

AUDIO: Shady Claims by NYT on Russia-gate: Peter B. Collins interviews Gareth Porter

Gareth Porter discusses with radio host Peter B. Collins his Consortium News [article](#) exposing exaggerated claims of Russian skulduggery on Facebook in 2016.

By Peter B. Collins



Journalist and historian Gareth Porter returned to the Peter B. Collins [show](#) to discuss his new article, exposing exaggerated claims of Russian skulduggery on Facebook in 2016. Porter's [article](#) was published last week at **Consortium News**, showing inaccurate claims in the late-September [recap of Russia-gate](#) by *New York Times* reporters Scott Shane and Mark Mazzetti.

Both Porter and your humble host consider Shane to be a credible reporter, and credit him with caveats in stories on Russia-gate, including the quote from the September 26 report that these claims “can neither be proven nor disproven.”

We note how many “progressive” media figures, including Thom Hartmann, claim that Mueller's convictions and plea deals amount to proof of “collusion”, even though Manafort and the others have not been tried on such charges.

Porter explains that the numbers cited by the *Times* about Facebook are grossly exaggerated, with “potential impressions” being treated as click-throughs. He notes that Facebook estimates that only 1 out of 10 posts in a news feed are actually read by the user. When you compare the modest traffic attributed to all Russians, including government actors, it's infinitesimal compared to the \$80 million-plus the Trump campaign spent on dark-targeted Facebook ads.

Porter also looks at the role of Twitter bots in amplifying tweets by the candidates, and argues that the impacts cited by Shane and Mazzetti are not significant. Listen to Peter B. delve deep into the deceptions of Russia-gate with Gareth Porter. Running time 35:14.

Peter B. Collins, a veteran radio host on the airwaves in the San Francisco Bay Area, is host of the [Peter B. Collins Show](#).

Consortium News' Comment Policy

We are republishing our Comment Policy to remind readers to please adhere to it. We do not practice censorship based on political views but comments that violate the Policy will be removed to maintain a dignified and fact-based comments section.

At **Consortium News**, we welcome substantive comments about our articles, but comments should avoid *ad hominem* attacks, abusive language toward other commenters or our writers, sexist, homophobic, ethnic, racial or religious slurs (including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia), and allegations that are unsupported by facts, as well as gross or misleading factual errors.

If we notice violations of this Comments Policy, we will either edit or take down such comments. If readers spot such violations, they can bring them to our attention at info@consortiumnews.com. Repeat offenders will be placed on a watch list requiring case-by-case approval of their comments. Violators can be blocked.

Obviously, our preference is for commenters to show self-restraint and to make their observations in a respectful, thoughtful and factual way that is on-topic. We have plenty of work to do without having to police the comment section.

Also, because of annoying SPAM, we have installed a SPAM filter that uses algorithms to detect SPAM. The filter does a good job at this, but sometimes catches legitimate comments by accident. During the day, we try to recover these comments, but please do not be upset if one of your comments suffers this fate.

In addition, we use an automated system that pulls out questionable comments for manual review. Those comments that do not violate our Comments Policy will be restored. Do not be dismayed if there is a delay before your comment is approved or permanently removed.

We also strongly encourage commenters to use their real names and avoid pseudonyms unless there is a legitimate reason to do so.

–Written by Robert Parry

If you have any questions about this policy please contact us at info@consortiumnews.com

Peter Lavelle: Why I Read Consortium News

Peter Lavelle, the host of RT's Cross Talk, explains what Consortium News means to him.

From the desk of Peter Lavelle:



Not long ago during a visit he made to Moscow, I told Joe Lauria – now editor-in-chief of **Consortium News**– that I would read Robert Parry's brilliant articles before I went to the studio to record my program, *CrossTalk*, at RT. Indeed it would not be exaggeration to claim Parry was my most important and influential "research assistant." To this day **Consortium News** continues to be a valuable source of news and well-reasoned analysis.

The media sphere today is under immense pressure. Governments, media in the service of power, and the growing tyranny of Big Tech have marginalized serious, well-informed journalism. **Consortium News** is one of the few news outlets I visit on a daily basis. It is refreshing and not bombarded by partisan bluster and low-octane thinkers. Instead, I find excellent, well-edited writing, as well as high-level intellectual honesty.

