# DISCUSSION BULLETIN

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## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>About This Issue</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noam Chomsky on Anarchism, Marxism &amp; Hope for the Future, Red &amp; Black Revolution</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Noam Chomsky’s Denial of Anarchism, Larry Gambone</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter, Jeff Stein</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borders Books, Chomsky and the IWW, Industrial Workers of the World</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s Right with Big Government, Robert S. Hertz</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter, John Cabral</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critique of David Stratman’s We CAN Save the World by Ron Elbert, Comments and Excerpts</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge Is Mostly Potential, Review of We CAN Save the World, from Socialist Standard</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fake Democracy, New Democracy Flyer</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter, De Leonist Society of Canada</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satirical Look at Our Health Plan, A Hewittson</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election Poster, <em>The Poor, the Bad, and the Angry #2</em></td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s Time We declared America a Monocracy, <em>Z Magazine</em></td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes, Announcements, and Short Reviews</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABOUT THIS ISSUE

In our lead article readers will find what is probably the longest published comment Chomsky has made on the political matters that interest DB readers. Of special interest are his first answer to RBR (Red & Black/Revolution) and the section headed “Capitalism.” Somehow after reading this I think that I understand how Chomsky can buy into the leftwing/social democratic politics of groups like the New Party and journals like Z Magazine without a feeling of inconsistency. To betray anarchism and its adherents, Chomsky would first have to have embraced it. Next Larry Gamboa expresses his personal feeling of betrayal, unwarranted in my opinion as stated above. Chomsky’s political life has been spent with leftwing academics and intellectuals, and I suspect it is another case of what Lenin—speaking of George Bernard Shaw—referred to as a good man fallen among Fabians. Part of the accommodation of

(To p. 21)

ABOUT THE DISCUSSION BULLETIN

The Discussion Bulletin is affiliated with the Industrial Union Caucus in Education (IUCE). It serves as the financially and politically independent forum of a relatively unknown sector of political thought that places great weight in the “left,” not between Anarchists and Marxists but between capitalism’s statist leftwing of vanguardists and social democrats and the real revolutionaries of our time: the anti-market, anti-statist, libertarian socialists. They are organized in small groups of syndicalists, communist anarchists, libertarian communalists, world socialists, socialist industrial unionists, council communists, and left communists. The perspective of these groups with their rejection of capitalism’s wage, market, and money system as well as capitalist politics and unionism constitute the only real alternative to capitalism in both its market and statist phases.

In the DB the often antagonistic groups that make up this sector can debate and discuss the issues that divide them, gain some understanding of their history and future possibilities and begin a process, we hope, of at least limited cooperation.

The pages of the DB are open to anyone in this political sector, the only limitation being that submissions be typewritten, single-spaced, and copy ready. We do no editing here. As to content, we assume that submissions will be relevant to the purpose of the DB and will avoid personal attacks.

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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.

RRR: 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 Guérin’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.

RRR: 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.

RRR: 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. To 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 underestimated 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 communal passivity 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 hu-
man life and society that is not simple-minded, when absurdity and self-serving posturing are cleared away.

RBDR: How about in more established left-wing circles, where one might expect to find a certain 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’ll find some familiarity with what I say 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.

RBDR: 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 Rusdolf 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 particularly, 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

RBDR: In the past, when you have spoken about anarchism, you have often emphasized 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.

RBDR: 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 organized 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 in sometimes the case, in specific contingencies).

Democracy

RBDR: 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 in 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 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,
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 a "class 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 readily 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 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 communists 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 - Determing 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, compare the politics of President John F. Kennedy with Lenin, 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 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 anarchosyndicalism. 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 judgment on which of these continuities reflects the 'real Marx,' if there even can be an answer to that question.

RBR: Recently, we obtained a copy of your own Notes On Anarchism (re-published last year by Discussion Bulletin in the USA). In this you mention the views of the "early Marx", in particular his development of the idea of alienation under capitalism. Do you generally agree with this division in Marx's life and work - a young, more libertarian socialist but, in later years, a firm authoritarian?

CHOMSKY: The early Marx draws extensively from the milieu in which he lived, and one finds many similarities to the thinking that animated classical liberalism, aspects of the Enlightenment and French and German Romanticism. Again, I'm not enough of a Marx scholar to pretend to an authoritative judgement. My impression, for what it is worth, is that the early Marx was very much a figure of the late Enlightenment, and the later Marx was a highly authoritarian activist, and a critical analyst of capitalism, who had little to say about socialist alternatives. But those are impressions.

RBR: From my understanding, the core part of your overall view is inferred 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 fundamentally 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 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 determinate intrinsic structure, which of course radically limits the paths of development, would be some kind of ameoboid creature, to be pitied (even if it could survive somehow). The scope and limits of development are logically related.

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 are 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 same 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

RBK: 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: 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 "luxuriant 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, who are now reaping the benefits of 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 much 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 organization 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. Mr. Gingrich, who leads the current crusade, represents a super-rich 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, 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

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(From Red & Black Revolution #2, P.O. Box 1528 Dublin 8 Ireland)
ON NOAM CHOMSKY'S DENIAL OF ANARCHISM

Chomsky talks of a "fear of government" whipped up by propagandists. Does he think the population are actually that stupid? Dislike of the central govt. is based upon real grounds - high taxes, ridiculous regulations, corruption. Devolution "equalling tyranny" is truly an Orwellian use of language and an ignoring of the actual process by which State capitalism developed. It was the State that created the situation allowing corporate capitalism to develop. Corporate capitalism, in turn, was largely responsible for the growth of statism and the destruction of decentralization and limited government. It did this both to further its own aims and to co-opt the legitimate grievances and programs of the early 20th Century populist, syndicalist and socialist movements. Capitalism was responsible for Wilson's "Progressives" and Roosevelt's New Deal. Rather than a victory for working people, these schemes represent the defeat and corruption of an independent working people's movement. State capitalism's ultimate roots lie in militarism. The welfare state was invented by Bismarck to defeat the Social Democrats and most of the ideas of the New Deal are rooted in the government controls developed during WW1.

Genuine devolution does not make governments more susceptible to so-called private power. Instead, it makes government more susceptible to popular control, something which scares the elite half to death. The larger the unit, the further away it is from the people, the harder it is to control. There is an inverse relationship between the level of government and the level of popular satisfaction. People are most satisfied with their local small town governments and most hostile to the Feds.

Capitalism has had the freedom to do what it wants precisely because power is centralized and local levels of government have little say in important matters. Many a mega-project has been forced upon local people, who given the chance would have refused this government "gift". One can, as generations of genuine libertarians have done, make the case that the best way of overcoming capitalism is through the decentralization of power and the smashing of the State. And if devolution is a bad thing, then the Swiss should really be suffering, rather than being the wealthiest people in the world, since their government is the most decentralized in existence.

Chomsky can be very exasperating. Here we have a professor of linguistics who throws around words like "fascist" and "totalitarian" like an 18 year-old who has just discovered the existence of injustice. We really deserve better than this. If meanness to the poor is an example of proto-fascism, then society has always been fascist. If this is the case, the word "fascist" is without meaning.

C. loves to describe the corporations as "totalitarian". I could write a whole page of nasty words to describe corporations, but "totalitarian" just wouldn't be one of them. No individual corporation or group of corporations, while having a lot of power, has the power over the individual that a totalitarian state or a religious or political totalitarian cult has. The only Institution in society that one could loosely equate with totalitarianism is government bureaucracy. Just ask anyone who has ever tangled with one. If the Unemployment Insurance bureaucracy is screwing you around you can't take your business elsewhere and get a better deal. It is precisely the "totalitarian" nature of these bureaucracies that has helped fuel the anti-governmental mood.

Chomsky's misuse of words and his hyperbole are a deliberate tactic used by politicians in making propaganda. The idea is not to win an argument through reason, but through bullying and emotional appeal. If your opponent is a so-called conservative, you won't get very far by calling him a conservative. However, if rant and rave that he is a Nazi who wants to enslave all the poor Third Worlders and throw all the welfare children into the streets, you have an edge with all those folks who don't have their bullshit detectors turned on.

