

Tools of the persuasion trade

I admit it. I have been a Fox News devotee for a long time. I have watched the channel ebb and flow over the years as some of its key personalities have bitten the dust and moved on (some by choice and some, involuntarily). One of those is Mr. Bill O'Reilly whose departure left perhaps THE biggest gaping hole in their lineup. Fortunately, it was filled by the courageous and often very humorous Tucker Carlson who is perhaps the most important man in the Fox stable of personalities. Over the years we've seen the departure of Ed Henry, Erik Bolling, Kimberly Guilfoyle, Bob Beckel, Shepard Smith and Megyn Kelly, to name but a few.

Some have gone on to bigger and better things while others have simply faded into the media wallpaper. One person who has remained at Fox is Chris Wallace, host of the Sunday morning program of the same name. I was a fan of his father's interviewing style (the famous Mike Wallace) for many years. There was no doubt that Mike Wallace was a Democrat, but he was a fearless interviewer. His son's political stripe was not always so apparent. It has become so over the past four years as he has made no bones about his dislike of Donald Trump and his embrace of Democrat politics.

His performance as moderator of the Trump/Biden debate of a few months ago, sealed it for me. There was no doubt left in my mind...Wallace had 'defected' to the other side as his moderatorship clearly showed. His disrespect for Trump was unmistakable, so much so that I vowed not to watch his Sunday show anymore. I ended up breaking my promise to myself and did tune in to a couple shows but ended up sorely disappointed in his conduct. Today's program sealed it for me. I'm done with him, for good. After watching his interview with Apple CEO Tim Cook and listening to the absolute softball questions he posed it became crystal clear to me that Wallace had lost his edge (if he ever had one) along with his curiosity, and he had totally slipped into the soft tapioca pudding category of interviewers. There was not one really probing question or follow-up to Cook in his whole interview. Wallace treated him like the Pope instead of the powerful disruptive force against free speech that he and his company are. He never challenged Cook on Apple's \$100 million investment in its Propel Program to *correct* what Cook called 'systemic racism' in America.

He just let him roll on and followed up with more innocuous ho hum questions that any high school newspaper editor might ask. That did it for me. I'm done, and Fox should be done with Wallace, too. He adds nothing to their lineup except to provide them with one more slobbering shape-shifting Left-leaning 'journalist' who masquerades as a Conservative. It's time for Fox to clean house and realize that it had better react to the demands of the Trump constituency that supports the network. The death of Roger Ailes in 2017 was a blow to Fox and I think it has taken the ensuing years for them to realize that while they may enjoy immense popularity with the evening show lineup (Carlson, Hannity and Ingraham) nothing should be taken for granted when millions of people are tuning in to conservative podcasts on the Internet. The competition for 'eyeballs' will certainly intensify as viewers reassess how they will spend their evenings during the coming Biden years. Will they stay with Fox or migrate away from cable news?

The cable news and traditional TV media landscape has now completed its transformation to one of total partisan programming. There is no doubt where the political loyalties of CNN, MSNBC, ABC, CBS, NBC and PBS lie. They do not even bother to hide their political sympathies. There is no such thing as a *fair and balanced* network anymore. The same is true of national radio conglomerates. Cumulus Radio which owns the Albuquerque AM/FM KKOB station has migrated away from its traditional conservative bent and is now fully on board with a new liberal stance. Recent directives from Cumulus corporate have required its 'talent' to avoid talking about election fraud or anything that would smack of support of a contrary position to the politically-correct one proffered by the Democrats. Talk radio is becoming muzzled, save for the independently-produced 'Rush Limbaugh Show'.

That said about the media, how are we, the listening and viewing public, being 're-educated' to accept the new political realities of the Democrat Left domination? For one thing, we are seeing definitions of words and events being re-defined. Words like *insurrection*, *mobs*, *peaceful protests*, *racial inequities*, *racism*, *racist*, *gender equality*, *White supremacy*, *White elitism*, even *patriot* mean something very different to the powers that be. There is a growing list of 'acceptable words' creeping into the media and indeed many corridors of power. And these new word definitions are also helping to redefine what it means to be one of the states of being like: racist, homophobe, patriot, free speech advocate, gun owner, etc. etc. The social engineers on the Left are engaged in a top-down and bottom-up push for changing the way we think by elevating many of the cultural issues to top priority status. Just this morning I heard that the incoming Biden Administration will be concentrating its efforts on four crises: the Coronavirus pandemic, the economy, climate change and racial equity.

Granted, two of those are important and have been on the Trump radar screen for the last year at least: the pandemic and the economy. The other two, however, are purely political and have been added to secure support for funding in Congress AND to change the public narrative by the Left. Soon it will be a punishable offense to even cast doubts as to the validity of 'systemic racism' or a 'climate crisis' existing in America. That is the sinister use of 'accepted prevailing wisdom' in determining which path any country takes. If a government can convince you that a crisis exists, it can convince you that detractors are wrong and should be punished or shunned from the public square.

When the government, the media (both social and traditional) and corporate America collude and use similar tools of the propaganda trade to force our buy-in and compliance to 'accepted orthodoxy', nothing good can come from it. That goes for attacks on our freedom to disagree and our choice to be skeptical, too. Today, it may be government mandates for mask-wearing, social distancing and vaccinations. Tomorrow, it could be considerably worse. We used to say that sunlight is the best disinfectant against duplicity or tyranny. I would add that sunlight without vigilance and resistance is just light without heat.

Stephan Helgesen is a retired career U.S. diplomat who lived and worked in 30 countries for 25 years during the Reagan, G.H.W. Bush, Clinton, and G.W. Bush Administrations. He is the author of ten books, four of which are on American politics and has written over 1,100 articles on politics, economics and social trends. He operates a political news story aggregator website, www.projectpushback.com. He can be reached at: stephan@stephanhelgesen.com