

Human Rights and Media Manipulation

From Pinochet to 'Human Rights' in China

By [Michael Barker](#)

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[When the](#) twentieth century becomes history it will be seen as distinctive, I believe, for three developments in liberal Western societies: the growth of democracy; the rise of huge concentrations of economic power, known as corporations; and the professionalizing and institutionalizing of propaganda, especially as a means for safe-guarding the power of free-enterprise corporations against democracy." ([Alex Carey](#), 1987) [1]

Most regular readers of alternative media will be acutely aware of the US government's antidemocratic history. Indeed, according to William Blum and Dr Danielle Ganser, since 1945 this much neglected history has seen the US government attempt to "[overthrow more](#) than 40 foreign governments", "crush more than 30 populist-nationalist movements" and [provide support](#) to right-wing terrorist (stay behind) armies in every European country. Unfortunately as most members of the public rely upon the corporate media – for the most part unaware that a useful and democratic alternative media exists – they are for the most part unaware of the extent of this antidemocratic foreign policy (and perhaps more importantly still they are unaware that they can do something to change it).

This is not to say that the journalists within the corporate media suffer from amnesia: indeed, with regard to the coverage of the death of Chile's former dictator, Augusto Pinochet (in 2006), an [exchange](#) between British-based media watchdog, Media Lens, and *The Guardian's* (UK) [Isabel Hilton](#), illustrates that, in spite of their reporting, many journalists are well aware of the US's antidemocratic history. Responding to Hilton's article recalling Pinochet's life and death, Media Lens wrote to her, suggesting that the "real shock value" of Pinochet's rise to power "lies in the fact that the United States organised the coup". Media Lens challenged Hilton about this, asserting that "not a word in your article even hinted at it. Why not?" Hilton's full response was:

"There is never room to say everything in a rather short article and I have written about the US role many times. Is it surprising or shocking that the US played a central role? Hardly. The US had played that role in coups all over the sub continent for some time, (for me the worst was the one against Arbenz — worse for its long term effect) their role in Chile was not surprising for anyone who followed Latin American events, and the shock factor had long since worn off."

Given her evident knowledge of American history it is strange that regular consumers of British corporate media are still shocked when they first learn of the US's antidemocratic role in Chile; a subject that recently gained widespread attention in John Pilger's excellent documentary [The War on Democracy](#). Thus Media Lens replied to Hilton:

"Yes, you know that, but do your readers? In fact journalists generally refer to the US role in

Pinochet's coup in vague terms (as in current reporting) – the details and motives are rarely discussed. As for the wider US pattern of forcibly subordinating people to profit, this is essentially a taboo subject for the media.”

Media Lens received no further response from Hilton.

While Hilton may not be shocked by the antidemocratic nature of the US's involvement in Chile, I remain shocked by the CIA's brutal intervention. Moreover, I am equally shocked by the ongoing antidemocratic work of the [National Endowment for Democracy](#) (NED) – an Orwellian ‘nongovernmental organization’ that was formed in the early 1980s to wage the [cultural cold war](#) that was formerly fought by the CIA. William Colby, who directed the CIA from 1973 until 1976, noted that the beauty of the NED's PR-friendly approach to imperialism is that: “[It is](#) not necessary to turn to the covert approach. Many of the programs which... were conducted as covert operations [can now be] conducted quite openly, and consequentially, without controversy.”

Professor William I. Robinson has described this rhetorical shift in US foreign policy – from CIA to NED (and CIA) – in much detail; most notably in his seminal book [Promoting Polyarchy](#) (1996). With regard to Chile, Robinson highlights how with NED aid [Patricio Aylwin](#) rose to the Chilean presidency in 1990 a fitting reward for an individual who worked with the CIA to play a critical role in facilitating the 1973 military coup. As Robinson observes:

“[The Chilean](#) coup was part of a pattern in Latin America of military takeovers in the 1960s and 1970s with U.S. approval and often active assistance, in the face of mass struggles that broke out everywhere against the prevailing social and economic inequalities and highly restricted political systems. But Washington abruptly switched tracks in the mid-1980s and began to ‘promote democracy’ in Latin America and around the world. In Chile, Aylwin and his party once again received U.S. assistance, this time as part of a ‘[democracy promotion](#)’ program channelled through the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID), which would help Aylwin become president. Ironically, the return to power in 1990 of Aylwin and the party that openly participated in the 1973 military coup was projected around the world as the culmination of a ‘[democratic revolution](#)’ sweeping Latin America.”

