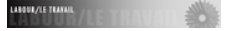


Labour

Journal of Canadian Labour Studies

Le Travail

Revue d'Études Ouvrières Canadiennes



Mark P. Thomas, Leah F. Vosko, Carlo Fanelli, and Olena Lyubchenko, eds., Change and Continuity: Canadian Political Economy in the New Millennium, (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press 2019)

Charles Smith

Volume 88, automne 2021

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1084985ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2021v88.0010>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (imprimé)

1911-4842 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Smith, C. (2021). Compte rendu de [Mark P. Thomas, Leah F. Vosko, Carlo Fanelli, and Olena Lyubchenko, eds., Change and Continuity: Canadian Political Economy in the New Millennium, (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press 2019)]. *Labour / Le Travail*, 88, 178–183.
<https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2021v88.0010>

at Kenora in a wider transnational environment. Second, it challenges and complicates several staples of both Canadian and broader historiography, namely the centrality of 1968 in relation to global protest and the Trudeau government's 1969 White Paper in connection to Indigenous political consciousness and protest within Canada. Finally, on a systematic basis the book illustrates the perpetual tendency within Euro-Canada to avoid reality and responsibility. The method of escape from avoiding addressing racism, inequality, and injustice is by focusing on similar forces in the United States or by blaming outsiders, including Americans and communists in the case of Kenora, for protest within Canada. This avoidance of the consequences of colonialism in one's backyard by gazing at the neighbour's shortcomings is an inherent component of Euro-Canadian identity.

If there is a weakness in the book, it is that the local story, particularly its Indigenous component, is less well fleshed out compared to the broader global take or the role of prominent individuals on the macro level. This is no real criticism of the author given, as he recognizes in the book's introduction, the biases of archives toward the prominent and the double burden this entails when it comes to detailing the lives of Indigenous peoples. Ironically, one primary source that may have yielded more paint for this difficult to complete portrait is Royal Canadian Mounted Police files. Rutherford's final chapter addresses the state reaction, but with limited recourse to police records that might have provided details not just on state operations against Indigenous resistance, but equally in relation to the materials the police may have obtained in relation to Indigenous activists, such as pamphlets and text of speeches. The author is particularly excused here regarding the absence

of police records given the unnecessary difficulties around obtaining such materials through Access to Information at Library and Archives Canada.

Ultimately, Canada is Kenora and Kenora is Canada and, as Scott Rutherford ably demonstrates in this fine work, both intersect with trends outside their borders. It is a book that in 2021 is timelier than ever. The echoes of the mistreatment of Indigenous peoples in Kenora resonate across Canada. Whether it is thousands of Indigenous children who died because of residential schools, or Indigenous men left to freeze to death by the Saskatoon Police outside the city dump, or Indigenous protesters against fracking in New Brunswick facing the weight of the state, it is essential that books like Rutherford's not shed light on but rather open eyes to what is already visible. The stories may change but the colonial book cover remains the same. The ending, however, has yet to be written.

STEVE HEWITT

University of Birmingham

Mark P. Thomas, Leah F. Vosko, Carlo Fanelli, and Olena Lyubchenko, eds.,
Change and Continuity: Canadian Political Economy in the New Millennium,
(Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press 2019)

IN THE 1970s and 1980s, the study of Canadian Political Economy (CPE) came of age with a new generation of Marxist and radical scholars challenging traditional liberal assumptions regarding Canada's transition to capitalism, the power of Canada's ruling classes, the construction of the capitalist state, and Canada's relationship to the British and American empires. Out of these new traditions came a significant volume of essays entitled *The New Canadian Political*

Economy, edited by Wallace Clement and Glen Williams (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989). That foundational text was expanded in 1997 by Clement and again in 2003, where Leah Vosko and Clement brought the study of CPE into the 21st century (McGill-Queen's University Press 1997, 2003). Out of that impressive collaboration comes a fourth edition of these foundational essays, this time edited with a new generation of political economists and scholars of the working-class at the forefront. At the centre of this new volume are scholars interested in pushing "the boundaries of traditional CPE scholarship," utilizing feminist political economy foundations to expand into new theoretical areas, which includes settler colonialism, race and racism, and social reproduction (4).

