

## THE LAURA FLANDERS SHOW

### AOC & NOAM CHOMSKY: THE WAY FORWARD

**LAURA FLANDERS:** We're talking at a moment in history when certain long-held assertions about markets and government and our relationship to the natural world seem to be loosening their grip, and the manufacturers of consent, as one of our guests today dub them, no longer seem to have control over what everyday people think and do. Millions of workers are refusing to work or believe what authorities say. Others are rising up against the odds, against racist police, powerful sexist men, and even border guards on horseback with whips. All at once it seems that all sorts of things that were once unthinkable are now being openly talked about. Coming from different backgrounds, contexts and generations, our guests, they have this in common. They demand that we think differently about everything from our nation's history and its place in the world to who can run for office in America and win. Some of those unthinkables, like that last one, are kind of exciting. Others are terrifying, like the thought that the human race just may be on a terminal brink. To discuss this moment in all its frightening and exciting possibilities, MIT Professor Emeritus, author and public intellectual, Noam Chomsky, and the Democratic Congresswoman from New York, Bronx Native, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. If I'm not mistaken, this is the first time you two have actually met. So do you have anything you want to say to each other, maybe Noam, start.

**NOAM CHOMSKY:** Sort of met, virtually met, that's a step forward. I hope there'll be an actual chance. I've been greatly admiring what you've been doing, following it closely, it's a real pleasure to be sort of with you.

**ALEXANDRIA OCASIO-CORTEZ:** It's absolutely, I think it's such an honor and a culminating moment to be able to engage with the one and only Professor Chomsky. And I greatly look forward to, you know, us being able to move as a society past this pandemic so that we can engage in-person.

**LAURA FLANDERS:** I can't wait for that, I hope I'm there. Well, Noam, starting with you, there's always been, as you put it, a kind of long list of unthinkable thoughts in America. And yet just today I read in one of our newspapers of record, the New York Times, that workers have real power, that the economy just might need some sort of planning and that just possibly leaving so many things to markets isn't the best idea, especially when it comes to the environment, healthcare, you name it. Are you seeing what I'm seeing? Is something shifting?

**NOAM CHOMSKY:** Well, we should, first of all, recognize that we've been living through about 45 years of a particular socio-economic political system, what's called neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism has a formal definition, pretty much what you said, reliance on markets and so on. That's almost total fraud. That's not neoliberalism. It was never a reliance on markets. The so-called free trade agreements or radically protectionist that we're seeing that right now in front of our eyes, we see virtual monopoly on drugs. What we've really had for the 45 years is what so many economists have called a bail out economy. So it's one side of class war, markets for the poor, protection for the rich.

**LAURA FLANDERS:** But now we talk about it, and it does seem to me there's been a shift. And I wanna come to you on this AOC, I, you know, have interviewed you before. And that was when you were just running for office for a panel about young people in politics for an indication of how much has changed in terms of what's possible. I recall with my chagrin that even I, a confirmed optoholic ended that interview saying well, but if you don't win this time, will you run again? I thought it likely that you might not be victorious against powerful Joe Crowley that first time. But you were, and you're not alone. Has a dam broken, do you think?

**ALEXANDRIA OCASIO-CORTEZ:** I do think that there is a dam breaking, both in electoral politics, but also in organizing beyond our electoral system. Like what we're seeing with the precipitation of strikes on a scale that really has not been seen in many years. And I think it's a bit of an emperor with no clothes type of situation for our political establishment and our capitalist systems where people are beginning to realize that once we name these systems and describe them, that this water that they are, that people have been swimming in, actually has a name. And there is alternative that people can come up for air if we try to explore alternative ways of doing things. And I think that, you know, after I won, there was such a large concerted attempt, and continues to be a large-concerted attempt by media to marginalize, not just my victory, but what happened in our community. This was a fluke, it was a, I mean, you have the former governor of New York, Andrew Cuomo, within days saying this was a complete accident. You had every, every major of elected official and Democratic Party member trying to dismiss what happened. And the thing is that it didn't stop. There would be a case for that if I was the only victory that occurred. But the fact of the matter is that simply wasn't the case that had the election 'cause people also naming systems and talking about what was previously extraordinarily politically taboo.

**NOAM CHOMSKY:** Very much, it's a sign that the one-sided class war of the last 40 years is becoming two-sided. The population is actually beginning to participate instead of just accepting the hammer blows. We now are having a huge strike. One of the major strikes in American history, when workers are simply saying, we're not gonna go back to the rotten, oppressive jobs, precarious, broadens circumstances is novel, we're just not gonna accept it. And that's a major factor in the economy now. And yes, it's a strike and it's showing up in other ways too, there are, for example, the teacher's strikes were quite important. These are non-unionized red states, tremendous popular support. When you live in Arizona, where one of them was signs on every

lawn, supporting the teachers, not a radical state by any means. They were not just calling for better wages, which they greatly deserve, but for saving the children, saving the public school, public education, which has been under severe attack for 45 years.