Most importantly, **Consortium News** does not bow to power. Robert Parry's tradition of calling "balls and strikes" reaffirms the purpose of journalism – to critically contribute to the public square. Needless to say there is precious little of that today. **Consortium News** fills this indispensable niche.

Please [make a donation](#) today during **Consortium's** Fall Fund Drive so it can continue to deliver for you.

Peter Lavelle is host of RT's political debate program *CrossTalk*.

Gareth Porter: Why I Write for Consortium News

Consortium News is a priceless resource for honing in on the truth in the tradition of its founder Robert Parry, says Gareth Porter.

From the desk of Gareth Porter

We've all seen how the recent period of vertiginous political change has resulted in rapidly growing pressure on independent media to conform to partisan and/or ideologically rigid positions on the most crucial issues of international and national politics. The result has been a further narrowing of the already very limited range of sources of news and analysis that are able to deliver truly independent and critical reporting.

That is why I have become increasingly convinced that **Consortium News** is a priceless resource for honing in on the truth in the tradition of its founder Robert Parry. His vision was to nurture an online source of investigative reporting and analysis that would never bow to pressure from powerful political interests, ignore pivotal stories or embrace official narratives based on falsehoods. Parry's untimely death last January posed an enormous challenge to his successor to carry on this fearless endeavor. But Joe Lauria, whom I have known for the last few years, is fully capable of steering the ship safely through the threats to the unique role of **Consortium News**. He is working hard to produce a news site that can continue to grow in stature and in readership.

And that is why I write for **Consortium News**.

Now is the time for all those who share Robert Parry's determination to defy pressures to conform to powerful interests and support this resource of inestimable value.

So please [make a donation](#) today during **Consortium's** Fall Fund Drive so it can continue to deliver for you.

Gareth Porter is an independent investigative journalist and historian writing on US national security policy. His latest book, *Manufactured Crisis: The Untold Story of the Iran Nuclear Scare*, was published in February of 2014. Follow him on Twitter: [@GarethPorter](#).

New Writers Welcomed to Consortium News

In the past few weeks **Consortium News** has added a group of accomplished writers as regular contributors, ensuring that **Consortium** remains a unique source of news, analysis and commentary that you will not find in mainstream media.

Pepe Escobar, the globe-trotting veteran Brazilian journalist, who can turn a phrase with the best of them while delivering incisive analysis of social

movements and West vs. East geopolitics, recently joined **Consortium's** roster and has already delivered.

His piece on the Brazilian presidential election is a must read.

Joining Pepe as a new **Consortium** writer is Max Blumenthal, one of the top journalists in alternative media. Max penned a brilliant obituary of Senator John McCain that gave you everything that was missing from *The New York Times*.

Patrick Lawrence, a long-time contributor to *The Nation*, *Salon* and other important alternative media, with a background in the mainstream as Asia Editor of *The International Herald Tribune*, has begun contributing his insightful analysis to **Consortium News**.

As'ad AbuKhalil, a.k.a "The Angry Arab," began contributing a few months ago with a special perspective on the Middle East as a Lebanese scholar of the region that overrides the usual Orientalist Western view.

Alexander Mercouris, a sharp observer of British politics has begun filing a regular Letter from Britain, in the vein of the legendary BBC U.S. correspondent Alistair Cooke's Letter from America.

John Kiriakou, a former CIA agent who blew the whistle on torture, has also begun contributing a regular column to **Consortium News**.

These important writers join our stable of regulars that include Ray Mc Govern, Gareth Porter, Daniel Lazare, Jonathan Marshall, Marjorie Cohn, Diana Johnstone and Annie Machon.

Unlike many websites today, we pay our writers at a competitive rate. But we can't do it without you.

So please make a contribution today to **Consortium's** Fall Fund Drive so that we can continue to provide you some of the best journalism outside the mainstream that exists on the Web.

Ray McGovern on Daniel Ellsberg and Consortium News

It is sobering to think that Dan Ellsberg, and other serious thinkers, look to **Consortium News** for professional journalism and analysis, says Ray McGovern.

