

Book Review

The New Enlightenment: a Twenty-First Century Peaceful American Revolution

By Robert Bivona

North Fort Myers, Florida: NECU, 2017.

Bob Bivona has put together a well written, well documented treatise on the structural ills of a global neo-liberalism, a manual for clarifying the themes for social action in what is essentially an agenda for societal re-democratisation, and a reference book for fact retrieval and argument building to support various progressive positions. He has done this in not three, but one book called: *The New Enlightenment: A twenty-first century peaceful American revolution*.

Of particular interest is the central role he sees for worker co-operatives and self-directed enterprises. He carefully details how “corporate capitalism”, while the predominant business form in the US, is highly anti-democratic. Workers have little if any say on the formation and exercise of corporate policy, including the critical point on how income is distributed among labour, managers, and owner stakeholders. Most owner shareholders are shut out from organisational influence as well. For example, most owners essentially have no say on the proportion of corporate profits they receive, nor how much compensation top executives in the organisation receive.

Bivona reviews that worker co-operatives and employee-owned businesses are designed to counter these hegemonic relations by providing for a labour-voice into policy making and organisational over-sight. It needs noting, also, that labour involvement in these organisations is even more consequential than, for example, serving on boards of directors. Workers participate directly in the production processes themselves. Four levels of involvement — production, direction, self-management and ownership — build an internal solidarity among the worker-owners that is very unlikely to occur in strict corporate-capital structures. With solidarity comes greater commitment and job satisfaction, more productive work and a sense of community both internally within the business and between businesses and local communities.

The book is full of these kinds of vignettes, first identifying a certain social injustice, highlighting the historical problematics, then suggesting possible directions and resolutions. All of it is presented and supported with easily understood charts, graphs and data. I can highly recommend this text as a good read for those looking for understanding and solutions to what may seem like intractable and forever unresolvable tensions of our era. Robert Bivona is so kind however, to leave us with an observation pregnant with anticipation and possibility: “Injustice motivated the age of enlightenment’s revolutions. Similar injustices exist in America today”.

The Reviewer

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