**LAURA FLANDERS:** The same is happening in healthcare, in your constituency and across the country, Congresswoman, what are you seeing on that front? And what do you think is gonna come of this? Because I have to say, you know, industrial unions came out of industrial economies. Today we have this kind of Bezos economy, Amazon economy and service economies that aren't organized, most of them, in the same way.

**ALEXANDRIA OCASIO-CORTEZ:** What is so intertwined in this discussion is that this is not just also about open critiques of capitalism, but also open critiques of white supremacy. And it's in greater understanding of white supremacy, not as just, you know, these social, these racist, social clubs of people donning hoods, but actually as a system and a systems understanding of how white supremacy has interacted with the development of the United States. And so the way that that ties back in is that so many of these essential labor forces are dominated by women and women of color, whether it's fast food workers or whether it's nurses or whether it's childcare and teaching professions, this, what I would say this capitalist class calls a labor shortage, in what is actually a dignified work shortage, is concentrated overwhelmingly in working class people, a multi-racial working class, but also in professions that are dominated by women and women of color. And so when we really intertwine our understanding of both of these systems, that presents to us and illuminates a lot of, not just the problems that are happening, but the solutions.

**LAURA FLANDERS:** Noam, when I came in to talking with you in the early '90s, there was a miserable and acrimonious backlash, even on the left, against what was then dismissed as annoying identity politics. What I'm hearing now in every corner is that people are getting it, as the Congresswoman just said, unless we address the power of white male supremacy, we're not gonna get the changes that we need. Do you agree there's been a shift on that front?

**NOAM CHOMSKY:** We should recognize that white male supremacy is a deep current in American history. It's not gonna go away immediately. But there have been dents, significant ones. So for example, even in the mainstream, when the New York Times ran the 1619 Project, it couldn't have happened a couple of years earlier. And it's because of changes in general consciousness and awareness. Of course, there was an immediate backlash, strong backlash, and you're gonna expect that, white male supremacy is a deep part of American history and culture. To extirpate it is not gonna be easy. And, but there are, there's very significant progress. Plenty of conflict coming. It's not gonna be an easy struggle.

**LAURA FLANDERS:** Well, both of you are very focused on that other uneasy struggle, and that is the struggle for survival of the human race on the planet. And I don't think I'm putting it

too grimly. AOC, your first piece of legislation was that Green New Deal resolution, which imagined a kind of 10-year national mobilization, we are a few years into that 10 years. Your latest book Noam, is called "The Precipice Neoliberalism: The Pandemic and the Urgent Need for Change." Are we still at a point where we can avoid going over that precipice, Noam? Is it too late?

**NOAM CHOMSKY:** It's getting close. We have just been, I should say, that Congresswoman sees resolution recently reintroduced is absolutely essential for survival, but I'd actually like to know what you think, the prospects are for moving it forward. Either something like that resolution will be implemented, but we're doomed. It's that simple.

**LAURA FLANDERS:** To ask your question of AOC, what are the chances we can get real change? I wanna say in our lifetime, but we actually need it much, much sooner than that.

**ALEXANDRIA OCASIO-CORTEZ:** It is still a resolution in and of itself, is a statement of the sense of Congress. It does not formally bind us, but what is incredibly encouraging is the mass adoption of this blueprint. And so once it was released and submitted to the House of Representatives and publicly available, we started to see movements across the United States that were not covered by media, but municipalities and states across the country started to adopt these targets on municipal levels. You know, what I think though, is that we can't underestimate what we are standing up against. We know, and there's a popular sense and understanding that so much of Congress is captured by big money, dark money, Wall Street and special interests. But what I don't think is as quite understood is that this money is oil money that fuels Wall Street that captures Congress. But what is also, you know, what is so important to recognize is that our systems and our avenues for action are not just limited to electoralism and when we engage, when we engage as far as we can to the limits of electoralism, then we also reengage in our capacities outside of our electoral system, whether it's the withholding of labor or other sorts of grassroots actions, because there is also a point of collective action that becomes too difficult for the ruling class to ignore, because it then starts to threaten their legitimacy.

**LAURA FLANDERS:** Let me ask you, Noam, to come in on this. I mean, where does that radical change come from, given the capture that the Congresswoman's described so well, and as you have over the decade.

**NOAM CHOMSKY:** The main part of politics is activism and mobilization. What happens in Congress is pill reflection, but it is a reflection. The fact that mobilization and activism, or the core of politics, there's very dramatic examples of that, but she was too modest to mention, so I'll mention it. The Sunrise Movement is one of the, at the forefront of activism on climate. They got the point of civil disobedience, occupying congressional offices, occupying Nancy Pelosi's office, demanding change or narrowly, they'd just be thrown out by the Capitol police. They

weren't this time because one person from Congress came and joined them. AOC came to join them. They weren't thrown out, moved on, that's what led to Biden's climate program. Not great, but better than anything before. Well, that's an illustration of the point she was making. Popular activism interacting with supportive people in Congress tend to lead to results. And this is an old lesson, we should learn. It takes a new deal, which greatly improved the floors, greatly improved American society. How did it come about? Hand-built by a combination of militant labor action, CIO organizing, sit down strikes and a sympathetic administration. That combination is crucial.

