

# The secret life of Noam Chomsky

Guest commentary by Edward Alexander

It is a commonplace of modern history that extremes of left and right often meet, as when Nazi Foreign Minister Ribbentrop in 1939 flew to Moscow to join Stalin in the non-aggression pact that prepared the invasion of Poland. Many extreme leftists have become violent rightists, and many Nazis have turned Communist.

Noam Chomsky's singular distinction as a political activist is a perverse eclecticism that unites the worst of both extremes. He may be the only writer published and trumpeted by the leftist *Nation* and the neo-Nazi *Journal of Historical Review*, which promotes his books and tapes on Israel along with the works of Josef Goebbels as the authoritative word on the subject of the nefarious Jews. The dead water, the point of pause of the opposite eddies of pollution unleashed by communism and Nazism is the brain of Noam Chomsky.

In America Chomsky's leftist activities—support for Hanoi, apologetics for the genocidal regime of Pol Pot in Cambodia, ceaseless denunciation of America as the "greatest threat to peace"—are much better known than his intricate, prolonged, feverish activities on behalf of neo-Nazi groups and writers.

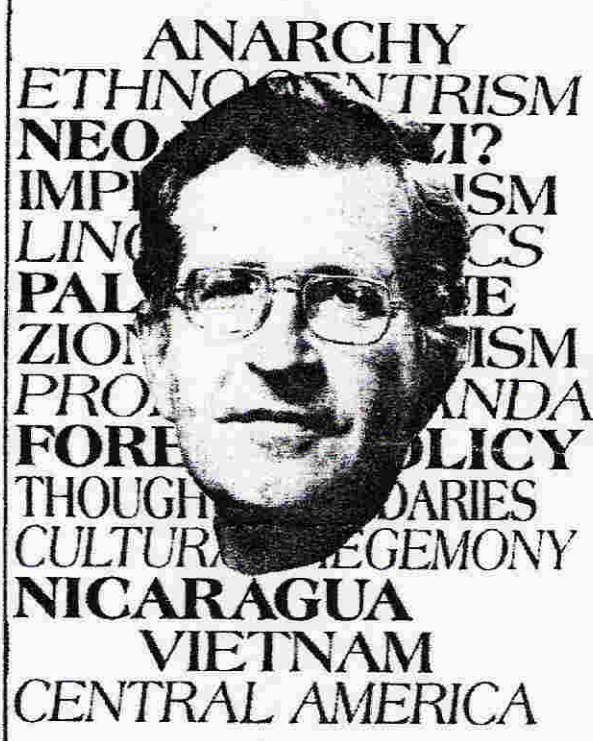
One of his critics, Professor Werner Cohn, likens him to "a bigamist who must constantly strain to keep one of his families secret from the other." The family that Chomsky would like to keep secret from his American leftist followers is *La Vieille Taupe* (The Old Mole), a neo-Nazi organization that seeks to vindicate the original Nazis by denying that they murdered the Jews of Europe.

The group's favorite author (barring Chomsky himself) is Robert Faurisson, a ferocious anti-semite who was suspended from his post at the University of Lyons because of his contention that there were no Nazi death camps in World War II and his strident attacks on all witnesses to the Nazi slaughter as liars—liars because they are Jews. Chomsky plunged into the defense of Faurisson, putting his name at the top of, and aggressively promoting, a petition that complained of the "intimidation" to which Faurisson had been subjected "since he began making his findings public" (my italics).

Chomsky then wrote a preface to Faurisson's book in which he called this crackpot "a sort of apolitical liberal." He also made the brilliant statement that he "sees no anti-semitic implications in denial of the holocaust." Interviewed by the *New York Times* (Dec. 5, 1980), Chomsky said he had "nothing to say about the contents of the book"; and the historian Lucy Dawidowicz reported (*Commentary*, September 1980), "In a letter to me . . . Chomsky expressed complete agnosticism on the subject of whether or not Faurisson's views were 'horrendous,' saying that he was not sufficiently involved in the issue to pursue or evaluate it."

This alleged indifference to the subject of Hitler and Nazis is belied by the licentious frequency with which they are referred to in Chomsky's writing about America and Israel. "What is needed in the U.S.," Chomsky has often written, "is de-nazification." Israel is for Chomsky the devil's experiment station. The Irish man of letters Conor O'Brien once said that when you come across a writer who throws "Nazi" and "Hitler" over every reference to Israel, like some popular seasoning or condiment, you are almost certainly reading an anti-semite. Chomsky's *Fateful Triangle*, all of whose twelve references to Hitler are references to Jewish actions, perfectly fits this description.

Once in France Chomsky's Nazi family in France reached these shores, he declined to present himself as a civil libertarian, concerned only with Faurisson's academic freedom. This is a rich joke to anyone familiar with Chomsky's history.



Noam Chomsky is speaking tonight on "The Roots of U.S. Foreign Policy: The Middle East" at 8 p.m. in Kane 130. Tickets are \$3-6. For information, call the Middle East Center at 543-4227. He is also speaking tomorrow on cognitive science at 3 p.m. in Kane 130 in a free lecture. He ends his Seattle engagement tomorrow night speaking on "The Roots of U.S. Foreign Policy: Central America" at 8 p.m. at the First United Methodist Church, 5th and Marion. Tickets are \$3-6.

In the sixties, when his disciples were shouting (or knocking) down those who did not share his views on Vietnam, Chomsky consistently refused to condemn their violence. He also declared that "by accepting the presumption of legitimacy of debate on certain issues, one has already lost one's humanity."

One of those issues, it turned out in 1984, was Chomsky himself. The British linguist Geoffrey Sampson wrote in the *English Biographical Companion to Modern Thought*: "Chomsky forfeited authority as a political commentator by . . . repeated polemics minimizing the Khmer Rouge atrocities in Cambodia and endorsement of a book that denied the Holocaust." Chomsky persuaded the American publisher to drop Sampson's remarks from the American edition of the work. When asked how this act of censorship comported with his passionate devotion to the free speech of Nazis, Chomsky replied, "With regard to a book, readers can form their own conclusions. But an entry in a reference work is something quite different."

Many scholars have documented Chomsky's unscrupulousness. In 1969 Arthur Schlesinger caught him out in a series of bold-faced lies about Truman and denounced Chomsky as "an intellectual crook." In 1981 Stephen Morris (*Harvard International Review*) demonstrated Chomsky's untrustworthiness in discussing American foreign policy. In 1982 Walter Laqueur (*New Republic*) described Chomsky's book on the Cold War as "a squalid tract, a clumsy piece of propaganda, a ludicrous fabrication, intellectually worthless and morally grotesque, a parody of scholarship that reminds one of the worst excesses of Hitlerism and Stalinism."

The level of professional judgment exercised by the academic units that have sponsored Chomsky's political lecture here makes one understand why there is widespread fear for the future of our university system, and also why Orwell said that there are some ideas so stupid that only intellectuals can believe them.

Edward Alexander is UW professor of English. Guest commentaries are welcome from anyone. If you are interested in writing, please contact Editor Mark Jewell at 543-2700.