

INTERVIEW WITH MIKE HOY, FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT
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On Censorship: Public, Private, and Self

Q. So you don't go much for censorship?

Hoy. You might say that. How can individuals make intelligent decisions, unless we have access to information and ideas? Attempts to control access to information, no matter who does it, are anti-life. My theory is, that the urge to censor is based on fear – fear of the human mind. What possible reason is there to forbid anyone to read a book? If the book is false, the best thing is to get it out there and expose it. If the book is true, the best thing is to get it out there and expose it. When has prohibiting thinking ever helped anything?

Q. You have a broader concept of “censorship” than just the government passing laws.

Hoy. Yes, I do. Government censorship at least is right out there in the open, where everyone can see that it is censorship, and exactly what is being censored. It is much easier to fight it, if it can be seen. According to an article on AlterNet, (“Personal Voices: The End of Academic Freedom?” by Beshara Doumani), as I write this, there is a bill in the US Senate (it already passed the House: House Resolution 3077) that “would rob our society of the open exchange of ideas on college campuses.” The bill includes a provision “to establish an advisory board to monitor campus international studies centers in order to ensure that they advance the national interest. ...the target is clearly the nation's 17 centers for Middle East studies. ...[Its] aim is to defend the foreign policy of this administration by stifling critical and informed discussion on U.S. campuses.”

Doumani continues: “Campus Watch and other hawkish, pro-Israeli right-wing organizations have launched campaigns to pressure and discredit professors judged to be un-American for questioning U.S. policy in the Middle East. Some organizations openly recruit students to inform on their teachers. Students and faculty connected academically or culturally to Muslim and Middle Eastern countries have been especially targeted. Some have been subjected to hate mail blitzes and their institutions pressured to short-circuit their careers. Sen. Rick Santorum, R-Penn., announced his intent last April to introduce legislation cutting federal funding to institutions of higher learning where students or faculty criticize Israel, labeling such criticism – regardless of its content or basis in fact – as Anti-Semitic.”

Notice here that we have all three forms of censorship joining forces to deprive us of facts and points of view which are contrary to the current regime (and any future regimes, where the law is concerned). First, you have the proposed law, which would not actually throw anybody in jail, but would “cut funding” to any institution which allowed such talk. Government funding is one of the best forms of sneaky censorship – first the Feds tax away money from localities, so that local institutions need to be “helped” by Federal funds; then all sorts of social engineering strings are attached to the funding (which was taxed away from the locals to begin with).

Then, second, we see here private censorship: non-government groups trying to silence people with opposing points of view, in the hope that this will, third, lead to the worst form of censorship of all: self censorship. Any prof who doesn't want his career chopped off had better keep his

mouth shut about criticizing the government. So “censorship” doesn't necessarily have to only take the form of the government passing a law that you will go to prison if you say such-and-such. The sneakier censorship is, the harder it is to fight (or even to recognize).

Q. What are some other types of private censorship?

Hoy. Well, the absurd expansion of corporate “intellectual property” is one frightening type. Even everyday activities, such as swinging a swing or traditional farming techniques have been commodified as “intellectual property.” The story of how a small coterie of multinational corporations came to write the charter for a new global information order is told in the book *Information Feudalism*, by Peter Drahos and John Braithwaite. The following text appeared on the copyright page of a recent ebook edition of Lewis Carroll's novel *Alice in Wonderland*:

COPY. No text selections can be copied from the book to the clipboard.

PRINT. No printing is permitted of this book.

LEND. This book cannot be lent or given to someone else.

GIVE. This book cannot be given to someone else.

READ ALOUD. This book cannot be read aloud.

Alice in Wonderland was first published in 1865, but a corporation now tells us that we cannot “read it aloud.” This is only one example of the perversion of the concept of “intellectual property.” Look at how that recording industry group has been suing college kids for downloading songs. They pick kids whom they know do not have the monetary and legal resources to stand up to them, and get them to “settle” for a couple thou or so. And then each one of those “settlements” can be cited as a precedent every time they pull this on anyone.

Curiouser and curiouser, as Alice herself might have put it. I read an article the other day which revealed that independent auto repair shops (and individual car owners) are having the codes to the computer chips which run our cars (modern automobiles have 40 or so chips in them) withheld from them, so that when something goes wrong, a car owner can only have his car fixed by authorized dealerships. A guy isn't even allowed to work on his own car anymore, because the knowledge of how his car runs is the “intellectual property” of the car manufacturers.

