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CRIME AND POLITICAL ECONOMY

Ian Taylor

Crime and Political Economy

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Crime and Political Economy

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Series Preface

The International Library of Criminology, Criminal Justice and Penology, represents an important publishing initiative designed to bring together the most significant journal essays in contemporary criminology, criminal justice and penology. The series makes available to researchers, teachers and students an extensive range of essays which are indispensable for obtaining an overview of the latest theories and findings in this fast changing subject.

This series consists of volumes dealing with criminological schools and theories as well as with approaches to particular areas of crime, criminal justice and penology. Each volume is edited by a recognised authority who has selected twenty or so of the best journal articles in the field of their special competence and provided an informative introduction giving a summary of the field and the relevance of the articles chosen. The original pagination is retained for ease of reference.

The difficulties of keeping on top of the steadily growing literature in criminology are complicated by the many disciplines from which its theories and findings are drawn (sociology, law, sociology of law, psychology, psychiatry, philosophy and economics are the most obvious). The development of new specialisms with their own journals (policing, victimology, mediation) as well as the debates between rival schools of thought (feminist criminology, left realism, critical criminology, abolitionism etc.) make necessary overviews that offer syntheses of the state of the art. These problems are addressed by the INTERNATIONAL LIBRARY in making available for research and teaching the key essays from specialist journals.

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Introduction

Generally speaking, criminologists working in Western societies during most of the post-Second World War period have largely been uninterested in matters of 'political economy'. In circumstances, such as in the 1960s, in which relatively full employment seemed to obtain and in which some scholarly commentators were talking of societies 'beyond scarcity',[1] the study of political economy was identified as a quaint preoccupation of the academic specialist but of no immediate practical policy relevance. In the turbulent 1990s, however, with European unemployment rates at their highest level in the entire post-war period – about 11 per cent of all those looking for work across Western Europe or over 18 million Europeans without paid work (Judt, 1995) – and agitated discussion in many circles about the 'end of employment' as we know it (Aronowitz and Di Fazio, 1994; Rifkin, 1995), it has become difficult for academic social scientists of any persuasion to ignore the importance of understanding the broad parameters of 'political economy'. In Europe as in North America, there is a renewed interest in understanding the relationships between the logic of economic change and technological development, political decision-making, 'the quality of life' and, indeed, the issue of crime and public order: in the United States, for example, in some of the debates around Amitai Etzioni's communitarian text *The Spirit of Community* (1993) and, more recently, around Robert Kuttner's detailed examination of 'the virtues and limits of markets', *Everything for Sale* (1996) and, in Britain, in the extraordinary response evoked by Will Hutton's fundamental critique of conditions of social life in free market Britain, *The State We're In* (1995), now reissued as an updated second edition.

What seems to be happening, in many ways, is the reinvention of the kind of 'political economy' that was most familiar to scholars and thinkers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries – a form of political, social and, indeed, moral philosophy concerned not only with the description of economic arrangements but also with the contemplation of their normative grounding (or justification) and the lived consequences of particular sets of economic organization (for example, the 'global free market'). This was the period which gave rise not just to a rich variety of philosophical creativity (Bentham, Mill, Montesquieu, and the Scottish moralists (Hume, Ferguson, Adam Smith) – sometimes all categorized together, far too loosely, as Utilitarianism – but also many other moral and political investigations into the possible ways of organizing the relationship between human labour, production and the organization of the 'good life'. Not least of these traditions in the UK were the variously utopian writings of William Morris, Edward Carpenter and, from a different point of view, John Ruskin. In the United States itself, still struggling to find a moral basis for its conquest of the first nations (the Indian peoples) and the settlement of that continent, the writings of Walt Whitman had importance for a certain audience.

One of the issues that is dramatically posed in this contemporary reinvention of political economy is, of course, the direction of contemporary economic theory and analysis itself and, indeed, the ability of the discipline of economics, as currently defined, to make good sense of the radical changes now rapidly taking place in forms of economic life. From the late nineteenth century onwards, the discipline of economics has essentially been dominated by

