

Response to Chomsky

Editor:

Noam Chomsky's vision seems to have been impaired by decades of pugilistic combat. He claims that we called him an intellectual crook just because he confused one Israeli general with a Russian novelist and another with an Israeli novelist (female). In fact, it was Arthur Schlesinger (*Commentary*, December 1969) who called Chomsky "an intellectual crook" because of a scandalous act of "scholarly fakery" in which Chomsky attributed to Harry Truman a series of statements that Truman never made.

So far from excoriating Chomsky for mixing up his generals and novelists, we called it a saving element of amusement in his work—an amusement not lessened by his explanation that "Leskov" and "Laskov" have the same orthography in Hebrew. The surname of Shimon Peres has the same orthography as the Hebrew word for Persia (Paras), but we don't think that would justify assigning the name Paras to Israel's current Finance Minister.

Chomsky complains that his denial of the "presumption of legitimacy of debate on certain issues" (in *American Power and the New Mandarins*) back in 1968 was taken out of context, and is merely a reference to his own delicacy with respect to debating "obscene" views. Its full context, however, beyond the phrases Chomsky adds, is an equation between America and Nazi Germany, embellished by the following assertions: 1. "There may have been a time when American policy in Vietnam was a debatable matter. This time is long past." 2. "We have to ask ourselves whether what is needed in the United States is dissent—or denazification. . . . To me it seems that what is needed is a kind of denazification." Can anyone doubt that Chomsky's truculent followers took such statements as encouragement to silence others rather than to refrain from debate? If Chomsky was so badly misunderstood,

why did he refuse to condemn leftists who used violence to silence their opponents? Why did he denounce as wicked groups devoted to no political position except the preservation of free speech and inquiry at universities? (See, on this topic, Chomsky's debate with Sidney Hook in *The Humanist*, Nov.-Dec. 1970 and Jan.-Feb. 1971.)

We note that Chomsky is conspicuously silent about his own widely publicized censorship of unfavorable remarks made about him by the British linguist Geoffrey Sampson. But perhaps silence is preferable to his earlier explanation of why he had persuaded Harper and Row to drop Sampson's remarks from the *Biographical Companion to Modern Thought*: "With regard to a book, readers can form their own conclusions. But an entry in a reference work is something quite different."

Chomsky imputes all other criticisms of him, including those made of his apologetics for the genocidal regime of Pol Pot in Cambodia and of his prolonged collaboration with neo-Nazi groups (another topic he does not care to discuss) to a sinister campaign of "slander and deceit" conducted against him by "supporters of Israel," who want to silence his "critical discussion of U.S. support for Israeli policies." Poor, sensitive plant! Breathe a few words of criticism at him, and he is liable to shrivel.

If Chomsky really wants to extricate himself from the "slime" of which he complains, we suggest he cease obsessively likening Israelis to Nazis, alleging that Israeli governments are inspired by "the genocidal texts of the Bible" with dreams of destroying the globe, and accusing America and Israel of being the principal purveyors of world terrorism. Chomsky should not be surprised that these anti-Semitic slanders have not gained universal assent; but we don't begrudge him his cherished fantasy of himself as a sensitive soul driven by an angry mob of thick-skinned louts to utter the bitterest taunts he can invent.

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