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This is a major new work that will be of interest to social movement scholars, political theorists, activists, and all those concerned about the state of the North American Left. “Another politics” names a particular current of the larger Left. For Dixon this current is characterized by four “anti’s:” anti-authoritarianism, anti-oppression, anti-capitalism, and anti-imperialism. “Another politics” – or what Dixon also calls the “anti-authoritarian current” – has played a significant role in a variety of Left movements from the global justice movement of the 1990s (indeed Dixon was one of the core organizers for the Battle of Seattle in 1999), to the more recent Occupy movement. Influential social movement organizations and networks like No One is Illegal, Critical Resistance, and Rising Tide are also embedded within the anti-authoritarian current.

The book is informed by interviews that Dixon conducted with over forty activists in the US and Canada. Dixon does not position himself as an objective collector of activist knowledge; he writes as a longstanding participant. The book’s foreword is written by Angela Davis, who is a key influence for Dixon’s approach. As Davis reflects in her foreword, a comment that also describes her scholarship: “[Dixon] neither writes about, nor even for, movements and their participants; rather he writes with those movements” (p. xii). Methodologically *Another Politics* is an application of the “movement-relevant theory” approach that Dixon introduced in an influential *Social Movement Studies* article written with Doug Bevington in 2005. A key premise of movement-relevant theory is that social movements and activists are vital knowledge producers. “We have much to gain,” writes Dixon in *Another Politics*, “when we understand activists and organizers as experts about the struggles in which they are engaged” (p. 13).

This book is a vital learning tool for those who are not on the front lines of anti-authoritarian activism. It is also invaluable for activists themselves. The book curates and analyzes conversations with anti-authoritarians from across the continent. The core of the book is captured in a simple phrase that Dixon borrows from autonomist Marxist John Holloway: “Against and Beyond.” For Dixon “another politics” is characterized by the ongoing effort to simultaneously resist authoritarianism, oppression, capitalism, and imperialism (the against), while prefiguring deep egalitarianism in modes of organization – prefigurative efforts that contain the seeds of another world (the beyond). The key lessons of *Another Politics* – for anti-authoritarians and the wider Left – flow from Dixon’s descriptions of how front-line organizers are navigating the tidal zone between radical vision and concrete struggles. Before getting to these lessons I want to clarify the contours of the anti-authoritarian current that is the focus of *Another Politics*.

Given that the radical Left writ large is at least nominally committed to anti-oppression, anti-capitalism, and anti-imperialism, the key distinguishing feature of “another politics” is anti-authoritarianism. This translates into opposition to the state-form, along with the pursuit of organizational vehicles and processes that flatten hierarchies and increase the possibility for directly democratic decision-making. But “another politics” is differentiated from a politics of absolute refusal (found in insurrectionary anarchism for instance). For Dixon: “those in this current are attempting to create a political space that is not bound up in the parties or party-building of liberals, Leninists, or social democrats; nor in the non-profit and agency sectors, all too often constrained by foundations, state funders, and grant cycles; nor in the insularity and
aversion to strategy and structure of much contemporary anarchism” (p. 5). The anti-authoritarian current is forging another politics “beyond currently available political categories” (p. 6).

In the book’s first chapter, Dixon offers a rich history of the different movements that have influenced “another politics.” The three influences he focuses on are anti-racist feminism, prison abolitionism, and a reconfigured anarchism. According to Dixon:

Anti-racist feminism provides a set of politics and practices for understanding interrelated systems of oppression and exploitation, linking interpersonal and systemic forms of domination, and elaborating intersectional strategies for social transformation. Prison abolitionism contributes an analysis connecting state violence and dominant social relations, a nonreformist approach to strategy, and experiments aimed at reducing harm and resolving conflict without resorting to the state. And reconfigured anarchism supplies nonhierarchical practices, prefigurative values, and a confrontational orientation (p. 55).

