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tion 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.

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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, unsubsidized, 'free enterprise' economy," and the government must be its "saviour." Without the "saviour," Gingrich's constituents would be poor working people (if they were lucky). There would be no computers, electronics generally, avia-

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

The following are excerpts of an interview with Noam Chomsky published in Issue 2 of Red & Black Revolution. RBR can be contacted at Red & Black Revolution, PO Box 1528, Dublin 8, Ireland. 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: 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

Take language, one of the few distinctive human capacities about which much is known. We have very strong reasons to believe that all possible human languages are very similar; a Martian scientist observing humans might conclude that there is just a single language, with minor variants. The reason is that the particular aspect of human nature that underlies the growth of language allows very restricted options. Is this limiting? Of course. Is it liberating? Also of course. It is these very restrictions that make it possible for a rich and intricate system of expression of thought to develop in similar ways on the basis of very rudimentary, scattered, and varied experience.

What about the matter of biologically-determined human differences? That these exist is surely true, and a cause for joy, not fear or regret. Life among clones would not be worth living, and a sane person will only rejoice that others have abilities that they do not share. That should be elementary. What is commonly believed about these matters is strange indeed, in my opinion.

Is human nature, whatever it is, conducive to the development of anarchist forms of life or a barrier to them? We do not know enough to answer, one way or the other. These are matters for experimentation and discovery, not empty pronouncements.

The future

RBR: To begin finishing off, I'd like to ask you briefly about some current issues on the left. I don't know if the situation is similar in the USA but here, with the fall of the Soviet Union, a certain demoralisation has set in on the left. It isn't so much that people were dear supporters of what existed in the Soviet Union, but rather it's a general feeling that with the demise of the Soviet Union the idea of socialism has also been dragged down. Have you come across this type of demoralisation? What's your response to it?

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 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. [...]

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

mentally in the direction of anarchism. You take a different view? Why?

CHOMSKY: The core part of anyone's point of view is some concept of human nature, however it may be remote from awareness or lack articulation. At least, that is true of people who consider themselves moral agents, not monsters. Monsters aside, whether a person who advocates reform or revolution, or stability or return to earlier stages, or simply cultivating one's own garden, takes stand on the grounds that it is 'good for people.' But that judgement is based on some conception of human nature, which a reasonable person will try to make as clear as possible, if only so that it can be evaluated. So in this respect I'm no different from anyone else.

You're right that human nature has been seen as something 'regressive,' but that must be the result of profound confusion. Is my granddaughter no different from a rock, a salamander, a chicken, a monkey? A person who dismisses this absurdity as absurd recognises that there is a distinctive human nature. We are left only with the question of what it is — a highly nontrivial and fascinating question, with enormous scientific interest and human significance. We know a fair amount about certain aspects of it — not those of major human significance. Beyond that, we are left with our hopes and wishes, intuitions and speculations.

There is nothing "regressive" about the fact that a human embryo is so constrained that it does not grow wings, or that its visual system cannot function in the manner of an insect, or that it lacks the homing instinct of pigeons. The same factors that constrain the organism's development also enable it to attain a rich, complex, and highly articulated structure, similar in fundamental ways to conspecifics, with rich and remarkable capacities. An organism that lacked such determinative intrinsic structure, which of course radically limits the paths of development, would be some kind of amoeboid creature, to be pitied (even if it could survive somehow). The scope and limits of development are logically related.

clarification about what people find "shocking," I can't comment further. The comparisons are specific, and I think both proper and properly qualified. If not, that's an error, and I'd be interested to be enlightened about it.

Marxism

RBR: Specifically, Leninism refers to a form of marxism that developed with V.I. Lenin. Are you implicitly distinguishing the works of Marx from the particular criticism you have of Lenin when you use the term 'Leninism'? Do you see a continuity between Marx's views and Lenin's later practices?

CHOMSKY: Bakunin's warnings about the "Red bureaucracy" that would institute "the worst of all despotic governments" were long before Lenin, and were directed against the followers of Mr. Marx. There were, in fact, followers of many different kinds; Pannekoek, Luxembourg, Mattick and others are very far from Lenin, and their views often converge with elements of anarcho-syndicalism. Korsch and others wrote sympathetically of the anarchist revolution in Spain, in fact. There are continuities from Marx to Lenin, but there are also continuities to Marxists who were harshly critical of Lenin and Bolshevism. Teodor Shanin's work in the past years on Marx's later attitudes towards peasant revolution is also relevant here. I'm far from being a Marx scholar, and wouldn't venture any serious judgement on which of these continuities reflects the 'real Marx,' if there even can be an answer to that question. […]

RBR: From my understanding, the core part of your overall view is informed by your concept of human nature. In the past the idea of human nature was seen, perhaps, as something regressive, even limiting. For instance, the unchanging aspect of human nature is often used as an argument for why things can't be changed fundaorders (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?

