

Brave New Films

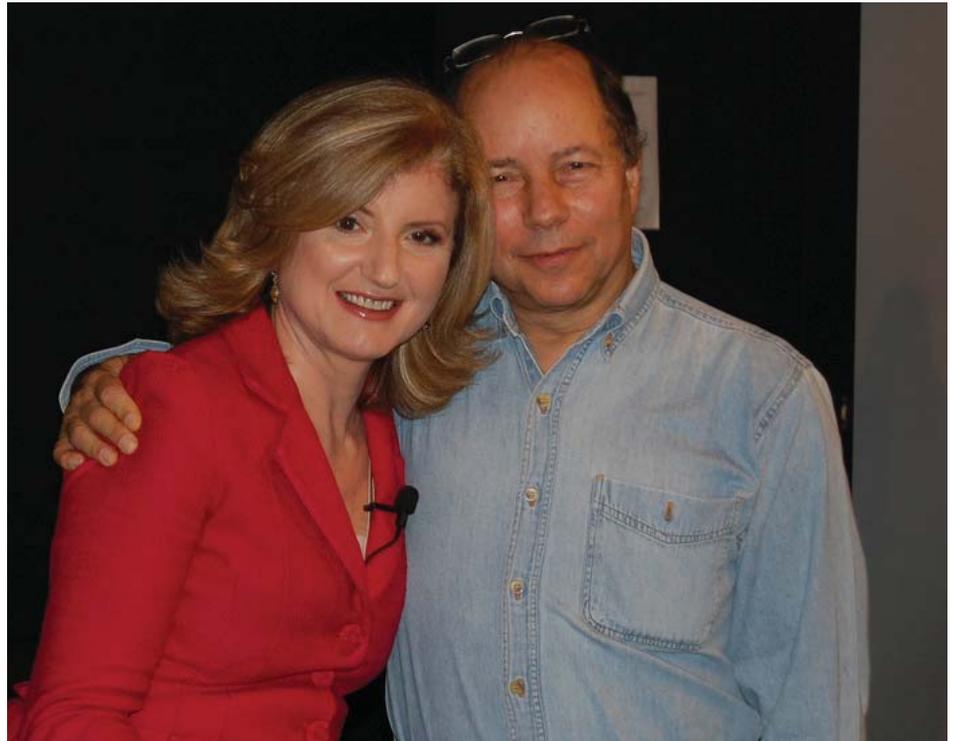
Using Online Videos for Agitation and Propaganda

By Neil Maghami

Summary: A veteran Hollywood producer of shoddy made-for-TV movies is the latest propagandist for crude left-wing politics. Unfortunately, he's developed some very effective methods using the latest technology—video and the Internet—to stir up trouble. And he's rethinking how nonprofits can deliver political messages.

Movement conservatives like to think ideas are important. They compile reading lists of books they have (or should have) read: Tocqueville and the *Federalist Papers*, Hayek and Friedman and Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. "Ideas have consequences" is a conservative slogan. By comparison, books and ideas don't seem to matter much to the modern Left. Academic leftists may continue to read Marx and babble about postmodernism, and a few liberal pundits cite John Maynard Keynes to defend stimulus spending, but most radical activists don't need arguments to believe life should be fair, with everyone equal and Dick Cheney in jail. The era of serious political debate about means and ends, rights and responsibilities is long gone.

These days what counts is marketing the message. Political activists, conservatives as well as liberals, focus on using modern technology to spread the word and prompt people to action. They look for new political campaign wonder-weapons, for just the right



Two left-wing propagandists: Robert Greenwald (at right) of Brave New Films poses with media magnate Arianna Huffington in 2009.

kind of information torpedo that will sink a rival's chance of victory.

Online videos are one such weapon. In an age when attention spans are short, when the spoken word is more powerful than the written word, and when images and music are more persuasive than arguments and ideas, political and issue campaigns have discovered online video. Activists are producing video messages for your computers, iPhones and

November 2011

CONTENTS

Brave New Films
Page 1

Briefly Noted
Page 8

BRAVE NEW FILMS

iPads. And Internet-savvy philanthropists are funding their productions.

It makes sense. So many people go online for basic information (Google, Wikipedia), for consumer purchases (Amazon) and rentals (Netflix), for feedback about everything from medical conditions, the reputation of doctors and dentists, and the quality of hotel rooms—why not harness the power of the Internet to mold political opinions? Imagine partisan “surround sound” videos that mesmerize the viewer and drown out rebuttals.