Chomsky's rejection (some might say betrayal) of anarchism is rooted in his demonological approach and uncritical adoption of leftist ideology. Leftism, a statist ideology, and anarchism are incompatible and he has never seemed to realize this. For some reason, most likely psychological, he needs a scapegoat, and corporations are his choice of victim. Although he likes to write in terms of systems, it always seems to boil down to those evil corporations and not more general terms, such as capitalism, statism or authoritarianism. This view is rooted in leftism, which only attacks a specific type of capitalism and authoritarianism, promoting
state capitalism as the solution.

Chomsky’s demonization is also out of date. 50 years ago, corporations did fit the stereotype of institutions investing the money of tiny handful of wealthy individuals. This is no longer the case. Modern Industry still needs the rich 1%, but as much or more, the millions of ordinary investors with their mutual funds, pension funds, savings accounts, annuities, IRA’s, RRSP’s. These investment funds are a massive block of capital owned by teachers, nurses, doctors, dentists and unionized workers. (The largest investment block in Canada is the Ontario teachers pension fund, in the US, the California public employees pension fund) Selling these investment programs to all these people has itself become a major industry. While the individual amounts invested may not be that large, when multiplied by tens of millions of investors it becomes a colossal figure. In the ECONOMIST Aug 31 1996, 50% of all shares are owned by institutions. In 1981, the figure was only 30%. The total value of pension funds in the USA is $4.3 trillion which is expected to rise to $6.4 trillion by the year 2000

Scapegoating corporations lets us off the hook. In a sense, we are the corporations, for not only do they depend upon our labor as they did in the past, and our consumption (beginning in the 1940’s), but also our investments. While labor has always been an area of contestation, and consumption since the ’60’s, investment must also become an area of challenge the system. Remaining trapped in an outdated worldview, pretended victims of a situation we are in large part responsible for, will not allow us to overcome this challenge. Furthermore, anti-corporate fetishism leads us back to a method which has been tried and proven worthless during the past century. That is statism. We must never forget that our enemy is the State.

On The Spanish Revolution.

It is doubtful that the Spanish Revolution could have been saved had the anarchists had a "correct theory". This oversimplifies a complex situation and gives far too much weight to theory. The problem for the Revolution was that its enemies were too numerous and too well armed. A large minority of the population feared the Republic, let alone anarchism, and longed for a "strong man". Among the Republicans, some wanted revolution, others did not. While the CNT-FAI and its POUM allies were the largest organized power block, they did not represent the majority of the Spanish population and while a minority can sometimes pull off a revolution, they had to contend with the opposition of Hitler, Stalin and Mussolini, not to mention all the liberal democracies.

Nor can the failure be attributed to a "reformist current" within the CNT. The union had a long insurrectionist history and the FAI was the most militant wing (barring Durruti) of the union. It was the leaders of the FAI who went into the government. These leaders knowingly went against their principles in order to maintain a united front against the Falange. Anti-fascism (as an ideology) rather than reformism would seem to be the root of the problem.

But even if they had not swallowed the anti-fascist ideology they may not have succeeded. The CNT was in a lose-lose situation. Had they pushed for the Revolution they would have been defeated, (being in a minority) and generations of rads would blame them for being "adventurous". Admittedly, it would have been better to have gone down to defeat making the revolution rather than giving in to the Communists and liberals. But really, what would you have done in their situation?

Come on SWF, charges of "incorrect theory" and "reformism" are cliches thrown about for the past 100 years to hide an unpleasant reality. - A reality that is messy, complex, contradictory, full of accidents and dead ends. A reality that requires a kind of high-wire act for even a limited comprehension. To think that someone has a clear grasp on what is going on just because one is a "revolutionary purist" or one follows or has concocted some fancy theory is to put your foot on air thinking it the rope.

SUBVERSION. If communism, in its pure Karl Marxian sense, did not occur in Spain after 1500 years of peasant communalism, 80 years of anarchist influence and major collectivisation, perhaps this says more about Subversion’s theories rather than the "weaknesses" of Spanish workers and farmers. Let’s not pretend we have all the answers. Maybe your pure communist vision is a utopia, maybe the best we can achieve for the foreseeable future is what you call "worker-run capitalism".
By attacking libertarian communism, Subversion knocks away the pillars of support for its version of communism. Applying this pure standard to all other revolts, no workers' uprising has ever been communist. Since no workers revolt was communist, then communism does not exist in the real world and is therefore imaginary.

I challenge you to prove, beyond reasonable doubt, that your communism is realizable, that it is rooted in reality and not just in thought. In other words, prove the scientific basis of your beliefs. If you can't, you are just a secular religious cult.

Larry Gambone

Dear Discussion Bulletin,

I want to make some comments on DB#79 (Sept-Oct 1996). The letter from the Workers Solidarity Movement criticizes anarcho-syndicalism as advocating the creation of "a-political" unions, which by simply "seizing the factories and the land" would cause the "state and all other institutions of the ruling class" to "come toppling down". This is an absurd caricature of the anarcho-syndicalist position. To begin with we anarchists want to see the creation of anti-political unions, not "a-political" ones. In other words, we want revolutionary unions dedicated to overthrowing both the state and the capitalist system in favor of workers' self-management of the entire society. Where we disagree with platformist anarchists like WSM, is that we feel the unions must be under the complete democratic control of the worker membership, not a political minority, whether it is a marxist political party or an anarchist "general union".

Secondly, although some anarcho-syndicalists may optimistically suggest that a general strike will cause the state to collapse without bloodshed, the movement as a whole is not that naive. The state is an institution created by violence, and maintained by violence, and will resort to violence to maintain itself as long as it has armed soldiers ready to carry out its orders and the workers are not able to defend themselves. It is strange that anyone can point to the CNT as an example of anarcho-syndicalists believing in a peaceful seizure of the factories as all that is necessary, when the CNT had a long history of violent suppression by the Spanish State and armed resistance to it, both before and after 1936. What about the 1933 general strike? What about the Asturias uprising? What about the bloody war against the employer pistoleros in the teens and 20's, or the Semana Trágica? Whatever the reason for the CNT joining the government in 1936, it was not because the CNT had thought that taking over the factories would cause the state to just wither up and die.

All anarcho-syndicalists are accused by our detractors of favoring the CNT-FAI entry into the Spanish Republic during the Civil War. The anarcho-syndicalist journal Libertarian Labor Review, with which I am connected, has on several occasions pointed out that entering the government was a big mistake, as well as a violation of anarchist principles. Although the CNT needed the help of the Republicans and Socialists to fight Franco, we feel that it was unnecessary to make all the compromises that they did. It should be pointed out that there was a reformist wing to the CNT, the "Treintistas", which was the driving force behind the decision to join the government (a similar reformist wing was behind the split in the CNT a few years ago). Unfortunately, the FAI and the more revolutionary faction of the CNT was deluded into believing that the war would be won quickly, and that everything else could be put on hold until Franco was defeated. Hindsight has proved them wrong, a hindsight that the WSM has a full measure of. At any rate, it must be pointed out the "Friends of Durruti" were not a product of any rejection of anarcho-syndicalism, and should not therefore be held up as some precursor of WSM or platformism in Spain.

On another note, I can't see Noam Chomsky as much of a subject for debate. Chomsky is an
anarchist sympathizer, nothing more. He is probably similar in this regard to somebody like George Orwell. Like Orwell, Chomsky is a critic of thought-control and media manipulation. Like Orwell, Chomsky has some nice things to say about anarchists from time to time, and has given our movement publicity. But also, like Orwell, he is not an anarchist activist, and moves in liberal and social-democratic political circles, that have little in common with anarchists. By extending the analogy even further, I would say that like John Zerzan, Noam Chomsky has to be taken by anarchist with a big grain of salt.

Fraternally,  Jeff Stein, Champaign, IL

BORDERS FIRES UNION ORGANIZER

On June 15th the General Manager of the Borders Bookshop in Philadelphia fired Miriam Fried, an IWW organizer, for questioning a check cashing policy ignored by most workers and managers in the store. She had received two glowing reviews during her employment at the store. Management had described her as a role model for other book sellers. We view her firing as a transparent attempt to break the IWW’s organizing drive at Borders in the wake of a narrow defeat in a March 27th NLRB election. Miriam Fried was one of the most visible and spirited union supporters, and has continued her efforts to build a union for Borders workers. 72 hours after the firing the policy regarding management check approval was discarded. But Miriam is still without a job.

