

Communism Vs Anarchism

An Interview with Kevin “Rashid” Johnson (Originally posted at <http://rashidmod.com/?p=639>)

Anthony Rayson: As you know, I am a serious Anarchist, as you are a dedicated Communist. At this point, we are on the same side of the barricades. The fundamental difference of course, is the Communists want to take state power, as the “leader” of the oppressed, and the Anarchists have as their goal the elimination of oppressive state power altogether. As international capitalism, led by the voraciously murderous U.S., gets more and more desperate to retain its empire, the world’s people will suffer through more hellacious wars, occupations, enslavements, lack of life’s basics such as food, water, health, safety, etc. People will become more and more politically polarized. Some will be suckered-in as fascist dupes (or outright agents and killers of the criminal state). Others will look for truth, protection, and involvement in revolutionary opposition – Communist, anarchist, New Afrikan, or otherwise.

Anarchists believe that state power is the epitome of evil – the ultimate corrupter. Now let’s assume that through a worldwide effort we are able once-and-for-all to destroy the centuries’ old nightmare of capitalism. Let’s also assume we were also able to stop them from dragging all life on earth down with them.

So, there’s a chance at “Socialism.” Anarchists believe in the equitable distribution along anti-authoritarian principles. Communists want to assume state power and orchestrate it all from a “Central Committee.” Every other time Communists have attained power, they’ve repressed Anarchists, other revolutionaries, etc. What would be different this time?

Rashid: I think this question offers the opportunity for an important discussion in the ongoing debate between Anarchism and Communism. Also, it exposes a common tendency I’ve observed of critics of Communism, namely that their critiques are often pretty inaccurate and just repeat charges based on superficial stereotypes. In fact, when one pushes Anarchists to the wall, and compels them to give concrete answers to concrete problems, instead of abstract criticisms, they begin to sound a lot like genuine Communists. Otherwise, they don’t go deeply and thoroughly into solving the real problems that arise in struggling to defeat an oppressive class system such as capitalism. But many of their criticisms are valid and worthy of consideration.

You begin with placing emphasis on the fact that Anarchists want an equitable distribution of social wealth and to abolish the state, but, by implication, you suggest Communists do not. Even the “mainstream” recognizes these implications to be untrue. Take for example this definition of “Communism” given by the *Merriam Webster Collegiate Encyclopedia* (2000):

“Communism: Political theory advocating community ownership of all property, the benefits of which are to be shared by all according to the needs of each. The theory was principally the work of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. Their *Communist Manifesto* (1848) further specified a ‘dictatorship of the proletariat,’ a transitional stage Marx called socialism; communism was the final stage of which not only class division but even the organized state – seen by Marx as

inevitably an instrument of oppression – would be transcended. That distinction was lost and ‘communism’ began to apply to a specific party rather than a final goal...”

This summary of the nature and goals of Communism sounds pretty similar to what you state are the goals of Anarchism: equitable distribution of property and abolition of the state. Indeed, both Communists and Anarchists agree that the state is an “instrument of oppression.” But it seems, just as the mainstream reference book points out, you’ve embraced the erroneous view that Communism is a “specific party” rather than a “final goal.” Can it be that the imperialists have a more accurate and fair understanding of what Communism is than the modern Anarchists?

However, prominent Anarchists of the past have conceded that the goals of Anarchism and Communism are much the same. Indeed, Alexander Berkman in his *ABC of Anarchism* (1929) saw the goals of Communism and Anarchism as synonymous. In fact, he used the term “Anarchism” to describe Communism:

“The greatest teachers of socialism – Karl Marx and Frederick Engels – had taught that anarchism would come from socialism. They said that we must first have socialism [the dictatorship of the proletariat], but that after socialism there will be anarchism, and that it would be a freer and more beautiful condition of society to live in than socialism.”

So the “fundamental difference” between Anarchism and Communism is *not* in their views on equal distribution of wealth and abolishing the state. The fundamental difference is on *how* to go about achieving these ends and their class basis. Anarchism promotes an *idealistic* approach rooted in a petty-bourgeois class perspective, while Marxist Communism promotes a materialist and dialectical approach rooted in a working class perspective.

