“Fake News” Is Fake News, according to William Blum

By William Blum
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*Our thoughts are with **William Blum** who passed away on December 9, 2018 at age 85.*

William was at the forefront of critical debate and analysis of US foreign policy. He combined Honesty and Truth with carefully documented analysis. His important legacy will live.

Below is one of his recent articles on “fake news”

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The people who created Facebook and Google must be smart. They’re billionaires, their companies are worth multi-multi billions, their programs are used by billions around the world.

But all these smart people, because of Congressional pressure, have swallowed the stories about “fake news”. Facebook hired a very large staff of people to read everything posted by users to weed out the fake stuff. That didn’t last too long at all before the company announced that it wasn’t “comfortable” deciding which news sources are the most trustworthy in a “world with so much division”. We all could have told them that, couldn’t we?

Facebook’s previous efforts to ask its users to determine the accuracy of news did not turn out any better. Last year, the company launched a feature that allowed users to flag news stories they felt were inaccurate. The experiment was shuttered after nine months.

Author William Blum (right)

“Fake news”, however, is not the problem. News found in the mainstream media is rarely

fake; i.e., actual lies made from whole cloth, totally manufactured. This was, however, a common practice of the CIA during the first Cold War. The Agency wrote editorials and phoney news stories to be knowingly published by Latin American media with no indication of CIA authorship or CIA payment to the particular media. The propaganda value of such a "news" items might be multiplied by being picked up by other CIA stations in Latin America who would disseminate it through a CIA-owned news agency or a CIA-owned radio station. Some of these stories made their way back to the United States to be read or heard by unknowing North Americans.

Iraq's "weapons of mass destruction" in 2003 is another valid example of "fake news", but like the CIA material this was more a government invention than a media creation.

The main problem with the media today, as earlier, is what is *left out* of articles dealing with controversial issues. For example, the very common practice during the first Cold War of condemning the Soviet Union for taking over much of Eastern Europe after the Second World War. This takeover is certainly based on fact. But the condemnation is very much misapplied if no mention is made of the fact that Eastern Europe became communist because Hitler, with the approval of the West, used it as a highway to reach the Soviet Union to wipe out Bolshevism once and for all; the Russians in World Wars I and II lost about 40 million people because the West had twice used this highway to invade Russia. It should not be surprising that after World War II the Soviets were determined to close down the highway. It was not simply "communist expansion".

Or the case of **Moammar Gaddafi**. In the Western media he is invariably referred to as "the Libyan dictator". Period. And he certainly was a dictator. But he also did many marvelous things for the people of Libya (like the highest standard of living in Africa) and for the continent of Africa (like creating the African Union).

Or the case of **Vladimir Putin**. The Western media never tires of reminding its audience that Putin was once a KGB lieutenant colonel – wink, wink, we all know what that means, chuckle, chuckle. But do they ever remind us with a wink or chuckle that US **President George H.W. Bush** was once – not merely a CIA officer, but *the fucking Director of the CIA!*

Facebook chief executive **Mark Zuckerberg** now says:

> "We decided that having the community determine which sources are broadly trusted would be most objective"; "broadly trusted" sources being those that are "affirmed by a significant cross-section of users".

Right, a significant cross-section of users – Will that include me? Highly unlikely. Broadly trusted sources – Will that include media like my Anti-Empire Report? Just as unlikely. Anything close? Maybe a single token leftist website amongst a large list, I'd guess. And a single token rightist website. Zuckerberg and his ilk probably think that the likes of NBC, NPR and CNN are very objective and are to be trusted when it comes to US foreign-policy issues or capitalism-vs-socialism issues.

On January 19 Google announced that it would cancel a two-month old experiment, called Knowledge Panel, that informed its users that a news article had been disputed by "independent fact-checking organizations". Conservatives had complained that the feature unfairly targeted a right-leaning outlet.

Imagine that. It's almost like people have political biases. Both Facebook and Google are still experimenting, trying to find a solution that I do not think exists. My solution is to leave it as it is. There's no automated way to remove bias or slant or judgment from writing or from those persons assigned to evaluate such.

Fake news by omission – the Haiti example

> "I'm happy to have a president that will bluntly speak the truth in negotiations," **Eric Prince** commented on Breitbart News. "If the president says some places are shitholes, he's accurate."

