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INTERVIEW

'Pulling the Monster Down'

Interview with William K. Carroll

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William K. Carroll is one of Canada's foremost sociologists. His research and teaching focus on the contemporary capitalist political economy and transformative social movements, as well as Marxist and post-Marxist theories, particularly those informed by Gramsci. His empirical work investigates central actors within the Canadian and world political economy, including social democratic governments, right wing think-tanks and the for-profit and alternative media. He is the author of more than a hundred books, articles, chapters and reports, making important contributions on many subjects, including globalization, neoliberalism and critical research methods.

Carroll plays an important role in many Canadian research and policy organizations. He is research associate with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and has been a central actor, in various capacities, in the Canadian Sociological Association. He is a long-time editorial board member and supporter of the *Society for Socialist Studies*, for which he gave the 2006 keynote address 'Hegemony, Counter-Hegemony, Anti-Hegemony' (Carroll 2006). In addition, he contributes to various innovative teaching programmes, including an interdisciplinary graduate programme in Cultural, Social and Political Thought at the University of Victoria. Recently, he was instrumental in establishing a new, interdisciplinary minor/diploma programme in Social Justice Studies, which he now directs.

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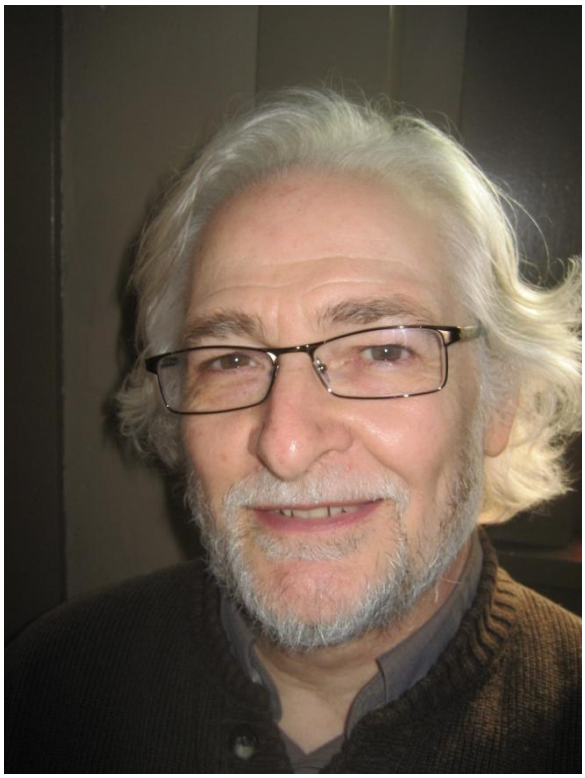

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Although best known in Canada, Carroll is appreciated internationally. He has been a visiting scholar to the University of Amsterdam, Netherlands, Griffith University of Brisbane, Australia, Kanazawa State University in Japan, and at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study.

From the beginning of his scholarly career, Carroll's has been recognized for outstanding contributions to research and service. As a graduate student, he was awarded multiple-year support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. He was offered, but declined, a SSHRC post-doctoral fellowship. Carroll has twice received the John Porter Tradition of Excellence Book Award from the Canadian Sociology Association, for *Corporate Power in a Globalizing World* (2004) and *Corporate Power and Canadian Capitalism* (1986). In 2003, he was awarded the Outstanding Service Award by the Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Association. In 2008, he was honoured for Research Excellence by the University of Victoria for decades of high-quality scholarly contributions.

I interviewed William Carroll on 20 February 2010, via the internet. He answered questions with characteristic thoughtfulness and in full, sometimes complex sentences that required only very light editing for purposes of clarity. In one instance, additional material was inserted into the interview via email. My questions were edited for purposes of space.

Elaine Coburn: Much of your empirical work centers on how a world capitalist political economy has played out in Canada, for example, how the

Canadian capitalist class has transformed, becoming more deeply embedded in transnational capitalist networks while still retaining a distinct national character. Yet, you weren't born in Canada but immigrated from the United States when you were a teenager, during the Vietnam war. Can you tell us about this 'key passage', as your website (http://web.uvic.ca/~wcarroll/) characterizes it, in your life?

William Carroll: My family moved to Canada when I was sixteen. That was, indeed, at the really intense point in the Vietnam war. There was a lot of anti-war activism and people were leaving the United States for those reasons. But in my case, my family moved to Canada as part of the influx of American academics to Canada, with the rapid expansion of the university system. So my father got a job teaching computer science at the University of Western Ontario. And that was the reason; there was no real political subtext to it. In fact, my parents were Nixon Republicans (laughs) in the late 1960s, although they did move toward the centre left over the years… Actually, I don't know if they moved to the centre left or if the political spectrum shifted so much further to the right that it appeared that they were in the centre-left thirty years later.

As for me, I had my first sixteen years in the United States and these were certainly very formative years for me. I came of age during the 1960s, which in the United States as well as Canada was a pretty remarkable moment of cultural and political ferment. It was a time when a lot of conservative traditions were being challenged and the new left was in its full flower: for a brief moment, the future seemed to open up before us, for people of my generation. And so I think that probably left a trace.

Did you feel unsettled when you moved across the border? Was there continuity, because both countries were in this moment of generalized youth ferment and hopefulness? Or was it a shift, leaving a country that takes for granted that it is the centre of the universe, to live in this hick country called Canada?

Definitely, the latter. I arrived in Canada as somewhat of an ugly American, steeped in the kind of unreflexive nationalism that Americans, certainly at that time, were socialized into very strongly. This was the height of American hegemony in the world, in the 1960s, so that most Americans thought this way. I don't think that is a gross overgeneralization, actually -- it was hegemonic, it was definitely commonsense to assume that the United States

was the greatest society in history. And so to leave the United States and to go elsewhere, to go to a place that even superficially appeared to be almost a carbon copy of the United States… I remember making various invidious comparisons in everyday life in Canada and they always inferiorized Canada.

I did this for some of my teenage years. It was an interesting process shedding that American nationalism, eventually challenging it and renouncing it, if you like. When you cross the border, when you immigrate, it's a process of cultural mobility that you undertake and there is a lot of thinking of who you are and where you are in the world. There's quite a good essay by Dorothy Smith in a book that I co-edited, called *Fragile Truths,* about the development of Canadian sociology and anthropology. She has an essay called 'Remaking a Life, Remaking Sociology' (Smith 1992) and she reflects on her move from the United States to Canada around the same time as I was immigrating. She writes how it inspired a very productive re-thinking of what she was all about and what she was doing as a sociologist.

