

ALSO BY NOAM CHOMSKY

*Detering Democracy*

Noam Chomsky

# UNDERSTANDING POWER

The Indispensable Chomsky

EDITED BY

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economic level, which it wasn't (in fact it was probably raising it)—it was because it was taking power out of their hands, and subordinating them to others, and turning them into mindless tools of production. And they didn't want that.

In fact, if you want to do some really interesting reading, one book I would suggest is the first book of labor history that was written—ever, I think. It came out in 1924, and it was just republished in Chicago: it's called *The Industrial Worker*, by Norman Ware, and it's mostly excerpts from the independent labor press in the United States in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>30</sup> See, there was a big independent workers' press in the United States at the time—it was about at the scale of the capitalist press, actually—and it was run by what were called "factory girls," or by craftsmen. And it's extremely interesting to look at.

Right through the nineteenth century, working people in the United States were struggling against the imposition of what they described as "degradation," "oppression," "wage slavery," "taking away our elementary rights," "turning us into tools of production," everything that we now call modern capitalism (which is in fact state-capitalism) they fought against for a full century—and very bitterly, it was an extremely hard struggle. And they were calling for "labor republicanism"—you know, "Let's go back to the days when we were free people." "Labor" just means "people," after all.

And in fact, they also were fighting against the imposition of the mass public education system—and rightly, because they understood exactly what it was: a technique to beat independence out of the heads of farmers and to turn them into docile and obedient factory workers.<sup>31</sup> That's ultimately why public education was instituted in the United States in the first place: to meet the needs of newly-emerging industry. See, part of the process of trying to develop a degraded and obedient labor force was to make the workers stupid and passive—and mass education was one of the ways that was achieved. And of course, there was also a much broader effort to destroy the independent working-class intellectual culture that had developed, which ranged from a huge amount of just outright force, to more subtle techniques like propaganda and public relations campaigns.

And those efforts have been sustained right to this day, in fact. So labor unions have by now been virtually wiped out in the United States, in part by a huge amount of business propaganda, running from cinema to almost everything, and through a lot of other techniques as well. But the whole process took a long time—I'm old enough to remember what the working-class culture was like in the United States: there was still a high level of it when I was growing up in the late 1930s. It took a long time to beat it out of workers' heads and turn them into passive tools; it took a long time to make people accept that this type of exploitation is the only alternative, so they'd better just forget about their rights and say, "Okay, I'm degraded."

So the first thing that has to happen, I think, is we have to recover some of that old understanding. I mean, it all starts with cultural changes. We

have to dismantle all of this stuff culturally: we've got to change people's minds, their spirits, and help them recover what was common understanding in a more civilized period, like a century ago on the shop floors of Lowell. If that kind of understanding could be natural among a huge part of the general population in the nineteenth century, it can be natural again today. And it's something we've really got to work on now.

### The Fraud of Modern Economics

MAN: *Noam, you mentioned Ireland being forced to export food to England during the Irish famine because of the supposed demands of the free market. How exactly did that kind of "free market" economic thinking get instituted as legitimate in the universities and in the popular ideology as a whole over the years—for instance, the work of the Social Darwinists [who claimed that natural selection and "survival of the fittest" determine individual and societal wealth], and of Malthus [early-nineteenth-century economist who argued that poverty was inevitable and population growth should be checked by famine, war, and disease], and others who in various ways blamed the poor for being poor?*

Malthus gets kind of a bad press, actually: he's singled out as the guy who said that people should just be left to starve if they can't support themselves—but really that was pretty much the line of classical economics in general. In fact, Malthus was one of the founders of classical economics, right alongside of guys like David Ricardo.

