

Only a Beginning

Review

Ron Sakolsky

2006

a review of

Only a Beginning: An Anarchist Anthology. Edited by Allan Antliff. Arsenal Pulp Press. 2004. 352 pages. \$25. Available from The Barn.

Left liberals in the United States laud Canada as a sort of parallel universe: a North American welfare state paradise where everyone has health care; foreign policy is about international peacekeeping; and a national propensity for politeness is translated into public discourse as civility. It's a mythic place where anger doesn't exist (except perhaps on the hockey ice), and anarchism is as genteel as a George Woodcock poem.

Anyone—in the US or elsewhere—harboring such illusions will find Allan Antliff's extensive compilation on the Canadian anarchist milieu since 1976 an illuminating read. The book—which grew out of a lecture series that Antliff was involved in at the Toronto Anarchist Free School—features reprints from a sprawling array of journals, zines, flyers, posters, artwork, and web sites mixed lovingly with assorted ephemera and accounts of anarchist gatherings, bookstores, and infoshops, book fairs, autonomous spaces, reading groups, squats, protests, traveling musical caravans, and communities of resistance. In short, it documents not only the politics—but the political culture—of Canadian anarchism, though its main emphasis is decidedly Anglophone.

This book is an invaluable historical resource in understanding the myriad currents of Canadian anarchism. Antliff's anthology invokes the collective past of anarchism in Canada by providing a discerning sampler of archival documents. This is a living history!

The power of the coffee-table sized *Only A Beginning* in documenting a dynamic period of resurgence for Canadian anarchism resides in the vibrancy of its 400 page collage of primary source material encompassing writing, art, and activism. Antliff has chosen entries with a keen eye for relevance and then deftly mixed these with informative analysis, which is retrospectively provided in essay form by some of the key players involved in Canadian anarchism.

Of course, any publishing project of this magnitude is inevitably incomplete. However, such omissions are not crucial to the overall success of the book. As I see it, the greatest compliment to *Only A Beginning* would be to take the title literally, as an inspiration for the promulgation of a wide variety of similar archival projects throughout the world—actively creating our own movement histories page by page.

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