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### How the Generation of Surplus Value Causes Capitalists to Assume the Risk to Kill

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# How the Generation of Surplus Value Causes Capitalists to Assume the Risk to Kill

Presented By: Devyn Jenks

## Introduction

The generation of surplus value is a key component of capitalism, that capitalists typically go through great lengths to defend. This project explores the behaviors of two capitalist corporations; Pacific Gas and Electric, and the United States Radium Corporation, and how these corporations assumed the risk to kill to defend their surplus value. Although Pacific Gas and Electric is a case of environmental intoxication, and the United States Radium Corporation is a case of labor intoxication, both of these cases show a systemic pattern that explains how corporations act under capitalism.

## Purpose

To use the cases of the Radium Girls against the United States Radium Corporation (USRC), and Erin Brockovich and the Hinkley community against Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E Hinkley), to show that capitalists assume the risk to kill to defend their profits, and to show that collective organization can yield reform that contains capitalism.

## Intoxication

PG&E Hinkley's failure to line their holding ponds with hexavalent chromium led to the illnesses of several Hinkley community members.

Radium was discovered as an industry poison in the mid-1900s, and was responsible for the sickness of the Radium Dial employees in the Orange New Jersey Plant.

## Health Issues

The sicknesses the the town of Hinkley and the Radium Girls were afflicted with, were serious conditions. The poison manifested itself in different ways in both cases, but even though different people had different health problems, there was still a clear link between the illness and the poison.

## Refusal to Act

Both companies knew that they were poisoning people, but they chose not to act to protect their surplus value. The USCR administered protective measures for their employees, and then reversed their decision in a month. PG&E ignored abatement order sentencing them to clean up the hexavalent chromium in the groundwater.



## Other Commonalities

Both corporations used company doctors, and did not reveal the truth from the medical examinations. These corporations constantly lied to their employees/ community members, and refused certain requests of people that were trying to get to the truth. Although both of these corporations acted covertly to avoid a scandal, both companies ended up paying settlement money to plaintiffs in arbitration lawsuits.

## Metabolic Relationship

Humans once had a metabolic relationship in which they would take, and then give back to nature. The way humans interact with nature now proves that there is a rift in our relationship with nature. We must mend this relationship by continuing to enact labor and environmental reform.

## Environmental Reform

PG&E was forced to line their holding pools, and clean up the hexavalent chromium they let contaminate the groundwater in Hinkley, CA.

USRC was forced to clean up the radium that lingered where the Orange, New Jersey plant was located.

## Labor Reform

As a result of the Radium Girl's trial, labor laws were created to protect employees with dangerous jobs. Safety standards improved as well, and the right for an individual to sue a corporation for damages due to labor abuse was also established.

## Social Change

The Hinkley community came together in order to fight PG&E Hinkley, leading to better environmental regulations, and compensation for their health problems.

The Radium Girls worked together against the USRC, leading to better labor regulations, and money as compensation for the radium poisoning.

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