Now Communists and most Anarchists agree that armed struggle will be required to compel and wrest control of property relations from the bourgeoisie (or capitalist ruling class) and to overthrow and smash the state it rules through – because the essence of state power is a specialized armed force of men (and now also wimyn). The capitalists aren’t going to relinquish their power and wealth without a fight – never have, never will!

So essentially, it is a question of what to do after the bourgeois class is overthrown, and when do we lay down our arms? Because that is what *state power* is all about. So by resorting to arms in the first place, the Anarchists *are* taking part in *the exercise of dictatorial power* and the use of *authoritarian* means to repress the bourgeois class. Here’s how Frederick Engels made the point:

“The anti-authoritarians demand that the political state be abolished at one stroke, even before the social relations that gave birth to it have been destroyed. They demand that the first act of the social revolution shall be the abolition of authority.

“Have these gentlemen ever seen a revolution? A revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing there is; it is an act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part by means of rifles, bayonets and cannon, all of which are highly authoritarian means. And the victorious party must maintain its rule by means of the terror which its arms inspire in the reactionaries. Would the Paris Commune have lasted more than a day if it had not used the

authority of the armed people against the bourgeoisie? Cannot we, on the contrary, blame it for having made too little use of that authority? Therefore one of two things; either the anti-authoritarians don't know what they are talking about, in which case they are creating nothing but confusion, or they do know, and in that case they are betraying the cause of the proletariat. In either case, they serve only reaction."

So we see an inherent contradiction in Anarchism that renders it fundamentally either pro- or counter-revolutionary, namely, whether it supports or opposes the armed struggle of the proletariat and consolidation of people's power. In either event, overthrowing the state power of the bourgeoisie won't in one stroke abolish the bourgeois class and its aspirations to regain state power. The Communists' goal is to smash the state power of the capitalists *right away*; to do away with their army, their police, their courts and their prisons. *But*, we cannot get rid of the bourgeois class so easily, nor the petty-bourgeoisie, nor the bourgeoisified workers and lumpen-proletarians.

If we were to put down our guns at this point, – if we did not maintain our own army, police, courts and prisons – these elements would turn right around and rig up a new bourgeois state. They would rig up a bourgeois state and use it to repress us – everyone connected with the revolution and the masses. This is exactly what happened in the Mexican Revolution when Emiliano Zapata listened to his Amerikan Anarchist advisors and gave up state power after victory and went home. The new reconstituted bourgeois state quickly hunted him down and murdered him like a dog – and Mexico has been under a bourgeois dictatorship and U.S. imperialist domination ever since.

This is also what happened in the *very* short-lived Spanish Revolution, the revolution the Anarchists claim to have been successful at. The bourgeoisie overthrew it overnight and immediately reasserted their rule. This occurred because the Anarchists opposed establishing a workers' state and the Communists who were trying to create one. The Fascists reaped the victory and ruled Spain with an iron fist for decades after.

In *Homage to Catalonia*, George Orwell's memoir of the Spanish Revolution, he gave an account of how instantly and completely bourgeois rule reasserted itself in Barcelona only months after it had been overthrown by the working class. In the beginning of his memoir, Orwell gives a glorious account of Barcelona when the popular revolution was still underway in latter 1936. He then contrasts how only months later the revolutionary successes had vanished without a trace. Here is his description of conditions in April 1937:

"Everyone who has made two visits, at intervals of months, to Barcelona during the war has remarked upon the extraordinary changes that took place in it. And curiously enough, whether they went there first in August and again in January, or, like myself, first in December and again in April, the thing they said was always the same: that the revolutionary atmosphere had vanished. No doubt to anyone who had been there in August, when the blood was scarcely dry in the streets and the militia was quartered in the small hotels, Barcelona in December would have seemed bourgeois, to me, fresh from England, it was liker to a worker's city than anything I had conceived possible. Now the tide had rolled back. Once again it was an ordinary city, a little pinched and chipped by war, but with no outward sign of working-class predominance.... The

officers of the new Popular Army, a type that had scarcely existed when I left Barcelona, swarmed in surprising numbers... [wearing] an elegant khaki uniform with a tight waist, like a British officer's uniform, only a little more so. I do not suppose that more than one in twenty of them had yet been to the front, but all of them had an automatic pistol strapped to their belts, we, at the front, could not get pistols for love or money...

