



Noam Chomsky: an interview

(Ceasefire Magazine)

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Introduction

Hicham Yezza

Sixty books, hundreds of academic papers, thousands of lectures, interviews and talks over five continents and five decades: at 80, Noam Chomsky is an intellectual, cultural and personal phenomenon. Yet the more interesting thing about the man is probably the fact that he seems completely unfazed, when not downright irritated, at his status as the "Elvis of Academia" (as U2's Bono calls him).

Thousands of pages have already been written about the man's personal and intellectual journey from teenage prodigy to acclaimed scholar and the world's foremost public intellectual. However, September 2008 is a good month to be taking a look at the man's achievements and positions on the economy. As far back as the late 1960s, Chomsky mounted a robust attack on the economic tenets of unregulated market capitalism. In particular, he denounced the corporate habit of whining about too much government control when the economic going is good only to protest at the need for the government to "intervene" to assist (i.e. bail out) those same corporate interests when the going isn't so good.

Those who have been observing at close range the unfolding economic disaster on Wall Street and beyond this past year have noted the powerful parallels between the Chomskyan critique of corporate greed and the predictable cries for help emanating from Lehman Brothers, Merrill Lynch and other stalwarts of Market Capitalism.

When Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy in Mid-September, straight-faced analysts and business leaders expressed shock at how the company was "allowed to fail" by the federal authorities. A peculiar formulation that you are unlikely to see used when talking about blue-collar workers "allowed" to be made redundant. The incredible assumption of course, was that the tax payer was supposedly a stakeholder (as management-speak has it) in a corporation's survival when it is in trouble but should be a mere bystander when multi-billion dollar profits are being raked in.

Chomsky's "academic" work is now seminal and whether you agree with its tenets or not, it is undeniable that he has reshaped (indeed, fundamentally altered) the face of linguistics and cognitive theory. There is a common tendency to dismiss his non-linguistics forays into media criticism, political theory and foreign affairs as naive, simple-minded and extremist. But it is precisely those efforts that have highlighted his continued relevance as a master expositor, analyst and educator. It is easy to underestimate the impact of his demystifying, no-nonsense approach as a writer and speaker on generations of activists, intellectuals and readers. But his attack on the academic disease of fetishising "language as obfuscation" has been very effective in exposing the growing tendency of academic circles to

establish intellectual niches seemingly inaccessible to the layman/woman (and, as Chomsky has shown repeatedly, often deliberately so) by creating unsurmountable barriers of entry to those members of the public without the necessary qualifications or bonafides: obscure jargon, layers of intellectual meta-structures to mask simple (rather than simplistic) truisms and a taste for the convoluted and the oblique (notably his attack on certain exponents of postmodernism and literary theory).

Whether he is seen as a prophet or a charlatan, Chomsky certainly leaves very few indifferent. And it is this ability to bring out the mind of his listener out of its atrophied comfort that continues to excite and stimulate. In his interview with Ceasefire - the first of two parts - you can see the trademark rigour, intellectual honesty and genuine humility that have characterized his life and his work. His profile as the "world's greatest intellectual" (a formulation he has incidentally denounced as meaningless) certainly shows no signs of diminishing. Whenever a major crisis erupts (9/11, The Iraq War, The Georgian War), or a major event takes place, Chomsky's opinion on the matter is always quickly solicited (and dissected) by disciples and foes alike. This is as good a definition of "being relevant" as you're likely to find.

Ultimately, whether as oracle or as nemesis, Chomsky's relevance is set to continue for many decades to come. As far as we're concerned: Amen to that!

The interview

August 18, 2008

Is a two-state solution to the Middle-East conflict still possible? Edward Said ended up supporting a binational-state position.

A two-state settlement in accord with the very broad and longstanding international consensus remains possible. An agreement along those lines was almost reached at Taba Egypt in January 2001, the one significant departure of the US and Israel from the rejectionist stand that has been primarily responsible for undermining this outcome. And though there have been changes for the worse since, they are not irreversible.

