus to become large vertically integrated economic actors, which collectively become oligopolistic.

The book was a tentative beginning of analysis, which could be built upon to develop more comprehensive accounts of

State(s), economy (ies), society (ies) and ideology (ies). In the book correlations between the ways that these institutions worked were taken, quite reasonably, as indicators of causal relations, but this was a hypothesis that required additional and more detailed explorations of the mechanisms that might explain these correlations. This would require further empirical and theoretical work. The book was based on a somewhat Lukacsian Marxism: social life was naturally diverse and dynamic it was in part, but only in part, shaped by major institutions but from these collectivities developed some autonomy as did individual people. But what was unique about capitalism was its drive to more and ever more commodification and this meant that the prolix nature of social life was in danger of losing its dynamism and its diversity. But at the same time as the proletariat were becoming alienated they were constituting themselves as new class subjects.

**SB: Subsequent to writing *Crimes of the Powerful* your own work seems to have shifted in that you have explored theoretical issues relating to Foucault, Althusser, Durkheim and Mauss. In what ways has this work influenced your own thinking about the place of Marxism in social scientific explorations of social and societal entities and relations? What sorts of empirical and theoretical issues have these lines of inquiry opened-up for you?**

**FP:** I was well aware that while retaining the theoretical gains that *Crimes of the Powerful* had made possible, it was necessary to go

beyond it. This proved a much greater and more interesting task than I expected. I taught Social Theory for many more years, reading Marx, Gramsci and Althusser, carefully and critically, but also reading Durkheim and Foucault in the same way. Eventually I moved on to, what I believe to be, a relatively undogmatic, structuralist and poststructuralist articulation of Marx, Gramsci, Althusser, Foucault and Durkheim. But I was not tied to anybody else's orthodoxy. I have never deviated from my belief that it is a correct premise of much Marxist thought that a socialist revolution requires the seizure of the means of production by the proletariat, which it should continue to collectively control just as much as it needs to nullify the coercive state. Furthermore, as became clearer to me somewhat later, both Antonio Labriola and Antonio Gramsci had very complex understandings of the essential role of Marxist theory in facilitating the analysis of class forces and of working-class organic intellectuals in soberly guiding the working class to strategically use a wide range of means in the serious business of preparing for power. Integral to socialism is the collective power of the working class, which I would define as those who in the labour process are robbed of the value of their surplus labour. If one examines the distribution of income in the major OECD countries to labour and capital for the last forty or so years while the sum of the two is relatively constant an increase in the one is matched by a decrease in the other. It is clearly a zero sum game where what is at stake is the appropriation of the surplus. During this time I deepened my empirical

knowledge by continuing to teach American History and Politics and the Sociology of Crime and Law and I published a fair amount in my different fields of interest.

The government in Britain in the late 70s was a lack-lustre Labour one, the Party was in office but hardly in power. This became evident when the Prime Minister James Callaghan and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Denis Healey, seeking some support from the IMF were offered a loan but only if they changed from their then current policies and accepted the IMF's agenda. This they did and, moreover, they failed to make any defence of their own previous policies, which involved efforts to limit wage increases while engaging in a somewhat ad hoc mix of Keynesianism and some timid redistributive policies while still providing many services through nationalized industries including the provision of health-care services and welfare. The IMF demanded measures to lower wages and to drastically cut government expenditure particularly in the area of welfare. In fact this exacerbated class conflict and the Labour Party became more and more a right wing party.

After the so-called "Winter of Discontent" in 1979 Margaret Thatcher managed to gain power. People on the left knew that her pre-Keynesian ideas and policies would undermine equality of opportunity, exacerbate poverty and cause crisis after crisis, but few anticipated how different was her idea of a successful society from even Liberal Welfarism nor how much she would silence any critical assessment of her policies

or opposition to them. But when the working class and its trade unions were under attack they bravely fought back. Tragically, Thatcher's well planned militaristic confrontation with the miners in the mid-1980s left mining communities devastated, many miners in jail and a very divided trade union movement. This left working people and left wing organisations and institutions unprotected.

