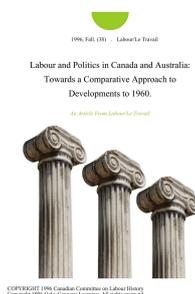


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LABOUR AND POLITICS IN CANADA AND AUSTRALIA TOWARDS A COMPARATIVE APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENTS TO 1960 EBOOKS 2019



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IF THE CONSTITUTIONAL bedrock of Canadian and Australian politics is quite similar, the institutional landscape has always been quite different. The most significant point is that the Antipodean labour parties were among the first and most successful in the world. Australian federalism, unlike the earlier Canadian experiment, which depended solely on the political genius of the colonial bourgeoisie, evolved in a context of extraordinary class contention which propelled workers' representatives into positions of significant political authority before the turn of the century. In 1910 the first Australian Labor Party (ALP) majority governments were elected. By the 1920s a rich and indigenous debate about the meaning of political power informed the workers' movement in Australia, (1) while Canadians were still engaged in primordial pursuit of "a political party for labour." (2) Such a party (commonly known as the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation -- New Democratic Party or CCF-NDP) was eventually built, but has never governed outside the provinces. Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau once likened labour's representatives in the House of Commons to "seagulls, squawking and squealing above the ship of state, [but] pretending to steer it." (3) No one, even allowing for partisanship, would have ever described Australia's Prime Ministers Hawke or Keating in exactly those terms. Inflections of these divergent pasts can still be heard today. Mike Moore, former leader of the New Zealand Labour Party, articulated well the common sentiment of Antipodean labour leaders when he said in 1993: "I do not want a narrow Labour Party. I want a Labour Party in New Zealand that looks like New Zealand, that reacts in any given situation as ordinary New Zealanders." (4) During the same year, Bob White, president of the Canadian Labour Congress, expressed a considerably more modest political ambition with a significantly different logic: "Ultimately most people realize that a lot of decisions are made in the legislatures and parliaments of Canada and [that] we should have a voice in there." (5) Despite these institutional differences, however, there are certain common programmatic themes in the history of labour and politics in the two countries. Liberal assumptions and strategies were of key importance in shaping labour's political interventions and institutions. On the other hand, distinctly anti-bourgeois ways of talking about and practicing democracy were common in the formative years and not unknown thereafter. The periodization of labour and politics is similar in the two countries. Indeed, we conclude in the 1960s because we wish to acknowledge a major watershed in the broader history of the political left in both countries: between oppositional currents rooted in the primacy of class, and the more diffuse objectives of the new social movements. If language is important, and we do agree that it is, it is clear that more recent political challenges to hegemony have not embraced a lingua franca, and that the political language of class indeed belongs to history in Canada or Australia.

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