

In a vain attempt to keep a clear mind amidst all the chaos in the region and in the world at large – Sudan, Mauritania, Iraq, Palestine, Belarus, Aqaba, Sinai – I thought it timely to offer the reader something both completely different and fairly refreshing. Despite all the criticisms one can direct at the Arab media – and there are quite a few – it seems, in some ways, we're way ahead of the Western media icons we measure ourselves by.

Edward Saeed once noted that Arab satellite and broadcasting enjoy more freedom than the American equivalent on account of political economics. He batted around Noam Chomsky's famous term, 'the manufacture of consent'.

Between a Rockefeller and a hard place

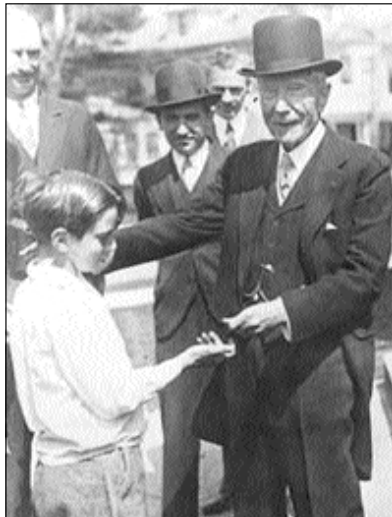
Saeed's speech floated back into my mind, when I stumbled across the woes of a colleague I have a great deal of respect for, Jonathan Nitzan. He's run into snags on many an occasion trying to get innovative research on Israel and on the Iraq War published in the Western press and academic journals. In one of his more eye-opening pieces, a book review entitled "The Rockefeller Boys" (Please see <http://bnarchives.yorku.ca/172/>), he reviews the transformation the Israeli economy underwent in the 1980s and 1990s, from socialist command economy to a capitalist laissez-faire system, which ties in with his other work on Israel's desire for 'peace'. Long have I known that Chomsky has always seen Israeli politics as beholden to developments in the US, but I never thought this extended anywhere near as far as Nitzan reveals.

According to Nitzan, it's not just a matter of the US leaning on Israel to adopt a 'peaceful' approach or the US turning a blind eye to Israeli aggression. The two countries, their respective elites, are tied together organically, financially and ideologically, with the US more or less calling the shots most of the time. It turns out that, when Israel changed gear in the 1980s and began to search for market outlets – in our neck of the woods – for goods manufactured in Israel by multinational subsidiaries, it came at the instigation of Israelis sponsored and cultivated by the powers that be in the US from as far back as the 1950s. John D. Rockefeller had been actively fighting against the New Deal from day one and saw in the city of Chicago – whence hailhail Leo Strauss – an ideological refuge for anti-Keynesian economics. Hence, the birth of neo-liberal economics in the University of Chicago – where neo-conservatism also saw the light of day.

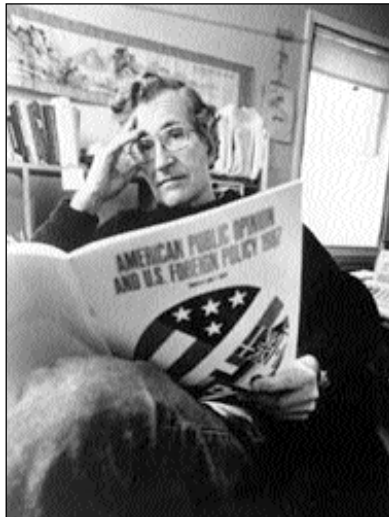
The advocates of neo-liberalism were nicknamed the 'Chicago Boys' and, not content with restricting their activities to

Postcards from the hedge: The political economy of talking about Israel and the US

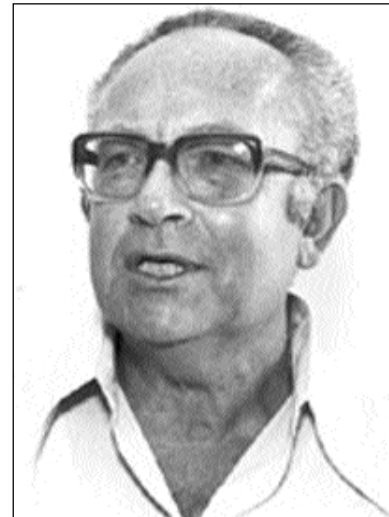
By Emad El-Din Aysha



ROCKEFELLER with one of his boys



CHOMSKY, weighed down by the consent industry



DON Patinkin, a big boy indeed!

the American theatre, they exported their insidious ideas to Israel via the Maurice Falk Institute for Economic Research, funded by an American donor and headed, initially, by a Chicagoist, Don Patinkin. It took a while for the 'Patinkin Boys', as they become known, to foist their neo-liberal agenda on Israel, but they eventually succeeded when the Israeli economy ran into problems in the 1970s – 'stagflation', like happened in much of the West.