My own view, since I reached political consciousness in the 1940s, is that a binational state would be the most reasonable solution for all concerned. From 1967 to the mid-1970s, steps could have been taken towards federalism and in the longer term binationalism. I wrote and spoke about the matter quite extensively at the time. By the mid-1970s, that opportunity was lost, and the only way to approach federalism and closer integration is in stages, the first stage being a two-state settlement. It is intriguing that when the proposal was feasible, it elicited utter outrage, but now that it is not feasible (except as a late stage in a long-term project), it is welcomed within the mainstream (New York Times, New York Review, etc.). The reason, I suspect, is that the proposal is basically a gift to hard-line rejectionists, who can claim that "they want to destroy us" so we had better take all we can.

We should attend carefully to the crucial distinction between proposal and advocacy. We can propose that everyone should live in peace and harmony. It rises to the level of advocacy when we sketch a feasible path from here to there. The only advocacy of a binational state that I know of is the one I described: in stages, beginning with a two-state settlement.

Supporters of a one-state settlement often argue that if Israel takes over all of Palestine, it will face an internal struggle for civil rights resembling the anti-apartheid movement. That is an illusion, however. Israel and the US can simply persist in their current programs of incorporating whatever is of value to them within Israel, while taking no responsibility for Palestinians in the scattered fragments that remain, and leaving them to rot and turn on each other, as is happening in Gaza.

Do you think there is a real chance that anarcho-syndicalism will ever be implemented on a large scale?

Prediction in human affairs is a very uncertain enterprise. Too much depends on will and choice.

There is also little point in speculation. Those who regard these ideals as worth pursuing should do what they can to lay the basis for implementing them, whatever their (necessarily uninformed) guesses as to the likelihood of success.

Do you agree that the 21st century will be dominated by the rise of China and India? If so, would this be a positive or negative development?

Looking over a long historical stretch, China and India are now beginning to recover their leading role in the global economy up to the 18th century, before they were crushed by Western (later also Japanese) imperialism. It is highly questionable, I believe, whether they can return to anything like the status they once had. Both countries face enormous internal problems, social and environmental. As one illustration, in the latest Human Development Index China ranks 81st and India 128th (about where it was when the neoliberal reforms were initiated 15 years ago). That is only one indication of very severe problems, which it will not be easy to overcome. Any progress they make should be, on balance, a positive development, though the world is too complex for any simple judgment.

Do you think the global anti-war movement has failed to achieve a critical mass of support over the past five years?

The notion "critical mass" is not well enough defined to respond. It has registered achievements as well as failures. Take Iraq. It has failed to bring the war to an end, but it has succeeded in preventing US escalation to anything remotely like the level of Vietnam. The "why" question would require a lengthy disquisition, not a brief response.

Does the term "public intellectual" still carry any meaningful weight in the 21st century? do they have a role to play?

As much as ever.

Update on Hich's case

(Ceasefire Magazine)

Submitted at 2/23/2009 7:02:33 PM

Dear friends,

Thanks to everyone for the considerable and unstinting support they have given to the Free Hich campaign from the start. It is only due to the help and support of thousands of people that Hicham has been able to fight for justice for so long.

As many of you may know, Hich lost his case against the Home Office at Northampton Crown Court on Thursday 12th February. The charge is "securing avoidance of immigration control using deception"

and comes under the Immigration Act. The sentencing will take place on March 6th. The charge carries a maximum sentence of 2 years in jail.

We are obviously saddened and disappointed at the outcome, especially considering how hard Hich and the campaign have fought for him to have his day in court. Despite this setback, Hicham's spirits remain high. His legal team is now considering the various options on offer and we will therefore be releasing a full statement in the coming few days.

Peter Tatchell, one of the UK's most prominent civil liberties commentators has written a piece about Hicham's persecution in today's Guardian. Please

read it and add your comments.

