



Soviet Style, Facebook Plants Negative Stories about Google

Sometimes you just wish that both sides in a contest could lose. Such is the case with respect to the latest revelation about Facebook: that it hired a PR firm to plant negative stories about Google. Writes Dan Lyons at *The Daily Beast*:



For the past few days, a mystery has been unfolding in Silicon Valley. Somebody, it seems, hired Burson-Marsteller, a top public-relations firm, to pitch anti-Google stories to newspapers, urging them to investigate claims that Google was invading people's privacy. Burson even offered to help an influential blogger write a Google-bashing op-ed, which it promised it could place in outlets like the *Washington Post*, Politico, and The Huffington Post.

The plot backfired when the blogger turned down Burson's offer and posted the emails that Burson had sent him. It got worse when *USA Today* broke a story accusing Burson of spreading a "whisper campaign" about Google "on behalf of an unnamed client."

After learning that the unnamed client was Facebook, *The Daily Beast* subsequently received confirmation from a company spokesman that it had, in fact, hired Burson. And the company is well-suited to the task it was assigned. Lyons also tells us, "Mark Penn, Burson's CEO, has been a political consultant for Bill Clinton, and is best known as the chief strategist in Hillary Clinton's 2008 presidential campaign." In other words, Burson could probably disgorge a 25-page analysis on the definition of the word "is."

Given Google's hard-left bent and censorship of Truth via the scrubbing of politically incorrect sites from its news search, one of my reactions here is that this couldn't have happened to a nicer company (and, ironically, the company's motto is "Don't be evil" — heck, don't be Google). Yet a more important reaction is to lament the amorality of our time.

While the reportage on the Facebook/Google spat focuses mainly on its minutiae, there's a more significant story here: While I don't know for sure that Burson intended to use falsehoods in its smear campaign (gratuitous repetition of unflattering truth works, too), there's no doubt that many Americans today are exhibiting an increasing willingness to use lies and deceit to achieve their ends.

Consider, for instance, the RATHERGATE scandal in which CBS peddled forged documents containing damaging misinformation about President Bush two months prior to the 2004 election. Or consider the recent Associated Press poll that showed Barack Obama's approval rating at 60 percent — by sampling



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almost twice as many Democrats as Republicans. Now, since when has polling been fused with op-ed ambitions? It's as if the media aren't even trying to hide their bias anymore.

Next we have the *New York Times*, which is increasingly specializing in slime. It lied about the Arizona immigration law, about the 2004 Bush/Kerry vote recount, about Iraq's attempts to buy uranium from Niger, and in implying that Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans were inordinately disposed to commit murder, to cite a handful of examples. In the *Times'* case, though, at least it's upholding tradition: The paper's Moscow correspondent in the 1920s, Walter Duranty, was an admirer of Stalin who routinely spread falsehoods designed to paint the Soviets in a positive light. And, writes Mark Herring of the *Oxford University Press*, "Duranty loved to repeat, when Stalin's atrocities were brought to light, 'you can't make an omelet without breaking a few eggs.' Those 'eggs' were the heads of men, women and children, and those 'few' were merely tens of millions." I should add that Duranty broke some eggs of his own: It was propaganda such as his that inspired some Depression-era Americans to leave the United States for the "greener pastures" of the USSR. Most of them died in Soviet gulags.

Apropos to this, planting false stories for the purposes of destroying opponents was a favored tactic of the Soviets. This isn't surprising, as it's what evil people do. And, tragically, we are more like our erstwhile Cold War enemy than ever. You see, while there were exceptions, it used to be that American journalists had to deceive themselves (rationalize) before they could deceive others; they would disseminate untruths only after first fooling themselves about reality. But now lying — *knowingly* spreading an untruth — is becoming increasingly common. And Rathergate illustrated these two phenomena well. Dan Rather, the old guard, wouldn't have knowingly peddled false documents, but some new-guard liar did. And then Rather, the rationalizer, salivating over what he wanted to hear, simply didn't apply the scrutiny he would have if the unfairly maligned had been a fellow Leftist traveler.

Getting back to the Facebook scandal, it illustrates why I'll never be an admirer of the corporate world. With a few notable exceptions (Chick-fil-A comes to mind), one of the few positive things I can say about modern big business is that it isn't modern big government. But it is cut from the same self-serving stone, which is why it more than ever is colluding with the latter (watch the documentary *Generation Zero* for an eye-opener). Oh, don't get me wrong — the reality behind these cynical complaints about institutions is that just as people get the government they deserve, they get the academy, media, entertainment, and businesses they deserve, too. These realms don't exist independent of a market, you know. But that doesn't mean I won't score executives who would sell their mothers' souls for a 13-percent growth in Web traffic.

As for the increasing acceptance of lies, it's not surprising in a land that no longer believes in Absolute Truth. After all, being honest can be inconvenient at times, so what will inspire you to sacrifice in honesty's name? If you believe that "Thou shalt not bear false witness" is a divine injunction, you may. If you understand that Truth has an existence unto itself and that it must be worshipped above all else, you may discard even lies that advance your agenda. But a person who denies Truth will subordinate it to his agenda; then, anything that advances the latter is fair game. For it is working in the service of what has become a god in his life.

This gets at, by the way, the problem confronting traditionalists in our cultural and political wars: We bring morality to a relativist fight. It's a blessed disadvantage the other side will never know.



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