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Review: The Anarchist Past and Other Essays

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June 23, 2009

The Anarchist Past and Other Essays, Nicholas Walter, David Goodway (editor), Five Leaves Publications, 2007 (£9.99)

This is an excellent collection of articles by the late Nicholas Walter. As can be gathered by its title, it is about anarchist history and covers (in a roughly chronological order) most of key events and people of anarchism – Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin, the Paris Commune, Kropotkin, the Russian Revolution, Goldman, Bookchin, Ward as well as other, less famous anarchists, like Joseph Lane and Charlotte Wilson. The articles are drawn from many sources, such as **Freedom, Anarchy** and **The Raven**.

All anarchists will gain something from this collection. His reviews of Paul Avrich's **The Russian Anarchists** and **Kronstadt 1921** are essential supplements to both texts, pointing out the errors and omissions of both works. The review of Quail's history of British Anarchism adds to that work immensely (although I disagree with Walter's suggestion that Quail should have discussed the likes of Herbert Spencer). All his articles express a wide-ranging of anarchist

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history and theory and repeatedly show up the pretensions of academics writing on anarchism. For example, his rebuttal to the suggestion that Godwin's **Political Justice** is a "sacred text" of anarchism may just state the obvious but does expose the ignorance of the academic in question with style and knowledge.

In summary, a wonderful collection of articles on anarchist history from which all anarchists will benefit from reading. Given Walter's prolific writing for the movement over the decades, hopefully this will be the first of more collections of his work.

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