Understanding this shift of ‘democratic’ aid from the CIA to the NED is critical to understanding the nature of contemporary imperialism, but unfortunately it is a shift that for the most part has remained unchallenged (in both the corporate media and alternative media alike) – for a discussion of *The New York Times*’ coverage of the NED [see here](#). Consequently it is not surprising that critical attention has not turned to the activities of the NED in China – either in the mainstream or alternative press – despite the fact that in 2006 the NED distributed [\\$5.7 million](#) of grants to China-related groups. This sum is more significant because the NED is active in “[over 90 countries](#)” and in 2006 they distributed a total of [\\$94 million](#) to groups all over the world, which means that in 2006 Chinese groups received a massive six percent of their total grants. [2]

In order to begin to remedy this information deficit surrounding the work of the NED in China, this article examines the ‘democratic’ background of one group that obtained excellent access to both the alternative and corporate media, this group is *Human Rights in China*.

‘Human Rights’ in China

Human Rights in China (HRIC) was founded in 1989, and according to their website they are an “[international, Chinese](#), non-governmental organisation with a mission to promote universally recognised human rights and advance the institutional protection of these rights in the People’s Republic of China (China).” According to the NED’s senior program officer for Asia, Louisa Coan Greve, “[Human Rights](#) in China is considered as reliable as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International as a source of accurate human rights information.” Moreover, despite the fact Human Rights in China have received ongoing support from the NED, one of their reports (from 1997) disingenuously notes that their work is “[independent of](#) any political groups or governments.” [3]

According to the NED’s [project database](#), Human Rights in China received their first NED grant in 1992 (which was worth \$74,000) to “support a Legal Education and Assistance Project that provides legal advice and support for prisoners of conscience and victims of political persecution in China”. [4] This legal project then received a further \$120,000 in 1993, and another \$155,000 the ensuing year. On top of this \$155,000 grant, they obtained an additional \$20,000 in 1994 to help them prepare for the UN World Conference on Women which was held in Beijing in September 1995.

In 1995, as a result of Human Rights in China’s “emergency response to the ‘May crackdown’ in Beijing” they received a supplement NED grant worth \$10,000 for its Human Rights Education and Assistance Project. They also obtained \$25,000 for its Women’s Rights Assessment Project, and a further \$140,000 to produce their twice-monthly radio program, and to help them engage “with international NGOs, the media, governments and intergovernmental bodies to maintain pressure on the Chinese government to improve its human rights record.”

Human Rights in China obtained continued NED support in 1996 and 1997, and in 2001 they received a grant to allow them to publish their quarterly journal *China Rights Forum* and maintain a web site. Since 2000, Human Rights in China have been given a further five NED grants worth a total of \$1.8 million – which have increased in size each year (the largest being their most recent [\\$0.5 million](#) grant). [5]

‘Democratic’ Directors

Human Rights in China (HRIC) work appears to be closely related to that undertaken by its better known counterpart, Human Rights Watch, as [Robert L. Bernstein](#), the founder and former chair of Human Rights Watch is currently the chair of HRIC’s board of directors (he is also a member of the national council of the ‘democratic’ [Human Rights First](#)). Not surprisingly Human Rights Watch and HRIC regularly work together to publish human rights reports, which is fitting as extremely [close ties](#) exist between Human Rights Watch and the global democracy manipulators (like the NED). (For further details see, [Hijacking Human Rights: A Critical Examination of Human Rights Watch’s Americas Branch and their Links to the ‘Democracy’ Establishment](#).)

The [founder](#) of Human Rights in China, [Fu Xinyuan](#), is Associate Professor of Pathology at Yale University School of Medicine; he also sits on the advisory board of the Israel Science Foundation (which is “[Israel’s predominant](#) source of competitive grants funding for basic research”). [6] Ironically, in 2005, *The Guardian* (UK) [reported that](#) foreign grant reviewers were boycotting the Israel Science Foundation due to the Israeli government’s human rights violations.

