



# **Effigies and Imaginations**

*Some thoughts and reflections on confronting  
the idea of Canada in Kingston, Ontario.*

As the 150th anniversary of Canada's "birth" looms closer, I thought it a good moment to print and circulate a blog post published here last year that discusses some anti-Canada actions that have taken place in my home town of Kingston, Ontario since 2013.



This is ongoing. On January 11, 2016, our local MP and the coordinator and spokesperson of John A. MacDonald's birthday parties both woke up to slashed tires and red paint poured over their personal vehicles. That same day, a group of protestors crashed the ceremony meant to commemorate John A.'s birthday and burned an effigy of MacDonald, drowning out the entire ceremony with their songs and chants. The protest was bigger than the party this year, perhaps for the first time, and it has inspired me and encouraged me to continue this line of struggle, despite whatever unanswered questions I might have about the value and utility of attacking symbols.

That question of symbols is a big one, too big for this little pamphlet, but I'll leave you with some questions and encourage you to write to us at [hatecanada@riseup.net](mailto:hatecanada@riseup.net) if you have answers or more questions to add.

*What are some ways that anarchists can and do fight the state?*

*What would it look like to fight Canada?*

*How do or don't attacks on Canadian nationalism fit in with a project of decolonization?*

*What role do symbols and celebrations play in Canada's power?*

*If we successfully created a version of Canada where people felt unsafe or guilty celebrating their country publicly would it bring us any closer to actually undermining that country's power over our lives?*

*Do we care about any "public" or "people" at all? What is our relationship to the people who show up to a Canada Day parade or party? What about those who organize it?*

*Aren't many of the things we do already symbolic? How do we decide whether and when to engage on a symbolic level?*

*Does it make it more or less promising to imagine launching an attack that will likely not be supported by a broader liberal or left-wing social movement?*

*Would this have any relevance in Quebec? Does that matter for those of us in the rest of Canada?*

*Might a clear line against Canadian nationalism help us to draw clearer lines with liberals and leftists? Do we want to draw those lines? How will or won't this look different under Justin Trudeau?*



## “Misplaced Celebration”

Posted in January, 2015.

There is nothing to celebrate about the foundation of Canada. Europeans came to this land for profit and imperial glory. They forced settlement and eventual westward expansion with lies and violence. They alternated between attempts to assimilate and exterminate the original people of the land. They built cities and fortresses and a railway through Indigenous territory for their own profit. Poor people, non-British or French Europeans and people of colour have always been pawns in this great plan, useful for building their infrastructure, defending their territory, and eventually toiling in their factories, but never welcome to share fully in the profit and glory that elites gained from stealing and destroying Indigenous land.

Here in Kingston, Ontario, where “every day is Canada day”, John A. MacDonald is at the centre of all of the misplaced celebration of this great era. This makes sense, because MacDonald is a perfect example of the kind of person who founded Canada. He pushed for and enacted many of the most disgusting and brutal colonial policies of the era. In an act that he would later refer to as his “greatest political accomplishment,” he pushed to disenfranchise and ultimately push out the Chinese population on the West Coast, saying that their presence would tarnish the “Aryan land” that he envisioned for his new country. He invented and implemented residential schools. He used starvation policies followed by military intervention to crush Metis rebellions and cement Canada’s expansion West.

John A. truly was a product of his time, and that's exactly why he doesn't deserve a party. He is a particularly ugly example of a period when white Europeans did particularly ugly things, all in the name of creating and expanding Canada. We have to remember this time because it is the foundation of a colonial project that continues to this day. Forgetting is inexcusable, as is celebration. The memory of these things should motivate us to fight against this colonial, racist country, not drink whiskey and sing about it.

Two years ago, somebody threw red paint on the large bronze statue of John A. MacDonald that stands in City Park in downtown Kingston. They wrote "murderer," "colonizer," and "F\*ck Canada" on the base of the statue. A few days later red paint was poured onto a number of plaques around the city centre that commemorate MacDonald. Last year, the location of his 199th birthday party was changed at the very last minute after a bomb threat was received for City Park. The venue change was blamed on poor weather, despite the event being billed as "rain or shine." Last week, a bucket of red paint was dumped on the plaque that marks his grave in Cataraqui Cemetery, and the word "Shame" was written in white across the steps to his grave. On the day of John A.'s birthday this year, members of the Idle No More movement and their supporters staged a powerful protest of the ceremony, singing mourning songs while various dignitaries and other speakers rambled on about the greatness of John. A., the greatness of Canada and other such nonsense. They continued singing while the uneasy party-goers sang a particularly pitiful rendition of Oh Canada, just as a fighter jet flew overhead for dramatic effect. How very Kingston!

And that's only what we know about. After the first week of attacks on the statue and plaques, the John A. bicentennial commission, the city of Kingston, the police and the mainstream media shifted their strategy and conspired to cover these acts from the public. It is possible that many more things have happened but we can not know about them.

At the same time as they've been glazing over these acts of protest, the commission has seriously changed their tone when it comes to John. A. and the bicentennial celebration, at least in part – we believe – because the initial vandalism was well-timed and effective. He's no longer just a great guy who deserves a great birthday party. Now he's a "complicated figure," with a "complicated legacy." More than half of the events included in their "MacDonald Week" schedule this year ended up being critical events, including a debate on his legacy and an art piece in which a man dressed as Louis Riel lit a fire at the base of his statue. This isn't happening because a bunch of nationalists, government hacks, and heritage enthusiasts have changed their mind about John A. and Canada overnight. It's happening for the same reason that outright attacks on their celebration are being covered up. They are including these events in an attempt to make their celebration of genocide look liberal, and they feel the need to do that because they are afraid. They are afraid that they can't just uncritically love Canada anymore, that their work will be recognized as a political act rather than a public good. They are scared that their nationalist ideology will be recognized as racist. They are afraid that they'll have to own up for the fact that to celebrate John A. MacDonald and the foundation of Canada is to celebrate genocide. And they want to celebrate that genocide, because they benefit from it, because they truly do love Canada, because they are in fact proud to be Canadian, with all that that entails.

Unfortunately for the Canadian government and the nationalists who support them, the legacies of genocide and land theft are not ‘complicated.’ They are disgusting. There is nothing to celebrate about Canada, its foundation or its current reality. There is no OK way to have a party about John A. MacDonald or the country that he created. They should not be allowed to have that party. We should not let them.

The party-planners are hoping to use John A.’s birthday as a kick-off for the bigger celebration that they are planning for 2017, the 150th anniversary of Canadian Confederation. We hope that we can too. The fireworks, “whiskey ceilidhs” and historical reenactments are just symbols, but Canadian nationalism thrives on symbols, and it propels and motivates very concrete acts of brutality, land theft, assimilation and repression. Let’s rain on their Canada Day Parade, and have that be a step towards fighting the colonial state they are celebrating. In doing so, let’s be smart, and find ways to protest that are not easily recuperated or worked in to a liberal version of the same old celebration. The birthday party for John A. is over, but his Canada is alive and well all around us. They are everywhere, and we should be too.

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Submitted to Kingstonist’s Community Soapbox by  
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