

# Notes on "Post-Left Anarchism"

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*It is plain that the goal of revolution today must be the liberation of daily life* – Murray Bookchin<sup>1</sup>

What is post-left anarchism? I'm not sure who coined the phrase, but it looks like I did. At some point, I asked several of the people most likely to know (including John Zerzan, Lawrence Jarach and Jason McQuinn), and no one was aware of anyone using the phrase before I did. Jason McQuinn confirms this in a recent letter.<sup>2</sup> The first known use of the phrase is in the last sentence of my book *Anarchy after Leftism*,<sup>3</sup> which was written in 1996 and published in 1997. This is the book's last paragraph: "There is life after the left. And there is anarchy after anarchism. Post-left anarchists are striking off in many directions. Some may find the way – better yet, the ways – to a free future."<sup>4</sup> At the time, I assumed that post-left anarchism was a phrase in current circulation.

Be that as it may, the phrase was taken up here and there by various radical anarchists. Jason writes to me "that, inspired by your *Anarchy after Leftism* text, I characterized your text as part of a theoretical and practical anarchist critique that grew out of historical anarchist practices, the 1960s rebellions and situationist influences (and that was the original inspiration behind *AJODA* [*Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed*]) as 'post-left anarchist,' when I called for contributions to the 'Post-Left Anarchy' issue of *Anarchy* magazine [no. 48 (Fall/Winter 2001-2002)]."<sup>5</sup>

What follows is part memoir, part history, and part critique. The memoir part, regarded as part of the history part, would exaggerate my personal role. The essay should be read with this in mind. And, written as it is from my parochial perspective, it concentrates on North America almost exclusively, although the phenomena I describe have, and had, counterparts in Britain, the Netherlands, India, and elsewhere.

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<sup>1</sup>Murray Bookchin, "Post-Scarcity Anarchism," *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (Berkeley, CA: The Ramparts Press, 1971), 44.

<sup>2</sup>Letter, Jason McQuinn to Bob Black, December 19, 2013, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>*Anarchy after Leftism* (Columbia, MO: C.A.L. Press, 1997). A second edition, with a new introduction by Jason McQuinn, is forthcoming from C.A.L. Press.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>5</sup>Letter, McQuinn to Black, pp. 1-2. Another issue which was substantially devoted to post-left anarchism was No. 54 (20(2)) (Winter 2002-2003). Contributors to that issue included John Zerzan, Lawrence Jarach, Jason McQuinn, Alex Trotter and myself.

The phrase post-left anarchism (or anarchy) now enjoys the dubious distinction of a Wikipedia entry, which amounts to an ontological seal of approval. Until the collapse of civilization, it will never go away. I could not now fully reconstruct the original meaning, for me, of an expression which I didn't think was original. Instead I shall begin by, in a small way, *deconstructing* it.

“Post-“ originally is a temporal signifier. It means “after.” Post-left anarchism, whatever it means, *refers to* an anarchism which has, by and large, come after, and largely out of, anarcho-leftism.<sup>6</sup> In my case, I was receptive to exactly the influences which Jason McQuinn mentions. When I use the phrase (I don't use it a lot), I think of anarchists writing in the last 40 or 50 years who have taken up, or taken on, matters which the traditional anarcho-leftists never considered; or if they occasionally did consider them, their reactions – variously stereotyped, superficial, mocking, and dismissive – called for critique.

Among the people I was thinking of as post-left anarchists were Fredy Perlman, John Zerzan, Dan Todd, Hakim Bey, Max Cafard, Michael William, John Moore, the *Fifth Estate* writers of the 70's and 80's (such as George Bradford/David Watson and Peter Werbe), Wolfi Landstreicher (he had other names back then), the *Green Anarchism* writers (especially John Connor), and several regular contributors to *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire* including its editor Jason McQuinn (then known as Lev Chernyi), Lawrence Jarach, and Aragorn. Several of them would decline the honor. John Zerzan would rather be considered anti-leftist than post-leftist. Some of them are better known (or would like to be better known) as nihilists, greens, primitivists, queers, insurrectionists, egoists, etc. Some were noticeably influenced – as I was – by the politicized avant garde art/anti-art<sup>7</sup> currents: Dada, Surrealism, and especially the Situationists. None of which, incidentally, were anarchist, or ever fully superseded leftism. What was living, *i.e.*, what was not dead (not leftist), in, for example, in “situationism” (the Situationists denounced the word), is to be found among post-left anarchists and almost nowhere else.

For reasons which remain obscure, just when the New Left 60s were expiring, mainstream publishers began to publish or republish some of the anarchist classics.<sup>8</sup> Three Charles Fourier anthologies (two of them original) were published by Doubleday, Schocken Books, and the Harvard University Press. Dover Books published Bakunin, Kropotkin, Goldman and Berkman.

Grove Press published a Bakunin anthology. Vintage Books also published Goldman. Doubleday published a Proudhon anthology. Beacon Press published Herbert Read. Harper & Row published Robert Paul Wolff and Max Stirner, although, in the latter case, in a scurrilous context.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>I shall be referring throughout to anarcho-leftism, not to left anarchism or left-wing anarchism. I do so because every time a conflict arises between his anarchism and his leftism, the anarcho-leftist comes down on the side of leftism. There's a difference between meaning (“sense”) and reference, as was first explicated by Gottlob Frege.

<sup>7</sup>Anti-art has long since been recuperated by the art industry and its academic adjuncts. See, *e.g.*, *On the Passage of a Few People Through a Rather Brief Period in Time: The Situationist International, 1957-1972*, ed. Elizabeth Sussman (Cambridge, MA & London: The MIT Press, 1989), published to accompany a traveling exhibition of Situationist art in 1989-1990. The exhibition was funded by “the National Endowment for the Arts, Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities, and Association Française d'Action Artistique.” I saw the exhibition in Boston. I discuss it, disparagingly, in Bob Black, “The Realization and Suppression of Situationism,” *Beneath the Underground* (Portland, OR: Feral House, 1994), 85-89.

<sup>8</sup>I won't burden the readers with citations, except in the next footnote. To a lesser extent there was a revival of interest in the 1960's, as indicated, for instance, by the general histories of anarchism by George Woodcock and James Joll. “Anarchism Revisited,” *Anarchism and Anarchists: Essays by George Woodcock* (Kington, Ontario, Canada: Quarry Press, 1992), 44.

<sup>9</sup>*Max Stirner: The Ego and His Own*, ed. John Carroll (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1971). This was an abridgment. I'm not necessarily against evenhanded abridgments of repetitious writers such as Stirner, or prolix writers such as

Mainstream and university press publishers also increased their output of anarchist history and biography by academic scholars such as Paul Avrich.

But why? Because of some vaguely felt sense that the 60s were anarchistic, and so maybe actual anarchist theorists might help explain what that was all about? Whatever the reason, anarchist books were made much more widely available than they had been since World War II, or indeed since World War I. Many future anarchists, left or incipiently post-left, read them.

