

## FOREWORD

Perhaps the most noble effort of the anarchist studies milieu has been its attempt, still ongoing, to recover and redeem the lost history of anarchism. Less noble is the near total failure of those within the milieu to explain to those outside why they ought to care about this history. Steve Shone's *American Anarchism* does not make this mistake and, for this reason alone, immediately stands apart from similar works that have been published in recent years. From the outset, Shone makes a powerful case that the figures and ideas he aims to discuss are more relevant today than at any point since their heyday in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The result is that *American Anarchism* is not just intellectual history; it is also a work of social criticism.

As intellectual history, however, *American Anarchism* is masterful. Self-consciously working against the longstanding and wrongheaded tendency to reduce the entire "classical anarchist" tradition to two or three white, European men, Shone enlists as his representatives non-whites (Lucy Parsons), women (Voltairine de Cleyre), Jews (Alexander Berkman), and immigrants (Samuel Fielden and Luigi Galleani). He includes communists (Peter Kropotkin) as well as individualists (Benjamin Tucker and Max Stirner), and even makes a brilliant and creative case on behalf of the anarchist *bona fides* of William Graham Sumner. The result is a refreshingly thorough and accurate picture of the diversity – both demographic and intellectual – that characterized the "classical anarchist" movement.

Also commendable is Shone's decision to provide a general overview rather than an exhaustive and comprehensive analysis of these figures' ideas. The latter course would not only have been too ambitious for a book this size but also would have eliminated another of *American Anarchism's* principal virtues – namely, the sense of connectedness and coherence which exists between chapters. By privileging general anarchist themes over idiosyncratic ideas, Shone clearly and skillfully articulates what these otherwise diverse thinkers share in common, rather than how they differ amongst themselves. As a political theorist and historian of philosophy I am often dismayed by the superficial, myopic rubbish that passes for exegesis and analysis in so much contemporary scholarship. Just the

opposite is on display in *American Anarchism*; this is a work which takes its subject matter seriously, giving it the careful attention it so richly deserves.

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