

opinion

feedback

Chomsky misuses facts

To the Editor:

Noam Chomsky's speech at the March 4 Coalition, "United States Foreign Policy," was so ludicrously false, both philosophically and factually, that it was amazing to hear it given before a college audience. His position was that the United States has been using aggression, Soviet and otherwise, as a pretext for pursuing a jingoistic campaign of repression throughout the non-communist world. Should America, in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, send arms to Pakistan? No, said Chomsky. Weapons dispatched to that country, instead of being used for defense, might be employed against the once-rebellious Baluchis in western Pakistan.

Country A, in other words, should not send arms to mortally threatened Country B because B, instead of using them against imperialist superpower C, might use them against faction D, who, for ideological reasons, probably despises A and may actually be in league with C! How absurd! Any good people when faced with the mortal threat posed by the USSR must have arms sent to it — and immediately. Independence must take precedence over everything else.

Should the United States sell arms to Israel? No, said Chomsky. Why? Oh, well, you see, the Israelis use American weapons illegally in southern Lebanon. What's that you say? The '67 war? The one in '73? Never heard of them!

To illustrate how the United States uses aggression as a pretext for militarism and repression, Chomsky cited an article by reporter Hedrick Smith that appeared in *The New York Times* shortly after our hostages were seized on November 4th in Teheran. Policymakers, said Smith, according to Chomsky, declared that the Iranian situation would pull the U.S. out of its

post-Vietnam reticence and make it possible to carry out plans to unleash the CIA, build new missile systems, establish a ring of bases around the Indian Ocean and assemble a 100,000-man rapid deployment force.

The fact is that the Smith article, published on December 2nd, said nothing about new missile systems and reported that new bases around the Indian Ocean were, by order of Defense Secretary Brown, ruled out. Though a rapid deployment force was discussed, nowhere does Chomsky's figure of "100,000" appear. Carter's request of \$300 million for both hardware and personnel would indicate a much smaller force. "As for intelligence efforts," Smith writes, "though some members of Congress would like to see President Carter take the lead in lifting some of the legal restrictions... they appear to be a minority. Most members are still wary of lifting restrictions on the Central Intelligence Agency too far."

No Chomsky lecture, no matter how brief, is complete without at

least one quotation taken out of context. The March 4th offering was taken from a *New York Times* editorial of August 6, 1954 published after a new oil agreement between Iran and the West brought to an end four years of turmoil. The speaker quoted it from memory as follows: "This will be a lesson to underdeveloped countries with rich resources that go berserk with fanatical nationalism." What Chomsky did not say was that *Times* told the Western powers that they had lessons to learn also. The paper continued: "The West, too must study the lessons of Iran and take account — before and not after great losses have been incurred — of the great forces which now move people everywhere in Asia, Africa, and South America. Partnership, even more in the future than in the past, must be the relationship between the industrialized Western nations and some other countries less industrialized, but rich in raw materials, outside Europe and North America."

Roger Kolb

Cancel the Senior Class Gift

To The Editor:

My residence in the MIT dorm system has been characterized by active concern for and participation in the continuing high quality of student life. I consider myself to be one of many "experts" (having been East Campus President and a Next House Planning Group member) in MIT dorm life and routine interactions with "The Administration." My disgust with "The Administration's" *modus operandi* reaches new levels each week.

I am one senior who has had enough. I find it difficult to express my rage over recent decisions by "The Administration" concerning both dining and housing. Two examples are:

(1) The adoption of a mandatory board program for dor-

mitory residents despite the persistence of overwhelming student disapproval, and

(2) The retention of the \$50 "Residence Fee" in dorm housebills to support the dining program despite the return of a mandatory board program. These are major issues; I could name many minor issues of concern to all dorms and I am sure that my peers from my Dormcon days could do the same.

In my opinion "The Administration's" actions are *intolerable*. These actions affect people who shall soon be alumni and whose stake in MIT's future is every bit as real as that of "The Administration".

"The Administration" has callously abused our friendship. It has flaunted and misused its

Of science and pseudoscience - Wallace & Darwin

(Continued from page 4)

throughout our professional careers, we search for reality and solutions to problems in reality. We are taught where to look, and how to look. If someone can make us look where they want, we can be deceived. At times our professional prestige may even get the better of us. ("If I can't explain it away, it must be real").

Then what does a respected scientist do when he commits himself and later realizes that a mistake has been made? How can he save face and still admit the mistake? It is hard to believe that a scientist can professionally commit himself to something he does not fully understand, but look at Linus Pauling and his tenacious commitment to vitamin C. Let me finish with a more relevant commitment — one relevant to pseudoscience itself.

The name of Alfred Russel Wallace is not well known in modern biology, although in his time (the 18th century) he ranked with the likes of Darwin and Lyell. Wallace wrote a letter to

Darwin on June 18, 1858; with that letter was a manuscript describing Wallace's theory of species by natural selection. This was the very same theory that Darwin had been working on since 1839, but had never published anything on. Darwin's originality was smashed. Darwin and Wallace worked out a compromise and a presentation of the ideas of both was given at the Linnean Society of London on July 1, 1858.

There are a number of factors which have stripped Wallace of his fame, but one of them is his encounter with the phenomena of spiritualism, such as mysterious raps that answered questions in code, levitating tables, and the materialization of objects out of thin air. Wallace wrote that, "They (inexplicable phenomena) compelled me to accept them as facts, long before I could accept the spiritual explanation of them. There was at that time "no place in my fabric of thought into which it could be fitted." (A.R. Wallace, 1875). Wallace recounts one experience where a six foot sunflower appeared out of nothing and fell upon the table, still having a large mass of earth about its roots. Wallace went on to defend mediums, even in a court of law, and put his professional reputation on the line. Needless to say, he suffered.

This is just the type of "misleading" that James Randi crusades against. Perhaps in the case of the paranormal, Randi's training in the carnival rivals eight years of education in the sciences, since he does know where to look. Incidentally, the trick I opened with, plus a few more are described in the January 1978 issue of *Technology Review*.

Next: Work done at the Stanford Research Institute in the paranormal and some encounters with Uri Geller.)

power and our tolerance of that power.

As an alumnus, I would not give any money to MIT because it has hurt me personally. However, I would only hurt future students more if I did not give... and I care about future students. MIT does not!

I strongly suggest the only viable form of action possible by student leadership. I call upon the officers of the Class of 1980 to lead the student body through a symbolic act of protest: Cancel the Senior Class Gift to MIT. Use the money elsewhere, for charity or a party.

When future classes fail to give, MIT will begin to listen. Thank you.

Martin Plys '80

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