

Indigenous Resistance

& Anarchism A Talk by Gord Hill



In 2013 Gord Hill gave a presentation on the connections between Indigenous resistance and anarchism at an anarchist social centre called 'La Déferle' in the occupied territories called 'Quebec'.

This zine is a partial transcription from a youtube upload titled *Résistance autochtone et anarchisme - Gord Hill à La Déferle*, due to background noise (including someone translating into French in the background) and jump cuts in the video itself, some context & content has been lost.

Indigenous Resistance & Anarchism

My name is Gord Hill, I am part of the Kwakwaka'wakw nation, our territory is on the north part of Vancouver Island. I'd first like to acknowledge that I'm on Kanien'kehá:ka territory (at least, that's what the mohawks told me) me and my partner arrived yesterday afternoon, it's been about 3 and a half days on the greyhound, I would not recommend doing that. It's my 3rd time doing this trip, but I think I've learned my lesson now, I won't be doing it again. Tonight's theme is Indigenous Resistance & Anarchism.

I've been involved in both Indigenous Resistance and Anarchist Social movements for maybe over twenty years now. I've never really done a presentation about these two concepts, they are, at first glance, two concepts that seem worlds apart.

Anarchism is a European concept and idea and Indigenous resistance is Indigenous to the Americas. As far as what I'm talking about, In North America the closest relationship we have between Anarchists and Indigenous resistance movements is found in Mexico, particularly with Emiliano Zapata who was a Nahuatl, an Indigenous person and he was influenced by Ricardo Flores Magon who was a Anarchist from Oaxaca in Southern Mexico. The rallying cry of the Mexican revolution *Tierra y Libertad!* which translates to Land & Liberty! is adopted from his writings.

Anarchism has had a strong influence on Indigenous movements in Mexico, Zapata was also exposed to the ideas of Peter Kropotkin. So that's probably the strongest connection between those two ideas.

Within the Indigenous the movements, there are not a lot of Indigenous people, activists or organisers who would identify as being an anarchist. But I think there are a lot of

commonalities you can see between the two concepts, Indigenous tribal peoples, for the most part were organised as autonomous decentralised villages, who had a relationship with other villages and shared a common language, culture and history. This was the Indigenous Nation, these nations as I mentioned were autonomous and decentralised, there was no centralised authority and there was no state institution, this informs the Indigenous resistance that is occurring today and Indigenous culture that still continues to exist. I think you can see with anarchism, it promotes autonomous, decentralised self-organisation.

There are some exceptions within the Indigenous peoples, especially those that began to establish civilisations like the Muisca and the Inca who had a more centralised authority, in the history of the Muisca when they encountered the Spanish conquistadors, they were a very large nation of 20-something million people, but they fell to the Spaniards within 10 or 15 years, a lot of it through disease, the Spanish warfare and the Spaniards ability to recruit a lot of the native peoples who had been more-or-less subjected under them. 300 Spaniards were able to organise along with 1000's of Indigenous peoples to attack the Muisca, they were

very vulnerable to decapitation as once their ruling class were captured or killed the whole system kind of crumbled. If you compare that to some of the plains Indian nations, like the Lakota and the Cheyenne who had a more grassroots Indigenous form of self organisation; autonomous decentralised villages they were able to resist the US expansion for decades using guerrilla warfare. That's an example of the strength, the resiliency of the form of autonomous self organisation.

In Canada in my experience over the last couple of decades, the anarchist movement has given some of the strongest solidarity to Indigenous struggles, because I think of the similar forms of self organising , autonomy, decentralisation, in Indigenous communities there's strong emphasis on individual freedom but within a collective group, so there's a balance that's established between individual freedom and the need of the communal group to have good relations between the people within it. That also corresponds to a lot of anarchist practice, where you want to have a lot of individual freedom but you also think of the collective group as you know, when we all work together we are much stronger.

Let's talk about the differences of our current situation, all Indigenous resistance is based in a community and even family unit. In a lot of the communities where there is resistance from Indigenous people it's one or more families that are the basis of the struggle and that is different from the anarchist movement, which is a diverse social movement that has brought people together. You may have conflicts with your family about your politics, but in a lot of Indigenous movements when they arise, the family can be a foundation of the struggle.

