

Peter Kropotkin

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Peter (Pyotr) Alexeyevich Kropotkin (Russian: Пётр Алексеевич Кропоткин) (9 December 1842 - 8 February 1921) was one of Russia's foremost anarchists and one of the first advocates of anarchist communism: most of his life he advocated for a communist society free from central government. Because of his title of prince and his prominence as an anarchist in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, he was known by some as "the Anarchist Prince". Some contemporaries saw him as leading a near perfect life, including Oscar Wilde, who described him as "a man with a soul of that beautiful white Christ which seems coming out of Russia."^[1] He wrote many books, pamphlets and articles, the most prominent being *The Conquest of Bread and Fields, Factories and Workshops*, and his principal scientific offering, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*. He was also a contributor to the *Encyclopædia Britannica Eleventh Edition*.

Peter Kropotkin



Kropotkin, by Nadar

Born	December 9, 1842 Moscow, Russia
Died	February 8, 1921 (aged 78) Dmitrov, Russia
Occupation	Anarchist Revolutionary, Geographer, Zoologist, and Political Essayist.

Contents

- 1 Biography
 - 1.1 Early life
 - 1.2 Expeditions
 - 1.3 Activism
 - 1.4 Timeline
- 2 Quotations
- 3 Works
 - 3.1 Books
 - 3.2 Articles
 - 3.3 Pamphlets
- 4 See also
- 5 References
- 6 External links and references

Biography

Early life

Peter (or Pyotr) Kropotkin was born in Moscow. His father, Prince Alexei Petrovich Kropotkin, owned large tracts of land and nearly 1200 "souls" (male serfs) in three provinces. Kropotkin's male line

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Schools	[show]
Theory · Practice	[show]
Issues	[show]
History	[show]
Culture	[show]
Economics	[show]
By region	[show]
Lists	[show]
Related topics	[show]

traced to the legendary prince Rurik; his mother, Yekaterina Nikolaevna Sulima, was the daughter of a Russian general.

In 1857, at age 15, Kropotkin entered the Corps of Pages at St. Petersburg. Only 150 boys — mostly children of nobility belonging to the court — were educated in this privileged corps, which combined the character of a military school endowed with special rights and of a Court institution attached to the imperial household. Kropotkin's memoirs detail the hazing and other abuse of Pages for which the Corps had become notorious.

In Moscow, Kropotkin had developed an interest in the condition of the Russian peasantry, and this interest increased as he grew older. In St. Petersburg, he read widely on his own account, and gave special attention to the works of the French encyclopaedists and to French history. The years 1857-1861 witnessed a rich growth in the intellectual forces of Russia, and Kropotkin came under the influence of the new Liberal-revolutionary literature, which largely expressed his own aspirations.

In 1862, Kropotkin was promoted from the Corps of Pages to the army. The members of the corps had the prescriptive right to choose the regiment to which they would be attached. Kropotkin had never wished for a military career, but, as he did not have the means to enter St. Petersburg University, he elected to join a Siberian Cossack regiment in the recently annexed Amur Oblast district, where there were prospects of administrative work. For some time, he was aide de camp to the governor of Transbaikalia at Chita. Later he was appointed attaché for Cossack affairs to the governor-general of East Siberia at Irkutsk.

Expeditions

Administrative work was scarce, and in 1864 Kropotkin accepted charge of a geographical survey expedition, crossing North Manchuria from Transbaikalia to the Amur, and soon was attached to another expedition which proceeded up the Sungari River into the heart of Manchuria. The expeditions yielded very valuable geographical results. The impossibility of obtaining any real administrative reforms in Siberia now induced Kropotkin to devote himself almost entirely to scientific exploration, in which he continued to be highly successful.

In 1867, he quit the army and returned to St. Petersburg, where he entered the university, becoming at the same time secretary to the geography section of the Russian Geographical Society. In 1873, he published an important contribution to science, a map and paper in which he proved that the existing maps entirely misrepresented the physical features of Asia; the main structural lines were in fact from south-west to north-east, not from north to south, or from east to west as had been previously supposed.

In 1871, he explored the glacial deposits of Finland and Sweden for the Russian Geographical Society. During this work, he was offered the secretaryship of that society. But by this time he had determined that it was his duty not to work at fresh discoveries but to aid in diffusing existing knowledge among the people at large. Accordingly, he refused the offer and returned to St. Petersburg, where he joined the revolutionary party.