Last week, the Guardian published a piece by Hicham on the subject of the student occupation movement.

In the meantime, your continued support is crucial to ensure Hicham is treated fairly and any attempts to deport him are resisted. Please continue to visit the website for updates and invite your friends to join this Facebook group. Ways to help Hich can be found on the website under "How to Help". <http://freehicham.co.uk/what-can-we-do/>

Sowing the Seeds - Gaza 2009

(Ceasefire Magazine)

Submitted at 2/22/2009 10:32:04 PM

Rowan Lubbock

"Not surprisingly, the anger and rage that is slowly sprouting from this latest sowing of violence is already visible."

The children walking in the streets, bitter with tears will be the fedayin in nineteen years, in the next round. Today we lose our victory.

Amos Kenan, 1967

Israel's latest military assault on Gaza that has killed, at the time of writing, over 1000 Palestinians has re-awakened the world to what could reasonably be called a fate worse than death. The strangulation of Gaza's 1.5 million residents, enforced since Hamas's election victory in 2006, has clearly shown the Palestinians that their choices are worthless, unless they coincide with Israel's political and strategic goals. The latest bloodshed is (according to the official Israeli line) a direct response to the homemade rockets launched into southern Israel by militant groups. During the proceeding carnage, the Israeli leadership have also let slip on more than a few occasions their intense interest in ousting the Hamas government altogether in an effort to rebalance the political allegiances of the Occupied Territories more to their favour. But while Israel claims to be protecting its citizens, it is far more likely that 'Operation Cast Lead' is merely sowing the seeds for the next round of violence - a narrative that is all too familiar in this tortured strip of land.

The latest horrors unleashed in the Gaza strip are, according to conservative columnist Charles Krauthammer, to be blamed on Hamas, "which started this conflict with unrelenting rocket and mortar attacks on unarmed Israelis". Given the available evidence to the contrary, it is surprising how often this chain of events in peddled in the mainstream media. The realities of the situation were soon after uncomfortably ingested by the guardians of truth, most notably this example from CNN, and has since been cited on an infrequent basis. One Israeli commentator to have recalled the source of the conflict before most others noted that, "the lull between Israel and Hamas, which lasted about five months, was violated in the wake of Israeli military activity within the Gaza Strip [on 4 November] that prompted Qassam barrages". Those who follow developments in the Middle East will no doubt be wondering what made Hamas's retaliatory rocket fire so provocative this time round. The fall out from the 2006 Lebanon War has undeniably played a crucial role in this regard.

Hezbollah's 'victory' in Lebanon (insofar as the group has survived to fight another day) over Israel's overwhelming military superiority became at once a reminder of Robert McNamara's retrospective reasoning as to the resilience of indigenous guerrilla movements, and a stark example of how politically valuable the idea of armed resistance could be in this fragile country. As Charles Harb observes, "Lebanese dignitaries from across the political and religious spectrum, Muslims and Christians alike, were lined up to welcome the freed prisoners, in a display of unity not seen since the earlier prisoner exchange of 2004. While many had previously lamented the cost of war and resistance, they now seemed eager to share in the glory of welcoming the last Lebanese prisoners of war".

While Israel has stuck loyally to its 2006 alibi (responding to the abduction of two Israeli soldiers), we soon discovered during the deliberations of the Winograd Commission that such an operation had been planned months before the two IDF soldiers were abducted. Israel's military brass considered the war's outcome as a slap in the face, as their "deterrent" capacity to terrorise the region had been seemingly destroyed. As New York Times' veteran Middle East correspondent, Thomas Friedman, notes: "[Israel's] only long-term source of deterrence was to exact enough pain on the civilians - the families and employers of the militants - to restrain Hezbollah in the future". "There is", therefore, according to former head of Israel's National Security Council, Giora Eiland, "one lesson here for Israel...": [the next] war, should it break out, would bring about Lebanon's destruction... This is the [sic] almost only way to create deterrence vis-a-vis an organization that attaches such great importance to its domestic

Lebanese legitimacy".

