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The Enemy of My Enemy is The Media. Wait, They're the Enemy?

Welcome to the age of feeling like Alice through the Looking Glass. Myself, having grown up under the semi-questionable umbrella of being a Generation-X'er, have seen lots of wars on... things... over the years. It seemed to be almost a catchphrase for the longest time: the war on drugs, the war on poverty, the war on terror, the war on crime, the war on cancer, the war on apartheid. That's a whole lot of war. Through the clamor of all of these battles, the world also saw some decidedly un-warlike. Apartheid ended in 1991, the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons was extended indefinitely in 1995.

Throughout all of these, there were reporters and journalists out and about giving us, the people, the stories and details behind both the wars and the victories. Not only did we receive reports on the victories, we received the news of the failures and tragedies: for as many people can still recall where they were when the Trade Towers fell, there are as many Gen-X'ers who can also tell you where they were at when the Challenger fell from the sky. The long, seemingly drawn out coverage regarding the trial of Ollie North... and the countless responses of "I do not recall that, Senator".

Fast forward a generation: now we have our Millennials figuring out their own direction and place in the world. The news is no longer on for an hour on the three local channels, there are dozens of sources who do nothing but the news. Online access to information is light years ahead of the past, and the lines of reporting and opinion/editorial have blurred. With such a broad

spectrum of coverage and information available to all (and able to be submitted, literally, by anyone) various spectrums of bias became visible to those who would look for, or be interested in, any shade of political leaning. Some venues would press more progressive/liberal views and encourage coverage of those items in their reporting, while others would cover the more conservative stories and news. Others maintained a middle of the road approach, dealing more with newsworthy events as they came up in day to day life. Online access to opinion pieces ranging from analysis to conspiracy theories were just a few clicks away.

Of note, the ease of self-publishing news and opinions also allowed items which were patently false to percolate throughout the mix – bringing about the rise of additional sources put forward with the sole goal of fact checking items of questionable validity. From comments made by a politician during their stump speech to debunking internet rumors regarding individual targets, the world and the internet (and thus the media) evolved their own methods of checks and balances. If something of questionable validity needed to be checked, one could simply check against other sources or entities such as Factcheck.org.

Yet now, we find ourselves in a time where the Media and News have been designated an “Enemy of the People”. What was once lauded as the Fourth Estate is now the target of a phrase used by Vladimir Lenin himself: “all leaders of the Constitutional Democratic Party, a party filled with enemies of the people, are hereby to be considered outlaws, and are to be arrested immediately and brought before the revolutionary court”. The phrase was used even more succinctly by the 1938 Nazi tabloid *Der Stürmer*: “... In former times sane people and sane leaders of the peoples made short shrift of enemies of the people. They had them either expelled or killed.”

Wait, what? The Media is now considered a seditious and treasonous influence by the United States Executive Office? Let's dissect this a little bit, shall we? Enemy, as put forward by Merriam-Webster:

1: one that is antagonistic to another; especially: one seeking to injure, overthrow, or confound an opponent

2: something harmful or deadly [example:] alcohol was his greatest enemy

3: a : a military adversary

b : a hostile unit or force

The mere mention of sedition and treason raise the specters of the worlds past in the form of imprisonment, incarceration, hangings, guillotines, and firing squads. Explained simply by News18, a partnership between TV18, one of India's leading television broadcast networks and CNN International:

“Sedition is an overt subversive act which leads to incitement against status quo or authority or order. It is a challenge to the establishment. It may be a book, a painting, an idea, a speech, pretty much anything that can act as a vehicle of an anti-establishment idea.

Treason, on the other hand, involves colluding with anti-national forces in terms of providing material support to people or groups who work against the idea of one's nation. So sedition is against a government in power where as treason is violation of one's allegiance to one's country or sovereign. Sedition threatens a government or individuals in power and treason threatens the entire country with all its people.

However, in many societies the differences between the two have become blurred and sedition has been closely linked to acts of terrorism and public safety violation.”

Now in a totalitarian regime, any public dissent could fall under this broad umbrella. However, in the United States of America, we operate under a core tenant (as put forward by Abraham Lincoln in his 1863 Gettysburg Address): “We here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth” thus the final arbiter and true source of government power here is (actually) the people, not those elected to lead.

However, we need to set the Way-Back-Machine to 1882: fifty-six years before Der Stürmer, one hundred and thirty-five years before the now infamous Tweet. In 1882, Henrik Ibsen wrote his play *An Enemy of the People*. Here our protagonist is not the Media or an elected official, the Enemy of the People in this case is in fact a Doctor. The protagonist, Dr. Stockman, finds out that the local baths had been contaminated, effectively poisoning travelers and residents. The corrupt powers-that-be run an effective smear campaign against the Doctor, since the news will wreak havoc on the towns economy – doing just as much harm as good in their eyes. Stockman, who was only trying to help people, ends up being labeled an Enemy of the People. By the end, everyone but his immediate family has turned against the Doctor: his house vandalized, his family ostracized. Yet Stockman stands to his principles, accepting the label, because for him: to not be doing right is to be doing wrong.

After our use of the Way-Back-Machine, perhaps Trump was a bit more accurate than he would have truly wanted. In all the examples above, the phrase Enemy of the State ends up boiling down to the common denominator of being *undesirable and contrary to the goals (or views) of those in power*. Yet, like Doctor Stockman, just because someone says (or does) something that the ruling order does not like, that something is not necessarily wrong.