

Many of your followers, including myself, are indebted to you for your inspiring deeds. But in reading your book, they will be ever more grateful -- for the courage and hope you will have instilled in them as they go forward into the storm.

Sincerely,

Michelle Weinroth

Harden, Joel D. 2013. *Quiet No More: New Political Activism in Canada and Around the Globe*. Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, ISBN: 9781459405073. Paperback: 22.95 CAD. Pages: 264.

**Reviewed By William K. Carroll**  
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A self-declared exemplar of ‘movement relevant theory’, this book seeks to understand contemporary progressive activism through direct experience and in dialogue with activists. While keeping one’s political commitments in plain view, the point is to ‘help stimulate critical thought and activist experimentation’ (p. 209). Indeed, Joel Harden wrote the book in part to make theoretical and practical sense of his own activism. Thus, it reads in places as an autobiography/autoethnography of the author’s experiences over the past two decades in and around the student movement, movements for peace and global/climate justice, Occupy, Idle No More, and the labour movement (where he served as a researcher and then as Director of the Labour Education Department for the Canadian Labour Congress from 2005 to 2012). Eschewing academic ‘Social Movement Theory’, Harden has organized his analysis as a series of narratives based in direct access to grassroots movements and activists (a number of whom he interviewed). These stories draw the reader into the drama of activism and political contention.

The book’s six chapters transit through a survey of activism in North America (Chapter 1), analyses of recent shifts in green activism, Aboriginal militancy and international solidarity with Palestinians (Chapter 2), the development of grassroots activism in trade unions (Chapter 3), the relationship between left political parties and grassroots activism (Chapter 4), and a discussion of key theoretical issues in the new activism (Chapter 5), to a Conclusion that counsels activists to embrace anti-systemic ideas and bottom-up organizing practices while reaching out to broader publics in a ‘participatory radicalism’ that is ‘both inclusive and progressive’ (p. 229). Harden’s story-based approach to analysis mimics the story-based organizing he features in his well-researched case studies: the emphasis is less on abstract theory and political appeals and

more on putting a human face on injustice, collective action, and change.

All this makes for an uplifting reading experience. Educators and activists will find in this book an accessible overview of the contemporary scene. Harden's minimalist approach to 'theory' is to engage with it practically, through three issues for activism: its place (the 'where'), its ideas (the 'why') and its organization (the 'how'). These issues are explored through a critical review of movement thinkers like Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri and Richard Day. Harden acknowledges their insights on horizontalism, yet their failure to address how to build durable capacity beyond a politicized but minority base leads him back to Gramsci and Luxemburg. Their socialist visions had at the core 'the need for participatory radicalism, where activists broaden the appeal of their activism through a democratic organization' (p. 238). As Harden notes, the contemporary left actually faces an 'organization gap': established groups such as labour often miss out on the energy of new activists whose collective agency instead fuels what Patrick Bond has called 'popcorn protests' that rise up and then disappear when the urgency behind them subsides.

Still, Harden maintains that new activism has had an impact on progressive organizations, and that developments in grassroots unionism within the labour movement illustrate this. The focus on labour, and on movement politics within it, is a strong point of the book, but at times Harden's upbeat tone strikes a dubious chord – as in his account of the Canadian Labour Congress's pension campaign of 2009-2010, in which he played a leading role. Characterizing the campaign, which was thwarted by the so-called Harper government in the fall of 2010, as a 'good news story' and an example of collective action 'winning positive results' (p. 126), Harden concedes that the Conservative government's calculation that reneging on an earlier pledge would not entail political fallout proved entirely correct. Elsewhere, the story of the New Democratic Party's breakthrough into Official Opposition status under the grassroots-friendly leadership of Jack Layton, climaxes in the federal election of 2 May 2011, described as a 'key historical moment' for the left in Canada. Yet surely the most fateful outcome of that election was the parliamentary majority won by the self-same Harper government. In his discussion of Québec Solidaire, a party-movement with left credentials far more credible than the NDP's, Harden again risks over-optimism with the claim that a heightening of political expectations may in itself be worthy of celebration.

A related tension between Pollyanna and Cassandra is evident on the vexed question of left unity. Harden appears unconcerned by new activism's lack of any unifying ideological 'meeting point' that might draw activists together, and even implies that an 'undefined and inclusive approach' might help activists avoid the pitfalls of earlier socialist and anarchist movements (p. 229). But few pages on, in moving toward a conclusion, he calls for a global left that goes beyond affinity-groups and World Social Forum 'pedagogical spaces'. If it is to break out of its marginality, the global left 'must organize itself seriously, and communicate its ideas to people beyond the activist core' (p. 237). This statement, however, presumes a left that is not only oppositional but clear about its own ideas. Tacitly, Harden recognizes the familiar synergy between movement/party organizing and the ideological consensus among activists that enables

both sustained collective action and the articulation of a counter-hegemonic project within widening circles of participation.

In a book full of remarkably insightful quotations from a wide range of activists, Harden gives the last word to Arundhati Roy, who in 2003 wrote, 'the corporate revolution will collapse if we refuse to buy what they are selling – their ideas, their version of history, their wars, their weapons, their notion of inevitability' (pp. 239-240). The key issue, however, is what comes after the collapse. A continuing task for left activism is to develop and articulate a feasible and just alternative, to move beyond the shared opposition to neoliberal globalization, which Harden discerns as a unifying thread among new political activists. The stories of grassroots democratic activism recounted in this book offer much inspiration in this political and cultural construction project.

Lilley, Sasha, David McNally, Eddie Yuen and James Davis. 2012. *Catastrophism: The Apocalyptic Politics of Collapse and Rebirth*. Oakland, CA: PM Press. ISBN: 978-1-60486-589-9. Paperback: 16.00 CAD. Pages: 192.

**Reviewed By Thomas Cheney**  
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The essays in this timely volume are built around the theme that the politics of fear, or catastrophism, are ultimately unproductive and even reactionary. In her introductory essay to *Catastrophism*, Sasha Lilley cautions that a left alternative to capitalism — one that can respond adequately to a series of contemporary crises, including environmental and economic ones — cannot give in to fear and the 'logic of catastrophe.' She warns, "the politics of fear ... play to the strengths of the right, not the left" (p. 3). Each chapter confronts catastrophism in different and complementary ways. Eddie Yuen describes the failure of catastrophism for the environmental movement. Lilley offers a history of the dangers of catastrophism in leftist politics, while James Davis chronicles the history of right wing fear-mongering and apocalypticism. The concluding essay by David McNally connects the cultural phenomenon of zombies with the catastrophes of everyday life in capitalism.

Yuen's essay challenges the environmental movement to adopt different and more productive narratives about climate change and possibilities for its reversal. While not denying that a catastrophe is indeed impending, Yuen points to the paradox that increased individual knowledge about climate change does not result in increased political engagement. The problem, he holds, is that mainstream accounts of global warming "follow compelling evidence for ecological collapse with woefully inadequate injunctions to green consumption or lobbying of