Malthus's point was basically this: if you don't have independent wealth, and you can't sell your labor on the market at a level at which you can survive, then you have no right being here—go to the workhouse prison or go somewhere else. And in those days, "go somewhere else" meant go to North America, or to Australia, and so on. Now, he wasn't saying it was anyone's *fault* if they were poor and had to remove themselves; he was saying, it's a law of nature that this is the way it has to be.<sup>32</sup> Ricardo in fact said that it was true at the level of "the principle of gravitation"—and of course, to try to interfere with a law of nature like that only makes things worse.<sup>33</sup>

So what both Malthus and Ricardo were arguing, sort of in parallel, was that you only harm the poor by making them believe that they have rights other than what they can win on the market, like a basic right to live, because that kind of right interferes with the market, and with efficiency, and with growth and so on—so ultimately people will just be worse off if you try to recognize them. And as you suggest, those ideas are basically still taught today—I don't think the free-market ideology that's taught in university economics departments right now is very much different. Sure, you have more mathematical formulas and so on today, but really it's pretty much the same story.

MAN: *But how did that thinking get instituted?*

How did it get instituted? As a weapon of class warfare. Actually, the history of this is kind of intriguing—and as far as I know, there's only one book about it: it's by a good economic historian named Rajani Kanth, who was just rewarded for his efforts by being thrown out of the University of Utah. But he goes through it all, and it's very revealing.<sup>34</sup>

You see, during the early stages of the industrial revolution, as England was coming out of a feudal-type society and into what's basically a state-capitalist system, the rising bourgeoisie there had a problem. In a traditional society like the feudal system, people had a certain place, and they had certain rights—in fact, they had what was called at the time a “right to live.” I mean, under feudalism it may have been a *lousy* right, but nevertheless people were assumed to have some natural entitlement for survival. But with the rise of what we call capitalism, that right had to be destroyed: people had to have it knocked out of their heads that they had any automatic “right to live” beyond what they could win for themselves on the labor market. And that was the main point of classical economics.<sup>35</sup>

Remember the context in which all of this was taking place: classical economics developed after a period in which a large part of the English population had been forcibly driven off the land they had been farming for centuries—that was *by force*, it wasn't a pretty picture [i.e. intensive enclosure of communal lands by acts of Parliament occurred between 1750 and 1860]. In fact, very likely one of the main reasons why England led the industrial revolution was just that they had been much more violent in driving people off the land than in other places. For instance, in France a lot of people were able to remain on the land, and therefore they resisted industrialization more.<sup>36</sup>

But even after the rising bourgeoisie in England had driven millions of peasants off the land, there was a period when the population's “right to live” still was preserved by what we would today call “welfare.” There was a set of laws in England which gave people rights, called the “Poor Laws” [initially and most comprehensively codified in 1601]—which essentially kept you alive if you couldn't survive otherwise; they provided sort of a minimum level of subsistence, like subsidies on food and so on. And there was also something called the “Corn Laws” [dating in varying forms from the twelfth century], which gave landlords certain rights beyond those they could get on the market—they raised the price of corn, that sort of thing. And together, these laws were considered among the main impediments to the new rising British industrial class—so therefore they just had to go.

Well, those people needed an ideology to support their effort to knock out of people's heads the idea that they had this basic right to live, and that's what classical economics was about—classical economics said: no one has any right to live, you only have a right to what you can gain for yourself on the labor market. And the founders of classical economics in fact said

they'd developed a “scientific theory” of it, with—as they put it—“the certainty of the principle of gravitation.”

Alright, by the 1830s, political conditions in England had changed enough so that the rising bourgeoisie were able to kill the Poor Laws [they were significantly limited in 1832], and then later they managed to do away with the Corn Laws [in 1846]. And by around 1840 or 1845, they won the elections and took over the government. Then at that point, a very interesting thing happened. They gave up the theory, and Political Economy changed.

It changed for a number of reasons. For one thing, these guys had won, so they didn't need it so much as an ideological weapon anymore. For another, they recognized that they themselves needed a powerful interventionist state to defend industry from the hardships of competition in the open market—as they always *had* in fact. And beyond that, eliminating people's “right to live” was starting to have some negative side-effects. First of all, it was causing riots all over the place: for a long period, the British army was mostly preoccupied with putting down riots across England. Then something even worse happened—the population started to organize: you got the beginnings of an organized labor movement, and later the Chartist movement [an 1838–48 popular campaign for Parliamentary reform], and then a socialist movement developed. And at that point, the elites in England recognized that the game just had to be called off, or else they *really* would be in trouble—so by the time you get to the second half of the nineteenth century, things like John Stuart Mill's *Principles of Political Economy*, which gives kind of a social-democratic line, were becoming the reigning ideology.

