

# Revolutionary Claims: Recalling the Politics of the Pavement in Toronto, 1928-1932

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This paper examines the pursuits of the Toronto Communists in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Specifically it addresses the following questions: (1) What problems and tactical errors did the Communists encounter in their attempts to create forms of counter-publicity against the dominate ruling class? (2) How can we use the Communist example further to understand the relevance of public space/public sphere to contemporary protests movements as seen in Seattle and Quebec City.

*Key words: Toronto, Communist Party, public violence*

**I**n the aftermath of the World Trade Organization (WTO) protests held in Seattle and the Summit of the Americas Meeting in Quebec City, we as geographers would do well to ask ourselves: What, if anything, did the upsurge of street politics accomplish? Several scholars have highlighted how capitalism has made social space the repository of its power. For these authors social space is increasingly becoming “abstract,”<sup>1</sup> responding to the logic of exchange and accumulation, promoted by those who stand to gain economic advantage and those having political power, while being stripped of historical custom (Boyer 1996; Harvey 1986; Lefebvre 1991; Mitchell 1996; Sorkin 1992). In contrast there is a body of literature demonstrating that those individuals or groups subordinated by the ruling class appropriation of space do not remain idle; instead they actively contest these representations (Berman 1982; Goheen 1994; Pred 1990; Soja 1985; Staeheli & Thompson 1997; Zukin 1995). Katherine Mitchell posits: that space can be “a powerful weapon in hegemonic struggles”; that the right to define and control public space is fundamentally political in orientation”; and that the ability to represent space at its roots is “about the right to define the society and its collective identity” (Mitchell 2000, 446). Recalling political narratives of struggle remains an important directive if we are to continue to postulate the relevance of unscripted political activity in making claims to urban space.

Before the wake of the events in Seattle had settled, Franklin Foer (2000) in a critical essay entitled “Protest Too Much,” seized the opportunity to introduce his readership to the New New Left. For Foer, the New New Left is comprised by anarchists who “have little patience for theory”, are “prone not only to mindlessness but to mindless violence as well” and in short are “bold, fun, and stupid.” Highlighting the wide spectrum of anarchists, from those prone to violence to those more likely to give a hug, Foer (2000, 23) argues that mainstream anarchists are unable to mimic what the labour and civil rights movement did, that is “disavow people who share their enemies but compromise their moral integrity.” He further adds, “It’s not just that the anarchists risk alienating mainstream America; they risk alienating their supposed allies” (2000, 23). With some factions of the anarchists having a proclivity towards action (especially violence) instead of theory, Foer (2000, 23) argues that someone will get hurt and “it’s likely to be the New New Left.”

In another post-Seattle/Quebec account, geographer Andy Merrifield provides another entry point for understanding the New New Left and their radical tactics. Relying on the work of Henri Lefebvre, Merrifield (2002, 130) attempts to bridge the gap between older Marxists and the younger Seattle protesters, between the “*rationality* of theory and the *irrationality* of action.” For Lefebvre, and in turn Merrifield, the degree of spontaneity that violence brings is a necessary component of radical struggle. As Merrifield explains (2002, 133):

Always spontaneity expresses itself in the street, the authentic arena of Lefebvre’s Marxist politics... The street, Lefebvre said is that arena of society not occupied by institutions. So institutions fear the street, try to cordon the street off [i.e. the security fence found in Quebec City], try to repress street spontaneity, try to separate different factions of protestors in the street, quelling the apparent disorder, seeking to reaffirm order, in the name of the law.

But, as Merrifield correctly points out, the Lefebvrian notion of spontaneity while stressing the importance of violence also presents violence as a powerful tool to be used in *conjunction* with, not in *isolation* of theory. Erik Swyngedouw (2002, 154) further adds, “any revolution, both in its staging and in its outcome, is decidedly geographical and, ultimately, primarily an urban affair. Revolution is acted out in the streets, not just contemplated in

the high temples of learning or found between the pages of scholarly books.” But at the same time, politicizing the street must go beyond the symbolic, past the simple naming of names and unveiling of power, otherwise protests are reduced to occasions of revolt, and are not revolutionary.

