

IN REVIEWING A collection of essays on Cambodia in the Fall 1984 issue, Charles Burton writes: "The chapter by William Shawcross effectively disproves the contention of Chomsky and Herman in their *After the Cataclysm* (Boston, Massachusetts: South End Press, 1979), that the refugee accounts appearing in the Western media in the 1970s were unreliable, a product of C.I.A. and Thai manipulation."

This is a serious misrepresentation. We raised no serious question about the general validity of refugee testimony and its implication that major atrocities were being perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge, and did not contend that it was the product of intelligence manipulation. Our chapter on Cambodia opened with the statement that "there is no difficulty in documenting major atrocities and oppression, primarily from the reports of refugees," and that the record of atrocities is "substantial and often gruesome." We also explained, clearly and repeatedly, that our concern was not with the truthfulness of refugee reports, which we generally accepted, but rather with the conclusions and interpretations that were developed on the basis of the evidence available. Here, we demonstrated massive fabrication and deception.

In our few remarks on refugee evidence there is no mention at all of the CIA; we did refer to State Department intelligence, commending its care in treatment of refugee testimony and concluding tentatively that its analyses and interpretations were probably the best available. We cited qualifications by Francois Ponchaud and Charles Twining of the State Department on the care that must be taken in interpreting refugee reports, and added some comments, which are rather obvious and have been questioned by no one, about the need to consider the possible role of Thai manipulation in particular cases, citing concrete examples. At no point did we question the general thrust of the refugee reports, or question at all the reports provided by credible observers—specifically, those on whom Shawcross himself relies.

Shawcross nowhere "effectively disproves" any contention we made. Though he does take exception to theses he falsely attributes to us, he never addresses any thesis we actually put forth, nor does he attempt to deal with a single fact or analysis we presented, including our discussion of his own remarkable deceit (pp. 232–4, 281–3). It is convenient for his purposes to pretend that there was little concern at the time with regard to Pol Pot massacres, which is demonstrably false, and that this was the result of the influence of "left-wing academics" over the media, which is nonsensical. Shawcross throughout avoids specific references or citations that are of any relevance to the theses he advances, for reasons that are obvious enough. Burton has unfortunately been taken in by a vulgar journalistic hoax.

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REPLY

IN THEIR *After the Cataclysm*, Drs. Chomsky and Herman maintain that "our primary concern here is not to establish the facts with regard to postwar Indochina, but rather to investigate their refraction through the prism of Western ideology, a very different task" (pp. 139–40). It is therefore surprising that later on in the text they manage the claim that "allegations of genocide are being used to whitewash Western imperialism, to distract attention from the 'institutionalized violence' of the expanding system of subfascism and to lay the ideological basis for further intervention and oppression" (p. 150). Further, in their chapter on Cambodia, they do, in fact, call into question "the credibility of those who transmit their version of refugee reports" (p. 141). They summarize their view of the media reports as follows: "A highly selected version of what refugees have reported under quite unfavorable conditions was transmitted by observers of evident bias and low credibility, and given massive publicity as unquestionable fact" (p. 201). To say that Chomsky and Herman asserted in their book that the refugee accounts appearing in the media were unreliable is in no way a misrepresentation of their views at that time (reference to the C.I.A. with regard to refugee allegations appears on p. 144).

After careful consideration of their letter, I am still hard pressed to perceive the "hoax" that Drs. Chomsky and Herman claim Shawcross has perpetuated. I remain of the opinion that Shawcross dealt with Chomsky and Herman's book fairly and with restraint.

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