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The Propaganda Portfolio

A group called Brave New Films is a media pioneer in the production of short online political videos. Unwaveringly left-wing, it's not waiting to be hired by political candidates and their consultants. Instead, it promotes nonstop the political causes it believes in.

Consider “**Rethink Afghanistan**,” a 2009 documentary produced by Brave New Films that argues for an immediate pullout of U.S. troops from Afghanistan. As every filmmaker knows, documentaries are a hard sell. Theaters must be secured for limited dates and audiences persuaded to see a film according to a fixed schedule. Most documentaries are lucky to be shown at a few film festivals.

Brave New Films not only has solved these logistical problems but it's created new audiences for its film. It released “Rethink Afghanistan” in multiple segments online and for free. The film's website provides a series of two to four-minute video segments. They have topical names like “Nato forces in Afghanistan can't deny they killed civilians in Sangin anymore,” “Stop Drone Attacks Outside of War Zones,” and “How many more troops have to die before politicians end this war?” The online film clips can be watched immediately and all at once or singly at the viewer's convenience. They

also can be emailed to a friend or posted to the viewer's Facebook page along with a personal endorsement, an invitation to sign an antiwar petition, and a chance to record one's thoughts on an online blog. The truly committed can host a screening of the full-length hour-long documentary in their local communities.

Brave New Films rejects President Obama's plan to gradually wind down the American military presence. It urges viewers to donate to its affiliated Brave New Foundation in order to “drive public and insider opinion against the war until the administration brings our men, women, and tax dollars home.” Arianna Huffington says the videos “should be required viewing for everyone in the White House, the Congress, and the Pentagon.”

Another Brave New Films online project is called “**War Costs**.” This website combines videos on the Defense Department budget and the cost of the Afghanistan war with online petitions urging Congress to cut the defense budget to protect Social Security and Medicare. The warcosts.com website also provides tips on how to write an op-ed piece or letter to the editor supporting the documentary's thesis.