Of course, I was a teenager, so I didn't go through that process. But I did, as I say, consciously shed nationalism as an aspect of my identity. In this sense, my becoming a Canadian meant not exchanging one status reification for another, if I can put it that way, but rather really rejecting nationalism in the shadow of this rejection of American nationalism. I've been a pretty reluctant Canadian, I would say. I didn't become a Canadian citizen until well into the 1980s and that's because basically I became an internationalist in the tradition of Marx. I really don't identify with the Canadian state. So, for me, it was pedagogically quite instructive to 'begin' as an ugly American and go through a whole process of remaking self.

Once you moved to Canada, you finished high school and then went to university. Your dad was in computer science, but you didn't go that route…At what point did you become interested in sociology?

My dad was in computer science with an engineering, natural science background and he didn't think much of sociology, although that changed over time. When I went to university he was trying to salvage my career prospects by suggesting various things. I had no idea what I would become when I began university. In my first year I bounced from biology to business administration, where I lasted for a couple of lectures, and then to sociology. And that was really by happenstance because I didn't know what sociology was. But I was immediately attracted by the big picture analysis, the emphasis on

interconnections, by sociology's character as an interdiscipline more than a discipline, by sociology's unruliness and promiscuity.

As an undergraduate, I developed a strong sense of the importance of holistic analysis. I didn't read a lot of Marx, just a few of the classical works, like *The German Ideology*, part one, and *The Communist Manifesto*. But, I developed this really strong commitment to holistic analysis. At that point, it was more of a microsociological take that I had, a social psychological mode but that, in some ways, was helpful too because a lot of the issues that we face when we come to political concerns around counterhegemony and social movement formation are partly social psychological issues. It's important to have a good social psychological understanding of how hegemony works on us. So, I picked some of that up in my undergraduate programme, along with this commitment to holistic analysis.

Did graduate school become an obvious option in your later undergraduate years, particularly since your father was an academic?

I had very supportive mentors at Brock University, professors that I got to know very well and they took me under their wings. I was writing things that were being published as an undergraduate and I really enjoyed the whole context of academia. So I could see my career as an academic as I progressed through the programme.

It was quite a small programme, so that was an advantage because I had a lot of time with my professors one on one. Since there was no graduate programme, the undergraduate honours students were treated as graduate students. So, I was quite clear that I wanted to go to graduate school and I applied to a number of different graduate programmes. Some of them were in the States, since after all, I was an American citizen and I had only moved to Canada a few years earlier. The only Canadian school I applied to was York University.

I was accepted to all of the schools -- and that was a moment of decision. I could have gone to the University of Illinois, or Pittsburgh or Michigan. But, at that point, I realized that I wanted to live in Canada. It wasn't really an academic decision, it was a decision about where I wanted to be in the world.

Were you attracted to York University because it was a solid sociology department or because you wanted to work with specific people or

because there was a certain density of critical thinkers or…? I guess, specifically, I'm wondering if this is where your commitments to Marxism and feminism began.

I originally went to York to work with Jim Moore, who was a small groups social psychologist, since I was very much microsociological coming out of my undergraduate programme. And this was one of the relatively few places in Canada that really featured the sociology of small groups. But Jim was on sabbatical the year that I arrived and the fellow who was running the small groups lab was a recently hired assistant professor, John Fox, who became my MA thesis supervisor and my dissertation co-supervisor. And, it just happened that John was a red diaper baby and a very committed Marxist, in addition to being an accomplished social psychologist. So, my interest in Marxism really developed through the mentorship of my two co-supervisors at York – Mike Orstein was my other supervisor -- who were both Marxists.

Through them, I became involved in the Toronto Marxist institute, which they were both quite active in. This is a very interesting formation coming out of the new left. It was an educational collective that existed outside of universities but that connected graduate students and faculty with various activists and concerned citizens that wanted to learn more about left analysis and perhaps read the classics of historical materialism and so on. Initially I became involved as a participant in study groups and then eventually I became a Marxist Institute activist, you might say, and facilitator of study groups. I think the Marxist Institute is still in business, actually. At the time that I was in it, it was very much a socialist-feminist collective. I began reading and absorbing and discussing socialist-feminist literature. Basically, I became a Marxist and a feminist simultaneously, explaining, perhaps, the interest I've had in how to integrate distinct yet related political projects. And of course Gramsci is particularly helpful on this issue. I think it does come back to this way in which I took up Marxism as I was taking up feminism. If there is some coherency or trajectory in my work (laughs) than this is one of the threads, I think!

But, there were a number of interacting factors. Arriving at York -- this is 1975 -- it was still very much a centre of new left activism and there was a very strong presence of the new left on campus. It also had a very strong, very large social science faculty, and still does, with a definite tilt to the left. So it was a big shift in context moving from Brock to York. And the York sociology department was this sprawling, chronically factionalized department. In a

sense, one had to fit in by choosing sides. One side was the radical phenomenology side and the other side was everything else. So, I went to the 'everything else' side, which included Marxist political economic analysis and all sorts of things. Some of the early socialist feminist scholarship was underway by then.

Looking back on it, there were a number of overdetermining elements. Another element is that this was in the mid-1970s, at the high tide of Canadianization as a movement, a movement which, narrowly construed, sought to begin to undo the effects of the migration of academics like my father, particularly into the social sciences. Of course, it's not such a problem in a field like computer science. But, as an example, the department of sociology at Brock, where I did my BA, was really a kind of American branch-plant set-up, in the sense that virtually everybody there was American, trained in the United States and not particularly knowledgeable about Canada. So, when I got to York, I found somewhat different of a sociological world. Paul Grayson, in particular, introduced me to the sociology of Canada. I had learned very little about it at Brock. I took Paul's course on Canadian society, a graduate seminar, and as I read Innis, Creighton, Levitt and Watkins and the lot, that was part of what shifted my perspective from a more micro perspective to a more macrosociological, political economy take.