See, the “science” happens to be a very flexible one: you can change it to do whatever you feel like, it's that kind of “science.” So by the middle of the nineteenth century, the “science” had changed, and now it turned out that *laissez faire* [the idea that the economy functions best without government interference] was a bad thing after all—and what you got instead were the intellectual foundations for what's called the “welfare state.” And in fact, for a century afterwards, “*laissez faire*” was basically a dirty word—nobody talked about it anymore. And what the “science” now said was that you had better give the population some way of surviving, or else they're going to challenge your right to rule. You can take away their right to live, but then they're going to take away your right to rule—and that's no good, so ways have to be found to accommodate them.

Well, it wasn't until recent years that *laissez-faire* ideology was revived again—and again, it was as a weapon of class warfare. I mean, as far as I can see, the principles of classical economics in effect are still taught: I don't think what's taught in the University of Chicago Economics Department today is all that different, what's called “neo-liberalism” [an economic stance stressing cutbacks in social services, stable currencies, and balanced budgets]. And it doesn't have any more validity than it had in the early nine-

teenth century—in fact, it has even *less*. At least in the early nineteenth century, Ricardo's and Malthus's assumptions had *some* relation to reality. Today those assumptions have *no* relation to reality.

Look: the basic assumption of the classical economists was that labor is highly mobile and capital is relatively immobile—that's required, that's crucial to proving all their nice theorems. That was the reason they could say, "If you can't get enough to survive on the labor market, go someplace else"—because you *could* go someplace else: after the native populations of places like the United States and Australia and Tasmania were exterminated or driven away, then yeah, poor Europeans could go someplace else. So in the early nineteenth century, labor was indeed mobile. And back then, capital was indeed *immobile*—first because "capital" primarily meant land, and you can't move land, and also because to the extent that there was investment, it was very local: like, you didn't have communications systems that allowed for easy transfers of money all around the world, like we do today.

So in the early nineteenth century, the assumption that labor is mobile and capital is immobile was more or less realistic—and on the basis of that assumption, you could try to prove things about comparative advantage and all this stuff you learn in school about Portugal and wine and so on [Ricardo's most famous hypothetical for demonstrating how free trade could be mutually advantageous to participating countries involved England concentrating on selling cloth and Portugal wine].

Incidentally, if you want to know how well those theorems actually work, just compare Portugal and England after a hundred years of trying them out—growing wine versus industrializing as possible modes of development. But let's put that aside . . .

Well, by now the assumptions underpinning these theories are not only *false*—they're the *opposite* of the truth. By now labor is *immobile*, through immigration restrictions and so on, and capital is highly *mobile*, primarily because of technological changes. So none of the results work anymore. But you're still taught them, you're still taught the theories exactly as before—even though the reality today is the exact opposite of what was assumed in the early nineteenth century. I mean, if you look at some of the fancier economists, Paul Krugman and so on, they've got all kinds of little tricks here and there to make the results not quite so grotesquely ridiculous as they'd otherwise be. But fundamentally, it all just is pretty ridiculous.

I mean, if capital is mobile and labor is immobile, there's no reason why mobile capital shouldn't seek *absolute* advantage and play one national workforce against another, go wherever the labor is cheapest and thereby drive *everybody's* standard of living down. In fact, that's exactly what we're seeing in N.A.F.T.A. [the North American Free Trade Agreement] and all these other international trade agreements which are being instituted right now. Nothing in these abstract economic models actually *works* in the real world. It doesn't matter how many footnotes they put in, or how many ways

they tinker around the edges. The whole enterprise is totally rotten at the core: it has no relation to reality anymore—and furthermore, it never did.

