

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

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Propaganda is out of hand

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The use of misinformation, scare tactics, and outright lies has reached epic proportions. It is high time that we come to terms with the "not so free" press that we have allowed to form and be perpetuated. Currently, masses of people move to the beat of the media. This is very dangerous if the media is not accountable for the information they are broadcasting. Those that deviate from the dominant views championed by our television "gurus" either keep quiet (for fear of being ridiculed) or speak up and risk being marginalized, demonized, or otherwise attacked. As a member of this latter group much of the time, it sickens me to think this is what our "democracy" has become. We need to recognize how limiting and manipulative dominant media outlets have become. Unless we make changes to them, we can expect continued violations of human rights, theft of the public coffers, and unjustified violence (in our name).

We have learned to accept things that counter to a free society. We've allowed our phones to be tapped. We have allowed our community organizations to be infiltrated by government spies. We have allowed our citizens to be kidnapped and sent to prisons overseas without charge or access to counsel (e.g., Amir Mohamed Meshal). And, relatedly, we have allowed our primary media outlets to become monopolies ruled by an elite few. None of these things should happen in a free society. So, why are they happening now?

Since the war with Iraq recommenced in March 2003, our reporters have become imbedded with the military. That is, they are only allowed to see what the military wants them to see. Under these circumstances, how objective can we expect our "war" news to be? Also, even before the American casualties started to come home, President George W. Bush, reinforced the ban that keeps the flag-draped coffins from public view. Apparently, seeing the more than 5,000 U.S. soldiers that have lost their lives in Iraq and Afghanistan was more than the public could bear. All of these policies ultimately allow us to go about our lives as far removed from the real horror (and immorality) of war (invasion, occupation, etc.). Have you heard that 2,500,000 Iraqis have been killed since the U.S. invaded Iraq (on false pretenses) (this number comes from the Iraqi Ministry of Health and Forensic Medicine). This is nearly 10% of the Iraqi population! Though there were very few terrorists from Iraq as of 2002, can you imagine how many Iraqis might now consider terrorism as an occupation? And we are led to believe (by our media) that we are safer as a result? I firmly believe that if we are going to support war, which of course should be done at last resort, we need to be able to stomach its full impacts and implications. If we are too squeamish for it then it probably isn't justified and we should find other forms of diplomacy.

One of the fundamental rights of a free society is protest. As a person who has protested often in my life, the last few years have been very eye-opening. Simply, our press covers protest when it is deemed "acceptable," such as we've witnessed in Iran or the Ukraine, but not when it may be counter to corporate or U.S. government interests, such as the massive protests we have heard little about in Honduras, Mexico, Peru, and even in the United States. Were you aware that as many as 500,000 Americans marched in protest against the

Iraq war in Washington, D.C. in September 2005 not to mention up to 30 million people worldwide who took to the streets to urge for non-military solutions even before the war started? Did you know that ~400,000 people marched through the streets of Chicago on May 1, 2006 to speak for the rights of immigrants here and elsewhere? For those that think these numbers are not huge, consider that both of these marches were much larger than the famous March on Washington in 1963 (remember, Dr. Martin Luther King and "I have a Dream") that changed the course of America for ever. As a person who attended these two recent protests, it is extremely telling that so little coverage was given to these very momentous and important political events. It vividly demonstrates that the media controls what most of us see and hear and they have decided that covering massive protests in our streets is worthy of not much more than a mention. Contrast this with: What is the latest word on Michael Jackson? Is Michael Vick actually going to throw touchdowns in Philly? See what I mean?

Generally, the mainstream press either ignores a story (whose political implications are not favorable to the ruling class) or they undermine it. Many of the events and accompanying statistics mentioned above were reported by some media outlets but they didn't get the time, follow through, or the balance of coverage and views that they deserve. Right now the same is happening with "single-payer" health care. Though the majority of citizens and medical doctors support this plan, mainstream television networks gave it almost no mention until very recently, and the little honest coverage that it gets now is heavily overwhelmed by lies and misinformation spread by highly paid propagandists. This is just the latest incarnation of a well-organized and heavily-funded wave of misinformation, i.e., propaganda. Doesn't the Afghani war (now with drones), the military coup-d'Etat in Honduras, the Israeli decimation of the Gaza Strip and its inhabitants, the bailouts of multi-billion dollar corporations, and China's vicious human rights abuses (while we celebrate their Olympic triumphs) represent additional examples? And these all happened in only the last year. What will this coming year bring?

So am I cynical? Well, yes and no. History tells us that there are times when information is highly controlled. Even with the Internet booming, and alternative information available at the click of an electronic mouse, most people still rely almost exclusively on television for the bulk of their information (where, by the way, so little alternative news is broadcast). This creates a situation where in effect there is a paucity of information and hordes of propaganda drafted, molded, and disseminated by a few well-situated (and protected) executives. My endearing faith in the human mind and spirit convinces me that we will get through this information whitewash. All it takes is an open, inquisitive, and discerning mind and a willingness to reject corporate, militaristic, and consumeristic sound bites that claim they are informative and newsworthy. It can be done. Are you ready?