Another thing I took away from York, partly because I didn't identify with the radical phenomenology wing of the department, was this emphasis on combining rigorous empirical work with careful theorization. I already had this at Brock to some extent, but it really became that much more consolidated at York. At the time, there was a certain dualism that was quite typical for radical scholars, which was to dismiss empirical work as tainted by positivism. Of course, this was to their own disadvantage…So that kind of combination of empirical work and careful theorization set me on an intellectual trajectory towards critical realism, which I embraced in the late 1980s and that I still very much identify with.

You say you were introduced to Canadian political economy at York, but you have been quite critical of Canadian political economists in a more nationalist tradition. I think of the contributions of Mel Watkins, say, or Wallace Clement. Can you explain your response to nationalist political economy, but also your distance from some other left-intellectual traditions, including both post-modern identity politics and a narrow

Marxist approach that identifies progressive struggle with the struggles white, unionized, working class men…

As I mentioned, I read Marx extensively and closely within those Marxist Institute study groups, beginning in the mid-1970s. This was also the heyday of dependency theory and left nationalism in Canadian political economy. Having developed a scepticism toward nationalism as a progressive strand, particularly in the Global North, I was struck by the almost total disconnect between the substance of Marxist political economy and the claims of Canadian political economy, and I featured this in my doctoral research on the structure of the Canadian capitalist class. This was not so much a rethinking of Marxist political economy -- my thesis was mainstream Marxist -- but it appeared quite radical in comparison with the then-dominant perspective in Canadian political economy.

What I have found fascinating is how dependency theory and left nationalism persists, despite its having been discredited on an intellectual level. I think this is because, from the Waffle foreword, the dependency framework has been the theory that informs the practice of left social democrats -- intent on incremental reforms that can humanize capitalism in Canada. Gary Teeple's 1972 dismissal of the NDP as 'liberals in a hurry' (Teeple 1972) is perhaps harsh, yet more than smidgen accurate. We still see this in recent work by Mel Watkins and Jim Stanford, as in the critique of the 'hollowing out' of corporate Canada -- the recent foreign takeovers of companies like Inco. This amounts to an unreconstructed replay of Levitt's *Silent Surrender* (Levitt 1970). I debated the issue of hollowing out with Mel at the Canadian Political Science Association meetings recently. I recall that at one point he remarked that the problem with the Canadian bourgeoisie is that they are not very bright -- that is a close paraphrase. The resemblance to Daniel Drache's exceptionalist thesis on 'the Canadian bourgeoisie and its national consciousness', (Drache 1970) from the late 1960s, is stunning.

I would take the exact opposite view. The Canadian capitalist class is entirely unexceptional. Within the logic of capitalist rationality, it responds to, and of course shapes, the specific accumulation situation in which it is dynamically embedded. Capital based in Canada is internationalizing at least as quickly as Canadian firms are being incorporated into transnational empires based abroad. So-called staples are produced in Canada under conditions that feature highly advanced, capital-intensive technology and relatively high wages. The composition of capital is skewed in the direction of resource

extraction because these are the most profitable sectors for industrial capital, not due to some logic of dependency.

I made these arguments in my 1986 book, *Corporate Power and Canadian Capitalism*. In my view, there is little point in putting great effort into the critique of foreign control, which in Canada is not particularly higher than in several other advanced capitalist countries. The emphasis should be on democratizing control of economic life, from the shop floor to overall investment decision-making and budgeting. Jerome Klassen and I have an article in the next issue of the *Canadian Journal of Sociology* (Carroll and Klassen, 2010) that presents a detailed analysis of hollowing out and the continuity of corporate power in Canada.

On the other issue, I have criticized both the economistic view that class struggle is the only game, partly because this conception simply leaves out the social justice claims of most of humanity, and partly because it misconstrues what class struggle might be about in our era. The typical equation of working class with organized labour is a contributing factor to the confusion. The noble image of workers fighting for higher pay is a very poor template for these times, which is not to say that labour's resistance to its immiseration is unimportant in the class struggle. But really, in a world in which private appropriation of wealth – capital – holds back human development in so many ways and keeps us on this unsustainable treadmill of production, the class struggle is not about higher pay. It is about ending the dominance of capital in human affairs. Given that the commanding heights of industry and finance are controlled by a miniscule fraction of humanity, class struggle from below is, effectively, the struggle to bring wealth under public, democratic control. The idea is to replace alienated social relations with those of mutual support, to break the class power of capital – power over -- while fostering new forms of community and power-with. This is the class struggle, and it necessarily intersects with a raft of social justice and ecological issues and movements.

The bigger issue, I think, is not that of orthodox Marxist die-hards of the Second International; they are no longer with us in any numbers! Rather, it revolves around a dismissal of the relevance of class, based in part on the antiquated stereotype I just invoked, and the elevation of identity and discourse to an exalted status, in concert with an unhealthy scepticism toward the construction of a collective will capable of effecting change beyond local, micro-political contexts. Rather than a postmodern retreat from class, I think we need a broader view of class struggle, along the lines I have sketched. As

capitalism's dual economic/ecological crisis has deepened, we see a reappearance of history's old mole, and perhaps a disenchantment with 1970s-style Parisian theory, which seems more than a little quaint. This is registered in the popularity of autonomist analyses such as Hardt and Negri's (eg., Hardt and Negri 2001). Foucault, as it turns out, is most helpful when taken with large helpings of Marx. Foucault had a cautionary tale to tell in his turn away from all big, transformative projects, but in this respect his politics seems to belong to a different era – the climax of post-war Fordism, the failure of state socialism and of the French Communist Party to break from the Stalinist template and so on. The challenges humanity faces today are simply too vast to be addressed within the confines of micro-politics and the ethics of self-care.