According to Ian McKay (2000b), Canadians have become the victims of a liberal passive revolution. McKay (2000a, 71) argues that the Canadian liberal order as a hegemonic formation, “formulates its own objects of knowledge, its own subjects, is driven by its own logic, establishes its own regime of truth; it evolves its “space of formation” and constantly interrupts, displaces and rearranges its opponents.” McKay (2000a, 71) further adds that this order has a “self-perpetuating character, through a myriad of laws, an array of cultural institutions, and implied philosophy of “individualism,” applied not just to abstract thought but also to such seemingly unconnected realms of religious faith and material life.” With McKay (2000a) dating the beginning of the liberal passive revolution in Canada to having begun in the late 1940’s, I would like to return to a time period prior to this to help demonstrate the dilemma(s) of a revolutionary agenda. Using the activities of the Toronto Communists in the late 1920s and early 1930s as a case example I will show how the difficulties of radical politics during the period are not unlike those facing the activists of today, with repertoires of contention remaining slightly behind methods of suppression.

## Passive Revolution and the Suppression of Violence

Canada is not often thought of as a violent society. Referring to Canada as a “peaceable kingdom”, Judy Torrance (1986) argues that the rationale for a non-violent society in Canada emerges from: (1) the lack of a revolutionary celebration (or war of independence) and the failure of most major violent events coupled with Canada’s frontier development being paralleled by government institutions; (2) the rejection of revolutionary models that other countries have adopted; (3) a culture that produces law abiding citizens who accept or at least tolerate multiculturalism; (4) a pessimistic attitude towards the value of violence in helping individual gain; and (5) a general insecurity of what it means to be Canadian: which normally creates

conditions that are conducive to violence, but in the Canadian context the constant instability of identity has leveled the motivation for extreme reaction. Furthermore, it is important to note that the use of violence in challenging the state is not well covered in Canadian historical writing although recently it has been portrayed in the form of catchy sound bytes and colourful depictions in the media. It is not often that Canadians go storming barricades, display passionate activism or use violence to get a message across, so when they do there is the genuine opportunity to learn something about politics in the country. For many people protests will be reduced to spectacle, but for others the acts in the street will cause them to think about the conditions of their lives. Let us now examine the activities of the Toronto Communists.

## Revolutionary Roots?

Two striking features make the history of the Communist Party in Canada between 1928 and 1935 important. First, was the appointment of Brigadier-General Denis Draper to the position of Chief Constable of Toronto on May 1, 1928 (Betcherman 1982). Second, was the widening chasm between communists and socialists that paralleled the shift of Canadian Communists move towards Stalinist revolutionary policies (Angus 1981; Avakumovic 1975). Each change merits further attention.

It is interesting to note, as has Lita-Rose Betcherman (1982, 4), that “at the time of Draper’s arrival in Toronto, street-corner meetings of the Communist party were as much a feature of city life as similar gatherings of the Salvation Army.”<sup>2</sup> While one might doubt Betcherman’s (1982) attempt to parallel the Communist public activity with that of the Salvation Army, the underlying implication that the Communists’ activities were at least being tolerated should not go unnoticed. Certainly close tabs had been placed on the ‘Reds’ whose actions were subject to the power of Section 98 of the Criminal Code (a legacy of the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919), an amended Immigration Act that allowed the deportation of radicals as well as close observation by the Intelligence Branch of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)(Betcherman 1982). The fusion of the Communist Party from diverse roots in a secret meeting held in a small barn outside of Guelph, Ontario in 1921, its coming out

into the open in 1924 and its activities leading up to Draper’s appointment, had all been monitored by the Canadian Government (Kealey 1992; Lonardo 1995). Despite the surveillance, Betcherman (1982, 5) reports that the RCMP had found the communists operating in a manner that “posed no threat to Canadian society.” Nevertheless, there remained a deep prejudice to the immigrants arriving from Eastern Europe.