From the desk of Ray McGovern:

Dan Ellsberg met me at the entrance to the Berkeley theater a half-hour before the Berkeley premier of *The Most Dangerous Man in America* in 2009. As we compared notes on a couple of the main issues of the day, he made a point of asking me, twice, to pass along to Bob Parry, the late founder and editor of this site, his thanks for **Consortium News**. When Dan turned to go up on stage to introduce the documentary, he dropped a manila folder crammed full of papers. Bending down to pick them up, he whispered, “Ray, these are recent **Consortium News** articles. I print out the ones I want to go back and read again; these are from the last couple of weeks.”

I was reminded of this last week when I spent several hours with Dan on the West Coast. He was as sharp and inquiring as ever; this time, though, there was a lightness in his step missing in previous years. No longer hanging around his neck is the albatross of an unfinished life’s work – Dan’s *crie de coeur*. The albatross flew off last December when Bloomsbury published *The Doomsday Machine: Confessions of a Nuclear War Planner*. **Consortium** [published](#) an [excerpt](#) earlier this year.

With unparalleled experience and insight, Dan warns of the danger of “near-term extinction” resulting from our own “inventions and proclivities.” It is sobering to think that Dan, and other serious thinkers, look to **Consortium News** for professional journalism and analysis on how acute that danger is today. I see in this a solemn charge for us to keep on keeping’ on.

So please [make a donation](#) today to help **Consortium News** make its [Fall Fund Drive](#) goal.

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He was an Army officer and a CIA presidential briefer, and is co-founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

The Fifth Online Vigil for Julian Assange

As the crisis over Julian Assange continues to mount, the fifth online vigil for Assange was broadcast live on Saturday by Consortium News. You can watch the entire event [here](#).

The isolation of Julian Assange, publisher of WikiLeaks, continues unabated as his lawyers and the former president of Ecuador, Rafael Correa, warn of deepening crisis for the imperiled asylee. These warnings come on the heel of the appointment of renowned Icelandic journalist Kristinn Hrafnsson as the new editor-in-chief of WikiLeaks – itself an indication of the dire circumstances at hand.

Assange's most high-profile supporters mobilized for the fifth #Unity4J online vigil on Saturday in solidarity with the silenced journalist. Guests included the CIA anti-torture whistleblower John Kiriakou, ex-U.S. House of Representatives member Cynthia McKinney, progressive comedian Graham Elwood and ACLU Board member and Radio Host Garland Nixon. You can watch the entire event [here](#).

Julian Assange in Crisis for Fifth Unity4J Online Vigil; Consortium News to Broadcast it Live on Saturday

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Past vigils in support of this political prisoner have been a great success, drawing in hundreds of thousands of viewers, with the support of the official Julian Assange and WikiLeaks social media accounts, as well as Julian's mother,

Ch  **STAND IN SOLIDARITY WITH JULIAN** **JOIN OUR HISTORIC ONLINE VIGILS** **#Unity4J** **10AM- 11PM EST**
SATURDAY OCTOBER 6TH
UNITY4J.COM/STREAM
Endorsed By: Ray McGovern, George Galloway, Bill Binney, Daniel Ellsberg, Chris Hedges, And More!

The vigil will commence Saturday, October 6 at 10:00am EST (7:00am PST), and will run until 11:00pm EST (8:00pm PST). The #Unity4J movement invites all supporters of free speech, press freedom and human rights to participate in the historic event. Organizer Suzie Dawson said:

“The astounding pace at which this solidarity movement for Julian Assange has grown is indicative of the universal respect and empathy for this generation’s greatest publisher. The greater the jeopardy he is placed in by the powers that persecute him, the more motivated and active his everyday supporters and defenders become. Every supporter who rises to protect him, brings our collective hope of justice and freedom one step closer.”

Livestream will be accessible at: <https://unity4j.com/stream> and on Consortium News. The official website: <https://unity4j.com> Official Twitter: @Unity4J Event hashtag: #Unity4J WikiLeaks Legal Defense Fund: <https://iamwikileaks.org/donate> WikiLeaks support website: <https://justice4assange.com> Courage Foundation: <https://couragefound.org>

Credible accounts for Julian Assange updates: <https://twitter.com/suzi3d/lists/assange-updates>

MEDIA INQUIRIES: Media inquiries and interview requests should be made to Suzie Dawson, via DM on Twitter: @Suzi3D, or by emailing info@unity4j.com .

