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# Professor Noam Chomsky Visits Prague

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I was confused when I left the Municipal Library in Prague at 12 o'clock on Tuesday the 3rd of June, after working all morning (well, sort of) to go and get lunch. Surely this crowd gathered outside could not be here for the lecture, which was to start in an hour and a half? They must be here for some other thing, I thought to myself. 45 minutes later and they were still there, their numbers in the meantime having doubled. In a somewhat surreal situation it seemed that people were queuing for almost two hours, not to see a politician, a celebrity or a sports personality, but to see a scholar. And for good reason too it seems, since within minutes of opening the doors the lecture theatre was filled to the brim, exasperated staff having to stop eager punters from perching on the stairs and other inconvenient places.

This picture illustrates better than any description I could give of the popularity of Professor Noam Chomsky, linguist, philosopher and political activist. Described as one of the world's most popular academics, this small, softly-spoken and fierce man, even at 85, still knows how to draw in the crowds.

The debate in Prague Municipal Library was organized by the Faculty of Education of Charles University, in cooperation with Palacký University in Olomouc, and was one of the talks given by the Professor during his visit to the Czech Republic. Jaroslav Fiala, of the Institute of Political Science at the Faculty of Arts at Charles University chaired the debate, drawing his questions from the recent Czech translation of Professor Chomsky's work (*Disident Západu, Dissident of the West*, a selection of Chomsky's texts published by the CU's publishing house [Karolinum Press](#)).

He began by asking about the professor's background and how he became a political activist, before moving on to the 1960's, and the atmosphere in the USA during the turbulent decade. The discussion then turned to his academic work, and to his thoughts on objective scholarship, and his version of the cold war narrative. The professor answered with his characteristic eloquence and passion – characteristics that I suspect contribute to his enduring popularity as a speaker. He described how his experiences growing up during the great depression influenced his political beliefs and steered him towards anarchism, and he analysed the process of creating an anti-war movement in the USA during the Vietnam War, going from its humble beginnings radicalizing living rooms to its far reaching impact on how the war in Iraq in 2003 was fought.

The second half of the debate was opened up to the floor, many questions being raised about the professor's feelings towards the situation in Palestine and Israel. Professor Chomsky was unambiguous in his condemnation of 'illegal settlements' and the 'cowardice of Europe' in the face of the USA, who he called upon to act on the international consensus to prevent further settlement extensions and to bring the conflict in Israel and Palestine to an end.

It was only the confinements of time that stopped the discussion from going on for longer, the hall needing to be emptied for the next event, and it was grudgingly that the debate was drawn to a close.



**By: Elan Grug Muse** is in her second year studying for a BA in Politics at the University of Nottingham, and is studying for a year at the Faculty of Social Sciences in Charles University, Prague. She is interested in international politics, music and literature, and was motivated to write for iForum because it offered a good opportunity to improve her journalism skills.