

Barry-Shaw, Nikolas and Dru Oja Jay. 2012. *Paved with Good Intentions: Canada's Development NGOs from Idealism to Imperialism*. Halifax: Fernwood. ISBN 978-1-55266-399-8. Paperback: 24.95 CAD. Pages: 320.

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There are few institutions that remain as idealized and venerated in the public sphere as development NGOs. For many Canadians, the perceived role that NGOs play overseas is ranked up there with the long-cherished myth of Canadian peacekeeping as the most defining features of Canada's benevolent foreign policy. While years of diligent ideological struggle on the part of the Canadian Left may have made the myth of Canadian peacekeeping harder to sell, the myth of benevolent development NGOs remains firmly intact.

Nikolas Barry-Shaw and Dru Oja Jay's book *Paved with Good Intentions: Canada's Development NGOs from Idealism to Imperialism* seeks to dispel this powerful myth, arguing that Canadian NGOs have been partners in the implementation and enforcement of the most destructive neoliberal policies in the Global South. "Contrary to their image as free-floating atoms of altruism," they write, "NGOs are actually tightly intertwined with the state" (2) and have "become increasingly integrated into the foreign policy apparatus" (6).

This has not always been the case, with NGOs understood to be only marginal actors in the development world up until the 1980s. However, after what the authors call the "NGO boom" of the 1980s – driven by the needs of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank – NGOs became crucial political actors in the project of neoliberalism. As Barry-Shaw and Jay put it, "NGOs helped secure the continued implementation of 'market reforms' by diverting the energies of the poor away from political protest and into ways of coping with deepened poverty that did not challenge its root causes" (17). That is, NGOs played a key role in pacifying and deflating protest movements in the Global South, serving in many instances to soften the blow of harsh policies of privatization that would otherwise provoke fierce resistance. Development NGOs function – to paraphrase the title of Chapter 2 – as a "spoonful of sugar" to help the neoliberal medicine go down, and in Chapter 6 the authors show how this is particularly true in the case of Haiti after the flood of 2004.

Development NGOs have been able to obfuscate their role as a "soft power" in imperial conquest by positioning themselves as autonomous from any particular state or corporation, which Barry-Shaw and Jay refer to as their "legitimizing myth" (55). One of the most valuable features of this book is the great lengths the authors go to emphasize the extent to which NGOs are dependent upon, and would collapse very quickly without,

large amounts of state funding every year. For example, the authors show that Canada World Youth depends on the Canadian government for 81.1 per cent of their yearly budget (as of 2011), with Oxfam Canada sitting at 44.5 per cent (as of 2010). Social justice and anti-imperialist activists in Canada owe Barry-Shaw and Jay a great deal of thanks for making this data clear and accessible, as the mythology of NGO altruism is sustained in large part by the belief that NGOs are driven by moral, rather than economic, considerations.

In many ways, Barry-Shaw and Jay's book explores issues similar to those discussed in INCITE!'s important 2007 anthology *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* (South End Press), where the editors introduce the concept of the "non-profit industrial complex." *Paved with Good Intentions* is a much-needed intervention into the study of Canada's own non-profit industrial complex, owing largely to the book's emphasis on the politics of NGO finances. As Barry-Shaw and Jay themselves point out, "the consequences of NGOs' dependence on government funding are rarely discussed...Most studies of development NGOs dismiss the issue as irrelevant to understanding these organizations" (3).

Absent from the book is any explicit consideration of the relationship between development policies and imperialism, which one might expect given the presence of the latter term in the book's title. Did the "NGO boom" of the 1980s signal a change to a qualitatively different form of imperialism? Is this form of imperialism more difficult to resist due to the prevalence of NGO "soft power"? How does this overlap with or compliment the traditional understanding of imperialism as a tendency toward monopolies? The lack of theorizing imperialism also goes hand in hand with an overemphasis on neoliberalism at the expense of saying much about capitalism itself, though the book actually succeeds at making quite compelling critiques development policies under capitalism without having to name it directly. In order to get a full picture of both the theoretical project of Canadian imperialism, and to contextualize the activities of Canadian development NGOs within a larger framework of Canadian foreign policy, *Paved with Good Intentions* should be read alongside Todd Gordon's *Imperialist Canada* (Arbeiter Ring, 2010) and Yves Engler's *The Black Book of Canadian Foreign Policy* (Fernwood, 2009). Taken together, these three books represent an important step in Canadian studies, and signal a crucial shift away from the left nationalist thesis that has long dominated the Canadian left by illustrating beyond any doubt the Canadian state's own imperial aims.

*Paved with Good Intentions* is not, however, a book of political theory, and it would be pointless to fault it for not being what it never claimed to be. Barry-Shaw and Jay have put together a groundbreaking exposé that will be of enormous significance for Canadian activists and scholars in the years to come, thanks to the book's wide scope and impeccable research. As *Paved with Good Intentions* makes clear, solidarity from below –

rather than neoliberal pseudo-empowerment handed down from above – is not only the most desirable way forward, but is the only way to break the NGOization that Canada and other imperial powers have imposed on the Global South.

Farber, Samuel. 2011. *Cuba Since the Revolution of 1959: A Critical Assessment*. Chicago: Haymarket Books. ISBN 978-1-60846-139-4. Paperback: 24.00 USD. Pages: 369.

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Samuel Farber's *Cuba Since the Revolution of 1959: A Critical Assessment* is bound to change the way we think about Latin America's most important socialist experiment. Farber, a US-based academic who left Cuba in the 1950s, focuses on the politics and ideology of the revolutionary leadership – its ideas. "The single most important factor that explains the uniqueness of Cuba's development," Farber writes, "was the political leadership of Fidel Castro, which made a major difference in the triumph against Batista and in determining the course taken by the Cuban Revolution after it came to power" (10). While acknowledging the challenges the Revolution faced and the unrelenting character of US imperial aggression, he sets out to demonstrate that the repressive nature of the Cuban government is general and systemic and not merely a justified response to specific security threats. Farber thus seeks to debunk the myths, fallacies and misunderstandings perpetuated by the revolutionary leadership and its apologists in a wide-ranging work that focuses on the social, cultural, political and economic dimensions of the Revolution from its early days to the present.

Farber does not deny the popularity of the Cuban Revolution among wide segments of the masses prior to the mass apathy of the 1990s. Drawing upon the "classical Marxist tradition," however, he puts forward a simple criterion in a detailed introduction that sets the tone for the rest of the book: "to be a fully participatory democracy," Farber writes, "it must be based on the self-mobilization and organization of the people, and the rule of the majority has to be complemented by minority rights and civil liberties" (4). In this sense, the Cuban Revolution never empowered its supporters to develop their "own autonomous political consciousness so that they could cease being the objects, and become the subjects, of history" (39).

In Chapter One, we are given an account of the decision-making style of the government that emerged following the revolution, its tendency to announce major