Information Feudalism covers “intellectual property” as censorship in depth.

Q. What are some other forms of private censorship?

Hoy. Well, of course, there are the various “speech codes” on college campuses (see *The Shadow University*, by Alan Charles Kors and Harvey A. Silverglate). This book lays bare the totalitarian mindset that undergirds speech codes, conduct codes, and “campus life” bureaucracies, through which a cadre of deans and counselors indoctrinate students and faculty in an ideology that favors group rights over individual rights, sacrificing free speech and academic freedom to spare the “sensitivities” of currently favored groups.

Another kind of private censorship is lawsuits. If you publish a book, and someone you never heard of in your life does something that happens to be in the book and harms a person, the person can sue you. Until very recently, publishers and media producers had assumed that – with a few exceptions such as libel – freedom of expression was absolute and protected from civil liability claims in the form of damage awards. Then along came an ambulance-chasing shyster looking for deep pockets (the *Hit Man* case), and now publishers have to worry about being sued off the face of the Earth for something a reader of one of their books might do.

And it's not just books, either. The *Hit Man* case was cited as a precedent in a lawsuit against Oliver Stone, director of the movie *Natural Born Killers*, claiming that Stone was responsible for damages inflicted by

someone who watched his movie. An excellent book on this type of private censorship is *The First Amendment and Civil Liability* by Robert M. O'Neil.

Q. Is there more?

Hoy. Unfortunately, yeah, lots. One of the most widespread forms of private censorship is the forbidding of advertising. The “Libertarians” are notorious for this kind of censorship. Reason magazine for years forbade Loompanics to place any ad whatsoever – this from a publisher who claims to be devoted to “Free Minds and Free Markets” (as long as they are not too free, I guess). I remember once, shortly after they had refused one of our book ads, receiving a fund-raising letter from Reason soliciting “donations” on the grounds that they were such big-balled, two-fisted freedom fighters that they had difficulty selling ads in their magazine, and you were therefore supposed to give them something for nothing. These hypocrites refused to engage in a straight-forward honest business deal (selling us ads), instead asking for handouts (and lying about why they were doing it) – this from an outfit which opposes food stamps for poor people on the grounds that giving them something they did not earn would destroy their “incentive” to earn a living.

We used to occasionally rent the subscriber list of Liberty magazine to send its readers a sampler of our books. On these occasions, Liberty would rent their list only “on the condition that no nudity appear in the mailing piece.” Thus does the publisher of a “Libertarian” magazine protect the virgin eyes of his readers from the trauma of seeing a pen-and-ink drawing of a woman's left nipple.

Q. Why do you think that the “Libertarians” are so timid?

Hoy. Well, these examples are actually more silly than they are threatening – I mean, what a bunch of fucking sissies, eh? But the fact of the matter is that no one has ever done more to discredit an ideology by espousing it than the “Libertarians.” They foghorn away about the necessity of the profit motive, but every “Libertarian” propaganda outfit is a non-profit corporation or foundation. Every one. Being themselves so incompetent that they cannot run an enterprise at a profit, they beseech the government to adopt policies forcing everybody but them to live by trade.

And since their products (books, magazines, treatises, etc.) are so worthless that they cannot support themselves by selling them, they ask the government to grant them “tax-free” status, and then ask corporations to give them “donations.” That is why they are so squeamish about accepting ads – they are afraid some corporate suckfish might be offended by actual “free minds and free markets” and shut off their handouts. And when corporations give the “Libertarians” money, the corporations are allowed to deduct these handouts as a “business expense.” Corporate donors are their real “customers” and they are scared to print anything the corporations might not like.

There has been a number of books published recently which call into question the corporate form of enterprise, especially as it is practiced by American/multinational corporations, but you won't find ads for any of them in “Libertarian” magazines. A recent piece in a “Libertarian” magazine (one devoted to “individual liberty”) warns its readers against even thinking critically about corporations and presents them with their thought-stopping mantra: “anti-corporatism.” Thus, any discussion of the true nature of corporations will be labeled by “Libertarians” as “anti-corporatism” and they will respond to the thing as if it were the label.

That is, they will refuse to think about it at all.