I have criticized the postmodern turn away from the concern with building a counter-hegemonic unity in diversity, a broadly inclusive movement/party that could create the cultural and political conditions for transitioning from capitalism to a democratic socialist formation. This scenario seems entirely far-fetched in contemporary Canada, though not in France or Germany, to say nothing of Venezuela or Bolivia. We need to keep in mind the second thesis on Feuerbach -- that humanity must prove the this-sidedness of its thinking in practice. As long as the left remains marginal, disorganized into postmodern fragments and social democratic remnants, the vision of a post capitalist world will remain far-fetched, *here*. And this brings us to the kernel of truth in Canadian left nationalism: Canada shares with the fading hegemon of world capitalism most of a continental landmass, as well as the deep cultural legacy of white settler colonialism. The geopolitics of North America, in my view, preclude any Canadian rendition of what happened, remarkably and to the everlasting credit of the Cuban people, in Cuba half a century ago, or what is happening today in Bolivia and Venezuela. The prospects for socialism in Canada are not easily separated from the fate of the left in the United States. That is a harrowing thought; indeed, it is the repressed underside to left-nationalist complaints about the congenital weaknesses of the Canadian bourgeoisie. Strategically, this asymmetrical dependence suggests that the left in Canada, while vigorously pressing social justice claims locally, provincially and nationally, should also cultivate continental -- and broader-- solidarities. The Common Frontiers project of the Canada/US/Mexico labour movement in opposition to NAFTA and the inspirational role that Canadian activists played in the Battle in Seattle of 1999

are exemplary. Deep integration, a bourgeois project now on hold but still alive, needs a creative response from the left.

Although you have been critical of Canadian political economy, I wonder if working in Canada, a step away from empire, has nonetheless mattered to the development of your radical political economy. You've written that many American intellectuals, consciously or unconsciously, identify with empire. This collapses the ironic distance that they are able to have within political economy: since they are in the eye of the storm, they don't see it. Being in Canada might enable an ironic, critical distance.

There is something in it. There is an American left. It's pretty marginal, but there are some very good left scholars in the United States. Nancy Fraser would be one example and there are many others. I think of the notoriety of Noam Chomsky. I've found American left academics quite inspirational. But I think it might well be the case that if you were to do a citation analysis of my work, that a lot of the references do not come from the hegemonic ground zero of global capitalism, but from the middle power places, like the Netherlands. I have spent a couple of sabbatical leaves in the Netherlands and that has been really helpful, getting a Dutch perspective.

And how did that happen, your Dutch connection? And what did you learn from this 'Dutch perspective'?

It all comes back to family, of course. My wife is the daughter of Catholic Dutch immigrants, meaning that we have a lot of cousins and uncles and aunts, a whole family network there. When it came to planning my first sabbatical in 1987, we decided to live in the Netherlands. I got an appointment as a visiting scholar in political science at the University of Amsterdam, which was absolutely perfect. That was the beginning.

At that time, in 1987-88, the Dutch left was beginning to break apart in some respects: the Dutch Communist party, for example, did not last much longer. Some of the scholars that I got to know were in the Dutch Communist Party, very Gramscian and very astute in their analysis not just of Dutch politics but global politics. I'm thinking of people like Kees van der Pijl and Henk Overbeek. They were professors of international relations there. There was a network of left academics, political scientists, sociologists and so on, that put on a series called *After the Crisis.* So we had these colloquiums running that were about the prospects for the left and for global capitalism

coming out of the crisis of Fordist Keynesianism of the 1970s. Of course, by then, neoliberalism was already in full swing but there was still the question of what kinds of contestations were possible, of what could take place. I found their perspectives, their insights, really attractive, especially the insights that Kees and Henk brought around how to think about the issues of hegemony within a political economic perspective on capitalism that was open to theorizing collective agency and transformative practice. So it was really helpful for me to spend a year with these folks. My actual sponsor at the University of Amsterdam was Meindert Fennema and a few years earlier, Meindert had written a pathbreaking work on transnational corporate elite networks as his dissertation. I have continued to work with Meindert over the years and we have recently published an article on the transnational capitalist class (Carroll and Fennema 2002).

Afterwards, in 2000-2001 you were visiting fellow at a centre there…

That's the centre for advanced studies (the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences), NIAS they call it. It's one of several centres in the world that you have to apply to, to take your sabbatical there. If you are able to get in, it's like dying and going to heaven as an academic. The resources are just perfect and you get to hang out with a lot of interesting people from around the world. You are in this bubble for a year with really good support for your research and really interesting people you are having lunch with each day (laughs) and offices that are six or seven times the average floor space of an office in the Cornett building at the University of Victoria! (laughs). So that was a very comfortable year and a very stimulating year. We had a research group and we were all at NIAS able to work together, looking at structures of corporate power in different countries in the world and globally…

You've also spent a little bit of time in Japan. I wonder if you could say something about what these international relationships mean for you, as a left-academic.

I've visited Japan, twice and spent about three weeks there each time. I don't have the same depth of relationships in Japan as I do in the Netherlands, but I have some very good colleagues there that I have kept in touch with, although I have not directly collaborated with them. For example, my good friend, Unno

Yahilo of Kanazawa State University will be staying at UVic this spring and summer. He will be writing a book for Japanese readers that resembles Jim Stanford's (2008) *Economics for Everybody*, which is quite a good book for Canadian readers. But Unno's one critique of Jim's book is that it is not sufficiently attuned to issues of globalization, so Unno will feature a stronger analysis of globalization in his book. So, I look forward to the various conversations I will have with him this spring and this summer.

These kind of collegial relations are really important to the development of left scholarship, for people to travel, to get to know each other, whether you are able to spend a whole year as colleagues or simply internet networking. It's important: the left is necessarily a cosmopolitan formation. I've certainly learned a lot from my involvement with Japanese scholars. Most of them are economists, by the way, since left political economy is still a very strong current in Japan: it was never completely displaced by American neoclassical economics. So, that is an interesting aspect of Japanese academia.

Can you talk about being at the University of Victoria, which could look quite peripheral within Canadian academia?

When I moved to Victoria in 1981 it was more on the periphery of cultural life, if you like, than it is now. Partly because of the advances in communications technology, partly because of the development of the city, it's become more culturally diverse and interesting. The University itself has grown tremendously and has attracted a lot of excellent scholars, many of them radical. In the initial years, of course, my benchmark was York University and it was a big shift from York to UVic. But, I think over time it's become a more and more interesting place. The student body has changed as well; it's become more multicultural. There are still not that many international students compared to universities like York, but it is a lot more diverse than it was three decades ago.