Borders President Richard Flanigan describes Borders as “A place where they (employees) can freely express their views.” Miriam was fired for expressing her views. She was told by Philadelphia store manager Dave Stewart: “You have no decision making power and no responsibility for decisions. That’s what makes you a bookseller.”

Not surprisingly, Borders workers across the country have approached the IWW and other unions about organizing for better conditions. In Philadelphia Borders management responded with captive meetings, misinformation, intimidation, hiring a notorious union-busting law firm, and now by firing a union supporter. Borders can afford to pay its workers a living wage, but it would rather fire those workers brave enough to stand up for their rights.

Please help Borders workers by telling management you won’t patronize their stores until they reinstate Miriam Fried and respect workers’ rights. Call Borders at 1-800-644-7733, (locally 913-1977) or write them at 311 Maynard St, Ann Arbor MI 48104.

An Injury to One is an Injury to All!

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labor donated
A MESSAGE TO BORDERS FROM NOAM CHOMSKY

To whom it may concern:

I am writing in connection with the firing of Miriam Fried from Center City Borders bookstore. The information available indicates that she was fired on an unsustainable pretext, and that the real reasons had to do with her organizing activities for the IWW. Needless to say, that would be entirely inappropriate and unacceptable. I hope that you will look into the matter, and act without delay to restore Ms. Fried’s rights and to protect the right to organize generally.

Sincerely yours,
Noam Chomsky

WHAT’S RIGHT WITH BIG GOVERNMENT

by Robert S. Hertz
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Picture if you will a 70-year man, living in Sun City, Arizona. He went to a public high school, then attended college on the GI bill. After getting his first job in a defense industry, he obtained a VA mortgage for $1 down and 3% interest. After retirement, he sold his house for ten times what he paid for it, and put part of the profits into a federally-insured S & L. He now receives Medicare for the Plan B premium of $46 a month, which covers about 10% of the actual cost; and he also receives Social Security, which in just a few years will have refunded all his contributions plus 8% growth on the money.

But this hypothetical individual is now voting Republican, or voted for Perot, because he’s convinced that we have too much “big government.” Considering that he’s been subsidized by big government for sixty years, does he really know what he’s saying? I don’t think so, and here’s why:

Reason No.1.....Very few people really know what’s in the federal budget.

Based on talk shows and opinion polls, you’d think our two largest expenditures were AFDC and foreign aid. The actual budget numbers read like this:

Social Security & SSI: $327 billion
Medicare and Medicaid: $224 billion
Federal pensions: $59 billion
Veterans benefits: $36 billion
Unemployment Comp: $35 billion
Food Stamps: $34 billion
AFDC: $27 billion
Housing: $21 billion
All other welfare, including General Assistance: $14 billion
Defense: $291 billion
All other cabinet dept's: $76 billion
Interest on the debt: $246 billion

Most federal monies do not go to foreign despots, bureaucrats, or welfare queens, but to other, more older, American citizens, many of whom are not poor now, and have not been poor for a long time. Taxpayers may think they are subsidizing indolent criminals, but most spending actually goes to their own parents and/or their own neighbors. Phil Gramm is talking nonsense when he pictures a government that only makes families poorer; the people who get government checks have families, too.

Direct expenditures to the poor are debated to the last penny, while much larger programs for the middle class go unchallenged. The complaint is often heard that "We threw $5 trillion at poverty in the 60's and 70's, and it didn't work," but that is simply inaccurate. Most of the money we "threw" went to the elderly, and it DID work, as poverty amongst them fell from 35% to 12%. The money we "threw" at food stamps DID reduce hunger, by all available measures.

The most expensive poverty program of all is Medicaid, and over 60% of that spending goes to the elderly, too. Even among immigrants, the largest portion of welfare dollars goes to older refugees. The sheer fact of getting a government check has not caused crime, corruption and divorce amongst senior citizens. American seniors live in a welfare state that Sweden would not be ashamed of, with national health insurance and essentially a guaranteed income that is adjusted for inflation, yet they vote as though Milton Friedman were running for President.

Reason No. 2: The Federal government is blamed for problems which it did not cause, and which it is actually helping, albeit clumsily, to solve.

a. The government did not cause black poverty, in the North or the South, but federal laws and federal employment have been instrumental in enlarging the black middle class.
   (In fact, labor statistics would suggest that the Army, the post office, HEW, auto, steel, rubber and refining companies virtually created the black middle class.)

Over 6 million blacks migrated from the South to northern cities in the last 50 years, one of the largest such movements in human history. (Far larger, incidentally, than the Irish migration of the 1800's, which was fairly violent itself, and larger than any immigration faced by Germany or Japan.) The average income of all blacks has still improved quite rapidly, and by the standards of world history America has nothing to be ashamed of (except, perhaps, of the Southern racism and cruelty that caused this migration in the first place.)
Given these enormous numbers, it is not surprising that some black poverty has persisted. Many conservatives believe that the answer is a new version of tough love, where dropping out and poor work habits and sexual irresponsibility are not tolerated, and they have a point, but Newt & Co. should remember that:

1) the black family was hardly a Norman Rockwell theme park before 1965. Illegitimacy and desertion have been a problem since slavery, and will continue to be a problem until black men earn more money. In order to see more traditional families, we have to let men be breadwinners with steady jobs. Unemployment for men is a social disaster; however, no one outside the Black Muslims, the Mormon Church, and George Gilder seems to appreciate this.

2) many school districts have shortchanged black children, and some still do, and local control is part of the reason. "State's rights" in the South used to mean opposition to free textbooks for blacks, so that federal standards for schools (if they are high standards) and some type of federal funding are still desirable;

3) the greatest enemy of black self-improvement is of course crime, which comes more from weak government — weak on drugs, weak on gun control, weak and/or indifferent on police protection — than from any state generosity. Crime is not caused by single mothers, it is caused by unpunished criminals taking over neighborhoods. To push back the street culture that is destroying black ghettos would require something on the order of martial law, strict censorship, and detention camps for up to 2 million gang members, all of which are federal in scope. Taking away welfare might mean more crime, not less.

b) The federal government did not cause old people to be sick, but the number of seniors who are denied health care or are bankrupted by health care has plummeted since the introduction of Medicare in 1965.

c) The government did not cause air pollution or water pollution or littering, but many parts of America are cleaner today than 20 years ago, and it would not have happened without government. EPA and OSHA certainly have their moments of bureaucratic idiocy, but industries like meat-packing would be even more hazardous without them.

d) In terms of federal regulation and supervision, the government is actually less involved with our lives than it used to be in the key areas of banking, transportation, agriculture, and foreign trade. Small businesses have many complaints about regulations, but truthfully, much of what government supervises in America is watched even more closely in foreign countries by labor unions. By European standards, American businesses are extremely unregulated when it comes to hiring, firing, overtime, and plant shutdowns.

e) Not everyone who deals with government is a victim; there are millions and millions of net beneficiaries. Between the people it employs, the goods it buys, and the checks it sends out, the federal government has enlarged the middle class. Government has also enabled families to stay in remote and rural locations, by providing many thousands of good jobs in schools, post offices, prisons, and army bases, and by supporting the farm economy. Does this cost tax money? Of course! But the social benefits are massive also.
Reason no. 3....Americans distinguish between "good welfare" and "bad welfare".

Social Security is considered good welfare, because the bulk of it goes to people who have worked and stayed married all their lives. The same is true of Medicare. Farm subsidies are good welfare, because they are at least designed to go to people who work very, very hard. Even the S & L bailout was less hated than AFDC, because it went to people who saved money.

Americans are not opposed to big government, if it is defending small-town values. The Republican party appeals to what Germans call "Gemeinschaft"..... the mythical organic community, where people lived in stable families and worked hard and were sober and chaste. Whether this nostalgic vision is achievable, or even accurate, does not reduce its political potency. How many people know that one-third of the children in colonial American were born out of wedlock, that alcoholism and violence were worse in 19th-century New York, or in pre-Civil War Texas, than they are today, that more children were in poverty in 1960 than in 1990, despite much lower divorce rates?

