

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)  
Anti-Copyright



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The Problems of Anarchist History  
1991

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# The Problems of Anarchist History

Albert Meltzer

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When the academics write up anarchist history they have re-search know-how and facilities and re-write to stress the bourgeois influence usually non-existent. (e.g. Herbert Read might have been an anarchist and influenced a few writers and artists but his influence on the anarchist movement was nil and their involvement nil).

It is easy to invent and stress a bourgeois influence (e.g. Woodcock can say the movement existed because of the literary influence he exerted and collapsed when he went to Canada to be revived when he wrote a book on it saying it was dead! — who can prove otherwise, or be heard if they did?) You can't put in what's not there from a working class angle since you're dealing with reality (you can exaggerate the influence of a book).

The necessity for archives and records so far as we are concerned are not matters of ancestor-worship or personality cult. They do not concern the remote past, tracing "libertarian thought" back to Confucius or to William Godwin. They are a matter for keeping knowledge of struggles alive for the present generation and those that come after. Even the Anarchist participation in the anti-poll

tax movement, already distorted, is now being misrepresented by academic theorists and pseudo-historians, even though we are talking about what happened less than two years ago and is still continuing.

A fair and impartial history of Anarchism is *Demanding the Impossible*, and this is the very title one Peter Marshall, who knows nothing whatever about the movement and precious little of its ideas, last discovered lurking around anarchist bookfairs, has chosen for a book just published. In it he devotes huge chapters to such unlikely sharers of the anarchist tradition as the Thatcherites, and while intimate with “anarcho-capitalists” portrays the real anarchists with less than reasonable ignorance. Black Flag is dismissed in one sentence as representing the “minor revolutionary trend” among Anarchists, and in that short sentence there are four inaccuracies! The Direct Action Movement, though part of the International Workers Association (of which even Woodcock has heard — though not of its British affiliate), the voice of organised International anarcho-syndicalism in Britain, gets dismissed in half a sentence, and is bracketed with odd little anarchist groups Marshall has probably dug out of catalogues. The Marxist SPGB, directly opposite to anarchism in every single respect save that it shares an aversion to “violence” with some pacifist groupings, is of “anarchist inspiration”! His account of Class War is taken from the *Sun*. It is said to have organised the Trafalgar Square riots, which in future will be the classic version (cf. P. Marshall, *ibid*).