And, the sociology department has changed quite a bit. When I first moved to Victoria, the department was pretty steeped in US-style positivism and the norm was a kind of sociology focussed around quantitative methods and hypothetical-deductive theory: that was sociology. The kind of work that Rennie Warburton was doing that was more critical and historical was really not considered sociology by a fair number of colleagues in the department. So it was not a very interesting place in that regard, initially. Of course, I

gravitated towards Rennie Warburton -- he was the only Marxist-oriented member of the department and one of very few critical sociologists. But, over the three decades I've been there, there have been a lot of changes, not just within sociology…

The place already became exciting, I would say, in 1983 when we got a taste of the kind of class struggle politics that BC was quite famous for, less so today, but certainly at that time, when the BC Social Credit government brought down this full-scale neoliberal political programme. It was the first of its kind in Canada, actually, so it was very much the vanguard of neoliberalism, the so-called 'restraint programme' of 1983. And a group of us, led by Warren Magnusson in political science, formed a little organization called the Committee on Alternatives for British Columbia. We put out, fairly quickly, an edited book called *The New Reality* (Magnusson *et al* 1984). It was the first critique of neoliberalism as a kind of coherent political programme in Canada. It was bestseller in BC and had some impact in terms of popular education and consciousness-raising. And that was very much my entry point into writing about social movements because I was active in the Solidarity Coalition, as it was resisting the new restraint programme, and I ended up writing the chapter in that book that is about the Solidarity Coalition. Also, it was my entry point into writing and thinking about neoliberalism.

In a sense, moving to BC was….a gift (laughs). I got in on the ground floor on neoliberalism as a phenomenon, I could be a participant-observer on the kind of transitions, the kind of political contention and the content involved in neoliberal politics. All of that came into focus for me in 1983-1984, which means, although you could say Victoria was on the periphery, in a sense it was in the vanguard of what was to come. The 'Common Sense Revolution' in Ontario doesn't take place until the mid-90s but already in BC we are seeing this project and we can sort of look at it and we can participate in resisting it but we can also come to understand it and so forth…

So there was the hands-on empirical experience of neoliberalism and social movements, and then there was the Gramscian conceptual part, from your colleagues in Amsterdam, a few years later… That was the process?

Definitely. Very much so. Basically, the article that Bob Ratner and I put together as our first collaborative work came out in 1989 in *Critical Sociology* (Carroll and Ratner 1989)and it was on British Columbia and the development of neoliberalism in British Columbia, as a hegemonic project,the attempts to

resist it and how they failed -- how basically they were very conjunctural, mechanical assemblages of movements that lacked a real coherent social vision and didn't have the organizational capacity to sustain themselves over the long haul. What was happening there was not a war of position but a momentary war of manoeuvre to try to block or resist a particular state initiative, and it was not likely to succeed for that reason. We wrote that up very much as a Gramscian analysis. I wrote most of that paper at the University of Amsterdam.

It's interesting that you say that because in your more recent work on media activists with Hackett (Hackett and Carroll 2006), you suggest that media activists in Vancouver share what might be called an 'architectonic' underlying political economic vision, even when they have what looks like quite different immediate aims…So, you seem a bit more optimistic about the capacity for political analysis among activists. Is there some kind of maturation of social movements against neoliberalism, at least in BC, over the decades?

It's hard for me to really judge the situation, today. When Bob Ratner and I did our work, this was really in the 1990s when we did a lot of in-depth interviewing with activists. Bob Hackett and I did our work on media activism in the year 2001 to 2002 primarily, so that's more recent. But, still, to really make a comment on how things are going at the moment is a little bit difficult. I would hope there has been some learning. In the interviews that we did in the 1990s, we found that the movement activists who were more networked across movements tended to have a more political economic analysis of power. They could actually talk *strategically* about what they were up against. That is absolutely critical for any kind of effective movement action. I think if we did the study again, we'd find similar results. Again, there's lots of savvy political activists. But probably what is lacking is the organizational form.

So, it's sort of the 64 000 dollar question, but again, what's missing is perhaps not so much individual learning or the consciousness of individual activists, but finding the organizational forms that can actually carry a counterhegemonic movement of movements. Of course, classically we are taking about a political party. But the space for a political party in a quite dysfunctional political system like Canada's, where the first past the post system basically robs the electorate of its democratic power, is constricted. And don't think the Green Party is a place for much counterhegemonic

movement. In some other contexts, green political parties have played pretty important roles but I don't see that in Canada.

The NDP, as we've written about, is like many social democratic parties, perhaps the worst offender being the British Labour Party under the spell of 'New Labour'. The NDP has undergone a certain process of neoliberalization, so it's a social democratic party that leans more to the right than to the left. It does not engage in *any* popular education or consciousness-raising. It is thoroughly opportunistic. Of course -- give the usual disclaimer! --I say this even though I have plenty of friends in the NDP (laughs). The NDP has a left wing, there are committed socialists in the NDP: I know that to be the case. I also say it as someone who donates money to the NDP and who has donated time on election day and so on. I don't consider myself to be hostile to the NDP. But I am profoundly disappointed….Perhaps disappointed is not the right word because I think what is happening is not surprising. I think what is needed is a political formation that is different from the NDP and that hasn't been happening.

Following on this, another feature of your work is that it emphasizes the role of the state. In your lecture for *Socialist Studies* (Carroll 2006) you talk about social movements 'walking on both legs', meaning simultaneous commitment to internationalism and to the national state. You have never given up on the state as a vehicle for progressive social change, despite NDP failures.

Any war of position has to be conducted partly vis-à-vis the state and partly vis-à-vis civil society. It's not an either/or. Focussing simply on one front is a formula for disaster. The state is a reality. Of course, not all power is somehow condensed into the state. Power is indeed capillary and diffused. If you go back to Gramsci's own work it's quite clear that that's how he views power. But, the notion that the state can be safely ignored is a really seriously flawed starting point for politics in today's world. I tend to see the state, very much with Gramsci, as extending beyond the immediate apparatuses of the state, into civil society. So we can speak of the integral state ,which is an entire complex field of cultural and political activity and a terrain of struggle. This is where the struggle is taking place. It is a pretty complex terrain and it is not easy to win these struggles because the terrain is sloped in ways that favour the ruling groups, but…one can still win, while playing uphill, it's just a lot more difficult! (laughs)

Of course, the classic social democratic strategy is to win an election to win control over the levers of the state and then to use those levers to bring in a series of social reforms. But, it's hard to actually point to many effective examples of that. The one that you would point to immediately would be Sweden, I suppose. But the point there is that for that long period of social democratic governance in Sweden, as Jonas Pontusson has pointed out, the Swedish Labour Party and labour movement became hegemonic: it was the hegemonic class. So, it was an odd kind of situation of a capitalist formation in which the labour movement was hegemonic. This is what made social democracy work in Sweden and it enabled the Swedish labour party to win a long series of elections and really implement a programme of progressive reform that did, to some extent, shift the balance of class power. I give a lot of credit to Swedish-style social democracy but I don't think that is easily replicated under today's conditions within the provinces, to say nothing of the federal level in Canada.

