

## “Guardians of Power”

Reviewing David Cromwell and David Edwards' book

By [Stephen Lendman](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

Global Research, January 09, 2008

9 January 2008

David Cromwell is a Scottish writer, activist and oceanographer at the National Oceanography Centre in Britain. David Edwards is also a UK writer who focuses on human rights, the environment and the media. Together they edit an extraordinary “UK-based media-watch project” called Media Lens. It “offers authoritative criticism of mainstream media bias and censorship, as well as providing in-depth analysis, quotes, media contact details and other resources.”

Today, the media is in crisis, and a free and open society is at risk. Fiction substitutes for fact, news is carefully filtered, dissent is marginalized, and supporting the powerful substitutes for full and accurate reporting. As a result, wars of aggression are called liberating ones, civil liberties are suppressed for our own good, and patriotism means going along with governments that are lawless.

The authors challenge these views and those in the mainstream who reflect them - the managers, editors and journalists. Their aim in Media Lens and their writing is to “raise public awareness” to see “reality” as they do, free from the corrupting influence of media corporations and their single-minded pursuit of profit “in a society dominated by corporate power” and governments acting as their handmaidens. They note that Pravda was a state propaganda organ so “why should we expect the corporate press to tell the truth about corporate power” and unfettered capitalism when they support it? They don’t and never will.

The authors go further and say their “aim is to increase rational awareness, critical thought and compassion, and to decrease greed, hatred and ignorance (and do it by) highlight(ing) significant examples of systemic media distortion.” There are no shortage of examples.

That objective is highlighted in their 2006 book, “Guardians of Power: The Myth of the Liberal Media” and subject of this review. It’s a work distinguished author John Pilger calls “required reading” and “the most important book about journalism (he) can remember” since Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman’s classic - “Manufacturing Dissent.” Cromwell and Edwards “have done the job of true journalists: they have set the record straight” in contrast to the mainstream that distorts and corrupts it for the powerful. Their book is must reading and will be reviewed in-depth, chapter by chapter, to show why. It’s also why no major broadsheet ever mentions it or its important content. This review covers lots of it.

### **The Mass Media - Neutral, Honest, Psychopathic**

Years ago, journalist and author AJ Liebling said “The press is free only to those who own one.” He also warned that “People everywhere confuse what they read in newspapers with news.” “Guardians of Power” lifts the confusion powerfully. It starts off noting that the term

media is “problematic.” It’s the plural of medium suggesting something neutral, and news organizations want us to believe “they transmit information in a similarly neutral, natural way” which, of course, they never do. Why? Because corporate giants are dominant, and large corporate entities control the media.

The authors thus argue that the entire corporate mass media, including broadcasters like BBC and the so-called mislabeled “liberal media,” function as a “propaganda system for elite interests.” It’s especially true for topics like “US-UK government responsibility for genocide, vast corporate criminality, (and) threats to the very existence of human life – (they’re) distorted, suppressed, marginalized or ignored.” Cromwell and Edwards present documented forensic proof to set the record straight and expose corporate media duplicity.

Doing it requires “understanding (that) curious abstract entity – the corporation,” more specifically publicly-owned ones. They’re required by law to maximize shareholder equity and do it by increasing revenue and profits. Corporate law prohibits boards of directors and senior executives from being friends of the earth, good community members or whatever else may detract from that primary goal. Social responsibility is off the table if it reduces profits, and executives who ignore that mandate may be sued or fired for so doing.

That led Canadian law professor Joel Bakan to call corporations “psychopathic creatures” that can’t recognize or act morally or avoid committing harm. It shows up at home and in foreign wars of aggression with Iraq as Exhibit A that’s the focus of three of the book’s 13 chapters.

First, an explanation of what Chomsky and Herman called the “propaganda model” in “Manufacturing Dissent” and that Herman later wrote about in “The Myth of the Liberal Media.” It works by focusing on “the inequality of wealth and power” and how those with it “filter out the news to print, marginalize dissent (and assure) government and dominant private interests” control all information the public gets. It’s done through a set of “filters” that remove what’s to be suppressed and “leav(es) only the cleansed (acceptable) residue fit to print” or broadcast on-air. The media is largely shaped by market forces and bottom line considerations. They also rely on advertisers for most of their revenue and are pressured to assure content conforms to their views.

