

**Václav Tomek, Ondřej Slačálek:**  
***Anarchism: Freedom against Power***  
**(*Anarchizmus: Svoboda proti moci*)**

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The two authors – each of a different generation, Václav Tomek is a historian of Czech anarchism and Ondřej Slačálek is a student of political science and an anarchist by conviction – have produced a noteworthy work. Their book presents the development of anarchist ideas from their initial glimmering in shared streams of thought to their present day form. The development of anarchist political ideas is the subject matter of their study (published as the second volume of the *History of Ideas* series), while at the same time the biographies of the main anarchist thinkers, and the historical development of particular anarchist movements, are a constant reference.

This is reflected in the structure of the book. The main part (20 chapters) analyzes the thought of selected orthodox writers. These are followed by four chapters mapping the general development of anarchism, two chapters reviewing anarchism in the Czech lands, one on anarchism in Spain, a review of some seminal works in the domain and finally an epilogue, more in the form of an independent essay than a conclusion of the work.

The introduction to the book was written by sociologist Jan Keller, who emphasises the value of certain anarchist ideas in our present situation. The authors themselves do not treat anarchism as an historical phenomenon only of the past. Anarchism is at the outset defined as the rejection of oppression in the political, economic and cultural domains (with reference to Italian turn of the century anarchist Errico Malatesta.) This vague and normative definition reveals the difficulty of reaching a more precise conceptualisation of this heterogeneous stream of political thought. The authors focus above all on those ideas directly connected with the anarchist movement throughout history. In a work written as a history of ideas, this would be a disputable, but possible, starting point. However, the only thing we learn about certain streams traditionally classified as anarchist (above all the right-leaning libertarianism, also referred to as “anarchocapitalism”), is that the authors do not consider them anarchist (p. 469).

The book presents anarchism as presenting a variation of the traditional left-wing emphasis on liberty and equality, with the exception of the forms proposed by Max Stirner, a Young Hegelian and radical individualist, and John Zerzan, a contemporary primitivist. As such, it is a variation which rejects the state, which is conceived by most of the left as at least a *temporary guarantee of these values, for being their antithesis and negation*. In an attempt to provide a different form of a guarantee, emphasis is laid on benign human nature (most notably in Kropotkin, pp. 206–208) and on the significance of culture, presented in opposition to the detested principle of power over people (pp. 421–427). Anarchism aims at an organisation of society that would realise human freedom, both individually and collectively possible, i.e. in decisions

## REVIEWS

of both personal and social nature (pp. 617–618). A constant critique of coercive institutions and the dismantling of those that have failed to demonstrate their utility (p. 525) serves as a means to that end. These general social ideals took on various forms in the past; the book aims to reflect these various forms with a variety of references (despite being marked by its context and the political positions of the authors).

Different anarchists have sought their predecessors amongst Taoists, Buddhists and medieval Christian heretics. This tendency the book represents with a critical distance. The authors tend towards the conclusion that anarchism can be discussed only as a complete political philosophy after the advent of the anarchist movement. Even chapters dealing with authors whose texts usually rank among the classics of anarchism (enlightenment-era critic of government William Godwin, the individualist Max Stirner, the unorthodox socialist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the lesser-known precursor of anarcho-communism Joseph Dejacque) are appended to the section concerning the precursors of anarchism.

Mikhail Bakunin is considered, not only by the authors, the first anarchist in the true sense of the word. As we read, he was a Russian revolutionary with certain very disputable episodes in life, such as his servile confession to the Czar in prison, or his collaboration with the fanatic Netchayev. Bakunin formulated the basic principles of the anarchist political program towards the end of his life, and led an important polemic with Marx in which he warned against the avant-gardism of left wing intellectuals and the threat of the “red dictatorship”. A whole range of authors, starting with Engels and ending with Chomsky, have considered Bakunin a mediocre political thinker. The exposition of his views can be considered an implicit attempt by the authors to dispute this.

Apart from Bakunin, the authors present the natural scientist of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Elisée Reclus, the terrorist Johann Most, the educationalist Francisco Ferrer, and above all, the anarcho-communist natural scientist and historian Peter Kropotkin. This Russian revolutionary tried to combine his conviction about good human nature with Darwinism. As the authors suppose, Kropotkin’s anarcho-communism emphasised the natural competition among particular species. Yet between members of the same species the whole spectrum of mutual interactions and relations plays a significant role, and in this situation the most successful interactions are those that overcome competition in favor of cooperation.

The radical religious pacifist Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy, better known as a writer, is, with a greater or lesser note of criticism, also considered an anarchist by the authors, as well as by many historians. His humble and non-violent approach to life obviously caused many to believe that Tolstoy’s approach is the opposite of other anarchists’s approach. Thus Tolstoy is often categorised, with William Morris and Oscar Wilde, among the “fellow-travellers of anarchism”.