Since 2002, Human Rights in China's executive director has been Sharon Hom – an individual who also serves as a member of Human Rights Watch's [Asia Advisory Committee](#), and is an emerita professor of law at the City University of New York School of Law. Prior to Hom's appointment to Human Rights in China, the organization's longstanding executive director – from 1991 to 2002 – was [Qiang Xiao](#), who was formerly the vice-chair of the steering committee of the NED-initiated [World Movement for Democracy](#), and presently acts as the [director](#) of the China Internet Project (at the University of California at Berkeley), sits on the board of [advisors](#) for the NED-funded [International Campaign for Tibet](#), and is the chief editor of China Digital Times.

The China Digital Times (formerly the China Digital News) at which Qiang Xiao is chief editor, describes itself as a “[collaborative news](#) website covering China's social and political transition and its emerging role in the world.” The project receives funding from the [MacArthur Foundation](#) amongst others, and their executive editor, [Sophie Beach](#), was formerly a senior research associate for Asia at the ‘democratic’ [Committee to Protect Journalists](#). In addition, the chair of the China Digital Times advisory board is [Orville Schell](#) who is an emeritus board member of Human Rights Watch and a vice chair of their Asia Advisory Committee, is a director of the ‘democratic’ [National Committee on United States-China Relations](#), a member of the core founding group of the Dalai Lama Foundation (a group whose [president](#), Tenzin Tethong, is also the founder of the NED-funded [Tibet Fund](#)), and has [worked](#) for the [Ford Foundation](#) in Indonesia. In 2004 (at least) Schell was a director of Human Rights in China, and he also acts a [member](#) of the elite planning group, the [Council on Foreign Relations](#), is the founder of the Pacific News Service, and ironically serves on the [advisory board](#) of the Center for Investigative Reporting. Finally, John Gage, another member of China Digital Times' advisory board with strong ‘democratic’ ties, currently serves on the [advisory board](#) of the deceptively named [US Institute of Peace](#) (the NED's sister organization), and is a director of [Relief International](#).

Returning to Human Rights in China, although their website provides no current list of their staff or directors (one is available for 2004, [see here](#)), a basic internet search has shown that the following people act as their directors:

- [Andrew J. Nathan](#) – who is a trustee of [Freedom House](#), a director of the NED-funded Center for Modern China, a member of the editorial board of the NED's *Journal of Democracy*, the former Director of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute where he is presently a faculty member, is a member of [Human Right Watch](#)'s Asia Advisory Committee – where he was chair from 1995 to 2000, and is a member of the both the [Council on Foreign Relations](#) and the [National Committee on United States-China Relations](#)
- [R. Scott Greathead](#) – who is also a founder and director of Human Rights First, and is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations
- [Harold Hongju Koh Koh](#) – who was the assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labor during the Clinton administration, and is a [director](#) of both the National Democratic Institute (a core NED grantee) and Human Rights First
- [Perry Link](#) – who serves on the advisory board of the NED-funded *Beijing Spring* (see later), is the former chair of the Princeton China Initiative, and is a member of Human Rights Watch's Asia Advisory Committee
- [Hu Ping](#) – who is a former president of the NED-linked Chinese Alliance for Democracy, a

“regular commentator for Radio Free Asia”, and has been [chief editor](#) of *Beijing Spring* since 1993

- [Nina Rosenwald](#) – who is a trustee of Freedom House, serves on the advisory board of the [American Center for Democracy](#), is a director of the **American Israel Public Affairs Committee**, and a member of the Council on Foreign Relations

In addition, former Human Rights in China director [Fiona Druckenmiller](#) is a trustee of the [Carnegie Corporation of New York](#), and is a former director of Human Rights Watch. Other people involved with Human Rights Watch with ‘democratic’ ties include the chair of their executive committee Liu Qing, who serves on the advisory board of *Beijing Spring*, is a former editor of the *April Fifth Forum*, and is “[a close](#) ally of Wei Jingsheng” – a Chinese activist who won the NED’s [1998 Democracy Award](#). As a number of HRIC’s team are linked to *Beijing Spring*, the following section will introduce their ‘democratic’ work.