Nevertheless at least until the late 1980s, this was a period of great intellectual ferment. There were, of course schisms in Marxism but fortunately for us we had not yet been misled by the faux radicalism of the postmodern versions of post-structuralism. It was not in its beginnings a time of defeat, of resignation or fearfulness. The same was true in the U.S., at least politically. Excellent work was being published on Criminology and the Sociology of Law and Crime by Jerome Skolnick, William Chambliss, Tony Platt, Herman and Julia Schwendinger, to name but a few. Post-Watergate the study of corporate crime was also burgeoning. Marshall Clinard and Peter Yeager's 1980 book, *Corporate Crime*, was based on the findings of a large research project and Stanton Wheeler was already publishing the results of his research into White-Collar Crime, another large research project. In fact the most productive period in the study of corporate crime was just beginning. Two works stand out: Steve Box's (1983) *Power, Crime and Mystification*, and John Braithwaite's (1984) *Corporate Crime in the Pharmaceutical Industry*. But there were many well-researched books and articles. Few of the authors were Marxists: two

exceptions were Harry Glasbeek and Laureen Snider, both of whom are still producing excellent work and both of whom are Canadian.

**SB: I think a great example of how your work shifted somewhat following *Crimes of the Powerful* is evidenced in your rather different book *Toxic Capitalism: Corporate Crime and the Chemical Industry* written by you and Steve Tombs? This was written some 20 years after *Crimes of the Powerful* and in it you and Steve critically interrogate the chemical industry, particularly in relation to the devastation caused by Union Carbide in the Bhopal chemical disaster. What does this work reveal about the nature of corporate power and the inability (unwillingness?) of states to regulate corporations?**

Yes, in late 1984, there was a dramatic and tragic event that forced me to sharpen my focus and to try and make sense of the complex processes that lead to a completely avoidable "accident". In December of that year, the population of the city of Bhopal was devastated by the release of a cocktail of gases by Union Carbide India Limited, a wholly owned subsidiary of the American Multinational Union Carbide Corporation.

The Bhopal gas disaster, within days, led to the deaths of 7,000 Indian men, women and children and subsequently the deaths of another 18,000 or more. The victims were mainly, but not exclusively, the poor and defenseless. When I first realized that such a tragedy was unfolding, I hoped that, like some Tsunamis, it was the unpredictable

effect of capricious natural forces. I did not wish on anyone the terrible responsibility for what occurred. But, a careful examination, interpretation of, and theorization of, a great deal of evidence made available by victims, medical personnel, scientific reports, and by investigative work by researchers, media reporters and by activists lead Steve Tombs and myself to the unequivocal conclusion that this was a completely avoidable disaster. The actions that led to it were imbricated in capitalistic, imperialistic, elitist, scientific, and neoliberal practices and were the consequences of what are often represented as "morally neutral" or "amoral" calculations by a wide range of social actors; these include corporate executives, engineers and investors, politicians, and members of regulatory agencies and academics, in the USA, India and internationally. They're indifferent and knowing neglect of attention to the likely catastrophic consequences of their actions means that far from being amoral they were culpably immoral. Coming to this conclusion has required the deployment of political economy, sociology, criminology, and legal discourses.

*Toxic Capitalism* is only one of the places where Steve Tombs and I have explored the issues raised by the Bhopal tragedy; another one of these is our recent e-book, *Bhopal: Flowers of Profit and Power* (2013), and, most recently, the special issue on "Bhopal and after: The Chemical Industry as Toxic Capitalism," *Social Justice* December 2014, in this case I co-edited the special issue with Tomas Macsheoin, and Steve Tombs and Dave Whyte, contributed to it a powerful article on the human cost of dangerous

workplaces in this moment of globalising capital.

A consolation from such an analysis is the conclusion that the current mode of producing goods is neither the only way, nor the best way, of providing for human needs or the necessities of life. They are not required for humanity to live comfortably and safely. Producing plentiful and nutritious food and other necessities of life could be achieved by organizing societies and institutions that are egalitarian and democratic with open systems of communication and high general levels of education, in other words, in socialist societies.

Although these articles and books have received some attention, I feel that there is a failure to recognize that Bhopal is not simply one event among many others but it is the effect of many different "natural" and "social forces", which proved to be identifiable by deploying a series of different discourses. The tragedy, as is revealed by the multilayered analyses of it, is paradigmatic. Here, I am using the term; more as do Foucault and Agamben than as does Kuhn.