More generally, the dominant media serve wealth and power interests that include their own as well as other corporate giants. They thus rely on “official sources” for news and information and ignore others considered “unreliable.” More accurately, they ignore the unempowered who have no say or whose views are out of the “mainstream.”

Media expert, Robert McChesney, explains the dilemma by saying publishers know their journalists must appear neutral and unbiased when, in fact, that notion is “entirely bogus” for three reasons:

- to appear neutral, journalists rely on “official sources” as legitimate news and opinion when, in fact, they’re not;
- a news “hook” or dramatic event is needed to justify covering a story, but the power elite does the selecting to serve its own interests; and
- advertisers apply pressure so content favors or at least won’t offend them.

McChesney also explains that “balanced (journalism) smuggles in values conducive to the commercial aims of the owners and advertisers, as well as the political aims of the owning class.” And as their power grows, so does their control over what news and information people get as well as a tsunami of sports and entertainment to divert and distract from what matters most.

## **Iraq - The Sanctions of Mass Destruction**

The authors cite British Prime Minister Tony Blair’s “big bad lie” in making a “moral case for war” for which there was none. Two years later, the Iraqi Planning Ministry and UN reported that almost one quarter of children aged five or under suffered from malnutrition. That condition was even worse than the appalling situation under economic sanctions and the destruction of the country that began after Saddam invaded Kuwait in August, 1990. Four days later, Operation Desert Shield was launched. It began with US-dictated economic sanctions, a large military buildup in the region, and a sweeping PR campaign for war that became Operation Desert Storm on January 17, 1991.

Before it ended on February 28, US forces committed grievous war crimes that included gratuitous mass killings as well as bombings to destroy essential to life facilities of almost everything imaginable. The dominant media ignored the human cost along with removed power, clean water, sanitation, fuel, transportation, medical facilities, adequate food, schools, private dwellings and places of employment. A defenseless nation was leveled by a ruthless superpower. It was only the beginning.

Twelve years of crushing genocidal sanctions followed. The results were predictable and devastating. Normal life was impossible and became a daily struggle to survive. By the mid-1990s, it was apparent many hadn’t and wouldn’t going forward. The media ignored it and instead blamed Saddam for what Washington and the West caused. The authors note that in the face of ugly facts, Tony Blair “once again employ(ed) his favoured strategy – passionately ‘sincere’ truth-reversal.”

That and clear facts on the ground got two UN heads of Iraqi humanitarian relief to resign in anger with Dennis Halliday in 1998 saying he did so because he “had been instructed to implement a policy that satisfies the definition of genocide: a deliberate policy that has effectively killed well over one million individuals, children and adults” including 5000 Iraqi children monthly in his judgment. The media was silent then and ever since in spite of appalling evidence of war crimes in plain sight.

Consider the so-called Oil-for-Food program as well. It was adopted under UN Resolution 986 in 1995 but was hopelessly inadequate by design. An internal 1999 UN report revealed it provided about 21 cents a day for food and 4 cents more for medicines with vitally needed items banned or in short supply. Everything considered potentially “dual use” was blocked including chlorine to purify water, vital medical equipment, chemotherapy and pain-killing drugs, ambulances and whatever else Washington wished to withhold punitively. The consequences were horrific, the media was silent, and instead supported Blair’s, Clinton’s (and now Bush’s) “moral war.”

As the authors put it: “With the wholehearted complicity of the media, the US and UK governments were able to blame the Iraqi regime for the suffering” it didn’t cause and could do nothing to prevent. “Supported by a wave of propaganda, journalists were able to pass over the West’s responsibility for vast crimes against humanity.” Examples abound like

BBC's John Simpson restricting his comments on "Western responsibility for genocide" to 16 words in one sentence in a November, 2002 on-air documentary.

The authors noted that nine months after Media Lens was launched in 2001, they "began to realise the extent to which even high-profile journalists were unable to defend their arguments" in the face of overwhelming evidence refuting them. They tried nonetheless, still do and it keeps getting worse.