I wanted to pick up on this Gramscian idea that the state reaches into civil society, including into education. This means there are possibilities for building progressive spaces for critical thinkers within academia. Teaching undergraduates is one of the few times left-academics have a captive audience! Of course, you have been quite involved in the creation of such spaces, across academia. This seems to go beyond an idea of professional service, to self-consciously creating room for left-progressive activism…

Yes, absolutely. I mentioned the Committee on Alternatives for British Columbia that we formed in 1983, publishing a book in 1984. That network became the infrastructure for our developing the Contemporary Social and Political Thought programme, an interdisciplinary programme in critical theory at UVic. That programme, which launched in 1988, was really quite transformative. For example, in our graduate programme in sociology, we began to attract very interesting, critical, theoretically-oriented graduate students. That changed the nature of the graduate programme, much to the chagrin of some of my colleagues I might say (laughs). This is a small-scale example of how these networks that go across disciplines, in this case within a particular institution, can bring about a shift in the context of teaching and the kinds of students who come into a programme and so on. So we have a much more vibrant programme that I think we would have if CSPT had not been invented in the late 1980s.

If I think of the Social Justice Studies programme, back in 2006, I put out a memo to a dozen progressive colleagues in different departments at UVic suggesting the idea that we have a critical mass of teachers and a lot of interested students that would sustain a programme of this kind. And I got back some very encouraging responses, so we started working on it. It was approved in 2008 and we accepted our first cohort of students this past fall. There is a lot of student interest. It's the kind of programme that exists between a whole number of disciplines, so it's creating space that enables students to pick up a credential: you can major in whatever but then you also minor in Social Justice Studies. That enables them to connect into interdisciplinary analyses of injustice and of social movements and other practices, critical pedagogy and so on.

The faculty of education is involved. There are courses on anti-oppressive social work; UVic has a very strong social work department in that regard and they're involved in the programme. There is critical history and histories of decolonization; the UVic history department is really strong. Indigenous Studies is heavily involved in Social Justice Studies. So, it's a really interesting nexus between a number of disciplines, involving 42 participating faculty members who are all very much on board in terms of Social Justice Studies and bringing in students who are very often activist-minded, even if they are not activist in their practices today. And then connecting all of that into the community through various means. This term we have a 'Conversation with Activists' series where we have leading activists from Victoria come up to campus to dialogue with a group of students in the Social Justice programme, as well as anybody else who wants to show up. It's an interesting gathering point for civic engagement in which we're combining the education function of educating students in the programme, with reaching out to various communities and trying to establish these kinds of networks and dialogues in a local sense. That is going really well, so it presents a nice model.

It's important to say that there are a number of Social Justice programmes in Canada. Ours is not the first. There is one at Brock, at Windsor. King's College at the University of Western Ontario has one and the University of Regina has one. And I have been trying to get together a meeting – speaking of networks and cross-institutions -- of the directors of these different programmes at the Congress. That might blossom into a session at Socialist Studies where we can talk about the pedagogy of Social Justice Studies.

I assume that the book *Critical Strategies for Social Research* (Carroll 2004) grew out of your teaching experiences. This seems to me characteristic of a certain kind of rigour across all your work, the insistence that methods are not divorced from politics, but embedded in the dominant political economy.

The book emerged directly -- well almost directly -- out of teaching. I noticed a problem in the methods curriculum in our department. It's basically the same in sociology departments generally, which is that we teach the techniques of research but not really the strategies of how to do research, particularly from a social justice perspective. That is to say, we don't teach how to do research in ways that are not just ethical, in the sense of not doing harm to people, but that actually help a process of empowerment of the disempowered or that further democratization through the research process itself, while gathering veridical data. It's not a matter of 'corrupting the data', but doing the research in a way that is sensitive to the social justice concerns that surround the issue that you're looking at.

Basically, I convinced the department to introduce a social justice concentration within our degree programme about a decade ago and part of that concentration was a new course called 'Critical Research Strategies.' After teaching that course for a term I was asked by Barry Adam at the University of Windsor to give the inaugural lecture for the University of Windsor's new doctoral programme in social justice studies. This was in 2002. I prepared a lecture on sociology as praxis, and the lecture reflected on various critical research strategies for developing knowledge that address issues of power and domination and that tries to press for justice. These are methods like institutional ethnography, participatory action research, critical discourse analysis and of course, good old historical materialist dialectics, as ways of generating emancipatory theory and practice. This was the idea. And this is how I teach the course – I still teach the course, I'm teaching it this term.

That lecture became the backbone of the book. The book took shape from the lecture and the lecture took shape out of my teaching the course. And the book became the textbook for the course. It's been used in some other courses in Canada, but it hasn't had an enormous up-take, partly because, as I say, the methods curriculum tends to be fixed in stone and really overly oriented around technique. There is not a lot of space in the curriculum for these kinds of discussions. But it's been a very successful course and the

students in it certainly seem to get a lot out of it. It's part of our social justice studies minor/diploma programme, as an elective.

You insist that the way research is carried out cannot be separated from politics, especially a concern for progressive, socially just politics. But, your concern with social justice carries over to other aspects of your life. Of course, I am referring here to your song 'Do We Pull the Monster Down', about the injustices built into capitalism, which you wrote for one of your sons. So, I wonder if you could talk about where this fits in with your more obviously academic work?

This is a very good question, particularly coming after the question on critical research strategies because it's important to recognize that we can, that we *need* to find the truths about the human condition, not simply through the use of scientific method. Artistic, literary aesthetic kinds of modes of presentation and that kind of work, like novels, for example, are a tremendous source of insight about the human condition. They are not the same genre, if you like, as a social science research article, but they are not to be dismissed. They can't be appraised using the same kinds of standards and everything, but I don't think that the social sciences have a monopoly on truth and insights about the human condition.