“A deep change had come over the town. There were two facts that were the keynote of all else. One was that the people – the civil population – had lost much of their interest in the war; the other was that the normal division of society into rich and poor, upper class and lower class, was reasserting itself.”

Communists simply recognize the state for what it is – namely an instrument by which one class asserts its power over another. Unless the proletariat overthrows the bourgeois capitalist state and replaces it with a proletarian socialist state, the bourgeoisie will maintain its dominance. Only under working class state rule can massive Cultural Revolutions take place to purge bourgeois thinking and practices, which, once this process succeeds, will bring about the egalitarian stateless social order. So our object is to create a proletarian state with our own special bodies of armed wimyn and men, our own courts and our own prisons for those who commit crimes against the people. Under this system the armed workers will defend the revolution and use their power to transform all of society to eliminate classes and lay the basis for advancing to the kind of society both the Anarchists and Communists want.

It is at this point, *and not a moment sooner*, that we will lay down our guns and move forward to advance the stateless society, because only then will it be *possible* to do so. Any other approach is just pipe-dreaming idealism. We believe in the principle of from each according to their ability and to each according to their needs – that is, doing away with the whole concept of commodity exchange. In short: abolishing money. But there has to be a whole lot of cultural revolution and transforming of society to make that possible. There has to be basic changes in how production and distribution of goods are organized. People have to be willing to participate in socialized production without being forced to by economic necessity, and we have to produce enough of everything for everybody to be able to get what they need to survive and be happy.

Another factor is that you've got to do it in such a way as to preserve and protect the natural environment so future generations will be able to get what they need and be able to keep society running. This calls for revolution in the cultural, social and political realms and also in science, production and ecology. This all has to be planned, organized and done on a global scale as well as regionally and locally. A stateless society must by definition be a global society without borders. And we can't have one section of humanity hogging all the world's resources, like we do now, which is just what would happen if we didn't start with a worldwide dictatorship of the proletariat.

As to who will get repressed along the way, well, that's up to the proletariat. Isn't it? We advocate a step by step, planned transformation of society rather than anarchy. We believe the masses can be won to understand the logic of this and support it. In this way, repression can be kept to a minimum and democratic methods of persuasion will be the primary focus and means of the struggle. But counter-revolutionaries will be repressed at every stage, and the proletariat

will decide how and when and who – no matter what the counter-revolutionaries call themselves – through the organs of people’s power and the people’s courts.

One thing we’ve learned from past revolutions is that the greatest threat of capitalist restoration will come from within the upper ranks of the Party and state from those who betray the class stand of the proletariat and assume that of the bourgeoisie. As socialism is a stage of transition from capitalism to communism, it is relatively easy for those at the top to rig up a state capitalist system under the cover of building socialism and take the country back down the capitalist road. This is what happened in the Soviet Union after Stalin, when Khrushchev came to power, and in People’s China after Mao died in 1976.

The lesson here is for the proletariat to keep a firm grip on its Party and to exercise all round dictatorship over the bourgeoisie – and especially on those in leadership positions in the Party and the workers’ state. Cultural Revolution is the weapon to prevent capitalist restoration and to keep moving society down the path of socialist revolution.

The working class must arm itself with a thorough understanding of the *Science of Revolution* and increasingly take power into its own hands directly to revolutionize every aspect of society. When we say “All Power to the People!,” we mean that literally in an ever deepening and all-round way. So long as classes exist, it is the proletariat who will be exploited and oppressed, and it is the proletariat who must play the leading role in waging class struggle to overcome it. The class struggle leads inevitably to the elimination of classes and communist society. But at every step it will be a struggle – against idealism and those who would sidetrack and derail the class struggle to preserve and enhance their own privileged positions and keep on exploiting the masses of people.