### **Iraq Disarmed - Burying the 1991-98 Weapons Inspections**

To make its case for the March, 2003 invasion, Bush and Blair promoted two "myth(s) of non-cooperation" - that Saddam refused to cooperate with UNSCOM weapons inspectors up to 1998 and had retained deadly WMD stockpiles that threatened the region and western interests. One big lie followed another like Saddam expelled weapons inspectors in December, 1998. In fact, he was remarkably cooperative in the face abusive intrusions few nations would ever tolerate and if demanded of the US would be impossible.

Making false claims was part of the scheme to attack and occupy the country as Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill discovered in the earliest days of the administration. He saw a secret memorandum preparing for war and a Pentagon document that discussed dividing up Iraq's energy reserves among western Big Oil giants. The road to war was launched with no turning back even though Scott Ritter, UNSCOM's chief weapons inspector, confirmed the following: that Bill Clinton ordered his team out of Iraq in December, 1998 on the eve of Operation Desert Fox, and the country was fundamentally disarmed with 90 - 95% of its (chemical and biological) WMDs "verifiably eliminated" at the time. There was no nuclear program.

Further, whatever remained didn't "constitute a weapons program....only bits and pieces of useless sludge" past their limited shelf life. Conclusion: "Iraq cooperated in" its disarmament, but the US nonetheless manufactured a conflict in December, 1998 that was a precursor for the big one ahead. It was also learned that CIA spies operated with arms inspectors to get information the Clinton administration used for its attack. When it ended, Saddam wouldn't allow inspectors back in and justifiably called them spies.

All along, the media reported the official line, ignored the truth and were thus complicit in the crimes of state they supported. The authors noted a "remarkable feature of media performance - that large numbers of individual journalists can come to move as an obedient herd despite easily available evidence contradicting the consensus view." As it always is, "This was standard right across the media" that never lets facts conflict with their servility to power.

The authors also point to an "astonishing media omission" they call "the sludge of mass destruction" and cite CIA as the source. In a 1990 briefing, the spy agency stated: "(Iraq's) Botulinum toxin (its biological weapons) is nonpersistent, degrading rapidly in the environment" and only has a shelf life of a year when stored below 27 degrees Celcius. Further, Scott Ritter debunked Tony Blair's specter of an Iraq weaponized VX nerve agent. He confirmed UNSCOM found and blew up a VX factory in 1996. Iraq no longer could produce it and any amount remaining was worthless sludge. Comments from the media - support for Tony Blair and silence on the facts.

### **Iraq - Gunning for War and Burying the Dead**

Throughout their book and with ample documentation, the authors eloquently and persuasively make their case. They conclusively prove without a doubt that “the role of the media is merely to channel the view of power (to allow it) to do as it pleases (so) the public will (only) be told what the powerful believe right, wrong, good and bad....all other views are ignored as irrelevant....” That’s what passes for mainstream journalism in the West without even a hiccup of contradiction or hint of remorse. Doing otherwise is viewed as “crusading journalism....no matter how corrupt the interests and goals driving war.” Noam Chomsky put it this way: “The basic principle, rarely violated, is what conflicts with the requirements of power and privilege does not exist.”

In the case of Iraq, the media fell right in line leading up to the conflict and once it began. It didn’t matter they were being used or that they were callously indifferent to “the immorality of the US-UK attack and the (appalling) suffering” it caused. The little touched on above can only hint at the human toll and plain fact that the “cradle of civilization” was erased by design and reinvented as a free market paradise for profit with the grand prize being Iraq’s immense, mostly undeveloped oil reserves.

Then, there’s the body count with estimates from 1990 to March, 2003 ranging up to 1.5 million or more deaths, two-thirds being children under age five. Post-US/UK invasion, it’s even more staggering from the highly respected Lancet, UK ORB polling firm, UNICEF and other sources - up to two million deaths with UNICEF data estimating 800,000 children under age five.

Slaughter on this scale is incontrovertible genocide under the provisions of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. It “means any (acts of this type mass-killing) committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, the national, ethnical, racial or religious group (by) killing (its) members; causing (them) serious bodily or mental harm; (or) deliberately inflicting (on them) conditions (that may destroy them in whole or in part).” By this standard alone, three US administrations and two in Britain are criminally liable. Additionally, there’s what the Nuremberg Tribunal called “the supreme international crime” against peace, and the level of culpability overwhelms.

