Erica Armlin

The McWane Corporation is a prime example of the atrocities that a Neo-Classical business mindset can lead too. This was a shocking film that showed the result of a company being interested solely in profit maximization, despite undeniably bad working conditions, death of employees on the job site, and defiance against the law.

It is unfortunate that McWane is allowed to get away with such horrific conditions simply because the law is not advanced enough to deal with the company. The fact that they are able to get away with an employee’s death at one of their plants for a fine of less than $1,000 is ridiculous. McWane has found it is cheaper for them to continue being in violation of OSHA laws and regulations than it would be for them to make the necessary changes to their plants and be in compliance with the law. This really shows that the company’s priorities are not in the right place. They are willing to put lives at risk on a daily basis, and despite the multiple deaths that have already occurred McWane is still willing to be in violation of OSHA standards.

The law needs to catch up with these kinds of loop holes that are probably occurring in more industries and companies than McWane alone. These companies need more than just a slap on the wrist when their violations have caused the death of an innocent employee simply trying to put food on the table for his family. It is shocking to me that the government has yet to step in and do something about this. The rights of employees working for McWane need to be defended. The government needs to make it clear that these laws are not a joke, but are in place to keep people safe and alive at their place of employment.

Maxwell Goddard

This documentary is a narrative on the failures of market regulation. Internal regulation, as revealed by the previous safety director, was at best a guise, a disingenuous attempt at appeasement. Outside regulation, such as OSHA, could not enforce policy, and when able, it could not effectively penalize. The film presses the issue further, arguing that regulatory objects, such as Workers’ Compensation, enable gross malpractice by removing employees’ ability to sue in return for swift payment. McWane’s ability to continually endanger workers without repercussion questions whether the labor market is regulated at all.

* A Dangerous Business * inadvertently challenges the assumptions of the Neoclassical school of economic theory. In a world of perfect competition, firms such as McWane’s should be unable to hire enough laborers. The atrocities McWane commits through negligence, combined with the low wages the firm offers, should drive away all but the most risk-seeking laborers. Yet, McWane continues to find labor and operate at a profit. Somehow, the efficient market outcome has been lost. McWane is able to extract more than the theoretical maximum amount of surplus, cutting into the very lives of its’ workers.

This is the crux of *A Dangerous Business*, recognizing an unfortunate quality of the labor market by showcasing the realities of desperation. In an unregulated market, there will always be people desperate enough to accept low-pay, high-risk jobs. Hence, unethical firms can continue
to hire after previous employees die or quit. It is simply too easy to find someone willing to work for less, even when less isn’t enough. The unethical firm will continue to exist and thrive because the labor supply is not equipped to operate as optimally as Neoclassical theory believes. Thus, *A Dangerous Business*’s message is twofold: current regulation is ineffective and the axioms assumed by Neoclassical theory are false.

Michael James

Frontline’s “A Dangerous Business” serves as an indictment against the unsafe working conditions at industrial plants owned by the McWane Corporation. McWane’s company philosophy of “disciplined management practices,” essentially aggressive cost-cutting, is in line with neoclassical economics’ doctrine of self-interested rationality. Labor costs and environmental regulations were seen by McWane as the budgetary burdens most easily overcome. In its pursuit of profit maximization, the McWane Corporation from 1995 to 2002, amassed more safety violations than all of its major competitors combined. Over the same span, nine employees were killed while working at McWane owned plants. More than 4,600 have been injured. On every bulletin board and in every break room at a McWane foundry in Tyler Texas the slogan “Reduce Man Hours Per Ton” was proudly emblazoned— an irksome, even gruesome, reminder to employees as to who the company sees as impinging on the bottom line. It is the McWane way to blame workplace accidents on worker incompetence, rather than the ownership’s penchant for irresponsible, unilateral cost cutting across all stages of production.