For more background on the recent escalation of grave threats to Julian Assange’s life and liberty, we recommend reading the following articles:

Courage Foundation: [Assange’s Protection from US Extradition “in Jeopardy”](#),

[Inter-American Court Decision Regarding Asylum Rights](#)

[United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention’s decision regarding Assange’s Plight](#)

[Getting Assange: The Untold Story](#)

[Access to Medical Care, a Human Right, Must Also be Guaranteed to Julian Assange](#)

The New York Times as Judge and Jury

Seeking to maintain its credibility, The New York Times dispenses with the criminal justice system and basic principles of journalism to weigh in again on Russia-gate, reports Joe Lauria.

By Joe Lauria

Special to Consortium News



We've seen it before: a newspaper and individual reporters get a story horribly wrong but instead of correcting it they double down to protect their reputations and credibility—which is all journalists have to go on—and the public suffers.

Sometimes this maneuver can contribute to a massive loss of life. The most egregious example was the reporting in the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq. Like nearly all Establishment media, *The New York Times* got the story of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction—the major *casus belli* for the invasion—dead wrong. But the *Times*, like the others, continued publishing stories without challenging their sources in authority, mostly unnamed, who were pushing for war.

The result was a disastrous intervention that led to hundreds of thousands of civilian deaths and continued instability in Iraq, including the formation of the Islamic State.

In a massive *Times*' [article](#) published on Thursday, entitled, “‘A Plot to Subvert an Election: Unravelling the Russia Story So Far,” it seems that reporters Scott Shane and Mark Mazzetti have succumbed to the same thinking that doubled down on Iraq.

They claim to have a “mountain of evidence” but what they offer would be invisible on the Great Plains.

With the mid-terms looming and Special Counsel Robert Mueller unable to so far come up with any proof of collusion between Russia and the Trump campaign to steal the 2016 election—the central Russia-gate charge—the *Times* does it for him, regurgitating a Russia-gate Round-Up of every unsubstantiated allegation that has been made—deceptively presented as though it's all been proven.

This is a reaffirmation of the faith, a recitation of what the Russia-gate faithful want to believe is true. But mere repetition will not make it so.

The *Times'* unsteady conviction is summed up in this paragraph, which the paper itself then contradicts only a few paragraphs later:

“What we now know **with certainty**: The Russians carried out a landmark intervention that will be examined for decades to come. Acting on the personal animus of Mr. Putin, public and private instruments of Russian power moved with daring and skill to harness the currents of American politics. Well-connected Russians worked aggressively to recruit or influence people inside the Trump campaign.”

But this schizoid approach leads to the admission that “no public evidence has emerged showing that [Trump’s] campaign conspired with Russia.”

The *Times* also adds: “There is a plausible case that Mr. Putin succeeded in delivering the presidency to his admirer, Mr. Trump, though it cannot be proved or disproved.”

This is an extraordinary statement. If it cannot be “proved or disproved” what is the point of this entire exercise: of the Mueller probe, the House and Senate investigations and even of this very *New York Times* article?

Attempting to prove this constructed story without proof is the very point of this piece.

A Banner Day

The 10,000-word article opens with a story of a pro-Russian banner that was hung from the Manhattan Bridge on Putin’s birthday, and an anti-Obama banner hung a month later from the Memorial Bridge in Washington just after the 2016 election.

On public property these are constitutionally-protected acts of free speech. But for the *Times*, “The Kremlin, it appeared, had reached onto United States soil in New York and Washington. The banners may well have been intended as visual victory laps for the most effective foreign interference in an American election in history.”

Why? Because the *Times* tells us that the “earliest promoters” of images of the banners were from social media accounts linked to a St. Petersburg-based click-bait farm, a company called the Internet Research Agency. The company is not legally connected to the Kremlin and any political coordination is pure speculation. IRA has been explained convincingly as a commercial and not political operation. Its aim is get and sell “eyeballs.”

For instance the company conducted pro and anti-Trump rallies and social media messages, as well as pro and anti-Clinton. But the *Times*, in classic omission

mode, only reports on “the anti-Clinton, pro-Trump messages shared with millions of voters by Russia.” Sharing with “millions” of people on social media does not mean that millions of people have actually seen those messages. And if they had there is little way to determine whether it affected how they voted, especially as the messages attacked and praised both candidates.

