

The Slow Burning Fuse

The Lost History of the British Anarchists

**John Quail • Afterword: Constance Bantman •
Biographical sketches: Nick Heath**

In the accounts of the radical movements that have shaped our history, anarchism has received a raw deal. Its visions and aims have been distorted and misunderstood, its achievements forgotten. The British anarchist movement during the years 1880–1930, while borrowing from Europe, was self-actuated and independent, with a vibrant tale all its own.

John Quail, in this first major work, shows a history largely obscured and rewritten following 1919 and the triumph of Leninist communism. The time has arrived to resurrect the works of the early anarchist clubs, their unsung heroes, tumultuous political activities, and searing manifestos so that a truer image of radical dissent and history can be formed. Quail's story of the anarchists is one of utopias created in imagination and half-realised in practice, of individual fights and movements for freedom and self-expression—a story still being written today.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

John Quail was a member of Solidarity, a libertarian socialist group active in the UK between 1960 and 1992. He is now a visiting fellow at the University of York.

Constance Bantman is a senior lecturer in French at the University of Surrey, who has published extensively on the history of transnational anarchism, and in particular Anglo-French connections.

Nick Heath is the author of multiple biographical articles about anarchists as well as articles on the Hungarian Revolution, the Makhnovists, and a pamphlet on the Third Revolution in the Soviet Union.

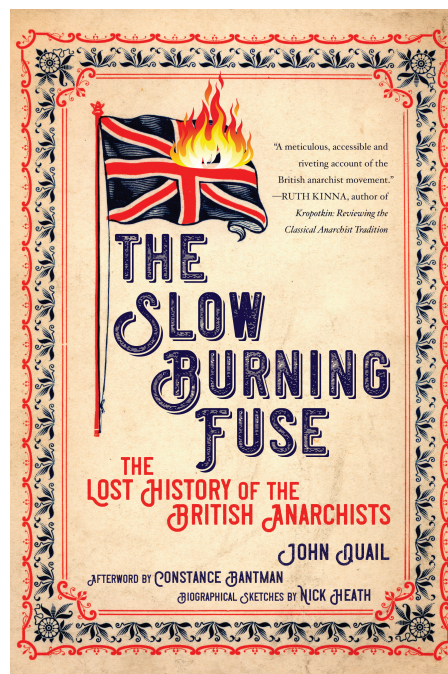
ACCOLADES

"*The Slow Burning Fuse* is a meticulous, accessible and riveting account of the British anarchist movement. John Quail introduces us to the anarchists of the Socialist League, explores the early history of the Freedom group, describes the murky world of police spies and agents provocateurs, and shows how small groups of anarchists in London and Sheffield animated working-class movements at the turn of the twentieth century. Quail's rich history is also an unflinching reflection on anarchist organising. Examining the personal feuds that plagued the movement and the political disagreements generated by the incidence of violence in France, Quail shows how internal divisions exacerbated the problems created by systematic police repression. Anarchist utopian aspirations are easily romanticised or mocked. Quail avoids both and instead invites us to weigh up the value of spectacular actions and consider the effectiveness of strategic initiatives. The result is a passionate but sober defence of anarchist politics and movement building."

—Ruth Kinna, author of *Kropotkin: Reviewing the Classical Anarchist Tradition*

"The book is important and groundbreaking, though Quail was mainly interested in action rather than theory, describing the discussion of theory as 'balls-achingly boring.'"

—Peter Ryley, author of *Making Another World Possible*



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