The background of contemporary nontraditional anarchism is the 60s – the 60s of the New Left and the Yippies, but even more so the ideas and actions of May 1968.<sup>10</sup> The immediate antecedent of post-left anarchism was the – at first rather localized – intellectual ferment of the 1970s especially as stimulated in Detroit by Fredy Perlman’s Black & Red publishing project and, a little later, the *Fifth Estate* after the anarchist takeover.<sup>11</sup> We were treated to one theoretical or historical or anthropological novelty after another. We were introduced to Foucault, Camatte, Sahlins, Debord, Mumford, Ellul, Vaneigem, Barrot, Clastres, Debord, Fredric Turner, and the early Baudrillard We learned the hidden history of the Russian

Revolution from Arshinov and Voline. Ironically, we also read Murray Bookchin’s essays of the 1970s, such as “Spontaneity and Organization,”<sup>12</sup> which expressed the very essence of what he later caricatured as lifestyle anarchism. This was rich fare, which was sometimes regurgitated without having been fully digested. But there was nothing like it on the anarcho-left, from which we were, at various speeds, drifting away. Over there, college students and baristas were, in small numbers, joining the Industrial Workers of the World, founding self-destructing anarchist membership organizations, and/or feuding with each other.

The rise of post-left anarchism coincided with the heyday of what I call the marginals milieu: the zine subculture, the do-it-yourself subculture which is the subject of my book *Beneath the Underground*.<sup>13</sup> Anybody with access to copy machines, and pocket money for stamps, could join in. “Posterists” such as Upshot (John and Paula Zerzan) and The Last International (myself) found places to publish posters which had originally taken the form of posters, intended to be stapled up, on the assumption that what they had to say was unpublishable.

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William Godwin. What was objectionable, indeed offensive, about this version of the book was its placement in a short-lived series called “Roots of the Right: Readings in Fascist, Racist and Elitist Ideology,” along with Gobineau, de Maistre, Maurras, the Nazi racial ideologue Alfred Rosenberg, and even the Spanish tinpot dictator Primo de Rivera. As an atheist, and an anti-capitalist, Stirner cannot in good faith be assigned to the right.

<sup>10</sup>“Introduction,” *2013 LBC Books Review* ([Berkeley, CA]: LBC Books, n.d.), 4.

<sup>11</sup>See Lorraine Perlman, *Having Little, Being Much: A Chronicle of Fredy Perlman’s Fifty Years* (Detroit, MI: Black & Red, 1989).

<sup>12</sup>See also Mike Gunderloy & Cari Goldberg Janice, *The World of Zines* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992). They edited *Factsheet Five*, founded by Gunderloy (an anarchist), which reviewed zines and related artifacts, and which I was reading from the time it was one mimeographed sheet until it was over a hundred pages an issue of fine print. Gunderloy donated the tens of thousands of the zines he reviewed to the New York State Library. There are materials for many a dissertation there. Cf. Uri Gordon, *Anarchy Alive! Anti-Authoritarian Politics from Practice to Theory* (London & Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2008), 9.

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Zine publishers liked posters because they were short, to the point, often witty, and camera-ready. Collage art proved to be especially congenial to zines. A few of the zine artists were even aware that what they were doing is what the Situationists called *detournement*, “Short for detournement of preexisting aesthetic elements.”<sup>14</sup> Mail artists like Al Ackerman, who had long been using the mails to circulate individualized art, also fit right in to the marginals milieu, and they could fairly claim to have anticipated it. The zine (short for “fanzine”) format itself had been invented by science fiction fandom in the late 1930s, which also overlapped the marginals milieu by the 1980s. The connection between punk and anarchism, forged in the 1970s and still not quite broken, would require its own article or book to discuss.<sup>15</sup>

There were also tabloids, such as *Popular Reality*, and photocopy magazines such as *Dharma Combat* and *Feh!* and *Demolition Derby*, to mention just a few of the best ones, and many pamphleteers (including “pro-situ” groups such as Negation, Contradiction, Point Blank, and For Ourselves, which were most active in the early 70s<sup>16</sup>). Zine membranes were usually permeable, and anarchism, especially the nontraditional tendencies, permeated the marginals milieu. The milieu itself was inherently anarchistic insofar as it was radically decentralized, individualistic yet tightly networked, and passionate in the practice of freedom of the press.

Murray Bookchin was later to sneer at the publishing of zines,<sup>17</sup> but he published one himself (in newsletter format): *Comment*, from which is drawn his best book, *Toward an Ecological Society*.

From its pinnacle in 1985-1990, the scene gradually dwindled, although it hasn’t entirely disappeared. By 1996 or so, the zine subculture had mostly either withered away or migrated to the Internet. As much as I regretted its demise, its passing was in keeping with its own ethos, as with mine. All autonomous zones are necessarily temporary, even in a world of only autonomous zones. They should still be transient, like the construction of situations.<sup>18</sup> The do-it-yourself subculture was a ladder to be climbed, then kicked away (Wittgenstein again<sup>19</sup> – sorry). But we got a kick out of it too.

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<sup>14</sup>“The integration of present or past artistic productions into a superior construction of a milieu.” “Definitions,” in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. & tr. Ken Knabb (rev. & exp. ed; Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), 52. Examples appear on the covers of my first three books.

<sup>15</sup>Gordon, *Anarchy Attacks!*, 19. A good place not to start is Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989). And then there is “cyberpunk,” a science fiction tendency in the 1980s which was influenced by the marginals milieu. E.g., Lewis Shiner, *Slam* (New York: Doubleday, 1990) (where even the Loompanics Catalog puts in an appearance). It was also influenced by my anti-work critique. E.g., Bruce Sterling, *Islands in the Net* (New York: Arbor House, 1988) (the autograph on my copy says, “For inspiration”). There is even a brief borrowing from “The Abolition of Work” at pp. 171-72. Sterling, and Greg Krupcy (who was well-known in the zine scene), joined me for a zerowork panel discussion in 1992, at an event in Atlanta called PhenomiCon 2.

<sup>16</sup>Examples: *Public Secrets: Collective Skirmishes of Ken Knabb* (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1997), 166-287; *Point-Blank!* No. 1 (Berkeley, CA: Point-Blank, 1972); For Ourselves, *The Right to Be Greedy: Theses on the Practical Necessity of Demanding Everything* (Port Townsend, WA: Port Townsend, WA: Loompanics Unlimited, n.d.) (originally published 1973).

<sup>17</sup>Bookchin, *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm* (Edinburgh, Scotland & San Francisco, CA: AK Press, 1996), 54.

<sup>18</sup>“We must try to construct situations, that is to say, collective ambiances, ensembles of impressions determining the quality of a moment.” Guy Debord, “Report on the Construction of Situations,” *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. & trans. Ken Knabb (rev. & exp. Ed.; Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), 40.

<sup>19</sup>“He [who understands me] must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.” Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C.K. Ogden (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), 185.

In retrospect, I notice that I previewed post-left anarchism in a satiric way in “Elementary Watsonianism,” which was published, to my astonishment, in the Centennial issue (1986) of the venerable London anarchist periodical *Freedom*. Among its founders was Kropotkin. Not all traditionalist anarchists lack a sense of humor, as leftists usually do. I wrote of “Watsonian” or “Type 3” anarchism: “Neither an individualist, capitalist, right-wing ‘type 1’ anarchist nor a socialist, collectivist, leftist ‘type 2’ anarchist, he is a type 3 anarchist and nobody’s fool.”<sup>20</sup> Type 3 was the type of the atypical.