The book argues that Anarchism was developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century from a very strong normative ideal of human emancipation. The political and economic ideals of anarchism also originated from this ideal of an emancipated human being. The absolute negation of bourgeois society shifted into the des-

perate form of terrorist attacks. The contra-productivity of these actions became clear only some decades later, and anarchism sought better means of enforcing its goals. Some of these means were community experiments, participation in emancipation movements (women's rights, anticolonialism, antimilitarism, antireligious movements) and above all, in the radical trade unions. For anarchists, the trade unions were not only organisations meant to enforce the rights of workers, but were also an alternative to political parties and instruments for a revolutionary transformation of society.

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, anarchists have participated in the revolutionary movements in Mexico, Russia, Italy, Germany, Manchuria and, above all, Spain. However, they were defeated by counter revolution or by authoritarian elements in the actual revolutionary movements. Eventually the Anarchists could not stand up to their own ideals. Not only did they cooperate with authoritarian revolutionaries, but they also participated in the resultant governments (the cases of Germany and Spain).

The book argues that Czech anarchism, which was particularly developed at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, also shows a total loss of identity. In its resistance to Austria-Hungary, the Czech Anarchist Movement merged with the national socialists' party. Thus the Czech Anarchists gained a seat in the parliament and in the government. In the later opposition against the First Republic they were not in anti-state positions, but they were a part of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia.

Thus in the 20<sup>th</sup> century anarchist conceptions were evolving from the forms they took in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to adapt to the new conditions. It seems that in spite of the original meaning of the word "anarchy", it was taking its load from the past. Despite this, they brought some new views into this radically changed atmosphere. The authors describe how the French anarcho-syndicalist Émilé Pouget connected far-reaching anarchist visions to the practices of the unions. He, with his collaborator Émilé Pataud, created a unique "syndicalistic Utopia" (p. 362).

On the other hand, the German visionary Gustav Landauer emphasized the ethical side of anarchist thought. The career and work of anarcho-feminist Emma Goldman is also especially interesting. She pointed out the conditioned relationship of equality of a man and women. In her work she also enforced the thought of freedom and antiauthoritarianism. We can read the work of Hitler's contemporary Rudolf Rocker like a radical antithesis of German Nazism. Rocker, a Jewish leader and later the leader of a German trade union, claimed that any kind of thoughts of dictatorship are a lamentable heritage of the bourgeois thinking contaminating the labor movement. He also considered the nation a construct only substituting for the legitimising role of religion, which was in decline.

After World War II, Anarchism underwent a period of recess. This was also due to the tragic fate of the anarchist movement in Franco's Spain. The anarchists opposed both sides in the Cold War. In their critique of the Stalin regime they not only pointed out the dispute between Bakunin and Marx, but (referring to Stalin's estrangement to Marx's thoughts) they also further developed the older anarchist critique of utopian thinking. Anarchist theorist Marie Louise Berneri did not consider the envisioned perfect societies

## REVIEWS

the desired aim. For her, these were just a nightmare needed by the omnipotent state. However, she herself presented her own liberal utopias against this dominant stream of authoritarian utopias (Diderot, Morris).

Anarchism gained new relevance in the 1960s with new political themes such as protection of the environment or equality for women. The authors describe how the thinking of this period influenced the works of social environmentalist Murray Bookchin, playful and practical thinker Colin Ward and self-described “traditional anarchist” Noam Chomsky. Newer anarchism is also represented in the thinking of radical critic of modern civilisation John Zerzan and the only “collective author”, with which the book better acquaints us, the British Anarchist Federation. Further on, one chapter maps the development of Czech anarchism after 1989, taking note of the similarities between anarchism and critical Marxists from the 1930s to the 1980s (Záviš Kalandra, Egon Bondy, Robert Kalivoda, Petr Uhl, etc.).

After a strong bibliographic chapter – the bibliography, which sometimes causes useless fragmentation, is a very strong feature of the publication – follows an interesting epilogue in the form of a brisk essay. It attempts to explore problematic spheres in anarchist political thinking. However, it has to be said that this relatively short ending provides little in the way of a conclusion, or even of a proper discussion of the questions raised in the last 660 pages. This huge amount of text deserves a stronger, more conclusive, ending. The rich bibliography includes many useful references to web pages and samizdats. Readers will probably also appreciate the monochrome illustrations – quite uncommon in domestic publications of this kind.

In summary, the authors’ attempt to encompass the history of anarchism is definitely successful. This project must have been very difficult to complete, and it was much needed and expected in the Czech environment. The authors offer descriptions of the main streams of anarchist thinking, which is still highly relevant today. Hopefully this publication will contribute to a further discussion of anarchism in academia. The term “anarchy” as used in the theory of international relations, and also as used by the anarchists to express their ideal of “order without rule” also merits further discussion.

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