Throughout it all, the media was unperturbed and continues to back the most appalling crimes of war and against humanity like they never happened. Consider this audacious comment from BBC political editor, Andrew Marr, from his 2004 book on British journalism: Those in the trade “are employed to be studiously neutral, expressing little emotion and certainly no opinion; millions of people would say that news is the conveying of fact, and nothing more.” The hypocrisy is breathtaking.

It continued as the media uniformly extolled the transfer of “sovereignty” in June, 2004 without mentioning that no legitimate government can exist under occupation and certainly not one turned to rubble. The authors quoted noted British journalist Robert Fisk saying “Alice in Wonderland could not have improved on this. The looking glass reflects all the way from Baghdad to Washington” with a stopover in London. Since it was formed, the “Iraqi government” is impotent. All power is in Washington, liberation is an illusion, and so is the notion of a free and democratic Iraq that was never part of the plan. Democracies are messy and the reason they’re not tolerated.

## **Afghanistan - Let Them Eat Grass**

The authors quote media expert Edward Herman on how the major media and other experts “normalize the unthinkable” by ignoring the most appalling state-sponsored crimes, doubting their severity and believing ends justify means. Bottom line – poor people of color in developing nations don’t count, and the “art of successful mainstream journalism is to (convey this) without the public noticing.”

For the media on Afghanistan, the war largely ended when Kabul fell on November 13, 2001, a scant five weeks after it began on October 7. The bombing continued, but “the war was suddenly yesterday’s news,” and only Taliban crimes mattered. Ignored was what John Pilger wrote in his newest book “Freedom Next Time” – that “Through all the humanitarian crises in living memory, no country has been abused and suffered more, and none helped less than Afghanistan.” He then described what was more like a moonscape than a functioning nation. Little has changed since, but the major media are uniformly silent. All that matters is the “war on terrorism” that justifies occupation, continued conflict, mass suffering and death.

The authors cited a surreal example – “In the land of the blind, (a) one-eyed lion is news.” Against the backdrop of mass human suffering and deaths, ITN journalists reported on the plight of “Marjan” in Kabul’s zoo, and that a team of vets flew in to help. The network later mentioned that “Marjan” died as it callously ignored conditions on the ground for Afghanistan’s human population who remain unnamed and matter less than a lion. Conditions for them are appalling with humanitarian agencies reporting they saw “people (without food) still eating grass” in January 2002.

This contrasts with state-sponsored propaganda that Afghanistan is now free from “fear, uncertainty and chaos,” and the US and UK “act(ed) benignly, and (the)humanitarian military assault is beneficial.” Again, reality can’t deny the official message so blamed for continuing conflict are the “meddlesome Afghans (who) are undermining our good work.” Out of sight and mind are the real motives behind the 9/11 attack and the price Afghans (and Iraqis) pay for it.

Also ignored is why we occupy their country. It has nothing to do with terrorism, humanitarian intervention or democracy. It has everything to do with imperial gain. The result is an unimaginable level of suffering that continues today under a puppet government, a brutal occupation, and no end to either in sight. Try getting that type report in the mainstream.

### **Kosovo - Real Bombs, Fictional Genocide**

No recent conflict in memory evoked more popular support on the right and left than the 1990s Balkan wars. They culminated in 1999 with a 78 day NATO air assault on Serbia whose leader, Slobadon Milosevic, was unfairly cast as the villain. The conflict lasted from March 24 to June 10 on the pretext of protecting Kosovo’s Albanian population. It was all a ruse. Kosovo is a Serbian province. It still is, but it’s under NATO occupation with plans to make it independent and complete the “Balkanization” of Yugoslavia.

In the run-up to war, the propaganda was familiar. Tony Blair called it “a battle between good and evil; between civilization and barbarity; between democracy and dictatorship.” British defence secretary, George Robertson, was even worse saying intervention was needed to stop “a regime which is bent on genocide,” and Bill Clinton also raised the specter of “genocide.” Each case was the equivalent of elevating Bunker Hill to Mt. Everest or

maybe the heavens.

So how did unreported facts on the ground refute the official myth? The Balkan wars destroyed a country to keep predatory capitalism on a roll for new markets, valued resources and cheap exploitable labor. Slobodan Milosevic was the fall guy and ended up in the Hague where he was hung out to dry by the ICTY US-run court. There he was effectively silenced, denied proper medical care and forced in the end to take his secrets to the grave with him.