## The Real Market

So take a look at one of the things you don't say if you're an economist within one of the ideological institutions, although surely every economist has to know it. Take the fact that there is not a single case on record in history of any country that has developed successfully through adherence to "free market" principles: none. Certainly not the United States. I mean, the United States has always had *extensive* state intervention in the economy, right from the earliest days—we would be exporting fur right now if we were following the principles of comparative advantage.

Look, the reason why the industrial revolution took off in places like Lowell and Lawrence is because of high protectionist tariffs the U.S. government set up to keep out British goods. And the same thing runs right up to today: like, we would not have successful high-tech industry in the United States today if it wasn't for a huge public subsidy to advanced industry, mostly through the Pentagon system and N.A.S.A. and so on—that doesn't have the vaguest relation to a "free market."

In fact, if you want a good illustration, just read today's *New York Times*. There's a story on the business page about how we've got a funny kind of economic recovery going on in the country right now: there's a lot of economic growth, but not many good new jobs—you know, big surprise. And they use one factory as an example, a stove factory that's being set up in Tulsa by the Whirlpool corporation. Well, the last paragraph of the article points out how the "free market" really works: the reason why Whirlpool decided to put the factory in Tulsa instead of, say, in Mexico, is that the taxpayers in Tulsa County are going to pay 25 percent of the corporation's capital costs.<sup>37</sup> Okay, that's how the free market *really* works—in fact, that's how it's *always* worked, from the early days of the industrial revolution right up until this morning, without any known exception.<sup>38</sup>

As a matter of fact, the United States has been the most economically protectionist country in history. We've traditionally had the highest protectionist tariffs in the world, so much so that one leading economic historian in a recent book (published by the University of Chicago Press, no less) describes us as "the mother country and bastion of modern protectionism."<sup>39</sup>

So for example, in the late nineteenth century, when Europe was actually toying around with *laissez faire* for a brief period, American tariffs were five to ten times as high as theirs—and that was the fastest economic growth period in American history.<sup>40</sup>

And it goes on right until the present. The United States developed a steel industry a century ago because it radically violated the rules of the "free market," and it was able to recover its steel industry in the last decade or so

by doing things like restricting imports from abroad, destroying labor unions to drive down wages, and slamming huge tariffs on foreign steel.<sup>41</sup> I mean, the Reaganites always talked enthusiastically about “market forces,” but they refused to allow them to function—and for a very simple reason: if market forces had been allowed to function, the United States would no longer have an automobile industry, or a microchip industry, or computers, or electronics, because they would have just been wiped out by the Japanese. So therefore the Reaganites closed off American markets and poured in huge amounts of public funds. And actually, they were perfectly frank about it to the business community—though of course, not to the public. So when he was Secretary of the Treasury, James Baker proudly proclaimed to a business audience in 1987 that Ronald Reagan “has granted more import relief to U.S. industry than any of his predecessors in more than half a century”—which was far too modest, actually; Reagan probably provided more import relief to industry than all his predecessors combined in that period.<sup>42</sup>

Of course, the “free market” ideology is very *useful*—it’s a weapon against the general population here, because it’s an argument against social spending, and it’s a weapon against poor people abroad, because we can hold it up to them and say “You guys have to follow these rules,” then just go ahead and rob them. But nobody really pays any attention to this stuff when it comes to actual planning—and no one ever has.

So there was just a British study of the hundred leading transnational corporations in the “*Fortune* 500,” and it found that of the hundred, every single one of them had benefited from what’s called “state industrial policy”—that is, from some form of government intervention in the country in which they’re based. And of the hundred, they said at least twenty had been saved from total collapse by state intervention at one point or another. For instance, the Lockheed corporation was going under in the early 1970s, and the Nixon administration just bailed them out with public funds.<sup>43</sup> Okay, so they’re back in business. And now they *stay* in business because the public pays for C-130s [military aircraft], and upgrading F-16s, and the F-22 project, and so on—none of which has anything to do with a “free market” either.

