

## BOOK REVIEW/ COMPTE RENDU

**Klassen, Jerome.** *Joining Empire: The Political Economy of the New Canadian Foreign Policy.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014. 330 pp., \$32.95 paper (9781442614604).

**M**uch ink has been spilled over the last decade lamenting the passing of liberal internationalism in Canadian foreign policy. The rejection of multilateralism by the Harper government, Canada's military engagements in the Middle East, Central Asia, and North Africa, and its dismissal of international cooperation to address issues such as climate change have caused much consternation among journalists, scholars and senior bureaucrats, nostalgic of a more constructive period in Canadian diplomacy. Klassen suffers none of the delusions of the liberal pundits, who view foreign policy primarily as an extension of domestic-party politics, fatally overlooking the remarkable continuity that has characterized Canada's foreign policy over the last three decades. The Conservatives undoubtedly added more muscle to Canada's role in the world, but the militarization of foreign policy was initiated by Liberal governments in response to the War on Terror, and both parties have made the interests of Canadian transnational corporations the centerpiece of their economic policy and strategy of global engagement. Indeed, *Joining Empire* shows how a new power bloc in the Canadian political economy has transformed the state and redirected foreign policy around a strategy of "armoured neoliberalism" (29) that fuses the economic logic of global exploitation with the political logic of disciplinary militarism, a strategy that has been pursued by both governing parties.

Klassen engages in multiple debates in the literature on international political economy, imperialism, Canadian foreign policy and Marxist theory. Along the way, he mobilizes new empirical information and contributes significantly to the theorization of the domestic origins of Canadian imperialism. The analysis is divided into four parts. In Part I, Klassen puts forward the by-now-standard view among Marxist scholars that, while undoubtedly supporting US Empire, the Canadian state acts principally to further the interests of a highly-transnationalized Canadian corporate elite in the global arena. Like other factions of the transnational capitalist class, this elite profits through the exploitation of under-valued labour power in poor countries, the movement of speculative capital flows in global financial markets and the extraction of

minerals and other commodities on a global scale. US Empire, then, provides the framework for the realization of the accumulation strategy of the transnationalized fraction of the capitalist class. Part II traces the evolution of US grand strategy since WWII, the development of global capitalism as a manifestation of US Empire, and the shifts in Canadian foreign policy in response to these and other changes. Drawing upon the work of David Harvey, Klassen puts forward the perspective that, in response to the crisis of profitability in the world economy in the 1970s, the Canadian corporate elite increasingly embraced a global neoliberal accumulation strategy, with integration through CAFTA and NAFTA serving as a spatial fix to restructure on a continental – and then global – scale. This coincided with an aggressive attack on working-class power in the domestic sphere.

Part III is the empirical core of *Joining Empire*. Klassen traces the historical emergence of the transnationalized corporate elite, its integration into global circuits of production and exchange, and its dominant position in the Canadian political economy. Drawing upon the methods of critical sociology, Klassen identifies the leading Canadian transnational firms, mapping out the network of interlocking directorates across global corporations that bind the Canadian corporate elite to a larger transnational-capitalist class. In this, he follows the lead of the critical sociologist, William Carroll, whose work has empirically substantiated the rise of the transnational fraction of the Canadian ruling class, and who is listed as a co-author of Chapter Five. Like any serious critical analysis of corporate power, Klassen recognizes that Canadian capitalists are full participants in the global order of exploitation; they are unqualified members of an “Atlantic ruling class” and support US Empire not because Canada is in any way a semi-colony, but because it is in their interests to do so. Klassen’s book thus offers a challenge to the enduring tendency within parts of the Canadian left to view Canada as a victim of US power rather than an active participant in the global capitalist order. Part IV further elaborates the notion of the new imperial power bloc – which includes the most advanced factions of capital “as well as a mix of political parties, think tanks, lobby groups, business forums, security and defence agencies, and organic intellectuals that support the project of transnational neoliberalism and US global primacy” (189) – and traces its historical impact on foreign policy. Klassen demonstrates that the bloc has profoundly restructured the foreign policy apparatus for a class-based project of armoured neoliberalism. Specifically, this project has hinged upon a grand strategy of neoliberal market enforcement, continental securitization, cooperative specialization with the United States and disciplinary militarism.

*Joining Empire* is a formidable theoretical and empirical *tour de force*. Although the book would have benefitted from a deeper engagement with the actual deployment of Canadian imperial power – the only case studies on imperialism, Haiti and Afghanistan, are combined in a single chapter at the very end – the value of the book lies mainly in its detailed examination of the domestic origins of the grand strategy of the new imperial state. The actual deployment of power is largely secondary. More damning, perhaps, is Klassen's failure to theorize the relationship of the Canadian working class to imperialism. As inequality continues to grow and the class compromise of the *Trente Glorieuse* further unravels, there is an argument to be made that the super-exploitation of the Global South is helping to stabilize the standard of living of the working class through ongoing access to cheap commodities (along, of course, with massive levels of debt fueled by financialization). Marxists such as Samir Amin have long emphasized the role of the "imperialist rent" and colonial privilege in securing the reproduction of capitalism in the core of the global capitalist economy. At the same time, many working class Canadians and sections of the petty bourgeoisie are increasingly turning towards nationalism, racism and militarism in response to global dislocations. Labour unions, for their part, have hardly mounted a serious challenge to imperialism apart from short-fought battles against corporate trade agreements, and most of the social movements that have opposed imperialism remain organizationally weak.

These are serious structural and political barriers to a mobilized resistance to Canadian imperialism, and they raise important questions about how to build anti-imperial forces in the current conjuncture. What have we learned from twenty-years of resistance by labour and social movements? How can we extend and deepen this resistance? What is the basis of socialist strategy to oppose the new power bloc? These are the questions to which the Canadian Left must increasingly turn. But this does not significantly detract from Klassen's important contribution to the historical materialist literature on Canadian foreign policy and imperialism. Indeed, *Joining Empire* is perhaps the most lucid and empirically-grounded analysis of the formation of the transnationalized fraction of the Canadian corporate elite and the development of an imperial power bloc to date, and it introduces many new important concepts to the theoretical arsenal of the Left (chief among them, armoured neoliberalism). This book is a major contribution and it deserves to be widely read by critical scholars, intellectuals and activists alike, particularly during a period of return to Liberal rule in Canada, when a resurgence of multilateralism may distract from the underlying continuities behind the imperial project of the Canadian state. Advanced undergraduate and graduate

students in several disciplines – international development, Canadian studies, critical sociology, international political economy, and globalization studies, to name only a few – would also benefit immensely from engaging with Klassen’s book.

*Ottawa*

Neil Burron

**Neil Burron** is a labour activist and independent researcher in the Ottawa region. He has published widely on Canadian and American imperialism in the Americas. Neil holds a PhD in political science from Carleton University.

[naburron@yahoo.ca](mailto:naburron@yahoo.ca)