

THEY DON'T LIKE IT UP 'EM

Roy Greenslade wrote in 2002 in the respectable liberal UK broadsheet The Guardian, on a sinister US reaction to the Daily Mirror's stance on America and its war on terror. Now we have a much better perspective on it.

Freedom of speech and freedom of the press are enshrined in the first amendment to the US Constitution, but America's bill of rights evidently does not apply to journalists who write something the neurotic US leadership does not like, even their chums Tony Blair's British, some of whom assert their freedom writing in British newspapers. Rarely have articles in a British tabloid received so much attention in the US as John Pilger's pieces in 2002 in the Daily Mirror. His "Mourn on the fourth of July" polemic provoked a wave of media anger.

Reporting a view commonly held in much of the world since the present US Administration started posturing everywhere in the world, he called the US "the world's leading rogue state" which was guilty of undermining international law, and referred to President Bush's Administration as a criminal gang who had killed twice as many people as died in the world trade centre atrocity. Perhaps five or six times more after Iraq.

No mainstream American paper in the present unhealthy climate of self-righteous hysteria and revenge could come close to publishing material like this, and - in the words of Dad's Army's Corporal Jones:

"They don't like it up 'em, sir, they don't like it one bit."

The New York Post weighed in with a series of abusive responses, calling the Mirror a "terrorist-loving London tabloid". Suddenly any criticism of US policies of bombing the world into submitting, is supporting terrorism, even though it is plainly not supporting US terrorism. The New York Post is owned by Rupert Murdoch who, as the Post's senior staff know all too well, has no love for the Mirror or Morgan.

The editor-in-chief of the Washington Times, Wesley Pruden, called the Mirror "a shrill tabloid read by London's lip-readers, soccer hooligans and other mutants" and described Pilger as a "distinguished

war correspondent" who "speaks for a lot of the bad-breath left in Old Blighty". One headline showed that New York has its share of lip-readers too:

"Bush-bashing Brit editor got stung in stox-sleaze scandal".

Newspeak? Russ Smith, editor-in-chief of the New York Press online, singled out the 4 July issue of the Mirror as "a filthy document" and called Pilger's piece "bilge".

Morgan and Pilger may write for "soccer hooligans and mutants" according to the elevated Washinton Post, but they would not deny it its freedom to say whatever it choses, however childish it might be. The lowly Daily Mirror more recently spent time expressing dismay that the leading "mutants" in the US Republican party were acting no better than Saddam in bombing innocent people - indeed worse, since they have no excuse - they claim to be civilized.

The Washington Times is a hysterically right wing paper owned by... the Moonies! - the same lunatic so-called religious sect that American parents were terrified of only a few years ago when it was brainwashing teenage kids. Now it is telling all Americans what to think and they already agree whole-heartedly. Few Americans, of course, will accept that they are brain-washed even though many are too scared to say what they think. Great society? Economically perhaps, and even then with no sense of responsibility to the world as opposed to its own self-interest, but greatness has yet to find someone worthy among today's arcade-game rulers.

There is a more sinister side to this US hypocrisy. When US investment fund manager Tom Shrager of Tweedy Browne made a call to Trinity-Mirror's chief executive Philip Graf to complain about the Mirror articles, it raised a ghost the British did not know existed. The British have become used to brazen newspaper proprietors calling the editorial shots, from Lord Beaverbrook via Robert Maxwell to Lord Black, not to mention Rupert - "My papers will campaign against the euro" - Murdoch.

Investor power is a new one. Yet we should not overlook that almost a third of Trinity-Mirror's stock is in the hands of just three New York fund managers. Apart from er... Tweedy Browne's 4% stake, the mutual fund giant Fidelity owns 14% and the Capital group has 13%. If the key

players in those companies all feel like Shrager, who's to know what they might do. Trinity-Mirror is certainly taking it seriously. As one of their senior executives told Greenslade: "This is a very delicate matter." You bet.

Shrager has been candid about what he said. He told Greenslade he had simply wanted to register his disappointment about the Daily Mirror's coverage to its owners. Even so, he was strongly committed to the freedom of the press! His complaint was that the "right" to that freedom required that it be used fairly and responsibly. "The Mirror wasn't fair and wasn't accurate," he said. He meant it was not biased the way of the US press.

Was limitation of freedom countenanced by Thomas Jefferson, a staunch defender of press freedom? Shrager's press freedom is evidently limited. What was the point of Shrager's call if not to bring pressure to bear on the freedom of Morgan and Pilger? What does this tell us about global capital? Here is a British paper expressing British views yet partially owned by American capital. Could there be a better example of Pilger's central thesis about the worrying nature of the dominance the US enjoys through its economic superiority?

The hysterical reaction to the Mirror by the US media also says a great deal about America's post-September 11 mood in which all criticism of the 'war on terrorism' has been stifled. To everyone in the world, except for the average American, the war on terror is an excuse for naked colonialism. There are Pilgers in the US - notably, Noam Chomsky - but they have been marginalised. No paper selling 100,000 in the States let alone the Mirror's 2 million-plus would offer Chomsky the kind of platform Pilger is currently enjoying on Mirror front pages.

For the right wing Americans for whom freedom is particular only to them, let us remind them that when freedom is limited by strangers, it is not freedom at all. America was not free when it was ruled by George III. Why should anyone else in the world be grateful to be ruled by people like George W Bush and his neo-colonialist Administration?

According to Piers Morgan, his own readers like Pilger's approach. He says:

"Whenever John writes for us, he generates a bigger response than any other writer. Of the British people who contact us, more than 90% support him while 100% of Americans are against him."

What was it again that Corporal Jones said? "They don't like it up 'em, sir, they don't like it one bit." He was speaking, in this wartime comedy, about the Nazis threatening to invade poor defenseless Albion. Americans are proud to claim they saved the world from fascism, but how is that true when only 50 years later they become the neo-Nazis of the twenty first century? Big kids with no brains often become the bully on the block when they realise the power of their size and muscle. That is what has happened to Bush, Rumsfeld, Perle and the rest. You know what? Nobody likes bullies!

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