MEDIA RELEASE

17 October 2019

Shameless media bias in Ecuador and Hong Kong revolts

While the mainstream media provides non-stop coverage of the unrest occurring in Hong Kong, recent turmoil in Ecuador barely rates a mention, yet seven protestors are dead, 1,340 injured and 1,152 have been arrested. Ecuadorians took to the streets *en masse* after President Lenín Moreno implemented a brutal austerity package as part of an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This neoliberal economic assault includes a 20 per cent decrease in the salary of public employees, plans to privatise pensions, and the elimination of fuel subsidies which has seen the price of diesel more than double overnight. Moreno called a state of emergency in reaction to the protests and deployed both the police and military in a brutal crackdown that befits a fascist police state.

But President Moreno is an ally of the City of London and Wall Street financial oligarchy, so it's no surprise the corporate media pay little attention to his brutal regime. In April Moreno gave the order to evict Australian journalist Julian Assange from the Ecuadorian embassy, describing him as a "spoiled brat". This the man who's done more than any other journalist to expose war crimes, global corruption and human rights abuses. Assange exposed Hillary Clinton as the primary architect of the war in Libya, and released transcripts of her closed-door speeches to Goldman Sachs for which the bank paid her US$675,000—a payoff for her opposition to restoring the Glass-Steagall separation of banks perhaps?

Videos circulating on social media show unarmed demonstrators lying on the ground after being shot by police. Likewise, video evidence released by the Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos (CIDH) shows a protester drop to the ground after a sniper allegedly shot him in the head. Journalists exposing such human rights violations are under fire themselves. The Ecuadorian government Telecommunications Regulation and Control Agency shut down Pichincha Communications radio station following its reporting of police brutality against protestors. The Committee to Protect Journalists reported on 4 October that police officers pushed, kicked, and sprayed tear gas at a group of about 20 journalists in Ecuador's capital city Quito. The journalists were reportedly wearing clearly marked press vests at the time they were attacked.

Under Moreno's regime of IMF austerity, the level of structural poverty has increased from 23.1 per cent in June 2017 to 25.5 per cent in June 2019. Some economists estimate this will rise to 30 per cent by the end of the year should the current austerity plan proceed. Extreme poverty has risen from 8.4 per cent to 9.5 per cent during the same time period. Impoverished Ecuadorians have a choice: fight to end austerity or die of poverty and starvation which they know is the reality given skyrocketing food prices. In latest news President Moreno has reinstated the fuel subsidies in a deal to end the demonstrations.

Meanwhile in Hong Kong

Hong Kong authorities have been remarkably constrained in dealing with the violent protests of the last several months. Hong Kong police have not killed any protestors despite facing multiple threats to their own lives. Eighteen-year-old Tsang Chi-kin who was shot in the chest at close range is now recovering and has been charged with rioting and two counts of assaulting officers. Video footage clearly shows the context of the shooting: rioters chased a police officer and attacked him with metal rods. Other police came to his rescue and clearly only drew their guns when they were under attack. Any police force in the world would do the same.

While the corporate media refers to a "pro-democracy" movement in Hong Kong, Australian Seven News reporter Robert Ovadia discovered first-hand the actual reality. In a 9 October Facebook post he states, "I have never seen disinformation weaponised with such venom as my time in Hong Kong." He reported his experience in assisting well-known Hong Kong actress, Celine Ma, who protested the protesters. "Pro-democracy" thugs sprayed her in the face, punched her, shoved her to the ground, and smashed a glass bottle over her head.

Ovadia then describes the fake news: "Organisations like Apple Daily, which has specific links to the 'pro-democracy' protesters, deliberately edit videos out of context to alter their audience's impression of what happened, to make it seem like she attacked protesters first. A brief description of this is 'propaganda'. Apple Daily starts its sequence with Ms Ma defending herself, making her look like the aggressor and that became the narrative for so many. …

"My role in this was little more than a journalist seeking to interview her and I put myself between her and the mob to do it. I had not anticipated her pleading with me to escort her to the police station, which I felt compelled to do, and I certainly did not anticipate what followed in the coming days. For helping this woman, I was labelled 'pro China'. That led to … a torrent of abuse online and, far worse, death threats."

Despite his being a Seven News reporter, the Australian press has ignored Ovadia's Facebook post which contradicts the establishment narrative on the Hong Kong unrest. The Western media continues to paint China as an oppressive force, yet while China has lifted more than 850 million people out of poverty in four decades, poverty rates continue to rise in nations under the stranglehold of the City of London and Wall Street financial oligarchy. This extends to Hong Kong, which as a Special Administrative Region is still dominated by institutions of its British colonial past such as HSBC, still headquartered in Central Hong Kong.

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