**SB: Changing topic somewhat, in recent years you have spoken and written about notions of sacrifice in terms of understanding modern capitalism and its seemingly endless capacity to overlook the harms that result from the pursuit of profits. Can you speak to the concept of sacrifice in your own work? Does it fit in with your work on Bhopal?**

**FP:** My work in this area is very grounded in the reworking of Durkheim and Marx to be found in my book, *The Radical Durkheim*. Its first edition was published in 1989, and the second edition was published in 2001 and in 2012 Red Quill published an ebook edition. My goal has been and remains to critically work upon Durkheim's texts to produce a rigorous and potentially fruitful Durkheimianism and then similarly work on Marxist texts to produce in its turn a rigorous and potentially fruitful Marxism and to then forge new non-eclectic syntheses. One aspect of this re-theorisation is my ongoing work on sacrifice.

Now, in a brilliantly named book, *Sacrifice Zones: The Front Lines of Toxic Chemical Exposure in the United States* (2010) Steve Lerner demonstrates once again that in the name of progress the racialised, the poor, the marginalised are still paying the price of America's "Manifest Destiny". According to an article in the October 31, 1988 issue of the New York Times, at a number of Superfund sites decommissioned nuclear laboratories and plants had been left to rot. "Engineers at the Energy Department have privately begun calling such contaminated sites "national sacrifice zones" The term "sacrifice zones" has been taken up by environmental activists. It is used to dramatise how in the routine production, reproduction and development of the American economy, which supposedly benefits all, the most dangerous production processes, and the most likely dumping ground for the most toxic waste are the zones where live the racialised poor. While they are subject to the risk of great harm to the health of

themselves and their children, the wealthy white corporate elite monopolise the safer and more ecologically sound locations, both in the USA and internationally. But America has long represented itself as a meritocracy and as subject to the rule of law. The racialised poor have little chance of bettering their situation but are expected to make an equivalent contribution to the society as the average citizen with the implicit promise equal benefits. Globally, the same is true, many more have been, and continue to be, sacrificed, in regions of other countries and continents.

Bhopal is, of course, a case in point, where the most vulnerable people were also sacrificed in the name of progress; of the 25,000 who died as a result of UCC's release of poisonous gases, the majority were from the ranks of the poor and the marginalised. In fact their interests were sacrificed, as were they themselves. If it is clear that many were sacrificed, it is equally clear, that many made heroic efforts to save their families and that they and others have helped care for the survivors. Moreover this self-sacrificing work, both medically oriented, and oriented to getting adequate compensation for these victims is still ongoing, 30 years after the disaster. The same term, sacrifice, then, is used to both describe the macro-level machinations of the state but also, the generosity of individuals, often themselves in straightened circumstances. At this time I am trying to develop a critical understanding of the concepts of sacrifice to show how while it is often used cynically and manipulatively, on other occasions it is used

to describe stunning example of courageous and generous conduct.

One example of my attempt at a critical understanding is the article, “Obligatory Sacrifice and Imperial Projects” (2010). In this I use the work of Durkheim, Mauss and Hubert on the sacred and sacrifice and I use Marx’s discussion of social formations to see what, if anything, contemporary American military ventures have in common with Aztec military adventures, which involved human sacrifice. I am including some extracts from the article plus additional commentary to indicate the direction of the analysis thus far.

### [Read Rank Pearce’s Obligatory Sacrifice and Imperial Projects](#)

But, first a note on the contemporary use of the term Aztec. The term is used to refer to the twenty or so Mesoamerican peoples who spoke the Nahuatl language and shared a culture and cosmology and who in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries C.E. migrated south to the Valley of Mexico. Despite some opposition from already established inhabitants, they successfully founded cities both there and in adjacent valleys. In the fifteenth century C.E. three of these cities together created a large empire, known by the then contemporary Mesoamerican peoples as the “triple alliance” which was comprised of three ethnic based Aztec cities. The most powerful of the three were the Tenoch-Mexica who lived in Tenochtitlan, the largest city at that time in Mesoamerica; the second most powerful was Texcoco, the main city of the