In sharp contrast to the McWane Corporation’s doctrine of “disciplined management strategies” stands the American Cast Iron Pipe Co. (ACIPCO). Since 1924, ACIPCO has been collectively owned by its employees. Those who sweat, bleed and entrust the sacred product of their labor to ACIPCO share in its decision making and in the surplus value generated by their hands. While ACIPCO must exist within a capitalist system and employ wage labor, capitalism has not wholly subsumed the ownership process. Collective worker ownership of the means of production is a Marxist concept and ACIPCO is a socialized workplace. The company has found a way to function in a capitalist society without gross worker exploitation, reinvesting in labor instead of “rational,” self-interested growth.

Daryl Chu

The PBS Frontline documentary, *A Dangerous Business*, was a real eye-opener for me. I was shocked about McWane’s philosophy on work ethics, where maximizing productivity was top priority. Its treatment of the employees was unbelievably inhumane. Workers were not allowed to even leave their posts for bathroom breaks. They either had to hold it in or relieve themselves at their spots. They sometimes worked up to sixteen hours per day because of the push for longer hours to keep the machines running. Little to no health and safety standards were implemented to ensure the employees’ well being. Profits, as a driving force, led to many accidents, several deaths, and hundreds of OSHA violations within a seven-year period.
McWane’s disciplined management practices appalled me. How can an American-born company treat humans as dispensable objects all in the name of productivity? I also found the ineffectiveness of our government and its laws to be quite surprising. As McWane capitalized on surplus value from its employees, it accumulated an extensive list of OSHA violations. Despite all the unlawful actions, the company only paid fines. Since the fines did not exceed the cost for a safe work environment, the company dealt with the penalties and resumed its original practices. The inadequate handling of the issues allowed McWane to continue minimizing labor costs and treating workers as nothing more than sources of labor.

McWane served as a true embodiment of the neoclassical perspective, where profit maximization came before all else. As a company, it displayed individualism to an extreme extent by taking any self-beneficial actions at the expense of its workers. From a Marxist viewpoint, it is clear that conflict existed between McWane and the employees. Workers were denied a protected environment and quelled with compensations for their injuries.

Justin Davis

By holding safety costs to the lowest possible limit and regarding environmental regulations as a suggestion, McWane Inc. has been able to maximize profits at the expense of worker safety. The policies of McWane, after causing substantial environmental damage and killing several unfortunate employees, have left the company with a tarnished image. Even after reducing employment to an unsafe level the company struggles to fill positions and faces rampant worker turnover.

The objective of McWane's neo-classical management is to reduce costs to the bare minimum. A safe working environment in an industrial manufacturer involves safety personnel, equipment, and procedures which reduce output at a substantial cost. Cutting safety costs is ideal because it is a cost that can be reduced without lowering output. It is no surprise that sustainable environmental practices, which also reduce profits, are low on McWane's list of priorities. Because the multi-thousand dollar fines imposed by OSHA for safety violations are only a slap on the wrist for a company with $2 billion in annual revenue, McWane has no incentive to change.

From a marxist perspective, the vast wealth held by industrial companies is used to lobby the government to limit OSHA's ability to enforce a healthy working environment. The workers are continually mistreated because they have no voice and it is understood that any worker who attempts to make a change will be replaced.

Once McWane and their cruel practices came into the public eye, McWane pleaded that OSHA regulations leave them unable to keep pace with foreign competitors. There may have been some truth to McWane's plea if not for ACIPCO. ACIPCO has very low turnover, a long waiting list, very few workplace accidents, and is profitable. ACIPCO is proof that workers who are treated well and do not fear for their safety are more productive.
Janet Lee

Dangerous Business reveals a disturbing and eye-opening reality of the dominating, self-interested and inhumane business practices carefully orchestrated by the McWane Corporation. McWane successfully prioritized personal desires with absolutely no concern of any costs, even if it was at the expense of one’s own life. The documentary illuminates the critical issues surrounding basic human rights, showing the impact of capitalism in a society where the main vessels to the economy earn nothing but a bleak and painful future. With the embodiment of a capitalist system, McWane’s transparent objective to maximize productivity and profits at the expense of its workers became almost vividly clear.

