

Lining Up the Lefties: Media Incitement to War on Latin America

Written by

Sunday, 07 May 2006 22:15 - Last Updated Sunday, 07 May 2006 22:15

Lining Up the Lefties: Media Incitement to War on Latin America

Media Lens - The language in David Osborne's Independent analysis could have come from a US State department or British Foreign Office press release. Consider just a small sample: The pejorative use of the term 'populist', rather than 'popular'. Venezuela's Hugo Chavez 'has made a sport of taunting the United States', while Peru's Humala Ollanta is a 'leftist firebrand'.

www.medialens.org

MEDIA ALERT: LINING UP THE NEXT VICTIMS

MEDIA LENS: Correcting for the distorted vision of the corporate media

May 8, 2006

The 'Independent' Stokes Up Fear Of Left 'Populism' In South America

The British media is moving up a gear in support of Washington and London's agenda of demonising the next potential victims of western power, whether in Iran or Latin America. Consider 'The Big Question' posed last Thursday by the avowedly critical 'Independent' newspaper in London:

'Should we be worried by the rise of the populist left in South America?' (David Osborne, 'The Big Question: Should we be worried by the rise of the populist left in South America?', The Independent, May 4 2006; <http://news.independent.co.uk/world/americas/article361780.ece>)

Note that 'The Big Question' was +not+:

'Should we be heartened by the rise of the populist left in South America?'

Lining Up the Lefties: Media Incitement to War on Latin America

Written by

Sunday, 07 May 2006 22:15 - Last Updated Sunday, 07 May 2006 22:15

The full-page article reported:

‘A wave of ‘leftist’ leaders, parties and movements has swept into power in one South American country after another since 1998.’

This transformation has taken place right in ‘Bush’s backyard’.

The centrepiece of the article was a large map of Central and South America, with box captions and photographs highlighting the new wave of leftist leaders, including Venezuela’s Hugo Chavez, Bolivia’s Evo Morales, Ecuador’s Rafael Correa and Chile’s Michelle Bachelet.

The article addressed a region that has suffered appalling destruction at the hands of US, and US-supported, economic and military violence. Force has been systematically deployed to procure the region’s natural resources, and to crush any movement towards regional self-determination that could spread like a ‘virus’ of resistance to US control.

Recall, for example, the horrors of the Reagan era in the 1980s. A concocted ‘threat of Communism’ was used to justify a bloodbath as Washington funnelled money, weapons and supplies to US-selected dictators and US-trained death squads battling independent nationalism across Central America. The death toll included more than 70,000 political killings in El Salvador, over 100,000 in Guatemala, and 30,000 killed in the US-supported Contra war against Nicaragua. Journalist Allan Nairn described the Reagan period as ‘One of the most intensive campaigns of mass murder in recent history.’ (Democracy Now, June 8, 2004)

Jose Napoleon Duarte, former president of El Salvador, summed up his country’s past:

‘Fifty years of lies, fifty years of injustice, fifty years of frustration. This is a history of people starving to death, living in misery. For fifty years the same people had all the power, all the money, all the jobs, all the education, all the opportunities.’ (William Blum, ‘Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II’, Common Courage Press, 1995, p.353)

Lining Up the Lefties: Media Incitement to War on Latin America

Written by

Sunday, 07 May 2006 22:15 - Last Updated Sunday, 07 May 2006 22:15

The Semantics Of Subservience To Power

The language in David Osborne's Independent analysis could have come from a US State department or British Foreign Office press release. Consider just a small sample:

The pejorative use of the term 'populist', rather than 'popular'.

Venezuela's Hugo Chavez 'has made a sport of taunting the United States', while Peru's Humala Ollanta is a 'leftist firebrand'.

A progressive Mexican presidential candidate is 'famous for dispensing government funds', thus raising a faint whiff of corruption; why not 'investing government funds'?

Chavez and Morales 'pander to supporters', rather than to US-based investors, as has historically been the norm in the region. Imagine a government doing what it was elected to do!

'Chavez-style populism' is contrasted with 'more pragmatic routes, emphasising social programmes but showing restraint in macro-economics and foreign policies.'

A new trade agreement between Bolivia, Cuba and Venezuela is 'specifically meant to undermine the efforts by Bush to extend free trade through the Americas'; where 'free trade' is used in the Orwellian sense of trade that protects the rights of US corporations and wealthy investors at the expense of the poor.

Brazil's president Lula da Silva 'soon won back the confidence of foreign investors', rather than 'soon adopted policies which favoured foreign investors at the expense of the domestic population.'

Lining Up the Lefties: Media Incitement to War on Latin America

Written by

Sunday, 07 May 2006 22:15 - Last Updated Sunday, 07 May 2006 22:15

?George Bush, distracted by terrorism and Iraq, has failed to pay sufficient attention to his neighbours to the south. Washington now finds itself largely powerless to halt the shift to the left in these countries.?

There was no hint of what success in halting a shift to ?the left? has traditionally meant for victims in the region, or of just why it should be the superpower?s business to involve itself in the politics of sovereign nations.