At nearly the same time that Chief Draper took office in Toronto, the Communist Party was thrust into disarray as a result of the events leading up to and including the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in Moscow. Not only did the meeting of the Comintern cause a changing of the ruling Communist cohort within Canada, it changed the nature of voicing discontent. The Sixth Congress marked a shift towards Stalinist policies characterized by mass radicalization and revolutionary activism. Specifically, the Canadian Communist newspaper, *The Worker*, highlighted the need to increase the fight against social democracy and social reformists. In the pages of *The Worker* (22 June 1929, 4) social democracy was characterized as an “appendage of capitalism” and social reformists were accused of “chok[ing] the revolutionary energy of the working classes.” Following this logic, leading figures in the Canadian Communist Party were stigmatized as being too soft, too passive, too evolutionary, who did not fit the new model of revolutionary action and consequently needed to be removed. As a result, those posing a “Right Danger”<sup>3</sup> were replaced by the likes of Tim Buck and Stewart Smith who happily verbalized the new revolutionary rhetoric. The new policy encouraged the Canadian Communist Party to go-it-alone, to organize the struggles of the workers, to form trade unions, to become the sole voice of the Left (Penner 1988). With the change in leadership and a new Comintern directed policy of revolutionary struggle and mass action, the Canadian Communists went on the offensive. The paths of the Communists and the one charted by Chief Draper soon clashed and public violence was the outcome.

## A ‘Red Base’ in Toronto

As Penner (1988, 99) notes, a key feature of Stewart Smith’s tactics upon rising to the leadership of the Communist Party was his insistence that “the Toronto Party organization take to the streets and the public halls much more than it had been doing

previously....” Interestingly, Penner (1988, 125), having interviewed Smith in 1986, writes in a short but very important footnote the idea that “Smith always favoured the street corner as a place for Party propaganda.” Alternatively, the attitude of Chief Draper was equally clear. From the outset he supported an anti-communism campaign and immediately formed a Red Squad<sup>4</sup> in Toronto to help remedy the ‘problem’. Responding to the increased Communist activity, Chief Draper demanded that all Communist public meetings be conducted in English – since it was the only language the police understood – and that such meetings did not contain any disorderly or seditious reflections on government. When the Communists did not comply with the language requirement at a Lenin Memorial Meeting held in the Standard Theatre, the police arrested those individuals who violated the ban (Angus 1981, Betcherman 1982, *The Worker*, 2 February 1929). The charges against the accused were subsequently dropped but as *The Worker* (9 February 1929, 1) reveals, the police had adopted a new approach: “the policy of the police will be to cancel the licenses of those halls or buildings where Communist and militant workers hold their meetings.”

With the threat of a delay of hall renewal licenses by municipal authorities, the Communists soon found themselves with an absence of halls in which to meet (Avakumovic 1975, Betcherman 1982, *Canadian Forum*, February 1931, 167). For a party struggling to overcome internal rifts and membership dilemmas following the Sixth Congress of the Comintern, the inability to hold public meetings would have been a sizable blow for the communists. The importance of public meetings to the Communists should not be understated. As John Manley (1992, 83) uncovered in his work on communism and Cape Breton Miners (1922-1935), a great deal of importance was “according to well-orchestrated mass meetings.” Specifically Manley (1992, 83) writes, “It was CPC national policy to construct a calendar of revolutionary holidays, with key dates in February (Lenin Memorial Day), May, and November.” Across Canada, from the Savoy Theatre in Cape Breton (Manley 1992), to the Standard Theatre in Toronto (*The Worker*, 2 February 1929), to the Columbia Theatre in Vancouver (Askers 1992), and in countless smaller communities in between, educational work was performed at public meetings. As Manley (1992, 85) concludes, “Above all, these meetings dramatized the role of the party as

the embodiment of a tradition of struggle, the agent [sic] of contemporary resistance, and the vehicle of working class deliverance. Any “red-blooded” militant, man or woman, was welcome to join this elect.” The ability of public meetings to contribute to the production of a red culture was the very thing Draper and others were attempting to smash. Yet, in the process of attempting to asphyxiate the breath of political dissension in the public hall, the police attacks had, according to Penner (1988, 99), stimulated “an unexpected measure of public support” for the Communists.