In terms of songs, and this particular song… Well, it's really one in a long series of songs, of birthday songs that I have written for my sons over the years, since they were tiny tykes. As they have matured, so have the songs. Many of the recent ones are political in one way or another. Both of my sons are politically pretty engaged. Last summer, for example, I wrote a rhumba based on Ernst Bloch's notion of the 'Not Yet', for my older son Myles who was turning twenty. This song is entitled 'Not Yet.' It's very much a song about utopia and the possibility for utopia. That possible future, as potential, already inhabits the present, as what Bloch called 'the concrete forward dream'. But the realization of that dream is not here, not yet: it's over the horizon, it's waiting for tomorrow. Nonetheless, it's still a possibility that's not to be denied *as a possibility*.

But, of course, 'Monster' is much more of a dystopic piece and it's really the only one that I have recorded and shamelessly uploaded to Youtube (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rf8xB8gLp_I). It's been used in popular education, it's been put to use in political film festivals and in various teaching contexts. That's one of the great things about the internet, you can put

something up, and people will make use of it: if it's useful to them, they'll make use of it. The internet, in that sense, is a tremendously subversive communications medium.

I consider this song and the kind of visual presentation that goes with it, as a socio-poetic intervention. It does connect with my sociology work. It's not research, it's a different mode of expression. But, in many respects, using aesthetic modes can be much more powerful and effective in reaching people with a message and inspiring people: that was the idea with this. I'd like to do more of this kind of work if I had the time (laughs) but so far that hasn't presented itself.

Your forthcoming work (Carroll 2010) revisits capitalist networks and some of your earliest work, likewise investigates network relationships amongst the capitalist class. Empirically, can you describe some of your findings, from this book?

I have just completed this book and the working title is *The Making of a Transnational Capitalist Class*. In terms of thinking about what it all means, off the top, I would emphasize the extent to which the decades since the late 1970s have been a time of class struggle from above. You can see this in the comments of insiders like Warren Buffet. You know his famous interview with the *New York Times* in 2006 where he declared --this is a close paraphrase-- 'Yes, of course there is a class struggle, and my class is winning.'[1] It's a very interesting quote from the third wealthiest capitalist of the world. There is no doubt that capitalists understand that they are engaged in class struggle. Unfortunately, the rest of humanity is confused about it (laughs).

Looking at the actual architecture of global corporate power, certainly you can see that it is a pretty tight world up at the top. There are regional clusterings and still, definitely, national corporate communities, such as Canada's. These national corporate communities connect into a transnational network of business leaders who are often also involved in transnational policy planning groups, like the World Economic Forum or the International Chamber of Commerce, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development and so on. There is what Stephen Gill has called a transnational historic bloc in support of neoliberalism. From a social movement perspective, we need to

[1] "There's class warfare, all right," Mr. Buffett said, "but it's my class, the rich class, that's making war, and we're winning" (Stein 2006).

recognize this as a social movement from above that has been very effective in promoting and consolidating the neoliberal project. In general, we have, then, an era of development and consolidation of neoliberalism as a hegemonic project both within countries and on a global scale.

The specific way this has played out in Canada is, I think, quite interesting. Of course, we have our own right-wing think tanks and policy groups closely integrated with the top tier of the capitalist class. They've been very effective in producing and disseminating neoliberal propaganda, getting on the inside of certain parties and governments and so on. In Canada, we have this interesting federal-provincial dynamic where the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement and NAFTA were major strategic moves in leveraging a low–profile, molecular accretion of neoliberal policies and provisions at the federal level that gradually shifted the burden for social programmes to the provinces, particularly under Paul Martin's years as Finance Minister in the Liberal government and the cutbacks he instituted. In a number of ways, relatively low profile changes were made and a kind of passive revolution took place in bringing neoliberalism in at the federal level.

At the same time, this was punctuated by wars of manoeuvre in the provinces. I mentioned the 1983 restraint programme in BC, that was massively opposed by the Solidarity Coalition, but unsuccessfully. Of course, this goes right through to Ontario's Common Sense Revolution in the 1990s. You have this dynamic of neoliberal transformation by stealth at the federal level, to the point where now we have one of the most conservative politicians in the world as our Prime Minister. He is able to cash in on the hegemony of neoliberalism today and relatively few eyebrows are raised. I mean, I read *The Globe and Mail* and so on and you occasionally find someone writing in and saying that this obsession with cutting taxes is thoroughly irrational. Not particularly from a socialist perspective, but from a managerial perspective of trying to look after the basic infrastructure and basic needs in reproducing labour power, within the dominant social formation. But I think it's gotten to the point where neoliberal ideology has made it virtually taboo for a politician to suggest that taxes need to go up, which is obviously the case. We need to restore a progressive system of taxation. Taxes need to go up, particularly on wealthy people, but even on middle-income people. …. Basically, what we are talking about is a return to a logic of decommodification, which was part of the logic of the Keynesian welfare state – to take things out of the marketplace and to supply them to citizens as rights.

I think neoliberalism in Canada has established itself to the point that a politician like Jack Layton or Carole James, the NDP leader in British Columbia, these representatives of social democracy are so intimidated by neoliberalism and their actual parties have become so neoliberalized in practice, that they refuse to go there. The last election here in BC, Carole James used as her major plank a kind of right-wing populist tax revolt rhetoric. And I don't know what she was trying to do: capture the red-neck vote for the NDP? Instead, she could have responsibly and rationally critiqued the blatant hypocrisy of the provincial Liberals here on their so-called green strategy for the province. It would be very easy to point to the contradictions and holes in the actual policy of the Liberals. But because social democratic leaders have turned to neoliberalism, they don't believe that they can state anything outside that discourse and make it attractive to people. Secondly, they have accepted the widely popular idea that the electorate is now dumbed down to the point where people can't understand a rational political argument: this is the Baudrillardian scenario of the post-modern condition, people have turned off politics and just want to be entertained.

I think this is a misreading of the population completely. But, you can see this way of thinking in the strategies of social democratic leaders who refuse to try and put out any kind of complex political argument. Of course, this completely serves the right. The right is always served by opportunism and the dumbing down of politics: it is only a sophisticated political culture that would ever entertain a transition out of capitalism. This is really one of the big problems that we face. Certainly, it's not only in Canada that we face this, although Canada is one place and the United States perhaps even more so, where there is a political culture that is, on the one hand, minimally democratic and that, on the other, has been articulated overwhelmingly in terms of the neoliberal mantra of tax cuts and personal responsibility, shrinking the state, getting the state off our backs and so on. There is a need for the left to really break decisively from that and to offer a different social vision. I don't see that happening from the social democratic side of things, though. I think it's coming from the social movements.