Or take the fact that so many people live in the suburbs and everybody has to drive their own car everywhere. Was that a result of the “free market”? No, it was because the U.S. government carried out a massive social-engineering project in the 1950s to destroy the public transportation system in favor of expanding a highly inefficient system based on cars and airplanes—because that’s what benefits big industry. It started with corporate conspiracies to buy up and eliminate streetcar systems, and then continued with huge public subsidies to build the highway system and encourage an extremely inefficient and environmentally destructive alternative. That’s what led to the suburbanization of the country—so you get huge shopping malls in the suburbs, and devastation in the inner cities.<sup>44</sup>

But these policies were a result of planning—they had nothing to do with the “free market.”

Actually, the most dramatic example of these “market distortions” that I can think of—which I suspect is never even taught in economics courses—concerns the reason why the United States had an industrial revolution in the first place. Remember, the industrial revolution was fueled by textiles, meaning one commodity: cotton. And cotton was cheap, that was crucially important. Well, why was cotton cheap? Was it because of market forces? No. Cotton was cheap because they exterminated the native population here and brought in slaves—that’s why cotton was cheap. Genocide and slavery: try to imagine a more severe market distortion than that.

Other countries who had their own cotton resources also tried to start on industrial revolutions—but they didn’t get very far, because England had more guns, and stopped them by force. Egypt, for example, had its own cotton resources, and started on an industrial revolution at about the same time as the United States did, around 1820—but the British weren’t going to tolerate an economic competitor in the Eastern Mediterranean, so they just stopped it by force. Okay, no industrial revolution in Egypt.<sup>45</sup>

The same thing also happened in Britain’s earliest “experiment” with these ideas, in what was called Bengal, in India. In fact, Bengal was one of the first places colonized in the eighteenth century, and when Robert Clive [British conqueror] first landed there, he described it as a paradise: Dacca, he said, is just like London, and they in fact referred to it as “the Manchester of India.” It was rich and populous, there was high-quality cotton, agriculture, advanced industry, a lot of resources, jute, all sorts of things—it was in fact comparable to England in its manufacturing level, and really looked like it was going to take off. Well, look at it today: Dacca, “the Manchester of India,” is the capital of Bangladesh—the absolute symbol of disaster.<sup>46</sup> And that’s because the British just despoiled the country and destroyed it, by the equivalent of what we would today call “structural adjustment” [i.e. economic policies from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund which expose Third World economies to foreign penetration and control].

In fact, India generally was a real competitor with England: as late as the 1820s, the British were learning advanced techniques of steel-making there, India was building ships for the British navy at the time of the Napoleonic Wars [1803–1815], they had a developed textiles industry, they were producing more iron than all of Europe combined—so the British just proceeded to de-industrialize the country by force and turn it into an impoverished rural society.<sup>47</sup> Was that competition in the “free market”?

And it goes on and on: the United States annexed Texas [in 1845], and one of the main reasons for that was to ensure that the U.S. achieved a monopoly on cotton—which was the oil of the nineteenth century, it was what really fueled the industrial economies. So the American leadership figured that if they could take Texas, which was a major cotton-producing area,

then they would be able to strangle England economically. See, England was the main enemy at that time, they hated England: it was much more powerful militarily than the United States, it kept us from conquering Canada and seizing Cuba the way elites here wanted to—and in fact, the only reason the American colonists had been able to defeat England in the American Revolution in the first place was that the French military had massively intervened in the colonial uprising here to help overthrow British power.<sup>48</sup> So England was the real enemy. And if you read the Jacksonian Democrats, Presidents Polk and Tyler and so on, they were saying: if we can get Texas, we can bring England to our feet and gain mastery of the trade of the world. In fact, the worst charges, paranoid charges, that were leveled against Saddam Hussein before the Gulf War apply precisely to the Jacksonian Democrats: they wanted to monopolize the main resource of the world so they could bring everybody else to their feet.<sup>49</sup>

And exactly the same lessons apply today. Today it's oil that's at the center of the industrial economies. And why is oil cheap? Well, that's what you pay your taxes for: a large part of the Pentagon system exists to make sure that oil prices stay within a certain range—not too low, because Western economies and energy corporations depend on the profits from it, but not too high, because that might interfere with what's called the "efficiency" of international trade [i.e. because transport and other costs of trade rise with the oil price]. Well, trade is only "efficient" because a lot of force and international violence keeps oil prices from going too high, so if you really wanted to measure the "efficiency of trade," you'd have to figure in all of the other costs which *make* it that way, like the costs of the Pentagon for one. And if anyone ever did that, you couldn't possibly say that trade is "efficient." If anybody ever bothered to calculate these things, the efficiency of trade would drop very, very low, and it would in fact prove to be extremely *inefficient*.