This would have been fodder for a leader such as Smith who – as already stated – favoured street corner propaganda. By being forced out of public halls, the opportunity was created for the Communists to expose the licensing power of the police and state designs on limiting urban sociability. According to *The Worker* (9 February 1929, 1), the crackdown of the police had to be combated: “The battle must now be fought on other fronts ... These rights [free speech and free assembly] have been fought for during a century of struggle.” Spadina, Soho, Queen, Albert and Yonge streets became the new battlegrounds between the police and the Communists. While public meetings may have been crucial sites for party building, the suppression of them presented a greater propaganda opportunity.

For Don Mitchell (1995), the occupation of public space represents a critical act in contesting abstract space. “By claiming space in public, by creating public spaces, social groups themselves become public...” (Mitchell 1995, 115). By claiming public space the Communists were seeking access to the structures of power in society as well as enlarging their influence in the court of public opinion. Such claims must be read as having posed a threat given that Chief Draper and company were close behind with intentions aimed at “supress[ing] their outdoor meetings as well” (Betcherman 1982, 43).

When an outdoor free speech conference was broken up by police before it could generate momentum, *The Worker* (20 April 1929, 4) seized the moment to print slogans to rally the support of the workers:

More and bigger Mass Demonstrations on the streets  
must be our answer!...  
Onto the streets and fight against police brutality and  
persecution!



Demand the opening of public halls to all workers meetings!!

Fight for Free Speech and Free Assemblage!!!

The police responded by refusing to allocate permits that would allow public parks to be used by the Communists for the purposes of open-air meetings. But as the pages of the *The Worker* reveal (see figure 1), the attempt to generate mass support continued.

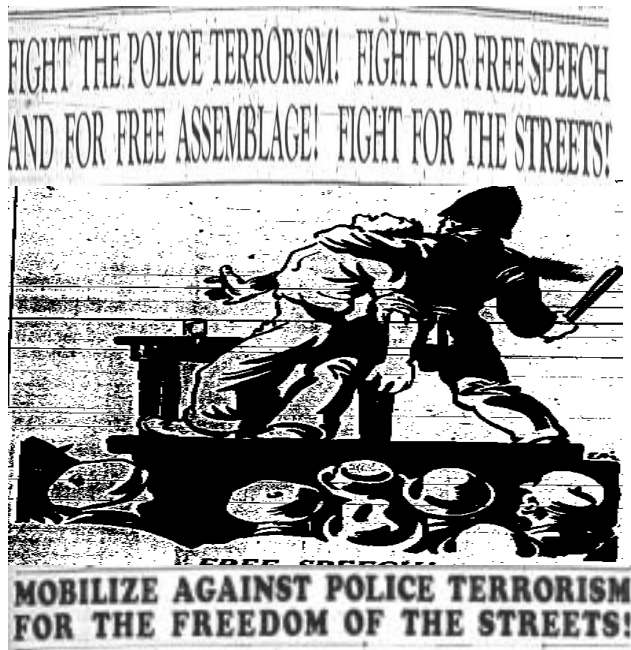


Figure 1: Propaganda in *The Worker* (sources: comic – *The Worker* 13 April 1929, Headlines – *The Worker* 17 August 1929)

The details of the articles printed in *The Worker* make it clear that while the CPC was attempting to rally workers into some sort of collective action, it was also striving to become the single representative of the Canadian Worker. By combining the *politics of the pavement* with the *persuasion of the printed page*, the CPC was laying claim to the status of being Canada's revolutionary party.