Activism

He visited Switzerland in 1872 and became a member of the International Workingmen's Association at Geneva. But he did not like IWA's style of socialism. Instead, he studied the programme of the more radical Jura federation at Neuchâtel and spent time in the company of the leading members, and definitely adopted the creed of anarchism. On returning to Russia, he took an active part in spreading revolutionary propaganda through the nihilist-led Circle of Tchaikovsky.

In 1873, Kropotkin was arrested and imprisoned in the Peter and Paul Fortress. He gained notoriety for his widely publicized escape from the prison in 1876, after which he went to England, moving after a short stay

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Philosophy portal

Politics portal

to Switzerland, where he joined the Jura Federation. In 1877, he moved to Paris, where he helped to start the socialist movement. In 1878 he returned to Switzerland, where he edited for Jura Federation's revolutionary newspaper *La Révolte*, and published various revolutionary pamphlets. He was a very out-going speaker on his beliefs that the peasants were being treated unfair and deserved to have the same land as the Lords

In 1881, shortly after the assassination of the Tsar Alexander II, the Swiss government expelled Kropotkin from Switzerland. After a short stay at Thonon (Savoy), he went to London, where he stayed nearly a year, and returned to Thonon in late 1882. Soon he was arrested by the French government, tried at Lyon, and sentenced by a police-court magistrate (under a special law passed on the fall of the Paris Commune) to five years' imprisonment, on the ground that he had belonged to the IWA (1883). But the French Chamber repeatedly agitated on his behalf, and he was released in 1886. He settled near London, living at various times in Harrow – where his daughter, Alexandra, was born – Ealing and Bromley. He also lived for a number of years in Brighton.. While living in London, Kropotkin became friends with a number of prominent English-speaking socialists, including **William Morris** and George Bernard Shaw.

In 1902 Kropotkin published the book *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*, which provided an alternative view on animal and human survival, beyond the claims of 'Survival of the Fittest' proffered at the time by some "social Darwinists", such as Francis Galton.

In the animal world we have seen that the vast majority of species live in societies, and that they find in association the best arms for the struggle for life: understood, of course, in its wide Darwinian sense – not as a struggle for the sheer means of existence, but as a struggle against all natural conditions unfavourable to the species. The animal species, in which individual struggle has been reduced to its narrowest limits, and the practice of mutual aid has attained the greatest development, are invariably the most numerous, the most prosperous, and the most open to further progress. The mutual protection which is obtained in this case, the possibility of attaining old age and of accumulating experience, the higher intellectual development, and the further growth of sociable habits, secure the maintenance of the species, its extension, and its further progressive evolution. The unsociable species, on the contrary, are doomed to decay.

– Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (1902), *Conclusion*.

Kropotkin's authority as a writer on Russia is generally acknowledged, and he contributed to many articles in the Encyclopædia Britannica, including an entry on anarchism in the 1911 edition (see external links, below). Most of the other articles (about 90) are about various aspects of Russian geography.

Kropotkin returned to Russia after the February Revolution and was offered the ministry of education in the provisional government, but he rejected. His enthusiasm turned to disappointment when the Bolsheviks seized power. "This buries the revolution," he said. He thought that the Bolsheviks had shown how the revolution was not to be made — by authoritarian rather than libertarian methods.

He died on February 8, 1921 in the city of Dmitrov, Moscow province and was buried at the Novodevichy Cemetery, Moscow.

Timeline

- 1842 - born in Moscow, Russia, on December 9.
- 1857 - joins the Corps of Pages where he begins to develop a rebellious reputation.
- 1858 - Peter's early writings show interest in political economy and statistics; begins contact with "real" peasants.
- 1861 - Peter has his first prison experience as a result of participating in a student protest.

