

April 27, 2007
Progressive Ponderings
The Fourth Estate

Fourth Estate *n* – the public press

Estate *n* – social standing or rank, esp. of high order; a social of political class

The definition of “Fourth Estate” is inadequate because it doesn’t emphasize the high rank it was given in democratic history. Our forefathers treasured it enough to enshrine the words “free press” in the First Amendment.

Polls taken in the United States throughout 2005, two years after the invasion of Iraq, indicated that the majority of U.S. citizens continued to believe: 1) Iraqis were involved in 9/11 and 2) Saddam did have weapons on mass destruction. Even though these two fabrications have been proven to be false many Americans still believe them to be factual. Administrative personnel, especially Cheney, continue to infer and even declare them to be true and the press continues to report this without comment.

Wednesday evening, April 25, public television aired a documentary produced by Bill Moyers entitled “Selling the War.” Moyers meticulously walked through the media’s lockstep with the administration leading up to and selling the need to go to war. Every major news organization in the United States, except Knight Ridder, bought and sold the administration’s fictitious “facts.” Under a dictatorship citizens know that “news” is nothing but the party line. But, in a democracy citizens want to believe that the “free” media is not abusing its freedom and that the press is believable. Thus, when “news” is manipulated by a press more interested in its bottom line than respecting its duty to accurately inform the citizenry, the press is just as totalitarian as its counterparts in a tyrannical dictatorship.

The name “Fourth Estate” indicates an independence from other power; it defines a responsibility and an accountability to the nation and its citizens; it signifies the power of its influence. When that power is purchased in the market, as any other commodity, it sacrifices truth for profit. That’s where we are today in the U.S. It took the majority of our citizens three to four years (2001-2 to 2004-5) to extract the truth regarding the Iraq invasion and occupation. Now the citizens have moved beyond the administration, but the press continues to regurgitate administrative spin as truth (“news”).

The Fourth Estate, the majority of which is owned by corporate conglomerates, answers to its immediate power clients: advertisers with an agenda different from and often opposed to democracy; stockholders whose agenda is short term profits; government officials who pave the way to additional power through deregulation and the allowance of monopolistic practices. The result is that instead of having a citizenry informed regarding their government, we have a citizenry indoctrinated by corporate agendas. A further result is a misled, misinformed citizenry that is the most depoliticized of any democracy in the current world. Evidence includes the sadly low voting rate, the absence of reaction to the government’s erosion of citizen human, civil, and constitutional rights, and the general lack of rebellion and protest (even a contempt for protest) as a citizen right and duty.

The current trend in the corporate media world is more consolidation (more power to fewer), the cutting of investigative staff, and the reliance on corporate sponsored think tank “experts” to provide us with “news.” The same people who maneuvered us into Iraq and a lowly reputation of world respect and opinion are still featured prominently by the propaganda “Estate.”

A citizen takeover of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is possibly the only way to change the “follow-the-money Estate.”
jmayer