Going back to the 19th century, it was the Republican party that demanded tariffs, public debt, Indian wars, and free land under the Homestead Act. The price support system for selected crops is actually a minimum wage, and is considered good sound Republican farm policy (though if Jesse Jackson proposed it for janitors, it would be called wild-eyed socialism). How many remember that by 1939, unemployment was still almost 20%, and it was only cured by World War II? Defense spending has always had a patriotic aura, which enabled conservatives to ignore the fact that a government program was creating prosperity.

As a nation we idolize Rambo and the Lone Ranger, rather than the space program and similar examples of teamwork and state support. Americans throughout the middle class, especially homeowners, veterans, and retirees, sometimes over-estimate what they have accomplished on their own. Phil Gramm himself was raised on a veteran's pension and attended land-grant universities. Without the strong influence of federal labor laws, (including the Wagner Act and labor concessions during World War II), our middle class might be much smaller and more precarious. Many of today's Republicans were lifted to prosperity by the New Deal and Democratic programs, but memories are short and of course, the Republicans have capitalized on moral issues. Many voters feel that gay rights, black street culture, and abortion are greater threats to America than anything a Republican could devise; and this has discredited Democrats so badly that many voters will not listen to liberalism's legitimate claims.

Still, the next time you hear a critique of big government, you might ask the speaker to consider what John Rawls called "the original position". His idea was to ask, "What set of social arrangements would each of us choose if we did not know who in the world we would become?" In other words, if tomorrow morning we woke up in Harlem, what would we expect the government to do for us, and what would we expect to have to do for ourselves? It is a useful, and sometimes humbling, exercise. Contrary to conservative folk wisdom, we might find that a "big government" which protected us against criminals, protected us against medical catastrophe, and truly educated our children would not be such an awful thing after all. There are worse things in life than paying taxes.
Dear Editor:

Thank you for the space you have devoted recently to the debate around David Stratman’s book, *We CAN Change the World: the Real Meaning of Everyday Life*. I would like to contribute a few of my own comments—not a review, but some of the reasons why I personally found the book so convincing and inspiring.

For a long time now I have wondered how leftists can be so pessimistic about ordinary working people in this country. This pessimism is found in most of the American left. It is noticeable at times even in the otherwise excellent *New Unionist*, a publication with which many readers of this Discussion Bulletin are probably familiar.

Most leftists and “progressives” are prone to accept what the media and the capitalist ideologues tell us: that American workers are too comfortable, with all of the material benefits the system provides them (home, cars, vacations, etc.) They are passive consumers, mindless, and just plain alienated. To boot, most Americans are racists, sexists, or religious fundamentalists, in this view.

Your typical American left-liberal progressive will concede that maybe some day ordinary people can rule society, *maybe*, and govern themselves, *maybe*, without capitalists or bosses, but only after things get real bad, and then only following a long period of education (“they’ll need to be educated”). Stratman’s answer: ordinary people can rule society. Not a thousand years from now, but *tomorrow*.

Stratman’s book thrilled me because it sees history as the result of class struggle, not of inherent and inexorable economic trends that play themselves out more or less independently of human agency. But by class struggle Stratman does not mean the struggle over the economic surplus or the means of production, primarily, but between the values and world visions of working people—in all epochs—and the values of their oppressors.

Murray Bookchin once ridiculed the American left’s infatuation with national liberation movements abroad as *Third World voyeurism*. Stratman locates the intellectual origin of this regrettable tendency in the New Left’s inclination to write off ordinary people—ordinary *American* working people, that is. Workers in imperialist countries benefit from colonialism and Third World oppression and therefore will not oppose it. They are no longer the historic agent for social change, according to this kind of thinking.

The street people, the unemployed, people on welfare, the disenfranchised, the victims, Blacks, Hispanics, poor people in general—so the thinking goes—yes, we need to reach out to them. They will give us a hearing. But the working majority in this country—forget it, they won’t listen. That’s why radical social change cannot possibly come from the U.S. It will come from countries like El Salvador or Nicaragua, according to this tendency.

Stratman counters these notions with a new, positive view of history. Working people are not a passive mass, motivated primarily by material interests, with an historic evolution determined almost exclusively by the growth of productive capabilities.
Most people, according to Stratman, are engaged in their own little struggles against capitalism on a daily basis, obliged to assert their humanity against the individualism and competitiveness of the capitalist system. What they manage to keep in their lives in the way of solidarity, cooperation, and mutual aid, whether among friends or in the family, or in the workplace, runs counter to the logic and the daily requirements and constraints of the capitalist system.

This does not mean people are immune from capitalist indoctrination, Stratman concedes. We are bombarded every day by scientific information management that tells us there’s no other way, that all experiments to change capitalism have failed, and that in any case nobody shares our sentiments and inclinations. But still we strive, all working people, each in our own individual way, to achieve meaning in our lives, in spite of the daily propaganda and the exigencies of capitalism.

People are usually not conscious of this, but when they are suddenly swept up by a big strike or a movement, says Stratman, then the real meaning of this everyday resistance to capitalism tends to come right up to the surface. One finds workers fighting tenaciously for their self-respect and for their dignity long beyond the point where there is any hope left that they will achieve their economic demands.

Stratman’s highly optimistic message is that ordinary working people already have the answers: they have their values of solidarity, cooperation, and equality. People’s values lead to consciousness as they struggle on a daily basis to implement those values in opposition to class society. They already know what society should be like. They just need to understand that that’s how society could be.

Revolution is possible and necessary not, as orthodox Marxists are fond of saying, because capitalism will destroy itself inevitably as a result of the falling rate of profit or some other inherent tendency. Neither will capitalism be overturned because economic crises will cause American workers to wake up and become revolutionaries. Revolution, though not inevitable, will come because capitalism runs contrary to human nature and human values of cooperation, solidarity and equality.

When people’s understanding of what human society should be coincides with their consciousness of what it can be, says Stratman, that will be the moment when they take matters into their own hands. From the bottom up, collectively, people will act to radically reshape the economy, and all of society, to fit their vision of what the world should be.

John Cabral
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Critique of David Stratman's *We CAN Change the World* by Ron Elbert, 77 page unpublished manuscript; copies available for $3.50 from the World Socialist Party, P.O. Box 440247, Boston, MA 02144

David Stratman's book has drawn the ultimate tribute, a booklet size critical examination by a competent reader. Writing from the Marxist, non-market perspective of the world socialism, Ron Elbert has produced a meticulous commentary on key passages he has selected. Elbert reveals his familiarity with the works of Marx and Engels as well as the ability to write clearly and coherently. Unfortunately it is much too long for the DB or for any other periodical, even in installments. He promises to produce a condensed version for an upcoming issue of the *World Socialist Review*, the journal of the World Socialist Party, U.S. If all goes well, the DB will also publish that version. In the meantime he has agreed to make copies of the *Critique* available to interested readers--see details above. Instead of a real review the DB reproduces below Elbert's introduction in which he describes his plan for the critique along with his three-paragraph conclusion.

INTRODUCTION. The "critique" that follows is actually the larger half of two separate--but closely interrelated--readings. The second half consists of excerpts from and commentaries on Thomas S. Kuhn's seminal essay on the historiography of science, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, written at the turn of the sixties. I undertook the latter critique in view of the author's evident reliance on that book for his use of the paradigm concept, and I should point out that a lot of my remarks on Stratman's treatment of it here originated in those (also very extensive) references; I plan to distribute those as soon as I possibly can. (They actually give a much more rounded--and even a more sympathetic--picture than do the notes below.)

These references, secondly, started out as a point-for-point running commentary that built toward a general argument. While I have rearranged them in a more logical order to correspond with the outlines of that argument, they remain in their crude form. The next step will be to combine both the Stratman and Kuhn references into an overarching review that I plan to publish in the *World Socialist Review* in the near future. In the meantime, my critique is divided into six sections:

- Socialism, democracy, revolution and consciousness
- Historical materialism (I): Marx's view of people
- Historical materialism (II): analysis of people's social relations
- Marxism-Leninism
- Reformism
- Capitalism as a system of social control
- Class struggle

For the sake of avoiding confusion, I have italicized all excerpts from *We CAN Change*
the World and boldfaced all excerpts from the writings of Marx or Engels. The end of a comment is marked by an omega character (Ω).

