

Brave New Canada

Meeting the Challenge of a Changing World

Reviewed by Glen Harper

Brave New Canada looks like one thing, and turns out to be something entirely different. On the surface, authors Derek H. Burney and Fen Osler Hampson want to see Canada change with the times and prosper. The world economy, they argue, is shifting towards China, India, Brazil, Vietnam, and Mexico, and Canada must focus on these states for new trade and investment. As the author's state: "By mid-century, it is expected that emerging markets will be home to 70 per cent of the world's wealth"(43).

To meet this change, the authors argue, Canada must take a number of important steps. First, we must liberalize trade with these emerging powers. Second, we must attract their foreign investment in Canada, and invest more heavily abroad ourselves. Promoting human rights abroad is step

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three, and finally, Canadians must manage our internal problems more effectively. Ultimately Canada will become more economically competitive. Underneath this brave new vision, however, is a formula that weakens the position of many workers at home and abroad.

Free Trade

Industrial workers in these economically growing states have virtually no rights. As demonstrated in the book *Insurgency Trap*, independent unions are banned in China. According to the Maquila Solidarity Network, workers in Mexico are beaten for trying to bring in legitimate unions, and

speaking out against starvation wages, high production quotas, and long hours. Fourteen factory workers in China committed suicide in



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2010, and 150 at one plant threatened suicide in 2012. Additionally, Chinese and Mexican workers suffer from the absence of government-enforced health and safety codes.

All of this means that the cost of manufacturing goods in these newly emerging economies is substantially lower than it is in Canada. In order to compete, Canadian workers would have to follow these countries and cast off all of the rights and protections that we have won over the last one hundred years, as well as accept a deep decline in our wages, or lose our jobs. Indeed, *Report on Business* (May 2015) reports a loss of 600,000 manufacturing jobs since 2003.

Foreign Investment

If companies in these emerging economies treat their own industrial workers poorly, they are going to do the same to Canadian workers when they invest in Canada. Vale, the Brazilian mining company that bought Inco in 2006, im-

mediately cut labour costs, which led to long strikes at the Sudbury and Port Colborne operations in 2009, and at Voisey's Bay in Labrador. "Sudbury does not have the capacity to change organically," said a leaked company document, quoted in the *Toronto Star*, "It will have to be done by us."

Not only will companies like Vale seek to undermine Canadian unions, but so too will our domestic governments as a way to attract more foreign investment. Here we can at least partially understand the back-to-work legislation imposed by the Harper government on the Postal and Air Canada workers in 2011. Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall, who wrote the forward to this book, asked the federal government to do the same with the provincial CN rail workers when they had a strike mandate in 2014.

Democracy Abroad

Only a foreign policy that seeks to bring the same labour standards in Canada to the new economies will give Canadian workers a fair chance. But Burney and Hampson do not think the Chinese want democracy: "As long

as the economy continues to grow and the benefits spread throughout society in reasonable balance, the desire for stability and continuity will prevail”(114). The fight for legitimate democratic unions and reasonable wages, according to Insurgency Trap, has been going on with Chinese workers for nearly two decades.

Burney and Hampson also think democracy is to be feared. As the authors define it, “Democratization is a slow process of social, cultural and political development”(119). Expecting a people who are being oppressed by their corporate and political bosses to accept that democratic change must be slow is ludicrous. The authors should also try telling these same people that, “Ultimately, the measure of successful nation-building is the creation of a viable functioning administrative state apparatus, not necessarily full-blown democracy itself” (119).

Democracy at Home

Not surprisingly, the workers here in Canada are also given little to no say on this brave new foreign policy. In the context of international trade talks, Burney and Hampson state: “Negotiators... have to recognize the importance of bringing key domestic constituencies onside, but not in a way that hands them a veto or substitutes endless rounds of public consultations for leadership and action. Major change occurs when advocacy and key interest groups come together to support new negotiations...”(81/82).

Along with compelling political leadership, Burney and Hampson want the same from business. As they state in chapter eight, “Since

any successful negotiation will ultimately involve trade-offs, the government will need credible voices other than their own to explain the benefits to Canadians...If, however, business leaders choose to sit on their hands, the predictable critics of any trade liberalization initiative will have an open field to run on”(172). For the authors, democracy entails only the business leaders.

Conclusion

From the point of view of an industrial worker like myself, the foreign policy contained in *Brave New Canada* does not look good. In exchange for the dubious benefits of free trade and more foreign investment from these new states, hundreds of thousands of Canadians will see a long-term decline in their rights as workers, in their democracy, wages and jobs. Ultimately our country will be divided even more deeply along the lines of class.

Industrialization and its workers play a central role in the newly emerging economies, and yet they are invisible to Mr. Burney and Mr. Hampson. Canadian industrial workers go equally unnoticed. Only on the second last page of the book is labour mentioned. Throughout the book they are clearly focused on the well-being of management, be it business, bureaucratic, and political. Everybody else is expected to fall in line. In *Brave New Canada* there is nothing brave or new. All I see is elitist rubbish. •

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