

William Carroll.

Corporate Power in a Globalizing World: A Study in Elite Social Organization.

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This comprehensive analysis of Canada's corporate elite is exemplary, critical, sociology. Rooted in Marxist concerns with the nature of class formation amongst the capitalist class, Carroll explores the impact of globalisation, financialisation, and reforms in corporate governance for the cohesion and structure of the Canadian business elite. In the first part of the book he uses evidence on the network structure and characteristics of directors of leading Canadian companies over the past three decades to show that there has been significant change. Since the mid 1970s the corporate elite has become somewhat more open to women, and to those from non-British backgrounds. He also traces the declining role of elite club membership within this elite and the declining integration within the corporate elite. Rather than these changes simply reflecting the democratisation of corporate power, however, Carroll shows how they are related to the subtle remaking of capitalist hegemony. Exploring the significance of 'financialisation' for elite formation, he shows the continuation of interlocks between the industrial and financial sectors. Here he traces the rise of the network's centre of gravity towards interests based in Canada but operating on a transnational scale' (p 85).

In the second part of the book, Carroll examines spatial changes in corporate networks. He shows that there has been a distinctive westward shift in the corporate networks, away from Toronto and Montreal, and towards western destinations such as Calgary and Vancouver. Then, in a very interesting chapter, he further develops his argument that much-heralded globalisation processes have actually gone hand in hand with increasing autonomy of a distinctively Canadian corporate elite as their 1970s subordination to American interests has been recast. Rather than direct control of Canadian subsidiaries by American parent companies, globalisation has entailed a subtle re-orientation of relationships between companies. Subsidiary companies have been given more autonomy to pursue strategies in their own local markets. Carroll also traces the rise of connections to parts of the world other than the US. In the final part of the book Carroll completes his study by examining policy formation and the increasing overlaps between the corporate world and university elites. Unlike the picture he draws of the fragmenting networks of the corporate elite, he shows that there are closer relationships between the business world and policy circles, and of new kinds of hi-tech and entrepreneurship on university governance

The strengths of the book are many. Carroll draws skilfully on social network analysis, yet is never so in thrall to his method that he loses sight of the big questions that animate him. He favours visual techniques that are accessible to many readers and clearly map the ties between members of the elite. On a few occasions, at least for this (non-Canadian) reader, the detail slightly detracted from the overall interpretation being made, but on the other hand the attention to specifics will help define this book as a major empirical contribution to the field. Theoretically, he draws on Marxist concerns with corporate power, infused with issues raised in debates regarding globalisation and corporate governance. He is one of the first scholars to fully explore the remaking of corporate elites in a leading capitalist nation, and to this extent this study itself will be a model for future research in different parts of the globe.

The book does also raise interesting issues for the future of network elite studies. The most fundamental of these is the extent to which the classic technique for analysing corporate elites, the study of interlocking directorates, is now suitable for understanding corporate organisation in the network age. As numerous theoretical currents from actor-network theory through Foucault's governmentality theory argues, power need not work through individual human agents, however important these people may appear to be. Carroll skilfully discusses how new forms of governance allow central corporations to retain control without having to have directors installed. Thus there are fewer directors of American corporations on Canadian firms, even when these are subsidiaries, yet this can be taken as an indication of the more complete control of the latter by the former, rather than as a breakdown of American hegemony. In developing this point, Carroll is very interesting on the significance of corporate governance reforms for breaking up the cosy world of the old boys club, making it more difficult for individuals to be on numerous boards and not doing much for their rewards. He charts the end of the old world of cosy, face-to-face relationships amongst a power elite. Yet, if we grant this point theoretically, the challenge this poses for social network analysis is how it can be used to map contemporary corporate power in an age when this is taking ever-more depersonalised forms.

Mike Savage
University of Manchester
mike.savage@man.ac.uk

Mike Savage is Professor of Sociology at the University of Manchester. He is interested in the restructuring of class relations, and his recent publications include *Class Analysis and Social Transformation* (2000), and *Globalisation and Belonging* (with Gaynor Bagnall and Brian Longhurst) to be published by Sage in late 2004. He has just become Director of the ESRC Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change (CRESC).

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