versions of mathematical model-building, focused on the description or prediction of individual choice-making in particular, very specifically defined, sets of circumstances. There have, of course, been significant changes in scholarly emphasis and interest – from the study of 'marginal utility' to the modern-day interest in 'rational choice' – but the fundamental concern has remained that of studying the rationality of individual 'economic men'. As many commentators now observe, that particular version of the responsibilities of economics is very seriously challenged by the kinds of fundamental change that have occurred, and are continuing to occur, within the broad parameters of economic life itself – variously described as 'the crisis of mass manufacturing' (Piore and Sabel, 1984), the emergence of post-Fordist systems of production, advertising and distribution (Amin, 1995) and/or the advent of 'New Times' and global economic competition (Hall and Jacques, 1990). As we shall see, however, it is precisely in this set of circumstances that economists of neoclassical persuasion have had the courage to advance the use of their (unrevised) models of choice-making and economic rationality into the cognate fields of social science, including the study of crime itself. Encouraged, on occasion, by managers of the criminal justice system, including senior police officers themselves, and aided by quantified, computerized information (notably, crime pattern analysis), economists have come to play a new and increasingly influential role in decisions being made at the managerial level about the deployment of scarce resources in the struggle against crime within existing economic arrangements – that is, within individual Western national societies which are currently struggling to come to terms with the demise of Fordist system of manufacturing and the decline of the Keynesian welfare state.[2]

I have discussed some of the significant issues involved in the re-emergence of political economy versus the ambitions of a neoclassical economics, fixated on the idea of crime as resulting from opportunities presented to individuals, elsewhere (Taylor, 1994). My objectives in editing this volume are to try to bring together a set of materials which students of crime – who increasingly recognize the provenance of the larger issue of economic forms and their general and specific social impact – will find useful as a way of mapping the overall area, and also as a starting point for individual research projects. I have organized this volume into seven Parts and tried to identify at least one important or representative piece on the theme of each Part. Inevitably, this exercise has involved editorial decisions with which others would disagree. I have not, for example, included here any of the empirical studies into the relationship between the business cycle and crime rates which were important in France (as well as in Belgium, Italy and Germany) in the early to mid-nineteenth century, and which some commentators perceive as the originating literature of positivistic criminology in the twentieth century, particularly in the United States (Pasquino, 1980). One reason why I have omitted these is because they were so helpfully discussed, several years ago, by George Vold in the first edition of his *Theoretical Criminology* (1969) as well as by Pasquino. Nor have I ventured at all into twentieth-century Russian and Eastern European criminology between 1917 and *perestroika* – 'Soviet Marxist criminology' with its particular version of a political economy of crime (cf., for example, Buchholz *et al.*, 1974) – since it seems to me that this literature deserves an extended treatment in a dedicated volume.[3] I am sure that there are many other omissions, but I hope that the framework I have followed makes some useful sense of the pattern and preoccupations of the criminological literature which I have gathered together here, and that the result will be of use to students for some considerable time to come.

The Marxist Tradition

Marx

The volume opens with two essays from the 1970s, exemplifying the overall approach adopted by Marxist criminologists at that time to the aetiology of crime. The choice of Marxist texts is inescapable since, during this period (and, indeed, throughout most of the earlier post-war period) there was a real sense in which the only intellectual tradition which had attempted to foreground 'political economy' *was* Marxism. Specifically sociological analysis between the Second World War and the early 1970s remained wedded to the idea of a general theory of social action in which the idea of political economy, or any other 'structural' variable, played a role strictly as a secondary issue – for example, as the source of the 'blockage of opportunity' in Robert Merton's theory of social structure and anomie (Merton, 1938). Marxism, in different forms, was in many ways more inspiring a resource for the increasing numbers of critically-minded students of social action in this period, not just as a way of making sense of the 'real' or 'material' limits that seemed to play on human activity but also because of the body of concepts and ideas it brought to bear on the analysis of those limits and inequalities. Not least of these ideas was that of materialist analysis itself: the notion that developments in social relations (particularly the patterned character of social inequalities) over time are an effect of developments occurring in the economic base of society – that is, in what Marxists called the 'mode of production'.

In the mid-1960s Bill Chambliss, in trying to sketch out an argument for such a political economy of crime, was very much a lone voice in American criminology and his well known historical analysis of the vagrancy laws of Elizabethan England, originally published in *Social Problems* in 1964–65 and presented here as Chapter 1, is noteworthy for its use of an indirect kind of terminology[4] and its leanings towards Weberian 'interest group' analysis, rather than a materialist analysis as such. But the thrust of Chambliss' central argument – anticipating the interest shown later in Rusche and Kirchheimer's analysis of shifts in modes of punishment – was that the criminalization and harsh treatment of the vagrant in the early 1600s are to be understood to result from the creation of a system of deterrence – a threat to any 'free labourer' resisting the discipline of the labour market.

