

portant story and following through with their own perceptive ideas about how the delivery of social services might be organized in the future. I'd be remiss as a reviewer if I didn't warn readers that this is an awkwardly crafted book; but then, as Norman Levi might say, the important thing is to get the story told.

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*The New Reality: The Politics of Restraint in British Columbia*, edited by Warren Magnusson *et al.*, Vancouver: New Star Books, 1984.

In December 1983, in the aftermath of the Bennett government's infamous July restraint program and of the November Kelowna accord between the government and the B.C. Government Employees Union and of everything in between, socially concerned faculty members of the University of Victoria formed the Committee on Alternatives for British Columbia which then brought forth this book.

Too often even decent academics sit on their hands and confuse praxis with bad-mouthing the world over coffee with colleagues. To their great credit the University of Victoria people did not do that; nor did a similar group at UBC which created the B.C. Economic Policy Institute and proceeded to issue a veritable plethora of research papers, of which some appear in this book. In a world in which the corporate-funded Fraser Institute publishes, as if it were objective research, the writings of academics with the appropriate ideological bias, it is for the social good that those not on the extreme right of the political spectrum be heard and heeded.

While the book ranges widely over the multitudinous crimes of the Sacred government, one theme stood out for this reviewer, perhaps because I am an economist. It is that there never was a fiscal crisis in B.C. that required a restraint program. There was an economic crisis, but that is a different matter, and it was simply worsened by alleging a fiscal crisis and tailoring policy thereto instead of to the real crisis. The government got away with as much as it did and for as long as it did because too many people in B.C. deplored their own ox being gored but believed that goring someone else's was necessary. Would that this book had appeared earlier and been widely read!

The evidence that there never was a fiscal crisis is so unambiguous that we are justified in believing, as this book argues, that the government did have a hidden agenda which was to use the occasion of the economic crisis to reorder society so that it would better accord with the precepts of neo-conservatism. The right wing pretends that its policies are necessary to get the economy moving again. The reality is that its policies are intended to reallocate the burden of the economic crisis — a burden which they actually exacerbate — away from those who have the wealth and power to resist bearing their share towards those already most disadvantaged and powerless. In this immoral objective they are only too successful.

Neo-conservative policies are everywhere inappropriate and dysfunctional. That is specifically so for B.C. to a degree that even the sustained critique of this book may understate. B.C. has a resource-based economy that has been badly managed in terms of maximizing benefits and minimizing costs. The solution requires more (and better) management, not the lessening management that flows from the new right laissez-faire pro-business bias. B.C. has a high-wage economy that creates a large market for a range of services provided domestically. Neo-conservative policies pretend that prosperity would result from reducing wages to the Third World level, and encourage wage cutbacks and concessions that shrink the domestic market just when it is most needed to compensate for problematic external markets. And so on.

The book is characterized by sound scholarship presented in an accessible language — in itself no mean achievement — but it does not quite live up to expectations that might result from taking seriously its sponsorship by a committee on *alternatives*, for it is long on critique and short on options. Perhaps that should not surprise and is not necessarily such a bad thing. We academics have special skills to help analyze and evaluate what is going on, and we should, like the authors of this book, use those to aid ordinary people. We are no better endowed than anyone else, however, in working out alternatives. True, some will want more. For those, I am happy to report that the people who brought you this book are now hard at work on volume two on a better future. Notwithstanding my forebodings in the abstract, the excellence of this volume in fact bodes well.

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