McWane’s dismissive attitude to the human race resulted in the loss and disintegration of productive and contributing members of society. This corrupted environment fueled by profit-driven motives jeopardized the lives of factory workers by exposing them daily to a life-threatening work place. It was assumed that following OSHA laws and regulations would only slow down production and gives more of an advantage to hard working employees. The dehumanization of workers and the increasing centralization of capital gave perspective to how McWane and its associates represented themselves as one of America’s largest manufacturing companies.

From a Marxist perspective, the government continuously supported illegal practices of this “dominant factory” by essentially indirectly fostering their actions. With a management system promoting constant violation of OSHA safety and environmental regulations, a form of punishment for the expense of a human being’s life would come in the form of a several misdemeanors and fines. The corruption and implementation of minimum government standards not only increased the danger of this destructive work environment, but it also in a way legitimized McWane’s actions, which placed blame on the victims of this viscous cycle. With no support, these workers and their families lived in misery.

Michael Mauro

Accidents happen in a variety of job fields, but no company has quite the same history as the McWane Pipeline Company. In a Frontline documentary featured on PBS, journalists attempt to expose the serious deficiencies in safety regulation at several plants within the McWane Corporation. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has cited McWane on numerous occasions, but to no avail. Management chooses to ignore OSHA regulations and continues to operate with sub-standard safety measures.

Management at McWane illustrates the Marxist view of class conflict, specifically, between workers and the owners of the means of production. Profits and productivity are the main goal for the capitalists and safety is sacrificed to maximize both. Some workers are forced to work 16-hour shifts and are not permitted to use the restroom. They are dehumanized as Marx predicted, becoming nothing more than a relatively cheap and easily replaceable commodity. Finally, as working conditions at McWane deteriorate further, the workers themselves begin to risk unemployment and “revolt” by going to the media and voicing their concerns.

On the other hand, McWane is an example of the neoclassical, profit-maximizing firm. The plant manager has no incentive to institute safety rules and regulations. Within this paradigm, it is more profitable to ignore hazards and risk OSHA fines than improve conditions for workers or shut down production in the event of an accident. In contrast, ACIPCO, a competitor, believes that happy and safe workers are also more productive. Here, working conditions are considerably better and management will sooner shut down the production line for safety reasons.
The horrendous accounts of workers who have been maimed or killed serve to show the public how important strict safety regulation is. It is only with public support that Congress can change legislation and give OSHA greater authority over exploitative firms like McWane Inc.

Dylan Markus

In 2003, Frontline set out to investigate the numerous injuries and deaths that occurred at various iron pipe foundries owned by McWane, Inc. The result was a compelling documentary about the unethical business practices of the corporation, entitled: *A Dangerous Business*.

The documentary forces the viewer to relive the tragic events that occurred at various foundries throughout the US, forever altering the lives of the individuals who were either injured or killed on the job. The cause of these incidents can be traced down to the companies underlying values. This includes Disciplined Management Practice, the term used to describe their cost reducing principles, viewed by many as a horrendous lack of safety regulations within the company. While these practices make sense in a purely capitalistic profit-driven sense, they disregard the safety and wellbeing of the tens of thousands of employees, along with the even larger number of citizens who live nearby the many sites owned by McWane, Inc.

Though there was no mention of labor unions, the documentary seems to have achieved similar results to that of the liberal perspective on the voice of unions. It provided a collective voice of social justice for those who became disabled while working for McWane, who otherwise may have felt discouraged or insignificant when facing such a large conglomerate individually. As it turns out, the documentary sparked a series of further investigations lead by the Justice Department and the EPA. McWane Inc. was faced with numerous civil citations as well as millions in criminal penalties. By no means do I believe that one could put a monetary value on the life of a worker, however by shining light on the unethical practice of a company, one can inspire change and therefore prevent further incidents and tragedies alike from occurring in the future.

