

# CIRA at Sixty

**The International Center for Research on Anarchism archive is an important part of the memory of our movement**

Sylvie Kashdan

2017

Anarchist solidarity can take many forms, including collecting books, pamphlets, and letters. Through such activity, comrades active in the world's anarchist archives are part of anchoring an important segment of the struggle for a libertarian and egalitarian world.

They are helping to maintain a living connection between present-day anarchist activities and that of yesterday's rebels whose values and goals continue to inspire.

One of the oldest projects still alive and thriving is the International Center for Research on Anarchism, often referred to as CIRA for its French acronym (Centre International de Recherches sur l'Anarchisme) currently located in Lausanne, Switzerland.

The means of preserving our history and maintaining continuity have changed over time. Starting in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the advent of the radical press and anarchist texts, one of the workers on a crew, for example painting the insides of buildings or in a cigar factory, would read aloud while others worked. Those doing the job pooled their wages to pay the reader.

Today, many people share texts online in digital archives that make our ideas and history available in several media for individual reading or listening, as well as for printing out for various purposes.

Infoshops for sharing anarchist history and culture have been and remain common in local anarchist-oriented spaces, but projects aiming to collect and share material systematically on a long-term basis are more difficult to organize and maintain, and consequently there have not been many.

So this year's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CIRA anarchist library constitutes a truly significant achievement. The project has grown from a collection of personal libraries of a few anarchists to a catalogued archive of nearly 20,000 books, hundreds of periodicals, as well as pamphlets, leaflets, multi-media, and graphical works, including the *Fifth Estate* and other North American anarchist publications.

Started in 1957 in a single rented room in Geneva, CIRA now occupies its own building in Lausanne. Its growth has been made possible through the solidarity of anarchists worldwide.

Material comes from donations made by anarchists from many parts of the globe, and most of it is available throughout the world on loan or as copies to those who pay a small membership fee.

Unlike most academic archives, CIRA doesn't limit access to university professionals and recognized researchers. In contrast to most government-run libraries, its collection is not subject to the changing winds of political fashion and censorship.

Donations of both current and older anarchist materials are always welcome. CIRA's goal is and always has been to be a place where anarchists in one part of the world can find out about anarchists in other parts in the present and past, helping to promote solidarity through current connections and memories of earlier movements.





CIRA's services also include publishing a yearly bulletin with articles in French, Spanish, Italian and English, along with listings of their acquisitions for the year. Several bulletins are available at no cost online at <http://www.cira.ch/bulletin-en>.

To learn more about this anarchist archive, visit their website at [www.cira.ch](http://www.cira.ch).

They welcome your publication at: CIRA, Avenue de Beaumont 24, CH-1012 Lausanne, Switzerland.

Sylvie Kashdan lives in the Northwest and is a long-term friend of and participant in the *Fifth Estate* and other anarchist projects, including anarchist social centers and libraries.

# fifth Estate

Sylvie Kashdan

CIRA at Sixty

The International Center for Research on Anarchism archive is an important part of the memory of our  
movement

2017

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/399-fall-2017/cira-at-sixty>

Fifth Estate #399, Fall, 2017

**[fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net](http://fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net)**