It is possible to document numerous examples of violence that took place during protests, demonstrations and other forms of contention following the Sixth Commission. The list of names of those harassed and arrested is long, with the Communists frequently being charged with a variety of offenses including

obstruction of traffic, creating a public disturbance and vagrancy. Still, the Communists pressed onward shifting their struggle to Queen's Park and generating attention as they went. In turn, the level of police violence increased with each shift in locale. When the Red orators took to the bandstand in Queen's Park on the 13 August 1929, the police acted in a manner that seemingly stretched the legal limits of law enforcement. As Avakumovic (1975, 86) writes, "Communists were beaten up, speakers arrested, and listeners dispersed in a way Canadians were not accustomed to." According to party leader Tim Buck (quoted in Ryan 1975, 137), the workers were merely attempting to exercise "their traditional right to hold meetings in Queen's Park." Recognizing that statements such as this – locating bolshevism within a tradition of British struggle – need to be handled with care, it is possible to reduce the level of presentist error by noting that this was not the first time that an argument such as Buck's had been made. Returning to Manley's (1992, 67) work on the Cape Breton Steel and Coal miners, we find that local radicals sometimes used their "Britishness" as a tactical and ideological resource." Consider the following the quotation, written by James Bryson McLacklan and Paul McNeill (President of the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers (AAISTW)) to Prime Minister Mackenzie King: "there was [is] nothing "alien" about "Cape Breton Bolshevism." It was nothing more or less than the right handed down by their "British forefathers ... to the working class of Cape Breton" (Manley 1992, 74). In effect, Buck was claiming that the Communists had a right to use public space, or more generally that they had a "right to the city." Was Buck's claim legitimate?

## The Roots of Resistance: Claim Making in Public Space

A wealth of literature on popular gatherings and other forms of political protest provides insight on the formation and challenge of social order (Bakhtin 1984; Cohen 1980, 1982; Jackson 1988, 1989, 1992; Muir 1981; Smith 1993; Spooner 1996). The ability to engage in social protest by the twentieth century has been linked to the identity of the protestors, the content of the claims as well as the method by which the claims are expressed (Gilmour 1992; Rudé 1964; Tilley 1978). The symbolic gestures and forms of ridicule that characterized medieval festivals and carnivals gave

way to newer forms of social action. In turn, the ferocity of riots (i.e. Swing Riots, food riots), the torching of castles, strikes and other forms of rebellion also had a short-lived popularity. Scanning the literature it is clear that strategies of resistance evolve. Tilley (1998, 14) explains: "The change occurred in part because authorities acquired effective means of repression, such as organized police forces; and in part because the organizational bases of the older performances disintegrated; and in part because national affairs (where the older forms of direct action had rarely made much difference) became increasingly crucial to ordinary people's interests." The changing scale for contentious politics from the level of the individual field to a broader national polity required new repertoires of contention.<sup>5</sup>

Using public space as an entryway into the dialogue of the public sphere *is* in the spirit of British tradition. Anna Clark's (1996) review essay on four major works of popular contention in Nineteenth-Century Britain makes this point clear. Examining the work of James Epstein (1994), James Vernon (1993), James Winter (1993) and Ellen Ross (1993), Clark shows that the struggle for political power and social change was frequently negotiated in the spaces of the city as well as the spaces of the home. Paraphrasing Winter's work, Clark (1996, 273) writes, "the freedom of the streets was more basic to English citizens, and more widely available than the right to vote." Similarly, John Roberts' (2001, 329) examination of the Chartist demonstrations in Hyde Park concludes, "it was a *spatially* situated form of public protest" which "effectively politicised the space of public meetings."

Reading the work of Peter Goheen (1993; 1995; 2003) we find that the Toronto Communists were not only performing in a manner that was consistent with British tradition, but also in a way that Toronto's citizenry had long put into practice. It is worth quoting Goheen at length to ensure that the richness of the argument is not lost.