Jon Boyles

The documentary film, *A Dangerous Business*, offers a compelling juxtaposition of two very different approaches to human capital in industrial pipe production. The film’s primary purpose is as an exposé into business practices of the McWane Corporation and subsidiaries such as Tyler Pipe, but the film also includes a short segment about one of McWane’s chief competitors, the American Cast Iron Pipe Company (ACIPCO), whose management style stands in stark contrast to the unethical, illegal, and sometimes lethal practices at McWane. Taken together, these two businesses present diametrically opposing views on labor: McWane viewing labor as a disposable input of production, and ACIPCO viewing labor as human capital to maintain and in which to invest.

Both McWane and ACIPCO are in the same industry, and both companies are financially profitable; however, McWane pays a much greater price in human suffering and life. Consider the analogy of oxen used to pull a wagon across the Oregon Trail: In McWane we see a company which chooses to beat and abuse its oxen to the point of death; all in an attempt to get a bit farther a bit faster. When the oxen die, new oxen are captured and the process repeats itself. At ACIPCO, the oxen are well fed and allowed to rest; treated with respect and given more that adequate care. Because ACIPCO properly cares for its oxen, they remain strong and healthy for longer periods of time, and it needn’t waste time acquiring and ‘breaking-in’ new oxen. Thus, in the long run ACIPCO travels at the same rate as McWane. Although one might argue that McWane has the added benefit of eating its oxen once they die, the practice of eating
sickly meat might well cause little Jane to die of dysentery.*** I think I’ll stick with ACIPCO’s approach.

Paul Krumholz

On Wednesday’s class we watch a documentary called, “A Dangerous Business”. This is the story about the McWane Corporation, an American water pipe company. Since the 1920’s McWane has been running a capitalistic business and their business morals have caused pain to many workers. This is a classic case of how capitalistic views can cause suffering for the working people.

The McWane Company is a believer of maximizing profits while minimizing cost, a neoclassical view. Marcus Lopez, a worker at the firm who has been working there since high school. Unfortunately, Mr. Lopez suffers from a fractured spine which is a work related injury. There were no warnings for Mr. Lopez to obey, for him to avoid such a dangerous injury. From the owner's perspective, the cost benefits were to ignore his debilitating injury and say it was not caused through work. The workers have no voice at the company and the only voice heard was that they needed to work in order to keep their job.

The workers need to use their voice and their numbers to form a contingency to revolt against these unfair practices. The workers need to unionize or attain a good labor attorney to represent them. The documentary does show another water pipe industry, who does listen to workers’ rights, and this other company is still able to maximize profits. It becomes obvious that each company has different methods of treating their employees. The McWane Corporation could learn from this company and use it as a business model. However, the solution is not a simple one; corporations like McWane hide against a cloud of worker’s opinions and are protected through the legal system. As long as companies weigh their own greed against human rights, there will always be conflict in the work place.

Conor Hanrahan

Neoclassical economists have often claimed that the hardship suffered under capitalism is offset by dynamically adjusting prices. This is supposed to lead to efficiency and a better long run state of affairs for all. Evidence of such progress is nowhere to be found in Frontline’s investigation of the McWane pipe company. The benefits reaped by the owner of capital seem to be providing no efficiency for the workers, who suffer severely and permanently as a result of cost cutting measures. This storyline has much in common with The Salt of the Earth. However the solution proposed by the Frontline documentary is more regulatory than revolutionary.

This regulatory solution has much in common with the liberal perspective. In this view, the kind of winner takes all capitalism which found at Tyler Pipe is an unnatural phenomenon. Because OSHA is unable to provide adequate regulation, we see the negative side effects that a liberal economist would predict. Interestingly, historical analysis is noticeably absent from the documentary. Though the
documentary briefly mentioned the past of the company, historical context was not used to give justification for the liberal solutions being offered. However, because it offers government as the solution, it is starkly opposed to neoclassical and Marxist ideologies.

