Nicholas Walter was the son of the neurologist, W. Grey Walter, and both his
grandfathers had known Peter Kropotkin and Edward Carpenter. However, it
was the twin jolts of Suez and the Hungarian Revolution while still a student,
followed by participation in the resulting New Left and nuclear disarmament
movement, that led him to anarchism himself. His personal history is recounted in
two autobiographical pieces in this collection as well as the editor’s introduction.

During the 1960s he was a militant in the British nuclear disarmament
movement – especially its direct-action wing, the Committee of 100 – he was
one of the Spies of Peace (who revealed the State’s preparations for the
governance of Britain after a nuclear war), he was close to the innovative
Solidarity Group and was a participant in the homelessness agitation.
Concurrently with his impressive activism he was analyzing acutely and
lucidly the history, practice and theory of these intertwined movements;
and it is such writings – including Non-violent Resistance and The Spies
for Peace and After – that form the core of this book. But there are also
memorable pieces on various libertarians, including the writers George
Orwell, Herbert Read and Alan Sillitoe, the publisher C.W. Daniel and
the maverick Guy A. Aldred. The Right to be Wrong is a notable polemic
against laws limiting the freedom of expression. Other than anarchism,
the passion of Walter’s intellectual life was the dual cause of atheism and
rationalism; and the selection concludes appropriately with a fine essay
on Anarchism and Religion and his moving reflections, Facing Death.

Nicolas Walter scorned the pomp and frequent ignorance of the
powerful and detested the obscurantist prose and intellectual limitations
of academia. He himself wrote straightforwardly and always accessibly,
almost exclusively for the anarchist and freethought movements. The
items collected in this volume display him at his considerable best.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nicolas Walter (1934-2000) was one of the best-known and mostly widely
read anarchist writers of the last half century. His About Anarchism has
been translated into many languages, including Russian, Serbo-Croat,
Greek, Turkish, Chinese and Japanese, and its popularity is said to have led
anarchist parents to name their boys ‘Nicolas’. But his immense output was
otherwise overwhelmingly journalism for the libertarian press. It is only with
The Anarchist Past and Other Essays (Five Leaves, 2007), a virtual history of
anarchism reaching from its prehistory in the American Revolution to the work
of Murray Bookchin and Colin Ward, and the present volume that libertarians
today are enabled to appreciate his range, erudition and readability.

ACCOLADES

“[Nicolas Walter was] one of the most interesting left intellectuals of the
second half of the twentieth century in Britain.”
—Professor Richard Taylor, University of Cambridge