

Jason Russell, Canada, A Working History (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2021)

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Jason Russell, *Canada, A Working History* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2021)

DIVERGING FROM STAID, state-centred surveys of Canadian history, Jason Russell reimagines national history through the lens of “work.” Organized into six distinct parts, the book begins by examining work in Indigenous nations prior to contact with Europeans and traverses the long history of colonial settlement, concluding with an assessment of the meaning of work for Canadians in the 21st century. An excellent resource, especially for popular readers or as a textbook for early-year undergraduate courses, *Canada: A Working History* uses changing conceptions of work, working-class experiences, and moments of class-based resistance to illustrate how these factors have shaped and influenced our readings of the country’s past. I expect that this book will find a wide readership, especially at a moment when popular social movements have emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic to launch major organizing efforts and question who benefits and who bears the costs of existing capitalist systems of production.

There is a materialist basis for much of Russell’s analysis. The first sentence of the first chapter illustrates this nicely: “The history of work in Canada begins with the land.” (15) The author continues by describing the staggering scope of economic and productive differentiation and sophistication among Indigenous nations across the Americas. Despite the degree to which these nations engaged in trade and used currency, Russell writes, “the idea of accumulating surplus wealth through exploiting labour was not part of everyday life.” (17) This notion is central to Russell’s conception of work; indeed, the book can profitably be understood more specifically as a history of the emergence, expansion, and proliferation of capitalist labour processes in northern

North America. As a result, the mechanisms and social relationships of work in Indigenous nations before the arrival of Europeans are perhaps understated. The differentiation of Indigenous societies would make a holistic approach untenable, but an expanded conversation about alternative structures of life and labour would be a welcome addition to Part 1: “The European Arrival to Confederation.”

Russell’s approach is useful in explaining both the institution of slavery and indentured servitude and the role of colonisation and settler-colonisation during European expansion in the Americas. He adroitly applies the pursuit of profits, the emergence of joint-stock enterprises, and proto-capitalism to both the implementation of racialized chattel slavery and the centuries-long dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their lands. The introduction of unfree labour to the productive capacity and resources of stolen Indigenous land made these ventures hideously profitable. Even among “free” labourers, state-sanctioned violence or forms of disciplinary control were marshalled in support of the private enterprise. In a series of chapters, Russell establishes the European legal and historical basis for these systems of control and traces their impacts forward in time – from Hudson’s Bay Company and its indentured servants to worker-soldiers in the Seven Years War and the class conflict of 1837 rebellions. The reader will recognize a theme. In each instance, the Canadian state or the European states that preceded it were willing to enshrine and protect the interests of the employer over those of the worker.

Part 2 (Confederation to the 1930s) treads familiar ground for historians of the Canadian labour movement. Russell provides an overview of labour organizing during the late 19th century, with attention to the Knights of Labor and the passage of the 1872 Trade Union

Act. Chapters on World War I and the 1920s discuss the rapid change of the Canadian economy during wartime, the rise of branch plants, Taylorism, and paternalism inside some of the nation's largest private employers. Notably, the "Workers' Revolt" is treated sparingly – with only a short paragraph mentioning the Winnipeg General Strike and the associated "pattern of protest." (79) This is where Russell's intentions are notably distinct from standard labour history fare; rather than relitigating the successes or failures of working-class movements, he provides an overarching narrative focusing on how experiences of work shifted during these decades for Canadian workers.

Technological advancement, the emergence of the postwar industrial relations system, and economic growth set the stage for part 3: World War II to the 1960s. Here, Russell provides a sustained exploration of the gendered differences between rates of pay and types of paid and unpaid work undertaken by Canadian men and women. One of the longer chapters in the book, "The 1950s," details significant shifts, including the rise of management training and the emergence of consumer culture, each of which shaped how Canadian workers came to view themselves. By the end of the 1960s, public sector workers gained bargaining rights and women were increasingly entering the paid labour force – all within an anxiety-inducing cultural context that included the risk of global nuclear war. As Russell concludes, "Canadian workers ended the 1960s with mixed feelings of hope and trepidation." (146)

Part 4: The Tumultuous 1970s and 1980s and Part 5: The Anxious 1990s and 2000s are where Russell sets the stage for his commentary on recent Canadian history. The chapter on the 1970s includes a smattering of historical events – from the Front de libération du Québec crisis and

Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries to the benefits of Cost of Living Adjustment clauses. The pivotal 1980s are similarly frenetic, with the associated chapter including the expansion of managerialism, the emergence of neoliberalism in Canada, and privatization. In any effort of this size and scope, there are bound to be topics that are treated lightly. While popular culture productions like *Roger and Me* or the popularity of Bruce Springsteen are referred to, there is little attention paid to the scope of the industrial closure crisis that buffeted working-class communities across North America in these decades. Nonetheless, Russell's broader argument is clear. With neoliberal austerity in full bloom and an ecological crisis on the horizon, work in Canada has changed much from the tenuous and uneven "Golden Era" (143) of the postwar period.

