George Woodcock
Canadian Anarchist Essayist and Literary Critic
(1912 - 1995)

Description: ...sought to raise awareness of the revolution in Spain and of what was being achieved by the Spanish working class against great odds. He was a firm believer in the working class's ability to reorganize society along fundamentally democratic and egalitarian lines. (From: Kevin Doyle Bio)

Tags: anarchist, writer, canadian, essayist, literary critic, publisher, editor.

Quotes:
"...the clock represents an element of mechanical tyranny in the lives of modern men more potent than any individual exploiter or any other machine." (From: "The Tyranny of the Clock," by George Woodcock, 1944.)

"These two centuries [the eighteenth and nineteenth], it should be observed, were those in which capitalism grew to such an extent that it was able to take advantage of the industrial revolution in technique in order to establish its domination over society." (From: "The Tyranny of the Clock," by George Woodcock, 1944.)

"Only if he is willing to accept of the hazards of living by his faith or his wits can the man without money avoid living as a slave to the clock." (From: "The Tyranny of the Clock," by George Woodcock, 1944.)

"In a sane and free society such an arbitrary domination of man's functions by either clock or machine would obviously be out of the question. The domination of man by the creation of man is even more ridiculous than the domination of man by man." (From: "The Tyranny of the Clock," by George Woodcock, 1944.)

Biography:
George Woodcock, author of two well known and widely available books on anarchism - Anarchism and The Anarchist Reader - has died, aged 82. Born in Winnipeg, Canada on May 8th, 1912 his life spanned some of the highest and lowest moments of the movement he came to chronicle. He first became active in Anarchist politics in the 1930s when his family returned to England from Canada to escape poverty. For a long period he was editor of the anti-war paper, War Commentary and the anarchist newspaper, Freedom. His political involvement in the years leading up the Second World War coincided with the great achievements of the Spanish anarchist movement in 1936-37. Woodcock, like most of his contemporaries - George Orwell and Herbert Read among others - sought to raise awareness of the revolution in Spain and of what was being achieved by the Spanish working class against great odds. He was a firm believer in the working class's ability to reorganize society along fundamentally democratic and egalitarian lines. The defeat of the Spanish anarchist movement came, accordingly, as a bitter blow.

Even so, Woodcock's own support for anarchism and the anarchist idea continued. While his contribution to other areas grew on his return to Canada, most notably creative writing, he remained, nonetheless, committed to encouraging a better understanding of what anarchism
stood for and its continuing relevance to movements for social change. For a long period his two best known books were the only comprehensive guides widely available about anarchism in the English language, and for this reason alone he will be remembered.

Anarchism, which was first published in 1962, has been criticized, rightly, for it’s emphasis on anarchism as a movement of the past. Reflecting on the period in which he had lived, Woodcock saw the passing of anarchism as a mass working class force as an irreversible feature of modern political life. His later contributions impressed anarchism's relevance on areas such as ecology and feminism.

The Anarchist Reader, in contrast, is a book which will stand the test of time. Emphasizing the theory and practice of anarchism, it draws on an array of people associated with anarchism over the years, giving a comprehensive and accessible introduction to the breadth and relevance of anarchist ideas. Noting the revival of interest in anarchism since the 1960s, Woodcock wrote in his introduction "Anarchism, in summary, is a phoenix in an awakening desert, an idea that has revived for the only reason ideas revive - that they respond to some need felt deeply by people". George Woodcock died on January 28th, 1995 aged eighty two.

Kevin Doyle

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Works:
Author of The Tyranny of the Clock (February 29, 1944)
Author of 1848, the Year of Revolutions (November 30, 1947)
Author of Anarchism (November 30, 1966)
Author of The Libertarians and the Cold War (November 30, 1953)
Author of Marie Louise Berneri 1918–1949 - A Tribute (November 30, 1948)
Author of Reflections on Decentralism (November 30, 1968)
Author of What is Anarcho-syndicalism? (November 30, 1942)
Author of The Emergence of the New Anarchism (November 30, 1969)

Chronology:

May 08, 1912: George Woodcock's Birth Day.


Links:
- Anarchy Archives: George Woodcock Archive
  http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/bright/woodcock/george.html
- Anarchist Library: George Woodcock
  https://theanarchistlibrary.org/category/author/george-woodcock
- Wikipedia: George Wood
  https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Woodcock

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