I mean, these market distortions are not footnotes—they are absolutely huge phenomena. Nobody ever tries to estimate them, because economics is not a serious field—but people in the business world know about them perfectly well, which is why they've always called upon a powerful state to protect them from market discipline: they don't want market discipline any more than they want democratic control, and they've always blocked it. And the same is true of just about every aspect of any developed economy there is.

## Automation

Well, let's just take one last case of this, an extremely important and revealing one: let's look at automation. I mean, it's standardly claimed these days that the reason why the population is suffering, why people have been losing jobs at a mad rate, real wages have been going down for the last twenty-five years and so on, is due to, as Ricardo said, "laws like the prin-

ciple of gravitation"—inexorable market forces are making it that way, like automation, or the efficiency of international trade. That's the standard argument: these things are inevitable because the market is just imposing them on us.<sup>50</sup> It's all total bullshit. I mentioned one reason why the "efficiency of trade" argument is mostly a fraud, now let's look at automation.

Well, it's true that automation is "efficient"—like, by market principles, automation saves businessmen money and drives workers out of jobs. But it didn't get that way because of the market, not at all: it only got that way through intensive and prolonged funding and development through the state sector—that's market *distortion*. I mean, for thirty years automation was developed through the military system in the United States, and the reason why it took so long and cost so much is that automation was so *inefficient* to begin with that it couldn't possibly have survived in the market—so therefore automation was developed the same way we develop most high technology: through the public sector.

See, in the Air Force and the Navy (where most of this took place), nobody *cares* about costs—because the taxpayer's paying, so the development can be as expensive and inefficient as you like. And in that way, they were able to develop automation to the point where it could then be used to drive people out of work and make profits for corporations. For instance, take the history of automated numerical control of metal-cutting machines [i.e. translation of part specifications into mathematical information that can be fed into machines without the need for skilled machinists]. That was developed through the Air Force, it went on for decades, and finally it got efficient enough so that it could be handed over to the corporations and they could then throw out their workers. But it didn't happen through market forces, not at all—it was the result of massive state intervention.

Furthermore, if you look at the *kind* of automation that was developed, you see precisely what workers in the early labor movement were complaining about: being turned into mindless tools of production. I mean, automation could have been designed in such a way as to *use* the skills of skilled machinists and to eliminate management—there's nothing inherent in automation that says it can't be used that way. But it wasn't, believe me; it was used in exactly the opposite way. Automation was designed through the state system to demean and degrade people—to de-skill workers and increase managerial control. And again, that had nothing to do with the market, and it had nothing to do with the nature of the technology; it had to do with straight power interests. So the *kind* of automation that was developed in places like the M.I.T. Engineering Department was very carefully designed so that it would create interchangeable workers and enhance managerial control—and that was not for economic reasons.<sup>51</sup> I mean, study after study, including by management firms like Arthur D. Little and so on, show that managers have selected automation even when it *cuts back* on profits—just because it gives them more control over their workforce.<sup>52</sup>

If you're interested, there's been some very interesting work done on this; the guy who's done the best work is David Noble—for his sins he was

denied tenure at M.I.T., and now he's teaching in Canada. He wrote a book called *Forces of Production*, which is a pretty specialized technical analysis mainly of the development of numerical control of machinery, but he's also got a good popular book out, called *Progress Without People: In Defense of Luddism*. Unfortunately, this is the kind of book that's published like in Karmandu or something—it's published by a very small anarchist press in Chicago. But it's very interesting, didn't make him too popular in the Faculty Club and so on.<sup>53</sup>

