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By a guest author

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Corporate media play pernicious role

By Tracy Jones

Based on a talk by the author to the Marxist Youth League in Buffalo, New York, on Nov. 11.

“If you’re not careful, the newspapers will have you hating the people who are being oppressed and loving the people who are doing the oppressing.” – Malcolm X



Pro-Palestine protest at CNN Center, Atlanta, Georgia, Oct. 23, 2023.

Typically, from birth we are taught that the media purports to tell the unbiased truth — that it is against the ethics of journalism to provide anything less. As we become more

cognizant of the politics of our world, we learn that this is a lie. We realize that no source presents anything unbiased.

It is rarely true that no overarching narrative defines the trajectory of a piece. These pieces tell us more about class interests and the prevailing untruths that either the whole of the ruling class or a subset wants to reinforce among the public.

Look back to Oct. 7 and the subsequent media frenzy: There was almost unanimous condemnation of Hamas with the narrative that their attack was somehow “unprovoked.” This was the official line of Israeli authorities, whom Western corporate media outlets have enabled and parroted.

One such way that the media enables certain narratives is by selectively citing sources. Following Operation Protective Edge, the 2014 Israeli war on Gaza, a study was conducted to show how few Palestinian sources the corporate media used. A sample of about 300 articles in both the BBC and the New York Times disproportionately cited Israeli sources, with Palestinian sources being far fewer than half of the total.

Media attempt to dehumanize Palestinians

Another such means of enabling the pro-Israeli narrative is by dehumanizing Palestinians. Words like terrorist, commandos and militants are often used to describe Palestinian actors, while rarely ever being used to describe Israelis. In the study, it was found that Israeli actors are always referred to as “soldiers,” while this is never the case for Palestinians, who are referred to as “militants” — a much more suggestive term.

Additionally, these media rarely ascribe a rational motive to Palestinian actions, whereas Israeli actions are described using words that give them a sense of legitimacy. For example, the Israeli military is never said to have been the aggressor, rather they are “reacting” or taking “detering measures” against Palestinian offenses. This extends to photo captions and graphics that accompany the articles.

It is no surprise that the study determined that Israelis are often depicted using humanizing photographs, whereas Palestinian actors are dehumanized — depicted in ways that reinforce the narrative of their “irrational militancy.”

Coverage of the genocide waged against Palestine has been equally abysmal, if not worse. Corporate media outlets, emboldened by wartime fervor, have spread unproven theories and rumors. There has been an overwhelming focus on the humanization of the Israeli hostages. They present the genocide against Palestinians as a means of fighting terrorism and securing the release of hostages.

On the other hand, the ruling-class media's depictions of Hamas' motives suffer from a demonizing undertone, using terms such as "jihad" intentionally to invoke terror and amplify Islamophobia.

It must be made clear how the corporate media is currently working as a tool supporting this imperialist conquest. Under the guise of impartiality and fairness, it subtly pushes a specific narrative, while marginalizing others — often that of the most oppressed. The media is representative of the ruling class, whose interests lie in contradiction with the peace and prosperity of the Palestinian people.

There's a plethora of examples outside of the ongoing conflict in Palestine from the Black Lives Matter Movement to the Indigenous Peoples Landback struggle. The media does its best in turning different sectors of the working-class movement against each other. Unless they are linked together, the workers' movement is destined to be ravaged and torn apart.

Workers must look to their own class's media when trying to understand the world around them — just as fishers would look at fishing news to better catch fish.

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