Peter Linebaugh's less frequently cited essay (see Chapter 2), from an early issue of *Crime and Social Justice*, was an inspired attempt to follow through on a similar kind of Marxist reasoning with respect to the imposition of new law in this instance by the agricultural bourgeoisie of the Rhineland, on an issue about which Marx himself had written, journalistically, in five articles in the *Rheinische Zeitung* in 1842 – the 'theft' of wood lying on the floor of the forest by local workers. Central to Linebaugh's pioneering analysis – in part influenced, no doubt, by work undertaken with the famous English Marxist historian E.P. Thompson – was the conflict between local Prussian workers' conception of their customary rights to this wood (and, indeed, their view that such wood was common property) and the determination of the Prussian agriculturalists during this period to put the whole production process under the emerging discipline of capitalism.

Taken together, these two essays are useful examples of the early attempts made by social scientists in this period to apply some of the conceptual apparatus which the Marxism of that period made available. We shall see later how this first embrace of a Marxist materialism –

with its insistence on the idea of correspondence or even determinate relationship between the economic base and 'superstructural' social relationships (including those governing by law) – was to be modified by other, more elaborate considerations.

Willem Bonger

One of the reference points for any criminologist venturing into Marxist political economy in the 1960s and early 1970s was the work, earlier in the twentieth century, of the Dutch Marxist criminologist, Willem Bonger (1876–1940). Bonger had been widely known in the 1930s and 1940s, especially in continental Europe, not only for his three very significant tomes of criminological scholarship, *An Introduction to Criminology* (1936), *Criminality and Economic Conditions* (1916)[5] and *Race and Crime* (1943), but also for the courageous stand he took throughout the 1930s against the advance of Nazi and other forms of extreme right-wing thinking about crime and jurisprudence.[6] At a time when all kinds of individualistic, pathological and, of course, racialist theories of criminality were in the ascendancy, Bonger made it his responsibility to sketch out the connections between the crises in capitalist economy in the late 1920s and early 1930s and the continuing inequalities of social position even during the recovery of the 1930s, all the while attempting to advance what we may call a materialist social psychology of crime – an attempt to explain the social pattern of the distribution of criminal motivations and thoughts. I have explored the parameters and limits of Bonger's materialist psychology elsewhere (Taylor, Walton and Young, 1973, ch. 6); here I have included, as Chapter 3, what I consider to be a useful detailed overview of *Criminality and Economic Conditions* – an essay by Barry Mike, first published in the *International Journal of Criminology and Penology* in 1976.

Rusche and Kirchheimer

The publication of an English translation of Dario Melossi and Massimo Pavarini's *The Prison and the Factory* in 1981 signalled the reawakening of an interest amongst students of crime and law in political economy.[7] The interest now, however, was not just an interest in seeing 'political economy' as a background variable to known instances of criminal behaviour (and in this sense as a part of a straightforward 'empiricist materialism'), but rather in the contribution of political economy to the understanding of the 'deep structures' or 'inner dynamics' both of 'crime' and of social responses to crime – the 'structures of social control'. Melossi and Pavarini, working together in Bologna under the influence of Alessandro Baratta, had 'rediscovered' the seminal text, first published in 1939 by Columbia Press, but largely ignored by American criminology in the subsequent period, Georg Rusche and Otto Kirchheimer's *Punishment and Social Structure*. This text, now generally seen as the work, primarily, of Georg Rusche, an enigmatic but gifted German Marxist who went into exile in England in the 1930s,[8] makes a serious attempt to ground an analysis of patterns of punishment (the exercise of penality) as a key element in the control of labour in different periods of the business cycle in capitalist societies. Prisons are identified specifically not in terms of their own ideological description as reformatories or agencies of rehabilitation but as institutions involved in the containment of the 'reserve army of labour' in capitalist societies, and this analysis is carefully grounded in a detailed analysis of patterns of

unemployment and imprisonment in different European countries in the early twentieth century. Another distinctive feature of *Punishment and Social Structure* – less frequently discussed in the secondary literature – is its analysis of the way in which legal and social ideologies worked to legitimize and make sense of the imposition of increasing levels of penal discipline – for example, by shifts in the demands being made in respect of 'good citizenship' (notably, in Nazi Germany). The text also contains the outline of a materialist historical sociology of law and penality for the early and late Middle Ages, and early modern capitalist period, informed (as in Chambliss) by an interest in filling out the connection between the development of 'the mode of production' dominant in a particular period and the structures of social discipline and control.

