

Warner, Tom. 2010. *Losing Control: Canada's Social Conservatives in the Age of Rights*. Toronto: Between the Lines. ISBN 978-1-897071-41-0. Paperback: 29.95 CAD. Pages: 292.

Reviewed by Lorna Erwin
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Now that a majority Conservative government has taken its place in Ottawa, what can we anticipate from the religious right? To judge from the volume under review, which was published in 2010 (before, that is, Stephen Harper's unexpected triumph), there is every expectation of fresh assaults on Canada's secularist and rights-centred political culture. Having effectively lost control of the country's moral agenda, amidst four decades of strident resistance to abortion, gay rights, and related issues, Canada's social conservatives, according to Tom Warner, nevertheless remain an "impressively organized and dynamic opponent" (vii). Moreover, "the holy war" (4) they continue to wage shows "no shortage of political support" (221).

And now, of course, as of May, 2011, such support would seem to bulk even larger. Warner, a prominent activist and spokesperson on gay issues in Ontario who once served on the province's Human Rights Commission, claims simply to offer a snapshot of the political landscape in 2010. Actually he does a good deal more, building his case for vigilance with a meticulous review of the police raids and prosecutions, the legal and theological arguments, and of course the government reactions that constitute Canada's record of human rights advances and retreats over the past forty years.

That it has mostly been a record of advances is readily acknowledged by the author—that, indeed, is why the undiminished anger and determination of the religious right must not be ignored, despite the seemingly overwhelming defeats it has suffered. Warner's chief concern, in any case, is with the mobilization of evangelical forces, beginning in 1970s, as their social status and political clout come under attack amidst the dawning of what Warner (following Chief Justice, Beverly McLaughlin), refers to as Canada's "Age of Rights." The hateful tirades that began during this period, the dire and, at times, even apocalyptic warnings—who today recalls any of this in connection with the rapid mobilization of the anti-abortion forces prior to the Charter, or for that matter the Trudeau government's embarrassing attempts at appeasement of these forces?

Clearly the struggle to decriminalize abortion and to sustain women's freedom from harassment in exercising their reproductive rights could easily sustain a book-length study. Failing that we are fortunate to have Warner's detailed chapter on the on-going pro-life/pro-choice struggle. His book's illuminating accounts of the trials and appeals that underlie Canada's changing definitions of obscenity and the multi-faceted efforts to secure gay rights are likewise welcome. Perhaps the most arresting chapter is on what the Manning Centre for Building Democracy might call the interface between pulpit and

politics. That Preston Manning, Harper and their media allies have been at pains to impose discipline on their Christian right supporters, even while denying that such supporters pose any threat to mainstream values and institutions is well documented in *Losing Control*. Like Marci McDonald, in *The Armageddon Factor* (Random House Canada, 2010), which covers some of the same ground, Warner quite plausibly sees such stealth and denial as an essential ingredient of social conservative advance.

What Harper has done for the religious right since becoming prime minister in 2006— his cancellation of the Court Challenges Program and gay pride funding, for example, or his exclusion of abortion services from his government’s G-8 initiative on maternal health—hasn’t generated a lot of controversy, which of course is precisely the point from the Conservative perspective. Nevertheless the question that can’t be evaded is this: can a prime minister determined to make the Tories into Canada’s natural governing party dare to turn the clock back on same-sex marriage legislation? And with support for abortion rights in Canada running to somewhere between 55 to 78 percent, can anything significant be done to appease those restive Catholics and evangelical Protestants who insist on reopening the debate?

Not surprisingly, *Losing Control* doesn’t offer clear-cut answers to such questions. But it does typically inform us, in a final chapter titled “Faith, Politics, and the Transformation of Canada” that “pro-life groups remain formidably active” (246). It is here that my reservations begin. For unfortunately Warner’s almost exclusive focus on organizational activities and noisy, attention grabbing statements leaves the social and political contexts of the activities he is writing about badly out of focus.

Where, in other words, are the statistics in this volume on trends in evangelical church membership or voting intentions in Canada? Or the comparisons with similar developments in the United States, where of course the polarization wrought by the religious right is especially acute. Warner does cite data from an academic source suggesting that slightly more than a quarter of Canadian voters in 2000 were inclined to identify themselves as social conservatives, and he throws in another poll from a religious organization to the effect that 19 per cent of Protestants and seven per cent of Catholics in Canada see themselves as “evangelicals.” But, in the absence of longitudinal data on religious and political trends, such “snapshots” tell us little.

Warner’s principal way of accounting for the growth of social conservatism is to point to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. More precisely, it is the success of the feminist and the gay and lesbian liberation movements, driving a rights-based political agenda made possible by the Charter, to which Warner attributes the moral backlash of the right. This is not so much wrong, in my view, as incomplete—especially inasmuch as it begs so many questions about changes in work and family roles. How, for instance, does the decline of teen-age pregnancy, abortion and divorce among the increasing numbers of women who attend college or university factor into the abortion debate?

At the dawn of a Conservative majority, it isn't only our Charter rights that are threatened. A hollowing out of health care and other social programs may well be expected, with devastating consequences for vulnerable families. And can anyone hope that our abysmal record on the environment is likely to improve? The point is that the Canadian left and its liberal allies have limited energies and resources. The author of this volume does well in recounting the hallmark struggles of the past and in likewise issuing a timely warning for today. But we need to know more about the social underpinnings of the "holy war" that confronts us, if we are to respond effectively to the stark choices we face.

Kinsman, Gary and Patrizia Gentile. 2010. *The Canadian War on Queers: National Security as Sexual Regulation*. Vancouver: UBC Press. ISBN 978-0-7748-1628-1. Paperback: 34.95 CAD. Pages: 554.

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In *The Canadian War on Queers: National Security as Sexual Regulation*, Gary Kinsman and Patrizia Gentile set out to "change Canadian history" and challenge "current Canadian historiography" by basing their analysis on "previously excluded and denied social experiences, making visible what was invisible and giving voice to what was silenced" (6). This is an ambitious goal, but one which they have managed to achieve, at least to an extent. Whether this book has altered the course of Canadian historiography remains to be seen, but where Kinsman and Gentile succeed is by bringing to light the voices that have until recently been absent from the historical record. The revelation that queers faced repression at the hands of the Canadian state is not an entirely original finding. While issues of surveillance in the post-war period have been previously raised (not least by Kinsman and Gentile themselves in previous works), *The Canadian War on Queers* adds a new perspective by focusing on the voices of individuals targeted by national security campaigns that sought to uncover and remove queers from the public service and armed forces. This study provides glimpses into the post-war queer communities and networks that the Canadian state sought to infiltrate, as well as the ways in which these communities developed strategies of resistance to expose and neutralize the RCMP and local police efforts to expose them.

The more than fifty interviews, combined with diverse national security documents obtained through access to information requests, provide the foundation for