CONCLUSION. We CAN Change the World is very obviously a mixed bag: in its broad sweep it celebrates the passing of the Leninist nightmare and moves to reset the "theory of revolution" back on its interrupted course—very much in keeping with the spirit of the times, and a very hopeful sign of things to come. On the other hand, its simplistic acceptance of standard media stereotypes ("Marxist societies," definitions of terms like socialism and communism) gives it its relatively unstructured approach overtones of uncertainty that could very easily prove its own worst enemy. Oddly enough, while Stratman identifies "socialism" with "communism" as an operational unity based on the same historical materialism, world socialists equate the two as used by Marx and Engels, independently of any "expropriation" type of Lenin, whose closest approximation to Marxist methodology was a masterful ability to play with phrases.

Anarchists would probably enjoy its Marx-bashing, although I think Communist Party organizations, their offshoots and remnants, as well as Trotskyists and DSAers would tend to let themselves be skewered by his polemic and simply dismiss him as another maverick. In general, he presents a loosely organized case for breaking with what he believes is Marx's view of people, redefining the axes of analysis on the basis of working-class attitudes and values. This is his single most valuable insight, but it comes nowhere near undermining, as he imagines, the established position of historical materialism: this, over a century and a half after Marx introduced it, now bids fair to become the initial paradigm (after Thomas Kuhn) in the different fields of social science, marking the beginnings of its maturity. Historical materialism's influence has never been so great—even if, in many cases, this only amounts to a functional inference, over the dead bodies of its sworn enemies.

By the same token, establishing this initial paradigm will involve the planet's entire population in an act of democratic revolution, since the laboratory of social science is precisely people's social (including economic) relations with each other. Their ideas about the world—and each other—can only be placed on a scientific basis by liberating human thought and behavior from the senseless constraints of capitalism. The real danger proponents of revolutionary democracy will have to face, if they proceed along the lines of Stratman's book, is that they may wind up punching themselves in the nose by either (a) "learning from the people" in such an overeager manner as to slide by degrees into an accommodationist reformism and become just another radical leftist sect; or (b) falling into a "Leninian" trap of telling the people what is good for them and ending up looking just like Uncle Vladimir.

—Ron Elbert, World Socialist Party (US)
Knowledge is mostly potential

We Can Change the World: the Real Meaning of Everyday Life.
by David G. Stratman,
New Democracy Books £7

From a socialist point of view, this book has much to commend it. However, it does have a few features which make us less happy. First the positive points.

David Stratman's main thesis is a critical opposition to both capitalism and Communism (the system he sees as having operated in the USSR) and their replacement by what he calls revolutionary democracy. In Part I he seeks to show the links between class struggle and people's everyday lives. He discusses the bussing in Boston of black children into white neighbourhoods, the British miners' strike of 1984-5, a meat packers' strike, and working-class opposition to an elite educational programme. The common theme he sees running through these episodes is that "class struggle is a struggle over different conceptions of what it means to be human".

In Part II Stratman back his claim that "the history of the past two decades is driven not by competition among rival business economies, but by a struggle between the world elite and most people over the future of human society". One chapter is devoted to "revolutionary" activity in the USSR. The author's general conclusion is that "the problem of capitalists is not each other; their problem is their inability to subdue the working population. Capitalism is in crisis because it cannot win the class war".

Part III is intended to show that "Communism" has been consistently counter-revolutionary and that trade unions function as instruments of capitalist control. In a chapter on the current US political scene Stratman attacks "the left" for not really believing in the possibility of revolution and hence restricting themselves to aiming at a reformed capitalism as the best possible system.

Finally, Part IV discusses the nature of the revolutionary movement, and the rôle of the revolutionary party which follows from "a new model of social change and a new view of people". Socialists would not dispute his contention that "the rôle of a revolutionary party is not to bring to the working class a consciousness from outside, but to uncover and bring together the fragments of consciousness that are already there, rooted in workers' experience and their values and social relations".

Stratman writes well and with conviction. He says many things with which we agree. However, here are some differences and disagreements.

We recognise that Stratman and his associates are living in a country where, perhaps even more than in Britain, "communism" is insistently and deeply identified with what went on in the USSR and elsewhere, and even "socialism" is grossly distorted. But do we get over this problem by calling our object the attainment of "revolutionary democracy"? Stratman admits that both "democracy" and "revolution" have been distorted in meaning, but he doesn't make a convincing case that a doubly distorted label for the kind of world we are working for is any better than a singly distorted one.

His major failure to recognise the positive theoretical insights to be drawn from Marxist thinking is made worse by his unsustainable claim that "Leninism is a consistent development of the internal logic of Marxism, adapting it for practical use... The Soviet Union and other Communist societies represent not a betrayal of Marxism but its fulfilment." There are also some worryingly approving comments on the Cultural Revolution in Mao's China.

Stratman talks about a "revolutionary party", yet he is very vague about what a revolutionary democratic world will actually be like, other than that it won't be capitalism. Will it be a world in which the means of wealth production and distribution will be commonly owned and democratically controlled? Will it be a world in which there
are no nation states, no armies and police forces, no buying and selling, no money! In the absence of a solid and widely understood basis for fundamental change, and democratic action to achieve that change, some form of capitalism will surely go on.

Stratman believes that "people collectively know enough now to crush capitalism and to create a new world". If they do know enough, what's stopping them? The answer must be that the knowledge is mostly potential, and that it needs to be converted into actual knowledge and then appropriate revolutionary action.

(From the September 1996 issue of the Socialist Standard, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN, England.)

(from p. 2)

The academic left with the state in the form of its institutions of higher learning has involved their willingness to rationalize acceptance of the career advantages that they can reap. Economic arguments can be very persuasive when the wellbeing of one's family is at stake.

Although Jeff Stein's letter is largely a defense of anarcho-syndicalism against the article by Workers Solidarity Movement in DB79, he enters the Chomsky discussion by arguing that Chomsky is an anarchist sympathizer, not really an anarchist. I would guess that is reasonably close to reality, assuming that sympathizers are under no compulsion to act in accordance with their basic beliefs. The IWW sent the next item, a poster with news of the Borders boycott on one side and on the other further evidence of Chomsky's inherent decency. The next article wouldn't have been published ordinarily, but it illustrates so well the thinking that I believe forms the views Chomsky expressed in the article from the Progressive that began this discussion of Chomsky as anarchist, and it also contains some statistics that may be useful to readers.

John Cabral's letter supports David Stratman and New Democracy (ND) while my "review" of Ron Elbert's 77-page polemic--actually a brief comment plus the intro and conclusion of his manuscript--examines it more critically. Also critical although not hostile is the next item, the review from Socialist Standard. It seems to me that aside from Stratman's hostility to Marxism, which antagonizes his most likely supporters--except the anarchists--among libertarian, non-market socialist, is the need for New Democracy to describe at least in our line, the main features of the new democracy it envisions as well as the steps needed to reach it. "Fake Democracy" is the most recent flyer ND has produced; it was included in their most recent mailing which is available to DB readers--see under "Notes, Announcements...."

The De Leonist Society of Canada responds to the publication in D75 of Einstein's essay and the SLP leaflet it prompted. A. Hewitsson, a WSP supporter, comments on the U.S. health plan, and next are a couple of posters dealing with this election. The Rivas election poster comes to us from The Poor, the Bad, and the Angry: A Magazine for Power-Hungry Proletarians; the M. Wuerker cartoon was delivered by the July/August issue of Z Magazine's. As usual we end with some "Notes, Announcements and Short Reviews."

BULLETIN MATTERS

Finances

(to p. 27)
FAKE DEMOCRACY
by Dave Stratman

It's easy to dismiss the electoral process as "fake democracy"—which it certainly is. But the process plays a role in American society that is too important to ignore.

