

NEO-LIBERALISM IS OVER (IF WE WANT IT)

Barack Obama's victory in the United States, the forced bailout packages doled out by governments around the world in response to the economic crisis, and what at this writing looks like an ousting of the Harper Conservatives just six weeks after their election, clearly indicate that the tides are turning against the rule of the free market. The crisis we are in has beyond a doubt proven that the ideologues who insisted that the markets would regulate themselves were mistaken. The markets and the free-marketeers who ran them, have proven themselves to be both greedy and reckless. While a crisis in the economy has many fearing for their jobs, savings and well-being, it also presents an opportunity to re-vision the ways in which our society is governed – including the place of the market in social and economic planning. Nothing has been more indicative of this opportunity than the election of Barack Obama and the fight over the Harper government's proposed budgetary cuts this fall.

With this crisis, we have hit on a critical moment for citizens to mobilize and push governments around the world to institutionalize progressive alternatives to the neo-liberal economic model that has jeopardized our present and future prosperity. Quoting Milton Friedman, author and political economist Naomi Klein notes that great crisis presents great opportunities. Of course, she is referring to the history of Chicago School neo-liberal economists deploying this idea, swooping in to reorder countries in crisis, making broad sweeping changes to open up economies to foreign ownership and currency and creating societies governed by the marketplace. But she is also speaking to a condition of openness; a moment where change becomes possible because the existing system has failed and people are scrambling for an alternative. It is at these times of crisis, she notes, that we grab hold of ideas that are already floating in the public consciousness. And it is precisely here that the opportunity arises. At this moment of transition, as we see a window

opening that looks outside the neo-liberal model for social and economic planning, we can both re-imagine and reconstruct the societies we are living in.

The political transitions this fall have been groundbreaking on a number of fronts, shifting the frame of possibility and creating momentum amongst grassroots organizations all over the world. Electing Obama president of the United States by record numbers at the polls, demonstrates an openness amongst the American people to see major changes implemented in their society. Elected on a platform of broad and sweeping reforms, with promises of wealth redistribution, market reform, investment in education, health-care and the environment, the direction for this change has been laid. Now, as many have been arguing, the key will be to push forward to ensure these reforms take place. This holds true on this side of the border as well, with many standing up to the different levels of government seeking to impose budgetary cuts as a means for fighting recession.

As we formulate solutions within our communities to a crisis created by corporate greed and rampant deregulation, we need to also talk back to politicians who believe slashing essential services such as healthcare and daycare is a way out of this recession. The City of Ottawa's November proposed budget eliminated 700 daycare spaces, cut \$4M from cultural organizations and undermined public transit and long-term health care services. This is a short-sighted response that ignores the forces that have brought the world economy to a halt. Now is the time for governments to recognize the responsibility they have to protect and invest in their citizens. While the turmoil that we are experiencing during a global economic crisis does not indicate that change has arrived, it is a signal that for the first time in many years it is possible and a great many people are ready for it.

– Izida Zorde



Photo: Lisa Kannakko