Thus did Mr. Eric Prince pay homage to **Mr. Donald Trump**. Prince of course being the renowned founder of Blackwater, the private army which in September 2007 opened fire in a crowded square in Baghdad, killing 17 Iraqi civilians and seriously wounding 20 more.

Speaking of Haiti and other "shitholes", Prince declared:

> "It's a sad characterization of many of these places. It's not based on race. It has nothing to do with race. It has to do with corrupt incompetent governments that abuse their citizens, and that results in completely absent infrastructure to include open sewers, and unclean water, and crime. It's everything we don't want in America."

Former Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide

Like the US media, Prince failed to point out that on two occasions in the recent past when Haiti had a decent government, led by **Jean-Bertrand Aristide**, which was motivated to improve conditions, the United States was instrumental in nullifying its effect. This was in addition to fully supporting the Duvalier dictatorship for nearly 30 years prior to Aristide.

Aristide, a reformist priest, was elected to the presidency in 1991 but was ousted eight months later in a military coup. The 1993 Clinton White House thus found itself in the awkward position of having to pretend – because of all their rhetoric about "democracy" – that they supported the democratically-elected Aristide's return to power from his exile in he US. After delaying his return for more than two years, Washington finally had its military restore Aristide to office, but only after obliging the priest to guarantee that he would not help the poor at the expense of the rich – literally! – and that he would stick closely to free-market economics. This meant that Haiti would continue to be the assembly plant of the Western Hemisphere, with its workers receiving starvation wages, literally! If Aristide had thoughts about breaking the agreement forced upon him, he had only to look out his window – US troops were stationed in Haiti for the remainder of his term.

In 2004, with Aristide once again the elected president, the United States staged one of its most blatant coups ever. On February 28, 2004, American military and diplomatic personnel arrived at Aristide's home to inform him that his private American security agents must either leave immediately to return to the US or fight and die; that the remaining 25 of the American security agents hired by the Haitian government, who were to arrive the next day, had been blocked by the United States from coming; that foreign and Haitian rebels were nearby, heavily armed, determined and ready to kill thousands of people in a bloodbath. Aristide was pressured to sign a "letter of resignation" before he was flown into exile by the United States.

And then US **Secretary of State Colin Powell,** in the sincerest voice he could muster, told the world that Aristide "was not kidnaped. We did not force him onto the airplane. He went onto the airplane willingly. And that's the truth." Powell sounded as sincere as he had sounded a year earlier when he gave the UN a detailed (albeit imaginary) inventory of the chemical, biological and nuclear weapons in Iraq, shortly before the US invasion.

Jean-Bertrand Aristide was on record, by word and deed, as not being a great lover of globalization or capitalism. This was not the kind of man the imperial mafia wanted in charge of the Western Hemisphere's assembly plant. It was only a matter of time before they took action.

It should be noted that the United States also kept progressives out of power in El Salvador, another of Trump's "shithole" countries.

Liberals today

On January 24 I went to the Washington, DC bookstore Politics & Prose to hear **David Cay Johnston**, author of "It's Even Worse Than You Think: What the Trump Administration Is Doing to America". To my surprise he repeatedly said negative things about Russia, and in the Q&A session I politely asked him about this. He did not take kindly to that and after a very brief exchange cut me off by asking for the next person in line to ask a question.

That was the end of our exchange. No one in the large audience came to my defense or followed up with a question in the same vein; i.e., the author as cold warrior. The only

person who spoke to me afterwards had only this to say as he passed me by: "Putin kills people". Putin had not been mentioned. I should have asked him: "Which government never kills anyone?"

Politics & Prose is a very liberal bookstore. (Amongst many authors of the left, I've spoken there twice.) Its patrons are largely liberal. But liberals these days are largely cold warriors it appears. Even though the great majority of them can't stand Trump they have swallowed the anti-Russia line of his administration and the media, perhaps because of the belief that "Russian meddling" in the election led to dear Hillary's defeat, the proof of which sees more non-existent with each passing day.

Sam Smith (who puts out the *Progressive Review* in Maine) has written about Hillary's husband:

> "A major decline of progressive America occurred during the Clinton years as many liberals and their organizations accepted the presence of a Democratic president as an adequate substitute for the things liberals once believed in. Liberalism and a social democratic spirit painfully grown over the previous 60 years withered during the Clinton administration."