As a resource for the study of the vital contribution of Georg Rusche to the political economy of crime and punishment, we include as Chapter 4 Dario Melossi's translation of Rusche's 1933 essay ('Arbeitsmarkt und Strafvollzug' – 'Labour Market and Penal Sanction'), originally written as a research proposal for the Frankfurt School of Social Research. The essay sketches out many of the key ideas which informed the longer manuscript written by Rusche in Germany and England in the mid-1930s but eventually reworked by Otto Kirchheimer in New York later in the 1930s. The relevance of this kind of analysis to the post-Fordist circumstances engulfing Europe in the 1990s, where unemployment is currently stuck at over 11 per cent of the labour force and prison populations have increased by some 25 per cent between 1990 and 1995, is unmistakeable.

Ideology, Crime Creation and Crime Control in Capitalist Society

The renewed interest in the analytical power of Marxist political economy, beginning in the late 1960s and continuing through the 1970s, was in no sense confined to academic criminologists, and indeed was in many ways more marked amongst sociologists, political scientists and, especially, geographers. In England, one of the most important influences was in the field of historical scholarship, led by a generation of historians (Christopher Hill, Eric Hobsbawm and E.P. Thompson) whose earlier intellectual formation had involved an ongoing dialogue with the materialism of orthodox Marxism, as nurtured within the Communist Party.[9] It was under the leadership of E.P. Thompson, in particular, at the University of Warwick, that the attention of younger historians turned away from a purely economic and mechanical reading of the invisible logic of political economy to the analysis of the complex play of ideas, values and beliefs with which living, breathing human beings made sense of the constraints and possibilities of the circumstances ('not of their own choosing') into which they were born. The work of this Warwick group is on record for posterity in the collection of essays published in 1975, *Albion's Fatal Tree* (Hay *et al.*, 1975), and in Edward Thompson's magisterial analysis of the Black Act of 1723, *Whigs and Hunters* (Thompson, 1975).

We include here, from *Albion's Fatal Tree*, the essay by Douglas Hay on 'Property, Authority and the Criminal Law' (Chapter 5) which has attained an almost classic status as an illustration of the rich potential of a Marxism focused on ideological re-representation (for example, in law) and in the understanding of practical aspects of the operation of law in particular historical moments – in this instance, the widespread availability, during the eighteenth century, of capital punishment as a sanction for a variety of behaviours by the

peasantry, but the highly selective and patterned use of this sanction by the local magistracy. In Hay's essay, we glimpse the first moves towards the systematic study of the relationships between law, crime and popular 'common sense' to be taken up later in the 1970s by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies – moving Marxism rather further away from its materialist underpinning into a dialogue with theories of ideology and political and social struggles conducted in the sphere of the mass media (Hall *et al.*, 1978). By way of a contrast with the developments taking place on the other side of the Atlantic, particularly in the camp of critical sociology, we also include, as Chapter 6, a well known essay by Steven Spitzer, originally published in 1979, which attempts to present a systematic overview of the relationship between changes in the forms of organization of productive arrangements under capitalism and the 'rationalization of social relations' which accompanies these changes. Like the work undertaken by the historians at Warwick, this essay had an importance due to its attempt to achieve some analytic distance on forms of Marxist argument couched in terms of inevitabilities and one-dimensional processes of 'economic determination'. Influenced in part by the structural Marxism of Louis Althusser and Nicos Poulantzas, Spitzer wanted instead to encourage close attention to the 'general tendencies' (for example, in the sphere of penality) obtaining in particular social formations at particular times, whilst also allowing for the notion of contradiction between particular local developments.[10]

Twentieth-century Empirical Political Economy of Crime and Punishment

Some of the issues raised by this investigation of the inner logic of capitalist labour markets and systems of punishment are available, in principle, to empirical investigation and elucidation. In 1982 and, again, in 1985, Steven Box and Chris Hale revisited Rusche and Kirchheimer's theses about the relationship between the development of the labour market and penal discipline. Through straightforward and careful examination of the relevant official statistics Box and Hale were able, to demonstrate that the task undertaken by the prison in capitalist societies cannot be understood simply and exclusively as that of containment and warehousing of the unemployed 'reserve army of labour'. Crucially, only a very small proportion of the unemployed population can ever be contained within a prison system, particularly as at moments of deep crisis in the capitalist productive cycle. In their essays Box and Hale presented a close examination of the 'rising prisoner population' of England and Wales during the 1970s, as a symptom of what they see as a move towards intensified framework of ideological deterrence, coinciding with the first indications of the collapse of 'full employment' (or unemployment measured, officially, at less than 2 per cent) in England and Wales during that period. Box and Hale's analysis – closely paralleling the Birmingham School's analysis of the shift from a welfare state into a 'law and order society' – was important for the clarification it provided of the meaning of different sets of official statistics: the size of the prison population was for them a symptom, or an indicator, of the level of *ideological pressure* thought desirable by the political class, the magistracy, and/or senior police officers, in particular historical conjunctures.