***Beijing Spring*: ‘Democratic’ Media**

Beijing Spring is a monthly Chinese-language magazine (sold in and outside of China) that was founded during the *Democracy Wall Movement* by Wang Dan (who in 1998 received the NED’s [1998 Democracy Award](#), and since 2002 has been the president of *Beijing Spring*), Zhou Weimin, and Chen Ziming (who founded the Beijing Social and Economic Sciences Research Institute in 1986, and in 1991 [won](#) the Committee to Protect Journalists’ International Press Freedom Award along with his colleague [Wang Juntao](#)). [7] According to the NED, the magazine “carries analysis and commentary by authors inside and outside China regarding political developments, social issues, and the prospects for democratization in China”, and since 2001, *Beijing Spring* has received annual NED aid (in 2006 they received [\\$195,000](#)). [8]

Beijing Spring’s [editorial board](#) is home to the following ‘democratically’ linked individuals Wang Dan, Hu Ping, Kuide Chen (who has worked for both the NED-funded Princeton China Initiative, and the NED-funded Center for Modern China), Yu Dahai (who was the founding president of the NED-funded Chinese Economists Society), Zheng Yi, and *Beijing Spring* manager Xue Wei (who between 1982 and 1993 worked for the Chinese Alliance for Democracy – a group that received a single NED grant in 1992).

Likewise, the members of *Beijing Spring*’s advisory board exhibit many ‘democratic’ ties and include Perry Link, Andrew J. Nathan, Liu Qing, [Fang Lizhi](#) (who, in 1995, was a board member of HRIC, in 2000 was a member of Human Rights Watch’s Academic Freedom Committee, and is a member of the international council of advisors for the [International Campaign for Tibet](#)), Su Shaozhi (who is the former chair of the Princeton China Initiative), and Yu Ying-shi (who helped set up the Princeton China Initiative). As a number of people affiliated with *Beijing Spring* have also been linked to the *Princeton China Initiative*, this organization will now be briefly examined.

The *Princeton China Initiative* (the Initiative) was founded in 1989 and [closed operations](#) in 2004, and between 1992 and 2005 they received seven grants from the NED to allow exiled Chinese dissidents to publish two monthly newsletters, *China Focus* (English-language), and *The Road* (Chinese-language). [9] In 1989 [Liu Binyan](#) (deceased December 5, 2006) a key person at the Initiative was “China’s most prominent journalist” and a Neiman fellow at Harvard University, but when he was banned from returning to China that year he helped found and head the Initiative. One important ‘democratically’ linked person who was

involved with the Initiative during its early years was their managing director Lorraine Spiess. Prior to joining the Initiative, Spiess had been the executive director of the Canada China Business Council, and had “worked on Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) programs to support China’s ongoing economic reforms.” Spiess’ ‘democratic’ links were strengthened when she left the Initiative, as from 1993 to 1995 she was the [regional program director](#) for the International Republican Institute (a core NED grantee) during which time she also [worked closely](#) with Phyllis Chang, the Ford Foundation’s [program officer](#) for Democracy and Rights in Beijing.

What Next?

As noted at the start of this article, the corporate media do not provide an accurate reflection of society, thus it is not surprising that the democracy manipulating nature of Human Rights in China (and Human Rights Watch) remain unmentioned in their coverage. This is because as Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky suggested in their seminal work [Manufacturing Consent](#), the mass media’s primary (usually unstated) goal is to manufacture public consent for elite interests. Bearing this in mind, it is logical – in spite of contrary evidence – that the mass media portrays a NED-funded group as a progressive organization, and that this critique of Human Rights in China will be rendered invisible in the mainstream media. (It probably doesn’t help that even the [BBC World Service Trust](#) received a [grant](#) from the NED in 2006.) Thus the anti-democratic nature of mainstream media is an obvious impediment to progressive social change: indeed concerned citizens:

“...[need to](#) consider whether the same media system that serves to naturalise and legitimise elite decision-making, can really encourage its antithesis, collective grassroots decision-making. It seems an anathema to even consider that by working on the terms set by the mass media, social movements are actually legitimising and tightening its hegemonic power over society, even while it simultaneously acts to de-legitimise or ignore the global justice movement.”