Like its predecessors, this latest edition will continue to be a foundational text for readers interested in CPE. It is well written, largely accessible, and pays careful attention to the materialist tradition in which it is embedded yet will challenge readers to bring in new theories and approaches to CPE. The focus on feminist political economy and the broadening of a CPE of settler colonialism are clear strengths of the volume. Yet, read as a whole, the book has real shortcomings in its stated goal of holistically understanding Canada's contemporary political economy. The book does not generally discuss a pan-Canadian political economy, as anyone interested in understanding the contemporary CPE issues in Atlantic Canada, the Prairies, or British Columbia will find little in this volume. Indeed, almost all the authors in this book are geographically situated in southern Ontario and thus almost all of their research and case studies (with some exceptions on macro-economic issues and the North) use concrete Ontario examples to extract conclusions that may or may not apply to different regions of

Canada. Given the economic debates that have occurred in Canada in the 21st century, it is surprising that the editors did not seek out case studies on the political economy of oil and gas extraction, pipelines, natural resource extraction, the environment, agriculture, fisheries, mining or other sectors prominent outside of Ontario and Quebec. For a book that seeks to offer a foundation to CPE in the new millennium, these are surprising omissions.

Having said that, there are important areas of social science inquiry introduced to CPE in this book, which is highlighted well in the introductory essay by Mark Thomas and Leah Vosko. Here the authors seek to build on the holistic materialist foundations of CPE while also underlining the critical contributions of feminist political economists in the 1990s and 2000s. Recognizing this, Thomas and Vosko extract five themes from the field that guide their volume. These themes are: 1) tensions and contradictions as sources of challenge and change; 2) the continuing importance of context; 3) continuity through change; 4) centring the margins and destabilizing the centre; 5) reorganization/realignment of state structures. While these topics are certainly a high level of abstraction and not all chapters clearly reflect these themes, the introductory essay nicely outlines the theoretical and empirical analyses of familiar CPE topics, such as neoliberalism, austerity, staples, time, space, trade, and state restructuring while also doing a fitting job in recognizing previously understudied areas, such as colonialism, anti-racism, Indigenous sovereignty, social reproduction, and others.

Readers of *Labour/Le Travail* will be particularly interested in a cluster of essays in different parts of the volume. Leah Vosko's chapter on precarious work and employment standards in Ontario builds on her previous work that highlights the

gendered and racialized form of precarious work within the neoliberal workplace. Vosko sets the essay within the feminist political economy tradition, analyzing how Ontario poorly regulates precarious work through its employment standards legislation. To be sure, this is a significant observation, yet it is unclear why the editors chose to situate an analysis of precarious workers and employment standards as somehow theoretically or empirically separate from other chapters in the volume that address similar themes related to work and workplace organizing. For instance, Stephanie Ross and Mark Thomas's excellent chapter on the organized working class seeks to examine the political economy of work, using the concept of precariousness to explain the multiple tensions of workers' movements attempting (and often struggling) to survive in the advanced stages of neoliberal capitalism. Here the authors conclude that legal forms of union organizing are failing to keep pace with shifts within the capitalist labour market and that unions are falling further behind in terms of numbers and economic influence. The themes raised by Thomas and Ross are virtually similar to those raised by Vosko yet are separated by fourteen chapters. This seemed an odd editorial choice. In a similar vein, Simon Black's examination of minor league athletes does an exceptional job in expanding the scholarly examination of class struggle into athletics. Black's piece is an interesting view of how surplus labour power is extracted by sports' capitalists. Yet, as mentioned above, this chapter may have proven more useful if it were able to make broader regional, national, and even international conclusions and perhaps integrate the sports/athlete analysis to all areas of the country where similar forms of oppression are occurring. Readers of *LLT* will also find Lesley Wood's piece on protest movements and broad resistance

to neoliberalism valuable because it attempts to build a critical praxis-oriented approach to understanding modern social movements yet does not fall into a trap of romanticizing these same movements. Rather, Wood is interested in how movements form, contest political and economic power, and how they act as sites of counter-hegemonic struggle in the modern era.

Outside of chapters immediately of interests to scholars of work and the working class, the book has several significant theoretical and empirical chapters that continue to build on the traditional themes of CPE. Wallace Clement revises his role as a foundational scholar in CPE, outlining where the field has been and where it is going. Clement's essay is unique in that it is both self-reflective and important in providing a useful biography of important CPE literature for students and researchers. Examining the staples tradition and its shortcomings and expanding on how class and class power shape the social relations of production, Clement recognizes that CPE has "striven to push the boundaries and establish new sites of investigation" (39) while also championing the "maturing" and "sophistication" of the field through new lines of inquiry. Nandita Sharma's essay on belonging, in which she critically challenges the concept of citizenship and Canadian nationalism, analyzes how racist and sexist forms of exclusion (accentuated by restrictive state policies over time) have shaped a particular restrictive form of Canadian capitalism. Calling for a politics of "No borders," Sharma makes a bold call to "reject borders and the entire apparatus of nation-states, global capitalism, and bounded imaginations that give them support." (75). While an ambitious argument, Sharma's criticisms of CPE's blind spots regarding citizenship and nationalism within the essay lacks nuance. For instance, Sharma criticizes Leo Panitch's

