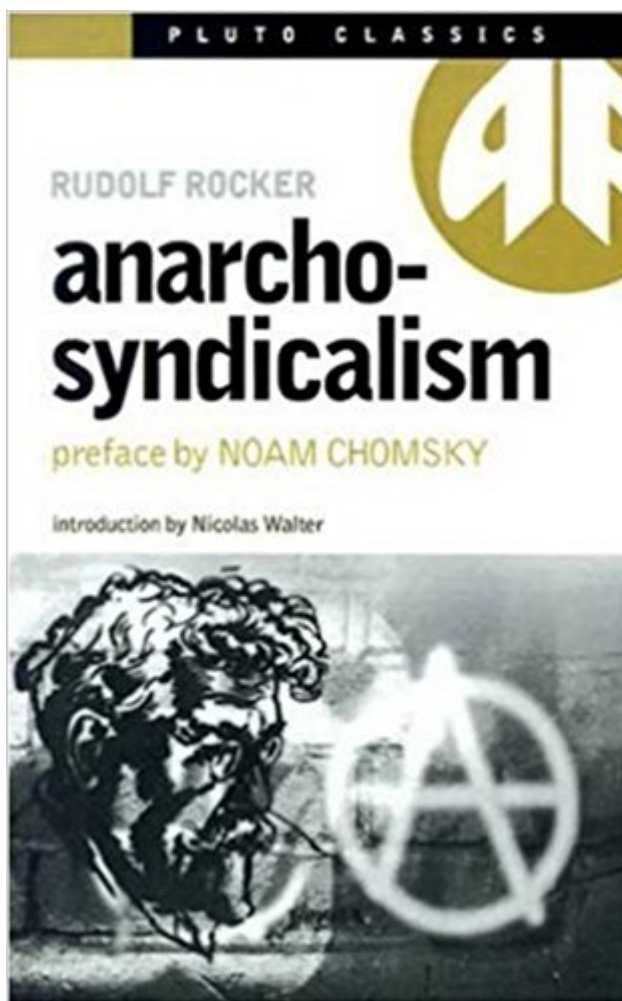


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Anarcho-Syndicalism (Pluto Classics)



Synopsis

Rudolf Rocker's classic survey of anarcho-syndicalism was written during the Spanish Civil War to explain to the wider reading public the ideology which inspired the social revolution in Spain. It remains unsurpassed as a general introduction to anarchist thought and an authoritative account of the early history of international anarchism by one of the movement's leading figures.

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Customer Reviews

'With a preface by Noam Chomsky, and a fascinating introduction by veteran British anarchist Nicolas Walker, this is a timely reissuing of Rudolf Rocker's classic statement of anarchist principles, values and methods' -- Spectre

Rudolf Rocker (1873-1958) was a leading figure in the international anarchist movement. Politically active in Britain, Germany and the United States for more than half a century, Rocker helped found several influential anarchist groups. His prolific lectures and writings made him one of the best-known proponents of liberty and freedom. Anarcho-Syndicalism, the most accessible of his works, was first published in 1938 and is now regarded as a classic survey of anarchism at a critical point in world politics.

By far one of the most essential essays on this extremely important and pressing topic. True

democracy and republicanism finds its expression in this ethic which, for all you ancaps out there, does not necessarily exclude the existence of a market but does allow for people to have an access to resources with which they can actualize their humanity by providing for themselves and perfecting a given craft which is not allowed for in wage slavery which reduces humans to machines and the natural and cultural environment into a wasteland.

There are several elements to Rudolph Rocker's energetic and highly readable biography of the Anarcho-Syndicalist movement that bear consideration by those who might initially think the subject had no relevance for them. My own impression of anything associated with anarchy has, up to this point, been completely negative and that it is confined to radical fringe groups bent on destruction or hedonistic chaos. (a la "The Sex Pistols" or "The Ayatollah of Rock-n-rolla"). I saw 'Anarcho-Syndicalism' and thought it synonymous with 'Crack-pot'. There is, however, a structure behind Anarcho-Syndicalism - this was surprising to me; I had long believed that Anarchy implied no structure at all. One of the foundational supports of that structure is the belief that 'The State', in whatever form it takes, whether democratic or proletarian dictatorship, is simply an organism designed to support and further entrench the current ruling class. According to Anarcho-Syndicalist thought, this is the only thing that the State CAN do; revolutions will only change the faces of the elites. Yet when the anarchist proposes doing away with governing bodies, he does not advocate chaos in its place; rather, he looks toward small groups of economically linked 'syndicates' (such as trade unions) to direct the business of those associated with it, and to interact with other such groups in a sort of loose federation. This would be the true fulfillment of the socialist idea. An analogy that I think of, which is not exact but I think captures the basic idea, is a comparison to groups of Native Americans before the arrival of the Europeans. Small groups are free to direct their lives as they saw fit, and who form alliances or engage in trading with others as needed. (I am aware that this is a gross generalization - it is only meant for illustration purposes.) This sort of structure demands self-reliance, which is implied by Rocker that the true anarchist embraces. One of the schisms in the early days of socialism was the turning of certain elements toward parliamentary politics - syndicalists saw this as a lure that seemed to obviate the need for constructive activity and inoculated people "with the ruinous delusion that salvation always comes from above." According to them, seeking solace or relief in the arms of the state, or even trying to change it from within is like changing staterooms on the Titanic - the view might change but the ship's still going down. In the late 1930's, during the Spanish Civil War, certain persons saw an opportunity to showcase the ideas at play between the fascists forces of Gen.