I haven't talked much about my actual research on elites (laughs), but a lot of that work is fairly technical. I've kept it up over the years, over many, many years now, as a kind of service responsibility, in a weird way. It's obviously academic work, but it's also a service to try and map out the structure of capitalist power, to make it really tangible, as a research project. Of course, since the structure is being reinvented and changing all the time I

could do this into my afterlife (laughs). As a project, it doesn't disappear. But in some ways, you could say it's a rather mundane research activity compared to the more intrinsically interesting research on social movements. … But for me it's a kind of responsibility to continue to do this kind of mapping, and I think that the most recent research has been very fruitful in enabling me to map out these elite structures on a global scale, which is an important piece of the puzzle.

I should add that we can also see the very tentative rise, partly in response to neoliberalism and its contradictions, of a global left, as Boaventura de Sousa Santos has put it. This global left includes quite a range of groups and activities, yet there is a fragility to it evident, for instance, in the cloud that hangs over the fate of the World Social Forum. Finally I would point to the increasing importance, strategically and ethico-politically, of struggles to democratize communication. Corporate and state control of communication, not simply through ownership but through the instrumental practices of commercialized, profit driven media, is an enormous challenge. It is a pillar of bourgeois hegemony. Again we see variegated responses from movements -- culture jamming and media literacy efforts, creating alternative media, campaigns to use state-centered reforms to rein in capital's cultural power.

You are quite lucid about things that don't work, for example, with respect to the NDP in power in provincial governments and regarding the organizational limits of social movements, as well as the problems posed by post-modern identities oriented to consumerism instead of progressive activism. But, in your critical methods books, I was struck by your interpretation of Marx's famous quote about 'history weighing upon us as a nightmare', as a hopeful phrase -- hopeful since our present activism can mean a different future. We are not simply captured by the past. What we do, right now, can create the conditions for a different, better future. Despite your research, are you ultimately hopeful?

This is certainly one of the biggest questions of all. Of course, I have to say that I am deeply pessimistic about the future. (laughs). In principle, I would defend the position that I take, that certainly the past does not lock us into a future. We can radically remake the world. This *can* be done. It's entirely possible. But this nightmare weighing on the brains of the living is Marx's way of saying that yes, people do make their own history. But they don't choose the circumstances. It can be very difficult to reverse tendencies that have achieved an entrenched position in the world. What we're talking about here is the

hegemony of transnational corporate capital, of states that are at best minimally, formally democratic. So it is, indeed, an uphill struggle. Nonetheless, the fact that the hegemony is thin, because of enormous inequalities and injustices in world capitalism, creates openings. You can see various movements, the movements of landless workers in Brazil, various actions, particularly in South America. There are very, very encouraging political developments in specific places, which, of course, is how political developments occur.

But, I am, I think, overall, pessimistic. Let me qualify that and explain what I mean, before I get too depressing (laughs). I think that we are in an organic crisis, where as Gramsci would put it, 'the old is dying and the new cannot yet be born.' We can recall other deep, protracted crises of this sort. There is the depression of the 1930s, for example, or the 1970s crisis of Fordist capitalism that eventuated in the triumph of neoliberalism. But this crisis we are in now is unprecedented. It is unprecedented because capitalism's ecological footprint has outgrown the biosphere. John Bellamy Foster recently published a piece in *Monthly Review* (Foster, 2010) that made an acute observation. The ecological crisis, particularly over climate change, is quite different from an economic crisis in its basic logic. Economic crisis, we know, is cyclical. It's cyclical under the assumption that no transformation of capitalism occurs. That is to say, if humanity is unable to figure out how to exit from capitalism, what will happen in an economic crisis is that the crisis will be resolved on the backs of working people and the subalterns of this world. You can see how the crisis of the Fordist Keynesian formation was resolved that way. That is what neoliberalism accomplished, for a certain amount of time.

Now, of course, I would say that neoliberalism is in crisis, most visibly since at least 2008. But the point is that ecological crisis is not cyclical, it's degenerative. That is, there is no future recovery whose condition is being prepared by the collapse. The collapse is a cumulative collapse and it's ultimately a matter of fundamentally changing humanity's relationship with the rest of nature. Avoiding this crisis is about avoiding getting to the tipping point. Once the positive feedback mechanisms -- which are quite well known now, in terms of the melting of the polar ice caps and the release of methane from the tundra regions as they thaw -- once these mechanisms kick in, the long term future is really grim. I think that the situation is extremely urgent. Of course, capitalism has built into it this grow-or-die expansionary logic that makes it incapable of solving this crisis. Yet the window for a solution is pretty narrow. So, I think it's hard not to be pessimistic, quite honestly. But,

pessimism is not the same thing as fatalism. On intellectual grounds, I don't think it's realistic to be optimistic today. But to allow one's will to be broken by pessimism eliminates all hope for a brighter future, or really any future for most of humanity. So I think collectively, through some complex convergence of many movements and communities pushing out the new, we really have to pull the monster down.

To twist around Margaret Thatcher's famous phrase, I don't see any alternative.

Not Yet

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'Fermenting in the process of the real itself is the concrete forward dream: anticipating elements are a component of reality itself.' -- Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*

Can you hear it?
Softer than a whisper
Sounds like someone singing
Maybe several singing

Everybody
Knows that song they're singing
Slaves who picked the cotton
Never were forgotten

Every night and day music laughs and plays
And the bodies sway along
Gently to the pulsing beat that moves the feet so wondrously in the
symphony of song.

Can you taste it?
Just like fried banana
Pisang drenched in honey
Richer than all money

There's a sweetness
Growing in the garden
Swords beat into ploughshares
Can feed a billion confreres

Every night and day music laughs and plays
And the bodies sway along
Gently to the pulsing beat that moves the feet so wondrously in the symphony of song.

We can't see it
It's over the horizon
Waiting for tomorrow
Tomorrow and tomorrow

Yet we feel it
In every movement rising
With every new beginning
A world is ripe for winning

Every night and day music laughs and plays
And our bodies sway along
Gently to the pulsing beat that moves our feet so wondrously in the symphony of song.

For Myles
20 June 2009

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