**LAURA FLANDERS:** AOC, you did that action that Noam just described in the first moments after your election victory. And you've sometimes said that part of your job is to retain that sense of outsiderism and freshness. How would you say you're doing on that front? And what is your vision at this point of the progressive agenda?

**ALEXANDRIA OCASIO-CORTEZ:** What we experienced at the beginning of this month was a real transformative event in the history of the progressive caucus within Congress, where for the first two years that I was in office, it was essentially myself and three other Congresswomen. Maybe, maybe we could get five others. And we have a numbers of maybe 10 people in the last Congress to be able to break with the party, and this most recent fight, the progressive caucus, which is 95 members out of the 218 needed to pass any legislation, galvanized and they were willing to withhold their vote in order to ensure that the package with the greatest amount of benefits for most people, from labor, healthcare, childcare, educational, protections to climate was prioritized. And I think that came as a shock to the party. It came as a shock to mass media. They didn't know how to cover it.

**LAURA FLANDERS:** I wanna just end by asking you to talk about your vision for the future, Noam, and what leads you to think we can get there.

**NOAM CHOMSKY:** Started in the 1930s, I'm old enough to remember it, my family was first-generation immigrants, working class, mostly unemployed, very hopeful. It's not like now. Much, in absolute terms, much worse than now, but in psychological terms for a different, there was a sense that we're working together, we can get out of this, rotten conditions. But we're together, we have the ability, labor action, we have political organizations, we have our groups, associations working together with a somewhat sympathetic administration, we can get together and fight our way out of this. And they were right, they could. Not everything, but a lot of progress that happens right throughout history. And take around 1960, couple of black kids sat in a lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, segregated lunch counter, of course, immediately arrested and thrown out. Could have been the end, except the next day, a couple more came back. Pretty soon you had two people coming from the north to join them. Pretty soon, you had Snick workers driving in freedom buses through the south, trying to encourage a black farmer to take

his life in his hands and go to register to vote. Pretty soon you had a huge movement. Always like that. It's the people, you don't even know their names. Who knows their names, nobody. But they're the people who make things happen and are the inspiration. Actually my old friend formulated this nicely. He said, we should really honor the unknown, the countless unknown people whose work lays the basis that ultimately enter history. They're the ones who are inspiring. And they're the ones that we should honor and respect.

**LAURA FLANDERS:** AOC, your vision, your sense that it's possible.

**ALEXANDRIA OCASIO-CORTEZ:** You know, there's this, there's the writing by Arundhati Roy, which is that another world is not only possible, but it is already here. And finding the pockets where this world has arrived, is what gives me hope. The Bronx has one of the highest per capita rates of worker cooperatives in the world. That is a new economy in our borough of millions of people. And so whether it's that, whether it is discussions around mass incarceration, abolitionists organizing, not just, you know, what does it mean to dismantle the jail, but what does it mean to reorganize the society so that we do not have people engaged in antisocial behavior on such a scale that we have today, or that we don't have antisocial systems. You know, that these are not just theoretical conversations that people are having, but there are communities that are actively experimenting and developing solutions. And so to me, I think what I work on is not how do we find solutions, but how do we scale the solutions that we've already developed to transform our society. And that is work that breaks our cycles of cynicism. Cynicism, I think is a far greater enemy to the left than many others, because it is the tool that is given to us to hurt ourselves. And hope creates action and action creates hope. And that's how we scale forward.

**LAURA FLANDERS:** Well, I think it was Arundhati that said, as you say, the nother world is not only possible, it's happening on a quiet day, I think she said, you can hear her breathing. And in this conversation, I've definitely heard her breathing. We will continue to report those stories that fly in the face of cynicism. I thank you both for your lifelong commitment to acting in ways that defy that cynicism, and appreciate that you chose to spend the hour with each other and with us at the Laura Flanders Show. Huge appreciation to you.

**ALEXANDRIA OCASIO-CORTEZ:** And I'm just eternally grateful to both of you for taking the time. And I so sincerely appreciate it, Professor Chomsky, of course, and Laura, thank you so very, very much.

**LAURA FLANDERS:** Like water to a fish, the status quo is just the way things are until someone names there's system among many and suggests we have a choice. Choice is part of what AOC and Noam Chomsky have been talking about for a while. We can think of thinkable thoughts, they say, and we have, just as we thought the unthinkable, that we could bring the two of them together in a single conversation. Well, we did it. And the rest of the conversation isn't

on the editing room floor. The full uncut version is in our archives. You can check it out. Hear how AOC cast a vote that made her cry. Hear what Chomsky believes has changed and hasn't about the Democratic Party. You can find that and more in our archives, which are made possible, in part, by our viewers and listeners. So thank you. 'Till the next time, stay kind, stay curious. I'm Laura.

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