

# **Anarchism in Canada**

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2009

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The history of European-influenced anarchism in Canada begins in the late nineteenth century as the process of colonial state-building reached its apogee. Two US-based French-language anarchist-communist journals, *La Torpille* and *Le Réveil des masses* (produced by exiled Paris Communards), circulated in Quebec during this period, but their readership remains elusive. Just before World War I, anarchist groups are documented in urban centers such as Montreal, Winnipeg, Calgary, and Toronto and in the newly established western province of British Columbia. The anarchist-syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) was mobilizing unskilled and racially oppressed workers (Chinese immigrants, for example) in the thousands. The IWW also circulated a bilingual French/English newspaper, *Travailleur/The Worker*, in Quebec and Ontario. Responding to government repression during World War I, a competing organization, the One Big Union (OBU), was formed in the spring of 1919 by former IWW activists and members of the Canadian Socialist Party. Co-opting IWW organizational tactics, it rejected anti-state syndicalism in favor of reformism. Within months of its founding, the OBU was organizing general strikes in Calgary, Winnipeg, and Edmonton, but the tenor of militancy quickly fell away. Weakened by defections to the OBU, the IWW's last large-scale organizing drive swept the logging camps of British Columbia in 1924. Thereafter the union declined so precipitously that by the 1930s it was "little more than a debating society."

In the 1920s and 1930s, the anarchist movement survived among emigrant populations, primarily within Jewish communities. When Emma Goldman resided in Canada in 1926–8 and again in 1933–5 and 1939–40, she drew support from such groups in Montreal, London, Toronto, Winnipeg, and Edmonton. In the 1930s anti-fascist activists from Italy, Spain, and Germany brought renewed energy to the movement, and before her death in 1940, Goldman campaigned (successfully) to save an Italian militant, Attilo Bortolotti, from deportation. Bortolotti and other exceptionally committed émigrés (notably Spanish Canadian Federico Arcos) kept anarchism alive during the 1940s and 1950s, when many more grew discouraged and fell away. At this juncture, anarchism's most significant impact was in the arts. On August 9, 1948, Paul-Émile Borduas, Jean-Paul Riopelle, and Françoise Sullivan and 13 other French-speaking writers, painters, and sculptors issued a manifesto of social revolt through anarchism in art – *Global Refusal* – which scandalized Quebec's cultural and political establishment. The "Automatists" are now a celebrated movement in the history of modernism.

After a period of hiatus, the upsurge of the Vietnam era generated a new wave of anarchists who, in the course of the 1970s and 1980s, transformed the face of radicalism in Canada. Anarchists were involved in the feminist movement, ecological protests, indigenous solidarity work, prison support work, the punk movement, and local community initiatives including housing cooperatives, back to the land communes, and info shops. A plethora of journals came out in the 1980s and 1990s – *Demolition Derby*, *Rebelles*, *La Nuit*, *Bulldozer/Prison News Service*, *Endless Struggle*, *Reality Now*, *No Picnic*, *Anarchives*, *Démanarchie*, *Open Road*, *Kick it Over*, *Resistance*, and *BOA* form a partial list. At this juncture, armed struggle also enters the picture. In 1982 the Vancouver-based Wimmin's Fire Brigade firebombed a chain of video stores marketing violent pornography. That same year a second underground group, Direct Action, ended the Canadian production of guidance systems for nuclear-armed cruise missiles by bombing Toronto's Litton Systems plant. Previously, the group had disrupted industrial expansion on Vancouver Island by destroying a hydro substation. Both actions inflicted massive property damage, leading to an intense manhunt that ended with the arrest of all five members on January 20, 1983.

As the 1990s drew to a close, the anarchist movement in Canada was growing exponentially. Anarchist-run bookstores, cooperatives, and social centers had spread across the country and cities in Quebec, Ontario, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia, and annual anarchist book fairs were hosted. Anarchists spearheaded militant anti-globalization protests beginning in 1997 with demonstrations against the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit in Vancouver and culminating in April 2001 with “Carnival Against Capitalism” actions targeting 34 heads of state convening to discuss a Free Trade Agreement of the Americas in Quebec City. Anarchism also made inroads in academe. Sociologist Richard Day’s influential study, *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements* (2005), is but one example of recent scholarly contributions to the movement.

When considering the nation-state called “Canada,” we must never forget it is a colonial project imposed on indigenous peoples whose homelands were forcibly seized by European colonizers. Indigenous peoples continue to struggle against colonial occupation to this day, and vast swaths of “Canada” are in fact unceded lands, illegally occupied and administered by the colonizing state. Under these circumstances, anarchist solidarity with indigenous struggles has been complemented by the growth of anarchist theory and practice in an indigenous context. Kanienkeha (Mohawk) scholar Taiaiake Alfred has played a leading role in this regard. Theorizing “anarcho-indigenism” as a path to the revitalization and renewal of indigenous peoples, Alfred is transforming anarchism yet again, as befits a movement that regards diversity as integral to its realization.

SEE ALSO: Anarchism and Gender ; Anarchocommunism ; Anarchosyndicalism ; Canada, Indigenous Resistance ; Canada, Labor Protests ; Global Justice Movement and Resistance ; Goldman, Emma (1869–1940) ; Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) ; Winnipeg General Strike of 1919 ; World Trade Organization (WTO) Protests, Quebec City, 2001

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