Earlier, however, war raged in his country for 78 mercilessly days as a sort of earlier version of “shock and awe.” NATO bombing killed 500 civilians, caused an estimated \$100 billion in damage, and according to Amnesty International (AI), was responsible for “serious violations of the laws of war leading in a number of cases to the unlawful killing of civilians.” Translated in language AI rarely uses – NATO committed war crimes, but only its victims were punished. They were carried out on the pretext of averting a humanitarian crisis that didn’t exist so NATO invented one.

Here are facts unreported in the mainstream. One month before the bombing, the German Foreign Office stated that a “feared humanitarian catastrophe threatening the Albanian civil population had been averted (and) public life (in larger cities) returned to relative normality.” Instead of genocide, NATO reported after the war that 2000 people were killed in Kosovo on all sides in the year prior to the bombing, and the US-backed Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) did most of it.

NATO’s attack was the culprit. It caused a humanitarian crisis, and the flood of refugees occurred when the bombing began. So did lootings, killings, rape, kidnappings and pillage according to an OSCE study. The media response was breathtaking. It “exactly reverse(d) cause and effect suggesting that bombing was justified (to halt) the flood of refugees it had in fact created.” Once again, the lies were breathtaking.

The authors note that like for the Iraq conflict, this war “was made possible by audacious government manipulation of a public denied access to the truth by an incompetent and structurally corrupt media. Every British paper (and American ones, of course) except one took a pro-war line” editorially, and journalists “proudly proclaimed their role in supporting the ‘humanitarian intervention’ ” when there was none.

The authors also note that “Editors and journalists do not drop bombs or pull triggers, but without their servility to power the public would not be fooled and the slaughter would have to end” or would never have begun. No nominally democratic government can stand up against the majority will of its people – provided they know about “the complicity of the corporate mass media in mass murder.” Another alternative also works against which they’re defenseless – ignore them, denounce them and seek reliable independent news and information sources like Media Lens, this web site and many other reliable ones.

### **East Timor - The Practical Limits of Crusading Humanitarianism**

Give credit where it’s due. Tiny impoverished East Timor is hardly a match for Indonesia with its 200 million population backed by Washington for what both countries gain from each other. Nonetheless and after “months of murderous intimidation” by Indonesian-backed militias, the East Timorese overwhelmingly voted for independence by a near four to one margin. It was courageous but costly, and it came in the form of “a horrendous

bloodbath” against pro-independence backers.

The US held off responding for 10 days intentionally and only did so under great public pressure. The delay allowed 70% of all public buildings and private residences to be destroyed and three-fourths of the population to be “herded across the border to West Timor, where hostage taking, killings and sexual assault were a daily occurrence.” BBC’s Matt Frei was indifferent like his fellow correspondents generally are. He described it as a “moral crusade,” but UN commissioner for human rights, Mary Robinson, had different view with “thousands pay(ing) with their lives for the world’s slow response.”

BBC practically choked before casually admitting our Indonesian allies were behind the massacres. Never admitted on-air was that its military-run country is a major Western ally and business partner. For BBC and others in the dominant media, “news ceases to be news when it seriously damages establishment interests.”

East Timor gained independence on May 20, 2002. At the time, reports mentioned that around 200,000 East Timorese (or one-third of the population) were massacred or starved to death in 1975 after the Ford administration condoned Indonesia’s takeover of the territory and supplied the Suharto government with lists of communist sympathizers to round up and eliminate. Back then, it got little attention in the mainstream and quickly faded from view after independence.

Why so? Indonesia is mineral-rich while East Timor hardly matters. The authors cited the “Golden Rule of media reporting – the tendency to overlook horrors committed by the West and its allies.” They also call this “The calculations of realpolitik.” Mineral wealth trumps concern for an impoverished people whose only worth is the sweat they supply at the lowest possible cost – everywhere.

### **Haiti - The Hidden Logic of Exploitation**

Haiti is the poorest country in the Americas and one of its most exploited. That’s saying a lot in a region dismissively called America’s “backyard” and ruthlessly exploited by Washington for decades. The country is small (around three times the size of Los Angeles) and has a population of around eight million. Since European settlers arrived 500 years ago, it experienced an almost unparalleled legacy of colonial violence and exploitation. Even when it gained independence from France on January 1, 1804, it lay in ruins. It was short-lived as France regained control and kept it until America took over later and solidified its hold when Woodrow Wilson sent in Marines in 1915 to protect US investments.