CAMPAIGNS AS JOB INTERVIEWS

A few years ago I went to a house-party for a candidate for Boston City Council. It was a week before the primary, and the candidate, seeking our support, said to us, "The Archbishop and the Vault [the most powerful bankers and businessmen in Boston] are closely watching the primary. If I do really well, I can get their support for the general election in November."

This was a revealing comment. For politicians the electoral process is a "job interview" before their potential employers. As the Boston candidate's remark revealed, however, the potential "employers" are not the voting public but powerful people behind the scenes.

The electoral process is both a smoke-screen and a testing ground. It is devised to hide the real power-holders behind the illusion of democracy. The monied elite pump generous amounts of wealth into both parties, to make sure there's a good show. The media and politicians focus the public eye on misleading issues, while they restrict the range of debate, so that ideas which challenge capitalism or reveal the real powers in society never surface. "Democracy" is reduced to pulling a lever every four years.

At the same time, the electoral process serves to test and identify and develop the politicians who can most effectively represent the interests of the real powerholders. The corporate leaders and financiers stay out of sight while they closely observe the qualities of the candidate. Does he or she have the rhetoric that can deceive and control large numbers of people? Can he divide people effectively? Confuse them? Is he greedy and ambitious and vain enough to be completely reliable?

The winner of the presidential election puts together an administration to run the government, much as a person hired by a corporate Board of Directors to be Chief Executive Officer (CEO) puts together his team to run the company. The CEO is given considerable leeway to administer the corporation and accomplish the goals of the Board in his own way.

Clinton has earned four more years from the Board of Directors. He has accomplished feats in office that George Bush (or Bob Dole) could not. After promising to oppose NAFTA, Clinton pushed it through. After promising to expand jobs programs, Clinton instead decided to "reinvent government" and added 250,000 government workers to the unemployment rolls. After promising national health care reform, Clinton cleared the way for an unprecedented and catastrophic takeover of health care by corporations and insurance companies. After promising welfare reform, Clinton delivered the most brutal attack on poor women and children in 60 years. No Republican could have accomplished so much for so few.

PLAYING A ROLE

Most people understand that politicians lie and don't deliver on promises that would benefit working people. What is less well-known is that the politicians are playing a role, as surely as if they were actors in a TV soap opera.

The role of the Republicans is to push the business agenda openly. The role of the Democrats is to push the public discussion as much as possible in the direction of business, while disarming critics of the corporate system. In all the debate over controlling the deficit, for example, not once did Clinton reveal that the deficit was designed by Reagan to dismantle the Great Society. Instead he narrowed the deficit debate to the question, "How many years should it take to balance the budget?"

As more people understand the sham nature of the electoral process, fewer partic-
ipate. Fake democracy, however, still has poisonous effects. In 1980 Ronald Reagan received barely 51% of the votes in an election in which only 50% of the eligible voters cast a ballot. And yet, though he had the support of a mere 26% of the electorate, media and politicians alike claimed that Reagan had a “popular mandate” to carry out his vicious policies.

The illusion of popular approval bestowed by fake democracy can convince people that politicians who in fact represent only the interests and outlook of a small elite really do represent the voice of ordinary people. The effect of this is devastating. It can make people feel that they are all alone in opposing the policies of a “democratically-elected” politician, and that change is impossible.

WHAT ABOUT A "THIRD" PARTY?

There have been numerous attempts in the last few years to break out of the two party system: the New Party, the Green Party, Ross Perot’s Reform Party, and others. At a convention in Cleveland this June, about 1200 delegates representing several labor unions and other organizations founded a Labor Party.

The strategy of forming alternative parties, however, including a Labor Party, is a very bad one:

*The problem we face is not simply that the Democratic Party represents the monted interests rather than working people. The problem is that the electoral process itself is a spectacle put on to create the illusion of democracy and hide the real wielders of power. Creating a “third party” or a “labor party” legitimizes the process and strengthens the illusion. It encourages people to accept as a serious means of social change a process that is designed precisely to prevent change.

*At a time when the greatest need is to break free of capitalist institutions to build an authentic working class movement, alternative parties channel the energy of the rank-and-file back into the structure of power controlled by capital and its agents.

The Labor Party in particular will depend for electoral success on many of the very leaders and institutions which continue to betray the working class in struggles such as the Caterpillar strike and the Staley lockout and the day-to-day life of unions.

*The Labor Party makes no claim to be anti-capitalist. As it tries to succeed at the electoral game, the Labor Party will very likely try to silence any voices in its ranks which may openly oppose capitalism.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Our real power to change the world lies in the fact that most people share the dream of a better world. The only way to realize this enormous potential power is by openly declaring our goals for a new world, so that we may build a movement to achieve one.

We in New Democracy believe that the best strategy is to build a movement of working people for democratic revolution. This movement should openly challenge capitalist goals, values, and power with the goals and values and power of working people. It should aim to overthrow capitalism and reshape all of society on principles of solidarity, equality, and democracy.

In every workplace and community there are already struggles in which people are resisting capitalism in some way. We should relate the specific issues in these struggles to the larger conflict in society between the capitalist class and the working class, and pursue the struggles in ways that strengthen the understanding and confidence of everyone involved that we can change the world.

Take the Detroit newspaper strike, for example. The best way for the strikers to win their contractual demands and also to win on the larger issues which underlie the strike is openly to build a revolutionary working class movement.

We recommend that the strikers “go...to auto plants and machine shops and hospitals and offices and shopping malls....armed with literature which explains the goals of their strike and the goals of a working class movement. They should call on other workers to help build a general strike...in Detroit and spreading as far as possible.” This general strike should aim at building the revolutionary movement, as well as at the immediate goals of the strikers. Such an effort would begin the era of democratic revolution—an era that will shake the world.
Dear Frank:

We were much impressed by the Einstein essay, "Why Socialism?" which you reprinted in DB75. This, together with your concurrent reprinting of the Socialist Labor Party's open letter response to Einstein, impels us to point up a fundamental difference between the SLP's concept of socialist democracy and our own concept.

The lead-in to the subject is a grave concern, eloquently expressed by Einstein thus: "How is it possible, in view of the far-reaching centralization of political and economic power, to prevent bureaucracy from becoming all-powerful and overweening? How can the rights of the individual be protected and therewith a democratic counterweight to the power of bureaucracy be assured?"

The essence of the SLP position is reflected in Stephen Emery's response, as contained in the following quotes:

"The questions referred to indicate sincere and penetrating thought. However, they also indicate that you, Dr. Einstein, have not escaped being infected by one of the most vicious of the many fallacies regarding Socialism in circulation today; the erroneous notion that the governing agency of Socialist society will be political in character--i.e., a State; and the corollary notion that control of Socialist industry will be vested in a bureaucracy...

"To seek to realize Socialism through the instrumentality of the existing machinery of government, to seek to adapt the present political mechanism to the requirements of Socialist society by even the most radical reforms conceivable--must fatedly result in a totalitarian 'planned economy.' Events in Stalin's Russia (as well as elsewhere) speak volumes on this head.

"Why is this so? Why cannot the State be bent to Socialist purposes? For the fundamental reason that the political form of government was not designed to serve as the instrument of the popular will. On the contrary, the origin of the political State traces to the desire and the need of a rising oligarchy to destroy the ancient influence of the people in communal affairs. And down through the centuries...the political State has, by a process of adaptation, continued unfailingly to perform its essential function, that of being the organized power through which the majority has been oppressed and a minority's self-interest imposed as the social law....

"There remains, however, the larger question still unanswered: What is to be the structure of government under Socialism?

"This problem was solved...by the American Socialist, Daniel De Leon, who formulated the ground plan for an industrial representative government, an economic administration democratically constituted by all those engaged in the industries and vocations on which our collective welfare depends....

