

How the Internet keeps us safe from people like Thomas Friedman

By Andre Damon
14 October 2017

There are few public figures more justifiably reviled by thinking people than Thomas Friedman. As a columnist for the *New York Times*, Friedman has served as a propagandist for every war the United States has started over the past two decades, from the bombing of Serbia, to the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, to the “regime change” operations in Libya and Syria.

It was Friedman who infamously declared, hailing the US bombing campaign in Yugoslavia, “The hidden hand of the market will never work without the hidden fist—McDonald's cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas, the builder of the F-15.”

Friedman's malice is outdone only by his stupidity. Former *Times* journalist Chris Hedges summed up Friedman's persona when he recently noted in a WSWs interview that he might as well be writing for the satirical publication, *The Onion*.

Friedman's columns consist of pretentious, pseudo-intellectual rants worthy of Shakespeare's Polonius. In his public appearances, he gives the impression of a small-town police chief who has gone mad and proclaimed himself a world-class intellectual, and whom everybody is humouring as a malicious prank.

But like the proverbial holy fool, Friedman's tirades often spell out his reactionary arguments more directly than those of his smarter co-thinkers, who have the sense to speak with more reserve.

Such is the case with Friedman's latest column, “From Russia with Poison,” in which he serves as a cheerleader for Senator Mark Warren and Congressman Adam Schiff, who have spent the last several months hounding Facebook and Twitter into confessing that they were unwitting accomplices in Russia's attempt to subvert the 2016 US election.

In so doing, Friedman spells out a sweeping justification for state censorship that makes clear the deeply authoritarian impulses behind the hysteria whipped up by the Democrats, the *Washington Post*, and the *New York Times* against Russian “fake news,” used by the social media companies and Google as the framework for censoring oppositional views.

“There is an abiding dream in the tech world that when all the planet's people and data are connected it will be a better place,” Friedman writes. “But getting there is turning into a nightmare—a world where billions of people are connected but without sufficient legal structures, security protections or moral muscles among companies and users to handle all these connections without abuse.”

The last elections, Friedman asserts, show that Facebook and Twitter have “connected more people than they can manage and they've been naïve about how many bad guys were abusing their platforms.”

These companies' lack of “morals” was expressed in the insufficient enthusiasm with which they accepted Warner's absurd lie that \$44,000 in “Russian” advertisements swung the 2016 US election, and their resistance to publishing a blacklist of accounts supposedly belonging to “Russian agents.”

Friedman smugly notes, “Last November, Facebook C.E.O. Mark Zuckerberg dismissed as ‘a pretty crazy idea’ evidence that people were using Facebook to generate fake news to tip the US election.” But after he got a personal visit by Warner, no doubt accompanied by threats, Zuckerberg admitted, “Calling that crazy was dismissive and I regret it.”

Friedman explains these supposed moral transgressions by stating that Internet companies wrongly believe their business is to facilitate communication, instead of blocking it.

“One reason Facebook was slow to respond is that its business model was to absorb all of the readers of the mainstream media newspapers and magazines and to absorb all their advertisers but as few of their editors as possible.”

Friedman is, of course, referring to editors like those at the *Times*, one of whom, Bill Keller, infamously declared that the Freedom of the Press includes the “freedom not to publish.”

On the Internet, readers can choose between content “edited” by shells like Keller, and material published by Wikileaks and commented on by critical writers such as Seymour Hersh, Chris Hedges, and Robert Parry, not to mention the *World Socialist Web Site*, who denounce “editors” like Keller and the current, CIA-connected *Times* editorial page editor, James Bennet, as the enablers and accomplices to war crimes.

Friedman’s own admission that “alternative” news sources are absorbing “all of the readers of the mainstream media newspapers” makes clear which sources readers prefer.

At the *Times* newsroom and on TV talk shows, Friedman is regarded as a visionary, while online, where there is genuine freedom of the press, he is pilloried as a dunce and a criminal. Numerous articles, many of which have appeared on the *World Socialist Web Site*, have argued that if international law were interpreted as it was at the Nuremberg Trials, where pro-war propagandists were treated as equally culpable as the political leaders who launched criminal wars, Friedman would have to stand on the docket.

Friedman’s overriding aim is to prevent such criticism from finding an audience. His authoritarianism comes out most directly in the following passage: “America’s democracy is built on two principles: truth and trust,” he writes “We trust that our elections are fair and that enables our peaceful rotations of power.”

But reality is the exact opposite. Bernard Bailyn, in his masterful treatise *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, made clear that American democracy was not founded on trust, but of profound *distrust* of all authority, with the corollary that those in power are assumed to be lying.

“A better world,” Bailyn wrote, “than any that had ever been known could be built where authority was distrusted and held in constant scrutiny... where the use

of power over the lives of men was jealously guarded and severely restricted. It was only where there was this defiance, this refusal to truckle, this distrust of all authority, political or social, that institutions would express human aspirations, not crush them.”

The explosive growth of the Internet is driven by the same impulse. It allows people all over the world to access information critical of corrupt liars like Friedman, and provides the basis for discrediting them in the court of public opinion.

It is for this reason that Friedman supports the censorship of the internet.

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