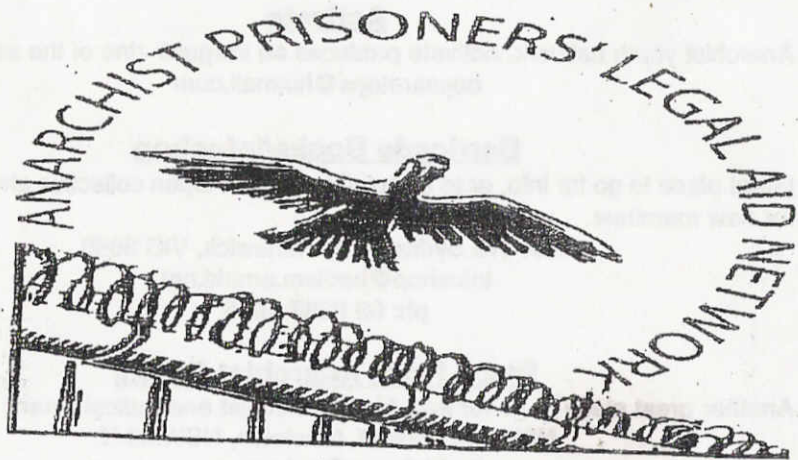




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Anarchist Prisoners' Legal Aid Network
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Anarchism, Marxism ¹⁹ & Hope for the Future

Noam Chomsky

interviewed by
Red & Black Revolution

Anarchism as philosophy

Anarchism derives from the philosophical premise that institutionalized power and enforcement, especially in the form of the State, is a negative method of trying to create and maintain social cohesion. The defining aspect of anarchism is a categorical rejection of the principle and practice of government. Further, anarchism entails a radical critique of the exercise of authority and power. Holding to the conviction that cooperation is a better and more just way of attaining social harmony than competition, anarchists have promoted voluntary cooperation, egalitarian relations, and mutual aid.

Anarchism as politics

In the political realm, anarchism begins from the premise that in order to be truly free, people need to dispense with government and its institutionalization in the State. The politics of representation, being hierarchical, is also considered authoritarian. Instead, anarchists promote direct action, which means any action undertaken in one's own interest without asking for permission from the State and its agents. The ultimate vision is a classless and stateless society, free from all forms of exploitation.

Mutual Aid

There are perhaps as many misunderstandings concerning mutual aid as there are about direct action. Mutual aid doesn't mean automatic solidarity with whoever asks for it, nor does it mean that anarchists have an obligation to enter into relationships with other oppositional forces. It doesn't mean a tit-for-tat arrangement; rather it means to be able to give freely and take freely: from each according to her/his ability, to each according to her/his need. Mutual aid is only possible between and among equals (which means among friends and trusted long-term allies). Solidarity, on the other hand (since it is offered to and asked for

principles

We come up with actions that are compatible with our strategy. The main question to ask is "What methods/tools can be used to achieve the goal?" The answer is whatever helps to make the goal(s) a reality; whatever is expedient at the moment depending on who's involved and what exactly we are trying to accomplish. Of course our tactics must be in keeping with our principles. But it is important to remember that tactics are not the same thing as principles. Non-violence is not an anarchist principle; it is a tactic. Depending on the situation, we decide when it's convenient or not to adhere to non-violent guidelines. At times we may decide that it makes more sense to fight back with force. Morality plays no part in deciding upon which tactics to use in a given situation-it only matters what is compatible with our strategy and principles.

Australian Anarchist Contacts

Anarcho-Syndicalist Federation

National federation of anarchist "locals". Affiliated to the International Workers Association. The ASF produces a monthly magazine called *ORGANISE*.

VIC: PO Box 98, Brunswick East, VIC 3057

asfm@exchange.anarki.net

NSW: PO box 231, Westgate, NSW 2048

asg-s@cat.org.au

WA: PO Box 1629, Morley, WA 6243

benav@one.net.au

SA: contact via Federation Secretary (VIC)

Anarchist Black Cross

Anarchist and class struggle prisoner support network of groups around the world. Focuses on prison issues.

VIC: PO Box 199, Brunswick East, VIC 3057

NSW: PO Box 691, Newtown, NSW 2042

QLD: PO Box 558, Stn Brisbane, QLD 4101

Libertarian Workers for a Self-Managed Society

Melbourne based anarchist group. LWSS produces a weekly newsletter and a weekly radio program.

PO Box 20, Parkville, VIC 3052

Activate

Anarchist youth network. Activate produces an irregular zine of the same name. copsaretops@hotmail.com

Barricade Books/Infoshop

Great place to go for info, or to borrow/buy books. Open collective always looking for new members.