"In lieu of extensive treatment [here] I earnestly recommend that you study De Leon's works, and with them the scholarly 'Ancient Society' of Lewis Henry Morgan, a masterwork which laid the basis for modern anthropology...."
The essence of our own position is centered in our thesis or position paper, DEMOCRACY: POLITICAL AND INDUSTRIAL, a paper first launched in September of 1992 for consideration by the Advisory Committee of the then De Leonist Society of U.S. (and subsequently published in both the first issue of The De Leonist Review, and in Discussion Bulletin 70). The paper recognizes, and we believe solves, what has been a serious problem in socialist democracy—a problem that had been officially recognized as such by the Socialist Labor Party some thirty years postdating Emery’s reply to Einstein (Minutes of the SLP’s 1978 NEC Session). The problem was a growing shortfall of democracy in the SLP program generated by ongoing demographic change! The solution sprang from our eventual realization that while State government implies political government, contrary to SLP belief political government is NOT NECESSARILY State government! Quoting as follows:

"The central problem was how to reconcile the introduction of the industrial vote with annulment of the political vote; how to harmonize De Leon’s definition of Socialism in which control will be exercised by the people (the people as a whole!) with the existing concept of industrial democracy wherein control is not exercised by the people as a whole; that is, how to equate self-government of the producers [i.e., the Work Force of the day] with self-government of the people!

"We could not do so.

"The question that then propelled itself forward was the question of sovereignty; WHO in a true socialist democracy must needs be sovereign, (must decide and control economic and social policy)—the people as a whole or merely those actively engaged in the work force?

"The answer to the question was of course immediately self-evident—the people must be sovereign.

"Not immediately evident, however, were the means by which the people could become truly self-governing! The answer was there, awaiting recognition, but certain erroneous habits of thought blocked our perception—namely (1) Political democracy is synonymous with the political State, therefore (2) The Central Directing Authority of a Socialist Republic must needs be the All-Industry Congress of the projected industrial democracy.

"Finally, after reflection, the way opened up. Political democracy is not synonymous with the political State; on the contrary, it will attain its fullest expression through abolition of the State. Socialist democracy is not industrial democracy instead of political democracy but a harmonious combination of both....

"The form of socialist industrial representation and administration, based on industrial constituencies, is our heritage from the genius of De Leon; the form of political democracy, based on geographic constituencies, is another priceless bequest tho from a more distant past....in short, the political form as well as the industrial form being at hand, it now seems clear to us that the revolutionary act that will lock out the capitalist from the workplace and shatter his control of Congress and Parliament must not thereby merely clear the industrial field for inauguration of indus-
trial democracy, but also the political field for inauguration of political democracy."

Now we would of course have to agree that our pivotal "discovery" cannot stand without a solid foundation to support it. After all, it challenges the long-held SLF position so vividly expressed by Emery in his open letter to Einstein, to wit: "...one of the most vicious of the many fallacies regarding Socialism in circulation today [is] the erroneous notion that the governing agency of Socialist society will be political in character--i.e., a State..." No question but that the SLF identified (and continues to identify) political government and State government as invariably one and the same! But again, on what grounds did we contest this position? Not on idle speculation but on the very "masterwork" that Emery recommended to Einstein, viz., "the scholarly 'Ancient Society' of Lewis Henry Morgan." In fact, Morgan's research indicates that a political form of government did not, as Emery implies, come into existence as a ruling class instrument (the Marxian State) but as a democratic organ in a "free state" serving the whole citizenry! Quoting Morgan:

"Gleisthenes...placed the Athenian political system upon the foundation on which it remained to the close of the independent existence of the commonwealth."

"Omitting minor particulars, we find the instructive and remarkable fact that the township, as first instituted, possessed all the powers of local self-government.... All registered citizens were free, and equal in their rights and privileges, with the exception of equal eligibility to the higher offices. Such was the new unit of organization in Athenian political society, at once a model for a free state, and a marvel of wisdom and knowledge. The Athenians commenced with a democratic organization at the point where every person must commence who desires to create a free state, and place the control of the government in the hands of its citizens."

The way is now clear for a deeper look into the question: How is it possible to prevent bureaucracy from becoming all-powerful and overweening? How can a democratic counterweight to the power of bureaucracy be assured?

The question arises from the questioner's awareness that the State can become a breeding ground for bureaucratic despotism. Starting from this premise, the replies proffered by the Socialist Labor Party and the Canadian De Leonist Society are markedly different. The SLF program replaces State government with a representative government based on industrial constituencies--and thereby concludes that the problem of socialist democracy is solved. We disagree. We point out that industrial democracy without political democracy not only disfranchises all in society except the Work Force of the day but we ask, in our turn, what assurance can be given that a socialist industrial administration will prove impervious to anti-social ambition?

The De Leonist Society, too, calls for abolition of the State and the institution of industrial democracy. However, unlike the SLF we neither hold that political democracy is inseparable from the State nor do we
postulate Socialist Industrial Administration as THE government of a Socialist Republic. On the contrary, both the political and industrial "structures" of government being at hand, we hold that social control of these structures rather than the structures per se must be the overriding concern of socialist democracy. Accordingly, in sharp contrast to the SLP program, our program retains the political form, vests ultimate control of both the political and industrial forms in the people (in the body politic) and so doing empowers society rather than the Work Force alone to determine both social and industrial policy. What is more, given dual branches of government (political and industrial) it should now become apparent that checks against bureaucratic usurpation are thereby greatly enhanced. Now not only can a Socialist Industrial Executive serve as a "democratic counterweight" to possible corruption of the political branch, but the latter can if necessary perform the same service for the industrial branch.

We must nevertheless conclude with an admission and an admonition. The point is, that while we have advanced social control of both the political and industrial government forms as the best protection against corruption of socialist democracy, what guarantee is there that such control, once won by society, might not one day slip out of society's grasp? Obviously there can be no such guarantee, only the counsel that survival of a Socialist Republic must ultimately hinge upon vigilance, eternal social vigilance!

Sincerely,

DE LEONIST SOCIETY OF CANADA

(from p. 21)

Again the DB held its own financially, actually posting a modest profit, and again we can thank the generosity of contributors for our economic health. With the annual bulk mailing fee of $85 due January 1 and Post Office box rent of $40 due February 1, we have a place for our surplus. So far—perhaps because of the crossed fingers here at PO Box 1564—the copier has remained in good health.

Contributions: John Ahrens $2.50; Ron Girkens $6; Steve Hoyle $20; Joseph Tupper $30; Kevin Glover $20; Harry Sitonen $7; Charles Diggs $2; Louis Prisco $7; Lynn Olson $4; Jeff Stein $5; Monroe Prussack $7. Total $110.50. Thank you, comrades.

BALANCE August 24, 1996 $77.22

RECEIPTS
Contributions $110.50
Subs and sales 89.00
total $199.50

DISBURSEMENTS
Postage $120.00
Printing 44.35
Bank Charges 4.00
Postage due 7.00
total $175.35

(to p. 31)
A satirical look at our health plan.

I'm not sure whether there is a diabolical plan afoot or whether capitalist economics is producing HMOs as a normal turn of events...in any case, when the average 'run-of-the-mill' worker retires from a life-time of work, he automatically becomes a retiree and joins a long list of folks who are unfit for work...he becomes a consumer of profits...he becomes a partaker rather than a producer as he once was...he becomes a burden to society in general and a liability to employers world-wide...he definitely takes his place in the debit column.

The employers, in their infinite wisdom, have devised a system of health care that is far more efficient than heretofore and will eliminate the gouging of Medicare by many doctors and at the same time reduce the health care that Medicare formerly provided...if the plan succeeds without opposition we may see a rapid reduction of funds in the form of Social Security payments. There is a great incentive for this plan to work...retirees, Beware...

We have briefly touched on one of the most pressing problems that have faced the employer in some time...as you can understand he must keep his employees in reasonably good health but those who are unfit for work are useless to him and the sooner they 'turn up their toes' the better...perhaps we can expect even more efficiency in the future...with the aid of digital technology the retirees could possibly be programmed to expire at a predetermined age and by-pass the HMOs altogether...can you imagine the savings that could be made by the Social Security Administration!....the govt. could reduce the deficit in no time...I'm sure this scheme would catch on rather quickly, world-wide....what a tremendous saving!!

Another on-going problem the employer must deal with is the never ending chore of spending whatever it takes to elect his politicians into office...he must have control of the democratic process...all it takes is 'gullible followers' that can be hood-winked into voting for 'leaders'...have you heard this before?..."where there are leaders there are led, where there are led there are bled"...need I say more?...is it not time to shed the stigma of being a follower?...we are many, they are few...use the ballot wisely...vote for Socialism...a world without money, wages, govt's, politicians, countries or borders...a world-wide system of free access to all we produce...

