

## NOTES

1. Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg, and Meaghan Morris (eds), *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, (Blackwell Publishing, Oxford 2005).
2. Some clarification is worthwhile concerning Revolution. Though it was deleted as a stand-alone entry in *New Keywords*, it at least managed to cameo under a consolidated Reform and Revolution heading, where it was cast by contributor Barry Hindess as one side of an 'old debate [...] [which] has largely disappeared from political discourse' (in Bennett et al., op. cit., p304). In delightful contrast, *Keywords for Radicals* contributor Thomas Nail's Revolution entry – sans 'Reform' and perhaps all the better for it – proclaims that '[t]oday we are witnessing the return of Revolution' (p375).
3. Bennett et al., op. cit., xviii.
4. Ibid., xxii-xxiii.

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Chris Dixon, *Another Politics: Talking across Today's Transformative Movements*

Oakland: University of California Press, 2014; 363pp; ISBN 9780520279025

Chris Dixon is an anti-authoritarian organiser, and a researcher who has been investigating the latest thinking about goals, strategy, methods and organisation among young, anarchist-inspired activists and organisers in Canada and the US. This insightful book is the result – a worthy read for anyone interested in anarchist theory and practice.

Dixon interviewed dozens of activists, with a few restrictions and emphases. He contacted only those younger than thirty-five years old, seeking views from those involved in current struggles. He made sure his sample included more women than men, and overrepresented ethnic minorities. In this way he counteracted the usual bias towards older white males.

Some of his interviewees thought of themselves as anarchists – most, though, did not, but were inspired by similar ideals. Dixon refers to the 'anti-authoritarian current', which encompasses a variety of perspectives, broadly aligned with anarchist thinking, but he acknowledges that this current is neither large nor highly influential. He interviewed organisers in several large cities, but even there the numbers of activists are comparatively few, and outside the cities the current is even less present. Despite its limited numbers, the current is quite influential in a variety

of social movements and struggles. Furthermore, it is developing an approach to social change efforts that, if taken up more widely, has the potential for laying the basis for revolutionary change.

*Another Politics* is told from Dixon's point of view, in both an individual and collective voice. He is quite willing to present his personal views, but much of the book is told through the words of his interviewees. In part, Dixon imposes his own sense of order to the exposition, while in part it emerges from the priorities and perspectives of those he interviewed. Because of this collective dimension, Dixon often and legitimately refers to 'we'; he is part of the movement. He does not speak for it, but through his research he can offer movement-oriented perspectives.

Dixon tackles topics that are among the most difficult facing anti-authoritarians, in particular strategy and organising. Strategy has long been a weak area for social movements. Many groups focus on campaigns, and are reactive; there is a racist incident, a police beating or the threat of a new law or war, and activists mobilise. This is worthwhile but it means long-term perspectives are submerged and that activism is driven by contingencies and by government and media priorities. It is hard for groups to adhere to efforts moving toward long-term visions without short-term actions and occasional victories to maintain morale. Dixon sees some hope in overcoming this challenge with what he calls a strategic framework.

For strategic purposes, prefigurative politics – behaving according to a vision of a future society – ideally involves a combination of a focus on the here-and-now and a connection to the ultimate goal. Dixon quotes many activists on the need to become engaged with messy current politics, because being purist (setting up a model commune, for example) will have little impact on dominant power systems. On the other hand, focusing on current politics holds the risk of becoming trapped within a reformist dynamic. For example, campaigners need to figure out their relationship with elections. Totally abstaining from electoral politics is a purist option; conventional campaigning for candidates is reformist. Somewhere between is selective engagement while promoting alternatives to electoral systems.

Dixon canvasses a range of issues, including ones that have plagued anarchist politics for decades without satisfactory resolution. One such issue is leadership. Many anti-authoritarians are turned off by dominant models of leadership, which assume hierarchical organisations and unhealthy interpersonal behaviours. However, by rejecting conventional leadership, activists may fail to address the need for different forms of leadership, involving role modelling, mentoring, skill sharing and expertise at the service of the cause. Rather than tearing down anyone who takes a leadership role, the challenge is to construct processes that recognise useful

roles for leadership within an egalitarian framework and that nurture leadership skills in many individuals.

*Another Politics* focuses on Canada and the US, with the limitation that the rest of the world becomes a backdrop. By some accounts, the US government is the coordinator of a contemporary world empire. In this context, concentrating on anti-authoritarian politics in the US is both important and inadequate. It is important because opposition within the core of the empire plays a special role. It is inadequate because opposition within the core should take into account forms and methods of opposition in the periphery, namely everywhere else in the world. Through their campaigns (especially on topics such as militarism and international trade agreements), activists in the US can probe the dynamics of the US state-military-capitalism complex and learn lessons that can be communicated to campaigners elsewhere. Likewise, activists throughout the world can gain insights through their campaigns that can be taken on board by US activists. *Another Politics* is an impressive piece of scholarship, and a vital contribution to the sort of activist dialogue that can build stronger and more strategic movements.

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