There were many other examples. The last one above particularly shocked us. We emailed David Osborne about it, asking him:

?Your unspoken assumption is that Washington has a right to intervene in these countries. Why do you assume this?? (Email to David Osborne, May 4, 2006)

Osborne replied:

?It's interesting that Latin America stirs a great deal of passion among our readers - I wish we covered Latin America more regularly. As for the line about Washington not being able to do anything to stop the shift to the left, I by no means meant to imply that it had a right to such a thing. God knows Washington's record in Latin America is hardly a glorious one. I do mean to imply, however, that there are enough people in Washington who would very much like to intervene in some form fashion [sic] if they could. Actually, I celebrate their powerlessness in this respect.? (Email from David Osborne, May 4, 2006)

We wrote back the same day, thanking Osborne for responding, and pointed out several examples of power-friendly contortions in his piece:

?The whole tone and pitch of your article - highlighted by its fear-mongering title and the major anti-?populist? questions posed - implies strongly that ?we?, in the west, *should* be worried. Or does ?we? refer to the power centres of Washington and London??

Lining Up the Lefties: Media Incitement to War on Latin America

Written by

Sunday, 07 May 2006 22:15 - Last Updated Sunday, 07 May 2006 22:15

We added:

?There is no question in your article that Washington has no right interfering in Latin America.?

We also wrote:

?You surely know that hundreds of thousands of people were cruelly slaughtered because of US attempts to shape the destiny of the hemisphere for its own ends. None of this merits a mention in your article. Why not?

?Venezuela, by virtue of its 'dangerous' tendency towards pursuing the interests of its own population, is now in the crosshairs of US power. As a journalist in a major newspaper, you bear a heavy responsibility for the way you frame your reporting, select your facts and pitch your comments.? (Email to David Osborne, May 4, 2006)

Osborne replied overnight, saying that he was about to travel to Mexico: ?[I] don't really have time to address every point, except that they are all perfectly legitimate, of course. For instance, there is no reason at all why I should not have written a piece asking if we should celebrate the rise of the left in Latin America. That probably would have been a more interesting approach.?

He continued:

?There is a psychosis [sic] about the USA and its history in Latin America which is understandable (and yes, I do know something about it) but it can also get in the way of rational debate.?

We will leave readers to unravel the logic of this last sentence. In reality there is no psychosis. Mostly there is ignorance in the West - the media has virtually nothing to say about US crimes in the region. People who do know and care - people who manage to penetrate the fog of media distortion and indifference - are stunned and horrified by what they find, by just how much has

Lining Up the Lefties: Media Incitement to War on Latin America

Written by

Sunday, 07 May 2006 22:15 - Last Updated Sunday, 07 May 2006 22:15

been buried by our 'free press'.

Words of Wisdom: Think For Yourself

A number of Media Lens readers also wrote to David Osborne on reading his article, posting their rational and articulate emails on our message board. Public challenges of this kind are not popular with professional journalists; accountability in reporting can be a difficult concept for them to accept. Thus, Osborne told us:

'What is odd here, I realise, is that all the emails sent to me today posed almost exactly the same challenges to the piece, as if this was a coordinated response. I hope that's not the case, because that would make things much less interesting. Better for people to think for themselves.' (Email from David Osborne, May 5, 2006)

Journalists often choose to see 'cloned', 'robotic' and 'coordinated' responses. Our guess is that they are keen not to recognise the uncomfortable truth - that large numbers of intelligent, thoughtful people are able to identify the same obvious propaganda assumptions in their reporting. In reality our readers are a feisty lot - if we make mistakes, we hear about them immediately. If they disagree with our arguments, they challenge +us+ rather than the journalists we are challenging. For the most part, they are acutely aware of the danger of mindless conformity. We have a keen sense that they despise the idea that a couple of self-proclaimed editors like us might presume to tell them what to do. They read our arguments, journalists' arguments, and decide for themselves. We would not want it any other way.

And yet reporters like Osborne consistently fail to see that people +do+ think for themselves, that they do write individually crafted challenges in response to reports like The Independent's 'Big Question'. We look forward to the day when media professionals agree that it would be 'better for reporters to think for themselves.'

Journalists who contribute to the propaganda offensive against countries declared official enemies by Washington and London bear a heavy responsibility for stoking the prospects of war - the moral consequences will almost certainly include yet more mass deaths of 'unpeople' in distant lands, and yet more torture, suffering and misery.

Lining Up the Lefties: Media Incitement to War on Latin America

Written by

Sunday, 07 May 2006 22:15 - Last Updated Sunday, 07 May 2006 22:15

SUGGESTED ACTION

The goal of Media Lens is to promote rationality, compassion and respect for others. In writing letters to journalists, we strongly urge readers to maintain a polite, non-aggressive and non-abusive tone.

Write to David Usborne of the Independent:

Email: d.usborne@independent.co.uk

Write to Leonard Doyle, foreign editor of the Independent:

Email: l.doyle@independent.co.uk

Write to Ian Birrell, deputy editor of the Independent:

Email: i.birrell@independent.co.uk

Write to Simon ?Silent? Kelner, editor-in-chief of the Independent & Independent on Sunday:

Email: s.kelner@independent.co.uk

Please also send copies of all emails to Media Lens:

Email: editor@medialens.org

The first Media Lens book was published in January 2006: 'Guardians of Power: The Myth Of The Liberal Media' by David Edwards and David Cromwell (Pluto Books, London). For further details, including reviews, interviews and extracts, please click here:

http://www.medialens.org/bookshop/guardians_of_power.php

This is a free service. However, financial support is vital. Please consider donating to Media

Lining Up the Lefties: Media Incitement to War on Latin America

Written by

Sunday, 07 May 2006 22:15 - Last Updated Sunday, 07 May 2006 22:15

Lens: www.medialens.org/donate

Visit the Media Lens website: <http://www.medialens.org>