- 1862 - becomes disillusioned with royalty when as *page de chambre* to the tsar he witnesses the extravagances of court life.
- 1862-1867 - at his own request serves with the military in Siberia. Witnesses the living conditions there, and the unwillingness of the corrupt administration to do anything to improve this.
- 1868-1870 - pursues survey and geographical studies.
- 1871 - becomes interested in the workers' movement and the events surrounding the Paris Commune.
- 1872 - travels to Switzerland, where he joins the International; returns to Russia with a quantity of prohibited socialist literature.
- 1873 - as a member of the Chaikovskii Circle, he helps with rewriting pamphlets in a way that can be understood by the uneducated; he shows great ability for communicating with the workers.
- 1874 - Peter is imprisoned in the Peter and Paul Fortress because of his revolutionary activities. At the intervention of the Geographical Society, he is given special dispensation to work on a paper on glacial periods.
- 1876 - escapes from a military hospital and moves to England.
- 1877 - returns to Switzerland to work with the Jura Federation. Attends the last meeting of the First International in Ghent.
- 1881 - attends the International Anarchist congress in London. In his propaganda of the deed he supports the assassination of Tsar Alexander II on the grounds that an explosion is far more effective than a vote in encouraging the workers to revolution. This gets him kicked out of Switzerland. The Russian government is embarrassed when he discovers a plot to assassinate him in London.
- 1882 - shortly after moving to France he is arrested for his work in The First International and sentenced to five years in prison. He stays there until 1886 when he is released on condition that he leave France.
- 1886 - returns to England. Learns of his brother Alexander's suicide in Siberian exile for political activity. Becomes co-founder of British anarchist magazine *Freedom*.
- 1890s — spends most of his time writing. Visits Canada and the United States in 1897. The *Atlantic Monthly* agrees to publish his memoirs. In his books he attempts to develop an anarchist-communist view of society.
- 1901-1909 - writes material in Russian for readers in his homeland. He was very disappointed by the failure of the 1905 revolution.
- 1909-1914 - returns to Switzerland on condition that he refrain from anarchist activities. Tries to publicize the massacre of 270 workers at the Lena gold mines, but this activity is cut short by World War I. He then moved to the United Kingdom, where he spent some time in the Brighton area.
- 1914-1917 - actively supports the war against Germany, and coauthors the *Manifesto of the Sixteen*. This position, a strange and questionable one for an anarchist to take, alienated him from many of his associates, particularly Errico Malatesta.
- 1917 - returns to Petrograd where he helps the Kerensky government to formulate policy. He curtails his activity when the Bolsheviks come to power.
- 1921 - his funeral at the Novodevichy Cemetery, with Lenin's approval, becomes the last mass gathering of anarchists in Russia.

Quotations

- "*Either the State for ever, crushing individual and local life, taking over in all fields of human activity, bringing with it its wars and its domestic struggles for power, its palace revolutions which only replace one tyrant by another, and inevitably at the end of this development there is ... death! Or the destruction of States, and new life starting again in thousands of centers on the principle of the lively initiative of the individual and groups and that of free agreement. The choice lies with you!*"
- "*All things for all men, because all men have need of them, because all men worked to produce them in the measure of their strength, and because it is not possible to evaluate everyone's part in the production of the world's wealth... All is for all!*"

- *"But what right had I to these highest joys, when all around me was nothing but misery and struggle for a moldy bit of bread; when whatsoever I should spend to enable me to live in that world of higher emotions must be taken from the very mouths of those who grew the wheat and had not bread enough for their children?"*
- *"In order that the revolution should be something more than a word, in order that the reaction should not lead us back tomorrow to the situation of yesterday, the conquest of today must be worth the trouble of defending; the poor of yesterday must be worth the trouble of defending; the poor of yesterday must not be poor tomorrow."*
- *"Lenin is not comparable to any revolutionary figure in history. Revolutionaries have had ideals. Lenin has none."*
- *"Vladimir Ilyich [Lenin], your concrete actions are completely unworthy of the ideas you pretend to hold."*
- *"Sociability is as much a law of nature as mutual struggle... mutual aid is as much a law of animal life as mutual struggle."*
- *"The two great movements of our century--towards Liberty of the individual and social co-operation of the whole community--are summed up in Anarchist-Communism."*
- *"[U]nless Socialists are prepared openly and avowedly to profess that the satisfaction of the needs of each individual must be their very first aim; unless they have prepared public opinion to establish itself firmly at this standpoint, the people in their next attempt to free themselves will once more suffer a defeat."*

Works

Books

- *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (1955 paperback (reprinted 2005), includes Kropotkin's 1914 preface, Foreword and Bibliography by Ashley Montagu, and *The Struggle for Existence*, by Thomas H. Huxley ed.). Boston: Extending Horizons Books, Porter Sargent Publishers. ISBN 0-87558-024-6. Project Gutenberg e-text (<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/4341>) , Project LibriVox audiobook (<http://librivox.org/mutual-aid-a-factor-of-evolution-by-peter-kropotkin/>)
- *The Conquest of Bread* Project Gutenberg e-text (<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/23428>) , Project LibriVox audiobook (<http://librivox.org/the-conquest-of-bread-by-peter-kropotkin/>)
- *Fields, Factories and Workshops*
- P.Kropotkin, *In Russian and French Prisons*, London: Ward and Downey; 1887.
- *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, London : Smith, Elder; 1899. Kropotkin's own memoirs, which were also published in the United States in the same year and have appeared in a number of modern editions.
- *The Great French Revolution, 1789-1793*, New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, London, William Heinemann, 1909, translated from the French by N.F. Dryhurst. e-text (in French) (<http://kropot.free.fr/Kropotkine-Vie.htm>)
- *Russian Literature: Ideals and Realities* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1915). Available online at the Anarchy Archives,^[2]
- *Ethics* (unfinished). Included as first part of *Origen y evolución de la moral* (Spanish e-text) (<http://bivir.uacj.mx/LibrosElectronicosLibres/Autores/PedroKropotkin/Pedro%20Kropotkin%20-%20Origen%20y%20evoluci%F3n%20de%20la%20moral.pdf>)
- *In Russian and French Prisons* (http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/kropotkin/prisons/toc.html) . Online book. A criticism of the existence of prisons.

