

CORPORATE CRIME

What The List Tells Us > Robert Weissman, Editor, Multinational Monitor

The list of the top hundred corporate criminals of the 1990's delivers a few messages. One is the breadth of corporate crime and how many different corporations, including many of the leading corporations in the country and in the world, are involved in criminal activities. So there's a pervasiveness to corporate criminality. It also tells us though, how small the fines were for most of the companies involved. Fines on the order of a million dollars may mean something to an individual but to a large multinational corporation, a million dollars is something to be laughed off. It's very little sanction and no deterrent really, whatsoever.

So on the one hand, the list shows the pervasiveness of the problem. On the other hand, it shows that there's really a problem of insufficient sanctions and punishment for corporations. And then finally, there's good reason to believe that the list itself, massively underestimates the extent of corporate crime. That's in part because many things that corporations do that should be crimes aren't defined as crimes, and it's also because the corporate criminal police are vastly underfunded and inadequately equipped to go after the corporate criminals.