For me, with the two concepts of Indigenous resistance and anarchism, the way I work with them is to promote the idea of anti-colonial and anti-capitalist resistance. The anti-colonial acknowledges the history of colonialism and also the anti-colonial resistance of Indigenous peoples and the anti-capitalism part acknowledges the current society we live in, the system that we're living in and how it's organised and the class divisions within it. To me the two concepts are intertwined, that's how we acknowledge the history of colonialism and the theft of land and genocide and the anti-capitalism is also a unifying idea, the people in this society who are exploited through the class, gender, patriarchal the white supremacy of the system. These things are included in both anti-capital and anti-colonial analysis.

In terms of anti-colonialism, capitalism arose through the process of colonisation, of course, when European states invaded the Americas this is what revived a dying Europe. Europe was dying, it was suffering from overpopulation, widespread poverty, social conflict, wars and disease. It was the invasion of the Americas in particular that brought in all kinds of resources back to Europe and revived the dying states of Europe and led to the industrial revolution which was the motor of capitalist expansion into imperialism. So considering that this is how anti-colonialism and anti-capitalism converged to give us a more comprehensive understanding and a more comprehensive resistance for wherever we're living in North America.

So I was gonna talk a little bit about some of the limitations of the anarchist movement in regards to Indigenous resistance, a lot of Indigenous people, including even within the Indigenous resistance, if you work in solidarity you may encounter hostility from some Indigenous people against anarchism because they don't understand what anarchism is. They're socialised and exposed to the corporate media and government statements that attack anarchism. So there may be a hostility towards anarchism, also anarchists have a culture of their own, this culture, you can see it in symbols, slogans, clothing, names they use, sometimes this is difficult

for Indigenous people to grasp or to accept. I remember one long-time Indigenous activist who was kinda hostile towards anarchists, he said that what the anarchists ought to do is; to get a haircut, take a bath, stop eating out of garbage cans. He's got a certain concept and a certain prejudice maybe and a different lifestyle right? For me, I always kinda saw anarchists and a tribe almost with their own culture.

A lot of Indigenous movements, I was involved in the native youth movement for many years and the common concept of Anarchists is that they're hippies. In terms of working in alliance with them, a lot of Indigenous people when they see non-Indigenous people coming around to be in solidarity with them, they call them "supporters", I think that white guilt can play a part in this, the white guilt idea that you have privilege and power because you're white, some of you are white, in this society. It can be a good motivating thing, to think about doing solidarity, but in the long term it can be counterproductive because it encourages the idea among the Indigenous activists that you're just a supporter and I've seen a lot of Indigenous movements try to exploit Indigenous people who come in.

Non Indigenous people often enable this as well. When you think about solidarity, solidarity is when you see that your struggle is connected to another and that it's important to build an alliance with this other movement, as an equal. The anarchist movement and anti-capitalist movement, it can be more comprehensive or perhaps deeper if it has an anti-colonial analysis to it. The anarchists have a legitimate movement that should not be subordinated to another movement, you should have the concept that you want to build an alliance. You are a force, and you see another force that is fighting this common enemy, so you want to make an alliance on that concept. In my opinion this is more healthy in the long run.

Indigenous social movements, often they don't wanna call their action, whatever it is, a blockade or whatever a protest, you see in Six Nations, the Six nations people were very adamant that they were not protesting, they called their action a land reclamation, there is some truth in it but it's also just kind of word games. For me I can understand why they wanted to reject this idea of protest and also the term 'activist', for them and a lot of Indigenous people this protest and activism is just acting, It's like acting out, there's nothing substantial to it, it's not gonna go very far, they're just going through the motions. For me the anarchists, they're more

like a warrior force of the non-native social movement, because they're black bloc, let's say, they're going to fight the police or carry out direct action. This is like the concept of a Warrior. One of the problems facing Indigenous peoples is they're just being exposed to the corporate media who demonise the black blocs. This idea of attacking property is such a threat to the system they (the media) don't want other people to adopt this method. One thing that really broke some aspects of this was Oka in 1990, for Indigenous people, we have an example of a modern day warrior force which wore masks and a uniform, which was camouflage combat clothing.

