

NATIVE INTELLIGENCE

A Column By
Jack D. Forbes

This column's focus: Right-wing Extremism Threatens Free Speech

The GOP leadership has launched an all-out attack upon the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) the Public Television System (PBS), National Public Radio (NPR), and through the CPB an assault upon all listener-sponsored, tribal, and community radio stations. The Pacifica Network of listener-supported stations, a multi-ethnic system with significant Native American participation, is a specific target of GOP right-wingers.

At the same time many GOP right-wing "culture czars" have launched a budgetary attack upon the very existence of the National Endowment of the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities, both of which have become vital to small Native American museums, theatre groups. and programs as well as essential to other cultural groups ranging from artists to translators of historical texts.

It is interesting, and revealing, that these simultaneous assaults upon non-commercial media, art, and humanistic studies come after many years of Republican control of the agencies concerned: the CPB, the NEA, and the NEH. Why then the rise in hostility to institutions which have certainly not been under any kind of cohesive "leftist" or anti-establishment control?

To discover the answer I suggest that we must recall the triumph of the Ayatollah Khomeini and his brand of Iranian sectarian fascism. The victory of Khomeini meant the end of any cultural openness in Iranian society and the imposition of a patriarchal, puritanical, lock-step society to be dominated by religious leaders who believe that they know best what God wants for all humans, whether they are Shiites or not. The conformity forced upon the Iranian people falls equally upon Kurds as well as Turks, Mongols as well as Persians, and upon Zoroastrians, Bahais, Christians, and secularists as well.

Have not the same fascist-rightist tendencies been seen in virtually identical movements in U.S. Christianity, Israeli Judaism, and even Indian Hinduism? These movements are often referred to as "fundamentalist" but, in fact, that is not the correct term since other Muslims, Jews, Christians, and Hindus would certainly deny that the right-wing extremists have discovered the "fundamentals" of their religions.

Ayatollah-like movements within U.S. Christianity are usually linked with supernationalism and with support of right-wing political agendas favoring the wealthy classes and large corporations. But they also seem generally to share the sexual puritanism of the radical Iranian Shiites including extreme hostility to any form of homosexuality.

Fascist movements within Islam usually target "western" influences as a major enemy, but by "western" they perhaps are really referring to any liberalizing tendencies. Thus for Persian or Egyptian women to take off the veil is not to become "western" only, it is also to return to their ancient Persian and Egyptian ways of wearing their hair prior to the Arab conquests of their homelands. Much of what we call "western" can, indeed, be traced back to the great Mediterranean Renaissance which commenced in the Arab and Islamic world with the study of Greek texts and then spread, along with new learning and architecture, to Italy and Christian Spain.

It is interesting to note that the Christian right is, in fact, in rebellion against much the same "western" values as are the Islamic militants. These values are actually the humanistic, liberal values which have evolved in different ages in many parts of the world including China, India, Africa, Europe, and ancient North America. The right-wingers of the world have often resisted the progress of liberalization whether we are considering its impact upon women's liberation, sexuality, freedom of artistic expression, freedom of speech, freedom of literary expression, freedom of styles of dress, and so on.

The attack upon public broadcasting, upon the arts, upon the humanities, and, thereby upon the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution has reached this stage because the GOP has been largely taken over by right-wing fanatics of several Christian extremist movements. It isn't simply a conspiracy to sell public radio and television stations to Rupert Murdoch or other media-kings. It isn't simply a conspiracy to defraud the public of stations which they have paid for, at a fraction of their value. It isn't simply a conspiracy to shut ethnic minorities and working-class whites off from media which occasionally reflects their viewpoints. It isn't simply a conspiracy to shut down the weak but important Native American radio stations.

It is all of these things but it is more. It is a culture *putsch* a la Adolf Hitler. It is a plot of right-wing extremists to do in the USA what Khomeini did in Iran. To shut off free speech and free expression and to impose a form of lock-step Christian rightist conformity is the objective of the people who have taken control of the GOP in Congress.

Thus it doesn't really matter if Republicans have controlled CPB, NEA, and NEH most of the time since 1981, because those "old-fashioned" Republicans have been largely replaced by a new wave of Christian fanatics.

House speaker Newt Gingrich is quoted in a recent news story as saying that "the appropriation is gone [for public broadcasting], ... the game is over ... the power of the speaker is the power of recognition, and I will not recognize any proposal that will appropriate money for CPB." Of course, this is the language of a dictator not of a legislator. This is the language of fascism, not of conservatism.

The attack on CPB, NEA and NEH marks a turning point in our history. Home-grown fascism has at least achieved a measure of power and there may be an Ayatollah waiting in the wings. [June 21, 1996]

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