

Will the Revolution Be Televised?

Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin

I was reading a letter from an activist a few days ago about the protests around the Democratic and Republican political conventions this past Summer, and about how the media distorted and covered up everything that happened. Did you know that over 3,000 persons have been arrested since the November 30, 1999 demonstration in Seattle? There has been widespread police brutality and repression of all those protests mentioned, and those in Washington, D.C., Minneapolis, Cincinnati, and other cities in the USA. For instance, in San Francisco this past October, a demonstration of thousands for death row political prisoner Mumia Abu Jamal, was broken up by a "riot squad" of city cops and state police, for no reason other than to express cop hatred and to exert police power over the participants. Young people were beaten, sprayed with toxic chemicals, and illegally arrested for no other reason than police state terrorism.

Yet the corporate mass media has said nothing about these incidents, and if any of them has been reported it has been in a sensationalistic fashion, designed to justify the cop violence. They broke windows, were not "the right kind of people", or were troublemakers. So go ahead and beat them officers! To the media there is no thing such thing as police brutality, nor a conspiracy to stifle the right to dissent by those in power. Instead it gives more attention to a 3-legged dog, a cat with mutton chops, talk show contestants, or the latest actions of "officer Friendly" with toddlers at pre-school, than reporting on police corruption and murder. The media likes to pretend it is objective and that it is a bulwark of the masses of people against government excesses, but what it really is is a handmaiden to the lies and distortion of the government and its agents.

We have now also seen years of media concentration and buyouts by mega telecommunications corporations, which means that there are even fewer independent or progressive voices out there and hardly any in the mainstream media. So when the state and the rich capitalists own the media, so how can the truth ever be told? Now there are no governmental controls on media operations or corporate restructuring. I mean the same company, whether the phone company, newspaper company, or even the public utilities, can own all media outlets in a community, ensuring that only one voice will ever be heard, and that there will be no challenges to the status quo. So what are we to do?

A number of things: one is to create and support independent and radical media like the Michigan Citizen, Z Magazine, African Frontline News, and other radical media. Also there are the online publications like the Independent Media Centers in over 39 cities and 10 countries around the world, which were instrumental in getting even the minimal word out that did get to us.

And the various Black community newspapers have been around for ages—they are the oldest alternative press service in the USA.

Yes, alternative and underground media are important, but they are not enough, just yet anyway, to contend with the mass media, which reaches millions. We have to demand accountability from the capitalist mass media as well. Although they have control of the airwaves, they do not own them. That belongs to the people, not the capitalists or the government. So we must fight to liberate them, not just assume that we can do nothing. I believe that accountability is possible, but will not happen without a fight.

Actually this is a free speech issue as well as a political issue. It's a free speech issue in that we are fighting to get our words out to a wider public, and our fight is political because we are fighting entrenched corporate power on behalf of the masses of people.

What can we do? I believe that instead of unanswered letters to the media or FCC, we need to start to have demonstrations at TV stations and networks, and even try to disrupt live and taped broadcasts, hold picket lines outside TV studios and sit-ins at the offices of management, and other protests. We need to fight for media access for our grassroots community groups and insurgent political groups to tell our own stories, and counter the lies of the government and corporations. We need to also put pressure on corporate sponsors of news and entertainment programs to not push these pro-police, racist, and demagogic entertainment shows. We need to fight to get other perspectives than the government line [i.e. radical Left views] on nightly newscasts. We must end media censorship of our ideas.

I know this is not a perfect plan, but I wanted to get us thinking on this. We need a direct action campaign against the capitalist media, as well as the WTO, the racist cops, crooked bosses, and other oppressive institutions under this system. I remember something somebody told me a long time ago, no other revolution had to contend with television and its mass brainwashing of the populace like in modern America and the world. The revolution won't be televised, but it must be neutralized!

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