

The Media Are not 'Orwellian'

Regular readers will know that we are **not** enamoured of the mainstream **media**. However, **Belmont Club** have gone rather too far in their excoriation of the media when they compare them to the Ministry of Truth in George Orwell's book **1984**.

In *1984*, Orwell describes a totalitarian society in which the state controls newspapers, books, television and all other media through the cynically named Ministry of Truth. One of the Ministry's functions is to maintain the official fiction that the Party is always right – not only by lying about the present but by changing all historical evidence. In that society the role of the media is to parrot what the dictators want them to say about both the present and the past, without paying attention to the truth.

The media in the West currently peddle a set of myths about the way the world works. Myths in which they believe. These beliefs cause them to impose certain interpretations on events and to ignore stories that tend to suggest that perhaps the world works in a different way. When they feel strongly enough, they feel obliged bend the truth – to report something other than what literally happened, in the noble cause of conveying a deeper truth to the public who would otherwise be led astray.

But, they do not have the power physically to coerce people who do not share their beliefs.

In some cases most of the media professionals happen to share the same set of prejudices as state officials and publicise these prejudices at the expense of the truth. Sometimes they even allow state officials to **rewrite scripts** to fit in with the government's agenda – in this case their witch hunt against drug users. However, the media can be independent of the government when they choose to be, as with their campaign of opposition to the liberation of Iraq. Nor do most of the media spin their stories in favour of George Bush's **visceral and ignorant** dislike of stem cell research. So the media are not simply an extension of the state, even when they behave badly.

The media do not, and cannot, censor opposing views. The likes of **Thomas Szasz** and free market economists can't get much time on major networks, but this has not stopped such people from propagating their ideas. Even though the media tend to stick fairly closely to a common left-of-centre, elitist ideology, they are not

completely homogeneous. Fox News is more right wing than CNN and the blogosphere is becoming more important. Although they leave a lot to be desired, the media in a free society are not like the omnipresent state controlled television in 1984 in any important respect.

P.S. It doesn't help that Belmont Club link to a Holocaust-denying web site in that post, and approvingly quote from its tendentious interpretation of both Orwell and World War 2. What are they thinking of?

Mon, 02/07/2005 - 00:04 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Media Ignores?

What ever happened to good old investigative journalism? Does it cost too much and take too long to produce a good and carefully researched story? Is there a risk of libel and slander suits that scares big media off?

To ask another question, what ever happened to journalism? Is every story a simple headline and two-step of reporting the majority opinion with a insert on the direct opposite opinion? Is this balanced news reporting or is it a cop out? Does good journalism sell?

If the story can be summarized in half an hour of well edited programming can the same story be reduced to one minute and thirty seconds of editorial comment?

Is the standard question media bias or is it a broader and more complex multi-layered issue of how media-in-the-name-of ignorance sells?

What is "the media"?

by a reader on Wed, 02/09/2005 - 15:28 | [reply](#)

The Belmont Club: What are they thinking?

I think it would be useful for people to see the link you reference: http://www.ihr.org/jhr/v06/v06p--9_Bennett.html. It has been my experience that sometimes (less nowadays, but a lot when I was younger) people who take what is commonly (but not always accurately) referred to as "right wing" views, often carry a lot of baggage like anti-Semitism, racism, and the like. For example, when I was growing up, the open opposition of some to even the most modest demands of the civil rights movement, such as the right to vote, unfortunately made it harder to accept from these same people other views that turned out to be more or less correct -- such as extremely strong opposition to the tyrannical Soviet Union (clearly correct) and the war in Vietnam (in my opinion, less correct, but still analytically linked to the former). I'm afraid that

the question "[w]hat are they thinking" has a rather simple answer:

they have clear and unambiguous sympathy for these ugly and incorrect views.

by **Michael Bacon** on Wed, 02/09/2005 - 18:22 | [reply](#)

bias

For example, when I was growing up, the open opposition of some to even the most modest demands of the civil rights movement, such as the right to vote, unfortunately made it harder to accept from these same people other views that turned out to be more or less correct

Err, but doesn't that work just as well in reverse? ie, the left has baggage too. so that makes it hard to listen to the left, too. thus it is hard to listen to anyone?

I think we should analyse ideas independent of their source -- who believes something cannot make it more or less true.

