

LETTERS

Noam Chomsky Replies

LEOPOLD LABEDZ'S ARTICLE (February) may have a certain interest for students of contemporary propaganda. Consider a few typical examples of what passes for argument.

Labeledz claims that I argued "that the refugees from Cambodia were not to be given credence", basing himself on a review-article (with E. S. Herman, *Nation*, 25 June 1977) in which we wrote that "their reports must be considered seriously." How does he turn our conclusion into its opposite? Simple. By suppressing our conclusion and noting only our qualification that "care and caution are necessary" for reasons we mentioned, which, as we added, are commonplace. Putting aside his distortion, consider the conclusion Labeledz draws from our qualification: that we are comparable to Nazi and Stalinist apologists. If so, then the same strictures apply to Ponchaud, whom Labeledz much admires, and who wrote in the book we reviewed that each refugee "recounts what he saw or heard, his imagination and homesickness tending to exaggerate and distort the facts." And to Charles Twining, whom the State Department regarded (accurately) as "really the best expert [on Cambodian refugees] . . . that exists in the world today", and who testified before Congress in 1977 that "you must talk to a refugee as soon as he comes out or the story may become exaggerated." In fact, everyone who is concerned with truth rather than with propaganda for his favoured cause draws the same conclusions.

LABEDZ CLAIMS that in a letter to ENCOUNTER (October 1979), I "obfuscate" my position by pretending that in the cited article my concern was about the "exact number of the victims of genocide" (his emphasis). My letter dealt with the allegation that the Khmer Rouge had "boasted" of having "eliminated" 2 million people, presented with no evidence and then modified after private inquiry to the charge that thousands or hundreds of thousands had been killed. To Labeledz, concern over a factor of 1,000 is "concern about the exact number." As for our article, we cited estimates ranging from thousands to hundreds of thousands and even millions killed, concluding that "We do not pretend to know where the truth lies amidst these sharply conflicting assessments." Our explicit point was that the harsher the accusations, the more publicity they received, quite independently of evidence. We also described a pattern of fabrication and deceit which persists, as demonstrated in my letter to ENCOUNTER and others that Labeledz cites, grossly misrepresenting their contents. There has been no "obfuscation", apart from Labeledz's attempts to distort the plain facts.

LABEDZ LAUNCHES similar accusations against Richard Gott, who offered a figure of 100,000 to 300,000 who "could have been killed." If this proves that Gott is comparable to Nazi and Stalinist propagandists, then the same is true of Ponchaud, who estimated the numbers killed at 100,000 or more; of Twining, who testified that

the numbers killed were in the "thousands or hundreds of thousands"; of Timothy Carney, the second of the State Department's leading experts, who estimated the number of deaths from "brutal, rapid change" (not "mass genocide") as in the hundreds of thousands (June 1978); and in fact, of virtually everyone who has been concerned to determine the facts. For details, see Chomsky and Herman, *Political Economy of Human Rights* (vol. II).

It is, incidentally, striking that while Labeledz's accusations against alleged apologists collapse upon investigation, he does provide a remarkable example of the genre, namely, his defence of the murderous US bombing of heavily populated areas as "front-line military action", a comment that really does rank with Stalinist apologetics.

FOR LABEDZ, it is an incontrovertible fact that "millions" were "liquidated" and the population reduced "from seven to four million" under the Khmer Rouge régime. Others are less certain. The US State Department estimated the summer 1979 population of Cambodia at about 6 million (Status Report, 13 November 1979). In late 1979 the CIA is reported to have produced a similar estimate, and a recent province-by-province survey regarded as accurate by foreign relief experts estimates the current population at "more than six million" (*Washington Post*, 7 February 1980). The current population plus the sum of those who fled to Thailand or died from starvation in 1979 gives an estimate of the population at the end of the Khmer Rouge régime. By Labeledz's standards, the class of neo-Stalinist apologists widens. Actually, all such estimates should be regarded with caution; they may understate or exaggerate the scale of the massacres.

Labeledz claim that I criticised Western intellectuals for giving "too much 'publicity' to the Cambodian genocide", another fabrication. What I criticised was not the "publicity" but the propagandistic excesses and falsifications, urging that critics keep to the facts, which, as I noted, were grisly enough.

IT IS CLEAR from many such examples that what really enrages Labeledz is the commitment to find the truth. But even here, his concerns are selective. Thus, in the same article that arouses his ire, we criticised Ponchaud for exaggerating the deaths caused by US bombing of Cambodia. Labeledz does not conclude that we are apologists for US atrocities. Our quaint view is that facts matter, whether the issue is Khmer Rouge or US atrocities. One facet of this commitment outrages Labeledz; another, his counterparts in other propaganda systems.

I DO NOT MEAN to suggest that all of Labeledz's shots miss the target. He is quite right to criticise the Soviet press for producing "not a squeak" on Cambodian atrocities until 1978.