There is no way to avoid this protracted struggle, and certainly not by disarming the proletariat as soon as the old bourgeois order is overthrown. It certainly can’t be done by substituting anarchy for a rational strategy. Only the petty-bourgeoisie – anxious to replace the old bourgeoisie – would intentionally propose such a short-sighted “solution.” The true solution is for the petty-bourgeoisie – *including those who become upwardly mobile through the revolution* – to be won to a position of *committing class suicide* and aligning themselves with the oppressed and exploited masses struggling to end all oppression and exploitation by revolutionizing every aspect of society – in a planned, organized and disciplined way through the application of the *mass line* and the illumination of the *Science of Revolution*.

Do we see the contradiction between ourselves and the Anarchists as inherently antagonistic? No, we do not. We believe that it can be resolved non-antagonistically so long as it remains a contradiction within the people. We do not want to repeat the Stalinist errors of treating contradictions within the people the same as contradictions with the enemy.

For many people, as it was with me, Anarchism is a starting place, because it is fundamentally an *emotional* response to the evils of capitalist-imperialism. This was the case with Mao Tse-tung, who self-identified as an Anarchist before becoming a Communist. Throughout his political career he was accused of still being an anarchist by both dogmatists and revisionists alike. Three times he was kicked off the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), but he

maintained that it was a Marxist-Leninist principle to go against the tide and stand firm for revolution. At the Lushan Conference, he threatened to quit his post as Chairman and go back to the mountains and start a new CCP and People's Liberation Army if it was necessary.

As Chairman of the CCP Mao was not the Head of State and was constantly at odds with the state bureaucracy. During the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, he suspended the democratic centralism of the Party so that lower bodies were no longer subordinated to higher bodies and he issued the call to the youth, workers and peasants to "bombard the Headquarters!"

Does this mean he was not really a Communist? No, it does not! It means that as a Communist his first and foremost loyalty was to proletarian socialist revolution and the class struggle. "A revolution is not a dinner party," he said, "it is the violent overthrow of one class by another." "By any means necessary!" was the way Malcolm X put it.

Many of the criticisms of the Communist movement made by Anarchists or others are right on. But they are also usually non-dialectical and one-sided. Often they obscure the criticisms of the proletariat who look at the same problems differently. Mao was a firm believer that Communists should openly reveal, criticize and struggle against their "dark side."

We can't do without a proletarian state any more than we can do without smashing the bourgeois state. Does this mean we love violence or love authority? No! It means we are serious enough about ending wage slavery, and all of the evils of capitalist-imperialism, that we are willing to be scientific about revolution and go beyond an emotional response.

As a New Afrikan and a condemned slave of the state, I can't afford not to be serious and scientific about the liberation of my people – and all oppressed people everywhere – through socialist revolution. Our fates are intertwined. Only by carrying the class struggle all the way to Communism will there be a bright future for our posterity. For us, there is only slavery or liberation, so we can have no hesitation when it comes to applying Brother Malcolm's dictum to our struggle. Step by step, stage by stage, we shall advance the revolution through all the twists and turns, setbacks and victories until full liberation is won.

As I said, we can't do without a proletarian state, but there is a tendency for it to turn into its opposite – and we are wise to it. Power does corrupt, and the inevitable continuation of old class relations – particularly in the lower stages of socialism – and the deeply-rooted ideology of the past will nurture the tendency for capitalist restoration. Commodity relations – even under socialist state control – do regenerate capitalism and bourgeois ideas. Non-proletarian class forces – who are necessary to keep the economy and social services going – are going to demand concessions, such as higher wages, personal power and retention of bourgeois rights.

Technicians and professionals in all spheres will defend their privileged position in society and resist the encroachment of the common people in their *business*. And only when the proletariat can do without them can we move from the lower to the higher stage of socialism. The struggle between "Reds" and "Experts" was a major aspect of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China. We all know that after Mao's death, the "Reds" were defeated and that the "Experts"

now live “high on the hog” in China and the so-called “Communist Party” has become a fascist party of “Experts” and capitalists.