Send for free literature to,

S.P.G.B. or W.S.P.(US)
52 Clapham High Street, 405 Beacon St.
London, SW4 7UN. Boston, MA. 02116
U.K. 02116-7

440 3117
Send a Leftist cop to the Hall of Justice!

GLORIA LA RIVA FOR SHERIFF OF SAN FRANCISCO!

Gloria Estela La Riva is a fighting militant of the Workers World Party. You've probably seen us in action at major demonstrations - providing leadership by having the loudest loudspeaker system, and aiding the Tac Squad in weeding out undisciplined protesters. From San Francisco to Washington D.C., in big city demonstrations coast-to-coast, the Workers World Party has taken responsibility as unpaid police auxiliaries. We've been there and we know how to get the job done!

Extremists and provocateurs claim that socialism means rule by social workers, but we say it means rule by police and social workers!

Throughout the 20th century, all progressive peoples have fought for compulsory labor for the poor - JOBS ARE A RIGHT!

Capitalists call for police for the few - we call for police for the many!

Our leftist politics are those of Ceausescu and Castro, Kim-II-Sung and Lavrenti Beria - A pantheon of glory! We supported the massacre in Tienamen Square and the repression of social unrest in Poland in 1981.

Throughout the twentieth century, people like Gloria have used socialist and populist jargon to extend the domination of wage labor everywhere. We can do the same here!

It's time to recognize the historically progressive social function of the left - We know how to police the working class.

Give Gloria a shot at the job! Police Before Profits!

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| Supervisor Terence Hallman, Supervisor Carole Migden, Reverend Cecil Williams, Glide Memorial Church and senior advisor to the San Francisco Police Department, Officers for Justice, Communist Party of Albania (exiled), Freedom Socialist Party, Democratic Socialists of America, CP-USA, PC-USA, Social Workers Party, Reese Erlich, League of Counter-revolutionary Struggle, Gorbachev Clubs USA, Communist Party (Kautskyist Leninist), Knights Templar, Paul Dumpster, Amalgamated Toxic Waste Workers USA, AFL-CIO Local 666, Working (really hard) Assets |
It's Time for One Dollar, One Vote!

It's Time We Declared America a Monocracy

No more silly pretense about the government representing the people! In our new Monocracy, government will simply and directly represent money!

Imagine: streamlined elections in which we just vote our bank balances! A.T.M.s will replace those old polling booths — very third wave!

It's time to put the wisdom of the freemarket in the ballot box! In America you're entitled to all the free speech you can afford... why not all the votes you can afford — people who don't have money don't deserve to vote — people with lots of money deserve lots of votes.

Money's always talked. It's time it got the vote!!
NOTES, ANNOUNCEMENTS, AND SHORT REVIEWS

**Good Work at Westy: The Socialist Labor Party on the Northern Coalfields 1901-1922** by Tony Laffan. 72 pages, wraps; $8.00 (surface postage paid) from Toiler Editions, PO Box 235, Singleton, NSW 2330, Australia.

Under consideration in Laffan’s 72 page pamphlet is the classic period of anti-reformist organization in the English speaking sector of the international socialist movement. It saw the rising influence of the U.S. Socialist Labor Party’s *Daily* and *Weekly People* as well as that of their editor, Daniel De Leon. The two decades, roughly 1900 to 1920 saw the organization of a revolutionary political party to oppose the reformist social democracy, a revolutionary union, the IWW, to oppose capitalist unions, as well as WW I and the betrayal of socialist internationalism by the social democrats and the Russian Revolution and the establishment of Leninist hegemony over the revolutionary socialist movement which canceled the DeLeonist influence. All this played out in Australia where revolutionary socialists broke with the social democratic labories as early as the 1890s and were influenced by the American SLP’s *People* soon afterward. By the first decade Australian revolutionary socialists had changed the name of their party to Socialist Labor and had begun publishing the Sydney People as well as their own pamphlets and leaflets. The author has given us a micro historical view of the activity of non-market, anti-reformist socialists in one working class locality in Australia. “Westy” (West Walsend), a coal mining town about a hundred miles north of Sydney, was the site of a strong branch of the Socialist Labor Party (SLP) of Australia as well as the scene of some major battles in the coal miners strikes in the region.

Besides photos of major characters in the book and scenes in West Walsend, Laffan has included two appendices, the vote of SLP candidates during this period, and the SLP’s application for membership, which lists the requirements expected of SLP members. There are also four pages of references, a three-page index, and a two-page bibliography which makes it clear that no history of the Australian SLP has ever been published. Indeed, despite its local focus, Laffan has apparently given us the closest thing to such a history presently available. Perhaps he has such a history in the works, one that will clear up some of the questions raised by the constraints on length imposed by self publication. Among these are the relationship of the SLP to the OBU (One Big Union), which I associate with Canadian industrial unionists.

**New Democracy** now has a non-profit mailing permit and is sending out regular mailings to persons on their mailing list. Their most recent mailing included the flyer “Fake Democracy” [reproduced in this issue], a flyer on the Detroit newspaper strike and the “new” AFL/CIO, correspondence from recipients of ND literature, a review by John Cabral of the movie “Land and Freedom,” and other material. To get your name on the mailing list write to New Democracy, PO Box 427, Boston MA 02130 or phone 617-524-0973. Dave Stratman’s book, *We CAN Change the World* is still available to DB readers for $3 per copy.

**1997 IWW Labor History Calendar,** “A revolutionary labor calendar with 14 striking photographs of labor struggles from around the world, and hundreds of notes marking important dates in our struggle against wage slavery...” $8.50 each postpaid, $5.25 each for five or more to same address— from IWW Calendar, POB 391724, Cambridge MA 02139.
Midwest Radical Scholars & Activists Conference, Friday November 15 and Saturday November 16 at Roosevelt University, Chicago, Illinois. The topic this year is “The New Class Warfare: Prospects for the Right, the Liberals and the Left.” I hope readers will look up the non-market socialist literature table. For information about the conference write to Networking for Democracy, 3411 W. Diversey, #1, Chicago IL 60647 or phone 312-384-8827.

The September-November 1996 issue of Internationalism, the publication of the International Communist Current in the U.S. contains a full tabloid-page article entitled “Reply to Discussion Bulletin: A Call for Responsible Political Debate.” For background DB readers must go back a year ago to an article “DeLeonism and the Democratic Myth” by Internationalism in DB73 discussing an article in the June 1994 New Unionist on the election of Mandela and the advantage to the majority of the South African working class that could result from this extension of capitalist electoral democracy. Internationalism saw the NU article as a “supporting” Mandela’s election and exemplifying what it regards as De Leon’s departure from Marxism on the matter of capitalist electoral democracy. I answered Internationalism in a four and a half page article “DeLeonism and Capitalist Democracy” published in DB74. The “Reply…” was written in response to that article. Unfortunately Internationalism forgot an important aspect of “responsible debate”: that both sides should have a chance to be heard. Unlike the DB, which published Internationalism’s article as well as its address, my article does not appear with their “Reply…” nor does the DB address, perhaps because Internationalism doesn’t answer the article at all. Instead it attacks me for “slanders aimed at the ICC” and for “attempts to discredit the ICC by labeling us Leninist and by implication Stalinist.” Readers interested in this exchange can obtain Internationalism from PO Box 288, New York 10018 for $1 and copies of the relevant material from the DB73 and 74 exchange for $1 from PO Box 1564.

The Poor, the Bad, and the Angry: A Magazine for Power-Hungry Proletarians #2 is the second issue of a journal in which the authors “...write about our actions in the class war to encourage others to engage in similar actions.” It situates itself in the political sector inhabited by Echanges, Aufstehen, Collective Action Notes, Wildcat, Subversion and Kamunist Kranti. The delightful Rivas poster in this issue is typical of its approach. To obtain PB&A send $3 (cash only) in an envelope addressed as follows: PO Box 3305, Oakland, CA 94609.

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