Short of working with others (like Media Lens) to challenge the (il)legitimacy of the mainstream media, another immediate solution to some of the problems identified in this article involves supporting independent investigative journalism by giving money to the alternative media instead of the corporate media. To pay for their valuable services simply click on one of the following links, [Centre for Research on Globalization](#), [CounterPunch](#), [Medialens](#), [Monthly Review](#), [Spinwatch](#), [Znet](#), or alternatively support a local outlet of your choice.

Furthermore, to prevent elite manipulation of human rights and democracy, first and foremost progressive citizens will also have to educate themselves about the work of democracy manipulators (like the NED) a process that has been made easier by the launch of two groups, the [International Endowment for Democracy](#) and [In the Name of Democracy](#). However, although it is certainly important to develop a comprehensive understanding of the role of the democracy manipulating establishment in circumscribing progressive social change, people can begin to rectify the democratic dilemma posed by the NED and its supporters by publicly denouncing their activities, and by refusing to work with them in the future. It seems that only then can progressive groups begin considering adopting more participatory funding arrangements that will help to allow them to promote a popular form of democracy that serves people not imperialism. [10]

Michael Barker is a British citizen based in Australia. [Most of his other articles can be found here.](#)

Endnotes

[1] To [Alex Carey](#)'s prescient analyses of corporate power one might now add how ironically, even democracy itself is now being used as an instrument of propaganda against democracy.

[2] In 1997, Representative Christopher H. Smith, Chairman of the Subcommittee on international Operations and Human Rights observed that: "Of the billions of dollars we spend every year trying to protect and defend freedom around the world, the \$30 million we spend on NED is probably the most cost-effective item in the budget. Because NED is small and because it is not a U.S. government agency, it can directly intervene to empower the victims of oppression even as our official foreign relations apparatus is doing its best to get along with the governments that are perpetrating this oppression."

Of the [\\$5.7 million](#) that the NED gave to China-related groups in 2006, \$4.6 million was earmarked for just working in China. The rest of the money was given for work in China (Hong Kong) \$0.4 million, China (Tibet) \$0.3 million, and China (Xinjiang) \$0.4 million.

[3] [China: Whose Security? "State Security" in China's New Criminal Code](#), April 1997, Vol. 9 (4).

[4] The [NED project database](#) lists their grants under three names, "Human Rights in China, Inc.", "Human Rights in China, Inc. (HRIC)", and "Human Rights in China". All forthcoming quotes relating to the NED's China grants can be found on the NED's database.

[5] It is also interesting to note that in 1996, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (the British version of the NED) also provided Human Rights in China with a £13,000 grant to "produce 500 copies of a human rights manual in Chinese to provide basic teaching material on human rights issues." While in 1994 Human Rights in China received a \$20,000 grant from the Canadian version of the NED, Rights and Democracy, to help them publish *China Rights Forum*.

[6] The Israel Science Foundation has an annual budget of "[roughly \\$60 million](#)" and it funds around "1,300 grants a year, providing 2/3 of all such funds."

[7] On February 12, 1991, Wang Juntao and Chen Ziming [were imprisoned](#) in China: in 1994, both were then released from prison on medical parole, and while Wang moved to America, Chen was rearrested in the following year and only released from house arrest in 2002.

[8] In 2004, their NED grant was used to allow Beijing Spring to "engage in a new initiative to work together with Uyghur democracy activists to increase awareness among Chinese communities, in China and abroad, of the dire restrictions on freedoms in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China."

[9] In 1996, the NED noted: the Princeton China Initiative's "English-language monthly, 'China Focus,' with an international circulation of 1,500, provides in-depth analysis and insight into underlying trends often not reported in conventional media. It has drawn praise from professional China-watchers for consistently providing essential information about the current, on-the-ground situation within China. The Chinese-language monthly, 'The Road,'

with a circulation of 3,000, allows readers inside China access to ideas and information otherwise blocked by state censorship.”

[10] To date, the issue of developing sustainable funding (in ways compatible with participatory principles) for progressive social change has not been seriously addressed by progressive activists – a recent exception being INCITE!’s (2007) [The Revolution Will Not Be Funded](#) (published by South End Press). For further examples of articles and books that have examined the antidemocratic nature of many ostensibly progressive funding bodies, see my recent article *Do Capitalists Fund Revolutions?* ([Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)).

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