

College Quarterly - Reviews - False God: How the Globalization Myth has Impoverished Canada

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False God: How the Globalization Myth has Impoverished Canada

James Laxer

Toronto: Lester Publishing Company, 1993

The Wealthy Banker's Wife: The Assault on Equalit in Canada

Linda McQuaig

Toronto: Penguin, 1993

Reviewed by Howard A. Doughty

The College Standards and Accreditation Council is presenting Ontario's Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology with an important challenge. CAATs must comply with CSAC requirements, among which is an overall commitment to general education. CSAC has voiced the employers' need for graduates who combine vocational skills with demonstrable communicative competence, social awareness, and critical thinking. It has recognized that vocational training alone cannot foster personal growth and enrichment.

For some colleges, meeting CSAC requirements will not be difficult; indeed, a few already exceed CSAC requirements in some programmes. However, many will find adjusting curricula and balancing faculty expertise a formidable prospect. Quite apart from the thorny issue of what counts as genuine general education -already a subject of some controversy among contending interests - there are practical problems to be overcome.

Among the most pressing of these is that most books published in the social sciences and humanities are written at a level conceded to be daunting for many entry-level college students. As well, standard texts, often produced for the first-year university market, are planned mainly for full-year courses rather than the CAATs' semester system. Fortunately, many topical and accessibly inexpensive "trade paperback" books are now finding their way into the colleges and may serve as models for the future. Two works useful for introductory Canadian social studies courses are considered here. Each of them contains an explicit political viewpoint, but is no less appropriate for that.

Jim Laxer, the popular academic writer, shows in False God how the rhetoric of global competition disguises a corporate agenda intent on integrating Canada into a declining North American economy while increasing domestic and international corporate profits from Canadian labour and resources. Unlike mere nay-sayers, he sets out an alternative agenda which he believes would allow Canada to maintain prosperity and sovereignty in the new global economy.

Linda McQuaig, a fine journalist whose earlier books (*Behind Closed Doors* and *The Quick and the Dead*) proved that one can write eloquently on Canadian tax and welfare policy, explains in *The Wealthy Banker's Wife* not only how the corporate agenda has diminished Canada, but also how neo-conservative assumptions conflict with the economic realities of industrial countries outside North America, countries whose living standards are leaving both the United States and Canada behind. Her emphasis is on the threat to Canadian social programmes; her analysis shows not that we cannot afford them anymore, but that we cannot afford to do away with them.

McQuaig's is the better of the two. Laxer's polemic is sound enough, but it seems only a modest extension of the critique he has offered since publishing his ground-breaking *Rethinking the Economy* almost ten years ago. McQuaig's book is equally sound and will engage more college students. Although it is not scholarly, it combines a lively style with just enough research to make persuasive her claims about the managed dismemberment of the middle class and increasing poverty in Canada and the U.S. Both books, however, are credible additions to college syllabi in a time of transition, offering similar solutions to our problems. - H.A.D.

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