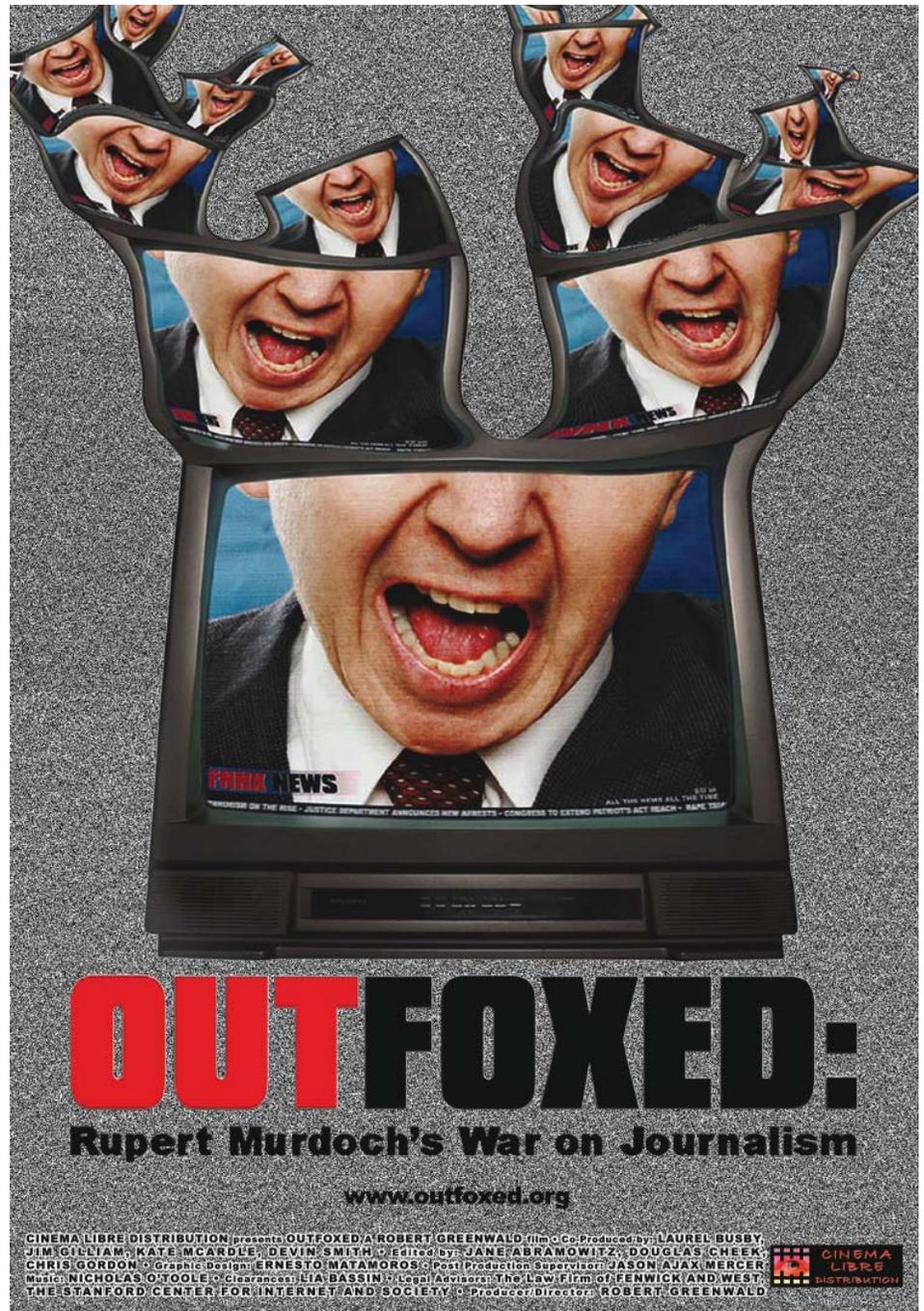
In an article on the website, Brave New

Films founder Robert Greenwald explains that America's fiscal crisis is an opportunity to reduce the armed forces. "The debt limit crisis that's consumed Washington, D.C. created an unexpected silver lining: the first opportunity in a decade to make real cuts to our runaway military budget," Greenwald writes with Derrick Crowe, political director of Brave New Foundation and a former spokesman for House minority leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and the national office of the Children's Defense Fund. "If we seize this opportunity, we can make big strides toward correcting a broken foreign policy that's made our weapons, not our ideals, the most prominent face of America abroad," they write.

The Brave New Films series of videos "**Sick for Profit: Where Do Our Premiums Go?**" profile the CEOs of the five largest health insurance companies who "are making millions at the expense of your health." As a narrator reports the stock options and salaries of the company executives, the videos show photos of their mansions. These are contrasted with interviews of people who describe the problems they face obtaining insurance coverage for their sick children.

The pie-in-the-sky "**Power Without Petroleum**" campaign demands that America pursue a "clean-energy economy" and end all domestic drilling for oil. The videos here promote "green jobs," the idea that subsidized wind and solar energy projects will substitute for coal mining and oil drilling to produce the jobs needed to cut unemployment and grow the economy.

There is a "**War on Greed**" video series with such self-explanatory titles as "**Stop Starbucks**," "**Stop Rush Limbaugh**" and "**Who's Keeping Burger King Workers in Poverty?**" "**The Real Carly**" campaign is a series of online videos about Republican
November 2011



Senate nominee Carly Fiorina. It appeared during her campaign to unseat California senator Barbara Boxer. As for the petition campaign that accompanied the video series "**Lieberman Must Go**," it generated 43,000 signatures and 4,000 phone calls to the Senate Democratic Steering Committee, urging it to strip the Connecticut Independent of his committee chairmanship.

Some Brave New Films video productions have no purpose but derision. **Brave New PacMan** is a silly online video that mocks Sarah Palin, Glenn Beck, Rush Limbaugh and Bill O'Reilly. Modeled on the popular 1980s video game, PacMan players capture the head of a conservative commentator, which triggers an audio clip. A sarcastic Limbaugh says, "How's that hoax and change working for you?"

Organization Trends

Other video campaigns are oddly parochial. The “**Stop Kennedy Smears**” campaign was aimed squarely at Hollywood entertainment industry insiders. “The Kennedys” is an eight-hour television miniseries that dramatically reenacts episodes in the personal lives of the Kennedy clan. Brave New Films assailed the program and launched a petition drive urging The History Channel and Showtime to refuse to show it. When the series eventually aired in April 2011 on the lesser-known cable ReelzChannel it got so-so reviews for its portrayal of such well-documented stories as the marital infidelities of John F. Kennedy. Joel Surnow, the film’s executive producer (and creator of the hit TV series “24”) blamed members of the Kennedy family (thought to include Caroline Kennedy and Maria Shriver) for privately pressuring The History Channel’s parent companies, A&E Television and The Walt Disney Company, to prevent its showing. Brave New Films coordinated the public campaign against the series, circulating petitions and rounding up historians to denounce the film as sordid and untrue.

