

9 June 2011
The Drum Online

Ethical perversion, not peace, is Chomsky's raison d'etre

<http://www.abc.net.au/unleashed/2751644.html>

In its infinite lack of wisdom, the Sydney Peace Foundation has decided to award its 2011 prize to an unapologetic apologist for genocide. A serious perusal of Noam Chomsky's paper trail reveals that the professor has size-14 feet of clay when it comes to the question of mass murder.

Professor Chomsky is betrayed by his own prolificacy. He has left in his wake a voluminous paper trail. And this track record shows he spent much of the latter 1970s attempting to whitewash the mass murder then underway at the hands of the Maoist Khmer Rouge in Cambodia.

Just as the Cambodian genocide hit its grisly peak in mid-1977, Chomsky co-authored an infamous piece for *The Nation*, a Left-wing magazine published in New York. Entitled *Distortions at Fourth Hand*, this article tried to blow a smokescreen over reports of mass killings by Cambodian communists.

Chomsky used the *The Nation* as a platform to challenge "extreme anti-Khmer Rouge distortions", and reports in the Western media of "alleged Khmer Rouge atrocities". In much the same vein, journalist Fred Barnes recounts how at a Harvard University seminar he attended in 1978, Chomsky explicitly denied that crimes against humanity were occurring in Cambodia.

In his 1979 book *After the Cataclysm: The Political Economy of Human Rights, Volume II*, Chomsky claimed the slaughter in Cambodia had been exaggerated "by a factor of 100". He went on to declare: "The evacuation of Phnom Penh [by the Khmer Rouge], widely denounced at the time and since for its undoubted brutality, may actually have saved many lives."

But Yale University's Ben Kiernan, one of the foremost academic authorities on the Cambodian genocide, contends that at least 20,000 people died during the depopulation of Phnom Penh at Khmer Rouge bayonet point.

In his *Nation* piece, Chomsky tried to cover his posterior prospectively by saying he doesn't "pretend to know the truth" about the mass killings in Cambodia. But that excuse simply won't wash. Even at the time, the brutal truth of the Cambodian genocide was there to see for anyone not totally blinded by ideology. US congressional hearings in May 1977 featured exhaustive testimony on the Khmer Rouge campaign of mass slaughter. And as historian William Shawcross wrote in his book *The Quality of Mercy*: "through 1976 and 1977 and especially in 1978 the Western press's coverage of Cambodia increased."

Noam Chomsky views the world through a simple binary prism in which the Washington establishment is the primary author of global evil. And if the United States is wicked, those who oppose it must be good. Anything that detracts from the righteousness of America's enemies must be denied to the last.

If that means glossing over crimes against humanity, so be it.

This simplistic zero-sum view was the motivating force behind Chomsky's purblind refusal to accept the reality of Marxist genocide in Cambodia. A letter he wrote in October 1977 complained that reports of Khmer Rouge crimes against humanity were "being misused by anti-revolutionary propagandists".

It was personal correspondence that landed Chomsky in a spot of bother on the topic of another genocide, as well. In 1979 he signed a petition in support of Robert Faurrison, a French self-styled 'historical revisionist' who denies that the Nazis ever engaged in a campaign of mass murder against the Jews.

Chomsky contends that his defence of Faurrison was a principled position taken in defence of free speech. But a personal note written in his own hand during the Faurrison controversy indicates a more cynical motivation. In correspondence with Professor William D Rubinstein, Chomsky declared:

I see no anti-Semitic implications in denial of the existence of gas chambers, or even denial of the Holocaust. Nor would there be anti-Semitic implications, per se, in the claim that the Holocaust (whether one believes it took place or not) is being exploited, viciously so, by apologists for Israeli repression and violence.

In essence, Chomsky was arguing that Shoah-denial is an entirely legitimate polemical weapon for use in the assault against Israel's legitimacy.

Yet for someone so promiscuous in the casting of aspersions towards others, Chomsky has proved remarkably thin-skinned when his own reputation comes under question. The professor's feral responses to personal criticism demonstrate that his professed dedication to liberty of expression is so much hypocritical bunkum.

In the October 1984 issue of *The New Criterion*, English linguist Geoffrey Sampson related what transpired after he was commissioned to write an entry on Chomsky for the *Biographical Companion to Modern Thought*. Sampson's sketch was largely positive, but he dared to mention some of Chomsky's more questionable political stances:

He [Chomsky] forfeited authority as a political commentator by a series of actions widely regarded as ill-judged (repeated polemics minimising the Khmer Rouge atrocities in Cambodia; endorsement of a book – which Chomsky admitted he had not read that denied the historical reality of the Jewish Holocaust).

Chomsky was less than pleased by this public mention of his unsavoury past. Geoffrey Sampson described how Chomsky used influence with Harper & Row publishers to quash the inclusion of the offending entry from the US edition of the book.

In the January 1985 issue of the magazine, Chomsky responded to Sampson with a vitriolic letter accusing the English linguist of "brazen lies" and "disgraceful fabrications". But as we have seen, this is quite a case of the pot calling the kettle black. So much for untrammelled freedom of expression.

One of the most disgraceful aspects of Chomsky's history as a political activist arises from his obdurate refusal to confess past sins. In his co-authored book *Manufacturing Consent* published in

1988, he continued to defend his refutation of the Khmer Rouge genocide. Even after demonstrable proof of crimes against humanity emerged after the 1979 Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, Chomsky remained adamant that his initial dismissal of mass murder was justified.

And in a stunningly dishonest interview given just last October to the Phnom Penh Post, Chomsky boasted of his "accurate review of the facts". He then engaged in the most brazen prevarication on his stance towards the Khmer Rouge, falsely claiming to have "harshly condemned Pol Pot's crimes".

But the taking of such flagrant liberties with truth is par for the Chomsky course. During another scandalous episode in which Chomsky was caught fabricating quotations, historian Arthur Schlesinger remarked: "Like the squid, he covers his retreat in a cloud of black ink."

Noam Chomsky's sordid history of service as an apologist for genocidaires is part of the open public record. And this gives rise to the question why the Sydney Peace Foundation selected such a morally tainted individual as an appropriate recipient for their 2011 Peace Prize.

A compelling clue to this paradox is provided by Chomsky's recent essay on US Navy SEAL raid that killed Osama bin Laden. In this article, Chomsky dances perilously close to outright 9/11 denialism, casting scornful doubts on bin Laden's own claims of responsibility. He then goes on to declare that even if Al Qaeda did perpetrate the September 2001 attack, the crimes of George Bush "uncontroversially exceed bin Laden's".

By describing the United States as an "international terrorist state" Chomsky explicitly posits a moral equivalency between the US and Al Qaeda. And in the warped universe of the Sydney Peace Foundation, that sort of crass anti-Americanism is enough to excuse a multitude of sins – including the whitewashing of mass murder.

The only award that Noam Chomsky merits is the booby prize for ethical perversion. And that small coterie of Leftwing activists who sit on the Sydney Peace Foundation's board should get runner up in this category of moral disrepute.

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