Alcohuia and a city renowned for its learning; the least powerful was Tlacopan, a Tepanec city. The Tenoch Mexica received the largest proportion of the “tributes” extracted from the subaltern states and virtually monopolized the ceremonies that celebrated its imperial might. A few Aztec tribes and cities were hostile to this empire, for example, the Tlaxcalteca, Huexotzinca, and the Chalca. However most of the Aztecs and other peoples, in the valley of Mexico, and areas adjacent to it were affiliated to the Triple Alliance and accepted that it was the Manifest Destiny of the Tenoch Mexica to rule them, that the Mexica’s gods should be honoured by providing worthy victims, ideally enemy Aztecs, to their priests so that the fifth sun rose every morning. Both the US and the Aztec/Tenoch/Mexica impose some similar requirements on those who commit themselves to a willingness to die for their country. A key issue is the authoritarianism to which they are subject and the dubiousness of the claim that they share real interests with their masters and receive an equivalent amount of benefit from their sacrifices.

Briefly, I argue that successful imperialist societies always impose great sacrifices, including death and physical injury, on their victims, the members of the societies that they dominate – one only has to pay attention to the mass killings engaged in by Belgium, France, Britain, Spain, Germany, and the USA – but, in the process, they also are careless about the lives and well being of many of their own members. While the first of these is generally understood to be suffered involuntarily, and a matter-of-fact

consequence of war, the latter is represented as a quite voluntary choice of patriotic citizens. But, if so, it is often only formally so. When any society recruits its military through the draft, its claim to have a volunteer army is severely compromised. It is even more compromised if members of relatively poor, low status groups are the most likely to be drafted or, absent a draft, are more likely to volunteer, if they have few alternative work opportunities. In either case they will not be tutored in more than rudimentary military skills, will be low in rank and will thus have little opportunity to be part of decision-making processes. Military leaders tend to be recruited from relatively high status groups and to be provided with intense training, and are often much better equipped than the rank and file. They also tend to have more clandestine opportunities to avoid active service if they wish to do so. The attrition rate for rank and file soldiers and ordinary warriors is usually significantly higher than for elite personnel. These features are common to both American Imperialist armies and to the Aztec armies. For example, in a routine war in which they were victors the Aztecs lost about 20% of their warriors and if they were defeated, which they were, not infrequently, up to 80% of their warriors. Most of these were the peasants warriors obliged to serve the Triple Alliance. Arguably human sacrifice is an alternative to, but little different from, the mass slaughter typical of colonial wars. Human sacrifice is routine in imperialistic societies although it is only sometimes ritualized.

**SB: As a final question, I'd like to return to the role of Marxist thinking for interrogating crimes of the powerful. What are your thoughts about the state of Marxist scholarship today as it relates to this issue? I'm thinking particularly about the recent upsurge in Marxist commentaries following the 2008 global financial meltdown. While this work has produced considerable insight into the contradictions of capitalism that helped generate the economic crisis, there seems to be an almost begrudging or qualified acceptance of this work in broader academic circles – that it has its place in understanding the nature of the problem but only in these 'extreme' cases and only to the extent that this way of thinking does not lead to socialist struggles. Perhaps this is most clearly reflected by the fact that state responses to the 2008 crisis have been, for the most part, more of the same and few academics appear interested in a truly Marxian resolution to the contradictions of capitalism.**

FP: I think that the place to start is to consider the role of hegemony. Hegemonic ideologies limit the ability of those caught within them to move there thinking beyond their received wisdom. This is even true when the mismatch between how its crowing cheerleaders represent capitalism and its observable inability to delivery on its promises become glaringly obvious; these promises include a generalized shared prosperity, and a society that is essentially meritocratic. Members of such societies reflecting upon their own experiences and

what they hear and read – even when much of it is framed in terms of conservative ideologies – find these promises increasingly difficult to reconcile with these experiences. We need only look to the implausibilities associated with the growing disparity between the extremely wealthy minority versus the majority who suffer the consequences of this increasing concentration of power and resources and the failure of these elites to do anything about the problem of global warming. This creates a problem for all whose horizon of possibilities is limited to versions of capitalist economies and compatible legal and other institutions. Thus, if we look at the corporate crime literature, we see a long tradition of pluralistic thinking. And when these pluralist theorists are confronted with clear contradictions in capital, and when there are dramatic crises as we saw in 2008, then there may be recognition of the need to broaden their thinking. But there is little evidence that the corpus of the work of critical scholars including Dave Whyte, Steve Tombs and myself, among others, who have argued this position for decades, is attended to.

