

The Drum Online Opinion

July 2011

Truth about Chomsky: a response to Michael Brull

<http://www.abc.net.au/unleashed/2787088.html#>

[Philip] Mendes and [Nick] Dryenfurth [sic] ... are so racist that they do not even notice violence against Palestinians'. 'Look at how they support Israeli expansionism, they of the responsible Zionist left'.

So wrote Michael Brull on his eponymous blog (The Muslims are coming!, November 11, 2009).

In two sentences Brull made three 'basic' factual errors, to borrow a line from his The Drum article The boring truth about Chomsky (July 1, 2011). The misspelling of my tongue-twister surname is easy enough to make. But the allegations that I am a racist (Zionist) are reprehensible, defamatory and utterly false. A postgraduate law student, Brull should consider himself lucky that legal proceedings did not ensue.

Brull presumably believes that as a defender of Israel in the face of relentless global campaign of delegitimisation - sometimes disingenuously branded as the Boycott, Divestment Sanctions (BDS) movement - I am somehow anti-Arab or Islamophobic. Strange, then, that I would write a piece for The Punch during 2009 singing the praises of Muslim immigration and spruiking the cause of asylum seekers more generally. As for the Zionist accusation, strictly speaking I am no such thing. In fact, my political and intellectual stance is closer to that of non-Zionism.

Whilst I support Israel's continuing existence I do not subscribe to key Zionist principles, namely that Jewish life in Israel is inherently superior to that of the Diaspora, and nor as a non-religious Jewish-identifying agnostic do I base that support upon religious grounds. Crucially I also reject the Zionist proposition that Jews inevitably cannot live amongst non-Jews. These are complex distinctions, much like the Palestinian/Israel conflict itself, which do not conform to a binary Zionist/Anti-Zionist worldview propounded by the likes of Brull, his anarchist idol Noam Chomsky and blogger-journalist Antony Loewenstein.

It is, therefore, the height ofchutzpah for Brull to identify mistakes in my recent The Monthly commentary on Noam Chomsky's Sydney Peace Prize (SPP) award. Yes, I ought to have been more careful in identifying the provenance of two Chomsky quotes. His defence of holocaust denial on freedom of speech grounds derived from a private letter. Chomsky's remarkable description of Robert Faurisson as a 'relatively apolitical liberal' was drawn from a latter essay during the so-called Faurisson affair. As my friend and fellow 'racist' Philip Mendes has written:

Chomsky's failure to recognise the anti-Semitic implications of Holocaust denial, and his decision to provide a political character reference for a leading figure in the international neo-Nazi

movement was astounding. The overall effect of his statement was to promote a reversal of the roles of Nazi persecutor and Jewish victim.

All this is beside the point. Chomsky made those statements. Frankly I don't care if he lunched with the Dalai Lama in Lebanon, for when he met with, and praised, leaders of the fundamentalist Shia Muslim group Hezbollah, he lent credibility to one of the most anti-Semitic and anti-democratic organisations in the Middle East, one committed to destroying Israel. As I write in the Monthly, Chomsky's fraternisation with Hezbollah was unlikely to help foster a "common humanity", as the jury's citation for his award applauded. Likewise his Faurisson affair interventions can hardly be described as "unfailing moral courage".

Finally, in his defence of Chomsky, Brull makes the completely unfounded allegation that I have accused BDS proponents of supporting terrorism. Whilst I think BDS supporters are at best naive and contribute next to nothing towards practical reconciliation and peacemaking, this is simply untrue. In the words of my Monthly piece:

Most fair-minded observers agree that a negotiated peace settlement based upon a two-state solution will only be attained by bringing together moderates on both sides of the equation and sidelining extremists, whether Greater Israel Zionists or Arab–Palestinian militants committed to a 'one-state' solution. Aside from practical steps such as ending the construction of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and the Palestinian leadership recognising Israel's right to exist, in simple terms what is required is a rhetorical sea change. Ending the demonisation of the Palestinians by sections of Jewish and Israeli community must be accompanied by ending the demonisation of Israel by much of the Arab world and, notably, sections of the western Left.

I understand that the likes of Michael Brull are unlikely to concede a point to those they consider Zionists and social democratic sell-outs, let alone issue an apology for the unsubstantiated slur of racism. And the political backsliding and intellectual dissembling common to Chomsky and his acolytes will inexorably continue. In recent days the moral one has disowned his former 'socialist' friend Hugo Chavez on account of his undemocratic tendencies. Truth told, the veriest idiot predicted that a former army chief was likely to become yet another Latin American populist with an authoritarian streak.

Let me finish by testing the boundaries of the ABC's advertising regulations. For left-of-centre Australians and readers of The Drum who are sincerely committed to a peaceful and just resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict I encourage them to part with a few hard-earned dollars and pick up a copy of the July edition of The Monthly. There they will discover precisely why Chomsky's choice as SPP winner is so incongruous given his non-existent contribution to the achievement of that noble aspiration. Some commentators like to call this the boring truth.

Nick Dyrenfurth is an academic and the author or editor of several books on Australian politics and history.