

An Anarchist Cookbook That Actually Has Recipes!

The old bomb making guide is replaced by one that lives up to its title

Peter Werbe

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a review of

The Anarchist Cookbook

Keith McHenry, with Chaz Bufe Introduction by Chris Hedges, 2015

See Sharp Press, 154 pp.

It's unfortunate that the best selling book with the word anarchist in the title is a terribly flawed bomb- and drug-making manual.

The original *Anarchist Cookbook* was first published in 1971, compiled by William Powell, then a 19-year-old living in New York City.

Powell writes in a 2013 London *Guardian* essay reprinted in the current non-bomb-making version, that his motivation was simple: "I was being actively pursued by the U.S. military, who seemed single-mindedly determined to send me to fight, and possibly die, in Vietnam. I wanted to publish something that would express my anger."

Powell, now filled with regret about how it's been used and who never held copyright to the book, pleads with the current publisher to let it "quickly and quietly go out of print." However, having sold over two million copies, it is doubtful this will happen.

For most of its readers, the original book undoubtedly acted as a repository of revenge fantasies for destroying one's enemies, but never put to use. There have reportedly been several cases of injuries caused by its misdirected explosive instructions, although there were revisions made in 2003 by the current publisher to fix its errors.

Has the book caused actual harm?

A 2013 NBC News account reports it is linked to "Croatian radicals who bombed Grand Central Terminal and hijacked a TWA flight in 1976; the Puerto Rican separatists who bombed FBI headquarters in 1981; Thomas Spinks, who led a group that bombed 10 abortion clinics in the 1980s; Timothy McVeigh, who bombed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995; the Columbine High School shooters of 1999; and the 2005 London public transport bombers."

The book has also been tied to Arizona shooter Jared Loughner, the Boston Marathon bombers, and at least a half dozen alleged terrorists and school shooters. These are all connections made by police agencies, but there isn't any particular reason to doubt their accuracy.

In other words, this is a text with a pretty ugly history and bearing contents that shouldn't be associated with modern anarchist thought.

The original edition is equally worthless when defining the philosophy announced on its cover. It contains a "Prefatory Note On Anarchism Today," by a shadowy, probably pseudonymic, P.M. Bergman, who knows a lot about radical history but approvingly quotes Lenin and finishes by stating, "Anarchism, Marxism, Leninism, Maoism...they are all the real and concrete Refusal..."

This new edition (in part, an actual book of recipes for feeding people!) could have functioned as a much needed correction to the original if the text had been left to its main author, Keith McHenry. As the founder of Food Not Bombs (FNB), McHenry has cooked for and shared food with the hungry for 35 years and been arrested almost 100 times for his efforts.

Instead of instructions for manufacturing drugs, creating explosives and booby traps, this new version of *The Anarchist Cookbook* has chapters about “Recipes for Social Change,” including ones on boycotts, blockades, demonstrations, occupations.

Another section titled, “Basic Steps to Effective Organizing,” comments on affinity groups, public outreach, tours, meetings, and other suggestions for making anarchism “the real and concrete Refusal,” but also for building the infrastructure of a movement and a new society.

All are non-violent in keeping with McHenry’s and FNB’s basic philosophy. There is no need to agree with his every suggestion for revolt, but we also shouldn’t have to re-invent the wheel each time organizing is undertaken.

And, yes, the food and how to prepare it is here with recipes for large and small groups with “conscious eating” anchoring the vegan preparations.

The book’s problems begin with its inclusion of an introduction by Chris Hedges. The former *New York Times* war correspondent is properly reviled by many anarchists for his notoriously inappropriate 2012 op-ed piece, “The Cancer in Occupy,” criticizing the role of the Black Bloc during the 2011 Occupy Movement.

Although Hedges makes nice noises about anarchism, saying it is “about steadfast defiance,” he grounds his view of it in the ideas of French philosopher Julien Benda, who expressed admiration for “classical civilization, and the internationalism of traditional Christianity.”

Since the new edition is a book about actual anarchism, couldn’t the publisher find an actual anarchist to write the introduction? Hedges is featured in an online video available on his Truthdig web site entitled, “What It Truly Means to Be a Socialist.” Perhaps they could have found an anarchist woman, a youth, or a person of color, so the book wouldn’t be wall-to-wall, old white guys.

And, if anarchism is about “steadfast defiance,” as Hedges avers, wouldn’t that include the Black Bloc?

Certainly not for Chaz Bufe, See Sharp Press publisher and a contributing writer to this volume. Bufe spoils McHenry’s generous text by reprinting his supercilious, “Anarchism: What It Is & What It Isn’t,” essay which previously appeared in Frank Fernandez’s otherwise excellent, *Cuban Anarchism: The History of a Movement*, published by See Sharp in 2001.

Attempts by blowhards like the late anarchist theorist Murray Bookchin and cranky Fred Woodworth, editor of *The Match*, to define anarchism don’t come off any better when Bufe tries. For instance, he starts with “what anarchism isn’t” making sectarian claims stating that primitivism and individualism are not part of the anarchist tradition.

All of us probably have a personal list of “what is” and “what isn’t,” but history shows that revolution often comes from unexpected sources and these guys leave no room for anything other than what conforms to their narrow view, and that’s usually nothing and nobody.

The new *Anarchist Cookbook* also reprints a rather tired 1979 essay, “You Can’t Blow Up A Social Relationship,” the inclusion of which is rather strange since the book is dedicated to a Guy Fawkes mask, the one made popular in the 2005 movie, “V for Vendetta.” The massive contradiction here is that Fawkes and his Catholic, anti-democratic cohorts were, indeed, trying to blow up a social relationship by destroying the English Parliament in 1605!

Overall, the book contains practical information useful to anarchist organizing if one ignores Hedges and Bufe. The FNB recipes make me hungry and are a reminder that I should show up occasionally in Detroit’s Cass Park to help share food with the “Sundays with Friends and Forgotten Workers” bi-weekly program hosted by the Wobbly Kitchen.

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