The extent of these changes is obvious in the final chapters. Young workers who pick up this book will find Part 4 as revealing as it is chilling. Much ground has been lost. Tension, burnout, and anxiety are terms that emerge again and again to describe the character of 21st-century work, especially in the context of the global pandemic. Stagnant wages, the rough transition to precarious gig-economy employment, the climate crisis, and mass surveillance have Canadian workers staring down the barrel of an uncertain and bleak future. However, Russell is hopeful and argues "resistance is, in fact, possible, and so is a different future." (277) Underpinning this is the fundamental truth about economic transitions – the shape of change is never inevitable. The orientation of the labour market today is the result of decisions made by politicians, managers, and corporate leaders. Workers have power too, as we have seen from recent efforts to unionize at Amazon, Goodlife, and other struggles such as the 2021 Kellogg strike. While the

character of these struggles may change, as *Canada, a Working History* makes clear, the structuring forces of these conflicts date back as far as the introduction of proto-capitalism to the Americas.

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Andrea D’Atri, *Bread and Roses: Gender and Class Under Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2021)

ANDREA D’ATRI, psychologue, militante féministe et membre du *Partido de los Trabajadores Socialistas* d’inspiration trotskiste, publie en 2021 une réédition – la première de langue anglaise – de son célèbre ouvrage *Bread and Roses*. D’abord publié en Argentine en 2004, le volume est cette fois-ci bonifié d’une préface inédite. D’Atri y assume pleinement le caractère programmatique de son travail et revendique une posture militante, qu’elle oppose à un féminisme institutionnalisé et académique vidé de son caractère subversif. D’Atri souligne avec enthousiasme l’impact de la publication originale de *Pan y Rosas* : le livre a inspiré la création de nombreux collectifs éponymes en Amérique latine et en Espagne. Par cette réédition anglaise, D’Atri entend contribuer à la diffusion internationale de ce renouveau du féminisme socialiste et internationaliste.

Pour ce faire, *Bread and Roses* propose une ambitieuse synthèse de l’histoire des féminismes, depuis la révolution française jusqu’au tournant des années 2000, dans une perspective féministe marxiste. Les expériences féministes européennes, états-uniennes, soviétiques et latino-américaines s’y entrelacent dans un récit cherchant à inspirer les mobilisations actuelles et futures. L’objectif est double : d’une part, D’Atri cherche à démontrer que l’émancipation des femmes passe nécessairement par

une alliance avec la classe ouvrière dans la lutte anticapitaliste. Plaçant les rapports de classes au cœur de son analyse historique, D’Atri attribue chacune des avancées et des ressacs des mouvements féministes à des développements liés à l’état de la lutte des classes. D’autre part, l’auteur insiste sur l’importance du combat féministe pour le socialisme. Les femmes, qui composent la majorité de la classe ouvrière et ont historiquement joué un rôle d’avant-garde révolutionnaire, sont indispensables pour toute lutte d’émancipation collective : leur libération est donc essentielle afin qu’elles puissent pleinement participer à la lutte globale contre le capitalisme.

Le parcours historique proposé par D’Atri s’ouvre à la fin du XVIII^e siècle, au moment de la Révolution française (chapitre 1). Les femmes paysannes mobilisées contre les famines et l’exploitation nobiliaire s’allient alors aux femmes bourgeoises dans des clubs féminins révolutionnaires. En revendiquant leur inclusion dans le projet de citoyenneté et d’égalité universelle de la Révolution, elles contribuent à l’émergence de la question féministe en tant que problème politique. Cette alliance féministe se dissout rapidement au XIX^e siècle, alors que le développement du capitalisme industriel cristallise l’antagonisme opposant les classes ouvrières à la bourgeoisie (chapitre 2). D’Atri revient sur l’événement de la Commune de Paris et sur l’importante participation des ouvrières et des ménagères. Elle voit dans cet épisode sanglant un point tournant qui consacre la rupture entre femmes prolétaires et féministes bourgeois. D’Atri identifie dès lors deux féminismes qui se construisent en parallèle à la fin du XIX^e et au début du XX^e siècle (chapitre 3). En plus du féminisme bourgeois et réformiste, un féminisme ouvrier s’impose : celui-ci pense l’émancipation