work (64-65) on Canada's high-wage proletariat in the 19th century because she claims such an analysis only focused on white male workers. Yet, Panitch's analysis was specifically directed at the craft sector which labour historians have long recognized as conservative, exclusionary, racialized, and gendered. Panitch nevertheless demonstrated that the strength of craft workers' organizations (as conservative as they were) formed the core of the organized working class in that period and thus were capable of squeezing more concessions from local capitalists as occurred in the U.S. north and where workers routinely crossed the border between the two countries. Panitch's work was thus not a romanticization of Canadian nationalism or Canadian exceptionalism or on a particular sub-section of the working class but a close examination of how class struggle shapes and reshapes local economic conditions. In my view, scholarship within the classical political and labour history fields should not be so recklessly tossed aside as an uncritical examination of work and working-class politics in the 19th or 20th centuries. That criticism aside, Sharma's essay nevertheless challenges our thinking on states, migrant labour, racism, and sexism.

There are numerous chapters in the book that very nicely attempt to examine broad national economic factors that bridge CPE's long tradition in critically examining Canada's overreliance on staples production, on export trade, and on the weaknesses within Canada's manufacturing and service economies. Jim Stanford's essay on staples dependence is a modern take on criticism raised by numerous scholars in earlier editions yet remains an important contribution to explaining the overall weakness of an export based Canadian capitalism. Suzanne Mills and Steven Tufts also challenge the staples tradition but recognize that it has much to teach us about

economic development outside of the core. For Mills and Tufts, Canada has entered a "neo-staples" form of capitalism, which shapes the social relations of production in unique and gendered ways. Their analysis on how Indigenous communities have challenged this model is both new and exciting in the scholarship. Stephen McBride's work on neoliberalism, the state, and free trade continues to provide a benchmark for CPE researchers seeking to understand the transition away from Keynesianism to one of increasing neoliberal authoritarian capitalism. McBride recognizes that the demand for "freer" and unencumbered trade by powerful business interests has resulted in the weakening of equality and democracy. Meanwhile Peter Graefe provides important insight to the Québec state and Québec capitalism. Graefe's careful analysis about the contradictions of Québec capitalism and how the bourgeoisie inside of Québec are both pushed and pulled by their relationship to Québécois nationalism is insightful and important. Yet, it would be interesting to also examine how these same contradictions shape the Québécois working class, especially as we have witnessed a weakening of the unions in that province.

Greg Albo and Carlo Fanelli's piece on governance in Canadian cities attempts to construct a genuine pan-Canadian political economy, moving their focus beyond Ontario and Québec. Using a critical CPE, Albo and Fanelli demonstrate that neoliberal retrenchment has undermined the livability of cities, creating "a spatial polarization in Canadian cities between inner-city gentrification and professional employment, and outer suburbs of aging residential blocks segmented by race, immigration settlement, and precarious service-sector employment" (271). These conclusions reflect a careful balance of CPE theories and rigorous empirical research making it a must read for

anyone interested in urban governance in the neoliberal era. Tanner Mirrlees's essay on cultural industries also attempts to expand his analysis beyond Ontario, bringing important insight to examining how traditional media companies and newer forms of social media technology are grounded within the logic of capital accumulation. Mirrlees recognizes the contradictions in these relations alongside the racial and gendered nature of the industry building on the critical communications studies which underlines much of his work.

There are also several areas of the book that reflect a bold attempt to push CPE in new directions. Adrian Smith's chapter on law, socio-legality, settler colonialism, and capitalism is ambitious and challenging. This chapter very much pushes the boundaries on how to understand Canadian state formation and the dispossession of Indigenous peoples by powerful legal and economic interests. Yet, it is in his attempts to link those theoretical ideas with precarious labour in Ontario where the chapter lacks clarity. To be sure, the idea of linking settler colonialism and capitalism with law and precarious labour is a unique and ambitious idea. However, it is difficult to see the linkages that Smith is building. Rebecca Jane-Hall's exceptional essay on Indigenous-State relations in the North reflects an important contribution to this volume. Jane-Hall's essay brilliantly deconstructs the gendered and racialized dimensions of frontier "settlement," while also centering the importance of Indigenous women's work, which she recognizes has been brutally dispossessed by settler-colonial forces within the capitalist state.

There are also several essays on the contradictions of the neoliberal welfare state that readers will find worthwhile. Pat Armstrong, Hugh Armstrong, Tamara Daly, and Jacqueline Choiniere's essay on senior's care is essential reading

for anyone trying to understand how privatization and state neglect in this area of healthcare have led to numerous cost-cutting measures in the industry. Although written before the Covid-19 pandemic, this chapter does an exceptional job of explaining how neoliberal care in Ontario contributed to the spread of a deadly virus in a global pandemic. Tobin LeBlanc Haley's piece on mental illness is also an important contribution to CPE, as it usefully recognizes that "care" for people with mental illness is tied to work placement rather than people's actual health. Yet, by focusing on southern Ontario, it is unclear if readers can extract broader conclusions from this analysis or if more research is needed in other areas of the country.