Articles

- "Research on the Ice age", *Notices of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society*, 1876.
- "The desiccation of Eur-Asia", *Geographical Journal*, 23 (1904), 722-741.
- Mr. Mackinder; Mr. Ravenstein; Dr. Herbertson; Prince Kropotkin; Mr. Andrews; Cobden Sanderson; Elisée Reclus, "On Spherical Maps and Reliefs: Discussion", *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 22, No. 3. (Sep., 1903), pp. 294-299, JSTOR (<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0016-7398%28190309%2922%3A3%3C294%3AOSMARD%3E2.0.CO%3B2-O>)
- "Baron Toll", *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 6. (Jun., 1904), pp. 770-772, JSTOR (<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0016-7398%28190406%2923%3A6%3C770%3ABT%3E2.0.CO%3B2-B>)
- "The population of Russia", *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 2. (Aug., 1897), pp. 196-202, JSTOR (<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0016-7398%28189708%2910%3A2%3C196%3ATPOR%3E2.0.CO%3B2-V>)
- "The old beds of the Amu-Daria", *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 3. (Sep., 1898), pp. 306-310, JSTOR (<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0016-7398%28189809%2912%3A3%3C306%3ATOBOTA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-D>)

Pamphlets

- *An Appeal To The Young* (<http://flag.blackened.net/daver/anarchism/kropotkin/atty.html>)
- War.
- Law and Authority.
- The Place of Anarchy in Socialist Evolution.
- Revolutionary Government.
- Are Prisons Necessary? (<http://www.panarchy.org/kropotkin/prisons.html>) Chapter X from "In Russian and French Prisons" (1887)
- Anarchism : Its Philosophy and Ideal (<http://www.panarchy.org/kropotkin/1896.eng.html>) (1896)
- The State : Its Historic Role (<http://www.panarchy.org/kropotkin/1897.state.html>) (1897)
- On Economics (<http://www.panarchy.org/kropotkin/economics.html>) Selected Passages from his Writings (1898-1913)

See also

- Katorga
- List of atheists

References

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2. ^ *Russian Literature: Ideals and Realities*

External links and references

- Works by Peter Kropotkin (<http://www.gutenberg.org/author/Kropotkin+Petr+Alekseevich+kniaz>) at Project Gutenberg
- Free audiobooks of Peter Kropotkin (<http://librivox.org/newcatalog/search.php?title=&author=Peter+Kropotkin&action=Search>) at project LibriVox
- Kropotkin Page (<http://recollectionbooks.com/bleed/Encyclopedia/KropotkinPeter.htm>) at the Daily Bleed's Anarchist Encyclopedia
- The Peter Kropotkin text archive (<http://libcom.org/library/peter-kropotkin>) on libcom.org library
- BlackCrayon.com: People: Peter Kropotkin (<http://www.blackcrayon.com/people/kropotkin/>)
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- *The Anarchists*, historical book by James Joll
- Peter Kropotkin (http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/anarchist_archives/kropotkin/Kropotkinarchive.html) entry at the Anarchy Archives with complete collected works
- Joe Peabody, Houston Catholic Worker (<http://www.cjd.org/paper/roots/rkropotk.html>)
- The Anarchist Geographer — an Introduction to the Life of Peter Kropotkin, by Brian Morris (Genge Press, 2007)
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- Peter Kropotkin (<http://archive.thenuclearsummer.com/kropotkin.html>) at *(an)archive!*

Sources: 1911 Encyclopædia Britannica, [1] (http://38.1911encyclopedia.org/K/KR/KROPOTKIN_PETER_ALEXEIVICH_PRINCE.htm) ; *The Anarchists*, James Joll.

- George Woodcock *The Anarchist Prince: A Biographical Study of Peter Kropotkin*
- Peter Kropotkin-Short Documentary (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iu4n5uopvrg>) at YouTube

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