The immediate occasion for *Anarchy after Leftism* was the publication of *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm* by Murray Bookchin. His book cannot even claim originality. By the 1980s, some anarcho-leftists took time off from their collective narcissism and internecine feuding to notice that something was going on, not on their left, but beyond it. They invented most of the mutually inconsistent epithets (how can somebody be an “individualist” and a “fascist” at the same time? or bourgeois and lumpenproletarian?) which Bookchin later threw around.<sup>21</sup>

Because of the market clout of the publisher, AK Press; and because it served the short-term ideological interests of anarcho-leftists, the tract received far more attention and approval than it deserved. I need not repeat here all the many ways in which it is inaccurate, dishonest, hypocritical, and uncivil to the point of brutishness. That would require an entire book. As it happens, I wrote that book: *Anarchy after Leftism*. The anarcho-leftists acted as crass opportunists. They still do.

Bookchin began by hijacking the expression “social anarchism” for his own cult creed, although the phrase has always had a much wider application.<sup>22</sup> That didn’t bother his new anarcho-leftist fans, who never noticed that Bookchin’s late politics, like his early politics, is incompatible with standard anarcho-leftist doctrines such as syndicalism. It didn’t bother the class struggle anarchists that Bookchin repudiated the class struggle in the 1960s.<sup>23</sup> And it didn’t bother the organizationalists that in the 1970s Bookchin repudiated anarchist organization as inherently vanguardist.<sup>24</sup> Late Bookchinism vilified the primitivists, but his supposed masterpiece, *The Ecology of Freedom*,<sup>25</sup> extolled the virtues of “organic” primitive societies. (In the very long introduction to a second edition of the book, Bookchin in effect repudiated the book.) At the

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<sup>20</sup>“On a scale from left to right, the Watsonian anarchist is off on a tangent.” Bob Black, “Elementary Watsonianism,” *Friendly Fire* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1992), 207. This is the book on which Autonomedia has, for 18 years, refused to pay royalties, although it still retails it.

<sup>21</sup>For a caustic response to one of them, named Michael Kolhoff, see Bob Black (with Mike Gunderloy), “‘Neo-Individualism’ Reconsidered,” *Friendly Fire*, 199-201. I am told that Kolhoff has recanted.

<sup>22</sup>For example, one of the “fourfold tenets” of Bookchin’s minimal program for social anarchism is “municipal confederalism” – his pet cause – which no anarchist has ever considered a litmus test for anarchist orthodoxy, not even Kropotkin. *Ibid.*, 60. The academic anarchist journal *Social Anarchism* (1980-), for instance, has never been confined to this narrow program, although Bookchin was published there. Even I have been published there – although I am omitted from the Authors List at the website. I am now an unperson there, as in the old photos of the ruling elite on the rostrum at the annual Mayday parade in Moscow from which those who later fell from favor are later cropped out.

<sup>23</sup>Bookchin, “Introduction,” *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, 28 – a book which has been reprinted by the class struggle publisher AK Press! – in its “Working Classics” series!

<sup>24</sup>Bookchin, “Spontaneity and Organisation,” 251-274 .

<sup>25</sup>*The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy* (Palo Alto, CA: Cheshire Books, 1982). For my broader critique of Bookchin, see Bob Black, *Nightmares of Reason*, available online at The Anarchy Library, [www.theanarchylibrary.com](http://www.theanarchylibrary.com). I summarized, with derision, the book’s reception by academics in *Anarchy after Leftism*, 92-96.

very time Bookchin was handing down his tablet of anarchist orthodoxy, he privately informed his inner circle that he was not an anarchist.<sup>26</sup> But when, earlier, I *not only claimed, but proved* that he wasn't an anarchist,<sup>27</sup> I was dismissed as purist, dogmatic, sectarian, crazy, etc.

Post-left anarchism had, at the time I first used it, for me, a historical connotation. I thought that almost everyone I considered post-left, had previously been leftist – myself included. This turned out to be incorrect in several cases. But all of them were familiar with, and unhappy with, leftism. And I've always attached importance to history. Today, it's common for post-left anarchists to arrive at that perspective directly, without having been leftists. For some people, I've had something to do with that. This is good.

Still another phrase which, at one point, made some rounds was “The New Anarchists,” the title of an article by Professor David Graeber in the *New Left Review*.<sup>28</sup> He claims that this was not his title for the article. It was, at any rate, not his coinage: it was mine. In 1997 I referred to “the New Anarchism or, better yet, the New Anarchisms”<sup>29</sup> – but I'm quite sure that the editors of the *New Left Review* never read *Anarchy after Leftism*. For Graeber, the New Anarchists are activists, such as those in the anti-globalization protests. This was self-promoting, because by then the media had already made Graeber the star of that show, and then the star of the next show, Occupy. He is not only a New Anarchist, he is the new Daniel Cohn-Bendit (who had said, “I am simply a mouthpiece, a megaphone”).<sup>30</sup> It always looks good to profess modesty after you are already in the spotlight. It would look even better to refuse the spotlight.

My emphasis was on theory. Graeber ignored contemporary anarchist theory. He may have known very little about it. Or, if he did know something, he had his reasons to keep it to himself. Graeber wrote for leftists – this was in the *New Left Review* after all!<sup>31</sup> – trying to get them to welcome the New Anarchists as comrades (and, he hinted, for their usefulness: providing boots on the ground). I wrote for anarchists, suggesting that they get out of the left, not into it. Because of Graeber's avowed loyalty to the left, and his confusion of anarchy with direct democracy, if he's a New Anarchist, I'm not. He's not a post-left anarchist: this much is certain. As far as I'm concerned, he's not an anarchist at all.

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<sup>26</sup>Murray Bookchin, “The Communalist Project,” *Communalism* No. 2 (Nov. 2002), available at <http://www.communalism.org/>

<sup>27</sup>Black, *Anarchy after Leftism*, ch. 5 & *passim*.

<sup>28</sup>David Graeber, “The New Anarchists,” *New Left Review* 13 (Jan.-Feb. 2002): 61-73, available at <http://newleftreview.org/II/13/david-graeber-the-new-anarchists>.

<sup>29</sup>Black, *Anarchy after Leftism*, 145.

<sup>30</sup>Daniel & Gabriel Cohn-Bendit, *Obsolete Communism: The Left-Wing Alternative*, trans. Arnold Pomerans (Edinburgh, Scotland: AK Press, 2000), 235; David Graeber, *The Democracy Project: A History, a Crisis, a Movement* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2013), 4.