Who’s Behind Brave New Films?

Brave New Films is the brainchild of “a 64-year-old film director, Robert Greenwald, and his small band of 20-something assistants.” That’s how the *New York Times* hailed the producers of a series of videos attacking Senator John McCain in June 2008. The story explained that the videos were a cheap and highly effective way to shape voter perceptions. Greenwald’s work was “potentially upending the way American presidential campaigns are fought.” Reported the *Times*: “Mr. Greenwald’s McCain videos, most of which portray the senator as contradicting himself in different settings, have been viewed more than five million times—more than Mr. McCain’s own campaign videos have been downloaded on YouTube.”

As the founder of Brave New Films—the name is an ironic reference to Aldous Huxley’s novel *Brave New World*—Robert Greenwald no doubt sees himself as speaking truth to power. According to his website, Greenwald

“is a producer, director and political activist. Greenwald is the founder and president of Brave New Films, a new media company that uses moving images to educate, influence, and empower viewers to take action around issues that matter... In total, Brave New Film’s short videos have been viewed over 56 million times in the past two years, inspired hundreds of thousands of people to take action and forced pressing issues into the mainstream media.”

While he is certainly a creative entrepreneur of the new media, Greenwald is no computer geek working on a shoestring budget. He is a well-connected Hollywood ultra-liberal who uses his power to reshape political perceptions. Greenwald’s website observes, “Prior to his documentary work, Greenwald produced and/or directed more than 55 television movies, miniseries and feature films... He has been honored for his activism by the ACLU Foundation of Southern California; the Liberty Hill Foundation; the Los Angeles chapter of the National Lawyers Guild; Physicians for Social Responsibility; Consumer Attorney’s Association of Los Angeles; Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy and the Office of the Americas.”

Greenwald is well known as an executive producer of Hollywood made-for-TV movies. Over four decades he has produced such films as “Portrait of a Stripper,” “How to Murder a Millionaire,” and “Trump Unauthorized.” As if to do penance for his sins, he also produces political consciousness-raising made-for-TV movies such as “Lois Gibbs and the Love

Canal” [mom discovers chemical dumping], “Redeemer” [quest to release reformed Black Panther from prison] and “Steal This Movie” [aging radical activist exposes past FBI spying]. Greenwald’s production company churns out these movies to fill the limitless hours available on TV.

It’s only been since 2000 that Greenwald made the jump to negotiating rights and raising money to produce political documentaries. In 2000 he was executive producer of “Unprecedented: The 2000 Presidential Election,” and in 2004 he was co-producer of “Uncovered: The War in Iraq” and “Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch’s War on Journalism.” The latter documentary attracted considerable notice because it criticized Fox News channel reporting and charged News Corp., the parent media conglomerate, with blurring the line between corporate interests and journalistic integrity. The film said Murdoch’s control of his news media empire compromised the public’s right to know and replaced unbiased reporting with public relations “spin.”

“Outfoxed” is a professionally produced film, but its heavy-handed commentary and sinister soundtrack make it easy to ridicule. Like the films of Michael Moore, it suggests that “the power structure” manipulates public opinion and that the practices of corporate America are comparable to those of organized crime. Veteran documentary filmmaker David Hoffman has observed that such films are “just too easy to make.” Tedious diatribes, they repeat left-wing dogma under the guise of fearlessly telling “truths.”

Documentaries like “Outfoxed” never make money at the box office. According to one estimate, “Outfoxed” cost an estimated \$200,000 to make and grossed about \$466,000 over three weeks in August 2004. But that’s not the point. Like Greenwald’s

two-minute videos against Sen. McCain, they aim to poison public opinion against their enemies. In the case of Brave New Films, the enemies include the oil industry, supermarkets, Rudy Giuliani, Karl Rove, Burger King, Starbucks, Wal-Mart, the Koch brothers, and critics of the Kennedys.