If capitalism is failing the workers, why doesn't the documentary suggest a Marxist solution as in *The Salt of the Earth*? The answer has to do with the workers themselves. While the zinc miner’s entire lives revolved around their job, the pipe worker finds himself in a complex ecosystem. There are plenty of other jobs in the region, including a pipe factory that is much safer! It is because of greater economic circumstances, not simply isolation that the workers are forced to work for Tyler pipe. In this situation government regulation seems more suitable.

Devina Khanna

We never think that the safety of workers is sacrificed for productivity. The film, “A Dangerous Business” shows how far one company went to hold profit over safety and life. The neoclassical economist would argue that the goal of a firm is to maximize profit at the lowest possible cost. In that view, McWane, Inc. was simply trying to maximize the productivity it’s workers. A Marxist economist would argue a different perspective. With productivity as the top concern, the worker becomes dehumanized, and simply a part of a larger machine.

The film made it clear that McWane held productivity and efficiency as a top priority with no regard for the safety of the workers. It was less expensive for the company to pay OSHA penalties than make working conditions safer. McWane had no incentive to meet the demands of the workers or the government. Because work was so scarce in the areas of the factories, workers put their safety at risk in order to be productive. The neoclassical perspective says that the worker should be concerned with his or her own self-interest; the safety of the worker should not be the concern of the company. Marxists would criticize the McWane work ethic, and argue that “Money Bags” was trying to squeeze excess productivity out of the worker. The film’s message goes beyond the self-interest of McWane, and emphasizes the lack of government regulation to protect the workers.

Though both the Neoclassical and Marxist views agree that the government should be separate from the market, the liberal view believes that government should play a role. The film ends with a profile of a profit making company in the same industry, ASIPCO. Both companies have the same regard for productivity, however ASIPCO believed that the workers’ safety would increase the productivity. If McWane had so much concern for productivity, why had it never considered this strategy?
GROUP B

Georgia O’Donnell

I have just watched a documentary about death, dismemberment, burns, and the crushing of human life, all of which amount to an irrelevant expense at McWane Inc. This hard-hitting documentary exposes the ills of capitalism – when human beings become nothing more than replaceable components in a profit-maximising machine.

McWane Inc.’s “disciplined management practice” had a two-fold effect: productivity increased, but so did accidents in the workplace. However, with profits rising and only minimal fines from OSHA, this rogue company had no impetus to change. It became the workplace of last resort, where ex-convicts and only those desperate for work would risk their lives under the abusive management culture, which put the production of pipe above everything else.

The Neoclassical economist would point out the higher wages the pipeline company pays its’ employers. Therefore, those prepared to take on a risky job are financially rewarded and the labor market allocates workers efficiently. Any government intervention is inefficient for both labor and capital. Marxism on the other-hand would point out the clear brutality, dehumanization and abhorrent effects of the drive for profit. ‘Moneybags’ is supported in this relentless pursuit by institutions that make business easier; the pathetic extent of OSHA’s powers and Congress’ continual deregulation of the workplace all serve to widen the gap between labor and capital, and keep labor suppressed while extracting every last cent of its’ surplus value.

There were points in the documentary where I winced and closed my eyes, not just because of the gruesome pictures of workplace deaths, but also from the sheer discomfort of the narrative; hearing how inhumane people in pursuit of profit can become. However, the final five minutes were hugely positive – the ACIPCO pipeline company, while not perfect, is a profit-making, capitalistic corporation. It is operated along the ‘golden rule’ principles. Here labor and capital collaborate and cooperate, steadily improving conditions and productivity.

Christina Pereira

The documentary, A Dangerous Business, focused on the neglect and danger in the McWayne factories that haunts the daily lives of the laborers, who have no other options for employment. The owners of the company refuse to spend any money on improvements to safety even if they are in violation of OSHA rules and regulations. They prefer to pay the extremely low and ineffective penalty charges that OSHA demands.