-- Elliot Temple
<http://www.curi.us/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 02/09/2005 - 22:10 | [reply](#)

WOW

For anyone who doesn't want to go look themselves, it was not just some subtle hint of holocaust denial. Read this:

The Holocaust story is repeated ad nauseam to drum up emotional support for Israel, and Zionist Jews have accurately described it as "Israel's number one propaganda weapon." Anti-Zionist Jews such as Dr. Alfred Lilienthal describe the constant Holocaust drum-beating as "holocaustomania" and point out that the Holocaust has become a kind of new religion among Jews. Jewish intellectual Noam Chomsky described Dr. Rubenstein's reactions to Professor Faurisson's claims that there were no gas chambers as the reactions of a religious fanatic. The Holocaust is so important to Zionist Jews that Professor Friedlander has said that "the Revisionist School of historians, those who say the Holocaust never existed, that it is a Jewish invention, are more worrying than countries' political positions," while Professor H. Littell has said "you can't discuss the truth of the Holocaust. That is a distortion of the concept of free speech. The United States should emulate West Germany which outlaws such exercises." Despite cogent evidence that revisionists are censored and persecuted, one so-called intellectual recently stated that it is fashionable to claim that Hitler's gas chambers did not exist.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://www.curi.us/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 02/09/2005 - 22:23 | [reply](#)

What are they thinking

Would LFG put a holocaust-denier-sympathizer on their **blogroll**?

by a reader on Wed, 02/09/2005 - 23:10 | [reply](#)

LFG

I don't know, that is a big blogroll to look through. Why don't you tell us which blog you mean.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://www.curi.us/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 02/10/2005 - 03:42 | [reply](#)

What are they thinking

I meant the Belmont Club, and I meant why would LFG continue to blogroll them if they (Belmont) sympathized with Holocaust deniers?

by a reader on Sat, 02/12/2005 - 02:52 | [reply](#)

Holocaust deniers

I agree with the World that it's not helpful that the Belmont Club links to a Holocaust-denying website. However, I disagree with the last reader that it's bad to sympathize with people who are mistaken. Any person in favor of scientific freedom and a free and open exchange of ideas should sympathize with Holocaust deniers, especially those who are persecuted and jailed in countries such as Germany and Austria, and the fact that Amnesty International does not defend those people is a scandal. Remember Voltaire's dictum: "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it." Also remember that criticism and open debate of mainstream ideas is vital for the progress of science, even if that also means you'll see bad quality criticism from time to time. So although I do not believe the Holocaust deniers are right, I do sympathize with those of them who are well meaning and not motivated by anti-semitism.

Henry Sturman

by **Henry Sturman** on Sat, 02/12/2005 - 09:43 | [reply](#)

I am Curious

"...those of them [Holocaust deniers] who are well meaning and not motivated by anti-semitism"

Could you explain more? If they are not antisemitic, why do they

deny the reality of Holocaust? What other reason could there be?

by AIS on Sat, 02/12/2005 - 13:38 | [reply](#)

Igf links belmont club

the belmont club is not a holocaust denier sympathiser!

to call him that, he'd need to say something approving about that part of the site.

when leftists go to a peace rally organised by commies, many of them are not commie sympathisers. there is something wrong though.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://www.curi.us/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sat, 02/12/2005 - 18:25 | [reply](#)

Re: I am curious

AIS wrote:

"...those of them [Holocaust deniers] who are well meaning and not motivated by anti-semitism"

Could you explain more? If they are not antisemitic, why do they deny the reality of Holocaust? What other reason could there be?

That they believe the Holocaust did not happen.

Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Sun, 02/13/2005 - 01:10 | [reply](#)

But why?

That's my point: Why should people believe that it didn't happen in the first place?

And what would logically follow? a Jewish/Zionist conspiracy that has devised this fake history to take advantage of it. No?

What would that make of Jews/Zionists in the eyes of these people?

Aren't all that instances of antisemitism?

by AIS on Sun, 02/13/2005 - 06:46 | [reply](#)

That's my point: Why should

That's my point: Why should people believe that it didn't happen in the first place?