Funding the Brave New Enterprise

Greenwald's Brave New Films is registered with the IRS as a 501(c)(4) advocacy organization, which means that while the organization is tax-exempt, contributions to it are not. The organization's board members are Greenwald, entertainment executive Danny Goldberg, Progressive Majority president Gloria Totten, plaintiffs' attorney Guy Saperstein, and Jane Fonda ex-husband Tom Hayden. The group reported contributions of just over \$1,000,000 in 2009 and total revenues of about \$1.465 million. In 2010, Brave New Films reported just \$257,000 in contributions and \$850,000 in total revenues.

Distributing videos online is not expensive, but producing documentary films and the public campaigns against the film's targets does require added funding. Brave New Films appears to rely on the Brave New Foundation (also known publicly as Dreamcatchers), a registered 501(c)(3) public charity located at the same street address as Brave New Films – 10510 Culver Boulevard in Culver City, California. The foundation's mission "is to champion social justice issues by using a model of media, education and grassroots volunteer involvement that inspires, empowers, motivates and teaches civic participation and makes a difference."

In its 2010 annual report Brave New Foundation reported about \$3.2 million in income, including \$1.665 million in foundation grants and \$875,000 in major gifts. The foundation's 2009 IRS Form 990 reports \$1.449 million in contributions and grants and total revenue of \$3 million. Expenses,

BRAVENEW PACMAN

Barack Obama is a Pinhead!
I want everything Barack Obama does to fail

Are you ready to take on the right wing?

START GAME
Be sure to turn on your sound!

VOLUME

Email: optional

Brave New PacMan is a Brave New Films Production.

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mainly media production, have been about \$3 million. The Foundation board of directors consists of Greenwald, United Farm Workers co-founder Dolores Huerta, entertainment industry financier Irene Romero, labor lawyer Madeline Janis, activist law professor Lawrence Lessig, and *Nation* editor Katrina vanden Heuvel.

Brave New Foundation receives substantial grants from major foundations: In 2009, the Public Welfare Foundation approved a \$175,000 grant for "media strategies for health & safety workplace reform." The Stephen M. Silberstein Foundation committed \$75,000 to "champion social justice by using media." The Park Foundation in Ithaca, N.Y. gave \$25,000 to support the "No War

in Afghanistan Awareness and Advocacy" campaign. The Arcadia, Calif.-based Baytree Foundation gave \$25,000 for "general support", while the Houston, TX-based Lotus Foundation gave \$50,000 for "operational support". In 2010 the Tides Foundation gave the Foundation nearly \$14,000. Greenwald has boasted that the Foundation has "3,000 small-dollar donors" and that its list of large donors includes television producer Norman Lear, who gave \$1,000.

Brave New Films is a member of a networking group known as the Media Consortium, which counts some 40 left-wing media outlets such as *Nation* magazine, AlterNet, and the Center for Independent Media. The Consortium's sponsor is the San Francisco-based

Organization Trends

Foundation for National Progress, which is best known for its financial support for the far-left magazine *Mother Jones*.

Liberal foundations supporting the work of the Consortium frequently channel their contributions through the Foundation for National Progress (2009 income: \$9.2 million). In 2010 George Soros's Open Society Institute announced a two-year, \$200,000 commitment to the Consortium through the Foundation for National Progress. The Surdna Foundation earmarked \$100,000 to the Consortium, as did the Wyncote Foundation, which contributed \$70,000. Both grants were made through the Foundation for National Progress.

The link to Soros shows how Brave New Films and its online videos participate in his foundation-funded campaigns to influence U.S. politics. For at least a decade and a half George Soros has been interested in creating documentaries "to advance his goal of tilting America to the left," as a Capital Research Center report observed. (See "George Soros, Movie Mogul" by Rondi Adamson, *Foundation Watch*, March 2008.) A \$2 million Soros Documentary Fund was launched in 1996, and in 2001 it merged with Robert Redford's Sundance Institute to create "The Sundance Fund to Support International Documentary Projects." Gara LaMarche, former director of U.S. programs for the Open Society Institute, notes: "Nonfiction film can spur awareness and action, sometimes touching audiences beyond the reach of other methods." Movies "teach us about the world, what is happening to our fellow travelers on the globe—what is happening to us—and what we might do about it."

Why add Hollywood producers to an already-massive Soros network of radical filmmakers, activists and liberal foundation officials? Because, as columnist James Hirszen has observed, entertainment industry producers have skills that others don't.

The Koch Brothers: Brave New Films' Latest Target

A June 2011 blog post on Brave New Films' website telegraphed the nonprofit's latest target for smear-by-documentary: the philanthropists David and Charles Koch.