Thus, as the cheerleaders of state-sponsored terrorism convey the strategic rationale driving the policy of the Middle East's only democracy, the overall picture in Gaza comes into sharper focus. True to form, we now know that Operation Cast Lead was similarly planned months in advance of Israel's November 4 attack, utilizing techniques of disinformation to gain the upper hand with Hamas that "served to significantly increase the number of its casualties in the strike". Thus, the latest round of violence in Gaza is directly descended from the lessons learned from the 2006 Lebanon war. As Deputy Chief of staff Brigadier General Dan Harel explained a few days after the start of the bombing campaign: "After this operation there will not be a single Hamas building left standing in Gaza, and we plan to change the rules of the game". But Israel has not changed the rules of the game - it has merely entrenched the age-old orientalist adage: Arabs only understand the language of force. "...[T]his is the most aggressive line that we have ever taken towards fighting the Palestinians", said one IDF lieutenant, "As you say in English, the gloves were off".

It is clear why Israel chooses to speak in such a language. As long as the PLO presented itself as merely a security threat, so the logic went, Israel could confidently rely on its one trump card: a terrifyingly effective military machine. One of the great crises of Israel's occupation came during one of Palestine's only peaceful mass-resistance movements (Intifada) aimed directly at the Zionist regime in the territories, beginning in December 1987. But if the PLO and the people they represented were to turn away from violence, then the entire military equation would be altered. As the prominent Israeli intellectual, Shlomo Avineri, noted at the time, "[a]n army can beat an army, but an army cannot beat a people". As the Intifada proceeded, the US State Department noted that by January 1989 a total of 11 Israelis and 366 Palestinians had been killed during the Intifada. Yet Israel's iron fisted approach to popular (and non-violent) resistance was proving fruitless.

It was at this point that the classic occupier's game of divide and rule would prove so useful. Never before faced with a truly popular political movement, Israel's only option was to divide the movement itself. But, as the Scottish poet Robert Burns so momentarily wrote, "The best-laid plans of mice and men often go awry". Or, to put a more contemporary twist on this turn of phrase, as Israel's Defence Minister Ehud Barak recently told Yediot Ahronot, "One of the lessons learned in the Middle East is to never try to anticipate the other side's moves. I hate to remind you that 20 years ago we supported the induction of Hamas".

The rationale behind supporting an Islamist group in the Occupied Territories since the early 80's, as described by then US Ambassador Daniel Kurtzer in 2001, was that "Israel perceived it to be better to have people turning toward religion rather than toward a nationalistic cause", such that the PLO and the Intifada represented. But these "nationalistic" groups were not quite as easy to mollify as they once were. The problem, as clearly spelled out in a 1988 report from the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, was that "the pragmatic element - the traditional, middle class elites in the West Bank who accommodated themselves to the Israeli occupation - [had] been undermined" by the Intifada.

It was therefore hoped that Hamas could similarly undermine the PLO's base of support by becoming a counter-weight to the forces of a secular-based national liberation movement. But Hamas's very legitimacy rested on its decision either to continue its acquiescence (albeit a reactionary one) to the status quo, or to support the Intifada. Not surprisingly, it eventually chose the latter. After its requests for political inclusion were shunned by the PLO (believing the group, justifiably, to be a pawn of Israeli-US rejectionism), Hamas now started to see its political future in standing opposed to Israel's vacuous "peace process".

As the PLO inched ever closer to the US-Israeli sponsored plan for Palestinian "autonomy", which was more of a euphemism for "self-occupation", Hamas began to conduct a series of worker strikes in the Gaza strip, eventually leading to fatal clashes between itself and Fatah. By December 1992, Hamas had irreversibly turned to violent resistance, partly driven by its insistence on freeing all of historic

Palestine, but mostly due to its drive to regain some political ground from the PLO by presenting itself to a weary and frustrated Palestinian population as the only credible resistance movement in the territories. The flame of the Intifada had now been extinguished.