<sup>31</sup>*NLR's* political sympathies, or rather antipathies, may be inferred from the articles it published about the Situationists, such as Regis Debray, “Remarks on the Spectacle,” *NLR* I/214 (July-Aug. 1996), 134-141. Regis Debray! The Maoist turned advisor to the President of France! Peter Wollen, “The Situationist International,” *NLR* I/174 (March-April 1989): 134-141, reprinted as “Bitter Victory: The Art and Politics of the Situationist International,” in *On the Passage of a Few People Through a Rather Brief Moment in Time*, 20-61 (Wollen, a sometime arts editor for *NLR*, organized the art exhibition for which this book was the accompaniment). Debray vilifies the Situationists. Wollen, and Debray as well, magnify the artistic importance of the S.I. in order to minimize its political importance. T.J. Clark & Donald Nicholson-Smith, “Why Art Can't Kill the Situationist International,” *October* 79 (Winter 1997): 15-31, reprinted in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International*, ed. Tom McDonough (Cambridge, MA & London: The MIT Press, 2004), 467-488. All the contributors to both volumes appear to be academics or arts critics, except Clark and Nicholson-Smith, who had been members of the S.I.

What then is leftism? I've occasionally been asked this question. I've sometimes replied with what Wittgenstein and other philosophers call an ostensive definition: *that* (pointing) is "red": *you* (figuratively, pointing) are *a* red, a "leftist." Only leftists ever ask. They don't seem to need a definition for their own purposes, and I don't need one for mine. I've never constructed a definition of leftism, because then leftists would complain about my definition, not about my critique. They know whom I'm talking about. I'm talking about them. Leftism is what self-identified leftists preach. If that can't all be encompassed by an authoritative definition, so much the worse for leftism, or for authoritative definition.

Nobody, to the extent of my limited knowledge, has tried to define leftism,<sup>32</sup> at least not in terms of its criteria: the necessary and sufficient conditions for identifying something as leftist.

There may be no such criteria. I know of no assertions that leftism *must* include this or that, although there may be positions (such as racism<sup>33</sup> or corporate capitalism<sup>34</sup>) which must be precluded. Perhaps "equality" is an essential value of leftism, but that word can mean almost anything, nor is it unique to leftism. Protestantism, liberalism, and market capitalism espouse versions of equality. Perhaps "freedom," but almost everybody espouses that too.<sup>35</sup> Although doing so might appear to be fashionable or lazy, I am inclined to bring in Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblance: "We find that what connects all the cases of comparing is a vast number of overlapping similarities, and as soon as we see this, we no longer feel compelled to say that there must be some feature common to them all."<sup>36</sup> I never felt feel this compulsion.

Then there is the genealogical approach. Leftism does have a well-documented pedigree dating from the 18th century. The "left" originally referred to the seating arrangements in the French Assembly during the Revolution. Almost every modern leftist ideology, from liberalism to state communism, put in an appearance in Paris between 1789 and 1795. Only anarchism is absent. Might that be because anarchism is not a leftist ideology?<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>But see Murray Bookchin, "The Left That Was," in *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism*, 66-86. The Dutch translator of *Anarchy after Leftism* didn't translate "leftism" literally because, he explains, although there's a Dutch word, *linksisme*, nobody knows it. Letter, Frank de Grasse to Bob Black, Jan. 12, 2014. For a useful discussion of leftism which likewise does not attempt a dictionary-style definition, see Lawrence Jarach, "Leftism 101," in *Uncivilized: The Best of Green Anarchy* (n.p.: Green Anarchy Press, 2012), 92-99 and, even more briefly, and with even more malice, Bob Black, "Left Rites," in *The Abolition of Work and Other Essays* (Port Townsend, WA: Loompanics Unlimited, 1986), 79-81.

<sup>33</sup>Maybe not even that. In the 1922 during the great Rand strike by white miners in South Africa, the slogan of the workers was "Workers of the World, Unite! and Fight for a White South Africa." The Communist Party supported the strike (it was more like an insurrection) which was suppressed by the military at a cost of 200 lives. Then there is the racism of some left-wing, identity-politics intellectuals with time on their hands who are Persons of Color. Some of these self-important characters played a divisive and demoralizing role in Occupy Oakland, and they continue to do so.

<sup>34</sup>Maybe not even that. In Italy, syndicalism shaded off into national syndicalism which shaded off into corporatism, which is the economics of fascism. David D. Roberts, *The Syndicalist Tradition and Italian Fascism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1979).

<sup>35</sup>Gordon, *Anarchy Attacks!*, 32.

<sup>36</sup>Ludwig Wittgenstein, "The Brown Book," *The Blue and Brown Books* (2d ed.; New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), 87. He doesn't use the phrase "family resemblance" here: it first appears in *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. P.M.S. Hacker & Joachim Schulte, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, & Joachim Schulte (4th ed., rev.; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 36 (§ 67).

<sup>37</sup>"From the time anarchism was first defined as a distinct radical movement it has been associated with the left, but the association has always been uneasy." Wolfi Landstreicher, "From Politics to Life: Ridding Anarchy of the Leftist Millstone," *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* No. 54 (20(2)) (Winter 2002-2003), 47. "The relationship between

The expression post-left anarchism is implicitly critical of leftism. Certainly I meant it that way. Leftism is something to be surpassed. “Post-left anarchy,” I wrote, “is poised to articulate – not a program – but a number of revolutionary themes with contemporary relevance and resonance.”<sup>38</sup> Writing as I was against Bookchin, I provided a short, non-exclusive list of differences. I suggested that post-left anarchism was (1) “unambiguously anti-political” – no voting, for instance; (2); hedonistic (“Many people wonder what’s wrong with wanting to be happy”); and (3) if not necessarily rejective, then at least suspicious of modern technology and the extravagant liberatory claims made for it.<sup>39</sup>

But there were other points left off this particular list, such as the rejection of anarchist organizationalism, in the sense of recruiting the working class into trade-unions (anarcho-syndicalism), and also in the sense of recruitment of all anarchists into one disciplined programmatic vanguard organization (neo-Platformism). Both are impossible, both are undesirable, and both are preposterous. And both are profoundly anti-anarchist. I’ve been criticizing the syndicalists for many years, as I did in my most recent book, in dealing with Noam Chomsky.<sup>40</sup> I’ve also criticized neo-Platformism (anarcho-Leninism).<sup>41</sup> If these doctrines are left anarchist, and marketed as anarchist (as they are), then every real anarchist has to be a post-left, or at least a non-left, anarchist. With a few exceptions among the nihilists and individualists, post-left anarchism is a social anarchism. I prefer speak of “free association” rather than organization, because the organizer leftists have freighted the word “organization” with connotations of hierarchy, membership exclusivity and doctrinal orthodoxy. Max Stirner’s “union of egoists” is more to my liking, provided it be understood that he was not referring to One Big Union or to labor unions, but to a basis for free association.<sup>42</sup>

I might also have mentioned, as a widespread, if not quite universal leftist tenet, “productivism”: which conceives of man as in essence man the producer, and holds that social revolution and human self-realization consist of, and are exhausted by, workers seizing ownership and control of the means of production from the capitalists.<sup>43</sup> Then there is the related doctrine of “workerism,” which typically combines the celebration of the worker *as* worker, with the glorification of work, and with the notion that the working class, or some sector of it, is the necessary and privileged agency of social revolution. The promise of workerism is self-managed servitude – and the duty to

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anarchists and Marxists has never been happy.” Ruth Kinnah, *Anarchism: A Beginner’s Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2005), 27, quoted in Black, “Chomsky on the Nod,” 131. These may be understatements.