The volume concludes with the awkwardly situated essay by Olena Lyubchenko on maternity benefits in Russia. To clarify, the essay is well written and researched and offers useful insights on the how the Russian state is using maternity benefits to reinforce an atomized (and increasingly authoritarian) form of social reproduction that fails to address underlying material and gendered inequities. Yet, the chapter's focus on Russia and its placement as the last essay in the volume suggest that the editors needed to better integrate why a chapter on Russia is important in this volume when Canada outside of Ontario and Québec was rarely discussed. It is unclear, for instance, why this chapter did not appear with similar pieces on health and healthcare or why other comparative examples in other provinces or in similar neoliberal democracies may also have been consulted. To be sure, Lyubchenko works hard to apply her analysis within the broad CPE tradition and to employ comparative lessons to her topic.

In the end, the book needed tighter editorial focus in order to explain some of its organizational decisions and its

omissions. While the editors should be thanked for keeping this important volume alive for new CPE researchers, students, and teachers, more editorial work was needed to make the chapters more closely align with the region as a whole.

CHARLES SMITH

St. Thomas More College,
University of Saskatchewan

Martin Petitclerc et Martin Robert,
Grève et paix. Une histoire des lois spéciales au Québec, (Montréal : Lux Éditeur 2018)

IL Y A PRESQUE vingt ans, Leo Panitch et Donald Swartz publiaient une étude phare sur l'usage des lois d'exception au Canada depuis 1945, qui visent à restreindre le droit de grève des travailleuses et travailleurs syndiqués. En s'intéressant à ces lois qui favorisent les employeurs, les auteurs remettaient en question la théorie du grand compromis historique entre travail et capital dans l'après-guerre, pour plutôt trouver les origines du néolibéralisme dans l'époque qui le précède. Panitch et Swartz observaient que bien que les gouvernements fédéral et provinciaux aient reconnu les droits de se syndiquer et de faire la grève, ils ont rapidement limité leur portée avec des lois « spéciales » anti-grève. Éventuellement, les lois d'exception sont devenues la norme et les auteurs parlent ainsi d'un « exceptionnalisme permanent ».

La couverture des lois spéciales au Québec de Panitch et Swartz était cependant limitée et ne comparait pas le Québec avec les autres provinces. Martin Petitclerc et Martin Robert, dans *Grève et paix*, corrigent cette lacune en offrant un examen détaillé de toutes les lois d'exception adoptées au Québec entre 1964 et 2001. C'est un survol magistral des rapports de force entre classes sociales, de la Révolution tranquille à

l'époque néolibérale, alors que tous les partis représentés à l'Assemblée nationale du Québec ont accepté que l'État dispose de pouvoirs presque illimités afin de restreindre le droit de grève.

Les années 1960 avaient laissé planer un certain espoir quant à la possibilité des syndiqués de lutter pour améliorer leurs conditions de travail et de vie. Avec la fin de la Grande noirceur de Duplessis se dissipait une certaine hostilité contre les syndicats, de pair avec une croissance des effectifs syndicaux, particulièrement dans les services publics. En adoptant le Code du travail en 1964, les libéraux de Jean Lesage ont cédé aux demandes des travailleurs et travailleuses du secteur public qui réclamaient le droit de s'organiser. Plus tard en 1977, le Parti québécois de René Lévesque a donné suite aux revendications syndicales en interdisant le recours aux briseurs de grève dans les conflits de travail.

Cependant, dès l'adoption des premières lois reconnaissant les syndicats et le droit de grève, l'État québécois s'est donné le pouvoir de limiter ses concessions. À partir de 1967, des lois d'exception ont été imposées dans le secteur public, prévoyant d'importantes amendes pour les syndicats dont les membres refusaient d'obéir aux ordonnances du gouvernement. Le Québec est d'ailleurs la seule province ayant adopté des lois d'exception – sept, plus précisément – avant 1972 : « [...] Ces lois contenaient des dispositions pénales particulièrement sévères qu'on trouvait rarement, sinon jamais, ailleurs au Canada : peines disproportionnées, renversement du fardeau de la preuve, culpabilité par association et atteintes multiples à la liberté de l'association » (13). Cette répression par l'État a encouragé une résistance militante qui s'est manifestée dans un appui, tout au moins rhétorique de la part des syndicats, en faveur d'une transformation socialiste au Québec.