There is a definite lack of serious debate. Marxism has a reputation for criticizing other views and so it should. One aspect of this is identifying confusions, incoherences and contradictions in one or more theoretical discourse(s) but, if possible, to then move beyond them by a transcendental synthesis of what is valid in each. Such critical readings need to be scrupulously accurate in their account of the discourse, including its tacit assumptions, and carefully

cite the evidence that justifies negative judgements. This can produce counter critiques and an agonistic relationship may develop. This kind of challenge is intrinsic to intellectual development and the current tendency to avoid serious engagements can only particularly limit the robustness of theories not willing to engage with critiques. Without challenge and exchange theories and theorists are likely to become more and more tautological. In this context there is a sort of endless revisability to discourse that allows pluralists not to address the contradictions that Marxism so clearly demonstrates.

This is not to deny that pluralism can and has developed. In the last 20 years or so neo-pluralist political science, for example in the works of Peter Gourevitch, Charles Lindblom March and Olsen etc., has become increasingly significant. Some limited recognition of the effects of economic inequality on the politics of the economy can be seen in the following quotation from Lindblom:

The system works that way not because business people conspire or plan to punish us, but simply because many kinds of institutional changes are of a character they do not like and consequently reduce the inducements we count on to motivate them to provide jobs and perform their other functions... The penalty visited on [government officials] by business disincentives caused by proposed policies is that declining business activity is a threat to the party and the

officials in power (cited in Bruff and Hartmann. 2014)

This formulation is very similar to those developed by such early neo-liberal thinkers as Anthony Downs and Gary Becker which Steve and I critiqued in *Toxic Capitalism*. This quotation is taken from a forceful and compelling critique of the whole movement of this new institutionalist pluralist understanding of economy and politics to be found in a recent special issue of the journal, *Capital and Class* (including contributions from David Coates and Bob Jessop) (2014, Vol. 38, No. 1). The authors in this special issue point to how much these newer theorists rely on an American neoliberal understanding of capitalism and they do not adequately engage with other more radical theories. They fail to adequately conceptualise the nature of capitalism. They still take for granted that profit is primarily an incentive and reward for investment and fail to recognize that its changing rate is inversely related to changes in the amounts of money paid in wages; in other words at any time only so much surplus is available and it either goes to increases in wages either increasing the value of their labour power or increasing the rate of profit. Moreover that there is always a struggle over this both at the point of production and in the movement of the different circuits of capital and also in how the state should intervene in the economy and in the distribution of the funds that it controls. These processes create instabilities and difficulties and along with general movements in culture are the unplannable consequence of many heterogeneous processes that shape the

possibility and modes of securing the expanded reproduction of capital

There's a final point that I'd like to make here, and it relates to the work of Antonio Labriola who noted that the beginning of the 19th century marked the emergence of the proletariat. It was a time when labour became disembodied from the community; the idea that basically certain propertyless and unrooted people were for all intents and purposes replaceable, one with the other, and their individuality was a matter of indifference. Workers were together out of a contingent necessity and neither formed nor represented any community. They were alienated. Labriola goes on to say that Marx and the other communists were writing at a unique moment historically – they were witnessing the creation of abstract labour – and their interpretation of this played a key role in the self-consciousness of workers. The Communist Manifesto is a prescient document that catalogued a key moment, but what I think is really important is that there is nothing essential about this outcome, it is all contingent. It was within this context that both Labriola and Gramsci clearly stressed the necessity to organize and change people's consciousness to challenge the non-essentialist reality of abstract labour.

So, if we return to my work in *Crimes of the Powerful*, I've always found it peculiar that it is seen by some as being reductionist or economistic. Its actual underpinning assumption is that the social world is a creation of social beings in relationships, but people do what they can with what they have within the particular social relations and

discourses. It's about how capitalism comes through societies and relations to produce economic reductionism, not that the analysis is reductionist. Capitalism is a force, not a planned or automatic outcome. We therefore need to remember that there are examples of capitalism failing and we should note that there has been a failure to date to resolve the contradictions made manifest in the financial crisis of 2006-2008.