<sup>38</sup>Black, *Anarchy after Leftism*, 143-44.

<sup>39</sup>Black, *Anarchy after Leftism*, 144-45. I know that primitivists will not be satisfied with point (3) as phrased. They believe that anarchism entails primitivism. To which I reply that radical critiques of technology are not confined to anarcho-primitivists or, indeed, to anarchists, although the primitivist critique can be difficult to distinguish from primitivism generally. Gordon, *Anarchy Alive!*, 109-10.

<sup>40</sup>Bob Black, “Chomsky on the Nod,” *Defacing the Currency: Selected Writings, 1992-2012* (Berkeley, CA: LBC Books, 2012), 132-144. What Chomsky espouses may be slightly closer to council communism than to anarcho-syndicalism, but to me they appear much the same, and Chomsky himself has variously identified with both positions.

<sup>41</sup>Bob Black, “Wooden Shoes or Platform Shoes? On the *Organizational Platform of the Libertarian Communists*,” *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* No. 54 (20(2)) (Winter 2002-2003), 14-15, 19.

<sup>42</sup>Jean Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production*, trans. Mark Poster (St. Louis, MO: Telos Press, 1975).

<sup>43</sup>Black, “Chomsky on the Nod,” 140; see Michael Walzer, “A Day in the Life of a Socialist Citizen,” *Dissent* 15(3) (May 1968), reprinted in Walzer, *Radical Principles: Reflections of an Unreconstructed Democrat* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 118-128.



attend a lot of meetings.<sup>44</sup> These dogmas are counter-revolutionary nonsense. Very few workers are workerists, and you will find far more workerists in classrooms or cafes than in factories or offices. And you will find few workers even in those privileged places. Workers are more often to be found in bars or at baseball games.

Many, though not all, post-left anarchists reject moralism. Several would distinguish ethics from morality; I think this goes too much against established usage. This is not the place to mount any sustained critique of moralism: these are readily available from Benjamin Tucker, Friedrich Nietzsche, Max Stirner, Emma Goldman<sup>45</sup> and, on the contemporary scene, Wolfi Landstreicher and Jason McQuinn. But I will quote myself a little on that fashionable derivative of morality, “human rights”: “My own view is that what has been called rights-talk is obscurantist for anarchists. It is only a roundabout way of expressing preferences which might more honestly and economically be expressed directly.”<sup>46</sup>

The kneejerk retort from the dogmatic, doctrinaire, purist and sectarian anarcho-leftists is that post-left anarchists are “dogmatic,” “doctrinaire,” “purist” and “sectarian.” This is the very vocabulary of abuse which Marxists apply to all anarchists, themselves included. And as the (himself very dogmatic) left communist Amadeo Bordiga observed: “Damn those who talk about dogmas! There has yet to be a renegade who did not use this word.”<sup>47</sup>

This first epithet, “dogmatic,” is an amusing bit of doublethink and doubletalk. Denouncers of dogmatism apparently don’t know what the word “dogma” means. It has a religious, Christian origin. Dogmas are authoritative, belief-it-or-else doctrines (such as the Holy Trinity, Original Sin, and the infallibility of the Pope). It is leftists like the neo-Platformists who solemnly promulgate obligatory codes – the “Platform” itself, for instance.<sup>48</sup> One of the worst of the anarcho-leftists, and possibly the stupidest, is Chaz Bufe, who once (if you can believe it) handed down Ten Commandments – ten moral commandments – for anarchists,<sup>49</sup> some of which he and his

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<sup>44</sup>Black, “Chomsky on the Nod,” 140; see Michael Walzer, “A Day in the Life of a Socialist Citizen,” *Dissent* 15(3) (May 1968), reprinted in Walzer, *Radical Principles: Reflections of an Unreconstructed Democrat* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 118-128.

<sup>45</sup>According to Emma Goldman, “no other superstition is so detrimental to growth, so enervating and paralyzing to the minds and hearts of the people, as the superstition of morality,” in *Red Emma Speaks: Selected Writings and Speeches*, ed. Alix Kates Schulman (New York: Random House, 1972), 127, quoted in Black, “Chomsky on The Nod,” 124-25. Emma Goldman is a major embarrassment to anarcho-leftists. She is avowedly and indisputably an anarcho-communist – and a woman! and a feminist! – but she is for sexual freedom and against morality. It is Goldman’s misfortune that her papers, The Emma Goldman Papers, ended up at the University of California (Berkeley) where their editor and director, since 1980, has been Candace Falk. Falk, who vastly prefers Goldman’s feminism to her anarchism, wrote a biography which depicts Goldman as a man-crazy, dick-whipped neurotic. *Love, Anarchy and Emma Goldman: A Biography* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1984). It is reminiscent of what happened when Nietzsche’s sister, an anti-Semite and German nationalist, after his death controlled his publications and manuscripts.

<sup>46</sup>Black, “Chomsky on the Nod,” 124.

<sup>47</sup>“The Spirit of Horsepower,” *Murdering the Dead: Amadeo Bordiga on Capitalism and Other Disasters* (London: Antagonism Press, n.d.), 75.

<sup>48</sup>The Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad, “The Organizational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists (Draft) June 20, 1926,” in Alexandre Skirda, *Facing the Enemy: A History of Anarchist Organization from Proudhon to May 1968*, trans. Paul Sharkey (Edinburgh, Scotland & Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2002), 192-213: a Platform for an imaginary organization. Skirda has written an alternative-universe story in which Platformism has always been a presence and has always been important in the anarchist movement.

<sup>49</sup>Chaz Bufe, Listen, Anarchist!” available online at [www.theanarchistlibrary.com](http://www.theanarchistlibrary.com) (originally published in 1987) This is the anarcho-leftist *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Bufe conceals his hidden agenda as an agent of the crypto-Marxist slick magazine *Processed World* which dealt with me, its critic, ruthlessly and violently. See Black, “Circle-A Deceit” and “Notes on ‘Circle-A Deceit,’” *The Abolition of Work and Other Essays*, 91-99; Bob Black, *The Baby and the*

Marxist friends were then conspicuously violating.<sup>50</sup> “Thou shall not bear false witness against thy neighbor,”<sup>51</sup> from an earlier version of the Ten Commandments, is the one that Bufe and many anarcho-leftists have the most trouble with. Marxists routinely use anarcho-leftists like Bufe (as did *Processed World*) as their dupes. Amoralists tend to be more moral than moralists, just as atheists tend to be better behaved than Christians.

I defy any leftist to identify any post-left *platform* or *credo*. While you can find instances of dogmatism in the writings of post-leftists, credos and catechisms are nowhere at home there. And what I’ve just written here is neither. One merit of the family resemblance notion is its flexibility. Anybody who has most or all of what I consider the typical attributes of leftism is somebody I would probably call a leftist, or maybe something worse, if there was an occasion for that. But she might be a special case. Because I try to be sensitive to the particular, I am inclined to be open-minded. Up to the point where “open-minded” passes over into “gullible.”