Some of the strongest solidarity for Indigenous resistance has come from anarchists, the Leonard Peltier defence committee was established in Vancouver because Leonard Peltier was American Indian Movement sought, for the killing of two FBI agents, the Leonard Peltier Defence Committee was set up in Vancouver and a lot of anarchists did a lot of the work for the LPDC including people who would go on to form the guerrilla group Direct Action, Wimmen's Fire Brigade. These people were really influenced by Indigenous struggles, you can see this in their communiques of direct action and their idea of ecological resistance

The Lubicon Cree of northern Alberta had a successful campaign in the late 80s to mid 90s, Their solidarity group was *Friends of the Rubicon* and they had a campaign boycotting Daishowa, a large paper and pulp company called Daishowa. Friends of the Rubicon was started by Anarchists in Toronto.

During the Anti-Olympics campaign that we had in Vancouver from 2006-2010, a lot of the solidarity in actions across the country were carried out by anarchists. The torch disruptions, *including a bunch of ya'll*, anarchists were the ones who engaged in that kind of solidarity.

That slogan “*no justice on stolen land*” was one of the first times a slogan relating to Indigenous resistance was carried out on a national level in this country, this is something significant historically.

Just to close, I'd really like to recommend this book *Dispersing Power - Social Movements as Anti-State Forces*, *Dispersing Power* is written by Raul Zibechi it a analysis of Bolivia and Aymara people particularly in the city of El Alto in the early 2000's up until about 2005. It analyses how this grassroots Indigenous social movement arose and how they self-organised their own community councils, logistics,

communications, medical aid as part of a urban insurrection as part of an urban insurrection where they took control of parts of the city and forced the police and government out through an autonomous and decentralised form of organisation and I don't think they mentioned the word anarchist once in this book. It's just the traditional Indigenous way of organising that they used for their resistance against a number of policies of the state in Bolivia. It's a very inspiring story or account, it's also very revealing because if you think as an anarchist you'll see the commonalities that I've been trying to describe between grassroots Indigenous resistance and the anarchist social movements.

I've been involved in Indigenous & Anarchist movements for about over 20 years, sometimes I was more involved with one than the other, when I was in the Native Youth Movement I didn't have too much association with anarchists, unless it was something like the Summit *of the Americas* in 2001. During the anti-olympics campaign it was a little bit of a convergence of the two things for me, anti-colonial and anti-capitalist, I have the two comic books that have been produced by Arsenal Pulp Press in Vancouver, the *500 Years of Indigenous Resistance Comic Book* and the *Anti-capitalist Resistance Comic Book* those are the

two main areas that I have engaged myself in, so I guess maybe my role within the anarchist movement is to share these ideas about Indigenous resistance and the interconnection between these struggles. Then within the Indigenous movement I hope I can contribute to radicalising the Indigenous movements especially in terms of developing anti-capitalist analysis because anti-colonial doesn't necessarily mean anti-capitalist, there is a lot of anti-colonial liberation movements that weren't necessarily anti-capitalist I think, so again for me it's important that the two concepts are always presented.

Questions from the Audience

QI: *You were interested in Indigenous struggles but you became more with Oka, but you were anarchist before, can you explain a bit more?*

A: In the early 80s I was in the Army reserve, I was in an infantry regiment going through training and I'd just moved to Vancouver with my mother. One of my cousins was really into punk, I started hanging out with him and I listened to a punk radio show in the city. I got exposed to ideas and I got involved with a solidarity group with El Salvador for the *FMLN*, the *Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front*. They were of course an armed Communist group from El Salvador, I had no idea that's what they were, the solidarity group were all Communists, I didn't know that either!