CHOMSKY: Criticism of 'democracy' among anarchists has often been criticism of parliamentary democracy, as it has arisen within societies with deeply repressive features. Take the US, which has been as free as any, since its origins. American democracy was founded on the principle, stressed by James Madison in the Constitutional Convention in 1787, that the primary function of government is "to protect the minority of the opulent from the majority." Thus he warned that in England, the only quasi-democratic model of the day, if the general population were allowed a say in public affairs, they would implement agrarian reform or other atrocities, and that the American system must be carefully crafted to avoid such crimes against "the rights of property," which must be defended (in fact, must prevail). Parliamentary democracy within this framework does merit sharp criticism by genuine libertarians, and I've left out many other features that are hardly subtle — slavery, to mention just one, or the wage slavery that was bitterly condemned by working people who had never heard of anarchism or communism right through the 19th century, and beyond.

Leninism

RBR: The importance of grassroots democracy to any meaningful change in society would seem to be self evident. Yet the left has been ambiguous about this in the past. I'm speaking generally, of social democracy, but also of Bolshevism — traditions on the left that would seem to have more in common with elitist thinking than with strict democratic practice. Lenin, to use a well-known example, was sceptical that workers could develop anything more than "trade union consciousness"- by which, I assume, he meant that workers could not see far beyond their immediate predicament. Similarly, the Fabian socialist, Beatrice Webb, who was very influential in the Labour Party in England, had the view that workers were only interested in "horse racing odds"! Where does this elitism originate and what is it doing on the left?

CHOMSKY:I'm afraid it's hard for me to answer this. If the left is understood to include 'Bolshevism,' then I would flatly dissociate myself from the left. Lenin was one of the greatest enemies of socialism, in my opinion, for reasons I've discussed. The idea that workers are only interested in horse-racing is an absurdity that cannot withstand even a superficial look at labour history or the lively and independent working class press that flourished in many places, including the manufacturing towns of New England not many miles from where I'm writing — not to speak of the inspiring record of the courageous struggles of persecuted and oppressed people throughout history, until this very moment. Take the most miserable corner of this hemisphere, Haiti, regarded by the European conquerors as a paradise and the source of no small part of Europe's wealth, now devastated, perhaps beyond recovery. In the past few years, under conditions so miserable that few people in the rich countries can imagine them, peasants and slum-dwellers constructed a popular democratic movement based on grassroots organisations that surpasses just about anything I know of elsewhere; only deeply committed commissars could fail to collapse

with ridicule when they hear the solemn pronouncements of American intellectuals and political leaders about how the US has to teach Haitians the lessons of democracy. Their achievements were so substantial and frightening to the powerful that they had to be subjected to yet another dose of vicious terror, with considerably more US support than is publicly acknowledged, and they still have not surrendered. Are they interested only in horse-racing?

I'd suggest some lines I've occasionally quoted from Rousseau: "when I see multitudes of entirely naked savages scorn European voluptuousness and endure hunger, fire, the sword, and death to preserve only their independence, I feel that it does not behoove slaves to reason about freedom."

RBR: Speaking generally again, your own work — Deterring Democracy, Necessary Illusions, etc. — has dealt consistently with the role and prevalence of elitist ideas in societies such as our own. You have argued that within 'Western' (or parliamentary) democracy there is a deep antagonism to any real role or input from the mass of people, lest it threaten the uneven distribution in wealth which favours the rich. Your work is quite convincing here, but, this aside, some have been shocked by your assertions. For instance, you compare the politics of President John F. Kennedy with Lenin, more or less equating the two. This, I might add, has shocked supporters of both camps! Can you elaborate a little on the validity of the comparison?

CHOMSKY: I haven't actually "equated" the doctrines of the liberal intellectuals of the Kennedy administration with Leninists, but I have noted striking points of similarity — rather as predicted by Bakunin a century earlier in his perceptive commentary on the "new class." For example, I quoted passages from McNamara on the need to enhance managerial control if we are to be truly "free," and about how the "undermanagement" that is "the real threat to democracy" is an assault against reason itself. Change a few words in these passages, and we have standard Leninist doctrine. I've argued that the roots are rather deep, in both cases. Without further