VIC: 115 Sydney Rd, Brunswick, VIC 3056

infoshop@bedlam.anarki.net

ph: 03 9387 6646

Black Rose Anarchist Books

Another great place to go for info, Huge anarchist and radical library.

NSW: 17 Lord St, Newtown, NSW 2042

blakrose@cat.org.au

ph: 02 9519 9194

CONTACTS

AAA
Black Clad Messenger
Green Anarchy
NAELPSN (earth liberation prisoner support) naelpsn@hotmail.com
P.O. Box 11331
Eugene, OR 97440
USA

(A variety of projects share this address. Their commonality lies in their explicitly anarchist, revolutionary and anti-industrial perspective)

@-news
P.O. Box 30557
Athens 10033
Greece
(A calendar of direct actions and attacks made by anarchist and other revolutionary groups in Greece, quarterly)

Black Star North
P.O. Box 7328
Portland, ME 04112
(An excellent new 'zine of anarchist analysis, highly recommended)

CAL Press
P.O. Box 1446
Columbia, MO 65205-1446
USA
(Publishers of *Anarchy: a Journal of Desire Armed*, a long-standing, consistently intelligent journal of anarchist theory, news and history, and distributors of a variety of anarchist books)

Claustrophobia
P.O. Box 1721
Baltimore, MD 21203
USA

I haven't seen this paper in a while. A well-love anarchist project that emphasizes a local perspective that would be of interest to non-anarchists, an emphasis on class struggle—occasionally tainted by syndicalism—and information useful to the larger anarchist movement as well)

Coalition Against Civilization
P.O. Box 835
Eisenburg, PA 15601
Publishes the unabashedly anti-civilization anarchist 'zine, *Species Traitor*

CrimethInc
2695 Rangewood Drive
Atlanta, GA 30345
USA
(Publishers of the paper, *Harbinger*, and the book, *Days of War, Nights of Love*, excellent introductions to why one should make their personal insurrection against the social order)

Do or Die
c/o Prior House
6 Tilbury Place
Brighton, East Sussex BN2 2GY
United Kingdom
(The best radical environmental journal available in English, explicitly anarchist and revolutionary with good information on international movements and uprisings)

Elephant Editions
BM Elephant
London WC1N 3XX
United Kingdom
(Insurrectional anarchist books and pamphlets—a catalogue is available)

Feral
530 Divisadero, PMB 321
San Francisco, CA 94117
USA
(A rarely published anti-civilization anarchist magazine)

Killing King Abacus
41 Sutter Street, Suite 1661
San Francisco, CA 94104
USA
(A magazine of intelligent anarchist theory and social analysis from an insurrectional perspective with commentary on action, approximately yearly)

South Chicago ABC zine distro
P.O. Box 721
Homewood, IL 60430
USA
(Distributor of a variety of anarchist publications with an emphasis on those by anarchist prisoners)

Twilight In Turkey
P.O. Box 476738
Chicago, IL 60647-6738
USA
(This situationist-influenced anarchist 'zine with a love for the marvelous has also been missing in action for a while, but is well worth the read if you find one)

Noam Chomsky on Anarchism, Marxism & Hope for the Future

Noam Chomsky is widely known for his critique of U.S. foreign policy, and for his work as a linguist. Less well known is his ongoing support for libertarian socialist objectives. In a special interview done for *Red and Black Revolution*, Chomsky gives his views on anarchism and marxism, and the prospects for socialism now. The interview was conducted in May 1995 by Kevin Doyle.

RBR: First off, Noam, for quite a time now you've been an advocate for the anarchist idea. Many people are familiar with the introduction you wrote in 1970 to Daniel Guerin's *Anarchism*, but more recently, for instance in the film *Manufacturing Consent*, you took the opportunity to highlight again the potential of anarchism and the anarchist idea. What is it that attracts you to anarchism?

CHOMSKY: I was attracted to anarchism as a young teenager, as soon as I began to think about the world beyond a pretty narrow range, and haven't seen much reason to revise those early attitudes since. I think it only makes sense to seek out and identify structures of authority, hierarchy, and domination in every aspect of life, and to challenge them; unless a justification for them can be given, they are illegitimate, and should be dismantled, to increase the scope of human freedom. That includes political power, ownership and management, relations among men and women, parents and children, our control over the fate of future generations (the basic moral imperative behind the environmental movement, in my view), and much else. Naturally this means a challenge to the huge institutions of coercion and control: the state, the unaccountable private tyrannies that control most of the domestic and international economy, and so on. But not only these. That is what I have always understood to be the essence of anarchism: the conviction that the burden of proof has to be placed on authority, and that it should be dismantled if that burden cannot be met. Sometimes the burden can be met. If I'm taking a walk with my grandchildren and they dart out into a busy street, I will use not only authority but also physical coercion to stop them. The act should be challenged, but I think it can readily meet the challenge. And there are other cases; life is a complex affair, we understand very little about humans and society, and grand pronouncements are generally more a source of harm than of benefit. But the perspective is a valid one, I think, and can lead us quite a long way.