Washington remains in control, and the authors explain its logic to keep Haitians and other developing world people in line. Their “dreams of a better life must be crushed by violence and grinding poverty so extreme that local people will accept any work at any rate, and abandon all notions of improving their lot.” It’s the reason why western elites use “death squads, tyrants and economic oppression” as their methods of choice and why ordinary people are no match against them.

Hope for Haitians arose in 1990 when a Catholic priest named Jean-Bertrand Aristide gained prominence. He ran for President and shocked Washington by getting two-thirds of the vote to become Haiti’s first ever democratically elected leader. A September, 1991 US-backed military coup cut short his tenure, however. It removed him, reestablished harsh rule, and “stamp(ed) out (the beginnings of a) vibrant civil society” that began to take root. A



bloodbath followed with CIA paramilitaries behind it.

Aristide regained nominal power in 1994 after he agreed to Washington's neoliberal terms. Haiti's constitutional rule was restored, and he was allowed to return as President along with 20,000 US "peacekeepers" to assure IMF demands were observed.

The authors noted the "free press" version of events from when Aristide was first elected. Like always, it glossed over facts and ignored "the long, documented history of US support for mass murderers attacking Aristide's democratic government and killing his supporters....the hidden agenda behind (his return) to power (and) the limits imposed on his range of options by the superpower protecting its business interests." There was barely a mention of US commercial interests in Haiti or how brutally Haitians are exploited for profit.

Against all obstacles, however, Aristide was overwhelmingly popular. It showed in November, 2000 when he was reelected President with 92% of the vote, and his Lavalas party dominated parliament from the earlier May election. Their control lasted four years, then ended abruptly on February 29, 2004. In the middle of the night, a US Marine contingent forcibly removed the Haitian leader because he defied the rules of imperial management, governed like a democrat and was committed to helping Haiti's poor. Ever since, the country has been a killing field under US control with a paramilitary "peacekeeper" contingent as enforcers. They were sent illegally for the first time ever to support a coup d'état against a democratically elected President instead of backing his right to return to the office he won freely and fairly.

The media ignored the facts and portrayed the US as an "honest broker." They supported the scheme that Aristide "had to go" because his people no longer supported him nor did the international community. "Forget the democratic process. Forget the landslide victories." Forget the successive US-backed bloodbaths following Aristide's rise to power in 1990. Forget any hope Haiti might emerge from its nightmarish 500 year history. All that mattered was power and where most of it lay. No need to point a finger. A great need to denounce the media that turns a blind eye to it.

### **Idolatry Ink - Reagan, the 'Cheerful Conservative' and 'Chubby Bubba' Clinton**

Few US presidents did more harm yet got more praise than Ronald Reagan, and Mark Hertsgaard wrote about it in his book, "On Bended Knee: The Press and the Reagan Presidency." The authors here review his record and cover some of the adulatory avalanche following his death on June 5, 2004. It was a painful week to recall and one that abandoned any measure of truth to portray a man and his "extraordinary successful presidency." It was indeed for the power elite and the way he served them at the expense of the public good.

Out of sight and mind were a few minor things that happened during his tenure. The Iran-Contra scandal for one that would have sunk Nixon faster than Watergate had he been the culprit. But there was much more, and the authors cover some of it to set the record straight on a man only corporatists and friendly tyrants could love.

Reagan earned his bona fides on two issues - supporting big business and claiming he was hawkishly anti-communist. The two were, in fact, the same with the authors saying "the real motive behind the American slaughter in the Third World - profits, not fear of the Soviet Union - is indicated by patterns of investment" that rose dramatically under US friendly regimes. Examples were in Chile under Pinochet, Iran under the Shah, Brazil under the

generals, Guatemala after its democracy died, and many other client countries around the world. Excluded from investment and targeted for regime change are states run independently that place their sovereignty above our right to control it.

The authors give examples of leaders who tried in Central America and paid dearly for their effort. They put it this way: "Reagan's eight years in office (1981-1989) produced a vast bloodbath as Washington funnelled money, weapons and supplies to client dictators and right-wing death squads battling independent nationalism across Central America." Central Asia, Africa and wherever else an independent leader arose followed a similar pattern.

