

# Book review

Pamela Davies reviews *Corporate Crime* (1999) by Gary Slapper and Steve Tombs, published by Longman Criminology Series.

It has been commonplace to preface a discussion on white-collar crime with comments about the paucity of literature in that field. More recently this criticism is less valid, although the accessibility and exposure of this work is still somewhat constrained. Corporate crime has suffered a similar fate. The literature specific to corporate crime has tended to comprise of case study material (Braithwaite, 1984, Ermann and Lundman, (1978 original) which is often corporation-specific and now dated. It is still a valid observation that few criminology textbooks index corporate crime, although one recent exception is the undergraduate text *The Problem of Crime* (edited by John Muncie and Eugene McLaughlin, 1996). Slapper and Tombs likewise point out that the study of white-collar crime has been marginalised within criminology and also by undergraduate courses. Moreover, within the area of white-collar crime corporate crime has been marginalised still further. *Corporate Crime* offers a long awaited remedy to many of the limitations surrounding the currently available literature. It can be described as a general book on corporate crime in the sense that it is not a case-study based approach. Rather, it contains within it examples and illustrations mostly drawn from the area of safety and health crimes. It can be viewed as an ambitious attempt to combine a textbook approach to the subject of corporate crime, together with a particular perspective favoured and developed by the authors elsewhere.

The book consists of ten chapters, the contents of which are clearly labelled with meaningful sub-sections. The introduction includes a useful discussion on the distinctions between white-collar and corporate crime, rooting the debate in the theoretical work of Sutherland and Tappan. This is followed by an historical and detailed examination of how criminal law and criminal justice policies, origi-

nally devised for dealing with the individual, have been developed and adapted in order to deal with corporations. These early chapters indicate an attention to detail that is followed throughout the remainder of the text. Chapter Three looks at types of corporate crime and divides previous work into two traditions, the quantitative and the qualitative, which is further divided into useful sub-headings: case studies; types of crimes; industry specific case studies. Chapter Four continues measuring the extent of corporate crime by counting and costing it. This and the following chapter also explore various aspects of victimisation. In chapters six and seven the authors confront the problem of explaining or 'accounting' for corporate crime. This part of the book addresses the questions: what contribution does criminology make to our understanding of corporate crime?; and, is corporate crime endemic within capitalism? Chapter Eight, entitled 'Regulating Corporations', addresses control of corporate crime and the authors explore the case for following the political economy approach, calling for an understanding of 'the reality of corporate power' and of 'regulation from the point of view of states economies societies' (p194). Following on from this Chapter Nine explores a wide range of sanctions and debates applicable to corporate punishment.

Each chapter has its own conclusion in addition to the concluding chapter. It is mostly in these sections (and chapters eight and nine) that the authors further develop their own perspective on corporate crime and how it can be critically researched in order to contribute towards a critical social science. Slapper and Tombs adopt a deliberately broad (though not woolly) and inclusive definition of corporate crime and provide convincing arguments (particularly in chapters one to five) for doing so. They argue that the profit-motive is paramount for a corporation operating within a capitalist social order and the need to maximise profitability means that businesses make rational, amoral calculations resulting in safety and health crimes. They go on to argue that when reactions and responses to these crimes occur the focus is often upon powerless individuals and this consequently produces a 'distorted gaze' in respect of regulation and punishment issues.

The book is not a simplistic account of the title subject. A major criticism is levelled at the body of work on white-collar crime. It is referred to as being under-developed theoretically. This book takes the task of theorising the subject seriously. It is theoretically grounded and does not shy away from this difficult task from beginning to end. As a general comment, however, the book has a tendency to oscillate between two purposes. Chapter Eight can be used to illustrate this point. The discussion on 'regulating corporations' addresses the criminalisation model versus the co-operation model, but in such a way that the chapter does not read as a self-contained debate which might be expected of an undergraduate student text. This chapter reads as an ongoing critique of the interactionist and compliance schools which, the authors argue, tend to ignore the importance of the concept of power (politics and economics) in their work. Such treatment of the subject pushes forward the frontiers in respect of academic theorising on corporate crime and is on a different plane to the writing in other parts of the book. An undergraduate text might be expected to introduce this debate at a more basic level. There appears to be an uneasy balance between these twin endeavours which is managed better in some parts of the book than others.

Overall, *Corporate Crime* is a highly useful book for people who teach and research corporate crime. Students at undergraduate level may find the book challenging but, nevertheless, a thorough initiation into the sub-discipline. The text draws upon a vast range of literature sources and a variety of sources of information; all in all, it provides an invaluable source of reference. Not only does this result in an extensive bibliography but suggestions for further reading relating to each of the substantive chapters are also provided, in addition to a full and thorough index. It is scholarly, deserves to be widely read and, as they had hoped, 'is more than simply an academic text.... this is also an attempt to engage on both practical (policy-making) and political levels' (p21). A welcome text, long overdue and an invaluable contribution to the field.

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