Noam Chomsky's politics and Albert Einstein's violin

Guest commentary by Edward A. Stern

Professor Carlos Otero's vituperative attack in last Thursday's Daily on Professor Edward Alexander for daring to criticize Noam Chomsky went beyond the limits of responsible debate. Besides being self-contradictory and inaccurate, it elevated a personal attack on Alexander above the issue of Chomsky himself.

Otero claims that Chomsky's association with the neo-Nazi movement was limited to signing a petition for the "civil rights" of the Nazi propagandist Robert Faurisson and writing a preface to his book, which, by the way, is entitled Mémoire en Défense. Préface de Noam Chomsky.

The truth is that the petition had aroused the ire of civil libertarians in France because it used the word "findings" to describe Faurisson's "documentary." Stung by complaints that his promotion of the petition (with its name at the top) had encouraged the neo-Nazi movement in France, Chomsky wrote an essay saying even fascists and racists should have free speech. He sent the essay to one of his neo-Nazi cronies named Serge Thion, telling him to use it as he thought best.

When Chomsky learned that it was to go into Faurisson's book, he wrote to express misgivings. But once the book appeared, with his essay as preface, Chomsky (according to Faurisson's publisher, Pierre Guillaumé) declared his letter of resignation null and void, and said it had been withdrawn. Guillaumé has praised Chomsky for his loyalty to the neo-Nazi publishing house La Veille Troupe, a loyalty to which neo-Nazi "revisionists" credit much of their present strength in France.

Otero's laughable claim that Chomsky is the world's greatest civil libertarian is a far more egregious misrepresentation of civil libertarians than any George Bush perpetrated in the presidential campaign. Civil libertarians may give legal aid to Nazis; they do not, as Chomsky has done, cooperate with Nazis, publish their books with Nazi publishers, and print their articles in Nazi journals. Otero's apologia for him makes one wonder whether Chomsky had been given the chance, would have contributed a preface to Mein Kampf in 1924. About how many civil libertarians do we ask that question?

With steam-coming regularity, Otero keeps repeating that Alexander accused Faurisson and Chomsky of "crimes," a word that never appeared in his article. Perhaps Otero is projecting upon his opponents Chomsky's well-known habit of calling people he disagrees with (as he used to call President Kennedy about once a week) "criminals." Although Alexander did not say that Faurisson is a criminal, Chomsky may wish to note the fact that courts in Canada and elsewhere have ruled that "freedom of speech" is no excuse for spreading falsehood in order to inflame racial hatred.

I grant Otero that many people would not readily conclude that a denunciation of America as a great threat to peace is necessarily a crime. But he conveniently forgets that Chomsky has denounced America as "the greatest threat to peace" (American Power and the New Mandarins), has called for the "denazification" of America, and argued that if dictators were smarter they would surely use the Ameri-