Public ritual in the urban public space of nineteenth-century North American cities was imprinted with symbolic associations that derived from deeper historical experience that played out on this continent. . . The habit of claiming this [public] space for collective action to endow one's cause with the aura of significance, to become visible if only momentarily, was traditional. The process remained dynamic, the

repertoire was changeable, but its association with public space was little susceptible to alteration. Such rituals, let us be clear, were many and varied: they included events both official and unofficial, orderly and disorderly, legal and illegal, large and small (Goheen 1995, 246).

And in another article,

The central city streets were magnets attracting demonstrators and spectators who by their very presence gave support to many causes through performances that ranged from meticulously arranged civic festival to unrestrained riot. This rich variety of collective performance attests to a diversity of outlook among a population largely composed of immigrants. It likewise reminds us of the strength of a tradition, carried to America as cultural baggage from Europe, of largely unhindered access to the streets . . . The streets had long been available for collective demonstration; in the colonies as in the homeland they provided the location of choice groups wishing to give public expression to their cause: they became the principal arena for both consensual and for contentious demonstrations (Goheen 1993, 127).

Goheen (1995, 246) makes it clear that while the city's streets had retained their preeminence as sites for public events, parks such as Queen's Park and Exhibition Park had "also become useful for public rituals." Yet, Goheen (1995, 246) notes, "the city was able to exert a control over public assembly in the parks that it had not dreamed of exercising in the streets."

In the Communist example, this form of policing was clear as the open space of the street and the public park provided little more security than the public hall. When the municipality proposed a bylaw that required police approval for all public meetings, when the police used brutality in the streets to prevent meetings, the authorities had unsettled a recognized cultural tradition. To be clear, it was not the content of the Communist speech that was at stake, it was the right to speak at all that formed the grounds for debate. Tim Buck's claim that the communists had the right to use public space, coupled by obvious visibility of violence in the streets, had been enough to attract the attention of the general citizenry and especially those groups who stood to be affected by the proposed bylaw. What was once an issue between the police and the Communists now took on broader

dimensions. Regardless of motivation, citizens were speaking out because laws put in place to curb communism were affecting ordinary citizens. At issue was the repression of free speech and whether police meddling with public meetings was against British tradition. Even some of the more popular newspapers began to cast the police in a negative light, calling them “Draper’s Dragoons” and “Cossacks” (Betcherman 1982, 63).

Yet, one must be careful not to equate such ‘minor’ achievements with having a lasting impression on the political culture. The masses, while helping defend the right for oppositional political activity and unmediated interaction had not committed themselves to communism. Even in the shadow of the Depression, Canadians still voted in the Bennett government and did not elect a single Socialist or Communist (Birney 1955). In short, communism was still an identity that was viewed as radically other to the Canadian liberal order and an identity that the majority of the working class did not identify with. In addition, the unwillingness of the communists to organize with the various labour movements and other fragmented forces of the left prevented them from establishing an effective united front from below.

## The Shift to Legal Violence

With various groups questioning the practices of the police and demanding constitutional integrity, the Tory establishment responded with the full force of their authority, utilizing Section 98 of the Criminal Code to cripple the Communist movement at the top. The guilty verdict of the eight Communists convicted on the 12<sup>th</sup> November 1931 under Section 98 stands as one of the important trials in Canadian history. Not only did it imprison some of the most influential Communists of the period, the Communist Party itself was declared illegal. One could argue that the convictions of John Boychuck, Malcolm Bruce, Timothy Buck, Tom Cacic, Sam Carr, Thomas McEwen, Tom Hill and Mathew Popvich (Michael Golinsky was also arrested but the charges were dropped) caused the revolutionary pulse in Canada to flat line. Since the Communists had isolated themselves from all possible allies, they were left to face the charges alone. The result was a shift from police violence in the street to state sponsored violence in the courtroom.