The post, by Anne Landman of the leftist Center for Media and Democracy, blames the condition of U.S. politics on "a sophisticated corporate echo chamber propaganda strategy funded primarily by the Koch brothers for the purpose of turning business-friendly, fringe right-wing ideas into mainstream policy arguments. The echo chamber strategy is very real, and has been perfected by corporate interests over the last several decades. It involves carefully selecting and fine-tuning a message that resonates with the populace, and then arranging to get that message repeated over and over through a variety of credible media sources."

Because David and Charles Koch believe in the power of ideas and in the need to defend free markets, they have dared to fund think tanks and policy institutes—including Capital Research Center. Their readiness to support the dissemination of ideas has led Greenwald to add them to his list of online video targets.

"Koch Brothers Exposed" is the latest eight-part video documentary that Brave New Films is screening online. The group proclaims, "This new campaign will be like none ever done before." Besides releasing each issue-focused segment of the documentary individually, Greenwald promises "a flurry of action around them. This campaign will live in film, online actions, grassroots efforts, community gatherings, ground actions, multi-media coverage, artistic components and collaboration with the larger community that is ready to take action. We have the wonderfully talented AgitPop onboard to help expose the Koch brothers, and will be working with many other progressive organizations to increase the shared impact of this effort."

Agitpop is a public relations outfit that engages in what it calls "guerilla marketing" and "net-roots subvertising." Headed by John Sellars, president of the notorious Ruckus Society, it has a client list that ranges from the leftist activists at MoveOn.org, True Majority, the Rainforest Action Network, and Amnesty International to the ostensibly nonpartisan Rock the Vote and United Cerebral Palsy.

It's unclear whether Brave New Films and Agitpop have generated as much public pressure as they anticipated with their anti-Koch campaign. However, Koch Industries senior vice president and general counsel Mark Holden noted in a letter to *New York Times* public editor Arthur Brisbane that a *Times* May 4, 2011 story, "Liberal Group's Video Assails Koch Brothers" appeared to be less a news report on the video than a concerted campaign to give the video publicity.

Brave New Films in Context

You could grow numb watching Brave New Films' video output and wonder about the underlying meaning of its messages and the political strategy behind it.

In 2009, the Media Consortium published "The Big Thaw: Charting a New Future for Journalism." This paper, available on the Internet, has received little attention. That's a shame, because it holds the key to understanding how the political Left plans to use tax-exempt media outlets like Brave New Films to expand its power using new media.

"Big Thaw" argues that fundamental changes in the mass media business model pose more than a problem in how newspapers and television stations will make a profit. Such factors as the rise of the Internet, changes in consumer preferences for receiving news, and producer methods for delivering news represent an unprecedented opportunity. For the so-called progressive movement, they are the Left's opportunity to enhance its political power.

Through so-called "independent media"

such as Brave New Films, the Left is positioning people like Robert Greenwald to shape political messaging. People like Greenwald are “community organizers” for the digital age.

“Independent media outlets could borrow tactics from other groups. Change.org [another activist website] is already mobilizing communities around blogging and journalistic content. What if independent media organizations built more robust membership programs that can support their work and be activated for social action?

According to “Big Thaw,” the journalist-as-community-organizer can make a big difference:

“Traditional journalists often do not like to mix community organizing with journalism because it can contaminate the credibility of the reporting. However, as the competitive landscape shifts from scarcity to abundance of information and voices, the ability to ‘cover’ the news objectively is no longer the most valuable key competency. Building active communities among users is exponentially growing in value.

The study points to the Sierra Club, which has 716,000 dues paying members, all of whom receive its free magazine. Whatever influence the magazine loses because of its perceived bias is more than made up for by the strong-arm tactics of the Sierra Club organization.

“If community building becomes a new competitive advantage [for media outlets seeking viewership/readership], then declaring a perspective may become more valuable than seeking objectivity.”

In other words, when Brave New Films

November 2011

goes online with anti-McCain or anti-Koch videos and encourages viewers to comment, petition and take action, it is organizing an online militia much as when the Sierra Club summons its hundreds of thousands of members to press Congress to enact radical environmental policies.

In this way, Robert Greenwald’s goal is not to produce an informative leftwing documentary. It is to energize an online political community. This is “virtual community organizing,” and it costs a fraction of the time and money required for direct mail, phone calls, and print advertisements.

