

# Letters from our readers

14 October 2004

*The following is a selection of recent letters received from our readers.*

On “Australian elections: the media rewrites history”

Dear James Cogan,

If you think that’s bad, here in the US along comes the news that the Sinclair Broadcasting Group, a major cash contributor to the Bush campaign, is ordering its 62 stations to preempt regular programming to air an anti-Kerry film, *Stolen Honor: Wounds That Never Heal*, which is to be shown without commercial interruptions, just a few weeks before the November 2 election. The film condemns John Kerry for his antiwar activities after his service in Vietnam.

Putting aside for the moment the fact that the airwaves belong to the people, this blatant propaganda effort should give everyone pause. Consider: Sinclair is forcing the networks—which reach nearly a quarter of the electorate—to show the film and they are showing it without commercial interruption, something virtually unprecedented. Who is paying the freight?

I would suggest that Sinclair recall the fate of the Nazi media propagandists at the Nuremberg Trials. Particularly relevant is the story of Hans Fritzsche, charged with the crime of using propaganda as an instrument of aggression. The prosecution also stated:

“Fritzsche incited atrocities and encouraged a ruthless occupation policy. The results of propaganda as a weapon of the Nazi conspirators reaches into every aspect of this conspiracy, including the atrocities and ruthless exploitation in occupied countries. It is likely that many ordinary Germans would never have participated in or tolerated the atrocities committed throughout Europe, had they not been conditioned and goaded by the constant Nazi propaganda. The callousness and zeal of the people who actually committed the atrocities was in large part due to the constant and corrosive propaganda of Fritzsche and his official associates.”

He was lucky not to have been hanged.

CZ

San Francisco

12 October 2004

The United States media was created to serve five functions: reporting and interpreting the news, influencing citizen opinion, setting political agenda and socializing citizens about politics. The media contributes to democracy by being the watchdog of government actions and in turn, communicating the public’s attitudes and reactions to the government. But corporate ownership of the mass media is causing the rapid decay of democracy in America.

This is no more evident than in the case of the Sinclair Broadcast Group ordering its stations to preempt primetime programming to air a film one week before the November 2 election that attacks Sen. John Kerry’s political activism following the Vietnam War and his military record. Although broadcast stations are required to provide equal time to candidates in an election year, Sinclair has cloaked this smear campaign as “news” and is therefore protected from legal action. What sort of message is the corporate-owned media sending? In short, the media is attempting to obfuscate the issues for monetary gain.

Could a disdain for this type of “news” lead to a decline in participation as well as a lack of substantive knowledge? Because the mass media has undue influence in shaping public opinion, these giant media corporations pass on their shared values to society by emphasizing issues and news favorable to corporate America and avoiding information that is not. This means that the public is exposed to ideas and opinions held by a handful of people.

It is well known that an informed public is the key to democracy. Corporations are rapidly, and subtly, destroying that. If Sinclair is allowed to broadcast the Kerry “documentary,” then the American public should not have to *pay* to see Michael Moore’s *Fahrenheit 9/11*.

SL  
Austin, Texas  
12 October 2004

Thanks for the article, James. I've been actively involved with SEP in Melbourne for the last few months now. I did write a scathing letter to the editor of the *Australian* yesterday. The premise being, that they can extol our despotic prime minister all they like, but there are plenty of Australians who don't buy such execrable dross, and those numbers are likely to grow when interest rates, etc., start to bite.

I also wrote not to expect Australian workers just to roll and over die to support proposed new legislation being passed to aid big business in their quest for a piece of the Global action. Off to work now.

Thanks again  
DD

Melbourne  
13 October 2004

On "Ohio appeals court upholds exclusion of SEP candidates"

As I am voting with an absent voter's ballot, I would appreciate your advice for writing in the names of Mr. Van Auken and Mr. Lawrence, so as to avoid the vote being dismissed for a technical error. Also, are there other SEP candidates running in Ohio and in Knox County that I should know about? The only information I've received about the candidates in the coming election was from the Republicans.... At least I'll know some of the people not to vote for.

This is the message I sent to Mr. Blackwell:

Dear Mr. Secretary of State Blackwell,

When I received my absent voter's ballot from Knox County, Prec: 009/1 Mount Vernon 3-B, Monday, I was surprised that the SEP presidential candidate Bill Van Auken and SEP vice-presidential candidate Jim Lawrence were not included on the list. Then, I learned that despite having gathered nearly 8,000 petition names to be able to present themselves for the November 2 elections, your office had denied them access to the ballot, for reasons that appear to be très mesquin, or very petty at best.

Please rectify this situation. In a free society, everybody should have the right to express themselves and the right to vote, and to vote for whom we choose is one of our most fundamental means of expression.

Stan Thompson

Ardin, France  
8 October 2004

On "Citizen of the world: a brief survey of the life and times of Thomas Paine (1737-1809)"

Dear Ann,

Thanks for another insightful article. I have always liked Thomas Paine, but I never read such an interesting history of his life and work. Teachers in the US are frequently asked where they go to church. Rather than engage in a fruitless dialogue about my very personal atheist beliefs with parents, etc., I simply quote Thomas Paine who said, "The world is my nation, and my religion is to do good." Thanks again.

Warmest regards,

Phyllis  
Pittsburgh  
11 October 2004



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