BOOK REVIEW

George Woodcock, Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements**. Peterborough: Broadview Encore Editions, 2004, 434 pp., $22.95.**

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Reviewing this new edition of Woodcock's classic text on the history of the anarchist movement proved to be a much more difficult task than I had initially imagined. First, there is the problem of an apparent lack of novelty. It could be argued that, since no new material has been added to the previous editions, there is nothing here to review. However, the fact that a Canadian publishing house has chosen to release a new edition of one of the best-known works of a Canadian-born writer makes this somewhat of an event. Putting aside the problems I (and Woodcock!) have with statist modes of identification, I might allow myself to hope that the increased attention to this book may make Woodcock seem like he is a little more 'ours' than 'theirs'. I also think it is important that a Canadian publisher has chosen to be identified with an explicitly *anarchist* book. This may help to bring anarchism itself a little closer to home as well.

Another problem I encountered in writing this review is that, in a certain sense, this is not a book at all, by which I mean to say, no one writes like this anymore. Here I am referring to the broad sweep that Woodcock allows himself, the serene confidence with which he puts forward his many opinions and interpretations. This is, quite clearly, *his* history of anarchism. I'm honestly not sure if this is a bad, good, or indifferent thing, but it does provide me with a way to frame my reading, which will be focused on two questions: first, I will discuss the extent to which Woodcock's text remains relevant today; and second, I will identify some of its deficiencies, while pointing to other texts that might help to address them. Really, then, this is a review of the place of Woodcock's work in the small, yet growing, field of anarchist historiography.

Given Woodcock's authorial approach, it should not be surprising that his text is driven by a clear narrative line, albeit one that changed over time. In the first edition, after charting

the rise of anarchism to its zenith in the Spanish Revolution, Woodcock ended with a lament for a movement that he thought had exhausted itself. This was perhaps appropriate for a book written during 1960-61, after the horrors of World War II, the capitalist triumphalism of the 1950s, and before the resurgence of radical activism in the 1960s. In a new preface to the 1986 edition (upon which the Broadview edition is based), however, Woodcock takes himself to task for his earlier pessimism, and the text ends on a much more upbeat tone. How, he asks did the anarchist *idea* survive and flourish in the later twentieth century, after the *movement* had apparently died out? By making this shift of focus from movement to idea, Woodcock rescues himself from his own negativity. For, while the anarchist movement may rise and subside from time to time and place to place, concepts such as individual and community self-determination, mutual aid, free federation, and consensus are just as eternal as domination, exploitation, and relentless self-interest. Thus Woodcock helps us to see how anarchism is always with us, as a more or less subterranean flow, a set of latent possibilities that it is always up to us to realize—or ignore—in our lives, here and now.

Inasmuch as his book charts the vicissitudes of anarchist desire as it appears, flourishes, and is fought back underground, Woodcock provides a fascinating account of both the movement and the idea. His narrative suffers, however, from an almost exclusive focus on European events and personalities. The first half proceeds in a biographical mode, giving us the details of the lives and works of what Woodcock himself has helped to define as the dominant figures in the classical anarchist canon: Godwin, Stirner, Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin. Even in the second half, when the book turns to a discussion of 'international endeavours', we stay within the European domain, with only a brief mention of Latin America. This is, of course, a long-standing problem within anarchism, one that is only beginning to be addressed in the past few years, through the publication of texts such as Peter Zarrow's *Anarchism and Chinese Political Culture*, Frank Fernandez's *Cuban Anarchism*, and Sam Mbah and I. E. Igariwey's *African Anarchism: The History of a Movement*. Still, however, there is a long way to go before these traditions are given the place they deserve within anarchist historiography and, indeed, will no longer signify as 'non-European'.

It must also be noted that anarchist women are given short shrift in Woodcock's narrative. Emma Goldman is mentioned in a few places, but is not given the kind of sustained attention that is devoted to Godwin et. al. Dorothy Day is mentioned on one page, and Voltarine deCleyre nowhere. Again, this is a systematic problem in the stories that anarchism tells to itself (including some of my own). It is beginning to be addressed by readers such as Quiet Rumours by the Dark Star collective, but much work remains to be done before the anarchist canon more adequately reflects the movement's long-standing commitment to fighting oppression in *all* of its myriad forms.

Another problem—one for which no remedy can be expected, but which nonetheless must be mentioned—is that Woodcock's handling of the story after the failure of the Spanish Revolution is not nearly as adept as the discussion that leads up to that point, and the coverage gets thinner and more distant the closer we get to the 'present' (i.e., 1986). So, what we have here, really, is a history of a specifically *modern* anarchism of the Old Left that does not come to terms with the role of anarchisms and anarchists in the 1960s, or in the 'anti-globalization' movement of the 1990s. Peter Marshall's *Demanding the Impossible* is better on the 1960s, but we may have to wait for the second volume of Robert Graham's *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas* for a text that addresses the most recent wave of anarchist activity.

Woodcock's book is dated, but still it should be read. First, for the possibility of communion with a 'great mind' of the sort that, as I have already mentioned, appears to have passed into history (but perhaps I am too pessimistic?) And second, as a way into the minds, lives, and theoretical contributions of several generations of people who, similarly, are unlikely ever to live again, but will continue to inspire others who respond to the subterranean call of something that feels more like freedom than what most of us live every day.