Since announcing the Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles in 1993 the situation facing ordinary Palestinians has steadily deteriorated. According to Israeli historian Ilan Pappé, the source of Israel's continued oppression derives from the fact that the Palestinians could only "get to the final status negotiations to the extent that it safeguard[ed] Israel's security concerns during the interim ["autonomy"] period". The Israeli foil was therefore complete; the people were divided, and Israel's occupation continued.

While this period has been amply covered elsewhere, the legacy of the "peace process" came under sharp scrutiny soon after Hamas's surprise victory in 2006. According to the New York Times, US officials assigned "most of the blame on Mr. Abbas for not offering a positive alternative to Hamas", despite the glaring fact that Abbas has consistently failed to elicit "American help in persuading Israel to curb settlement growth, release prisoners and lift the checkpoints and roadblocks choking off livelihoods in the West Bank".

Now that the Palestinians have broken with what they perceive as Fatah's collaboration with Israel, they have been feeling the full force of Israel's disapproval. Having placed all their bets on Mahmoud Abbas's Palestinian Authority (PA), US and Israeli officials were shocked to learn of the widespread disillusionment among the Palestinian electorate. Immediately, plans were drawn up to oust Hamas in a US-Israeli sponsored coup, and to be carried out by the PA forces in Gaza. After achieving a legitimate political victory through the ballot box, however, one could only expect Hamas to harbour a few sour grapes over this attempted putsch. As one of Dick Cheney's ex-neecon underlings, David Wurmser, said closer to the time, "It looks to me that what happened wasn't so much a coup by Hamas but an attempted coup by Fatah that was pre-empted before it could happen".

The current bloodletting is, therefore, merely the expression of Israel's frustration with Hamas's intransigence in refusing to accommodate itself with the continued (albeit "remote") occupation of Gaza. While there has been a great deal of talk concerning the new "security environment" at the border, or the supposed success in destroying the Hamas "infrastructure" (meaning the party itself), more sober-headed prognoses have recently started to emerge. As one New York Times editorial notes:

Israeli officials acknowledge that the 20-day offensive has not permanently crippled Hamas's military wing or ended its ability to launch rocket attacks. It is unlikely that Israel can achieve those aims militarily any time soon. The cost in human life and anti-Israeli fury would be enormous. Already more than 1,000 Palestinians have died in the densely populated Gaza Strip, where an always miserable life has become unbearable.

Not surprisingly, the anger and rage that is slowly sprouting from this latest sowing of violence is already visible. As one Gazan resident told the Washington Post soon after the IDF's disengagement, "My house used to be here... The only reason people don't blow themselves up against the Israeli army... is that they can't find explosives". Despite the lunacy in creating such a state of affairs, Israeli leaders can expect to accrue additional strategic benefits from the complete destruction of Gaza. The political revival of Labor's Ehud Barak has certainly played a major part, not to mention the prospect of sowing divisions throughout the wider Middle East that ultimately helps Israel to isolate the region's undesirables, namely Iran.

But as with all episodes in the great chess-game of Middle East power politics, it is the weak that suffer the consequences. Now that the Palestinian people have been effectively abandoned by the great powers for exercising their "freedom to choose", they are being systematically punished for having the courage to live on under the most extreme military occupation for the last 40 years. After the dust has settled, we must not forget their cries for recognition, their calls for independence, or their right to resist those who would seek to dismantle the very fabric of their future homeland.

Radicalism for beginners

(Ceasefire Magazine)

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Dominic Fox

What is a radical? A radical is someone who is concerned with a problem, and who addresses himself to that problem with the aim of uncovering its roots. For the radical, there is a difference between appearance and reality, symptom and cause. The purpose of radical action is to break through the outward manifestations of the problem in order to access its inner or underlying reality. To act in this way is to intervene: to come between the cause and the symptom, interrupting the communication between them. The radical does not want only to treat the symptoms of the problem. He wants to do something about whatever is producing those symptoms, to affect them at their source. Unless this is done, there will always be more symptoms to treat. Sooner or later the "symptom load" will become unworkable, and the decision must be taken to intervene. A radical is someone who has taken this decision.