For their arguments you'd have to look at their sites. Many of them

are honest but simply mistaken, and others are anti-semites or neo-nazis. Your mistake is that you take it for granted that the Holocaust happened. If you take the scientific view, and take nothing for granted, you'll see that there is nothing particularly strange about other people coming to a different belief about things than you do. There are many examples of people who genuinely have mistaken beliefs, such as Duesberg who does not believe HIV causes AIDS, psychiatrists who think alcoholism is a disease, politicians who think socialism is good. And we need people who question standard wisdom, because sometimes those people are right, such as the person who first said the earth is round.

That is the reason why on some level I have more respect for Holocaust deniers who understand that propositions should be based on arguments and criticism, than I have for Holocaust believers who have nothing more to say than that everybody knows it and to question it is automatically anti-semitism. It's precisely this attitude, this presentation of the Holocaust as a belief rather than as a documented fact, that encourages Holocaust deniers to be sceptical of the Holocaust. Which is a shame, because the evidence for the Holocaust is overwhelming, and this simply needs to be pointed out. And if people still are not convinced this ought to be accepted.

And what would logically follow? a Jewish/Zionist conspiracy that has devised this fake history to take advantage of it. No?

No this does not logically follow. If it is a **conspiracy** it need not be Jewish, it could also be Allied or war propaganda or whatever. And they might argue that it doesn't have to be an organized conspiracy; it could simply be something many people happen to believe, just as many people happen to believe in God.

What would that make of Jews/Zionists in the eyes of these people?

You see, you keep using character arguments. The question of whether the Holocaust happened is a historical question which has been settled by arguments. Whether people might be anti-semites is irrelevant to what is true and what is false.

Aren't all that instances of antisemitism?

Those Holocaust deniers who believe that it is a Jewish conspiracy are probably very often anti-semites. But even then there is no logical contradiction between believing in a Jewish conspiracy and **not** being an anti-semite. Compare: if I believe that JFK was murdered by a conspiracy of men, that does not imply I am a sexist.

Henry Sturman

by **Henry Sturman** on Sun, 02/13/2005 - 11:37 | [reply](#)

Take Nothing For Granted

Really? I suppose in some universe the holocaust never happened,

but where we happen to be located, taking for granted that it did (based on the evidence) is like taking for granted the fact that the world is round and not flat (based on the evidence). I don't think it would be "scientific" at all to seriously doubt either fact or to give much credence or sympathy to those that do.

by **Michael Bacon** on Mon, 02/14/2005 - 21:09 | [reply](#)

Facts and Truth

I think we should make a distinction between facts and truth. What you said about scientific mentality isn't really relevant here. Holocaust was a historical fact. So saying it happened is different from proposing a theory about say a particular mechanism. Actually one way to refute theories is by experimental evidence, and although the interpretation of what an experimental result actually means is itself partly based on the existing still reliable theories (reliable in that particular case), the fact something has been observed or a change has taken place is there. There is every evidence that Holocaust did take place. There are films, photos, documents and witnesses from different nationalities and political orientation. It is a fact, why is it denied, where as many other facts of everyday life are taken for granted with much less "evidence".

As for Holocaust deniers, again let's compare it with other similar cases. There has been many genocides committed throughout human history against different groups of people, and although the perpetrators of the crime themselves usually deny the accusations like Turkey in the Armenian massacre or the Arabs right now in the case of Sudan, it is very rare for third parties, people who belong to neither side of the affair and in later times to deny so energetically and so blindly any other event with comparable magnitude. Why is the Holocaust different? That's my question.

Antisemitism is quite a common attitude in different degrees and it is not just about the "Jews" despite its own claims. Mostly it comes in mild doses among people who are otherwise normal, but it is there nevertheless. It even exists among the Jews although there the number is very limited for obvious reasons. I think it shares a lot with say anti-West or anti-Capitalist attitudes. (the latter is rampant among the Jews too which is an important point, since now the direct attack against one's ethnicity is replaced with a more subtle and abstract and less personal target.)

I don't think banning Holocaust deniers' works and speeches is a good idea either. It violates the principle of free speech and it only adds to their aura of being victims for their courageous struggle for freedom against censor. Where as refuting the evident nonsense they claim is both easy and useful for keeping the debate and the memory alive in a natural way, without falling into repetitions or cliches.

However that doesn't mean that I can feel respect for such people for even a second.

by AIS on Tue, 02/15/2005 - 02:49 | [reply](#)

Wildly Off Topic

The Media is Not Orwellian.

That was the original topic, was it not?