Franco and the various groups that opposed him; these same persons convinced Rocker that he was the man to transcribe the beliefs of the anarchists, and ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM (and its now discarded subtitle: Theory and Practice) was published in 1938. In its six chapters, Rocker breaks down the movement's aims and purposes, traces the history of organized labor and the forerunners of syndicalism, and then successively outlines the objective, method, and evolution of anarcho-syndicalism. Whether or not after reading Rocker's treatise one finds himself converted to the ideals of Anarcho-Syndicalism is, I think, beside the point. Although I recognize certain aspects of the ideology in different groups operating today, I'm not aware that there are any large-scale efforts (at least in America) to agitate toward a syndicalist society, at least in the way that Rocker envisioned it. And even though ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM is quite obviously meant as propaganda, and perhaps to win converts, I think too much time has passed for it to effectively perform that task. However, I did find it intellectually stimulating, both as a concept and as an example of a historical mindset. This is where I see the greatest value of Rocker's work - a concise, easily understandable breakdown of a line of reasoning that motivated a great number of people at one time.

Orwell's "Homage to Catalonia" was an excellent look at the Spanish Civil War by an front-line observer, but when it came to the groups who were fighting against Franco, I always felt as though I had a rather loose grip on their beliefs. Yes, they were against fascism - in hindsight, it's easy to believe that it was axiomatic to stand against fascism, yet obviously it wasn't, or else their leaders would not have held the sway over their people as they did. So in Spain, there were groups who believed in something else - and for me, Rocker sums up nicely what it was they fought and died for. Historical periods and events, such as the civil war in Spain, can too often be over-simplified in an effort to graft meaning and context onto them, or else make them agree with other narratives. In that respect, ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM, even with its highly biased content, is a document that adds depth and complexity to a particular era by illustrating the motivation of some of its participants. Recommended for those interested in political science, the history of labor movements and students of the Spanish Civil War.

"Anarcho-Syndicalism" provides readers with an engaging account of an egalitarian political philosophy that has its roots in Enlightenment thought. Author Rudolph Rocker presents a systematic conception of the development of anarchist thought towards anarcho-syndicalism, writing that "anarchism is not a fixed, self-enclosed social system but rather a definite trend in the historic development of mankind, which, in contrast with the intellectual guardianship of all clerical and governmental institutions, strives for the free unhindered unfolding of all the individual and

social forces in life. Even freedom is only a relative, not an absolute concept, since it tends constantly to become broader and to affect wider circles in more manifold ways. For the anarchist, freedom is not an abstract philosophical concept, but the vital concrete possibility for every human being to bring to full development all the powers, capacities, and talents with which nature has endowed him, and turn them to social account. The less this natural development of man is influenced by ecclesiastical or political guardianship, the more efficient and harmonious will human personality become, the more will it become the measure of the intellectual culture of the society in which it has grown." Rucker shows that there is value in studying "trend(s) in the historic development of mankind" that do not articulate a specific and detailed social theory. Although intellectuals and social commentators alike dismiss anarchism as utopian, formless, primitive, or otherwise incompatible with the realities of a complex society, Rucker states that at every stage of history our concern must be to dismantle those forms of authority and oppression that survive from an era when they might have been justified in terms of the need for security or survival or economic development, but that now contribute to -- rather than alleviate - material and cultural deficit. "Anarcho-Syndicalism" remains an amazing intellectual and political statement containing a message of egalitarian hope.

Rucker's work is the finest marriage of classic political liberalism and economic equality. Rucker grounds the spirit and ideas of anarchism proposed by Bakunin in a concise social/political agenda. A far more lucid vision of a social order which is both economically socialist (or communist) and politically open, than any other theorist before or since. Some may find it a bit dated. The sorts of labor organizations he refers to bear little resemblance to those found in contemporary societies. That is, not syndicalistic. Still, I believe he is one of the most overlooked influences upon contemporary, Western, left-wing thought. I also believe that the book's first section 'Anarchism: Its Aims and Purposes' should be read by more social activists. It would help focus the often disparate voices of opposition, giving them a clearer vision of the road ahead and what needs to be done to travel upon it.

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