

with its petty squabbling, electoral prostitution and pusillanimous postmodernity, stand? Who knows? The benefit of this book, however, is to remind us that we may need to do more than revisit Whitlamite social democracy. It might be time again to rediscover a few Enlightenment metanarratives, along with the moral courage and intellectual acuity of people like Tom Paine and Mary Wollstonecraft.

PETER LOVE

ON NOAM CHOMSKY

In parading his obvious admiration for Noam Chomsky, Clinton Fernandes (*Overland* 180) unfortunately distorts and whitewashes Chomsky's role in the Faurisson affair.

Chomsky chose to intervene on behalf of Nazi apologist Robert Faurisson in two ways. Firstly, he signed a petition drawn up by prominent American Holocaust denier Mark Weber in defence of Faurisson's civil rights. This action was arguably defensible on the grounds of defending Faurisson's freedom of speech.

But then Chomsky wrote an opinion on the civil libertarian aspects of the Faurisson affair. This opinion stated that "the fact that Faurisson denied the existence of gas chambers plainly did not demonstrate that he was a Nazi or anti-Semite", and that "denial of the worst atrocities, even the Holocaust, does not in itself suffice to prove racism (or Nazism)". Chomsky concluded that Faurisson appeared to be a "relatively apolitical liberal".

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 (however unintentionally) a reversal of the roles of Nazi persecutor and Jewish victim. The neo-Nazis and the Holocaust deniers were transformed into the persecuted victims whose rights demand protection whilst the Holocaust survivors and their supporters were depicted as the persecutors.

Whilst it would be wrong to say that Chomsky supports Holocaust denial or Holocaust deniers, there is little doubt that the nature of his intervention in the Faurisson affair granted political credibility to the purveyors of race hatred (For further details,

see my 'Noam Chomsky and the Holocaust denial controversy in Australia', *Political Expressions* 1:2, 1996, pp.111-126).

PHILIP MENDES

CLINTON FERNANDES RESPONDS:

Dr Mendes may be referring to a personal letter in about 1980, asking Chomsky whether denying the existence of gas chambers proves that a person is anti-Semitic. He responded that it does not, because one might believe six million Jews were exterminated in other ways. Furthermore, even denial of the Holocaust does not prove that a person is anti-Semitic. For instance, "if a person ignorant of modern history were told of the Holocaust and refused to believe that humans are capable of such monstrous acts, we would not conclude that he is an anti-Semite". The letter was later made public.

Chomsky notes that the US public believes Vietnamese casualties in the Vietnam War to be approximately 100,000 although the official figure is two million and the actual figure is probably four million. But this does not necessarily imply that the entire US public are anti-Vietnamese racists.

Similarly, most Westerners deny, despite massive historical and demographic evidence, the genocide of approximately ten million Native Americans in North America and approximately one hundred million in South America. They are not necessarily anti-Native American racists.

Many Australians are unaware of the extent of the death tolls of Aboriginal Australians. Racism is not the sole reason; others include ignorance, misinformation or incredulity.

Dr Mendes correctly describes Nazis as anti-Semites. By contrast, some of Chomsky's pro-Israeli detractors describe Holocaust denial and Nazism as "antique and anaemic forms of anti-Semitism". They argue that "delegitimation of the Jewish national movement" is a "far more virulent form" of anti-Semitism, as is the "attack on talent" and the "politics of resentment" represented by the tenet "that a just society would not have individuals from any group underrepresented or overrepresented in its positions of prestige and influence" (*New Republic*, 3 October 1988, p.9).

CLINTON FERNANDES