Beyond such generalities, we begin to look at cases, which is where the questions of human interest and concern arise.

RBR: It's true to say that your ideas and critique are now more widely known than ever before. It should also be said that your views are widely respected. How do

you think your support for anarchism is received in this context? In particular, I'm interested in the response you receive from people who are getting interested in politics for the first time and who may, perhaps, have come across your views. Are such people surprised by your support for anarchism? Are they interested?

CHOMSKY: The general intellectual culture, as you know, associates 'anarchism' with chaos, violence, bombs, disruption, and so on. So people are often surprised when I speak positively of anarchism and identify myself with leading traditions within it. But my impression is that among the general public, the basic ideas seem reasonable when the clouds are cleared away. Of course, when we turn to specific matters - say, the nature of families, or how an economy would work in a society that is more free and just - questions and controversy arise. But that is as it should be. Physics can't really explain how water flows from the tap in your sink. When we turn to vastly more complex questions of human significance, understanding is very thin, and there is plenty of room for disagreement, experimentation, both intellectual and real-life exploration of possibilities, to help us learn more.

RBR: Perhaps, more than any other idea, anarchism has suffered from the problem of misrepresentation. Anarchism can mean many things to many people. Do you often find yourself having to explain what it is that you mean by anarchism? Does the misrepresentation of anarchism bother you?

CHOMSKY: All misrepresentation is a nuisance. Much of it can be traced back to structures of power that have an interest in preventing understanding, for pretty obvious reasons. It's well to recall David Hume's Principles of Government. He expressed surprise that people ever submitted to their rulers. He concluded that since "Force is always on the side of the governed, the governors have nothing to support them but opinion. 'Tis therefore, on opinion only that government is founded; and this maxim extends to the most despotic and most military governments, as well as to the most free and most popular." Hume was very astute - and incidentally, hardly a libertarian by the standards of the day. He surely underestimates the efficacy of force, but his observation seems to me basically correct, and important, particularly in the more free societies, where the art of controlling opinion is therefore far more refined. Misrepresentation and other forms of befuddlement are a natural concomitant.

So does misrepresentation bother me? Sure, but so does rotten weather. It will exist as long as concentrations of power engender a kind of commissar class to defend them. Since they are usually not very bright, or are bright enough to know that they'd better avoid the arena of fact and argument, they'll turn to misrepresentation, vilification, and other devices that are available to those who know that they'll be protected by the various means available to the powerful. We should understand why all this occurs, and unravel it as best we can. That's part of the project of liberation - of ourselves and others, or more reasonably, of people working

Without the "saviour," Gingrich's constituents would be poor working people (if they were lucky). There would be no computers, electronics generally, aviation industry, metallurgy, automation, etc., etc., right down the list. Anarchists, of all people, should not be taken in by these traditional frauds.

More than ever, libertarian socialist ideas are relevant, and the population is very much open to them. Despite a huge mass of corporate propaganda, outside of educated circles, people still maintain pretty much their traditional attitudes. In the US, for example, more than 80% of the population regard the economic system as "inherently unfair" and the political system as a fraud, which serves the "special interests," not "the people". Overwhelming majorities think working people have too little voice in public affairs (the same is true in England), that the government has the responsibility of assisting people in need, that spending for education and health should take precedence over budget-cutting and tax cuts, that the current Republican proposals that are sailing through Congress benefit the rich and harm the general population, and so on. Intellectuals may tell a different story, but it's not all that difficult to find out the facts.

RBR: To a point anarchist ideas have been vindicated by the collapse of the Soviet Union - the predictions of Bakunin have proven to be correct. Do you think that anarchists should take heart from this general development and from the perceptiveness of Bakunin's analysis? Should anarchists look to the period ahead with greater confidence in their ideas and history?

CHOMSKY: I think - at least hope - that the answer is implicit in the above. I think the current era has ominous portent, and signs of great hope. Which result ensues depends on what we make of the opportunities.

RBR: Lastly, Noam, a different sort of question. We have a pint of Guinness or order for you here. When are you going to come and drink it?