One of the things he discusses there is Luddism [a movement of English workers who wrecked industrial machines, which began in 1811]. See, the Luddites are always accused of having wanted to *destroy* machinery, but it's been known in scholarship for a long time that that's not true—what they really wanted to do was to prevent *themselves* from being de-skilled, and Noble talks about this in his book. The Luddites had nothing against machinery itself, they just didn't want it to destroy *them*, they wanted it to be developed in such a way that it would enhance their skills and their power, and not degrade and destroy them—which of course makes perfect sense. And that sentiment runs right throughout the working-class movements of the nineteenth century, actually—and you can even see it today.

Well, if economics were like a real field, these are the kinds of things they would be studying. None of it is very complicated—like, everybody knows why cotton was cheap, for instance: everybody who went to elementary school knows why cotton was cheap, and if it hadn't been for cheap cotton, there wouldn't have been an industrial revolution. It's not hard. But I'd be very surprised if anybody teaches this stuff in economics courses in the United States.

I mean, sure, there are some market forces operating—but the reality is, they're pretty much off around the edges. And when people talk about the progress of automation and free-market "trade forces" inevitably kicking all these people out of work and driving the whole world towards kind of a Third World-type polarization of wealth—I mean, that's true if you take a narrow enough perspective on it. But if you look into the factors that *made* things the way they are, it doesn't even come *close* to being true, it's not even remotely in touch with reality. But when you're studying economics in the ideological institutions, that's all just irrelevant and you're not supposed to ask questions like these: you have all the information right in front of you, but these are simply not matters that it is proper to spend time talking about.

### A Revolutionary Change in Moral Values

MAN: Noam, given an intellectual culture like the one you've been describing—can you find any "honest" intellectuals in the U.S.?

You can find them, but like I say, usually they're not inside the institutions—and that's for a very good reason: there is no reason why institutions of power and domination should tolerate or encourage people who try to undermine them. That would be completely dysfunctional. So typically you're going to find major efforts made to marginalize the honest and serious intellectuals, the people who are committed to what I would call Enlightenment values—values of truth, and freedom, and liberty, and justice. And those efforts will to a large extent succeed.

MAN: Who are those people? I mean, you make the whole situation look very bleak—who would you say are the intellectuals that are going about things in the right way?

Well, very often they're the people who have done things to make a real change in the world. Take the S.N.C.C. [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] activists, for example—they were serious intellectuals, and they made a big change. Or take the people in the 1960s who did the work that's led to so many of the improvements we've seen in the country over the last twenty years—and "work" didn't just mean running around the streets waving signs, you know, it also meant thinking about things, and figuring out what the problems were, and trying to teach people about them and convince them. Despite what you always hear, that was *not* elite intellectuals: the liberal intellectual community in the United States was always *strongly* opposed to the people who protested the American aggression in Indochina on principled grounds, they were *not* the ones assisting the popular movements. Well, those people were serious intellectuals, in my view.

So you see, there is sort of an "honest" left intelligentsia, if you like—meaning intellectuals who are not serving power as either a Red Bureaucracy, or as state-capitalist commissar-equivalents. It's just that most of the time they're outside the institutions—and for almost trivial reasons: you're not going to find a militant labor activist as Chairman of the Board of General Electric, right? Yeah, how could there be? But there are people all over the place who are honest and committed, and are thinking about the world, and trying to change it—many more today than there were thirty years ago, in fact.

I mean, it's standardly claimed that there's less of a left intelligentsia around today in the United States than there was in the Fifties and Sixties—but I don't believe a word of it. I think the opposite is true, actually. Just take a look at the people who they're *calling* the big thinkers of the 1950s: who were they? They were intelligent people, like Edmund Wilson's an intelligent person—but *left intellectual*? Or Mary McCarthy: yeah, smart person, wrote some nice novels—but not a left intellectual. In fact, what you have now is much more serious activists all over the place, people who are thinking carefully about important questions, and who understand a lot.