Box and Hale's use of empirical materials was distinctive for its focus on the examination (or even the 'test' it provided) of a specific theoretical account in the tradition of political economy. Much of the other empirical literature in criminology on the political economy of

crime and punishment operates without any such theoretical ambition. Particularly in the United States, there is a voluminous literature investigating the statistical relationships between different aspects of 'the economy' (especially unemployment) and crime, in which 'the economy' has no greater significance in principle than any other variable that could have been chosen (for example, levels of police presence, the severity of local magisterial sentences and so on). In some respects, the work in this tradition is a twentieth-century variant of the kind of statistical investigations that was widely undertaken, during the nineteenth century, in different European societies into patterns of crime – for example, in relation to the business cycle or to consumer prices (which are discussed in Vold, 1969, ch. 9 and also in Taylor, 1994).

However, there is also a more committed kind of socially reformist scholarship at work in some of this literature, which attempts to underline or demonstrate, for example, the socially and personally destructive aspects or pathological consequences of unemployment. This kind of work can best be understood, perhaps, as a modern-day expression of the work of one of the three founding fathers of the *Scuola Positiva* in Italy – Enrico Ferri – in trying to bring a positivist method to bear on the sphere of political economy. During the 1970s and 1980s one of the most ardent proponents of this tradition was Harvey Brenner, Professor of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University, who spent considerable time and effort carrying out empirical investigations in that country (and also in Canada and Britain) into the effects of increases in unemployment. His work was well known in that period for its attempts to demonstrate a causal connection between unemployment and high levels of crime, as well as with both social and personal tragedies (ill-health, mortality and suicide).[11] It is also widely discussed for its use of a version of 'lag' or 'time-series analysis', in which the effects of changes in unemployment levels were examined over a three-year period, rather than contemporaneously.[12]

In the 1980s and 1990s there have been a large number of subsequent studies into the statistical relationships between unemployment, in particular, and crime, mostly using some more or less sophisticated version of correlational analysis. We have chosen to include here only the one example – Cantor and Land's analysis of time-series data from the United States for the period 1946 to 1982 – which is distinctive for its attempt to break down the effect of increases in unemployment on *different categories of recorded offences*. Unsurprisingly in many ways, this study, presented as Chapter 6, seemed to give considerable support to arguments about the impact of increases in unemployment on property crime but was less clear in respect of the relationship of unemployment with crimes of violence and other crimes against the person. Similar studies continue to be produced during the 1990s, with the important new addition of more sophisticated and detailed analysis of the cumulative and concentrated effects of the increasing social inequality that is now characteristic of many Western societies (Hagan and Peterson, 1995) and, in the United States, William Julius Wilson's project of demonstrating the concentrated impact of absolute and relative deprivation (as well as discrimination) on American blacks (Wilson, 1987).

Neoclassical Economics and Rational Choice Approaches to Crime

For most of the twentieth century, the study of crime has been perceived as being outside the ambit of classical economic analysis. A discipline which has been rigidly focused around idea of the rational choice-maker – 'economic man' – in the respectable pursuit of the private good, seemed unable to encompass the idea of freely chosen but disreputable activity (no matter how public its effects). The essay by Gary Becker reprinted here as Chapter 8, from the *Journal of Political Economy* in 1968, had a very fundamental impact in legitimizing the extension of the basic theorems of neoclassical economic theory into all forms of 'business'. The essay helped win Becker a Nobel Prize in Economics, and acted as a beacon for many other similarly minded economic scholars, such as Isaac Ehrlich, whose main essay on rational participation in illegitimate activity follows as Chapter 9. Both these essays are characterized, as with all such neoclassical model-building, by a commitment to the possibility of objective analysis of the determinate relationships between individuals' positions within a particular set of political–economic arrangements, and the (rational) choices which they are likely to make. During the 1970s and 1980s Becker and Ehrlich were amongst a very small number of neoclassical economists interested in such issues, and hence the equation in the academy of the political economy of crime with Marxist and post-Marxist social and political theory was relatively unchallenged. But, since the mid-1990s, we have been witness to the development of a considerable body of new economic writing, attempting to advance beyond the analysis of individual choice-making in the abstract, to the identification of different specific situations of opportunity in which the committal of crime might be understood as a rational choice. The development of 'opportunity theories' of crime has partly been encouraged over the last 20 years by the increasing interest shown both by the state itself and political leaderships in technical, rather than fundamental political and social, solutions to crime – for example, in new architectural systems ('designing out crime') or refurbishment of hitherto existing buildings or public spaces ('target hardening') (Newman, 1973). However, it is also to be understood as a particular expression of the return in many Western societies to what we may call 'analytically individualist' theories of human behaviour. In this instance, the focus is not on individual emotion or irrationality but rather on individual rationality and calculation, and on the possibility of modelling these rational processes predictively, with a view to enhancing the effectivity of systems of crime prevention (Cornish and Clarke, 1986).