CHOMSKY: Keep the Guinness ready. I hope it won't be too long. Less jocularly, I'd be there tomorrow if we could. We (my wife came along with me, unusual for these constant trips) had a marvellous time in Ireland, and would love to come back. Why don't we? Won't bore you with the sordid details, but demands are extraordinary, and mounting - a reflection of the conditions I've been trying to describe.



larly, and other contemporary ideologies, all of which seem to me to reduce to advocacy of one or another form of illegitimate authority, quite often real tyranny.

The Spanish Revolution

RBR: In the past, when you have spoken about anarchism, you have often emphasised the example of the Spanish Revolution. For you there would seem to be two aspects to this example. On the one hand, the experience of the Spanish Revolution is, you say, a good example of 'anarchism in action'. On the other, you have also stressed that the Spanish Revolution is a good example of what workers can achieve through their own efforts using participatory democracy. Are these two aspects - anarchism in action and participatory democracy - one and the same thing for you? Is anarchism a philosophy for people's power?

CHOMSKY: I'm reluctant to use fancy polysyllables like "philosophy" to refer to what seems ordinary common sense. And I'm also uncomfortable with slogans. The achievements of Spanish workers and peasants, before the revolution was crushed, were impressive in many ways. The term 'participatory democracy' is a more recent one, which developed in a different context, but there surely are points of similarity. I'm sorry if this seems evasive. It is, but that's because I don't think either the concept of anarchism or of participatory democracy is clear enough to be able to answer the question whether they are the same.

RBR: One of the main achievements of the Spanish Revolution was the degree of grassroots democracy established. In terms of people, it is estimated that over 3 million were involved. Rural and urban production was managed by workers themselves. Is it a coincidence to your mind that anarchists, known for their advocacy of individual freedom, succeeded in this area of collective administration?

CHOMSKY: No coincidence at all. The tendencies in anarchism that I've always found most persuasive seek a highly organised society, integrating many different kinds of structures (workplace, community, and manifold other forms of voluntary association), but controlled by participants, not by those in a position to give orders (except, again, when authority can be justified, as is sometimes the case, in specific contingencies).

Democracy

RBR: Anarchists often expend a great deal of effort at building up grassroots democracy. Indeed they are often accused of "taking democracy to extremes". Yet, despite this, many anarchists would not readily identify democracy as a central component of anarchist philosophy. Anarchists often describe their politics as being about 'socialism' or being about 'the individual' - they are less likely to say that anarchism is about democracy. Would you agree that democratic ideas are a central feature of anarchism?

also been dragged down. Have you come across this type of demoralisation? What's your response to it?

CHOMSKY: My response to the end of Soviet tyranny was similar to my reaction to the defeat of Hitler and Mussolini. In all cases, it is a victory for the human spirit. It should have been particularly welcome to socialists, since a great enemy of socialism had at last collapsed. Like you, I was intrigued to see how people - including people who had considered themselves anti-Stalinist and anti-Leninist - were demoralised by the collapse of the tyranny. What it reveals is that they were more deeply committed to Leninism than they believed.

There are, however, other reasons to be concerned about the elimination of this brutal and tyrannical system, which was as much "socialist" as it was "democratic" (recall that it claimed to be both, and that the latter claim was ridiculed in the West, while the former was eagerly accepted, as a weapon against socialism - one of the many examples of the service of Western intellectuals to power). One reason has to do with the nature of the Cold War. In my view, it was in significant measure a special case of the 'North-South conflict,' to use the current euphemism for Europe's conquest of much of the world. Eastern Europe had been the original 'third world,' and the Cold War from 1917 had no slight resemblance to the reaction of attempts by other parts of the third world to pursue an independent course, though in this case differences of scale gave the conflict a life of its own. For this reason, it was only reasonable to expect the region to return pretty much to its earlier status: parts of the West, like the Czech Republic or Western Poland, could be expected to rejoin it, while others revert to the traditional service role, the ex-Nomenklatura becoming the standard third world elite (with the approval of Western state-corporate power, which generally prefers them to alternatives). That was not a pretty prospect, and it has led to immense suffering.

Another reason for concern has to do with the matter of deterrence and non-alignment. Grotesque as the Soviet empire was, its very existence offered a certain space for non-alignment, and for perfectly cynical reasons, it sometimes provided assistance to victims of Western attack. Those options are gone, and the South is suffering the consequences.

A third reason has to do with what the business press calls "the pampered Western workers" with their "luxurious lifestyles." With much of Eastern Europe returning to the fold, owners and managers have powerful new weapons against the working classes and the poor at home. GM and VW can not only transfer production to Mexico and Brazil (or at least threaten to, which often amounts to the same thing), but also to Poland and Hungary, where they can find skilled and trained workers at a fraction of the cost. They are gloating about it, understandably, given the guiding values.

