

in Bridgeport was truly a validation of an “alternative” political vision, as Bucki contends, or merely a backlash over drastic attempts by business leader to exert “corporate hegemony” over city fiscal affairs. While the persistence of the Socialists after 1933 seems to suggest otherwise, the continued influence of business leaders in controlling the financial affairs of the city also suggests that the Socialist party’s lasting influence may be part of a larger struggle over the working-class’s loss of political power rather than acceptance of an alternative political agenda. In “Class Wars,” although Stromquist does an adequate job of demonstrating the class partisanship that divided the progressive reform movement, he fails to show the broad implications of this division beyond the U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations. The same narrow focus holds true for Oberdeck’s essay on Alexander Irvine’s literary self-portraits. While Oberdeck shows the intellectual growth of perceptions of class, no effort is made to move beyond the world of Irvine. Instead, the reader is left with a narrowly conceived study of an intellect, offering little insight or relationship to the lives of the working class.

Still, in spite of minor shortcomings, *Labor Histories*, offers readers a strong foundation to understanding the broad scope of labour history. Furthermore, it stands as a testimony to the intellectual influence David Montgomery has exerted on the field of working-class history – an influence that will undoubtedly continue to be felt into the future.

John S. Olszowka
State University of New York, Binghamton

Jeffrey M. Ayres, *Defying Conventional Wisdom: Political Movements and Popular Contention against North American Free Trade* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998).

Ayres’s book on the movement against North American free trade offers a compelling account of the dynamics of contentious politics that we would do well to revisit in the context of the burgeoning movement against globalization, as witnessed recently in Seattle, Quebec City and Genoa. Given some of the cynicism about progressive activism and attempts to dismiss activists as members of the “lunatic fringe,” Ayres’s book is testament to the radical potential of a broad-based, coalition of concerned groups and citizens in the face of sweeping economic and political change.

From the perspective of social movement theory, specifically the political-process approach employed by the author, the book goes a long way toward bringing this important approach to bear on a Canadian discussion of “contentious politics.” In that, this is a rare book, as much of social movement scholarship seems unjustly centered on the U.S. and Europe. Some Canadian

exceptions to this general reluctance to employ aspects of social movement theory include the works of political scientists such as Jane Jenson, Susan Phillips, Miriam Smith, and William Carroll's edited volume, *Organizing Dissent*. In particular, the first chapter of the book, "Studying Movements Politically," provides a useful synthesis of competing theoretical approaches to the study of social movements.

The political process model, he explains, is helpful in elaborating the context within which movements organize sustained and effective challenges to the political-economic order. This approach rests "on the interplay of three factors: favourable developments in political opportunities, organizational strength and resource capacities, and the mediating influence of subjective, micromobilization processes such as consciousness-raising and solidarity-building" (20). Specifically, Ayres connects changes in these three factors to the successes and failures of the anti-free trade movement. Ayres acknowledges a debt to the pathbreaking work of American movement scholars such as Sidney Tarrow, Doug McAdam, and Charles Tilly, but this book is novel in deftly tailoring the discussion to the distinctively Canadian political landscape.

In addition, Ayres thankfully sidesteps the often stultifying debates over social movement "newness" and the incessant "theory-bashing" exchanges between the resource-mobilization and new social movement schools which have, arguably, hobbled social movement scholarship. Most notably, *Defying Conventional Wisdom* tackles the concern with collective-identity building so common among new social movement scholars, but traditionally ignored by many on the traditional left. With some notable exceptions, the left has been loath to address concerns with new identities around, for example, race, gender, and sexuality, for fear of perhaps abandoning or betraying what remains the focal point of socialist struggle: the worker. Ayres demonstrates that social movement actors can address "new" concerns without abandoning the old. In this sense, Ayres is responding to Lorna Weir's (1993) critique of new social movement analysis as obscuring the historical continuities of groups and contributing to a breakdown in relations between social movement actors and socialist, class-based actors.¹

The experience of the anti-free trade movement, he argues, was characterized by a dynamic process of coalition building with groups representing not only workers but women, Aboriginals, environmentalists, and farmers, to name but a few. "The development," Ayres argues, "of such wide-scale, national, inter-sectoral coalitions defied historical precedents for popular-sector groups to remain split along sectoral lines. The intervention by these coalitions in parliamentary debates and procedures and the spirited challenges they threw down to the party system also defied patterns of the past whereby popular-sector groups were co-opted by ruling elites and their parties" (143).