Let us call the process which leads to the radical's decision to intervene "radicalisation". It is typically experienced as a growth of awareness, leading to a transformation. The radical begins by being made aware of a problem, being presented with its symptoms. Investigating further, he finds that these symptoms present themselves with some regularity: the same mishaps or abuses happen over and over again. There seems to be something systematic about them. But their systematic character is not acknowledged: every time something goes wrong, it is treated as an unfortunate happenstance, just the sort of thing that happens from time to time. A subtle mechanism of explanation is brought into play: it was nothing really, the accusations of wrongdoing are malicious, it was an honest mistake, the injured parties deserved or solicited what happened to them, and in any case it is regrettably unavoidable that a few innocents should suffer for the greater good. The person in the process of radicalisation observes that these explanations are self-serving and mutually inconsistent. The mechanism of explanation first denies, then displaces and finally dissolves responsibility.

It is at this point that the separation occurs between appearance, which has a false consistency supported by an obscene underside, and reality, which is the domain of root causes which finally explain both "normal" experience and its apparent lapses into "abnormal" violence and disorder. While others are distracted by appearances, and led by them to believe that the world "just happens" to be a certain way, the radical begins to understand that there are real powers at work behind the forms of appearance, and that it is possible to identify and confront them. In this way, the radical is drawn into conflict with the real powers of

the world. He becomes responsible for the world, the guarantor of its moral consistency, assuming the very responsibility that those in authority take such pains to deny.

There are two paths open to the radical, once this responsibility is assumed. One is to strike violently against the false consistency of the domain of appearance, in the hope of reviving the real conflicts it exists to disguise and suppress. For the terrorist radicals of the Red Army Faction, it was a question of shattering the complacent self-satisfaction of the triumphant West, bringing the violence of anti-imperialist conflict in Latin America and Vietnam into the midst of West German society. For today's Islamist radicals, it is a question of spiritual awakening, separating the true followers of Islam from the decadent tyranny of secular governments. Theirs is a familiar line of attack: grand public outrages, aimed at shaking the spectator's faith in the solidity, the dependability, of the spectacle. What advertised itself as prosperity and social peace, a more or less livable arrangement, is shown to be susceptible to horrifying assaults, and to be incapable of responding to the threat of such assaults except through indiscriminate retaliatory excesses and a poignant attenuation of convivial sentiment.

The ultimate goal of this strategy is the "desertification" of reality: the undoing of social peace (which assuredly protects privilege and power) and the summoning of society to judgement through the tribulations of a final conflict. What began as a quest for reality must end with the furious annihilation of all that is unreal. But the real never appears, even as the world of appearances shudders. The terrorist radical, engineer of spectacular atrocity, does not succeed in dissolving the enchantment of the spectacle but rather in reinforcing it. The RAF's political critique is all but forgotten: the names of Baader and Meinhof are sentimentally conjoined, like those of Bonnie and Clyde. And what can we say of the obscene, compulsive unreality of the so-called "war on terror", if not that it is a war against a phantom, a war in which the helpless absurdities of "security theatre" go hand-in-hand with an indiscriminate and terrible violence? Truly this is the kind of war which the world of the spectacle wages against its own manifestations. Far from being an eschatological conflict in which the real stakes of existence are finally revealed and fought over, it has the interminable stupidity of a waking dream or a soap opera. Terrorist acts do not awaken populations, but knock them into a stupor.