The *Times* reporters take much at face value, which they then themselves undermine. Most prominently, they willfully mistake an indictment for a conviction, as if they do not know the difference.

This is in the category of Journalism 101. An indictment need not include evidence and under U.S. law an indictment is not evidence. Juries are instructed that an indictment is merely an accusation. That the *Times* commits this cardinal sin of journalism to purposely confuse allegations with a conviction is not only inexcusable but strikes a fatal blow to the credibility of the entire article.

It actually reports that “Today there is **no doubt** who hacked the D.N.C. and the Clinton campaign. A [detailed indictment](#) of 12 officers of Russia’s military intelligence agency, filed in July by Mr. Mueller, documents their every move, including their break-in techniques, their tricks to hide inside the Democrats’ networks and even their Google searches.”

Who needs courts when suspects can be tried and convicted in the press?

What the *Times* is not taking into account is that Mueller knows his indictment will never be tested in court because the GRU agents will never be arrested, there is no extradition treaty between the U.S. and Russia and even if it were miraculously to see the inside of a courtroom Mueller can invoke states secrets privilege to show the “evidence” to a judge with clearance in his chambers who can then emerge to pronounce “Guilty!” without a jury having seen that evidence.

This is what makes Mueller’s indictment more a political than a legal document, giving him wide leeway to put whatever he wants into it. He knew it would never be tested and that once it was released, a supine press would do the rest to cement it in the public consciousness as a conviction, just as this *Times* piece tries to do.

Errors of Commission and Omission

There are a series of erroneous assertions and omissions in the *Times* piece, omitted because they would disturb the narrative:

–Not mentioning that the FBI was never given access to the DNC server but instead gullibly believing the assertion of the anti-Russian private company CrowdStrike, paid for by the DNC, that the name of the first Soviet intelligence

chief found in metadata proves Russia was behind the hack. Only someone wanting to be caught would leave such a clue.

–Incredibly believing that Trump would have launched a covert intelligence operation on live national television by asking Russia to get 30,000 missing emails.

–Ignoring the possible role of the MI6, the CIA and the FBI setting up Trump campaign members George Papadopoulos and Carter Page as “colluders” with Russia.

–Repeating misleading statements about the infamous Trump Tower meeting, in which Trump’s son did not seek dirt on Clinton but was offered it by a music promoter, not the Russian government. None was apparently produced. It’s never been established that a campaign receiving opposition research from foreigners is illegal (though the *Times* has decided that it is) and only the Clinton campaign was known to have obtained any.

–Making no mention at all of the now discredited opposition research dossier paid for by the Clinton campaign and the DNC from foreign sources and used by the FBI to get a warrant to spy on Carter Page and potentially other campaign members.

–Dismissing the importance of politicized text messages between FBI agents Peter Strzok and Lisa Page because the pair were “skewered regularly on Mr. (Sean) Hannity’s show as the ‘Trump-hating F.B.I. lovebirds.’”

–Putting down to “hyped news stories” the legitimate fear of a new McCarthyism against anyone who questions the “official” story being peddled here by the *Times*.

–Seeking to get inside Putin’s head to portray him as a petulant child seeking personal revenge against Hillary Clinton, a tale long peddled by Clinton and accepted without reservation by the *Times*.

–Pretending to get into Julian Assange’s head as well, saying he “shared Mr. Putin’s hatred of Mrs. Clinton and had a soft spot for Russia.” And that Assange “also obscured the Russian role by fueling a right-wing conspiracy theory he knew to be false.”

–Ignoring findings backed by the Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity that the DNC emails were leaked and not hacked.

–Erroneously linking the timing of WikiLeaks’ Podesta emails to deflect attention from the “Access Hollywood” tape, as debunked in Consortium News by Italian journalist Stefania Maurizi, who worked with WikiLeaks on those emails.

Distorts Geo-Politics

The piece swallows whole the Establishment's geo-strategic Russia narrative, as all corporate media do. It buys without hesitation the story that the U.S. seeks to spread democracy around the world, and not pursue its economic and geo-strategic interests as do all imperial powers.

