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THE FALLACY OF NPR

by Jesus Rivas

Most free minded people, and liberal thinkers resort to National Public Radio (NPR) for their news and we often take their reports for truly fair and balanced, showing both sides of the issues. However, a closer inspection would reveal how the news is always biased towards one side and often omits critical information, perhaps not as blatantly as other news sources, but still, far from the real accurate news. Consider the atrocities committed by the occupation forces in Iraq at the Abu-Ghraib prison. Shortly after the news came out, the Bush administration labeled them as "prisoner abuse" and that was the only term that NPR used to refer to them thereafter.

Now, let's see what constitutes "prisoner abuse" in the English language? Prisoner abuse would be something of the likes of shoving them around, kicking them on the rump--, that kind of treatment. To have a prisoner, shackled and treating him/her this way would be wrong and we would be right to label it an "abuse of prisoners". Placing electrodes to someone's genitalia and giving him electric shocks is torture and it cannot be labeled anything else. If you label those kinds of atrocities as "prisoner abuse", it really condones the action and allows the perpetrators to soften the atrocity and underplay what really happened. Among the hundreds of times (or perhaps thousands) that the reporters from NPR have referred to these atrocities in the Iraqi prison, we would be hard pressed to find a dozen times in which the reporter from NPR press called it torture.

If we continue our analysis we see that NPR is consistently guilty of similar biases around other issues. For instance, it is not difficult to find reports about the Iranian president, the leader of Hezbollah or any other Persian or Arab officials. Notice how religiously NPR ends the report reporting with the statement that such person "does not recognize the right of Israel to exist". If the reader is a NPR listener, I am sure s/he can recall hearing this statement countless times; quite often towards the end of the report as a "take home message".

Now, can we recall any broadcast in which the reporter mentions that Israeli officials do not recognize the right of Palestine to exist? This is

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quite an omissions, not only for the frequency with which it happens but also because Israel's attitude towards Palestine is at the core of all the problems of the Middle East (Carter 2006), yet NPR's "fair and balanced" reporting hardly ever (if any time) points out that Israel's government commits the same fault as the Muslims leaders with regard to recognizing the other party's right to exist.

The reader probably thinks that even though NPR may not be perfect, it is a hell of a lot better than other news media. While it is true, it does not change the fact that NPR is presenting us with biased information. It is also true that by being less biased we are less likely to doubt what we hear and less likely to seek better sources of information, thus creating a distraction that serves the agenda of the main stream media.

The other part that many people do not know is the darker side of NPR, that lobbies in order to stunt the growth of other community radio operations that may be their competition for local audiences. While I was involved with Knoxville First Amendment Radio (KFAR) we knew that our main obstacle in getting a license to broadcast with higher power was the local NPR station preventing us from getting the permits. Understandably, if there were a high power community Radio they would compete for audience (and donations) with WUOT. So, not only is NPR not doing their job of giving the people fair and balanced news, but also by their sole presence (and active lobbying), they are preventing the people from getting more complete news.

THE FALLACY OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

The Democratic Party is just as guilty as NPR of producing the illusion of an alternative to the Republican Party. Nobody would argue that their policies are not a lot better than those of the Republican Party for the poor people of the country and also for the environment. But the solutions that the Democratic Party offers fall far from the real needs and the problems of the country. For instance, they talk about making health insurance more affordable or universal health insurance, not about universal health care and making sure that everybody receives the medical care that s/he needs (as in the case in all the developed countries and several developing ones). They talk about raising minimum wages, not about making sure that every body can make "living wages". They talk about keeping more jobs in the US, not about stopping NAFTA and other free trade agreements that

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are so badly strangling the working classes (and the environment). They talk about "better diplomatic policies" and working with our allies, not about a deeper change in our approach to international politics; stopping for once and for all, policies of invasions, warmongering and "regime changes" that have characterized the US for the last century.

This is only a list of the many issues in which, while having a better proposal than Republicans, the Democratic Party still falls short of providing a real solution. In the mean time, because of their sole presence (and also active lobbying) they prevent the development of a truly pro-people and pro environment party that would stand for world peace, the rights of the working classes, true environmental policies and not catering to the corporate interests. So while the Democratic Party produces the illusion of an alternative, it does not help to solve the real problems the people have and ends up distracting from the search for a real solution.


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at 10:24 AM 

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