

Introduction

Retrospection and Hope in a Democratic Socialist Alternative

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In the face of continued global crisis we need to be able to look somewhere to find real, meaningful hope in a way out. Our political leaders continue to remain entrapped within a world wherein only market solutions have any currency.

Here in British Columbia (BC) our political leaders are, true to form, lost in arguments over taxation – the consensus being no tax is good. We have watched the unimaginable take place. Activists that motivated the types of social movements Carroll and Ratner discuss in our feature article are now forging anti-tax alliances with people they once led protests against. Famed social commentator and former 1980's student activist Bill Tieleman (<http://billtieleman.blogspot.com>) has become the co-leader of a populist anti-tax movement with deep roots in the Tea Party-like homegrown BC conservative movement. Who is his partner in protest? Bill Vander Zalm, a former Social Credit Party premier in BC who was forced to resign in 1991 for mixing his private business with public affairs. Strange bedfellows indeed in this old-fashioned campaign for smaller government and reduced taxes. It's hard to find hope in this mix.

Carroll and Ratner's paper shows that despite the antics of individuals there are collective solutions that can have real effect in shaping a better world. I am drawn to calling their analysis incisive – penetrating, clear and sharp. It's what the times call for. Effective organization for the future needs to understand our past experiences.

Carroll and Ratner's analysis focuses upon three decades of research into counter-hegemonic movements in BC. Why should activists and theorists in other parts of the world care about what happens here, on the Canadian 'left coast' of North America? Our population is relatively small in terms of the land mass and our immediate neighbours to the south (such as Washington and California). Four and a half million people live within the 950,000 km² (365,000 sq mi) area that makes up BC (an area bigger than the nation of France). Even though BC is a preferred tourist destination of outdoors enthusiasts, we aren't really noted for the arts and letters. But BC has been on the forefront of a century of innovation and struggle in the ongoing contest between Labour and Capital.

BC's politics, often maligned in the rest of Canada for its 'wackiness,' has been structured by a clear political polarization almost from the beginnings of representative democracy in the 1870s. Bloody and aggressive labour conflicts flared up in the early resource extraction industries of mining, forestry, and fisheries. In the years leading up to World War I union leaders were shot on the docks in Vancouver and hunted down at gunpoint in the wilds surrounding mines on Vancouver Island. Wildcat strikes were common throughout much of BC's labour history and militant socialist and communist unions persisted long after their demise in other parts of North America well into the 1970s and early 1980s.

BC also has the dubious honor of being one of the first places in the world to try and implement the new liberal agenda of downsizing government and cutting debts in the early 1980s under the provincial leadership of Bill Bennett and the Social Credit Party of BC (Menzies, *New Proposals* 3(2):43-44). Bennett's attack on working class conditions of life and work was met with a major push back by organized labour and community organizations. This social movement is the starting point for Carroll and Ratner's analysis. In the face of labour and progressive defeats their article documents a way in which effective counter-hegemonic struggles can be organized and won.

BC may be a hinterland on the margins of global capitalist production. But perhaps it is this very fact of marginality that makes it possible for the emergence of effective and progressive social movements that can and have threatened the viability of global capital. As Carroll and Ratner show us it is possible to "find common ground in an ethical-political project that unifies oppositional cultures around a democratic socialist alternative to capital's injustices and ecological calamities" (this issue p. 20).