The *Times* reports that, "The United States had backed democratic, anti-Russian forces in the so-called color revolutions on Russia's borders, in Georgia in 2003 and Ukraine in 2004." The *Times* has also spread the erroneous story of a democratic revolution in Ukraine in 2014, omitting crucial evidence of a U.S.-backed coup.

The *Times* disapprovingly dismisses Trump having said on the campaign trail that "Russia was not an existential threat, but a potential ally in beating back terrorist groups," when an objective view of the world would come to this very conclusion.

The story also shoves aside American voters' real concerns that led to Trump's election. For the *Times*, economic grievances and rejection of perpetual war played no role in the election of Trump. Instead it was Russian influence that led Americans to vote for him, an absurd proposition defied by a Gallup poll in July that showed Americans' greatest concerns being economic. Their concerns about Russia were statistically insignificant at less than one percent.

Ignoring Americans' real concerns exposes the class interests of *Times* staffers and editors who are evidently above Americans' economic and social suffering. The *Times* piece blames Russia for social "divisions" and undermining American democracy, classic projection onto Moscow away from the real culprits for these problems: bi-partisan American plutocrats. That also insults average Americans by suggesting they cannot think for themselves and pursue their own interests without Russia telling them what to do.

Establishment reporters insulate themselves from criticism by retreating into the exclusive Establishment club they think they inhabit. It is from there that they vicariously draw their strength from powerful people they cover, which they should instead be scrutinizing. Validated by being close to power, Establishment reporters don't take seriously anyone outside of the club, such as a website like Consortium News.

But on rare occasions they are forced to take note of what outsiders are saying. Because of the role *The New York Times* played in the catastrophe of Iraq its editors took the highly unusual move of apologizing to its readers. Will we one day read a similar apology about the paper's coverage of Russia-gate?

Joe Lauria is editor-in-chief of Consortium News and a former correspondent for *The Wall Street Journal*, *Boston Globe*, *Sunday Times* of London and numerous other newspapers. He can be reached at joelauria@consortiumnews.com and followed on Twitter [@unjoe](https://twitter.com/unjoe) .

If you valued this original article please consider [making a donation](#) to Consortium News so we can bring you more stories like this one.

Hold the Front Page: The Reporters are Missing

So much of mainstream journalism has descended to the level of a cult-like formula of bias, hearsay and omission. Subjectivism is all; slogans and outrage are proof enough. What matters is “perception,” says John Pilger.

By John Pilger

Special to Consortium News



The death of Robert Parry earlier this year felt like a farewell to the age of the reporter. Parry was “a trailblazer for independent journalism”, wrote Seymour Hersh, with whom he shared much in common.

Hersh revealed the My Lai massacre in Vietnam and the secret bombing of Cambodia, Parry exposed Iran-Contra, a drugs and gun-running conspiracy that led to the White House. In 2016, they separately produced compelling evidence that the Assad government in Syria had not used chemical weapons. They were not forgiven.

Driven from the “mainstream”, Hersh must publish his work outside the United States. Parry set up his own independent news website Consortium News, where, in a final piece following a stroke, he referred to journalism’s veneration of “approved opinions” while “unapproved evidence is brushed aside or disparaged regardless of its quality.”

Although journalism was always a loose extension of establishment power, something has changed in recent years. Dissent tolerated when I joined a national newspaper in Britain in the 1960s has regressed to a metaphoric underground as liberal capitalism moves towards a form of corporate dictatorship. This is a seismic shift, with journalists policing the new “groupthink”, as Parry called it, dispensing its myths and distractions,

pursuing its enemies.

Witness the witch-hunts against refugees and immigrants, the willful abandonment by the “MeToo” zealots of our oldest freedom, presumption of innocence, the anti-Russia racism and anti-Brexit hysteria, the growing anti-China campaign and the suppression of a warning of world war.

With many if not most independent journalists barred or ejected from the “mainstream”, a corner of the Internet has become a vital source of disclosure and evidence-based analysis: true journalism sites such as wikileaks.org, consortiumnews.com, wsws.org, truthdig.com, globalresearch.org, counterpunch.org and informationclearinghouse.com are required reading for those trying to make sense of a world in which science and technology advance wondrously while political and economic life in the fearful “democracies” regress behind a media facade of narcissistic spectacle.

