

Reviews of History and Social Sciences

L. Campbell, M. Dawson and C. Gidney, eds., *Worth Fighting For: Canada's Tradition of War Resistance from 1812 to the War on Terror*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 2015. Pp. vii+313. Softcover, \$34.95.

If you have visited the history section of any large bookstore, or turned on the History Channel lately you will quickly recognize that the titles on most prominent display are overwhelmingly about military history. As the editors of *Worth Fighting For* remind us, much of this revival of interest in Canada's military heritage has been part of a conscious and partisan effort to overcome the "decades of darkness" in which Canada's military exploits disappeared under the "dangerously naïve myth" of Canada as a peacekeeper. *Worth Fighting For* serves as a counter narrative to this recent re-branding of Canada as a "Warrior Nation." In doing so, the authors of the seventeen chapters in this collection illustrate the long, complex, and fundamental importance of war resistance in Canada's history.

The collection begins with the examination of the struggles of the early "peace churches" (i.e. Mennonites and Quakers) to force

the colonial state to live up to its pledges to accommodate their conscientious objection to war. The middle chapters then move on to examine the resistance Canadians mounted against the nation's participation in the Boer War, the Great War, and World War II. These chapters remind us that much of the opposition to these "wars for democracy" was rooted in a liberal anti-imperial discourse, which viewed war as the antithesis, if not the chief impediment, to democracy. In this vein, David Tough argues convincingly that the liberties and democratic rights of Canadians were so incomplete at the outbreak of war in 1914 that they were hardly worth "defending" through sacrifice in the trenches of France. Rather, the expanded democracy that emerged in the aftermath of these conflicts was defined as much by the sacrifices made by soldiers on the battlefield as by the struggles fought on the home front to restrain the wartime state in its attempts to claim control over Canadian bodies and minds. Finally, the latter chapters concentrate on stories of resistance perhaps a little more familiar to modern Canadians, namely the opposition to nuclear arms race mounted in the 1960s by groups such as the Voice of Women (VOW) and the Student Union for Peace Action (SUPA), as well as the aid given to American war resisters from such conflicts as Vietnam and Iraq. Here again the various authors reveal that Canadians' resistance to "American militarism" was difficult. Those who courageously spoke out against nuclear weapons, who gave succor to American draft dodgers, or who campaigned against the marketing of war toys to children were often surveilled by the state, lampooned as communist dupes, denounced as "namby pamby" cowards, or worse, branded as sexually deviant.

Overall, the authors want readers to see war resistance not as "tangential to Canada's wartime experience, but at the centre to illustrate its long and complex history." (11). While I would agree that such histories are not tangential, I am not sure they always stand at the centre. In their attempt to counter the "Warrior Nation" narrative at times the authors tend to stretch their conclusions beyond, and sometimes in contradiction to, their own evidence. Indeed, what comes across repeatedly in this collection is that conscientious objection and other acts of resistance to war and militarism were difficult precisely because they were unpopular. That may not be the "better truth" that some of the authors here are looking to deliver. However, it is also wise to remember that even when Canadians have not taken to the streets in protest, or refused military service out of conscientious objection that they have long been ambivalent about war. After all, even the doyen of Canadian military history, George Stanley, entitled the first aca-

demic survey of the nation's soldiers "The Military History of An Unmilitary People." If nothing else what this collection reminds us is that current narrative controversies between Canada as "Warrior Nation" and Canada as "Peaceable Kingdom" has a long and interesting history that will require further exploration. We can only hope that those who take up this challenge will provide us with histories as engaging as those that appear here.

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