There is little fight between the workers and the employers for safer working conditions. The employers have a tight grip on the workers allowing them no voice and no means of improving their work environment. The McWayne factory is the epitome of the Marxist theory of worker versus moneybags. The company only focuses on maximizing the surplus value from each employee. Instead of unionizing or joining together to improve their conditions, many employees choose to simply quit. The factory has a very high turnover rate for employees and sees each person as merely a number or a warm body to fill the space or press buttons. The company is constantly suspicious of workers who ask to be compensated for their injuries. In this case, it seems less costly to the employer to pay to cover up accidents that occur in the factory as opposed to initiating reform.

In this film there is also a neoclassical view, the workers are paid high wages for working in dangerous conditions. The company has no problems in treating their workers poorly because they feel justified since they are compensating by paying them more than their competitors. There have been almost five thousand injuries at the McWayne factory since 1995 and the struggle of the pipe laborers will not improve without the help of government or a safety rights movement.
Daniel Nyberg

The PBS Frontline documentary “A Dangerous Business” details the horrific business practices of McWane Inc. in relation to labor during the mid-to-late 1990s. The documentary features aspects of the three traditional economic paradigms: neoclassical, liberal, and Marxist.

McWane Inc.’s employees were often former prisoners lacking many job opportunities who were generally aware of McWane’s poor working conditions. Neoclassical economists would argue these workers made rational, self-interested decisions to seek employment at McWane Inc. Despite repeated accidents and violations at their plants, McWane attracted workers with relatively high wages. In their economic situations, workers showed little aversion to risk. Neoclassical economists would argue that government regulations creates economic inefficiencies, and that workers were properly compensated for risk through their wages. McWane reduced expenses through poor safety standards, faulty workers’ compensation, and illegally dumping harmful waste. Neoclassical economists may defend the government regulation of illegal dumping, arguing that rivers are public goods that should be protected on behalf of the American population.

A liberal paradigm would be the government’s role to preserve humanity. Government regulators visited McWane Inc.’s plants to investigate accidents and ensure proper working standards. Although these regulators were often unsuccessful in incentivizing McWane to comply with labor laws, they sought to curtail the adverse effects of capitalism. A former safety director described the McWane way as “do not tell anybody anything, let them convict you, do not convict yourself.” Inspectors who regulated the plants were often withheld key information by safety directors.

A Marxist point of view is that McWane Inc. exploited the working class to extract as much surplus value as possible. McWane slashed as much surplus value away from employees, through faulty worker’s compensation programs that failed to protect their health and through their disciplined management practices. This practice reduced workers per ton, increasing profits for ‘Moneybags’ while increasing hazards for workers.

Zulema Ruvalcaba

Frontline’s Dangerous Business demonstrates the horrors, injustices, and unbelievable conditions the pipe factories workers experienced. In matter of years countless injuries, amputations, and deaths took its toll on the workers. To the workers surprise, no responsibility was taken in part by the factory owners, the McWane Family. They left many workers disabled and unable to work for life. It was obvious the company preferred productivity over safety.

Ignorance of safety issues lead to the death of a man, due to an explosion of an illegally modified oven. A strong federal case was created against the McWane Corporation, but it never reached Attorney General’s attention. A potential criminal negligence homicide was avoided while pled guilty to environmental felonies. Aside of unsafe work areas, the many companies in McWane’s control, practiced improper disposal of hazardous wastes.

Under a neoclassical perspective, both the company owners and workers are individuals with preferences. The need for money leads many workers to risky jobs. There is always the individuals’ choice to leave difficult jobs. The company owners are maximizing their profits at the expense of safety. According to the film, it’s more profitable to pay fines, then to invest in change for better work conditions. This connects with the nature of jobs, where business men employ workers that less risk
averse at a higher wage. The McWane Corporation even recruited ex-convicts, to withstand long hours of dangerous work.

