

Chomsky's words stand on their own

Editor:

Upon returning from a speaking tour through the Pacific Northwest, I received clippings from the college campuses where I had spoken. Those from the University of Washington were unique in that they included virulent denunciations of me as an opponent of free speech, an apologist for Nazism and Communism, an intellectual crook, etc. This was no surprise. As organizers of my visit to Seattle will confirm, I had informed them long before to expect such diatribes. I will return to what all of this means. First, a word on the charges. I will take two representative examples.

To prove that I am opposed to freedom of speech, Professor Edward Alexander refers to my statement: "By entering the arena of argument and counterargument, of technical feasibility and tactics, of footnotes and citations, by accepting the presumption of legitimacy of debate on certain issues, one has already lost one's humanity." He omits the source (Introduction, *American Power and the New Mandarins*, 1969), and selects a few words to make it appear that I oppose freedom of speech on certain issues. Correcting for the blatant distortion, his argument reduces to the claim that if I refuse to debate you because I regard your views as obscene, I am denying your freedom of speech. Apart from the absurdity, consider the context that Alexander suppresses: the comment concludes my discussion of how one can be drawn into a "morass of insane rationality" by entering "into a technical debate with the Nazi intelligentsia"; we lose our humanity by even entering into debate with apologists for Nazi crimes. Recall that Alexander's major claim is that I have a hidden neo-Nazi agenda—deeply hidden, as anyone who investigates what I have actually written on this topic will quickly discover.

This is not ordinary misrepresentation, but deceit on a truly spectacular scale; and surely conscious deceit, exposed in print years ago, to no effect, of course.

Let us turn to Professor Edward Stern. To prove that I am an "intellectual crook," he alleges that I mistake an Israeli general for a Russian author, an extreme of absurdity, doubtless. Here are the facts he conceals. In the Hebrew orthography, the names "Leskov" and "Laskov" are written the same way, with the first vowel

omitted. In quoting a Hebrew source, I transcribed the name of General Laskov as "Leskov" (also the name of a Russian author).

These and other absurdities that Stern repeats were also exposed years ago, in print. Again, we are beyond ordinary misrepresentation. These are the productions of desperate men.

It takes only a phrase to produce a fabrication, and a paragraph to disentangle it, a fact well understood by specialists in slinging mud. Those who choose to pursue the tracks of these gentlemen will discover that every example they give, where not complete fabrication, is at this level of deceit; I will be glad to explain, if asked. The more interesting question is what it means. Here we can only speculate, but I do not think it is difficult to find the answer.

I take many controversial positions; it is obviously legitimate to question and criticize them. Those who know that they are incapable of doing so have only one recourse: slime, in the hope that people will be confused, discussion will be closed, and others will be intimidated. That explains why charges are repeated, even amplified, long after they are exposed as outright lies or merely ridiculous, and why a flood of slander and deceit is a predictable accompaniment of any critical discussion of U.S. support for Israeli policies; the point, after all, is not to establish truth but to bar the threat of open discussion.

Such tactics are familiar from the worst days of Stalinism, and have been revived with great passion by those who mistakenly describe themselves as "supporters of Israel." Israeli doves, who have been subjected to the same techniques themselves, have bitterly denounced them; for example, General Matti Peled, who, writing about his unpleasant experiences on a speaking tour in the United States in 1975, condemned the "state of near hysteria" and the "blindly chauvinistic and narrow-minded" attitudes that pose "the danger of prodding Israel once more toward a posture of calloused intransigence."

For many years, these tactics did succeed in closing off discussion, in large measure. As they have become less effective, the hysteria mounts and the deceit becomes more extreme. I trust that members of the university community will remain in the domain of fact and argument, which those whom Peled condemned are so desperately attempting to eliminate, for reasons that are not difficult to discern.

Sincerely yours,
Noam Chomsky