

BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

Miriam Smith, ed., *Group Politics and Social Movements in Canada*. Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2007, 378 pp. \$32.95 paper (978-1-55111-771-3)

This edited collection is a social movement junkie's delight. It covers a wide range of movements, and is theoretically rich and historically rigorous. It is written as a teaching text, but should also be of interest to scholars generally. Smith has done a wonderful editing job, ensuring that each chapter gives an overview of the issues addressed, provides historical background, elaborates relevant theories, details the organizations involved, evaluates the successes/failures of the movement, makes predictions about the future, and provides an extensive, useful bibliography. The book is divided into four sections: political economy; ethnicity, gender, and religion; nations and nationalities; and environment, disability and health. The authors range across disciplines: political science, public policy, sociology, labour studies, Canadian Studies, geography, Indigenous studies. The book also has a very good index. Unlike many edited collections, all chapters are strong.

Movements covered include the almost obligatory women's, First Nations, environmental, labour/unions, lesbian/gay rights, and Quebec sovereignty, as well as the less often addressed such as antipoverty, multicultural and human rights, Christian evangelical, disability, health movements, and (fascinatingly) business interests.

In the first chapter, Smith summarizes current social movement theories, including pluralism, Marxism/neo-Marxism, Canadian political economy, historical institutionalism, neopluralism, new social movements, political process, and rational choice. All of the authors refer back to these within their chapters. She also notes that in Canada other issues cross-cut many of these, including colonialism and racialized power relations. She argues that even with changes in the power of the nation-state, there are many areas where movements are still central to political outcomes.

Although these movements are different in many ways, some themes run through the collection. All of them show how the rise of neoliberalism, with its emphasis on the individual rather than group identity, has altered organizational forms as well as tactics. This is often combined with globalization and the changing role and power of the nation state.

The historical overviews also emphasize common political opportunity structures and their changes, particularly state funding of the new social movements of the 1960s; the Constitution, the Charter and subsequent litigation; and the cut-backs and elimination of state funding through the late 1980s to today, all of which produced changes in organizational forms and tactics. In addition, new participants and agendas have presented challenges to former forms of organization, especially in the “older” movements. Most movements also combine a variety of organizational forms and spaces, from local to regional to national to international, often work in coalition with other groups, and have challenges due to class placement, ethnicity, region, ability, gender, sexual orientation, and language.

Some have been more “successful” than others, depending on the political opportunity structure, organization, ability to frame, and historical constraints (and what is defined as success). In the areas of gay and lesbian rights, for example, much positive change has taken place since the 1960s, especially in legal rights. On the other hand, “Indigenous people are still making the same demands today that were advanced ... in the 1870s” (p. 247). In most cases, the evaluations are more mixed. While some movements (women’s, disability) gained much from the Charter and Constitution, others (Quebec, ethnocultural human rights) find it much more problematic. The environmental movement struggles with organizational issues, despite having produced a legitimate national political party.

Identity and framing, as well as the political opportunity structure, are key considerations for most authors. For instance, recognition of the social construction of disability (or “temporarily able-bodied people”) challenges the capacity to define a group. Likewise, the concept of Canadian mosaic is an impediment to ethnocultural human rights. Large business interests have done an excellent job in “civic propaganda” using think tanks and communications campaigns. In some cases, framing by the state has also been an obstacle (noted in the Queen’s Park Riot criminalization of dissent).

Flaws in this collection are few. Although some authors do compare with the United States, discussion of the international aspects of movements would have been helpful. And I am always frustrated with edited collections lacking a final chapter which identifies common themes and crucial differences. Social movement scholars should buy this book and use it in their classes.

ST. LAWRENCE UNIVERSITY

PATRICE LECLERC

Patrice LeClerc is Associate Professor of Sociology at St. Lawrence Univer-

sity. Her research interests are Canada/Quebec/United States comparative social movements. Her most recent publication is "Women in Canada" in Patrick James and Mark Kassof, eds., *Canadian Studies in the New Millennium* (University of Toronto Press). She is at work on a book comparing the development of nationalisms in Canada and the United States. She is an active member of the Canadian Network for the Study of Identities, Mobilization, and Conflict. pleclerc@st-lawu.edu