As the McWane Corporation is promising change, many more workers are suffering. OSHA’s inefficient laws are allowing for continuous safety violations on the workers. Money and profits are so powerful; it leads to create the notion, that it exceeds the value of the life itself.

Clarissa Zhang

There is no equation, in economics, simpler than “profit equals revenue minus costs.” However, what types of costs can be justified remain questionable. The profitability of McWane Corporation, as the documentary “A Dangerous Business” suggests, comes with the unacceptable human and environmental costs. On one hand, I am surprised the company’s disturbing and horrifying conductions have survived in modern times. On the other hand, I am not that surprised, because I understand the central building blocks of the neoclassical theory—self-interest, and the profit-maximizing motivation.

Employing the “disciplined management practices,” McWane foundries utilize their workers in the same way they do with machines. The corporation operates like a “true” neo-classical economist—demanding neither regulation nor government intervention, and believing in perfect competition. The result is the suffering of its employees and the overall society.

The powerless OSHA and negligent government invite us to re-visit the Marxist thought of the government role. Are the government agents really doing their jobs to provide health and safety guarantee for workers, secure the human rights for its citizens, and ensure the sustainability of our environments? Or, like Marxists would argue, they are simply fostering the capitalist system, and smooth the conflicts rising between owners and workers. There was no other explanation can give answers to why the New York state attorney general postponed the self-evident indictment of the owner of one McWane company, for criminally negligent homicide, which had caused the death of its worker.

There is another question. Is there another way to maintain profitable, and be socially responsible simultaneously? McWane’s competitor—ACIPCO offers the positive answer. By providing a better working environment, ACIPCO successfully makes its employees satisfied and more productive. Indeed, ACIPCO is still a capitalist company, who seeks for profit maximization, unlike McWane, in a much more humane way.

Alisa Pinerbasi

Frontline’s documentary on McWane Corporation uses employee files as a visual aid to chronicle deaths caused by their inhumane working conditions. The files contain disconcerting images of factory homicides; including a worker crushed to death, hands mere inches from a safety shut off valve. Though McWane claims this to be a work related accident, evidence from their ‘disciplinary management practices’ proves otherwise.

To keep productivity high, McWane ignores OSHA’s regulations and insists workers repair machines while they are running. These practices keep McWane workers at constant risk of injury to which they often become a victim. Dangers associated with McWane factory jobs are well known yet people continue to accept jobs there. Tying closely to the concept of hedonic wages- as long as there are enough workers willing to accept poor safety conditions the company need not change them. This notion derives from the political economists view of oppression. Management relies on the fact that people desperate for jobs will always exist, and exploit workers by not complying with OSHA’s safety conditions. In the end will McWane benefit more than a company that makes safety a priority?

Taking a liberal stance, the answer is no. McWane’s conditions are consistently injuring employees making them unable to work. This increases their labor turnover, in turn decreasing
Throughout the documentary, McWane workers stress loss in productivity is unacceptable, leading viewers to believe the company would flounder if money were spent on safety. However, Frontline counters this thought by presenting viewers with a company who make safety a priority, ACIPCO. The pipeline company has been around as long as McWane, showing it is possible to be competitive and reliant upon adhering to safety regulations. Concluding the documentary, Frontline brings awareness to McWane working conditions, and proves them inexcusable.

Eric Rodriguez

“A Dangerous Business” is a scathing exposé on the inhumane practices committed by McWane, Inc. in the pursuit of the bottom line. The piece is as much a critique of the manufacturer’s management as it is of free market Capitalism. McWane’s practices highlight major faults in the neoclassical school of thought. According to this view, employers who cannot afford to follow all safety measures will hire workers who have less risk aversion at higher pay. McWane takes this notion to a sickening extreme, conforming to few regulations while employing only the most desperate workers. Some are wallowing in debt, while others are fresh from prison. All are short on opportunities. These men with few options are must endure a corporate culture in which safety is routinely sacrificed for productivity, working for a company that saw 4,600 injuries and 9 deaths between 1995 and 2002. “But they paid good money,” says Robert Restor with regret in his voice. Restor, a former manager, paints a picture capable of convincing many to pick up the Marxist mantle: “The way you treat people would be awful… they’re just a number.” This piece forces one to wonder whether proponents of the neoclassical view are callous or naïve.

