

A Short History of Anarchism

Max Nettlau • Preface: Shawn P. Wilbur

Max Nettlau, “the Herodotus of Anarchy,” had a career that spanned nearly six decades, during which he produced an immense body of historical and theoretical works on anarchy and anarchism, published in numerous languages and nations. The international anarchist movement has arguably never seen his equal as a historian and perhaps never will. The collection of anarchist and radical materials that he collected during his lifetime, now housed at the International Institute for Social Research, remains one of the finest in existence. But very little of that work has been available to readers of English, so Ida Pilat Isca’s translation of *A Short History of Anarchism*—a comprehensive, one-volume introduction to the origins of the idea of anarchy and the emergence of the modern anarchist movement—is a particular treasure.

Written to indicate the breadth and diversity of anarchist ideas and practices, in a style that largely allows the historical facts to speak for themselves, it remains remarkably useful and current, despite the years that have passed since its composition in the 1930s. Nettlau’s historical account is supplemented by biographical and bibliographical resources—some new to this edition—which aid both readers and researchers interested in navigating the broad river of anarchy.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Max Nettlau (1865–1944) was active in the European anarchist movement for six decades. Best known as a historian of anarchism and biographer of Mikhail Bakunin, Nettlau was also a sharp internal critic of anarchist strategy and tactics. His works have been published in numerous languages and include *A Short History of Anarchism*.

Shawn P. Wilbur is a historian, translator, and curator of the Libertarian Labyrinth digital archive. His published translations and edited books include works by Emma Goldman, Charles Fourier, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and Joseph Déjacque.

ACCOLADES

“No historian of anarchism can help but stand upon the shoulders of Max Nettlau. Nearly a century later, much of his scholarship on the origins, evolution, and global spread of anarchism remains unsurpassed. As a ‘participant-observer’ in the movement that he meticulously chronicled, Nettlau was exceptionally knowledgeable, sober in his critiques, and intransigently anti-sectarian and anti-authoritarian in his analysis. This book not only contains the history of how anarchism came to be, but also includes glimpses of what an open-minded and experimental anarchism ‘without adjectives’ may yet become.”

—Kenyon Zimmer, author of *Immigrants against the State: Yiddish and Italian Anarchism in America*

“Max Nettlau is the greatest historian of anarchism.”

—Paul McLaughlin, author of *Anarchism and Authority: A Philosophical Introduction to Classical Anarchism*



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