

Antiwar Criticism and the Formation of Collective Opinion

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There are themes in the West that are difficult to question without running the risk of receiving sharp criticism. For the following themes, for example, there is a position considered “correct” by Western collective opinion: “Welfare State,” “climate policy,” “multicultural society,” or “covid-19 vaccination.” It is implied that the “acceptable” position to each one of these themes can and should be adopted without any prior critical analysis at the individual level.

The list of these themes is not static; new ones rise to prominence in society, while others become less important over time. In recent years two new themes have emerged: “authoritarian Russia” and “communist China,” which is not surprising considering that Washington, and thus, by extension, the West, has decided to treat these two nations as strategic enemies. A [recent study](#) shows, for example, that in a very short time the percentage of Americans with a negative view of China increased dramatically, from 46 percent to 67 percent. This is not a coincidence, but the result of a media communication strategy.

The Critique of the Antiwar Position

As far as Russia is concerned, the “correct” attitude to have in the West, especially since the start of the Ukraine conflict on February 24, 2022, is no less than an absolute condemnation of that country. Support for Ukraine must be comprehensive and can receive social confirmation by a small blue and yellow flag on Facebook. Unconditional support for the economic war waged by Western leaders against Russia is also socially required for Europeans, even though they will be the first to suffer from it.

It is for this reason that the Amnesty International report of August 4, 2022, which [confirmed](#) that “Ukrainian forces putting civilians at risk and violating the laws of war when they operate in populated areas” became a media [bomb](#), not only [in Ukraine](#) but also in [the West](#). This report [disturbs](#) a lot of people because it is not in line with the black and white

view of Russia as a criminal aggressor and Ukraine as an innocent victim.

The people who do not take the “correct” stance on the conflict in Ukraine are often accused of being “pro-Russian,” even when this stance simply consists in being objective; by considering the recent history and behavior of the various protagonists. They are considered “pro-Russian” because they do not express unconditional support for Ukraine, but more often, propose conditions for peace. Indeed, the position of most of these critics is not at all “pro-Russian,” but “pro-peace” by supporting active Western efforts to reach a ceasefire, thus sparing as many Ukrainian lives as possible.

Western media did not react when, on July 14, 2022, the Ukrainian government [published](#) a black list of Western politicians, academics, and activists who, according to Kiev, “promote Russian propaganda.” This list includes leading Western intellectuals and politicians, such as Republican Senator Rand [Paul](#), former Democratic Congresswoman Tulsi [Gabbard](#), military and geopolitical analyst Edward N. Luttwak, the political realist John [Mearsheimer](#), and award-winning freelance journalist Glenn [Greenwald](#).

Though this Ukrainian blacklist should obviously have been condemned in the West, it has hardly elicited any reactions at all, because the Western media already agree with its conclusion: the people on the list are already criticized in their *own* countries for not adopting the pro-Ukrainian position. Moreover, would the Ukrainian government have dared to publish such a list if it had not had the prior agreement of Washington?

The Formation of the Collective Opinion

What is happening in the case of the attitude toward Russia, as well as in the other themes mentioned above, is not surprising or new. In his famous work, [On Liberty](#) (1859), John Stuart Mill is perhaps today best known for his prescient early warning of the dangers of the “collective opinion”; the “tyranny of the majority” in the form of “the dominant opinions and feelings that society is trying to impose” on a minority.

Society’s majority is naturally intolerant of nonconformism, because thinking like everyone else gives psychological comfort and strengthens social ties. Yet, though society depends on collective opinion for its social cohesion, paradoxically it also depends for its well-being on views that run counter to this majority opinion. Just as natural science progresses only through the sometimes tortuous but generally respectful process of peer review, society also needs minority opinions and dissident voices to curb the permanent search for consensus on the part of the majority.

But minority opinions will suffocate if there is no deeper understanding of Mill’s idea. Fortunately, this understanding exists today. To Mill’s “collective opinion” were added fundamental sociological concepts, such as “[crowd psychology](#)” (Gustave Le Bon, 1895), the “[political formula](#)” (Gaetano Mosca, 1923), “propaganda” (Edward Bernays, 1928), the “role of the [intellectuals](#)” (F.A. Hayek, 1949), the “[banality of evil](#)” (H. Arendt, 1963), the “[manufacturing of consent](#)” (Chomsky and Herman, 1988), and recently the concept of “[mass formation psychosis](#)” (Matthias Desmet).

This accumulated knowledge in the reference above leaves no doubt about the will and the ability of Western political and financial elites to form and direct collective opinion through the control that they exert explicitly and implicitly on the editorial boards of traditional media and on social media platforms. The development of the opinions of Western

majorities to the themes mentioned at the beginning of this article is largely the result of these elites" influence on Western public opinion. The collective opinion with respect to climate change is probably the most glaring example of this influence today, considering the significant economic consequences that it will have for Western society.

Libertarianism Is the Only Solution

Political globalization, an antiliberal process which has been underway for several decades, has the effect of aligning national political centers and thus reducing plurality. Gradually, Western political power is flowing toward supranational institutions (like the UN, the EU, the World Economic Forum). This centralization of political power, and the resulting economic concentration of business, including [concentration of media groups](#) that this has entailed enables and facilitates the formation of public opinion by the Western elites.

The political philosophy that theoretically is best placed to solve this dilemma of modern society is libertarianism, because it clearly argues for a significant and definitive reduction of political power, both nationally and internationally.

One of the strengths of libertarianism is precisely the importance it places on the cultural and intellectual plurality of a free society. This is the famous "marketplace of ideas" which, like the free market in goods and services, can only exist partially with the pervasive crony capitalism and massive State intervention that most Western societies are subject to today. In a free society, that is, a highly decentralized society with a weak State having at most a night watchman role, the formation of public opinion by political elites then becomes impossible.

The present moment in history represents a particular threat to freedom, because the ruling globalist elites now have an unprecedented opportunity to shape the attitudes and opinions of their societies, in their own, often twisted, interests. At the same time, the new and easy access by the general public to alternative analyses and independent information, can counteract this nefarious trend. In these social conditions, Western voices of freedom must continue to present libertarianism, not only for its economic benefits but also as a means of liberating Western peoples from the chains of directed collective opinion.

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