

Derek Wall

Babylon and Beyond: The Economics of Anti-Capitalist, Anti-Globalist and Radical Green Movements.

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This book fits nicely within a developing literature on socio-political currents opposing globalized capitalism; indeed, it provides a useful guide to the field, cutting across the boundaries of disciplines and political ideologies in a wide-ranging survey of perspectives. Within his purview Wall includes the anti-capitalist capitalists — lapsed organic intellectuals of global capital such as Joseph Stiglitz and George Soros — whose alternatives amount to a bid to salvage market society via global Keynesianism, but the focus is on approaches emanating from without and from below. He canvasses the critiques of rampant corporate power offered by Naomi Klein, David Korten and others; the Marxist analysis of exploitation, capital accumulation, imperialism and recent globalization; the autonomist analysis of Empire and Multitude; the small-is-beautiful vision of green localism; and the more comprehensive ecosocialist project, to which Wall seems most sympathetic. There is even discussion of Major Douglas's 'social credit' alternative to domination by the banks, deftly joined to more recent ventures into monetary reform such as the Paris-based Association for the Taxation of Transactions and for Aid to Citizens (ATTAC) — advocates of the Tobin Tax on speculative financial transactions.

Wall addresses these various anti-capitalist currents in terms of three implicit thematics: the sociological, the theoretical and the practical, with an emphasis on the latter two. He offers accounts of the various elements of anti-capitalist movement activism that have provided social bases for alternative economics. He presents, in some depth, the theoretical critiques of capitalism that have issued from intellectuals (Marx, Keynes, Polanyi, Schumacher, Kovel, Foster, etc.) and from the movements themselves. He considers actual economic proposals for alternative arrangements, institutions and practices — ranging from state-centred reforms through community-centred initiatives (such as Local Exchange Trading Systems) to revolutionary transformation. Wall's treatment of this panoply of viewpoints and strategies is clear, fair, and occasionally humorous. A major strength lies in the serious treatment given to the radical green critique of globalism and the (eco)socialist critique of capital accumulation as an unsustainable and inequitable process. A prominent member of the Green Party, U.K., Wall has no axe to grind against either of these positions, and readers are invited to consider the virtues of each.

This is not to say that *Babylon and Beyond* lacks a critical edge regarding its subject. Three antinomies, introduced in the first chapter, help structure the subsequent discussion. Is globalization a ruse — a conspiracy promulgated by neo-liberal elites to legitimate corporate rule; or can the cold, detached concepts of political economy shed light on its actualities? Is economic growth sustainable in principle, or must modernist productivism give way to a green "primitivism"? Can the global economic system be reformed incrementally, or are the problems so severe as to demand sudden, even violent transformation? Wall sees some value in each polarity, but cautions against over-investment in any one of them.

The conclusion takes stock and points ahead, noting that anti-capitalist protest can only take us so far. Ultimately, “solid, liveable alternatives to neo-liberal globalisation” are a political necessity (p. 172). The strategic image of the amphibian — “half in the dirty water of the present but seeking to move onto a new, unexplored territory” (p. 178) — figures heavily in Wall’s final assessment of anti-capitalist alternatives. These include rolling back both market and bureaucratic state; fostering localism where ecologically appropriate but resisting the romantic regression to the pre-industrial; re-embedding markets in society (via cooperatives, innovative participatory mechanisms for popular decision-making and the like); defending anti-capitalist states, such as Venezuela and Cuba, which now promote decentralized eco-socialist economics; and reclaiming/protecting the commons, both physical and cybernetic, from capitalist enclosure.

This book is an engaging and rewarding read. In itself, it breaks no new ground, but offers a highly informative overview and an appealing political vision at the intersection of ecological and socialist thought. It would be an effective core text in courses on environmental sociology or political economy and a useful ancillary text in courses on social movements.

William K. Carroll
Sociology, University of Victoria
wcarroll@uvic.ca

William Carroll's book, *Remaking Media: The Struggle to Democratize Public Communication* (co-authored with Robert A. Hackett) will be published by Routledge in May, 2006. Carroll's current research program, "Mapping Global Corporate Power: A Network Analysis of Elite Social Organization, 1996-2006," is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. His book *Corporate Power in a Globalizing World: A Study in Elite Social Organization* was reviewed in *CJS Online* in 2004.

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