Applying the same reasonable standard elsewhere, recall that since December 1975, roughly the same period, the Indonesian army has been on the rampage in East Timor, with current estimates of victims in the range of 100,000-200,000, roughly 1/5 of the population, thus "genocide" by Labeledz's standards. The direct responsibility lies in Washington, which has provided the required military and diplomatic support and laboured to conceal the facts; the "Human Rights" administration sharply increased the arms flow, enabling Indonesia to conduct the murderous offensives of 1977-8 that created conditions that relief workers and others compare to

Cambodia. To a lesser extent, responsibility falls on other industrial democracies. We now ask how many "squeaks" there have been in ENCOUNTER, recalling that the basic facts have been available to those who chose to know for four years. Note that the comparison is unfair to the Soviet press; the state it serves was not directly responsible for the Cambodian massacres, whereas honest reporting in the West could have brought the Timor massacres to a halt. The conclusions seem obvious, with no further comment.

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Ed. Note: A reply by Leopold Labedz to this letter, plus some more general remarks on the views of Noam Chomsky, will be found in his column, "Under Western Eyes: Chomsky Revisited", on p. 28.

Australian "Misunderstandings"

DR FRANK KNOPFELMACHER (March), while referring to my "impeccable past as a social democrat and civil libertarian", states that I have "adopted neo-Nazi doctrines." All that I have done is to examine the evidence for the allegation that the Nazis had a policy to exterminate Jews especially by gassing in "gas chambers", and conclude that much of the "evidence" is fabricated and contradictory, and that the allegation is false.

My conclusion has nothing to do with accepting neo-Nazi doctrines but results from a close examination of the available evidence over a period of several years.

My conclusions are shared by Professor H. Diwald in Germany, Professor R. Faurisson in France, and Professors A. Butz and J. Martin in the USA. The high death-rate in the German camps, which was comparable to the death-rate in the Boer war camps, was due to malnutrition resulting from the chaos and shortage of food caused by saturation bombing, and due to typhus which spread because of a failure to use the disinfectant *Zyklon-B* on a more regular basis. The bodies of the people who died in the camps were cremated.

The continuous repetition of the "6 million Jews murdered by the Nazis" legend is designed to bolster the diplomatic position of Israel whose hard-line policies could lead to a world war, and have already contributed to a sevenfold increase in oil prices. Zionist Jews frankly refer to the Holocaust as "Israel's number one propaganda weapon."

The Butz thesis has been fully debated in the Australian media including three nation-wide television programmes. The Holocaust legend will not stand up to close scrutiny. That is why UK magazines such as the *New Statesman* devote four pages to attacking the revisionist historians referred to above, and refuse to publish any letters in reply. The continued repetition of the legend is a group libel of Germans.

As is evident from the ridiculous stories alleging bizarre atrocities by the Russians in Afghanistan, truth is the first casualty in war.

JOHN BENNETT

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MR BENNETT'S LETTER makes it unnecessary for me to refute the claim (or thesis) that Bennett is engaged in historical scholarship, however widely defined, or that he is conducting a learned discussion about the precise number of Jewish victims during the Holocaust. Bennett's message is quite clear: the Holocaust is a cynical fabrication concocted to steal other people's land. The result is bringing our industries to a standstill, and the world to the brink of war, by way of an oil crisis. If our economic system breaks down, or if a war breaks out, it will be largely the work of "the Zionist Jews." In resuscitating the age-old hate theme—"The Jew is to blame for the evils that beset us"—Mr Bennett is not alone, except for the brutality of his approach which contracts with the cynical subtlety of some influential publications in Britain and elsewhere, whose systematic campaign of defamation against Israel is almost as implacable.

It is interesting to get "from the horse's mouth" a description of how generous the dissemination of the Butz-Bennett "thesis" was in the respectable Australian mass media. I tried to explain the reasons for their odd behaviour, as charitably as I could, in my letter to ENCOUNTER (March 1980). It is also instructive to read Bennett's last paragraph, in which he fortifies (not for the first time) his denial of Nazi massacres by a denial of Communist massacres.

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"Confessions of a Biographer"

I UNDERSTAND that a section of my recent article, "Confessions of a Biographer" (ENCOUNTER, February) has caused unintended offence to Dr Hoskin, the former Librarian of Churchill College, Cambridge, and to his colleagues. I deeply regret this, and wish now to withdraw those remarks which have so upset them.

Though the then Churchill College Librarian probably did not know of the existence of the Brendan Bracken/Beaverbrook correspondence until after the publication of my prize-winning book on Bracken, *Poor, Dear Brendan*, just as I certainly did not know that the College was the residuary legatee of any surviving Bracken papers, Dr Hoskin quite properly wrote to inform me of the position and to remind me that I was in breach of copyright. What I tried, obviously too loosely and perhaps facetiously, to convey in the subsequent article was my own sense of bewilderment at being seemingly blamed for discovering important documents and reproducing them without due permission simply because I had been unaware of Churchill College's legal standing in the matter. Readers may or may not realise that, in keeping with Bracken's wishes, most of his personal papers were burned within twenty-four hours of his death. I was fortunate enough to find some that escaped the flames; but I gladly acknowledge that these were the property of Churchill College, which at no point sought, or could have sought, to act as a censor against me.

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London