



The Russian Anarchists

Paul Avrich

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In the turmoil of the Russian insurrection of 1905 and civil war of 1917, the anarchists attempted to carry out their program of “direct action”—workers’ control of production, the creation of free rural and urban communes, and partisan warfare against the enemies of a free society.

Avrich consulted published material in five languages and anarchist archives worldwide to present a picture of the philosophers, bomb throwers, peasants, and soldiers who fought and died for the freedom of “Mother Russia.” Including the influence and ideas of Bakunin and Kropotkin, the armed uprisings of Makhno, the activities of Volin, Maximoff, and the attempted aid of Berkman and Emma Goldman.

Paul Avrich is a retired professor of history at Queens College.

The Russian Anarchists Details

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From Reader Review The Russian Anarchists for online ebook

Tym says

a great and engaging history of the anarchist movement in russia

Rufus says

Wonderfully written, very lucid. Avrich is one of the foremost scholars of anarchism. This is essential and canonical reading for anyone interested in the history of anarchism, with special focus on mid-to-late nineteenth century Russia, and the subsequent period of the rise of the Soviet state in the early decades of the twentieth. The perspective of the Russian anarchists gives a clear view of the negative effects of the rise of the authoritarian left on the whole radical movement in Russia. It presents a lot of criticism of the anarchists as well, namely, their seeming inability to coalesce into a cohesive whole. Bitter factionalism are frequently experienced, there is also the anti-intellectual strain which is interestingly discussed by Avrich, among other issues.

Also another great introductory work I recommend is James Joll's 'The Anarchists.'

Steven Peterson says

Paul Avrich's scholarly discussion of the anarchist movement in Russia makes a nice contribution. For one thing, it demonstrates the strength of the anarchist movement in an inhospitable environment—first under Czarist Russia and, second, under the Bolsheviks. Avrich observes that (Page 4) “The Russian anarchists have long been ignored by those who regard all history through the eyes of the victors.” He goes on to say (Pages 4-5) that “if one is to appreciate the true range and complexity of the Revolution of 1917 and the events that followed in its wake, the role played by the anarchists must be taken into account.”

There are two parts to the book—the first focuses on the events of 1905. At this time, discontent against the Czarist government bubbled over. There was an array of forces agitating against the government. Some were descendants of the Marxist tradition (such as Lenin) and others were advocates of Bakunin's anarchist perspective. Indeed, Peter Kropotkin's views were also represented among opposition to the status quo. Chapters 1-4 describe events of this era, including the anarchist terrorists, advocates of “propaganda of the deed” (Nechaev as one example) and syndicalists.

In 1917, the Czarist regime crumbled. At the outset, Petrograd and the naval station at Kronstadt became libertarian outposts. Anarchists were a part of the revolution as were Bolsheviks. Kerensky's government, coming to power after the ousting of the Czar, was itself overthrown in October. Over time, the Bolsheviks worked to suppress opposing forces, culminating in Trotsky's attack on Kronstadt. Conflict continued between anarchists and Bolsheviks for a while, including Makhno's rebellion. In the end, though, Lenin's forces prevailed.

The book is worthwhile for pointing out the role of anarchists in the run up to the revolution as well as during the early part of the revolution. Avrich's book is well researched and provides ample detail.

Velvetink says

bookfi.com

John says

Paul Avrich does not disappoint, but how could he? This story is full of drama with not so wonderful heroes and just plain awful villains. For me a thrilling read. As I've written before, I'm a historian for good reasons - You just can't make this stuff up.

Yi says

This book is a great source for an abridged history of the Russian Revolution and the role the anarchists played in bringing down the Tzarist Institution. Decently written, and highly informative on what anarchy really means. It also shows what a bunch of sneaky little bastards the Lenin/Trotsky camp really were.

Radostinski says

That was a very interesting read indeed. Paul Avrich provides an account of the anarchist activity in the first decades of the 20th century as well as of the different currents and disputes in the Russian anarchist movement. When one reads about the Russian revolution, it is mostly the Bolsheviks, Mensheviks and the SRs one is being fed with. As it turned out, the Anarchists were not as numerous as the aforementioned groups, but played a significant role in the events with their revolutionary zeal. At the end, it was however the Bolshevik SOB's who ruined everything. :-)

chris says

An excellent account, using mostly primary sources, of the anarchist movement before and during the Russian Revolution. Exposes Lenin and the Bolsheviks for the assholes that they were.

Shadday says

Heading out to buy a frame for a this photograph of Bakunin. Great book. The gang's all here. If your idea of anarchism is some blend of t-shirts, amplified fiddlers, and whatever else your news outlet lies to you about, I'd recommend this text save the fact I doubt any critical text does the mentally handicapped any good.

Sugarpunksattack Mick says

Paul Avrich is a wonderful and sympathetic historian of Anarchism whose various books over incite into crucial anarchist interventions. This book is no exception. 'The Russian Anarchists' show the role anarchists play in the Tsarist period before and leading up to the unfolding of the Russian Revolution. Section one covers the various anarchist people, groups, and movements in the Tsarist period paying attention to their philosophical and strategic differences. Section two covers the Russian Revolution period roughly from 1917 to 1921. Section two does a wonderful job of exploring the general movements and major events in the Russian revolution with emphasis on the Anarchist participation and the Bolshevik reaction to the anarchist after they take state power. Likewise, Avrich shows that the Bolshevik government from the beginning maneuvers to crush and get rid of the popular anarchist movements as a way to solidify their hold on power. Avrich's book is a great and a thorough introduction to the Russian revolution and Anarchist involvement. The overall book is very readable, but the first section is a little jumbled because of how many different, random groups emerge and dissipate so quickly. My other criticism is that Avrich's understanding of Bakunin's philosophy appears to be surface level, if not complexity wrong, attributing to Bakunin a strong anti-intellectualism. This misrepresentation is often utilized by marxists and liberal scholars as a way to down play Bakunin's contributions to anarchist history and philosophy. Bakunin is interested in destroying the separation of manual and intellectual labor, rather than embracing an anti-philosophy position.

xDEAD ENDx says

I want to give this three stars. It's a little bit of a dry history, the stories of the people involved have been told so many times now, and the lessons are (or, should be) well-known by now. But given that Avrich was such a prolific historian, I have to imagine his documentation is the reason we know so much about our Russian forebears.

Alex says

a solidly thorough but concise account of anarchism before and after the 1917 russian revolution. most interesting to me in regards the Bolshevik repression of those advocating actual workers' control and the ideals of socialism, and the degeneration of workplace democracy into the Leninist hands of state capitalism. good book, but i would suggest "My Dillilusionment in Russia" by Emma Goldman as the far superior read.

James says

An excellent introduction to Russian anarchists in the period leading up to and including the 1917 revolution. Part I recounts the prequel in 1905 including the syndicalists and terrorists. The discussion of the influence of Michael Bakunin and his followers is a key aspect of this section. Part II focuses on 1917 and the struggle between anarchism and bolshevism, leading to the eventual failure of Russian anarchism. The ebb and flow of factional strife within the Anarchist movement is a key aspect in this section. This book would make a good adjunct to reading a more general history of the Russian revolution.

Mark says

Bit of an epic work for the time. Does what it says on the tin and is a useful addition to other studies of the revolution.