Baraking up the wrong tree

What has happened since then, and here I disagree a little with Nitzan, is a

desperate attempt to reconcile the Israeli mixed-economy, welfare state of yore with the competitive, globalising impulses of neo-liberalism. The Likud Party in Israel, ironically, is more left-wing than the Labour Party. People like Shimon Peres were content to end state sponsorship of a full employment economy in exchange for larger markets abroad, thinking this would soak up the resulting unemployment and eradicate poverty. It didn't work and the Likud won the elections, and has kept on winning, by promising to maintain the vestiges of state socialism. How were they able to do this?

Through their links with their counterparts in the US. That is, the American Likudniks – neo-conservatives and Christian fundamentalists. The objective is to pry open, by force of arms if necessary, Arab markets – awash with cheap labour – and thus force Arab money to migrate to Israeli banks. Moreover, the aggressive posture of Israel on behalf of America also means generous dollops of cash, aid and investments, which will further bankroll the socialism of the Israeli economy. I think one of the mistakes Peres and the 'Labourists' in Israel made was tying themselves too much to the now-defunct

Democratic Party.

Martin Endyk and Dennis Ross, after all, are Democrats. The other thing that shocked the system was 11th September, which occurred after Barak had left office. I'm all for criticisms of neo-liberalism but neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism are not the same thing, even if they can both coexist under the same Republican umbrella. The neo-cons, as I've said before, are even hostile to the whole notion of globalisation and have been pursuing restrictions on global capital flows, supposedly to keep track of terrorist financing. They are opposed to the welfare state in the US, that is true

– push the defence budget up to keep social expenditure down through a deficit – but they don't seem to have extended their rightwing economic philosophy to Israel.

I may disagree a little with Nitzan but at least I have read him, learned a great deal from him and cited him in the past, which is a lot more than I can say for the Western press. It's downright atrocious, not to mention inexcusable. Worse still, not only were his ideas sidelined, when they did finally see the light of day, it was under the banner of other names.

Unacademic integrity

This came to light recently with the publication of his article "The Scientist and the Church". (Please see <http://bnarchives.yorku.ca/185/>). Here he exposes an avant garde group of trendy leftwing intellectuals who call themselves 'Retort' – Iain Boal, T.J. Clark, Joseph Matthews and Michael Watts. They pilfered Nitzan's other works: "The Weapondollar-Petrodollar Coalition," a chapter in *The Global Political Economy of Israel* (Pluto 2002), "It's All About Oil" (2003), "Clash of Civilization or Capital Accumulation?" (2004), "Beyond Neoliberalism" (2004) and "Dominant Capital and the New Wars" (2004). (Please see <http://bnarchives.yorku.ca/>). I always thought that cut-and-paste jobs without citations was a characteristic of the Arab press, us primitive, lazy, armchair anthropologist Third Worlders. Seems we're all guilty! (Except for me, of course. I always make references and add my own ideas along the way. Please see "Iraqi oil speculators' ball: Palast the prospector hits the mother lode", Saturday, March 26, 2005).

Nitzan sees this hostility to his analysis as a desire to "disable, block and, if necessary, appropriate creativity and novelty... [which] defy dogma and undermine the conventional creed... challenge... threaten those in power..." I'd add to this – thanks to my own Western publication problems – that it is not so much because they don't want to hear what I have to say but because they want to be the ones who say it.

Ironically, while opposed to capitalism they are as competitively driven as anybody else! This is inexcusable but, sadly, understandable. Again, I can draw many parallels with the Arab mind. To finish off where I started, I still think we are a little better off than our counterparts in the Western media, if only because we're too incompetent to get around to manufacturing consent. I guess there are virtues to being behind-the-scenes, after all!

The writer holds a PhD in International Studies