



Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism

By Peter Marshall

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Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism By Peter Marshall

Lively and authoritative, this study of a widely misunderstood subject skillfully navigates the rough waters of anarchistic concepts—from Taoism to Situationism, ranters to punk rockers, individualists to communists, and anarcho-syndicalists to anarcho-feminists. Exploring key anarchist ideas of society and the state, freedom and equality, authority and power, the record investigates the successes and failures of anarchist movements throughout the world. Presenting a balanced and critical survey, the detailed document covers not only classic anarchist thinkers—such as Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Reclus, and Emma Goldman—but also other libertarian figures, such as Nietzsche, Camus, Gandhi, Foucault, and Chomsky. Essential reading for anyone wishing to understand what anarchists stand for and what they have achieved, this fascinating account also includes an epilogue that examines the most recent developments, including postanarchism and anarcho-primitivism as well as the anarchist contributions to the peace, green, and global justice movements of the 21st century.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The goal of an egalitarian, communal society has always united Marxists and leftist socialists, some of the latter (often if not always described as anarchists) refusing any truck with centralized power. At various times, such ideas have found relatively wide appeal, and this era is one—expressed for instance in the antiglobalization movement's emphases on local control and direct democracy—making Marshall's comprehensive treatment a timely read. Newly revised and updated, this indispensable history of social libertarian thought now reaches into the 21st century—touching upon themes echoed in other recent titles, including Raj Patel's *The Value of Nothing*. Marshall casts a wide net, gathering all traces of antiauthoritarian socialist thought in works from Lao Tzu through Noam Chomsky, social ecology, and the Zapatistas. Readers will be repeatedly rewarded by Marshall's judiciousness and close readings of both the great names in anarchist history—Proudhon, Kropotkin, and Tolstoy—and less expected contributors—Rousseau, Swift, and Burke. Blowing away cobwebs of misunderstanding and misrepresentation, this is a stimulating portrait of a highly varied but distinctive political ideal, tradition, and practice arising from the enduring human impulse to be free. (*June*)

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Review

"Blowing away cobwebs of misunderstanding and misrepresentation, this is a stimulating portrait of a highly varied but distinctive political ideal, tradition, and practice arising from the enduring human impulse to be free." —*Publishers Weekly*

"[This is] the book I always recommend when asked—as I often am—for something on the history and ideas of anarchism." —Noam Chomsky

"Large, labyrinthine, tentative: for me these are all adjectives of praise when applied to works of history, and [this book] meets all of them." —George Woodcock, *Independent*

"Attractively written and fully referenced . . . bound to be the standard history." —Colin Ward, *Times Educational Supplement*

"Though this highly engaging book can certainly be read from start to finish, I expect that its ultimate role in the average reader's life will be as a reference; not like an encyclopedia but rather more like a favorite author's collected works or a Bible: a massive repository of wisdom and of histories that might be otherwise lost to us." —*Time Out New York*

About the Author

Peter Marshall is a philosopher, a historian, a poet, and the author of 15 books, including *Nature's Web: Rethinking Our Place on Earth*.

Users Review

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Carol Ray:

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