What is the second path open to the radical? It is to recognise in the separation of "appearance" from "reality" not the final division of forces constituting the world, but the primary evidence of the contingency of any regime of appearance. Simply: what is made to appear is not everything that there is,

or could be, and the "internal logic" of what appears is never wholly adequate to support its apparent consistency. The problem is not only that the "immoral logic" of imperial power is coupled with a "moral illogic", in which the plausibility of "humanitarian" apologetics for projections of that power is established through the most cynical manipulation of opinion. It is also that, as much as it may depend on lucid calculations of material interest, the Realpolitik of the ruling classes does not place them in command of reality itself: their "immoral logic" is no less a logic of appearance, a logic organizing a world-view and fatally bound to the finite interests of those who uphold it.

In fact, it is up to the radical to identify that which eludes this logic, that which is subtracted from the world-view that it organises. To think towards the real, by way of entering the site of a subtraction, rather than seeking to denude the real by annihilating the merely apparent. The "immoral logic" of imperial power has the force of a rationalisation, a "making reasonable" of what is, at bottom, arbitrary privilege backed up by recourse to devastating force. One is compelled to accept the rationalisation because the person making it does not need to answer for its rationality, having recourse instead to violence as his final answer. But there is always some aspect of reality that such rationalisations cannot master, some point at which instead of continuing on a path towards the real they double back and attempt (and fail) to form a closed loop of self-justification. It is at such a point that reality falls outside the ambit of the rationalisation that attempts to capture it, such that it is subtracted from the "rational" account of reality. From the point of view of any self-interested instrumentalisation of reason, it is reality itself that is "unreasonable".

The task of the radical is accordingly to take reason to unreasonable lengths, to resume the passage towards the real. And this means: making unreasonable demands, and not backing down when opponents protest at the incompatibility of these demands with the "reality" of imperial consensus. Refusing to "see reason" when threatened and coerced. Refusing to abide by what common sense declares is only a reasonable accommodation to the state of affairs. Refusing to be cowed by the apparent worldly mastery of those who promulgate the currently fashionable rationalisations of their own dominance. Above all, refusing to let the radical orientation of thought towards the real be dismissed as irresponsible and irrational, as lacking in civic piety or human sympathy. "To go to the root" is to be concerned with the only possible basis for a human sympathy not limited by communitarian interest or ethnic particularity, or a responsibility not finally answerable to the caprices of power.

Why Ceasefire?

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month of May but frames his experiences in defeatist rhetoric that is endemic of disillusioned former radicals who have lost faith in the effectiveness of social movements.

These movements are nearly always presented sealed: the fate of it is complete, or failed and generally, over. That DeGaulle was not overthrown and replaced by 20 year olds and that the French movement stopped as quickly as it started (due to new

Remembering 1968

(Ceasefire Magazine)

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"Be realistic, demand the impossible," has safely made its way into clichéd revolutionary discourse – along, perhaps, with Che Guevara's face. As we post-Thatcher youths of today make our way through what are perhaps the last dregs of our formal education, we do so with highly-set precedents of activism behind us. Slogans and movements, ideals and ideas from the heady 60s and 70s remain etched in today's culture and in our collective memory. The shift, which changed so much, is now neatly stereotyped, printed and hung up in student rooms or on less than sexy t-shirts.

The black power movement is now celebrated with documentaries and bronze statues: a triumph complete, and Feminism is now a dirty, (or worse, irrelevant) word. The Vietnam war is used to evoke notions of presidential competence within the republican party and the student movements of '68 can be nostalgically perused through the book shelves of all major literature retailers in France- a 40th anniversary special edition of course.

The 1960s in all their commotion have officially been quartered and hung up to dry, available at a good price for anyone with nostalgic left-leaning desires for a time long gone. It is always comfortable to look at rose-tinted revolt when the issues seem no longer relevant- race and gender inequality, a US- waged war

and public discontent are obviously moments long gone and strangely they continue to interest us. This very article was to be printed in May 2008 - in recognition of those forty years gone since Parisian students took to the streets and halted the city in its tracks, responding to the non-democratic patriarchal state that France was becoming. The May edition of Ceasefire was delayed due to the unfortunate arrest of our editor under the terrorism act, but I shan't make any obvious, indulgent or uncomfortable connections to the continuing relevance of the defence of civil liberties.

