

Early Canadian State Intervention in Sport

Kevin Wamsley

University of Alberta

Even though there is a relatively large body of literature pertaining to state theory and an increasing number of studies examining Canadian state involvement in sport, most scholars have chosen to ignore events prior to the 20th century. From a primitive growth and development period in the 1800s to the present day, the Canadian state has been involved in sport and related areas. The Canadian state slowly and cautiously emerged during the 1800s under the auspices of British imperialism and the influence of United States continentalism. The nature of intervention in sport reflects state policy, in response to various internal and external pressures during the process of national establishment; and state function, relative to the needs of an evolving capitalist system. The purpose of this paper is to examine the nature of selected instances of Canadian state intervention in sport, from the mid 1800s to the beginning of the Strathcona Trust era (i.e. 1909-1911), relative to local, national, and international pressures, and to functions of the state in a capitalist society.

State intervention in sport during the late 19th and early 20th centuries consisted of forms of regulation and control, exploitation, and development. The functions of state intervention in sport, in an evolving Canadian capitalist society, were accumulation, coercion, and overt perpetuation. The foundations of state intervention in sport lay in the 19th century. This analysis, examining the theoretical implications of intervention, may aid in understanding the nature of state intervention in the following years and present time.