Leftists, if the matter comes up, rarely deny being leftists. An exception may be some of those who call themselves “progressives.” These are people who adopted this word to avoid being stigmatized as radicals, but without admitting that they are liberals.<sup>52</sup> Their class base is the yuppies (“young urban professionals” – many of whom are, however, approaching retirement age)<sup>53</sup> – plus the academics and graduate students in the humanities and the soft (very soft) social sciences, of which the softest are Cultural Studies, Women’s Studies, African-American Studies, Queer Studies (the new kid on the blockhead bloc), law school Critical Race Theory theorists, etc., *ad nauseum*.

Another tendency which is widely, but not universally shared by post-left anarchists is an existential preference for the concrete and the particular, and a corresponding distrust of grand narratives and supposed universal truths.<sup>54</sup> Neo-liberalism and Marxism are examples of grand narratives which anarchists should, and mostly do, reject. Post-modernism is a grand narrative pretending to be the rejection of grand narratives. Human nature and its supposed derivative, human rights, are universal truths which anarchists should reject, not only because they simply

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*Bathwater* (repr. ed.; New York: Feh! Press, n.d.) (originally published in 1985); and the Kane and Jarach text cited *infra* fn. 47.

<sup>50</sup>Brian Kane & Lawrence Jarach, “Hold Your Tongue Demagogue: Turning a Deaf Ear to Pure Bufe-oonery,” available online at [www.theanarchistlibrary.com](http://www.theanarchistlibrary.com). The Anarchist Library puts up even a lying and libelous screed like “Listen, Anarchist!” in the interest of free discussion and debate. The leftist websites which post Bufe, such as lib.com, don’t post the rebuttal by Kane and Jarach. Bufe reprinted his tract in 2000, with, I suspect, financial assistance from a vengeful Murray Bookchin (his girlfriend wrote the new introduction). By then Bufe had read the critique by Kane and Jarach., which exposed his errors of fact and challenged his argument. But he didn’t change a single word. All this is exemplary of (to borrow a phrase from Trotsky) “their morals and ours.” I sometimes suspect that moralism and morality are inversely proportionate.

<sup>51</sup>*Exod.* 20:16 (KJV).

<sup>52</sup>“The ‘progressive community’ in the United States is defined by left-leaning voters and activists who believe that working through the Democratic Party is the best way to achieve political change in America.” Graeber, *The Democracy Project*, 95.

<sup>53</sup>“Much of the hesitation [of progressives to accept radical, direct-action anarchists], I suspect, lies in the reluctance of those who have long fancied themselves radicals of some sort to come to terms with the fact that they are really liberals: interested in expanding individual freedoms and pursuing social justice, but not in ways that would seriously challenge the existence of reigning institutions like capital or state.” Graeber, “The New Anarchists.”

<sup>54</sup>For example, the hoopla about universal and objectively existing human rights. These are mythical, ethnocentric, and implicitly statist. Anarchists are at risk of being drawn into reformism by taking up this particular cause. I spoke on this subject at the Long Haul in Berkeley in August 2013, and I’ll eventually write an article about it.

don't exist, but also because their political tendency is liberal or conservative (an increasingly elusive distinction).

This preference (or prejudice) – Murray Bookchin called it, as if this were a bad thing, “personalistic”<sup>55</sup> – ultimately derives from the 60s: from the critique of everyday life (Henri Lefebvre and the Situationists) and from “the personal is the political” (the feminists), and maybe a little from something earlier, existentialism – among other sources. The ultimate source is Romanticism. Even when it's only a mood, I sense it here and there, and I feel it myself. I like the way it feels.

Taking the epithets out of order – all my life I have found myself ruled out of order – how about “sectarian”<sup>56</sup>? This one is so dumb that it makes the other dumb adjectives look almost smart. Sectarians are, by definition, *organizationalists*. Sects are organizations. Those who strive to “organize” (all this means is, to recruit) people into membership organizations with doctrinal (“dogmatic”) admissions requirements are sectarians. There are no post-left anarchist counterparts to this sort of sectarianism. There are only affinity groups, communications networks, publishing projects, and (horrors!) individuals. I've never joined an anarchist organization in my life. So how can I be a sectarian?

“Doctrinaire” is more of the same, and it also doesn't merit much attention. It was a favorite of V.I. Lenin (as in his denunciation of “Left doctrinaires” in 1920).<sup>57</sup> George Woodcock, the author of the best general history of anarchism in the English language,<sup>58</sup> criticized Noam Chomsky and Daniel Guérin for not being, as they claimed, anarchists, but rather left-wing Marxists pilfering anarchism to pretty up their Marxism.<sup>59</sup> I have drawn attention to what a Chomsky errand-boy, Milan Rai, had to say about that: “This is a good example of what might be termed the doctrinal approach to anarchism, perhaps also the dominant approach.”<sup>60</sup> My response: “What Rai calls ‘the doctrinal approach to anarchism’ is what anarchists call ‘anarchism.’”<sup>61</sup>

And finally, the damning charge of “purism.”<sup>62</sup> Now, just because you believe what you believe, and you don't believe what you don't believe, does not make you a purist, because then every-

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<sup>55</sup>Bookchin, *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism*, 4 & *passim* & *ad nauseum*.

<sup>56</sup>Prior to World War I, anarchists and syndicalists debated the role of trade-unions in the revolutionary struggle and in an anarchist society. The anarchists were therefore “sectarian anarchists” according to historian (and ex-Stalinist) Daniel Guérin – but the syndicalists, it seems, were not. Daniel Guérin, *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice*, tr. Mary Klopper (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), 80. This book contains a laudatory introduction by Noam Chomsky, since reprinted in *Chomsky on Anarchism*, ed. Barry Pateman (Oakland, CA & Edinburgh, Scotland: AK Press, 2005), 118-132, as “Notes on Anarchism.” This is the book I trashed in “Chomsky on the Nod,” in *Defacing the Currency*, 61-172 – a review essay which has also been published in *Modern Slavery* #3. Pateman, by the way, works under Candace Falk at the Emma Goldman Papers in Berkeley.

<sup>57</sup>V.I. Lenin, “*Left-Wing*” *Communism, An Infantile Disorder* (Peking, China: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), 109. Denigration-by-quotation-marks is routine among anarcho-leftists, as among post-modernists, who learned it from Marxists, who have been doing it ever since Marx. It is reprehensible. See Theodor W. Adorno, “Punctuation Marks,” *Antioch Review* (Summer 1990), 303, quoted in Black, *Anarchy after Leftism*, 38.

<sup>58</sup>*Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Cleveland, OH & New York: Meridian Books, 1961).

<sup>59</sup>George Woodcock, “Chomsky's Anarchism,” in *Anarchism and Anarchists* (Kingston, Ontario, Canada: Quarry Press, 1992), 228; see Kinnah, *Anarchism*, 25.

<sup>60</sup>Milan Rai, *Chomsky's Politics* (London & New York: Verso, 1995), 95. Rai does not even pretend to be an anarchist: he's just a peacenik.

