
Angel Smith. *Anarchism, Revolution and Reaction: Catalan Labor and the Crisis of the Spanish State, 1898–1923*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2007. ISBN 978-1845451769, \$89.95 (cloth).

As recently as twenty years ago, many academics would have regarded anarchist scholarship as a marginal pursuit, anarchism itself having been widely dismissed as politically obscure and irrelevant. Yet beginning in the late 1990s scholars in a wide range of disciplines began to give anarchism more careful consideration that has since blossomed into an independent and evolving field of inquiry, which includes the recent works of Benedict Anderson, *Under Three Flags* (2005); Uri Gordon, *Anarchy Alive* (2008); Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding* (2007); Paul McLaughlin, *Anarchism and Authority* (2007); Benjamin Franks, *Rebel Alliances* (2006); Samuel Clark, *Living without Domination* (2007); and Ruth Kinna, *Anarchism* (2005). Anarchist studies, as the anthropologist David Graeber points out, “is veritably exploding right now.” Several examples—ranging from individual works, to journals, to institutes and organizations—may be cited as testaments to the vitality of contemporary anarchist studies. Many of these have a deeply historical seam running through them; they seek to revise the standard historiography of the left that places anarchism as a poor second to Marxism, to revive the memory of key thinkers in the history of the tradition, or to recover the centrality of anarchists and anarchist thought to the Spanish and Cuban Revolutions, as well as to anticolonial and liberation struggles worldwide (see A. Christoyannopoulos, *Religious Anarchism*, 2009; A. Prichard and J. Cohn, eds., *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of Modern Anarchism*, 2010; B. Franks and M. Wilson, eds., *Anarchism and Moral Philosophy*, 2010; D. Graeber & S. Shukaitis, *Constituent Imagination*, 2007; and N. Jun & S. Wahl, eds., *New Perspectives on Anarchism*, 2009; among others). It is within this burgeoning milieu that Angel Smith’s excellent work belongs.

The quarter-century of Spanish political and social history discussed in this work tends to be overshadowed by more well known periods such as the Miguel Primo de Rivera dictatorship, the Popular Front, and the Spanish Civil War. Conventional historiography typically portrays 1898 to 1923 as an era of massive decline marked by military loss, social unrest, and economic uncertainty. As Smith demonstrates, however, these were also exciting years replete with unrealized possibilities, especially for the radical labor movement in general and Catalan anarchism in particular. It was

during this time that the stage was set for many of the struggles that would emerge during the 1930s.

Smith's rationale for discussing Spanish anarchism from 1898 to 1923 is two-fold. First, it exhibited enormous strength during this period, particularly in Catalonia and, to a lesser degree, in Andalusia. As he notes, the anarcho-syndicalist labor federation, the CNT, which briefly had over half a million members in 1919, over 50 percent of whom were Catalan. Second, the political, military, and business elite of the Restoration period perceived the burgeoning Spanish labor movement, including the CNT, as a credible threat and devoted considerable time and resources to combating it. These struggles culminated with a coup d'état against the Restoration regime in 1923, which brought Primo de Rivera to power as dictator. Smith contends that the origins of this coup "cannot be understood without taking into account the violent social conflict which had racked the city [of Barcelona] over the previous four years" (p. 1). Accordingly, his discussion proceeds in three parts. The first section of the book focuses on the nature and extent of economic and social change during the period and the impact this change had on the lives of Catalan workers as well as on the attitude of the Spanish elite toward labor. The second section discusses the growth of anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism in Catalonia at the expense of other ideologies such as socialism. The third and final section explores the role the Catalan anarcho-syndicalists played during the Spanish–American War and the build-up to the de Rivera dictatorship.

This book constitutes a significant contribution to the history of Spain in general and anarchist studies in particular, and this for several reasons. First, it betrays a remarkably subtle and perspicacious understanding of anarchism—an ideology that has too often been misunderstood in the scholarly literature. With this comes a much more adept analysis of the complex relationships among various factions on the Spanish Left, on the one hand, and between labor and establishment, on the other. Second, Smith has shed considerable light on a much overlooked and little understood period and, in so doing, invited new and deeper study of subsequent periods.

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