

New York Times: Great Paper. Great Propaganda Organ

By [Edward S. Herman](#)

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[Z Communications](#)

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

This week, Edward Herman passed away at age 92. He will be remembered. His lifelong stance against war and social injustice will forever live in our inner consciousness.

His writings on Manufactured Consent reveal the inner workings of today's media propaganda. In the words of Edward Herman:

"The New York Times is a great newspaper, but arguably this very fact helps make it a great instrument for the engineering of consent to lots of problematic and sometimes very nasty policies and pieces of reality."

This article on the central role of the New York Times was first published by Z Communications and Global Research in October 2012.

From the very inception of Global Research, we have published Edward Herman's writings (2003-2017).

The Archive of Prof. [Edward S. Herman's writings on Global Research](#) includes a list or more than 60 articles.

Edward S. Herman has been a source of inspiration to many of us including thousands of Global Research readers.

We have over the years communicated by email, but I have not had the opportunity of meeting Edward Herman.

Michel Chossudovsky, November 16, 2017

On October 11, 2011, Paul Krugman asserted on his blog that he had the privilege of writing two columns a week for "the world's greatest newspaper," the New York Times (NYT). The NYT is surely an outstanding paper, with exceptionally wide scope, many good journalists on board and publishing many interesting and enlightening articles. But if the standard by which we judge greatness is the quality of its service to the public interest, to the 99 percent who don't own or advertise in newspapers or TV networks, or control or benefit directly and heavily from other corporate and financial entities, and/or exercise substantial influence on governments, the paper's greatness is debatable.

In fact, a case can be made that the NYT is the world's greatest—or at least most

important—organ of state propaganda. Because of its great prestige, its being pegged as a “liberal” newspaper, and the paper’s allowing just enough dissent to give the appearance of balance and to make its most serious apologetics seem credible, the general public is not aware of how often and how effectively the paper serves the imperial state, normalizing U.S. imperial ventures and putting them in a favorable light—and providing systematic apologetics for abuses by it favored clients. The editors even belatedly admitted their war-supportive bias in the run-up to the UN Charter-violating and lie-based Iraq war. They are clearly doing the same in the case of Iran, where the paper has had almost daily accounts of Iran’s alleged moves toward nuclear weapons capability, while working on the premise that Israel’s (and the U.S.’s) actual nuclear weapons, and almost daily and credible threats, are perfectly acceptable and understandable and don’t even constitute essential context in discussing the Iran menace.

The paper has preserved its high reputation even as it has been repeatedly guilty of serious failures in its basic newspaper function, at huge social cost. The classic illustration is provided in their own editorial “The Lie That Wasn’t Shot Down” (ed., June 18, 1988), which acknowledged that their earlier furious news-editorial-propaganda barrage of 1983 claiming a deliberate and knowing Soviet destruction of the civilian Korean airliner 007 was based on a lie. Significantly, the counter-evidence cited in the five-years-late editorial was not uncovered by the paper’s own staff, but by a congressperson’s inquiry. So they swallowed an official lie that served the official party-line and the ongoing process of demonization of the “evil empire,” but despite all their resources never got around to examining whether it was valid.

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



When this great newspaper is in a propaganda mode, which is often, and especially where foreign policy and “national security” matters are at issue, their biases are frequently blatant and even amusing. This can often be read in their word usage and headline policy which discloses their bias at a glance. For example, their party-line hostility to Hugo Chavez has been steadfast, and even led them to editorialize in favor of the soon to be aborted 2002 coup d’etat, with the editors claiming that “Venezuelan democracy is no longer threatened by a would-be dictator. Mr. Chavez, a ruinous demagogue, [who] stepped down after the military intervened and handed power to a respected business leader, Pedro Carmona” (ed., “Hugo Chavez Departs,” April 13, 2002).

The editors quickly changed their minds as the coup was reversed and the editors were subjected to sharp criticism for unprincipled behavior, acknowledging that Chavez’s “forced departure last week drew applause at home and in Washington...which we shared, [but] overlooked the undemocratic manner in which he was removed. Forcibly unseating a democratically elected leader, no matter how badly he has performed, is never something to cheer” (ed., “Venezuela’s Political Turbulence,” April 16, 2002). But the editors had cheered it, and had misrepresented the facts: the “ruinous demagogue” didn’t “step down,” his performance had not been “ruinous” as had been, for example, Yeltsin’s in Russia, lauded by the editors, and ending democracy does not terminate a threat to democracy,

either in Venezuela in 2002 or Chile on 9/11/73.

The incident revealed that the establishment party-line bias of NYT editors runs deeper than their commitment to democracy. More recently, William Neuman's "Chavez, After Treatment for Cancer, Gets His Bluster Back and Flaunts It" (January 22, 2012) is a simple and easily replicable illustration of the institutionalized presence of an anti-Chavez bias. "Bluster" and "flaunts" are snarl words that the paper wouldn't use for high-level U.S. or UK politicians, but are standard for Chavez.