Indeed, the book's main strength consists in connecting the failure of the protest movement to a contraction in the structure of political opportunity. The

political opportunity structure, according to Tarrow, emphasizes resources external to the movement which encourage or discourage challengers from pursuing collective action. Ayres points to three factors. First, pro-free trade organizations caught the movement off-guard with a successful mobilization campaign (countermovement) of their own, which was bolstered by the deep pockets of the business community. Almost half of the \$4.7 million spent on election advertising expenditures by third parties, he notes, was spent by the Canadian Alliance for Job and Trade Opportunities, the main pro-free trade lobby group. Here, however, some attention to the salience of economic ideas would have rounded out the discussion. Second, Ayres notes that the movement was unable to tackle and overcome the “perennial national question.” This largely anglophone movement “could not convince a majority of French-speaking Quebecers to identify with and support the strongly Canadian nationalist anti-free trade cause” (111). Third, the movement was hampered by the constraints of electoral politics. In particular, battles erupted among the Pro Canada Network, its affiliated groups and the New Democratic Party (NDP). The NDP, a presumed ally of the anti-free trade forces, took exception to the PCN’s cozy relationship with the Liberal Party, and to its attempts steal the limelight of the NDP, which “viewed itself as the leading social movement struggling for progressive change in Canada” (108). Ayres offers a more instrumental reason for the NDP’s growing disenchantment with the free-trade movement: the party feared that the links that were developing between organized labour and the movement might sap the Party of “the resource and organizational support of labour” (108).

Ayres also provides an interesting discussion of “the mutual opportunity dynamic from which the movement and especially the political parties that were its allies benefited” (147). This stems from the recognition that opportunities are rarely unidirectional. For instance, he notes, during the 1988 election the Liberal Party was able to exploit public uncertainty over the free trade deal, thanks in large measure to the force with which the anti-free trade forces primed voters on the issue. The movement, in effect, did much of the Party’s dirty work.

Defying Conventional Wisdom could have benefited from a richer examination of the role of academic elites – there is, after all, a strong current of anti free-trade sentiment in the Canadian academy – in these mobilization efforts. Did, for instance, activists employ the arguments proposed by academics writing on the subject? And, conversely, did like-minded scholars in the academy aid pro-free trade proponents in their efforts? One important exception is his interesting discussion of the anti-free trade comic book, *What’s the Big Deal?*, produced by newspaper cartoonist Terry (Aislin) Mosher and media critic Rick Salutin for the PCN.

Ayres is correct to focus on the broad-based support this movement enjoyed, but he devotes little discussion to the importance attached to anti-free-trade mobilization among those individual coalition members. For instance,

how successful/unsuccessful were Aboriginal organizations in convincing their numbers that opposing free-trade was in the interests of all Aboriginals? Similarly, how did women's groups sustain interest among women in anti-free trade mobilization?

Despite these minor shortcomings, *Beyond Conventional Wisdom* is a welcome addition to the fields of both political economy and social movement theory. In particular, Ayres demonstrates the need to connect the "macro" concerns of political economists with the "micro" concerns of social movement theorists. Although the activists' efforts failed in the long run to halt the free-trade deal, Ayres makes a compelling case for viewing these mobilization efforts as part of a much broader process of increased citizen engagement occasioned by the Canadian public's growing disenchantment with the status quo. As he notes, "at the very least the precedent has been set for extraparliamentary actors to take the initiative away from elites on issues of crucial concern to the public" (144).

Michael Orsini
Carleton University

¹ See Lorna Weir, "The Limitations of New Social Movement Analysis," *Studies in Political Economy*, 40, (Spring 1993). One attempt to apply the political-process approach to the study of new social movements can be found in Hanspeter Kriesi, Ruud Koopmans, Jan Willem Duyvendak, and Marco G. Giugni, *New Social Movements in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis* (Minneapolis 1995).

Kathleen Biddick, *The Shock of Medievalism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998).

After an Introduction which explains the assemblage to follow, seven essays are gathered in three sections: under "Sounds of Silence" are "Gothic Ornament and Sartorial Peasants," "English America: Worth Dying For?" and "Bede's Blush: Postcards from Bali, Bombay, Palo Alto"; "Works of Mourning" includes "The Devil's Anal Eye: Inquisitorial Optics and Ethnographic Authority" and "Genders, Bodies, Borders: Technologies of the Visible"; and "Virtual Loops" comprises "Humanist History and the Haunting of Virtual Technologies: Problems of Memory and Rememoration" and "Stranded Histories: Allegories of Artificial Life."

By those titles the field of study of the collection can be recognized, and it is not history, but rather a very contemporary brand of cultural poetics. At the date of publication Kathleen Biddick was Associate Professor of History and Director of the Gender Studies Program at the University of Notre Dame. Her previous monograph was *The Other Economy: Pastoral Husbandry on a Medieval Estate* (1989) based on her PhD dissertation (Toronto, 1982). That title