Aspects of the McWane saga speak to the sensibility of the liberal perspective on government intervention. When government was able (and politically motivated) to intervene, the corporation’s practices changed. Unfortunately, the only felony that McWane was ever found guilty of was an environmental felony, stemming from improper waste disposal, which resulted in a $500,000 fine. Meanwhile, all deaths resulting from safety violations were deemed “accidents,” and are therefore only misdemeanors. At the time, the maximum penalty facing a company for safety violations was a mere $7,000. Such inadequate intervention shows how a strong hand is needed to reign in the free market’s cruelty.

Scott Walchli

Dark and somber, the documentary, A Dangerous Business, offers viewers a peak into one of America’s largest pipe foundry corporations, the McWane Corporation. The investigation uncovers shocking information which the documentary presents in gruesome detail. Between 1995 and 2003, there were approximately 4,600 work-related injuries and 9 deaths across the various McWane factories nationwide. Although industrial manufacturing is notorious for work-related injuries, the documentary points out that negligence and irresponsibility (on behalf of the McWane Corporation) are to blame for the majority of the accidents.

The documentary exposes weaknesses in federal regulations (weaknesses that McWane is able to exploit). Employing the conservative paradigm, it can be argued that overregulation inhibits business growth. McWane argues that federal laws limit its competitiveness with industries in other countries, such as China, where industries are not held to the same safety and environmental standards. Therefore, there should be a push by industries to limit the power of OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) and other government bodies.

The documentary takes a more liberal approach by highlighting the consequences that result from a lack of government intervention. Fines are so minimal that “plants would rather pay the fines than comply [with the rules governing their operation].” Since government intervention in industry is
minimal, the documentary argues, corporations enforce safety and environmental regulations only when those regulations increase productivity or benefit the firm in some other way. Therefore, there is little regard for the workers or the environment.

The deaths and injuries investigated in the documentary were preventable, had the workers been more careful and had proper safety precautions been taken by McWane. These accidents are unfortunate reminders that in high-risk occupations, such as pipe manufacturing, there is little room for error.

Neel Patel
Fury, disgust, justice. These were a few of the emotions that engulfed my mind while experiencing Frontline’s Documentary about the McWane Pipe Corporation. The documentary depicted a neo-classical attitude of a profit-driven capitalistic firm. OSHA portrayed a Marxist attempt for justice against the corrupt McWane Corp.

The McWane Corp. was founded on unlawful principles of running an empire. Typical of a capitalistic firm, Marx would argue that the company’s sole interest was to increase profits while decreasing costs. Greed led the company to cut costs through various loopholes, which resulted in poor safety standards for the workers. McWane’s philosophy of “Disciplined Management Practices” showcases a capitalistic attempt to extract surplus value for the bourgeoisie sector at the expense of the secondary, working sector.

Tyler Pipe, a Texas branch, played a major role in the deaths and injuries surrounding McWane. The frugality of implementing a better work environment, at the cost of workers’ lives, resulted in a high turnover rate for the company. Despite worker turnover, McWane continued to cycle workers into the company due to a lack of government enforcement. At most, McWane was charged with minimal fines that did not affect the company. The neo-classical “laissez faire” approach to government regulation resulted in a loosening of reins on the McWane Corp.

As Marxist theory suggests, government regulation merely acts as a factor to keep the capitalist system afloat. Evidently, heinous crimes towards workers like Marcus Lopez lack persecution of McWane for ambivalence of health and safety standards. Without a liberal approach to government intervention, capitalistic firms receive a slap on the wrist and walk away scot-free for murder. OSHA attempts to give a voice to the workers, but without established unions, it becomes difficult to generate collective revolt against the unnatural construct of capitalism.