Major media ignored official Reagan administration policy - to "terrorize impoverished people into accepting a status quo that condemned them to lives of profitable misery." It doesn't matter how many tens of thousands die or how impoverished we condemn the living. Instead, typical media comments about Reagan were like the one from the London Guardian saying he'll be "chiefly remembered now for....his tax cutting economic policies, his role in (ending) the cold war and his ability to make America feel so good about itself after the turmoil of Vietnam, civil rights and Watergate."

Bill Clinton is still living, but he's also well treated, aside from his personal peccadillos in office now forgotten. As usual, the media ignores his dark side that caused great harm at home and an overwhelming amount abroad. As the authors observe, it's because demeaning a president is "disrespectful, even irresponsible." So the worst of his record was unreported with plenty of choices to choose from such as eight harsh years of Iraq sanctions that caused around 1.5 million deaths with two-thirds of them children under age five. This and more go unmentioned because the media defer to power, and presidents and prime ministers get "unlimited respect bordering on reverence." Want the truth? Independent journalism provides what's absent in the mainstream everywhere.

### **Ultimate Change - The Ultimate Media Betrayal**

The issue here is the danger that the planet may become uninhabitable because of climate change alone, and the authors cite evidence to show it. In each case, the conclusion is the same - global warming is real, threatening, and serious efforts are urgently needed to remediate it.

Enter the media with the authors saying although they "do report the latest disasters and dramatic warnings, there are few serious attempts to explore the identity and motives of corporate opponents to action" on this vital issue. Why? Because of powerful business opposition that includes the corporate press. The silence is deafening, and the authors state it's "the mother of all silences, because the fossil fuel economy is the mother of all vested interests."

It hardly matters that the London-based Global Commons Institute predicts over two million deaths worldwide in the next 10 years from climate-related disasters, and we see lesser amounts happening now every year. It gets worse with the prestigious journal Nature publishing a four-year research study by scientists from eight countries. They predict over one million species will be extinct by 2050, and they describe their findings as "terrifying."

How does the oil industry respond? According to oil and gas industry consultant, Bob Williams, it must "put the environmental lobby out of business." How does the media respond? Silence in the face of "much of life on earth threatened by mass death...." The

authors say “the corporate media occasionally laments the destruction of our world in editorials, but it is not in the business of doing anything about it. In fact, literally the reverse is true.” In their advertising and content, they promote a lifestyle of excessive fossil fuel consumption – gas-guzzling cars, air travel and a whole array of other high energy consuming products most of which are unessential and do little to enhance our lives.

The authors wonder if readers may question their view on how the media approach climate issues and answer this way: “....we believe our lives, the lives of our children, indeed much of animal and plant life on this planet, are in great danger. We believe, further, that the means of mobilizing popular support for action to prevent this catastrophe – the mass media – is fatally compromised by its very structure, nature and goals. This is no joke,” and unless we expose and challenge the status quo “there may well be no future for any of us.” What greater motivation is there than that.

### **Disciplined Media - Professional Conformity to Power**

Key here is that nations or people committing destructive acts don't usually act out of ingrained cruelty and hatred. As the authors put it: “In reality, evil is not merely banal. It is often free of any sense of being evil – there may be no sense of moral responsibility for suffering at all.” A typical response when asked is: “I'm just doing what I'm paid to do (or) I'm just doing my job.” It's as true of torturers as businessmen who must do as they're told and know what comes with the job. Perform or find another one, and the same obligation holds for journalists. “Like military personnel, (they) also sign themselves over to authority” and that requires prioritizing their employers' welfare “in everything they say and do.”

The result is always the same. Official enemies are demonized, government crimes are ignored or “prettified,” and corporate greed is overlooked along with the common good. The authors refer to this as the “gushing phenomenon” that led western journalists to “gush” over the fall of Baghdad and later the transfer of “sovereignty” in the country's “first democratic elections in 50 years in January, 2005.” Never mind the absence of democracy, the myth that there is any, and the fact that the country's “sovereignty” resides in Washington and is enforced from its branch office inside the heavily fortified Green Zone.

