

## **BOOK REVIEWS**

### **Global Capitalism, the Ecological Crisis, and the Quest for Environmental Justice**

*Eric Krieg*

**Daniel Faber, *Capitalizing on Environmental Injustice: The Polluter-Industrial Complex in the Age of Globalization*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2008.**

The age of globalization brings new challenges to both the environment and the environmental movement. In his new book, *Capitalizing on Environmental Injustice: The Polluter-Industrial Complex in the Age of Globalization*, Daniel Faber exposes the roots of environmental injustices at the local and global levels, convincingly arguing that the global neoliberal agenda is having devastating impacts on the quality of life for people around the world. Rather than analyzing globalization *per se*, Faber instead focuses on the impacts of neoliberalism (trade liberalization, deregulation, and privatization) in an era of globalization. This allows for a systematic analysis of ongoing political economic forces and for a pointed critique of how corporate-led globalization is taking place, thereby avoiding the clichéd question of whether globalization is good or bad. In this way, Faber is able to address more substantive issues of neo-colonialism, ecological unequal exchange, and the crisis of global capitalism.

According to Faber, the *polluter-industrial complex* is a sophisticated organizational infrastructure led by the most powerful corporate polluters in the United States. Made of think tanks, policy institutes, research centers, foundations, legal associations, political action committees, public relations firms, and “Astroturf” organizations, the polluter-industrial complex is “...committed to discrediting the environmental movement and to dismantling state programs and policies that promote environmental justice, protect public health, and safeguard the earth.” [p. 15.]

Underpinned by the claim that capital accumulation is dependent upon and rooted in the unsustainable consumption of nature described by James O’Connor’s *second contradiction of capital*, Faber outlines the structural roots of environmental injustice under American capitalism. The restructuring of the world economy increases pressure on corporations to compete and communities to survive in both global North and global South. In the current economic crisis, when world markets are contracting, global capital is looking to protect profits by cutting costs—especially those “unproductive expenditures” related to protecting the environment and human health. This goal is being achieved by disproportionately channeling the social and ecological costs of production into poorer minority and working-class communities both domestically and abroad. Patterns of environmental racism and classism, therefore, reveal the workings of the emerging global relations of production: increasing levels of inequality both within and between countries, the concentration of power in the hands of capital, disempowerment of communities at the local level, unsustainable rates of consumption, and reductions in the overall level of democracy.

The threat to ecological democracy is of particular importance. Faber dedicates a significant portion of the book to an analysis of (1) the ways in which the polluter-industrial complex colonizes the state, (2) the manners in which this colonization manifests itself in neoliberal environmental

policy, and (3) the disproportionate impact this is having on environmental and human health. Faber argues that corporate interests are better served by a sympathetic state and, consequently, much of the state apparatus—regulatory agencies, political appointees, and elected officials—are seen as valuable political terrain to be captured and used to facilitate accumulation.

Faber identifies a significant number of ways that the polluter-industrial complex has worked to take over the state apparatus—political campaign funding, political appointees, the expansion of public policy infrastructure, lobbying efforts, and the regulation of scientific standards. Combined, these have contributed greatly to the domination of market ideology in the U.S. and the failure to consider environmental policy options that effectively challenge the rights of corporations and the business class to exploit labor and nature. This has significantly reduced the likelihood and the potential benefits of policy initiatives that encourage critical reflection on social institutions and structures.

The outcome of the polluter-industrial complex takeover is the failure to effectively address environmental crises at their political economic core and, consequently, a long history of failed environmental policy rooted in an ideology of free-market environmentalism. At the global level, greater levels of economic integration are increasingly putting power into the hands of private capital and redefining the historical role of the nation-state from acting in the interest of the people to increasingly acting in the interest of capital. This paradigm shift poses a unique set of challenges for the environmental justice movement.

A successful environmental justice movement would strive to dismantle the institutional structures that (1) facilitate the unsustainable consumption of nature and (2) channel the social costs of capital accumulation into minority and working-class communities. Single-issue campaigns to address local crises are important but should not be considered successful movement strategy. Instead, the environmental justice movement needs to frame documented injustices in the context of struggle against the neoliberal tendencies of the modern state. Opportunities for successful resistance can be found in the promise of locally based grassroots organizations that are able to represent communities in ways that the mainstream environmental movement is incapable of doing. Specifically, the environmental justice movement has the potential to increase levels of participatory democracy by facilitating the ability of communities to set and pursue their own agendas. Framed in the larger context of struggle against neoliberal policies, these efforts have the potential to move beyond the NIMBY approach and move in the direction of *productive justice* rather than *distributive justice*. In other words, the manifest and latent functions of the movement need to reduce ecological hazards at the source rather than to strive for their equitable distribution among the salariat and working class.

Faber acknowledges that the environmental justice movement has a long way to go in achieving these goals and offers some strong criticisms of the movement's overemphasis on identity politics and organization structures and strategies. But he also offers several examples of environmental justice community organizing and policy initiatives that move in the direction of challenging the polluter-industrial complex. These include renewed interest in clean production (safe substitutes), the precautionary principle, new models for transnational movement building, and a growing recognition of the crisis of democracy. Calling for democratization of both the state and the workplace, efforts to overcome racial barriers in the movement, and greater levels of solidarity with movements in the Third World, readers are left not only with a better understanding of the nature of this crisis, but also with a set of tools with which to critically analyze the interconnectedness of

current events locally, nationally, and globally. Overall, the book is a thoughtful and provocative analysis that is both well-researched and well-written—an interdisciplinary must-read for anyone with interests in environmental justice, globalization, or the crisis of democracy.