Mao predicted that this outcome was “very possible,” but he also predicted that their rule would be short-lived and that they “would know no peace,” and we see that today there is a resurgence of Maoism in China and internationally, and we see that China’s masses are waging sharp class struggle against their exploitation and oppression.

We also see a resurgence of Anarchism today, and particularly among the youth of the imperialist countries. I *should* say among the *white petty-bourgeois* youth and students, because there is a class and race basis to this resurgence. Anarchy extols the supremacy of the individual and individual freedom, which is also a way to separate oneself from identifying with one’s *skin* and *class privileges*. One can say, “I am not responsible for racist and class oppression or for global imperialism. I reject all that. I am an Anarchist.” But that neither threatens the ruling class nor helps the oppressed class. It’s merely a lifestyle choice, a fashion. You can dress up for it, dye your hair black and get a “bad” haircut, eat vegan food, ride a bicycle, pierce your nose, nipples or tongue, dumpster dive and make the scene.

Then there are the Anarchist careerists, which brings to mind admissions made and the example set by Greg Wells, an Anarchist journalist out of Richmond, Virginia, with whom I was corresponding a few years back. At a time when I was facing a high-point of repression from prison officials, I proposed a few ideas to him about consolidating discrete activists into a practical support network for prisoner activists and other oppressed individuals. He replied that my proposals definitely needed doing, and that “as much as” he’d “love to” help he was “simply too comfortable to do any such thing.” He added, “I’ll tell you something that other Anarchists won’t admit, but it’s true. You know that most Anarchists are comfortable white middle-class and aren’t going to do much more than a little protesting and critical writing.”

Greg is a prolific writer who has made a career out of railing at capitalism, racial and gender oppression, U.S. imperialist wars, etc., yet he concedes his unwillingness to jeopardize his status and comfort level by allying himself in practice with the oppressed. As he confessed, this is typical of most of the milieu of petty bourgeois Anarchists. Indeed, I would say it is typical of most radical intellectuals on the Amerikan Left. As I stated in a previous unpublished article:

“99% of the radicals are divorced from the masses. They attend rallies and protests but lock their doors when driving through oppressed neighborhoods. They don’t know how to do mass work, how to agitate and organize. They think it’s their opinions that matter, that they fulfill their political duty by expressing them. Whereas, they need to create a presence on the street, amongst the oppressed workers and nationalities, and time is of the essence.”

Of course, there are some Anarchists like ABC, whom we consider to be comrades, who actually do play a role in assisting the struggle in the prisons and are groping with the question of making revolution. We are, as you say, “on the same side of the barricades.” The question is can we build a *higher* level of unity and what would that take? Well, we’ve created the White Panther Organization (WPO) as an arm of the New Afrikan Black Panther Party – Prison Chapter (NABPP-PC), so white comrades can fully unite with us and represent our Party among the

oppressed white people. They do have to accept the democratic-centralism of the Party and its rules of discipline, the same as the Black Panthers. They have to study and apply the Science of Revolution and commit to being all-the-way revolutionaries.

NABPP-PC is not a Communist Party per se. We are revolutionary nationalists and internationalists. Our ideological and political line, “Pantherism,” is illuminated by Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, and we are committed to fighting for proletarian socialist revolution. We see the key alliance in the United Front Against Capitalist-Imperialism to be between the oppressed nations and nationalities and the multi-ethnic, multi-national working class.

For New Afrikans, the solution to our national oppression is socialist revolution. As long as Black people are oppressed *because* we are Black, there needs to be a Black Panther Party to lead the Black Liberation Struggle. We need to stand together as a Nation under the leadership of our proletarian vanguard. To fight most effectively against white racism, we need white comrades to stand with us – as fellow Panthers or as supporters. We also need to stand in solidarity with all other oppressed peoples and have them stand with us. This is the basis of the United Panther Movement. We believe that the Nation of New Afrikans in Amerika must play a vanguard role in this revolution because of our historical oppression and because we are in a position to do so.

We live in the “Belly of the Beast.” We are concentrated in the urban centers of the sole imperialist superpower, and we are infiltrated throughout the oppressor’s military and political-economic infrastructure. We are everywhere, even if only pushing a broom or a mop.