Q. But don't these magazines have the right to exclude any content they don't approve of?

Hoy. Of course, any magazine has the right to exclude any content – I am not advocating that the government pass some kind of law that every periodical be forced to carry advertising for products they don't like. What I am saying is that these “Libertarians” are full of shit. While claiming that they want “less government,” they run to the government and ask to be granted exemption from marketplace forces. Just run down the mastheads of Liberty or Reason and look at all the “editors,” “fellows,” “associates,” etc. and you will see that the majority of these “Libertarians” do not earn their living in the private sector. The “marketplace” is the last “place” “Libertarians” want to be.

Of course, it isn't just “Libertarian” magazines who have forbidden Loompanics (and others) to advertise; the Wall Street Journal, Playboy, and Soldier of Fortune are among mags that don't want their readers to know that we exist.

Going back to the anti-free-trade nature of corporations, three excellent books on this subject are: The Divine Right of Capital, by Marjorie Kelly, When Corporations Rule the World, by David C. Korten, and Unequal Protection, by Thom Hartmann. Check 'em out, Homes.

Q. Any more examples of private or self censorship?

Hoy. Bushels and bushels, but frankly, I am getting tired and depressed by this negative subject matter, so I will just give a couple more. Going back to corporate “intellectual property,” Bev Harris' Black Box Voting reveals that the “Help America Vote Act” passed just after the 2000 election, encourages states to replace government-run paper-trail vote systems with no-paper-trail computerized systems from corporate vendors. The machines (now widely in use) generate no paper trail that can be audited, and when voting machine companies have been challenged to produce audits of their votes or to disclose details of their software, they claim that this information is their “intellectual property,” citing the privacy rights that come from corporations being considered “persons” in the United States.

And one more, regarding advertising: Google recently removed all of our ads – they won't let us advertise anything. They said: “At this time, Google policy does not permit the advertisement of websites that contain 'the promotion of 'drugs,' 'fake documents,' 'firearms.'” Note that the ban is on our entire website, and not just on some particular items. Thus, Google will not even let us advertise the book How to Build Your Own Log Home for Less Than \$15,000 (or anything else) on the grounds that our website contains other books they don't like. Down the memory hole with Loompanics, although in the very same email they insist: “Google believes strongly in freedom of expression and therefore offers broad access to content across the web without censoring search results. Please note that the decisions we make concerning advertising in no way affect the search results we deliver.” And if you believe that, I bet they've got a bridge in Brooklyn they would like to sell you.

And just a bit more about the worst form of censorship of all: Self-censorship. This is when you (or your programmers) cause you to deliberately be unable to think sensibly on a subject: thought-stopping. Religious cults teach thought-stopping techniques to their members, so that if you try to bring up something they have been programmed not to think about, they will literally clap their hands over their ears, and shout: “Help me, Jesus! Go away, Satan!” and so on. Thought-stopping words abound in our society. I mentioned the phrase “anti-corporatism” as a “Libertarian” thought-stopper earlier. Other current examples are “Drugs,” “Children,” “Terrorist,” and lots of others. When we are fed these words, we are supposed to literally stop thinking and regurgitate our programmed positions.

Q. Whew! Can we somehow close this on a positive note?

Hoy. OK, good idea. We are not helpless against this constant onslaught of censorship – it is imperative that we make a conscious effort to examine all the “news” we are spoonfed and think about things. If you stop thinking, you're finished. Above all, avoid self-censorship. Here is number 49 from Claire Wolfe's forthcoming book *The Freedom Outlaw's Handbook: 179 Things To Do Until The Revolution* (scheduled for July 2004):

“49. BUYING ON THE QUIET

“What if you want to order merchandize that's very confidential – legal, of course, but so private or so controversial you don't want your order to show up anywhere in your own records or in the records of the business you buy from?

“If the business is local, of course, it's still possible to walk in and pay with untraceable cash, as long as the amount of your purchases remain below the fedgov's ever-changing 'reporting thresholds' or don't constitute 'suspicious activity.' But what if the company's 3,000 miles away?

“That's where Quiet Buy comes in. This service, the brainchild of Tim Wingate, gives you a way of purchasing those controversial books, tapes, DVDs, and other merchandise without drawing unwanted attention

Quiet Buy

124 York Ave. Box #214

Elmhurst, Illinois 60126

Web site <http://www.quietbuy.com/>

“(Complete information on how to use the service is found on the Web site.)”

Q. Any last words?

Hoy. Yeah, the usual: have fun, think for yourself, and buy some books.

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