

US cable network fires right-winger after anti-gay tirade

By David Walsh
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US cable television network MSNBC—jointly owned by General Electric/NBC and Microsoft—fired extreme right-wing radio talk show host Michael Savage July 7 after he told a caller to his weekend television program to “get AIDS and die.”

Savage (born Michael Weiner), known for his reactionary social views, was hired by MSNBC to do a Saturday afternoon show in March, over the protests of gay rights organizations. On his radio program, heard on some 300 stations, Savage rants about immigrants, homosexuals, women, anti-war protesters and so forth. He is the founder of the violently anti-immigrant “Paul Revere Society,” which advocates closing US borders, deporting all “illegal immigrants,” requiring “health tests for all recent foreign born immigrants” (sic) and, incidentally, making “tax cuts permanent.” The Society stands for “the reassertion of our borders, our language, and our culture.”

A February 12, 2003 press release from Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting (FAIR) noted, “Savage routinely refers to non-white countries as ‘turd world nations’ and charges that the US ‘is being taken over by the freaks, the cripples, the perverts and the mental defectives’ (San Francisco Bay Guardian, 9/20/00). In a recent broadcast he justified ethnic slurs as a national security tool: ‘We need racist stereotypes right now of our enemy in order to encourage our warriors to kill the enemy,’ he explained (San Francisco Chronicle, 2/6/03).

“At times Savage’s arguments echo the conspiratorial scapegoating of the white supremacist movement: ‘With the [Latino] population that has emerged, since they breed like rabbits, in many cases the whites will become a minority in their own nation. ... The white people don’t breed as often for whatever reason. I guess many homosexuals are involved. That is

also part of the grand plan, to push homosexuality to cut down on the white race’ (San Francisco Bay Guardian, 9/20/00).”

Savage’s best-selling book, *The Savage Nation*, includes passages such as the following: “The al-Qaida network is not America’s most dangerous enemy. To fight only the al-Qaida enemy is to miss the terrorist network operating within our own borders. Who are these traitors? Every rotten, radical left-winger in this country, that’s who.”

At the time of MSNBC’s hiring of this neo-fascist demagogue the network’s president Erik Sorenson described Savage as “brash, passionate and smart.” MSNBC officials, in a statement, asserted, “The addition of Michael Savage to the MSNBC lineup was made with the full awareness of his reputation for controversy and confrontation. We respect the right of those who wish to protest. However, we also strongly defend his new show as a legitimate attempt to expand the marketplace of ideas. By bringing our viewers a wide range of strong, opinionated voices, MSNBC underscores its commitment to ensuring that its perspective programming promotes no one single point of view.”

In the July 5 incident that resulted in his firing, Savage became involved in an angry exchange with a caller. After asking him, “Are you a sodomite?,” Savage continued, “You should only get AIDS and die, you pig. How’s that? Why don’t you see if you can sue me, you pig. You got nothing better than to put me down, you piece of garbage.”

MSNBC spokesman Jeremy Gaines explained, “His comments were extremely inappropriate.” Gaines described the decision to fire Savage as “an easy one.”

That Savage was hired by General Electric and Microsoft to pollute the airwaves on the eve of the

invasion of Iraq was not accidental. His engagement was one small part of the overall propaganda effort to intimidate anti-war opposition and stampede the US population into accepting the Bush administration's case for invading the Middle Eastern nation. In the build-up to war cable television news became little more than a 24-hour-a-day, 7-day-a-week forum in which countless retired generals, former CIA agents and self-proclaimed "counterterrorism experts" argued at length that a pre-emptive attack on Iraq was vital to US security and national interests.

Savage was hired shortly before veteran talk-show host Phil Donahue, known for his liberal views, was dropped by the cable network. MSNBC hired Savage, former Republican House Majority Leader Dick Armey and former Republican congressman Joe Scarborough—both also extreme right-wingers—in one stroke.

Bill Berkowitz, of WorkingForChange.com, commented in March, "MSNBC has been getting creamed in the rating wars by both the rapidly rising Fox News Channel [owned by Rupert Murdoch] and that old news warhorse, CNN. Recently, in moves that have symbiosis written all over it, MSNBC fired talk-show host Phil Donahue and hired Savage and two other right-wing ideologues." Donahue commented that the hirings "suggest a strategy to out-Fox Fox."

In the event, Savage did not do much for MSNBC's ratings. He drew an average audience of 347,000 and marginally improved the ratings for his time-slot.

A report commissioned by MSNBC on its future, cited by Rick Ellis (allyourtv.com), goes some distance to reveal the political motives at work in the network's programming decisions. Ellis notes that the Donahue firing came after NBC executives received the results of the study, which described Donahue as "a tired, left-wing liberal out of touch with the current marketplace." (In fact, Donahue attracted more viewers to MSNBC than any of its other programs, including Chris Matthews of "Hardball.")

Significantly, the report went on to claim that Donahue presented a "difficult public face for NBC in a time of war. ... He seems to delight in presenting guests who are anti-war, anti-Bush and skeptical of the administration's motives." Ellis writes, "The report went on to outline a possible nightmare scenario where the show becomes 'a home for the liberal antiwar

agenda at the same time that our competitors are waving the flag at every opportunity.'" "

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