

# Don't mourn - Organise!



World-renowned smart-arse Noam Chomsky made a welcome return to Belfast over the Halloween weekend to deliver a short speech entitled "Hopes & Prospects" as part of an Amnesty International platform at the Whitla Hall. Chomsky is reported to be the most-quoted author of modern times and has been a bulwark of the left for nearly 50 years providing articulate and clearly referenced analyses of US foreign policy and its effects on the rest of the world. Chomsky's impeccable research has provided an intellectual ammunition for both the left as well as liberal critics and many others looking for a slice though it is less acknowledged that anarchism is central to his political philosophy.

He writes: "The ideas have been reinvented continually; in my opinion, because they reflect real human needs and perceptions. The Spanish Civil War is perhaps the most important case, though we should recall that the anarchist revolution that swept over a good part of Spain in 1936, taking various forms, was not a spontaneous upsurge, but had been prepared in many decades of education, organization, struggle, defeat, and sometimes victories. It was very significant. Sufficiently so as to call down the wrath of every major power system: Stalinism, fascism, western liberalism, most intellectual currents and their doctrinal institutions -- all combined to condemn and destroy the anarchist revolution, as they did; a sign of its significance, in my opinion." In his speech, delivered in his inimitable dead pan monotone, he discussed the recent Nobel peace

prize award to Barack Obama and indicated the irony considering Obama has continued the foreign policy of the previous administration under Dick Cheney, particularly in respect of Israel. He dissected the 'special relationship' between the US and Britain and offers that Britain has been a 'lieutenant' to the US since the end of WW2. Nothing new perhaps. Critics of Chomsky such as the anarcho-primitivist Zerzan, have argued that his focus on US foreign policy is 'narrow' however Chomsky reminds us of the effects that policy has on the rest of the world, particularly in the form of neoliberalism and free-trade capitalism. He mentioned the find of significant gas fields in Gazan waters and the theft of that resource by Israel in an alliance with BP which was facilitated by Tony Blair.

He also examined, however, the growing swing to the left in South America, and the rise of indigenous opposition in Venezuela, Bolivia and the worker occupations of factories in Argentina. Returning to the mass opposition to the war in Iraq and Afghanistan he pointed out, quite strongly, that although these movements did not stop the war they limited their scope considerably and he justified this by setting out a list US goals and interests which were not ultimately fulfilled. Chomsky ended his address with a quote from labour organiser Joe Hill - "don't mourn - organise!" to which he added "don't ridicule, organise!" suggesting also that critique in itself is not enough.

The second part of the evening was a Q&A session compered by

the dreadful, though aptly named, William Crawley, whose smug attitude was eclipsed only by his embarrassing stunt to get Chomsky to press a button on his phone and create his first "tweet on Twitter". Chomsky retorted with "That's the sort of thing my grandchildren would do".

As to be expected from the generally liberal audience many questions centred around the "it's all crap, what can we do about it, Noam?" variety.

Tom Lane, in an interview with Chomsky for Znet commented: "Though Chomsky has written a considerable amount about anarchism in the past three decades, people often ask him for a more tangible, detailed vision of social change. His political analysis never fails to instil outrage and anger with the way the world works, but many readers are left uncertain about what exactly Chomsky would do to change it. Perhaps because they regard his analytical work with such respect, they anticipate he will lay out his goals and strategy with similar precision and clarity, only to be disappointed with his generalized statements of libertarian socialist values. Or perhaps many look to a great intellectual to provide a "master plan" for them to follow step-by-step into a bright shining future."

Chomsky's replies centred around organisation and that we can no longer be spectators but must be participants in social change. One question, which I may well have asked myself, was a reference to anarcho-syndicalism and worker movements like the Industrial Workers of the World as a social model in place of capitalism. Compere Crawley, interpreting the question for the hard of hearing Chomsky, said "He was asking about the benefits of industrial capitalism" completely reversing the meaning of the question! Chomsky replied that he, like his father before him, was a fully paid up member of the IWW. Generally I found Chomsky far more animated than I'm used to and especially given his advancing years it was perhaps all the more poignant for it. He re-emphasized the need that we cannot ignore the grievances that people have the world over but, more markedly and central to his speech, nor is it enough to watch from the sidelines.

Don't mourn. Organise! Indeed!

Danny (back2front zine)

Chomsky also gave a free talk at St Mary's College in Belfast on 30th October. Tickets were snapped up in just 15 minutes. Journalists, activists, enthusiasts and even our own publicity-seeking MLAs crammed into the lecture theatre. Many more were lucky enough to be able to witness the event in the upstairs lecture hall, via a video link. Chomsky made one shocking revelation after another: on the Copenhagen climate change conference; nuclear weapons policies; US military expenditure; US policies in South America; and world poverty. With regards to the conference on climate change in Copenhagen, Chomsky explained that it is unlikely that the decisions reached by the world's leaders would meet the severity of the environmental situation. The richest countries, he insisted, are unwilling to assist the developing world and unwilling to put a cap on their catastrophic dependence on fossil fuels. Chomsky outlined how the establishment of a nuclear-free weapons zone (NFWZ) in the Middle East, which would include Israel, Iran and the current US forces in the vicinity, would reduce the threat of a nuclear war, and also the threat of war with Iran. However, the US and British governments have dismissed this idea.

Chomsky revealed that, even under Obama, US military spending is almost as high as the military spending of the rest of the world combined. He explained how Obama's administration plans to heighten its military expenditure next year. This would make Obama a higher military spender than any other President since the Second World War.

Chomsky explained that while people in South America are beginning to address the biting issue of poverty, largely a consequence of devastating neo-liberal policies, UN agencies have announced that the number of the world's hungry has passed one billion - a sixth of the world's population. In the USA food stamp assistance is measuring approximately 36 million. Lastly, Chomsky told us that we should not leave the talk with a feeling of hopelessness and he insisted that the world's evils can be challenged, and that activism is the key to success. He assured us that, despite what the mainstream media claims, the opposition to the Iraq war is far greater than that of the Vietnam War; and that we should draw upon the successes of the social movements which have been achieved since the 1960s.

His sincerity and wit are compliment to the admiration he can boast; yet it is his fearless drive to expose the truth about the evil of US policies which make him one of the world's most respected intellectuals.

Sean