When visitors to the Brave New Films webpage can volunteer to be “Distribution Advocates” for the nonprofit’s videos, they are mobilizing themselves to circulate Brave New Films’ content “through their Facebook page, MySpace page, blog, YouTube channel, and posting to other blogs.”

These advocates may even become online snoops who will agree to “write comments on blogs, monitor other people’s comments about Brave New Films, and alert Brave New Films of notable comments.”

The goal is to build up the Left’s power base using nonprofits funded by foundation grants. The method is the techno-wizardry of Brave New Films’ “community organizing.”

Conclusion

Robert Greenwald is one snarling, angry guerilla warrior. He and his backers disdain conservative politics and the conservative media. That’s their right as Americans. “No one questions [an] artist’s right to speak, organize, contribute to political causes and insert political messages into his creative productions,” wrote CRC researchers Brian Tubbs and Robert James Bidinotto in “The Hollywood Left” – John Kerry’s Most Loyal Constituency” (*Foundation Watch*, September 2004).

Greenwald’s political documentaries are continuations of his made-for-TV movies. They manipulate emotional responses to shape political perceptions and to damage

his political opponents as much as possible. The way he edits and posts his videos online and urges his viewers to take action is innovative and creative. But don’t expect him to encourage thoughtful reflection, offer up ideas or make a persuasive argument. The Left is way beyond that.

Neil Maghami, a frequent contributor to Capital Research Center publications, most recently wrote about the environmentalist war against nuclear power (Green Watch, June 2011).

OT

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We need your help in the current difficult economic climate to continue our important research.

Your contribution to advance our watchdog work is deeply appreciated.

Many thanks.

Terrence Scanlon
President

Briefly Noted

Evidence is mounting that suggests that **ACORN** is paying people to participate in the Occupy Wall Street protests. The **SEIU-funded Working Families Party**, a front group for ACORN, placed a want ad on the Craig's List website in September recruiting activists to carry out "direct action," a leftist term for tactics of provocation and sabotage. WFP organizer **Nelini Stamp** said the protests are aimed at "trying to change the capitalist system" and bringing "revolutionary changes to the states."

Leaked emails reveal that Occupy Wall Street (OWS) organizer **Harrison Schultz**, who works at **Atrinsic**, a publicly traded corporation, called the burgeoning movement both "a revolutionary plan" and a "Corporate Funded Revolution." Schultz wrote that corporate money may be needed after financial support from radicals dries up. In fact **George Soros** has funded many of the left-wing groups participating in the nationwide OWS demonstrations through his **Open Society Institute**.

Radical labor organizer **Stephen Lerner** of SEIU, a prime architect of the Occupy Wall Street demonstrations, said he intends to terrorize the families of bank executives in their homes. At the left-wing Take Back the American Dream conference in Washington, D.C. last month, Lerner said he will send union goons to "visit" CEOs at their homes. He also told another recent gathering that it is necessary to demonize people like **JPMorgan Chase** CEO **Jamie Dimon** in order to advance the socialist agenda. "We've got to be clear on the human beings who are bad," he said. Wealthy corporate leaders must be ostracized, he said. "How do we make it so politicians don't even want their money because their money's toxic, it's dirty, it's evil."

Tea Party activists recently met with anti-corporate liberals at Harvard Law School to discuss the possibility of convening a new constitutional convention to deal with what they consider to be failures in the American system of government, Daily Caller reports. The Constitutional Convention Conference ("ConConCon") — was chaired by left-wing professor **Lawrence Lessig** and **Tea Party Patriots** co-founder **Mark Meckler**. "The Framers created a method for escaping from captured government: An Article V Constitutional Convention," said a joint statement. "The conference's lead organizers are both proponents and opponents of an Article V convention and we actively encourage the participation of those who support a convention and those who oppose holding a convention at all."

National Republicans have created the **Congressional Leadership Fund**, the first GOP "Super PAC" focused exclusively on House races, the *Politico* reports. The new entity chaired by former Sen. Norm Coleman (R-Minn.), aims to compete with the **Democratic House Majority PAC**, which is backed by House Democratic leader **Nancy Pelosi** (D-Calif.). "We will counter efforts on the left including the House Majority PAC, unions and the ACORN-style groups," said **Brian Walsh**, president of Congressional Leadership Fund. Former National Republican Congressional Committee chairman **Tom Reynolds**, **American Action Network** chairman **Fred Malek**, and former Rep. **Vin Weber** (R-Minn.) sit on the new fund's board.