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"Remarkable book" provides first historical study of how political activists used theatre performance in Canada

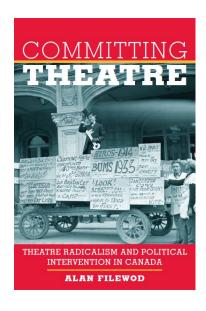
Key issue is the relationship of theatrical practices and communication technology

<u>Committing Theatre: Theatre Radicalism and Political Intervention in Canada</u> offers the first full-length historical study of political intervention theatre and theatrical spectatorship in English Canada. "Theatre history is always a history of the forgotten and unremarked, traced through the survival of the exceptional," says author Alan Filewod. "Committing Theatre offers one way of filling out that forgotten history by examining how activists have used and adapted changing practices of radical theatre in Canada."

Lumber-camp mock trials, Mayday parades and street protests, the Workers Theatre Movement, agitprop theatre, the counter-culture theatre of the 1960s and 1970s, and more recent anarchist theatre collectives all played a role in a vibrant and unique radical theatre culture that went largely unnoticed, unrecorded, and undocumented by the professional theatre establishment.

A key question in the book is the relationship of theatrical practices and communication technology. *Committing Theatre* looks at the invention of agitprop in William Aberhart's fusion of radio broadcast and live performance in the 1920s, and the role of the automobile in the development of the Workers Theatre in the 1920s. An in-depth examination of how the Communist Party used theatre from the early 1930s to the late 1950s offers new research that shows that theatrical performances – from the banned *Eight Men Speak* in 1933 to the socialist musical *Little Paul Bunyan* in 1955 – have been one of the most effective means to claim space in the public sphere.

Drawing on a lifetime of engagement in political intervention theatre, *Committing Theatre* traces the history of radical theatre in Canada by combining archival research, documentation, critical analysis, and personal memory and commentary.



Committing Theatre: Theatre Radicalism and Political Intervention in Canada

Alan Filewod ISBN 978-1-926662-76-3 October 2011 29.95

Theatre studies and drama/History/Activism and social movements

About the author

Alan Filewod is Professor of Theatre Studies at the University of Guelph and a recognized authority on Canada's theatre history. He has been involved in political theatre for over thirty years. His books include *Collective Encounters: Documentary Theatre in English Canada* (1987), *Performing "Canada": The Nation Enacted in the Imagined Theatre* (2002), and, with David Watt, *Workers' Playtime: Theatre and the Labour Movement since 1970* (2001), and numerous articles and book chapters on social action theatre. He is a past president of the Association for Canadian Theatre Research and of the Association for Canadian and Quebec Literatures/ Association des littératures canadienne et québécoise, and is a former editor of *Canadian Theatre Review*.

Praise for the book

- "A remarkable book. *Committing Theatre* challenges traditional paradigms and should be required reading in any study of Canadian theatre."
- -Jerry Wasserman, professor of English and Theatre, University of British Columbia
- "Reading this is like watching a clockmaker dismantle the mechanism of Canadian theatre to show what makes it tick. I kept saying to myself "Aha! So that's why our country's theatre looks like it does." Committing Theatre is a refreshingly clear-eyed work that moves the fence posts in the field of Canadian theatre analysis, and widens our field of vision."
- —Chris Brookes, author, documentary-maker, former artistic director of the Mummers Troupe Theatre of Newfoundland, and Order of Canada recipient
- "Committing Theatre is an unprecedented study of radical theatre and performative political activism in Canada since the nineteenth century. Filewod's lucid, brisk writing style makes this book a compelling read, validating and instigating much needed theatrical political intervention."
- —Aida Jordão, popular theatre artist and scholar
- "This sophisticated yet accessible treatment combines personal reflection with scholarly rigour, and covers an impressive array of performance events, styles and venues. More histories of theatre should do this."
- -Stephen Johnson, director, Graduate Centre for Study of Drama, University of Toronto