If we agree that the roots of resistance are deep within British tradition, then the trial should reflect the notion that methods of repression are equally deep seeded. In Britain, the Combination Acts (1799, 1800), Seditious Meetings Act, the ‘Six Acts’ following the Peterloo Massacre (1819), Reform Acts (1832) and Acts that coincided with the Chartist movement, provide indication of power shifting from the center outwards (Corrigan & Sayer 1985; Roberts 2001). In Canada, Order-In-Council PC 2384, Immigration Acts, the War Measure Act and Section 98, amongst others, have had severe implications for those parties wishing to reveal their social identity. In a thoughtful essay, Barry Wright (1992, 10) comments, “sedition cases illustrate the repressive uses of criminal law as well as the possibilities and limits of counter-hegemonic struggles in the criminal courts. They underline the importance of criminal law as a repressive social ordering mechanism, but one which must be distinguished from the use of brute coercive force.” Interestingly, Wright (1992, 56) demonstrates that the real chances for social movements and labour radicals contestability reside in the political public sphere, not in the courts, because prosecutions initiated by the Crown generally produce defensive reactions, “which while not precluding counter-hegemonic possibilities, certainly limited them.” William Alexander (1936, 278) gets to the point when he writes, “Leftists should observe that constitutions are never drawn to promote change but to prevent it.”

From the banning of foreign language press entering Canada as well as the prevention of the production of such literature in Canada, the requiring of public meetings to be conversed in English, warnings of possible deportations, the threat of hall license cancellation, the restrictions on free assembly and the willingness to use violence and imprisonment, all exemplify the unique blend of coercion and consent that is the State. Under Section 98, the Communists mentioned above were charged with forming and being members of an unlawful organization aimed at overthrowing the government through the use of violence. In the end the Communist’s challenges to the state were negotiated with the state (state prosecutors), with the state ‘rules’ (laws), and on the state’s grounds (courtroom) – there was little chance of success.

## A Revolutionary Mistake

As McKay (2000a) writes, “The ‘red bases’ were real, and their cultural legacy merits much closer study on the part of people today who would like to multiply ‘zones of resistance’ – but they were also fragile, demographically precarious, and widely separated from each other in a far-flung archipelago.” Adopting the Comintern’s Stalinist strategy of a counter-hegemony based on a united front rather than a popular front, the Canadian Communists had unrealistically attempted to preach a revolutionary will to an unwilling mass public. Simply put, the Communists were purists and using this strategy in the public sphere was crippling because it made the formation of public opinion extremely difficult, if not impossible. Entering the bourgeois public sphere according to Harold Mah (2000, 164), “requires as a condition of entry a phantasmic reshaping of social identity.” This was a condition that the Communists were not willing to take. By asserting a very narrow identity in the public spaces of the city, by attempting to be the sole representative of Canadian workers, the CPC presented an identity with clearly defined boundaries. Reading Mah (2000, 167) we come to realize that this emphasis on group particularity might make them visible “*in* the public” but “they would never be able to present themselves *as* the public.” While their membership and audience may have increased as a result of the sensational free speech fight and later the trial itself<sup>6</sup>, the rigidity of the party’s identity, with its intimate link to the Soviet Union, really functioned to intensify rather than blur their outsider status.

This is a problem that many broad-based political movements continue to face (witness Foer’s (2000) characterization of the New New Left as anarchists). Since most political movements originate from particular struggles in particular places, the critical dilemma of shifting from local particularities to larger universal understandings remains a sizable obstacle. A sense of direction is difficult to decipher amongst numerous groups with multiple agendas.

## Lessons from Gramsci

Gramsci posited that strategies of violence and revolution would not work in western societies because the state’s power was too deeply entrenched into the ordinary life of the citizens, its rule supported by the majority of the social classes and its norms

having already achieved a high degree of consensus. Instead of using direct violence and revolutionary propaganda that challenges the state outright, Gramsci stressed the need to construct a counter-hegemony by using the building blocks of the State (i.e. church, family, schools, civil society and its organizations, etc.). In essence, Gramsci was creating a distinction between what he calls a “war of maneuver” and a “war of position”. Michael Waltzer (1988, 445) clarifies, “The first of these [war of maneuver] is literally and simply the seizure of state power – buildings, communications, police. The second [war of position] is the ‘seizure’ of civil society, which is neither literal nor simple, more like an infiltration than a takeover, a long arduous cultural struggle, the new world slowly, painfully, displacing the old.” As McKay (2000b, 628) emphasizes, “If Antonio Gramsci’s theory of hegemony has taught us anything, it is to appreciate the extent to which a given social group can only exercise leadership over others by going beyond its immediate corporate interests to take into account the interests of other groups and classes.” Angus (1981, 261) relates this sentiment to the context of the Canadian Communists: “To defeat Draper, the Communist Party would have to show that it was ready to cooperate with disparate forces in the left and labor movements.”