This kind of language would also not be used to describe Argentinian state terrorists during the years of military rule (1976-1983) or Augusto Pinochet in Chile, at least during the time when they were in power (see my *The Real Terror Network*). It was amusing to see that the December 11, 2006 NYT obituary for Pinochet by Jonathan Kandell was entitled "Augusto Pinochet, 91, Dictator Who Ruled by Terror in Chile, Dies." While he was in power, the NYT very rarely referred to him as a "dictator" and I don't believe they ever said that he "ruled by terror." But with Pinochet dead and long out of power, the paper can combine "dictator" and "rule by terror" in the very title of an article on him.

The official party-line is now hostile to Vladimir Putin and surely not because of any undemocratic or corruption factors, which were perfectly acceptable and even encouraged in the Yeltsin and early Putin years, with the editors describing Yeltsin's 1996 electoral victory as "A Victory for Russian Democracy" (July 4, 1996), which it certainly wasn't, but it was a triumph of a man who was taking our orders. No, Putin's problem is his decline in willingness to take orders and, notably, his resistance to the U.S.-NATO push for clienthood and subservience on a global basis, with Russia, like China, constituting an alternative potential center of power. The result is that the NYT selects as newsworthy, and pushes anything, that will now put Putin in a bad light.

Thus, the trial and imprisonment of the "Pussy Riot" trio in 2012 is given intensive, page-one coverage, with a characteristic slant and misinterpretation that meets the political demands for denigration, including outrage that a mere "stunt" attacking Putin results in a jail sentence (David M. Herszenhorn, "Anti-Putin Stunt Earns Punk Band Two Years in Jail," August 18, 2012). That it was carried out in Moscow's Christ the Savior Cathedral, which invited police action and that it was a police action sought by church authorities, rather than political officials, is buried.

The subtitle is "Trial of Three Women Put Intense Focus on Free Speech." But "Pussy Riot" members had carried out other actions elsewhere without jailing as had many others, so was it a challenge to free speech in Russia or was it a stunt that could be mobilized by anti-Putin (and pro-Western) forces as part of a larger propaganda campaign? Does this case tell us anything useful about free speech in Russia?

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Isn't it amazing to see it taken up by Amnesty International (AI), Avaaz, and Human Rights Watch (HRW) with such aggressiveness? AI and HRW neglected the important case of Julian Assange and the serious official U.S. campaign against whistleblowers and contributors of "material aid" (undefined) to terrorists (see Diana Johnstone, "Pussy Riot and Amnesty International: The Decline of Political Protest," Counterpunch, August 28, 2012). Would the NYT ever give such intensive and positive publicity to Americans interrupting church services to make a political point or carrying out illegal acts of protest against U.S. training-of-state-terrorists pro- grams at the School of Americas or nuclear weapons facilities?

The Moscow protests against Putin have not only been featured heavily in the NYT, with photos, but here also you can find language that is reserved for propaganda service. Thus, a rally in Moscow is described as "vast" with a crowd of tens of thousands (the organizers claimed 120,000) and a challenge to Putin's authority, all within a single headline (Ellen Barry and Michael Schwartz, "Vast Rally in Moscow Is a Challenge to Putin's Power," December 24, 2011). The same Times reporters write that, "After Election Putin Faces Challenges to Legitimacy" (March 5, 2012). Putin received a larger percentage of the votes than did Bush or Obama, but you will not find the NYT mentioning any challenge to an elected U.S. president's "legitimacy." Such language is reserved for hostiles.

The NYT has long been unfriendly to labor unions and in favor of "reform" here and across the globe, "reform" meaning "flexible" labor markets and more compliant or disappeared unions. This may strike people as implausible given the liberalism of the paper, but it is an establishment newspaper. While it expresses regret that inequality has grown so great and it may oppose crude attacks on labor, still the underlying forces damaging labor and escalating inequality have been openly supported. The Times's leading liberal for many years, Anthony Lewis, was enthused that Margaret Thatcher had put labor in its place and he and the editors both supported the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement and castigated labor for opposing it.

The Times had only modest and scattered coverage of the Reagan-business community attacks on organized labor in the 1980s, even though many of these attacks were in violation of the law, and although they were badly weakening an important civil society institution that protects ordinary citizens both in the workplace and political arena and was arguably essential to a real rather than nominal democracy.

Business Week wrote in 1994 that “over the past dozen years...U.S. industry has conducted one of the most successful union wars ever,” assisted by “illegally firing thousands of workers for exercising their right to organize.” But you would hardly know this reading the New York Times (or for that matter its mainstream colleagues).

I was still intrigued to see a recent Times article by Liz Alderman with the title “Italy Wrestles With Rewriting Its Stifling Labor Laws” (August 11, 2012), with the word stifling repeated on the continuation page. The article rests almost entirely on the claims by members of one Italian family business of their multiple difficulties: that they won’t hire because they can’t fire workers in a business downturn; that they can’t fire for theft without an airtight case; that taxes to support an “extensive social welfare net” are burdensome; and workers can stay on three years beyond retirement age even if superior and cheaper replacements are available.

No contesting or qualifying sources are introduced, so that the benefits of these laws and taxes to workers are not mentioned and evaluated. Only the costs to business and their further macro effects are deemed relevant. “Italy” and the NYT want “reform.”

The New York Times is a great newspaper, but arguably this very fact helps make it a great instrument for the engineering of consent to lots of problematic and sometimes very nasty policies and pieces of reality.

Edward S. Herman is a media critic, economist, and author of numerous books, including The Politics of Genocide (with David Petersen).

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