I began to communicate with Anarchists who were producing a journal called *No Picnic*, they had a *Anarchist Black Cross*, I travelled with some of them to the *Anarchist Gathering In Toronto* in 1988, I met Jean Wier who was doing

Elephant Editions and she had the book *From Riot To Insurrection* by Alfredo Bonnano, that was when I became more involved in Anarchist stuff, the Anarchist movement, we would organise rallies, I was publishing a little punk Anarchist zine, that was my main focus, anarchist punk. Until 1990 Oka, when that happened. That was very inspiring, especially as a militant Anarchist, a militant Indigenous Anarchist to see this Indigenous insurgency happening, that was really inspiring, after that I began to focus more on Indigenous resistance, I always kept an association with the Anarchist movements too. While montreal's the big anarchist headquarters right now *crowd chuckles* But In the early to mid 90's it was Toronto. You would not believe it if you went now, but Toronto was very advanced. They were forming some of the first cohesive black blocs in North America, *Anti Racist Action*, very militant, very well organised and did a lot of good work.

Through the 90s I kept my association, but in the mid 90s, the Gustafsen Lake siege in 1995 was another big thing for me, because it was occurring in 100 Mile House, in the central interior of British Columbia, a small little town which is where I was born. That was cool, I put my birthplace on the map through this Indigenous armed resistance against RCMP and stuff like that. (Royal Canadian

Mounted Police) Through the years I've kinda gone back and forth between Anarchist and Indigenous resistance.

Q2: *You mentioned a little earlier that maybe one of the reasons why the anarchist movement and the Indigenous movement does not associate that much is because the anarchist does not put that much importance on race and thinks that race importance is created by capitalists. Why would the Indigenous tribes not associate with that idea?*

I think that some Indigenous people look at the Anarchist movement, they don't see this analysis of Indigenous self determination incorporated into the Anarchist analysis. Within mainstream society, it's hard for society to look at anarchism and get it, it's just as difficult for Indigenous peoples to do that. I think there's more potential in Indigenous peoples because of the culture that most Indigenous people have in terms of how their societies were organised before colonisation, which was as autonomous decentralised village units, with the family as a core of it, but still, autonomous decentralised villages.

To me it's very inspiring to see, during the anti-olympic campaign, that was a really good example of anti-colonial, anti-capital resistance.

Q3. Question About Elders In Indigenous Communities.

The concept of elders in Indigenous communities of course is very important, they are holders of knowledge and wisdom that they've gained through life experience so it's very important. There was always a desire to consult elders to get advice and to share this knowledge, I don't think there was really an idea that the elders were really going to dictate that *this is what is to be done*. In Indigenous communities it's very hard for someone to come along and impose decisions on the community, even the people who are hereditary chiefs as they're called, hereditary leaders, they had no power or authority to coerce or to dictate the policies or anything, leaders who tried to do that would find themselves ostracised, people would just not follow them. It's the same today, it's almost like herding cats, it's the same with the anarchists too right?

The idea that there's an authority in the Indigenous community that will make decisions for the community, that's not how it really was. In indo communal living, these communities were communally based, when you have a

social organisation like that, people are held accountable for their actions, can't hide from the community, they can't gain benefits from outside, in the traditional Indigenous community. Nowadays it's a very different situation because the band council, the chief and council gain their power and authority from outside the community so they can't be held accountable by the community.

You can even read accounts from the early colony of Virginia, those early settlers when they were describing the Indigenous communities, the tribes that were in that area, they would call the chiefs kings and stuff like that. They would also notice that the kings couldn't do anything unless the people willed it. There's a concept from the early European settlers that there was always a chief at the top but that is not the reality, you would not find it in Indigenous communities today except maybe in the band council, the chief and council system imposed with the Indian act.

In different situations this concept of the elder is really abused, in the tent city in Vancouver against the Olympics, there was an elders council set up, there was people who ran around and say (they were such little weasels) *crowd laughs* they'd say "you can't have a fire because the elder said so!" It was very disturbing to see that kind of abuse.

Indigenous peoples have in common with anarchists their opposition to centralized authority and state institutions, most being self-organized as autonomous, decentralized societies. Indigenous cultures emphasize collective and communal practices that also make very significant personal freedoms possible, as many anarchists do. In the current context, anti-colonial resistance also shares a common struggle with anti-capitalist movements, in which several anarchists are involved. -- Gord Hill

SEDITIONIST