Mainstream journalists ignore this and are compliant because they have to be or find other work. They perform “in the absence of any conspiracy, with minimal self-censorship, and with even less outright lying.” Psychologist Eric Fromm explained the phenomenon that the authors expressed their way: that “all modern individuals are socialised to perceive themselves as morally empty vessels willing to accept whatever is demanded of them.” They're “commodities to be bought and sold for employment” – to do their job and not question their employers. Journalists aren't paid to lie. They simply “subordinate their capacity for critical thought to a professional standard (knowing this is) just how things are done.”

In a nominally free society, control isn't maintained by violence but “by deception, self-deception, and by a mass willingness to subordinate our own thoughts and feelings to notions of professionalism and objectivity.” It's sadly ironic that people who make an evil and violent world possible aren't that way themselves. Nonetheless, it must be wondered how often, if ever, they consider the consequences of their actions or inactions.

### **Toward a Compassionate Media**

The authors note that the dominant media's "subliminal message is that our rulers are superior, transcendent, benign (so they must) be afforded respect, even awe, as the loftiest stratum of a proudly meritocratic political system" that places all other people and their leaders on lower rungs. It shouldn't surprise that many journalists view western values and sophistication as "intellectually, culturally and morally superior to the less developed societies of the impoverished South." In a word, "West is best" in their minds so it follows our lives have greater value.

Enter Media Lens and its mission. The authors state to the best of their knowledge it's "the first serious attempt to provide a regular, radical response to mainstream propaganda in the UK." If corporate-paid journalists did it, their careers would end so they can't, won't and don't ever except around the edges where it hardly matters or is barely noticed. Media Lens, in the authors' words, does "much more than talk about practical solutions." It is "a practical solution."

The dominant media depends on uncriticized "self-delusions" while the role of the alternative media is to challenge them. With an expanding internet, it can be done by reaching a mass audience with minimal cost. The authors refer to "citizen reporters" and their growing role in providing real news and information unavailable in the mainstream. They hope this will lead to a greater public awareness and "power to impose a news agenda on the mainstream" or replace it altogether as a reliable source. Even more, they hope to "motivate large popular movements" that may be able to "reform media structures to restrict the influence of corporate interests" where the bottom-line priority is their "bottom line."

The authors go further as well and say an "honest media" require "truth telling (that) should be motivated by compassion for suffering rather than greed for wealth, status and privilege." In their judgment, that's incentive enough to seek real causes of problems and workable solutions to them. Their goal is an "honest, compassionate, non-corporate" media because a model based on profit and growing shareholder equity can't possibly allow sentiment and compassion to be a consideration. It doesn't flow to the bottom line.

Great goals begin with noble ideas backed by action, but the authors admit that vision is a long way off. For now, their "energies (are) spent....in joining, forming, funding and supporting real democratic media initiatives.... through Internet websites and blogs." The mainstream can be challenged, they believe, and success depends on believing in three things: the benefits of ending others' suffering; a compassionate media is worth working for; and acting to achieve it.

## **Full Human Dissent**

Corporations today manipulate society and our lives by harming the greater good for profits. Consider the cost: "individual depression, global environmental collapse, wars for control of natural resources" and global dominion. It happens because we're saturated in a "mass consumer culture" that ignores "our needs as human beings." To counteract this, we need "to find more humanly productive answers" mainstream culture calls "dissident" or "absurd," but the authors believe are possible and vital.

Approaches to "individual and social well-being (are) practiced in many traditional cultures (but have been) filtered out" of ours because they conflict with corporate goals already explained. The authors once worked for corporate employers and described their condition

as “unrelieved boredom and stress....work....of no intrinsic interest (and) simply a means to the end of material acquisition.” They concluded that life centered around money and status “becomes a depressing dead end, a kind of emotional wasteland.”

They contrast that experience to their involvement today in “unpaid human rights and environmental work” that includes their Media Lens efforts. Compassionate dissent holds promise as a motivating force – “for media activism, peace activism, human and animal rights activism, and environmental activism.” It’s also “profoundly conducive to our own well-being.” The authors end by stating political dissent must be combined with human dissent. The combination can be powerfully self-liberating and “all the motivation we need to act for the welfare of the world.” Isn’t that a goal worth working for? Isn’t it what we want for ourselves?

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