Propaganda Blitz

In Britain, just one website offers consistently independent media criticism. This is the remarkable Media Lens – remarkable partly because its founders and editors as well as its only writers, David Edwards and David Cromwell, since 2001 have concentrated their gaze not on the usual suspects, the Tory press, but the paragons of reputable liberal journalism: the BBC, *The Guardian*, Channel 4 News.

Their method is simple. Meticulous in their research, they are respectful and polite when they ask why a journalist why he or she produced such a one-sided report, or failed to disclose essential facts or promoted discredited myths.

The replies they receive are often defensive, at times abusive; some are hysterical, as if they have pushed back a screen on a protected species.

I would say Media Lens has shattered a silence about corporate journalism. Like Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman in *Manufacturing Consent*, they represent a Fifth Estate that deconstructs and demystifies the media’s power.

What is especially interesting about them is that neither is a journalist. David Edwards is a former teacher, David Cromwell is an oceanographer. Yet, their understanding of the morality of journalism – a term rarely used; let’s call it true objectivity – is a bracing quality of their online Media Lens dispatches.

I think their work is heroic and I would place a copy of their just published book, *Propaganda Blitz*, in every journalism school that services the corporate system, as they all do.

Take the chapter, Dismantling the National Health Service, in which Edwards and Cromwell describe the critical part played by journalists in the crisis facing Britain's pioneering health service.

The NHS crisis is the product of a political and media construct known as "austerity", with its deceitful, weasel language of "efficiency savings" (the BBC term for slashing public expenditure) and "hard choices" (the willful destruction of the premises of civilized life in modern Britain).

"Austerity" is an invention. Britain is a rich country with a debt owed by its crooked banks, not its people. The resources that would comfortably fund the National Health Service have been stolen in broad daylight by the few allowed to avoid and evade billions in taxes.

Using a vocabulary of corporate euphemisms, the publicly-funded Health Service is being deliberately run down by free market fanatics, to justify its selling-off. The Labour Party of Jeremy Corbyn may appear to oppose this, but is it? The answer is very likely no. Little of any of this is alluded to in the media, let alone explained.

Edwards and Cromwell have dissected the 2012 Health and Social Care Act, whose innocuous title belies its dire consequences. Unknown to most of the population, the Act ends the legal obligation of British governments to provide universal free health care: the bedrock on which the NHS was set up following the Second World War. Private companies can now insinuate themselves into the NHS, piece by piece.

Where, asks Edwards and Cromwell, was the BBC while this momentous Bill was making its way through Parliament? With a statutory commitment to "providing a breadth of view" and to properly inform the public of "matters of public policy," the BBC never spelt out the threat posed to one of the nation's most cherished institutions. A BBC headline said: "Bill which gives power to GPs passes." This was pure state propaganda.

Media and Iraq Invasion

There is a striking similarity with the BBC's coverage of Prime Minister Tony Blair's lawless invasion of Iraq in 2003, which left a million dead and many more dispossessed. A study by the University of Wales, Cardiff, found that the BBC reflected the government line "overwhelmingly" while relegating reports of civilian suffering. A Media Tenor study placed the BBC at the bottom of a league of western broadcasters in the time they gave to opponents of the invasion. The corporation's much-vaunted "principle" of impartiality was never a consideration.

One of the most telling chapters in *Propaganda Blitz* describes the smear campaigns mounted by journalists against dissenters, political mavericks and whistleblowers. The *Guardian's* campaign against the WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange is the most disturbing. Assange, whose epic WikiLeaks disclosures brought fame, journalism prizes and largesse to *The Guardian*, was abandoned when he was no longer useful. He was then subjected to a vituperative – and cowardly – onslaught of a kind I have rarely known.

With not a penny going to WikiLeaks, a hyped *Guardian* book led to a lucrative Hollywood movie deal. The book's authors, Luke Harding and David Leigh, gratuitously described Assange as a "damaged personality" and "callous." They also disclosed the secret password he had given the paper in confidence, which was designed to protect a digital file containing the U.S. embassy cables.

With Assange now trapped in the Ecuadorean embassy, Harding, standing among the police outside, gloated on his blog that "Scotland Yard may get the last laugh."

The *Guardian* columnist Suzanne Moore wrote, "I bet Assange is stuffing himself full of flattened guinea pigs. He really is the most massive turd."

