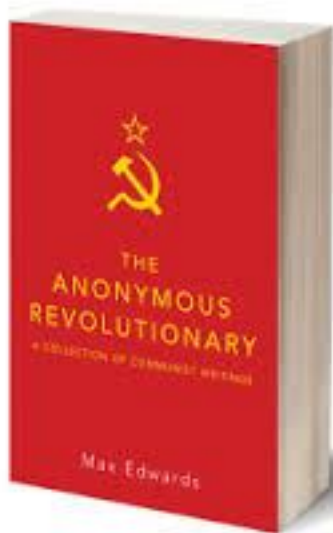


Book Review: *The Anonymous Revolutionary: A Collection of Communist Writings* by Max Edwards

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The Anonymous Revolutionary: A Collection of Communist Writings, Max Edwards, 2016 London: Short Books, ISBN 9781780722948

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To simply say I have been eagerly waiting to read and review this book would be an understatement. I have been reading Max Edwards's blog of the same name since around May, 2015 and was quite impressed with this sixteen year old's nuanced observations of everyday politics around the world. Edwards who died earlier this year whilst battling cancer began his blog in the winter of 2014 sharing his ideas of Marxism and communism with an ever-growing reader base. This blog went on to become the basis of the book which was published in February of this year.

The book is a testament to the ways in which the author was influenced by Marxism and his own intellectual and personal growth over the years. Whilst some of his earlier posts treaded water carefully, often lengthy historical pieces about Cuba, and the Russian revolution, often having to be apologetic about ideas which he considered 'radical', Edwards quickly transformed into a confident blogger offering his own takes and interpretation of the world around him. From his piece on the commercialisation of communism, where he talks of how communist symbols have been co-opted for capital profit making ventures to a piece on the lack of a left movement in Britain. In his piece titled 'Russell Brand and the British Revolution' Edwards explains that the Labour party in Britain (especially under Blair and somewhat under Brown) had moved from its socialist ideals to servicing neoliberalism.

The chapters in the book (which mirror the original blog posts) are a mixture between informative chapters such as 'Birth of Capitalism', 'On Trotskyism' to polemic pieces such as 'Marxism is a science not religion' and 'Communism and the Kurdish question'. For someone who is reading this book for the first time without having read the blog will see that Edwards changes his views quite a bit from one chapter to another- sometimes he describes himself as a Trotskyist and at other times a Leninist. Similarly some of his political views on the EU and austerity politics also move slightly over time. It is important to remember that Edwards never conceived this book with a central thesis. Rather his blog and their disparate pieces ended up forming this book. There are several illuminating chapters. A particular one on Jeremy Corbyn (that despite disagreeing with) makes some interesting points. Edwards called this chapter 'Communism not Corbynism.'

Edwards agrees that Corbyn's victory, as Labour leader is something to be celebrated especially for a party that has been advocating social capitalism. But Edwards agrees that whilst Labour's left radical stance is welcome but also laments at the public reaction to it; which is a testament of incommensurability of leftist thought in modern British politics which see's Corbyn's victory as radical. Edwards argues that Corbyn belongs to a party that will attack capitalism but won't commit to communism and this he sees as just not good enough. But much more (radically perhaps) interestingly Edwards writes that trade unions in Britain are more destructive in recent years for not standing to clear socialist principles. Edwards does not believe in capitalism being eroded over time rather he calls for a direct action and believes a third communist way is possible.

I must admit being a Corbynite myself, a labour party member and a one time supporter of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) many of the arguments made in this book are very close to home. I agree fundamentally with Edwards when he says capitalism strives to create happiness but only for some. In fact to go further I would argue that same of globalisation- the much appreciated and heralded 'movement' of our times. Similarly I share his optimism when he identifies 5 countries (UK, India, China, Russia and Greece), which he believes will lead the next proletarian revolution. But perhaps my respect for Edwards is his nuanced understanding of the world around him, for his ideologies which are not just reactionary but also self reflective. For example in Chapter 36 he writes scintillatingly of the Paris attacks and condemns France for carrying out the same atrocities against civilians which they are trying to protect their own citizens from. But perhaps his final 'confessional' post which is available on his blog (March 18, 2016. The book finishes with a post from January 8, 2016) where he describes his own complicity with capitalism for having flown in a private jet and being a beneficiary of the system which enabled him to live a privileged life marks his strong commitment and self reflection to the socialist cause. A book I would highly recommend to everyone.