Though wildly interesting, I fail to understand what Holocaust deniers have to do with an Orwellian or non-Orwellian media.

Is it that "they", insert favorite crazy group, get free publicity for simply engaging in wild unsubstantiated speculation? This seems to be the fact of what happens. Crazy, inciteful stories get printed. If not, why do "they" do it?

Why does the media pick up on it? How are these strange non-events reported? What constitutes a critical mass for media reportage?

The World Ended Yesterday and Noone Has Yet Refuted It!

UPI Yesterday on Mt. Ararat a secret sect gathered to celebrate the end of the world. The sun went down, everything faded to black, and the world ended in less then one minute, said Harvey Wetbottom, PhD., spokesman for the sect. All the sect members gathered up their picnic lunches and marched down off the mountain, declaring that it was an absolute fact that the world ended yesterday. No one has so far proved otherwise although a group of scientists, **The World** Did Not End Coalition (WDNEC) is attempting to refute the claims of the no longer secret sect, World Ended International (WEI).

Stay tuned for late breaking news!

NOMNDS (Non-Orwellian Media News Distribution Service)

by a reader on Tue, 02/15/2005 - 16:35 | [reply](#)

Political speech and language of the Bush Administration

"War is Peace"

-George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four.

"The war in Iraq is really about peace"

-George Bush, April 2003.

Many such Orwellian parallels are to be found in the political language of the Bushites. For example, consider the now-famous phrase, "Axis of Evil," which was first used by the little Bush in his January 29, 2002, State of the Union address. Bush characterized Iran, Iraq and North Korea as an "axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger..."

Coined by David Frum, the phrase "axis of evil" is actually very

clever, and arguably Orwellian. The word "axis" naturally evokes memories of the "Axis Powers" of World War II (Germany, Italy, Japan, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria) and serves to prepare the public for the acceptance of war against nations said to belong to the axis. However, there is a very important difference between the two that makes the use of the term misleading. It suggests an confederation of states that pose a significant danger because of their alliance. Iran and Iraq have been bitter adversaries for decades, and there is no collaboration at all between North Korea and the other two countries.

Obviously, Iran, Iraq and North Korea have all committed violations of human rights which may allow them to be qualified as "evil." But the singling out of three states as evil surely begs the question of why the Bush administration failed to include nations that violate human rights on a similar scale. I shall attempt to clarify what I mean by the use of a satire borrowed from SatireWire.com:

Bitter after being snubbed for membership of the "Axis of Evil," Libya, China, and Syria today announced they had formed the "Axis of Just as evil." Cuba, Sudan, and Serbia said they had teamed up to form the "Axis of Somewhat Evil" and Bulgaria, Indonesia, and Russia had established the "Axis of Not So Much Evil Really As Just Generally Disagreeable."

Jokes notwithstanding, the term has played an important role in stigmatizing countries so as to justify military action against them. The media, however, uncritically repeats the term until it becomes part of popular parlance. An odd and lamentable principle of human psychology, well known and exploited by everyone from advertisers to evil demagogues like Goebbels, holds that the strangest of lies can win credibility simply by repetition.

There is a number of similar Orwellian phrases promulgated by the Bushites. 'Pre-emptive defence' (what, as opposed to attack?), 'unlawful combatants' (as in "their not Prisoner's of War...."), and a war on an abstract noun spring to mind. As to whether the American media is Orwellian, I don't know. I suspect not. They can probably be excused of dishonesty on the grounds that before deceiving others, they have gone to great lengths to deceive themselves.

Kieren

by Kieren on Fri, 04/15/2005 - 20:27 | [reply](#)

Not POWs

Kieren protests that the Bush administration shouldn't describe people as 'unlawful combatants' rather than POWs. They are unlawful combatants, see [this](#) and [this](#). And defence that pre-empting an attack is pre-emptive defence, I don't understand why we should look at that as Orwellian.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Tue, 04/19/2005 - 02:02 | [reply](#)

pre-emptive defence

To call the act of attacking first, without an overt act of provocation, "pre-emptive defence" is euphemistic. The substitution of "defence" for "war" is a classic use of Orwellian doublespeak that dates back in the United States to 1947, when the Department of War was renamed the "Department of Defense."

Kieren

by a reader on Tue, 04/19/2005 - 18:51 | [reply](#)

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