“Another politics,” according to Dixon, is a synthetic current that draws from earlier and ongoing movements in an effort to best balance radical vision and effective engagement with the world as it is. The current is animated by what Dixon calls a “movement-building orientation,” a commitment to moving beyond activist enclaves and building the people-power required for revolutionary change. But building mass power is challenging when you are calling for the overthrow of capitalism and state borders, systems that unfortunately still have significant popular support. According to Dixon, important sensibilities are being honed in the anti-authoritarian current that allow for simultaneous fidelity to radical politics and the building of mass movements.

There is a common sense quality to these sensibilities, and yet their absence continues to weaken Left politics. The set of sensibilities that shine through in Dixon’s interviews can be generalized as a deep commitment to “revelatory organizing,” which is presented in contrast to more prescriptive approaches. According to Dixon:

I understand “prescriptive” to gesture more to correct line politics: this approach prescribes what we should think and do based on a predetermined “right” analysis. In contrast, I understand “revelatory” to mean a more open-ended, synthetic approach based on revelations – undetermined and uncertain – that we experience together through the process of struggle (p. 61).

The key constituents of this revelatory approach include non-sectarianism, non-dogmatism, non-vanguardism, not fetishizing particular tactics or organizing models, deep attunement to context, comfort with messiness and impurity, and relational openness. The revelatory organizing that Dixon unpacks in *Another Politics* is a necessary antidote to the prescriptive politics that regularly appear across the Left.

Dixon is committed to building a “lively, multi-tendency left that has broad appeal and real power” and his book contains lessons and wisdom that point us in that direction (p. 233). But there remains a significant division between anti-authoritarians and the wider Left – a division that stems from different approaches to state power. The revelatory and strategic approach advocated by Dixon encourages even the most ardent anarchist to engage the state when it means winning reforms that improve people’s lives, and that can build toward more systemic change. Rejecting the politics of simple refusal that inspired many occupiers, Dixon argues: “When so many resources and so much repression are organized through dominant
institutions, especially through the state, we can’t simply ignore them; we have to make demands on them” (p. 136). There are ample opportunities for cross-tendency alliance in pursuing these demands. But important ideological and organizational differences remain.

Many leftists, myself included, see in the state a potential for expanded freedom, not just regularized repression. For Dixon, the state-form stands in the way of people collectively making decisions about the day-to-day reproduction of their lives. Part of his vision for the future includes taking over “substantial pieces of state infrastructure such as schools and health services and incorporat[ing] them into our movements” (p. 153). This vision fills me with anticipatory exhaustion more than excitement. Needing to self-manage even more of our lives than we already do does not feel like freedom to me. There is a liberating potential to delegation and representation done right, even at large scales.

Dixon documents ongoing experiments with horizontalist forms of organization that include different degrees of representation and delegation; even asking if a form of anti-authoritarian hierarchy might be possible. Perhaps fears of losing my post-revolutionary life to endless deliberation can be addressed by anti-authoritarian praxis? I raise concerns around self-management in the spirit of collective revelation at the heart of Another Politics. Those of us on the socialist Left who are in solidarity with the anti-authoritarian current, but feel that freedom in complex societies requires some centralization of power, also need to keep clarifying for ourselves and others what that centralization looks like. The modern state is easily susceptible to elite capture and is a regular agent of imperialism, police violence, neoliberal rule, accumulation by dispossession, and extractivism, even as it can supply universal healthcare and other socialist programming. What forms of political delegation and representation are resonant with genuinely post-capitalist, post-colonial, post-oppressive, and deeply democratic societies, but without subjecting us all to endless deliberation about the reproduction of our lives?

Maybe socialist and anti-authoritarian explorations will result in shared organizational visions. Dixon’s book, and the revelatory organizing it emphasizes, helps make this prospect a genuine possibility. For this reason, along with the other crucial contributions it offers, this book is a must have for radicals. As Angela Davis notes at the end of her foreword, Another Politics “is a much-needed guide to the twenty-first century for all of us who believe that people’s movements are the key to a habitable future” (p. xiv).

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Notes of Contributor

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