

USSR much to be proud of: it was Russian support that enabled the Iranian Kurds to set up an autonomous republic in 1946, but they did not give it the means to support itself and colluded in its destruction; the Russians provided the Iraqis with the material to attack the Iraqi Kurds in the 1974-5 war, even if the Iraqis now complain that the Russians did not help them enough; and after initially publicising the demands of the Iranian Kurds after the 1979 revolution, the Russians have now lined up behind the Tehran government.

The Kurds are, as their defenders never tire of pointing out, and rightly so, a separate nation of between ten and fifteen million people who have always been denied the right to self-determination. Many Kurdish political representatives accept that they will never obtain a fully independent state; but even moderate demands for autonomy have been systematically rejected, often by governments that trumpet their 'revolutionary' credentials to the world. The autonomous region in Iraq is a sham, and the Kurds have no more political freedom than anyone else in Baathist Iraq. The Iranian Kurds, who have time and again stressed their demand only for limited autonomy, have been denounced as foreign agents and assaulted both by the regular Iranian army and the Islamic guards. The new military regime in Turkey is carrying out widespread arrests and harassment in the eastern, Kurdish, parts of that country. The liberating potential of the dominant nationalisms in these states, or of a new militant Islam, holds few attractions for the Kurds. They want their rights and, on the basis of their history of struggle chronicled in this book, they are not a people to give up.

Transnational Institute

FRED HALLIDAY

After the Cataclysm: post-war Indochina and the reconstruction of imperial ideology

By NOAM CHOMSKY and EDWARD S. HERMAN (Boston, South End Press, and Nottingham, Spokesman, 1980). 392pp.

Since the American military withdrawal from Indochina in 1975, the western media have been engaged in a propaganda battle to reconstruct imperial ideology, and the chief and chosen victims have been the Khmer Rouge and the people of Kampuchea. To this end western, and especially American, media have employed 'a highly selective culling of facts and much downright lying'.

Such is the chief contention of Chomsky and Herman in this the second volume of their *Political Economy of Human Rights*. They believe this 'system of brainwashing under freedom' in which

'questions of truth are secondary' has been a spectacular success. That success has been considerably aided by the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea and by the Vietnamese use of themes taken from the earlier western propaganda. *After the Cataclysm* was published too soon after the Vietnamese invasion to deal very fully with it, but not so soon that the authors were not able to point to Kampuchean resistance to conquest as giving the lie to American and Vietnamese assertions. The message from Chomsky and Herman is that the US war against Indochina has not ceased but become political instead of military, and the Vietnamese invasion has given the US its first victory, a victory which it will not be slow to exploit.

The charges that the authors make against the American media and the predominant sections of the US intelligentsia come down chiefly to two. First, that none of them are concerned either about human rights or human suffering. These only become important to them when they are 'ideologically serviceable' to imperial purposes. Thus, the terrifying massacres and suffering that accompanied the attempt of the Indonesian government to conquer East Timor were (and are) almost totally ignored in the US (and Britain), for to expose them would have been to criticise an imperial tool. Similarly, the havoc and death wreaked in Kampuchea and throughout Indochina by US forces before 1975 is now not referred to, nor the earlier French repression, even though these underlie all the more recent events.

That leads to the second charge, namely that in western campaigns of denunciation, such as that against the Khmer Rouge, the critical faculty is suppressed and facts are 'selected, modified or sometimes invented to create a certain image'. This, the authors say, is true of academics as well as the press: 'Mainstream scholarship can be trusted to conform to the requirements of mythology, just as in true totalitarian societies.' Perhaps the bitterness with which the authors attack academics is due to the fact that towards the end of the Vietnam war it seemed many were beginning to gain some independence of judgement, only to slip back into apathy or worse once the military withdrawal was over.

Chomsky and Herman substantiate their charges by a detailed and thorough analysis of American press reporting and comment on the situation in Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea since 1975. All sections are impressive, but that on Kampuchea is the most thorough and valuable. Moreover, it includes a penetrating and fair-minded discussion of the relevant books: the shallow *Readers Digest* propaganda volume, *Murder of a Gentle Land*, by Barron and Paul; the more serious but more seriously faulted *Cambodia: year zero*, by François Ponchaud; and the review of the French original edition of that book by Lacoutre, whose exaggerations of some of Ponchaud's statements provided the material for countless wild American and later Vietnamese

denunciations of the Khmer Rouge.

But the media sins of omission are as grave as those of commission. All views contrary to the chosen one are either suppressed or distorted. The serious and invaluable account of Kampuchea by Hildebrand and Porter, *Cambodia, Starvation and Revolution*, was ignored in the United States and elsewhere because it gave a rather favourable account of the Khmer Rouge programme. Similarly, the testimonies of Scandinavian and Yugoslav diplomats and others who visited Kampuchea between 1975 and the end of 1978 were either ignored, or twisted so as to give a quite contrary impression to the favourable one that they had tried to convey.

It would be possible to finish *After the Cataclysm* in a despairing mood. How can people learn the truth while so constantly battered by malicious propaganda in this way? But in the long run, is it not the voices who dared to speak out despite the barrage and against it which really count?

Ripon, Yorks.

ARTHUR CLEGG

The National Front

By NIGEL FIELDING (London, Boston and Henley, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981). 247pp. Cloth £12.50.

It now appears to be more or less compulsory for authors of books called *The National Front* to commence their work with the claim that the NF is not a fascist organisation. In his cheap paperback of that title, Martin Walker stated that he could not find it in his 'heart or conscience' to call the NF fascist (on the grounds that, having met them, he found them such nice fellows), and in his expensive hardback Nigel Fielding states that he does not wish 'to present the NF as a Nazi or fascist group', again on the basis of the way the party's members see themselves (as part of 'a modern movement enshrining traditional British values'). In both cases, too, these authors spend most of their time trying (and failing) to substantiate the assertion that a group of people who have been involved in openly fascist parties in the past, and who, despite a conscious and deliberate attempt to disguise themselves as respectable people, still hold to all the essential ideological and practical tenets of fascist ideology, aren't really fascists at all.

Unlike Walker, Fielding writes much of his book in that strange, alien language in which sociologist likes to speak unto sociologist ('I decided that a substantial measure of interaction with members would be sought, and that I would undertake the practice of participant observation techniques' – meaning, that he went to some NF meetings and talked to people afterwards). Even when he is not speaking of 'the