<sup>61</sup>Black, “Chomsky on the Nod,” 227 n. 36.

<sup>62</sup>See Sasha K., “‘Activism’ and ‘Anarcho-Purism,’” online at [www.theanarchylibrary.com](http://www.theanarchylibrary.com).

body would be a purist about everything, if only for the time being.<sup>63</sup> There's nothing bigoted or authoritarian about making up your mind. Judging is not necessarily prejudging. An open mind is not an empty mind, but it is available for filling. Almost always this "purist" epithet is thrown, like mud against a wall, at everybody the thrower disagrees with, hoping that it sticks. It doesn't stick, but it stinks. I am principled, and you are a purist, and he is a dogmatist, depending on who is talking. The meaning, the denotation, is the same. The reference and the connotation are the only differences. But these differences make all the difference.

I might add "individualism," which is, for Bookchin and the Marxists and the anarcho-leftists, a term of abuse. Often it's incorporated into the trite phrase "rugged individualism," in order to align Max Stirner or Henry David Thoreau or Renzo Novatore or myself with Gilded Age robber barons like Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller. Not having read him, the leftists don't know that Stirner was anti-capitalist.<sup>64</sup> Actually, most of the post-left anarchists I am familiar with are better described as *rugged collectivists*. Anybody who thinks he is an anarchist, but denounces individualism, is not an anarchist. There is "an individualist aspect to anarchism which exists in all its forms."<sup>65</sup>

Does a word like "anarchism" mean *anything*? It's not a restrictive perspective. It's the least restrictive principle – in principle – of all political principles. In its history, it has at times, nonetheless, been interpreted in a too restrictive way. That's how the anarcho-leftists want it to be now. But unless anarchism has some core meaning – and I would keep that to a minimum (and always open to reconsideration) – anybody can claim to be an anarchist or be accused of being one. We are not far from that point. According to Senator Harry Reid, the Tea Party is "anarchist." That's ridiculous. But it's not much more ridiculous than saying that Murray Bookchin was, or that Noam Chomsky or Ramsey Kanaan is, an anarchist.

Historically, it has sometimes happened that even some of the anarchist great ones have, when a crisis arose, betrayed their principles. Thus Peter Kropotkin and Jean Grave, and a few others, renounced their anti-militarism and internationalism by supporting the Allies in World War I. Their anarchist critics – the purists like Errico Malatesta – called that "anarcho-trenchism"<sup>66</sup>). In 1936, in Spain, when the army attempted a putsch, officials of the anarcho-syndicalist CNT (and even the anarcho-purist FAI) supported the Loyalist government and, indeed, participated in it. They too had their purist critics, such as the Friends of Durruti. The critics were right. And they were the better anarchists. The liberals and Marxists soon suppressed the anarchists (and lost the war).

Is there anything that anarchists just *cannot* accept as anarchist? I assumed as much for a long time, but I'm not sure now. I thought abstention from voting was part of the minimalist program.

But Noam Chomsky, who purports to be an anarchist, votes regularly.<sup>67</sup> Noam Chomsky has only a few anarchist quotations at his disposal, so he recycles them. One of these is, "anarchism

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<sup>63</sup>With the possible exception of post-modernists: "The difference between ancient society, modernism, and post-modernism is this: the ancients knew that they believed, the modernists believed that they knew, and the post-modernists believe that they don't believe in anything anymore. It is precisely this latter belief that we have to destroy." Guillaume Paoli, *Demotivational Training* ([Berkeley, CA]: Cruel Hospice, 2013), 12-13.

<sup>64</sup>Black, "Chomsky on the Nod," 77-78.

<sup>65</sup>Gordon, *Anarchy Attacks!*, 39.

<sup>66</sup>Errico Malatesta, "Anarchists Have Forgotten Their Principles" and "Pro-Government Anarchists," *Malatesta: His Life and Ideas*, ed. Vernon Richards (London: Freedom Press, 1977), 243-251.

<sup>67</sup>Black, "Chomsky on the Nod," 153-56 & *passim*.

has a broad back.”<sup>68</sup> He uses it to avoid answering questions about his own anarchist bona fides (such as his voting). The quotation is from Octave Mirbeau. Mirbeau is the 19th century French anarchist author of the witty anti-voting polemic “Voters’ Strike!”<sup>69</sup> which I’m sure Chomsky hasn’t read. Chomsky culled the quotation, as he culls most of his anarchist quotations, from a secondary source.<sup>70</sup>

Mirbeau didn’t think that anarchy’s back was so broad as to support voting. But in 2008, when the United States elected a black President, Chomsky voted for him. President-elect Barack Obama’s anarcho-leftist supporters (mostly college professors such as Dana Ward and Cindy Milstein) proposed to participate, as the “Hope Bloc,” as white penitents, in the Inaugural parade. I suspect that they were laughed off. They don’t talk about it any more.

Why the anarcho-leftists cling to leftism when most people, and workers especially, shun it, is something of a mystery. One might attempt a materialist interpretation: follow the money. In the late 1980s, Ramsey Kanaan, an ex-punk, founded, with family money, AK Press in Edinburgh, Scotland. This was supposed to be an anarchist publisher. The business prospered, and a few years later, he opened a branch in San Francisco, and he relocated there. AK Press published (and sold: it was at the same time AK Distribution) – books with, for many years, poor production values – many books, not to mention CDs, DVDs and T-shirts. The substantial majority of these books were not by anarchists or about anarchism. Instead they were standard generic leftist fare: Third World national liberation movements, racial identity politics, Marxism, feminism, punk fashion anarchism (the T-shirt market), vegetarianism, gay rights, and various reformist leftisms.

The timing – the early 1990s – was perfect, if fortuitous (or was it?). Many leftists, including leftists who never considered themselves Marxists – not exactly, anyway – were reeling after the collapse of European Communism. Now it was *their* turn to be nowhere at home. AK Press offered them an easy way into anarchism, which was, at the very same time, becoming fashionable after the Battle of Seattle and other anti-globalization actions. For these homeless leftists, AK Press anarchism was as familiar and comfortable as an old shoe (but not a wooden shoe). Aside from picking up a few new catchphrases – such as “mutual aid” and “direct action” – and abjuring a few old ones (the vanguard party, the dictatorship of the proletariat, etc.), they fit right in with AK Press anarchism. Leftists could even continue to read and idolize Noam Chomsky – published by AK Press – who, they learned to their surprise, and relief, is an anarchist! If Chomsky’s an anarchist, almost any leftist this side of North Korea can be an anarchist, and shine in the reflected glory of anti-globalization, the neo-Zapatistas, Argentine “horizontalism,” and Occupy. By the time AK Press came along, Chomsky was running out of publishers. They were “just in time” for each other.

It may be that Chomsky doesn’t have to subsidize the publication of his own books (as I once speculated that he did). I was shocked to be told, about a year and a half ago, that *Chomsky*

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<sup>68</sup>E.g. Noam Chomsky, “After Thirty Years of Class War,” *Occupy* (Brooklyn, NY: Zuccotti Park Press, 2012), 64; “Notes on Anarchism,” 118. Still working that one after 42 years.