There are many who wish they could have seen that time and I am certainly a little envious of my mother's or grandfather's experiences on the streets of Paris. This is perfectly reasonable based on an appreciation of the events of the era- the gradual transformation of many societal groups' role and rights in Western society. But this desire to have been there becomes skewed, and indeed dangerous, if it is based on a notion that '68 presented some kind of last-chance saloon for voyeurs of radical politics. This is what Christopher Hitchens describes as "the last gasp of red-flag socialism." He explains, "I thought 1968 was the beginning of something. Later, I understood that I had instead been part of the end of something." He writes of his experiences in Oxford during that famous

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deals for workers and appeasement strategies) should not detract from the successes of the time – this needn't be a debate between revolt, revolution and reform.

With victories achieved often comes the 'completion' of a movement that can now be admired from afar- preferably with somber voiceovers from a European white man. The events of the time are inevitably, obviously and beautifully appropriated by the mainstream. In parallel to what Adbusters describes as the "death of cool" (the use of alternative, underground and fringe movements as a tool to sell products commercially) the student riots of Paris, or the womens' movement or the black power movement have all been repackaged, neatly and expensively into 'liberal' or 'up to date' ideas that come naturally to the majority of us today.

Collective memory

But don't worry, all of this indicates the success and impact that such actions have had on wider society. The manufacture of a collective mainstream appreciation of events occurs only after thousands mobilize. Those values – whether equality, or emancipation, or simply liberty – filter through eventually so that most of us, from many facets of the political spectrum, assume a hazy memory of fights once fought and (now-deemed) just causes.

In 1968 Paris, thousands of students, and later workers (10 million of them), took to the streets in a revolt against the Gaullist establishment, capitalist power and the struggle for a new world order at the end of WW2. Fighting against the idea of a patriarchy (personified by then-president de Gaulle) and control, in May of 1968 the rubbish piled high on the streets as students and workers united in an exhilarating demand for change. Le Monde journalists wrote their paper in the morning and then sold it on the streets themselves in the afternoon, providing information on how movement was progressing (much to the dislike of their older, conservative readers.) Acclaimed existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre interviewed a student leader for the left-leaning publication

Liberation: the world was turned on its head, and student voices held more aplomb than ever.

Evidently campaigners of the time, the world over, now find themselves in extraordinarily different socio-political situations after forty years. In 1968, and for years after, Tommie Smith, John Carlos and their families suffered terrible humiliation and persecution at the hands of both authority and fellow citizens in the United States. This was due to their defiant, then outrageous and now iconic stand at the Mexico Olympics, the world famous black power salute. Today their figures stand 22ft high in bronze at their university. Second wave feminism was only just getting to its feet by this point and relations of post-war and post-50s authority- for example in France - were faltering under the surface before "the events" broke out. But the greatly positive changes evoked in that era, which create the contrast between then and now, should take nothing away from the contemporary potency of these movements, of how relevant they remain in struggles that persist today. The angle of analysis that focuses on what is buried with '68 feeds into ideas of radical left-wing demise, and with this the conceptualization of a completed struggle allows for neat and nostalgic presentations of events.

Although we may find commemorations of activism intrinsically based on conclusions, this construct is preferably enjoyed with a pinch of salt. Those neat new packages of social movements must avoid any unattractive trimmings (activists that were, say, 'too militant,') and the manufacturing process of an attractive collective memory may take some time, (it took 37 years before the bronze statues of black civil rights activists Carlos and Smith were erected). But you may look forward to the final package being delivered eventually, shiny and new, just in time for your own children to hang it up on their own bedroom walls, with little knowledge of the exhilaration, work and people power these collective memories take to create.