We can learn a lot about what the Cold War (or any other conflict) was about by looking at who is cheering and who is unhappy after it ends. By that criterion, the victors in the Cold War include Western elites and the ex-Nomenklatura, now rich beyond their wildest dreams, and the losers include a substantial part of the population of the East along with working people and the poor in the West, as well as popular sectors in the South that have sought an independent path.

Such ideas tend to arouse near hysteria among Western intellectuals, when they can even perceive them, which is rare. That's easy to show. It's also understandable. The observations are correct, and subversive of power and privilege; hence hysteria.

In general, the reactions of an honest person to the end of the Cold War will be more complex than just pleasure over the collapse of a brutal tyranny, and prevailing reactions are suffused with extreme hypocrisy, in my opinion.

Capitalism

RBR: In many ways the left today finds itself back at its original starting point in the last century. Like then, it now faces a form of capitalism that is in the ascendancy. There would seem to be greater 'consensus' today, more than at any other time in history, that capitalism is the only valid form of economic organisation possible, this despite the fact that wealth inequality is widening. Against this backdrop, one could argue that the left is unsure of how to go forward. How do you look at the current period? Is it a question of 'back to basics'? Should the effort now be towards bringing out the libertarian tradition in socialism and towards stressing democratic ideas?

CHOMSKY: This is mostly propaganda, in my opinion. What is called 'capitalism' is basically a system of corporate mercantilism, with huge and largely unaccountable private tyrannies exercising vast control over the economy, political systems, and social and cultural life, operating in close co-operation with powerful states that intervene massively in the domestic economy and international society. That is dramatically true of the United States, contrary to much illusion. The rich and privileged are no more willing to face market discipline than they have been in the past, though they consider it just fine for the general population. Merely to cite a few illustrations, the Reagan administration, which revelled in free market rhetoric, also boasted to the business community that it was the most protectionist in post-war US history - actually more than all others combined. Newt Gingrich, who leads the current crusade, represents a superrich district that receives more federal subsidies than any other suburban region in the country, outside of the federal system itself. The 'conservatives' who are calling for an end to school lunches for hungry children are also demanding an increase in the budget for the Pentagon, which was established in the late 1940s in its current form because - as the business press was kind enough to tell us - high tech industry cannot survive in a "pure, competitive, unsubsidised, 'free enterprise' economy," and the government must be its "saviour."

together to achieve these aims.

Sounds simple-minded, and it is. But I have yet to find much commentary on human life and society that is not simple-minded, when absurdity and self-serving posturing are cleared away.

RBR: How about in more established left-wing circles, where one might expect to find greater familiarity with what anarchism actually stands for? Do you encounter any surprise here at your views and support for anarchism?

CHOMSKY: If I understand what you mean by "established left-wing circles," there is not too much surprise about my views on anarchism, because very little is known about my views on anything. These are not the circles I deal with. You'll rarely find a reference to anything I say or write. That's not completely true of course. Thus in the US (but less commonly in the UK or elsewhere), you'd find some familiarity with what I do in certain of the more critical and independent sectors of what might be called "established left-wing circles," and I have personal friends and associates scattered here and there. But have a look at the books and journals, and you'll see what I mean. I don't expect what I write and say to be any more welcome in these circles than in the faculty club or editorial board room - again, with exceptions.

The question arises only marginally, so much so that it's hard to answer.

RBR: A number of people have noted that you use the term 'libertarian socialist' in the same context as you use the word 'anarchism'. Do you see these terms as essentially similar? Is anarchism a type of socialism to you? The description has been used before that "anarchism is equivalent to socialism with freedom". Would you agree with this basic equation?

CHOMSKY: The introduction to Guerin's book that you mentioned opens with a quote from an anarchist sympathiser a century ago, who says that "anarchism has a broad back," and "endures anything." One major element has been what has traditionally been called 'libertarian socialism'. I've tried to explain there and elsewhere what I mean by that, stressing that it's hardly original; I'm taking the ideas from leading figures in the anarchist movement whom I quote, and who rather consistently describe themselves as socialists, while harshly condemning the 'new class' of radical intellectuals who seek to attain state power in the course of popular struggle and to become the vicious "Red bureaucracy" of which Bakunin warned; what's often called 'socialism'. I rather agree with Rudolf Rocker's perception that these (quite central) tendencies in anarchism draw from the best of Enlightenment and classical liberal thought, well beyond what he described. In fact, as I've tried to show they contrast sharply with Marxist-Leninist doctrine and practice, the 'libertarian' doctrines that are fashionable in the US and UK particu-