<sup>69</sup>Octave Mirbeau, “Voters’ Strike!” in *Rants and Incendiary Tracts*, ed. Bob Black & Adam Parfrey (New York: Amok Press & Port Townsend, WA: Loompanics Unlimited, 1989), 74-78. This text (translated by Hakim Bey) appeared in the anthology only at my insistence. I was hoping the anarchist press would notice it and reprint it. As far as I know, that never happened.

<sup>70</sup>James Joll, *The Anarchists* (2d ed.; London: Methuen, 1979). Actually at third hand: Joll is also quoting a secondary source, Jean Maitron.

on *Anarchism* had sold 27,000 copies. Sales by now are reportedly much higher.<sup>71</sup> But I am sure Chomsky subsidizes the publication of other AK Press material. So, reputedly, does the anarcho-leftist band Chumbawamba. And Ramsey Kanaan's family money may not have run out yet. At some point, the AK Press collective which he founded, on high-sounding principles of egalitarianism, became irksome to Ramsey because it didn't always, only usually, do what he wanted. So – probably with more family money – he founded PM Press, whose collective always does what he wants. If it ever doesn't, he can always buy himself another one. To a post-left anarchist, the AK and PM publishing agendas are indistinguishable.

From a post-left anarchist perspective, there is much on the current anarchist scene to be dissatisfied with:

That the range of anarchists [now] includes the clowns from protest alley, micrometer-toting specialists of oppression-identification, and Marxists who wear black flags isn't a condemnation of anarchist ideas but *is* a significant reason for pause. In that pause we have to challenge our assumptions about anarchy. What do we really share with others in the big tent (or should it be called a circus tent) of anarchism?<sup>72</sup>

But post-left anarchists are deploying the weapons of criticism. As opposed to the AK Press/PM Press cartel, LBC Books is mounting a major challenge as to both publication and distribution. Other publishers, such as C.A.L. Press and Eberhardt Press, are still publishing despite economic conditions which are adverse to small press publishing in general, and anarchist publishing in particular. As counterpoint to the annual anarcho-leftist bookfair in San Francisco (what I call the “anarchist T-shirt fair”), there is now an annual, predominanty post-left anarchist bookfair in Berkeley. The battle of the books has begun.

Speaking of books, more and more books of a post-left tendency, or complementary to it, are finding their way into print. Green anarchism has an anthology<sup>73</sup>. So does the queer nihilist tendency, *Bash Back*.<sup>74</sup> An anthology of *Post-Left Anarchy* is forthcoming from C.A.L. Press. There's even the possibility that something like *Zerowork: The Antiwork Anthology*, which I compiled in the early 1990's – but which was trashed by the publisher Autonomedia, for reasons never explained – might be recreated and published. The original version was widely awaited. A new, improved version – for there is by now much new, or newly available material – might be more popular than leftists might like.<sup>75</sup>

Some expressions have their uses, for their time, and then fall into disuse. “Post-left anarchism” may turn out to be one of those phrases. I would not mourn its passing. What it subsumes, however, is anarchist critiques of leftism, which will never go away until anarcho-leftism goes

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<sup>71</sup>“Introduction,” *2013 LBC Books Review*, 1 (“less than 100,000” – presumably not a lot less than 100,000).

<sup>72</sup>Aragorn!, *Boom: Introductory Writings on Nihilism* (n.p.; Pistols Drawn, 2013), 93-94.

<sup>73</sup>*Uncivilized: The Best of Green Anarchy*. For a long time, John Zerzan did much of the heavy lifting for anarcho-primitivism. This anthology shows that, by now, many others are weighing in. There is also now available a systematic, comprehensive anarcho-primitivist analysis and critique of civilization: Enrico Manicardi, *Free from Civilization* (n.p.: Green Anarchy Press, 2012). This may diminish a certain cult of personality around Zerzan which I am sure he isn't comfortable with.

<sup>74</sup>*Queer Ultraviolence*, ed. Fray Baroque & Tegan Eanelli ([Berkeley, CA]: Ardent Press, 2011); *Queer Ultraviolence* (2d ed., abr.; Berkeley, CA: Ardent Press, 2013); see also *Bædan: Journal of Queer Nihilism* No. 1 (2012).

<sup>75</sup>A new website (launched January 2014), [abolishwork.com](http://abolishwork.com), is in the early stages of compiling anti-work and related texts.

away, or anarchism does. Leftism is the only ideology which, on the intellectual plane, remains a threat to anarchism – and vice versa.

Post-left anarchism is the only – theory, ideology, take your pick – which debunks the inanities of traditional conservatism, market libertarianism, and (this is the only one that matters) neo-liberalism – *and leftism*. It is, as yet anyway, the only possible revolutionary politics after leaving the 20th century. The neo-liberals and the neo-conservatives can and do brush off the follies of leftism, but they cannot answer the post-left anarchisms, except with the silent treatment: or, the criticism of weapons. With which they are well-supplied. But we are well-supplied with the weapons of criticism. Unlike leftists, who have neither weapons nor critique. The Tea Party at least has guns, if not roses, only neuroses.

We have had some modern revolutions, such as in France in May-June 1968, the Iranian Revolution of 1979, Nicaragua that year too, the Velvet Revolutions in Eastern Europe and then the U.S.S.R., and the Arab Spring. That they were not revolutions entirely to the taste of any anarchists is beside the point. Anybody who still subscribes to Francis Fukuyama's delirious "end of history" thesis is just plain stupid. There isn't *anywhere* in the world where there might not be revolutionary outbreaks. Not even the United States! As he so often did, Fredy Perlman got it exactly right: *anything can happen*.<sup>76</sup> But these revolutions will not conform – they never have – to Leninist or syndicalist or Platformist scenarios. They will not be commenced, or controlled, by left-wing organizations: least of all by numerically negligible anarcho-leftist organizations whose shelf lives are short. Except for the current campus- and –café-based caricature calling itself the IWW. It lingers on, a living fossil, if you call that living..

Leftism might have been a good thing, or at least a necessary evil, in the past. Nobody is capable of verifying a contention like that. I have doubts. By now, so much is sordid in the history of the left that I don't understand why anyone would want an accursed share of it. Well, in a way do I understand. Identification with the left is a way for unimportant people to feel important without doing anything important.

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<sup>76</sup>Fredy Perlman, "Anything Can Happen," *Anything Can Happen* (London: Phoenix Press, 1992), 7-14.

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Notes on "Post-Left Anarchism"  
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Post-Left Anarchism. Read. No Stories. Egoist Anarchism. 12 Followers. About · Careers · Privacy · Terms · Contact. Anarchism is a social philosophy which considers the state undesirable, unnecessary, and harmful, and instead promotes stateless societies, or anarchy. Anarchists seek to diminish or even eliminate reliance upon claims of authority in the conduct of human relations, but thus have widely disagreed on what additional criteria are essential or beneficial to anarchism and human society. It is usually identified as the most anti-authoritarian of social philosophies. See also: Anarchists (article listings).