Moore, who describes herself as a feminist, later complained that, after attacking Assange, she had suffered "vile abuse." Edwards and Cromwell wrote to her: "That's a real shame, sorry to hear that. But how would you describe calling someone 'the most massive turd'? Vile abuse?"

Moore replied that no, she would not, adding, "I would advise you to stop being so bloody patronizing." Her former *Guardian* colleague James Ball wrote, "It's difficult to imagine what Ecuador's London embassy smells like more than five and a half years after Julian Assange moved in."

Such slow-witted viciousness appeared in a newspaper described by its editor, Katharine Viner, as "thoughtful and progressive." What is the root of this vindictiveness? Is it jealousy, a perverse recognition that Assange has achieved more journalistic firsts than his snipers can claim in a lifetime? Is it that he refuses to be "one of us" and shames those who have long sold out the independence of journalism?

Journalism students should study this to understand that the source of "fake news" is not only trollism, or the likes of Fox News, or Donald Trump, but a journalism self-anointed with a false respectability: a liberal journalism that claims to challenge corrupt state power but, in reality, courts and protects it, and colludes with it. The amorality of the years of Tony Blair, whom *The Guardian* has failed to rehabilitate, is its echo.

"[It is] an age in which people yearn for new ideas and fresh alternatives,"

wrote Katharine Viner. Her political writer Jonathan Freedland dismissed the yearning of young people who supported the modest policies of Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn as “a form of narcissism.”

“How did this man ...,” brayed the *Guardian*’s Zoe Williams, “get on the ballot in the first place?” A choir of the paper’s precocious windbags joined in, thereafter queuing to fall on their blunt swords when Corbyn came close to winning the 2017 general election in spite of the media.

Complex stories are reported to a cult-like formula of bias, hearsay and omission: Brexit, Venezuela, Russia, Syria. On Syria, only the investigations of a group of independent journalists have countered this, revealing the network of Anglo-American backing of jihadists in Syria, including those related to ISIS.

Supported by a “psyops” campaign funded by the British Foreign Office and the U.S. Agency for International Development, the aim is to hoodwink the Western public and speed the overthrow of the government in Damascus, regardless of the medieval alternative and the risk of war with Russia.

The Syria Campaign, set up by a New York PR agency called Purpose, funds a group known as the White Helmets, who claim falsely to be “Syria Civil Defense” and are seen uncritically on TV news and social media, apparently rescuing the victims of bombing, which they film and edit themselves, though viewers are unlikely to be told this. George Clooney is a fan.

The White Helmets are appendages to the jihadists with whom they share addresses. Their media-smart uniforms and equipment are supplied by their Western paymasters. That their exploits are not questioned by major news organizations is an indication of how deep the influence of state-backed PR now runs in the media. As Robert Fisk noted recently, no “mainstream” reporter reports Syria.

In what is known as a hatchet job, a *Guardian* reporter based in San Francisco, Olivia Solon, who has never visited Syria, was allowed to smear the substantiated investigative work of journalists Vanessa Beeley and Eva Bartlett on the White Helmets as “propagated online by a network of anti-imperialist activists, conspiracy theorists and trolls with the support of the Russian government.”

This abuse was published without permitting a single correction, let alone a right-of-reply. The *Guardian* Comment page was blocked, as Edwards and Cromwell document. I saw the list of questions Solon sent to Beeley, which reads like a McCarthyite charge sheet – “Have you ever been invited to North Korea?”

So much of the mainstream has descended to this level. Subjectivism is all;

slogans and outrage are proof enough. What matters is the “perception.”

When he was U.S. commander in Afghanistan, General David Petraeus declared what he called “a war of perception... conducted continuously using the news media.” What really mattered was not the facts but the way the story played in the United States. The undeclared enemy was, as always, an informed and critical public at home.

Nothing has changed. In the 1970s, I met Leni Riefenstahl, Hitler’s film-maker, whose propaganda mesmerized the German public.

She told me the “messages” of her films were dependent not on “orders from above”, but on the “submissive void” of an uninformed public.

“Did that include the liberal, educated bourgeoisie?” I asked.

“Everyone,” she said. “Propaganda always wins, if you allow it.”

[Propaganda Blitz](#) by David Edwards and David Cromwell is published by Pluto Press.

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