In terms of social scientific explanation, the methodological individualism of rational choice theory sets it at the opposite end of the spectrum from the materialism and structuralism of Marxist political economy, and, in the absence of a shared language of explanation and approach, exchange and debate between proponents of these positions is difficult. The different approaches will continue to have a serious impact on criminological analysis in the final years of this century, however, because they do both claim to have purchase on the impact of economic arrangements, both in general and in particular, on social behaviour and, indeed, on people's recruitment into individual criminal acts or into criminal careers.

White-collar and Professional Crime: Sutherland and Beyond

In principle, of course, rational choice theory and neoclassical economics could be applied to offence behaviours at any level of the social formation. In practice, there has been a tendency for such work to focus very heavily on specific instances of street crime (for example, of thefts from/of cars, particularly from car parks), burglaries from businesses or residential premises or thefts and assaults (particularly in urban spaces). By contrast, a key emphasis in much of the empirical work undertaken by criminologists (as well as by sociologists of law) working in the tradition of Marxist or socially reformist political economy was on 'the criminality of the powerful' and/or the different set of social control processes that seemed to be associated with that kind of criminality (the question of the 'differential enforcement of penalties'). The criminological literature on white-collar crime and organized crime have been the focus of separate volumes in the Dartmouth International Library of Criminology, Criminal Justice and Penology (Nelken, 1994; Passas, 1994), and we include only three examples here. Frank Pearce's essay (Chapter 10), 'Crime, Corporations and the American Social Order', originally published in 1973, was important for the commitment to make use of Marxist political economy in the analysis of white-collar crime in America and therefore, in effect, to construct an alternative starting point for understanding the essential core of white-collar crime to that advanced by Edwin Sutherland himself in his celebrated text of 1948 – in what was essentially a social-psychologistic approach – 'differential association theory' (Sutherland, 1949).

Kit Carson's essay – a chapter from his book of the same title – published in 1980 and presented as Chapter 11, is included as a record of the extraordinary level of detail and subtlety which some analysts were able to apply to the study, from the political economy perspective, of different kinds of infractions and also the range of their vision in terms of explaining the impact of such a political economy. In this instance, Carson focused on the ways in which executives of the oil companies working on rigs in the North Sea in the 1970s and the United Kingdom's safety inspectorates came to the committed view that the urgency of economic return from North Sea Oil countermanded, in practice, the laws on the books, especially with regard to worker safety. This was a text, of course, which in effect predicted later disasters – in this instance, the Piper Alpha disaster of 1987 in which 125 oil workers lost their lives. But it also stands as evidence of the kind of detailed and extensive work which a committed empirical investigation of the political economy of crime might involve: a model even for our times, some 20 years on.

Mike Levi has himself been a model in his own right, in Britain and Europe as a whole, of a criminological scholar who has not felt content with the broad-brush of theoretical generalization, but who has instead been able to advance the cause of detailed and empirical research very significantly, even in the sequestered and relatively impenetrable spheres of white-collar and economic crime. From an extensive *oeuvre* of important empirical work (in which Levi has become the British expert on fraud investigation and trials), we have selected for Chapter 12 Mike Levi's recent essay on the nature of the decisions taken *not* to prosecute businesspeople, especially on so-called 'public interest' grounds. This essay can fruitfully be read alongside the recent work of scholars such as Donatella della Porta and Alessandro Pizzorno (1995), on the rise of the business-politician, as evidence of the problems involved in bringing white-collar and economic crimes to account in societies dominated by market goals – this being an issue to which we shall return.