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Intellectual Hypocrisy — The Case of Noam Chomsky

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Noam Chomsky is the current intellectual of record for the far Left. Now that Edward Said and Susan Sontag are dead, Chomsky reigns virtually supreme among the leftist intelligensia. His positions on most issues are very predictable. He has been an ardent opponent of virtually every American policy and action of the last half-century and sees America as the cause of many, if not most, of the ills befalling the world today. He is an opponent of private property and capitalism and a proponent of socialism and confiscatory taxation — except when he's not, it seems. And when he's not is when it comes to his own money.

Peter Schweitzer has written a brilliant essay on Chomsky, "Noam Chomsky, Closet Capitalist," published in the current edition of *The Hoover Digest*. Here are some choice selections:

One of the most persistent themes in Noam Chomsky's work has been class warfare. He has frequently lashed out against the "massive use of tax havens to shift the burden to the general population and away from the rich" and criticized the concentration of wealth in "trusts" by the wealthiest 1 percent. The American tax code is rigged with "complicated devices for ensuring that the poor—like 80 percent of the population—pay off the rich."

But trusts can't be all bad. After all, Chomsky, with a net worth north of \$2,000,000, decided to create one for himself. A few years back he went to Boston's venerable white-shoe law firm, Palmer and Dodge, and, with the help of a tax attorney specializing in "income-tax planning," set up an irrevocable trust to protect his assets from Uncle Sam. He named his tax attorney (every socialist radical needs one!) and a daughter as trustees. To the Diane Chomsky Irrevocable Trust (named for another daughter) he has assigned the copyright of several of his books, including multiple international editions.

Chomsky favors the estate tax and massive income redistribution—just not the redistribution of his income. No reason to let radical politics get in the way of sound estate planning.

When I challenged Chomsky about his trust, he suddenly started to sound very bourgeois: "I don't apologize for putting aside money for my children and grandchildren," he wrote in one e-mail. Chomsky offered no explanation for why he condemns others who are equally proud of their provision for their children and who try to protect their assets from Uncle Sam. Although he did say that the tax shelter is okay because he and his family are "trying to help suffering people."

More:

Chomsky, for all of his moral dudgeon against American corporations, finds that they make a pretty good investment. When he made investment decisions for his retirement plan at MIT, he chose not to go with a money market fund or even a government bond fund. Instead, he threw the money into blue chips and invested in the TIAA-CREF stock fund. A look at the stock fund portfolio quickly reveals that it invests in all sorts of businesses that Chomsky says he finds abhorrent: oil companies, military contractors, pharmaceuticals, you name it.

When I asked Chomsky about his investment portfolio he reverted to a "what else can I do?" defense: "Should I live in a cabin in Montana?" he asked. It was a clever rhetorical dodge. Chomsky was declaring that there is simply no way to avoid getting involved in the stock market short of complete withdrawal from the capitalist system. He certainly knows better. There are many alternative funds these days that allow you to invest your money in "green" or "socially responsible" enterprises. They just don't yield the maximum available return.

Ah, so that's the great moral line — the maximum rate of return on investment.

Chomsky has taught at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology [MIT] for many years, and he is credited with breakthrough research in the field of linguistics. Intellectual hypocrisy can be found on both the right and the left, but rarely so clear in its contradictions as this.

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