

Chomsky and Anarchism: Reply

January 27, 2011

Letter from: George Fish

SETH FARBER'S RESPONSE to my "Chomsky, Anarchism, and Socialism" (Summer 2010 *New Politics*) places a very heavy burden on what is a book review, not a major study of Chomsky's political thought. As such, I believe it does exactly what a book review should: give a basic outline of the book being reviewed, assess its strengths and weaknesses, and indicate to the reader why the reviewer recommends or does not recommend reading the book. In this I believe I have indeed done justice to Chomsky's anarchist thought as it relates to the book under review, *Chomsky on Anarchism*, and why there is merit to this book; most specifically as it relates to the interests of the generally socialist, not anarchist, readers of *New Politics*. I note that *Chomsky on Anarchism* not only contributes to the ongoing discussion in left circles of socialist-anarchist alliances (which I discuss in n.1), but is also highly useful to forging such alliances, and establishing common political ground between socialists and anarchists. If Farber thinks somehow that the manner in which I raise the above is incomplete, then he is criticizing me for what I did not write — a full-scale investigation of Chomsky's anarchism, not simply a book review of *Chomsky on Anarchism*.

As for Farber's assertion that I did not clarify what is "unorthodox" in Chomsky's anarchism, that's clearly untrue from a reading of the review itself. But before pointing out what I indicated precisely is "unorthodox" about Chomsky's anarchism, let me say that a writer is under no obligation to re-invent the wheel every time fingers are put to the computer keyboard. Certainly I can properly assume that the average reader of *New Politics* is already conversant in the general premises of socialism and anarchism, so that I do not need to re-explain what is already known.

Specifically, what I relate as "unorthodox" in Chomsky's anarchism are his notion that while all authority needs to be questioned, not all authority is illegitimate; democracy is not simply a "tyranny of the majority"; under certain circumstances, especially where Third World countries are under the onslaught of neoliberalism, it is necessary to strengthen state power in order to protect the people's rights; and Chomsky's own assertion that he himself votes, and supports left electoral parties such as the Greens.

Farber will certainly find no place in my review where I refer to myself as a "Marxist-Leninist." A Marxist, yes, as I indicated, but a Marxist who rejects several basic tenets of Leninism, and is quite critical of the legacy not just of Stalin, but of Lenin and Trotsky themselves. Had Farber bothered to read the long n. 3 of my review, he would've realized this. But where I find that Chomsky oversimplifies is his basic premise, shared with all other anarchists, that Leninism itself is responsible *in toto* for all that went wrong with the Bolshevik Revolution, both from the beginning and in its Stalinist aftermath. That simply is to tar Bolshevism with far too broad a brush, and again, I said as much in n. 3. But what I did say on Chomsky's fundamental critique of Leninism is that it "is not without elements of merit and political insight for revolutionary socialists to seriously consider."

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