## Conclusions

The notion that the Communists had to engage in civic disobedience in order to gain attention in the public sphere serves as a nice illustration of how difficult it is to converse with the State. Protestors in Seattle and Quebec have demonstrated that the struggle continues. Political actors of the new millennium who are struggling to find a voice in public space and the public sphere, might take note of the importance of linking political voices to cultural revolutions. If the Communist example has helped us to recognize the limits of social particularity in the public sphere then Foer and Merrifield’s readings of the recent protests remind us of the limits of letting too many ideological flowers bloom. In both cases, Gramsci’s lessons are still instructive. Shouts in the street that function simply to announce presence are only a preliminary act of revolution and not necessarily the first one. There remains the need for action to ensure that social space



does not become too abstract to be challenged. And yet, a little theoretical insight is also required to ensure that the frequent bursts of tension and resistance become something more than short-term conversation pieces. Without this blend, we likely face a condition of protest without promise. Unfortunately, the way between the book and the street is not a straightforward route and those versed in the first are not normally the ones facing the water canons and tear gas of the second. The key for the New New Left as for the Communists is to try and keep the protest in the space of the street and not in the courtroom – because those interested in theory are too timid, maybe even too Canadian, to go challenging the law. At the same time those of the New New Left await a cultural revolution in the courts to ensure that getting heard does not depend on being unruly.

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The concept of abstract space emerges and is fully explored in Henri Lefebvre's, (1991) *The Production of Space*. Eugene McCann (1999, 164) provides a tightly woven summation when he informs us that abstract space is “space represented by elite social groups as homogeneous, instrumental, and ahistorical in order to facilitate the exercise of state power and the free flow of capital.”

<sup>2</sup> It is possible to compare the actions of the Toronto communists as similar to those of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) that Don Mitchell (2000) writes about. As Mitchell (2000, 85-86) explains, “When the radical Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) wanted to reach and organize an audience for their theories of social revolution in the years before World War I, they went to where the audience was, setting up a soapbox next to or across from the Salvation Army preachers working the parks and street corners of American cities... The channels of communication, the processes of meaning and value construction, were the streets and squares of the city themselves.”

<sup>3</sup> According to Norman Penner (1988, 91) those figures who were expelled from the Communist Party included: William Moriarty, Fred Peel, R. Shoesmith, Jack MacDonald, John Stokaluk, Michael Buhay and J.B. Salsberg.

<sup>4</sup> The formation of the Red Squad followed a model set by the city of Los Angeles whose police chief used “brutality” to suppress Communist activity. In Canada, the Red Squad was comprised of “three policemen notorious for their strong arm tactics” (Betcherman 1982, 15).

<sup>5</sup> Tilley (1986; 1995; 1998) argues that “repertoires” of contention shifted from being largely parochial, informal and patronized action where routine, participants and symbols varied across time and place, to being centered on mass action that was consciously public, formal, national and autonomous. Tilley refers to the set of repertoires as being cosmopolitan, modular and autonomous because they were often extralocal, similarly formed and pre-planned. Tilley (1998, 12-13) further adds, “Public meetings, petition drives, firm-by-firm strikes, demonstrations, street marches and other still familiar forms of collective action constituted this emerging repertoire.”

<sup>6</sup> Scott Vokey (2000, online publication) informs us that following the trial, *The Worker* and in turn the CPC benefited financially from the increased sales of radical papers.

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