We are also part of the Third World, and we are kindred to all other sons and daughters of Afrikan descent. Everywhere we are oppressed because of our black skin under white world domination. As Mao said:

“The evil system of colonialism and imperialism arose and throve with the enslavement of Negroes and the trade in Negroes, and it will surely come to its end with the complete emancipation of the Black people.”

He said, “The Afro-American struggle is not only a struggle waged by the exploited and oppressed Black people for freedom and emancipation” but that it is a “clarion call” to all the oppressed peoples. This history and this positioning gives us the opportunity to play a vanguard role in the world revolution, not exclusive of others but in dialectical relationship to all people of color and all who suffer oppression. This does not negate the leading role that must be played by the international proletariat as the class of the future, for it is the ideology and worldview of this class that guides our struggle for liberation.

The New Afrikan Nation is primarily a proletarian nation – on the whole, we own nothing and are forced to sell our labor power to survive or otherwise to survive by any means necessary. Even most of our lumpen-proletariat has an on again off again relationship with wage slavery. Our Party must work ceaselessly to ground our cadre and comrades in a thorough-going proletarian class stand and struggle resolutely against lumpen and petty-bourgeois influences and tendencies.

For several decades now the ruling class has been pursuing a strategy of criminalization of the poor and our mass incarceration – particularly of our Black youth – and we must counter this with proletarianizing and revolutionizing our young wimyn and men by teaching “Pantherism” and raising up a generation of revolutionary warriors.

But let me return to your question and your point about Anarchists wanting nothing to do with state power and their accepting nothing short of its instant abolition. Well, *the* foremost modern Anarchist intellectual, Noam Chomsky – affectionately known in Anarchist circles as “Uncle Noam” – is both a proponent of using state power (and *bourgeois state power* at that) to address social ills, and he conceded that Anarchism is not an instantly attainable social order. Were it not for his speaking in support of *bourgeois* state power, instead of promoting *proletarian* state power, one would think Chomsky was a Communist espousing the need for the rational use of state power to transform society. “Uncle Noam” put it like this:

“Well it’s true that the Anarchist vision in just about all its varieties has looked forward to dismantling state power – and I personally share that vision. But right now it runs directly counter to my goals: My immediate goals have been, and now very much are, to defend and even strengthen certain elements of state authority that are now under severe attack. And I don’t think there’s any contradiction there – none at all, really.

“For example, take the so-called ‘welfare state.’ What’s called the ‘welfare state’ is essentially a recognition that every child has a right to have food, and to have health care and so on – and as I’ve been saying, those programs were set up in the nation-state system after a century of very hard struggle, by the labor movement, and the socialist movement, and so on. Well, according to the new spirit of the age, in the case of a fourteen-year-old girl who got raped and had a child, her child has to learn ‘personal responsibility’ by not accepting state welfare handouts, meaning by not having enough to eat. Alright, I don’t agree with that at any level. In fact I think it is grotesque at any level. I think those children should be saved. And in today’s world, *that’s going to involve working through the state system*, it’s not the only case.

“So despite the anarchist ‘vision,’ I think aspects of the state system, like the one that makes sure children eat, have to be defended – in fact, defended very vigorously. And given the accelerated effort that’s being made these days to roll back the victories for justice and human rights which have been won through long and often extremely bitter struggles in the West, in my opinion the immediate goal of even committed anarchists should be to defend some state institutions, while helping to pry them open to more meaningful public participation, and ultimately to dismantle them in a much more free society.

“There are practical problems of tomorrow on which people’s lives very much depend, and while defending these kinds of programs is by no means the ultimate end we should be pursuing, in my view we still have to face the problems that are right on the horizon, and which seriously affect human lives. I don’t think those things can simply be forgotten because they might not fit with some radical slogan that reflects a *deeper vision of a future society*. The deeper vision should be maintained, they’re important – but *dismantling the state system is a goal that is a lot further away*, and you want to deal first with what’s at hand and nearby, I think....

“So I think it’s completely realistic and rational to work within structures to which you are opposed, because by doing so can help to move to a situation where then you can challenge these structures.”

