

A Fool's Paradise Revisited: News, Social Media, Television and the "Anti-Mirror"

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Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

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My last [piece](#) clearly touched a nerve at least judging by the readership it's gotten so I thought it worth exploring the issue a little further, especially in light of the comments I've read.

Generally speaking the response has been favourable though one Website that carried it prefaced it by saying that it 'overstated the argument'. Elsewhere comments ranged from 'why the hell do you watch television anyway?' to 'you're stating the obvious', but if so, why so many readers?

'The threats [against Iran] are a shameless and brazen violation of international law' — Stephen M. Walt, Harvard professor of international affairs

Could it be because, trapped in a system of information control so complete, most of us suffer a kind of reverse sensory deprivation, overloaded with data but starved of contact with the real world?

How else to explain the almost total disconnect between our governments' actions and the public's response (or lack of one) to the barbarism of 'civilized' world? This is spite of the fact that we donate millions to 'charities' for the starving 'them'.

How else to explain the hypocrisy of a government that slaughters in our name with total impunity and the public's apparent indifference?

Surely we are not supplied with the facts, that's what propaganda is all about but contrast the situation today with that say in the 1960s when although it was still a small but determined opposition it was one that had its roots in working class organizations including trade unions that in turn reflected a wider and deeper political culture. In other words, the left was embedded in the long tradition of working class and progressive struggles extending back two centuries.

In part the change can be explained by the immense fall in trade union membership, down from a high in the 1960s of around 50% of the workforce to around 15% today. Trade unions, even in their reformist role are still political incubators that introduce workers to the class nature of economic life. It's for this reason, and not only the economic, that capitalism fights tooth and nail to restrict their political power let alone the right to strike.

Deindustrializing and de-unionizing not only destroys jobs and entire communities, it also

destroys our culture and in doing so, erases our past. It's a form of on-going cultural genocide.

The counter-revolution initiated by big business under Thatcher, so-called neo-liberalism, was as much about destroying the collective *culture* of the working class as it was about destroying working class opposition to the rule of capital. A process effectively accomplished with the end of the Soviet Union.

But obviously not the end of struggle.

But today's struggles by contrast, exist within a 'social-historical vacuum', rootless, without the underpinning of our histories as I contend the #Occupy movement demonstrates (and the anti-globalisation movement before it).

Anti-social media?

At first vilified by most of the left as tools of the devil, the new tools of communication have finally and seductively been embraced by the left. Every left/progressive group now has a page on Facebook or Twitter, this in spite of the fact that these groups have no control over the information contained in the thousands of pages they have deposited on Facebook and worse still, have no idea who gets access to it.

There is a certain irony here insofar as many left groups will not accept advertizing on their Websites yet are content to use Facebook thus bolstering its virtual value and supplying valuable information to the biggest database of people on the planet, over half-a-billion souls!

It explains why the Empire has been so effective in utilizing the tools that theoretically would liberate us from the deadly embrace of the Empire's propaganda machine. What the Empire has succeeded in doing is to effectively merge 'social media' with the corporate/state media. What is being called 'citizen journalism' might be better called 'citizens of Empire' journalism and I contend it explains in part, why the left was so quick to embrace the Libyan rebellion and to be less than enthusiastic about defending Syria's independence- until the bombs start falling.

Television: the anti-mirror

The triumph of television under capitalism to cut and paste the past and the present is not merely about the 'news', it extends to every facet of life that it covers, especially history. There is no other reason to explain the enormous preponderance of 'history' television programmes, all of which cut and paste the past, into *acceptable* forms for mass consumption.

And when working class life is presented in (melo)dramatic form ('East Enders', 'Coronation Street', 'The Royal Family', 'Shameless' *et al*) they all portray working people as barely literate, consumption- and celebrity-obsessed, and constantly embroiled in vicious domestic dramas. Life outside the pub or kitchen barely exists.

In stark contrast, when '[Coronation Street](#)' first appeared in 1960, it was consciously embedded in *real* Northern working class life. It was the reality, richness and humour of the inhabitants of *Coronation Street* that viewers could identify with and what made it a hit. It was also the first attempt at presenting working class life as it was really lived, to a mass

audience, using local dialects. It was *consciously* working class and proud of the fact.

It's an amazing sleight-of-hand. Propaganda, whether the news, drama or advertising, articulated by the 'middle-class' intelligentsia — all the products of a university system designed and built to serve the needs of capital — has succeeded in creating a mass culture and a way of viewing the world that purports to be ours. But it's an invented world, complete with an imagined working class, content to passively consume.

By appropriating our history and transforming it into something to be bought, the connection to the past has been broken. Like all products, history as commodity becomes ephemeral, to be discarded to make way for the 'new'. Clearly, we *are* living in a fool's paradise but one not of our own making but of the fools who run the show.

Whichever way you cut it, the issue of class is a central and contiguous part of our collective history and it's this that is missing from what passes for public discourse about the crises that threaten all of us.

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