



TRANSCRIPT: Reexamining History with Noam Chomsky: US Elite's view of European Fascism before WW2

NOTE: This transcript may not be 100% accurate.

Zain Raza:

Welcome to Activism Munich. Professor Noam Chomsky, thank you for joining us again. Glad to be with you. I want to start with some historical perspective and let's work our way up from there.

Before the Second World War what view did the United States government had of fascism in Germany? What was the political and military relationship between Berlin and Washington?

Noam Chomsky:

Well it was a mixed story. Roosevelt himself had a mixed attitude. For example: he was pretty supportive of Mussolini's fascism, in fact described Mussolini as that admirable Italian gentleman. He later concluded that Mussolini had been misled by his association with Hitler and had been lead kind of down the wrong path. But the American business community, the power systems in the United States were highly supportive of Mussolini. In fact even parts of the labor bureaucracy were. Fortune Magazine for example, the major business journal, I think in 1932, had an issue with the headline, I'm quoting it: "The wops are unwopping themselves."

The „wop“ is a kind of a derogatory term for Italians and the „wops“ are finally „unwopping“ themselves, under Mussolini they're becoming part of the civilized world.

There was criticism of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, a lot of criticism. But basically pretty supportive attitude towards Mussolini's fascism.

When Germany, when Hitler took over, the attitude was more mixed. There was a concern for a potential threat but nevertheless the general approach of the U.S., the British even more so, was fairly supportive. So, for example in 1937 the State Department described Hitler as a kind of a moderate, fending off the dangerous forces of the right (and left)

The State Department described Hitler as a moderate who was holding off the forces, the dangerous forces of the left, meaning the Bolsheviks, the labor movement and so on and of the right, namely the extremist Nazism. Hitler was kind of in the middle and therefore we should kind of support him. This is a pretty familiar stance, incidentally like in many other cases.

George Kennan, later famous as one of the architects of post war policy, was actually the American Council in Berlin up until Pearl Harbor. He was sending back reports which are public, which were qualified. He said we shouldn't be too harsh in condemning the Nazis since a lot of what they are doing is kind of understandable and we could get along with them and so on and this is one strain and a major one.

But there was also plenty of criticism and condemnation. But the general attitudes were fairly mixed. [This is sometimes called, when...] At the Munich Conference late 1938, Roosevelt sent his most trusted advisor, Sumner Wells to Munich and Wells came back with a pretty positive report saying we can really work with Hitler, this conference opens the possibility of a period of peace and justice for Europe and we should work out ways to interact and deal with him. That was late 1938! ok? and so it was quite a mixed story. Actually, there's good scholarly literature on this if you want to go through the details.

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