Chomsky’s proposing that radicals work within bourgeois state institutions to address social needs actually conforms to a strategy of absorbing and controlling dissidents and activists within government structures, which was proposed by the U.S. National Security Council in the late 1970s. This reflects how the confused class stand of the petty-bourgeoisie leads to erroneous approaches to opposing imperialist oppression. But, *that* Chomsky recognized the need to use state power along the road to ultimately abolishing the state shows that Communist and Anarchist theory is not so irreconcilable. Anarchists must simply recognize the role of the proletariat as preeminent in the struggle against capitalist-imperialism and the advance to a classless society.

I want to add that we reject the nihilism that is so often associated with both Anarchism and gangsterism. We base ourselves on *Panther Love*. As both Ché Guevara and Mao pointed out, love is the motivation of a true revolutionary. Our love for the people, for liberty and justice, and for the unborn generations for whom we stand ready to sacrifice our lives, is manifested in everything we do and say.

On the question of who should legitimately coordinate the application of state power and lead society in general, again “Uncle Noam” promotes the need and role for a leading structure very similar to our concept of a genuine vanguard party operating with committee structures and democratic centralism. He opposed the ultra-democratic approach to running even a basic community as impossible. Indeed there has never existed a society without some form of leadership. Here again is Chomsky:

“No, I don’t think [a large mass of people could actively participate in all the decisions that need to be made in a complex modern society]. I think you’ve got to delegate some of those responsibilities. But the question is, where does authority ultimately lie? I mean, since the very beginnings of the modern democratic revolutions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it’s always been recognized that people have to be represented – the question is, are we represented by, as they put it, ‘countrymen like ourselves,’ or are we represented by ‘our betters’?”

“For example, suppose this was our community, and we wanted to enter into some kind of agreement with the community down the road – if we were fairly big, we’d have to delegate the right to negotiate things to representatives. But then the question is, who has the power to ultimately authorize those decisions? Well, if it’s a democracy, that power ought to lie not just *formally* in the population, but *actually* in the population – meaning the representatives can be recalled, they’re answerable back to their community, they can be replaced. In fact, there should be as much as possible in the way of constant replacement, so that political participation just becomes a part of everybody’s life.

“But I agree, I don’t think it’s possible to have large masses of people get together to decide every topic – it would be unfeasible and pointless. You’d want to pick committees to look into things and report back, and so on and so forth. But the real question is, where does authority lie.”

Now compare Chomsky's emphasis on the legitimacy of representative committee structures lying in the election and recall by votes of leading members and such organizations being accountable to the masses by full exposure of their activities, with this 1905 Bolshevik summary of democratic centralism:

“Recognizing as indisputable the principle of democratic centralism, the Conference considers the broad implementation of the elective principle necessary, and while granting elected centers full powers in matters of ideological and political leadership, they are at the same time subject to recall, their actions are given broad publicity, and they are strictly accountable for these activities.”

Also, consistent with Chomsky's point that political power should be vested in the common people and not with “our betters,” the struggle which Mao initiated during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution between the “Reds” and the “Experts” was to displace political power from those who by virtue of their technical expertise considered themselves the “betters” of the common laboring people, and to have that power spread broadly amongst the working people.

This is one of the reasons why the petty-bourgeoisie cannot lead all-the-way revolution – or even the struggle to defend the human and democratic civil rights of the oppressed – as their class conditioning has them seeing themselves as the intellectual “betters” of the masses towards whom they have a “superior” attitude. George Jackson demonstrated that you don't have to be middle class or attend a university to become a *revolutionary intellectual* – a “Red” who is also armed with intellectual expertise. Some would say that I demonstrate this myself.

Those of us who have nothing to lose but our chains, who have no reason to hesitate or vacillate and every reason to be serious, dedicated, all-the-way revolutionaries have a responsibility to be in the vanguard and to struggle relentlessly against every form of oppression to build the mass-based revolutionary vanguard party to untie and lead the masses of oppressed people to rise up and end oppression at its source through proletarian socialist revolution and proletarian cultural revolution.

Dare to Struggle, Dare to Win!
All Power to the People!