And shortly afterward came **Barack Obama**, not only a Democrat but an African-American, the perfect setup for a lot more withering, health care being a good example. The single-payer movement was regularly gaining momentum when Obama took office; it seemed like America was finally going to join the modern advanced world. But Mr. O put a definitive end to that. Profit – even of the type Mr. Trump idealizes – would still determine who is to live and who is to die, just like Jews intone during Rosh Hashanah.

Poor America. It can travel to other planets, create a military force powerful enough to conquer the world ten times over, invent the Internet and a thousand other things … but it can't provide medical care for all its people.

Now, three of the richest men in the world, the heads of Amazon, Berkshire Hathaway, and JP Morgan Chase, which collectively employ more than a million people, have announced they are partnering to create an independent company aimed at reining in ever-increasing health-care costs for companies and employees alike. The three men will pursue this objective through a company whose initial focus will be on technology solutions that will provide US employees and their families with simplified, high-quality and transparent healthcare at a reasonable cost. Almost no details were made available on how they plan to do this, but I predict that whatever they do will fail. They have lots of models to emulate – in Canada, Europe, Cuba and elsewhere – but to an American nostril these examples all suffer from the same unpleasant odor, the smell of socialism.

I say this even though their announcement states that the new company will be "free from profit-making incentives and constraints". And **Warren Buffet**, head of Berkshire Hathaway, is cited on CNN as follows:

> "Warren Buffett says America is ready for single-payer health care. The billionaire investor tells PBS NewsHour that government-run health insurance 'probably is the best system' because it would control escalating costs. 'We are such a rich country. In a sense, we can afford to do it.'"

Of course the US could have afforded to do it 50 years ago. I really hope that my cynicism is misplaced.

The Trump Bubble. (Written before the market crashed)

Repeatedly, President Trump and his supporters have bragged about the "booming" stock market, attributing it to the administration's marvelous economic policies and the great public confidence in those policies. Like much of what comes out of the Donald's mouth … this is simply nonsense.

The stock market is, and always has been, just a gambling casino, a glorified Las Vegas. Every day a bunch of people, (gamblers) buy and/or sell one stock or another; sometimes they sell the same stock they bought the day before; or the hour before; or the minute before; the next day they may well do the exact reverse. All depending on the latest news headline, or what a corporation has done to elicit attention, or what a friend just told them, or a fortune teller, or that day's horoscope, or just a good ol' hunch. Or they make up a reason; anything to avoid thinking that they're just pulling the lever of a slot machine.

And many people buy certain stocks because other people are buying it. This is what stock market analysts call a speculative bubble. Prick the confidence and the bubble bursts.

> "The stock market," **Naomi Klein** has observed, "has the temperament of an overindulged 2-year-old, who can throw one of its world-shaking tantrums."

Walter Winchell, the 1960-70s powerful and widely-syndicated gossip columnist of the *New York Daily News*, famously wrote that he lost his faith in the stock market when he saw that a stock could jump sharply in price simply because he happened to mention something related to the company in his column.

And all this occurs even when the stock market is operating in the supposedly honest way it was designed to operate. What are we to make of it when sophisticated investors devise a computer scam for instantaneous buying and selling, as has happened several times in recent years?

Yet President Trump and his fans would have us believe that the big jump in stock prices of the past year is testimony to his sterling leadership and oh-so-wise policies. What will they say when the market crashes? As Trump himself will crash.

Driverless police cars

Yes, that's what they're thinking of next. Among other things these cars will be able to catch speeders and issue tickets. But here's the real test of the system's Artificial Intelligence – Can the police car be taught how to recognize a young black man, drive to within a few feet of him, and fire a gun at his head?

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This article was originally published by The Anti-Empire Report.

Notes

1. Philip Agee, Inside the Company: CIA Diary, published in 1974

2. Washington Post, January 19, 20, 23, 25, 2018

3. Breitbart News radio program, January 12, 2018

4. Wikipedia entry for Eric Prince

5. William Blum, Killing Hope, chapters 22 and 55; Rogue State, pp. 202-3, 219-20

6. Killing Hope, chapter 54

7. Business Wire, January 30, 2018

8. CNNMoney, June 28, 2017

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