



Max Blumenthal & Aaron Mate slam corporate media disinfo at Collision Toronto

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Martina Fuchs (MF): Good afternoon, everybody. Great to see you. Gentlemen, please follow me. Don't be scared. This is going to be a very controversial and hot topic that we are going to discuss in the next 20 minutes. The guys here can't take Q&A questions from the floor, so it will be a panel discussion. But afterwards, please join them outside and ask all the questions that you want. They will be available for you afterwards. So talking about the mainstream media; there is the truth; can we trust the mainstream media and where is the line between fact and fringe?! This is a very crucial and very timely topic, of course, with what's going on in the world, with the decoupling between China and the rest of the world, the war in Ukraine and Russia. So we want to hear from Grayzone, which of course, has come under fire several times as well. But first of all, let me ask the editor in chief here next to me, Max, what was the motivation to set Grayzone up about eight years ago now?

Max Blumenthal (MB): Well, in short, there was nowhere else I could do the reporting that we do. Because by the time I set it up as a fully independent entity in 2018, the mainstream press in the US had been fully consolidated as essentially an arm of the intelligence services, the national security state. And what we aim to do, which is what journalists like Sy Hersh, our friend, traditionally did, is to expose the deceptions that are taking us into these disastrous wars, which are now wrecking our economy and possibly imperilling all your start-ups. It's something that the mainstream media now, echoing Joe Biden as this little band of stenographers, is calling the Putin price hike. And for doing the kind of reporting we do, no one debates us. They don't challenge us on the facts. What they do and Aaron is going to address this is they try to deplatform us. They try to censor us. And they claim that me and Putin made a deal to set up The Grayzone. They also say, you know, I mean, this is the mainstream press, the one that's freaking out about disinformation; you've had a lot of panels here on disinformation. They also said that Putin paid bounties to the Taliban to kill US troops. The New York Times reported that. As if the Taliban needed extra incentive to get rid of occupiers that had been there for 20 years. They said that Putin fabricated the existence of

Hunter Biden's laptop, as if the Biden family couldn't be completely corrupt with business deals in China and Ukraine. They said that Putin helped Kamala Harris, the VP, said that Putin helped launch the anti-racism protests of Colin Kaepernick while CNN reported that Putin is spreading racism in the United States. I mean, Putin is being blamed now by a member of parliament in the UK named Tobias Ellwood for the British rail strikes. So what's going on here? Why is Putin being blamed for everything? It's because the role of the mainstream press, which is spreading all these lies, which is the most prolific disseminator of disinformation on the planet, is seeking to distract us from what our predator class at home is actually doing to us, to divide us and destroy our economic livelihoods.

MF: So these are quite some hard lines. Now, talk about censorship, right, Aaron. You must have come really under attack for exactly defending your, you know, editorial guidelines, right? Tell me about how that came about.

Aaron Maté (AM): Just recently at The Grayzone, we obtained some leaks from a British journalist named Paul Mason who claimed about...

MB: About a British journalist.

AM: ...about a British journalist..

MB: Yeah.

AM: Yeah, right. But these emails of Paul Mason; and basically he was plotting with some colleagues and some contacts inside the British national national security state to have us deplatformed. And there's a long conversation about it, and I can't go into details, but basically nowhere in these exchanges does it occur to them that if we don't agree with The Grayzone, why don't we just write an article debunking them? They've put out a bunch of reporting. We cover all sorts of topics; you know, Russia, Syria, Ukraine, China. Put out an article refuting us based on facts. That's what intellectually honest people do.

MB: These emails expose a prominent British journalist working with someone in the UK Foreign Office who is an intelligence officer, Andy Price, to get us removed from all social media platforms and removed from PayPal as other alternative media outlets like MIT Press and Consortium News were, simply because he doesn't like our opinions on the NATO proxy war in Ukraine. That's where we're at, right, now.

MF: Guys, Grayzone basically means standing between black and white. Would you really stand between different sides or are you basically always taking the counter side? It seems to me like you're, you know, against all mainstream media and just, you know, for everything else.

AM: We have our political views. I mean, I personally identify with the left. I always have. But the facts are the facts. And journalism was once considered a trade where the facts come first. But in this environment, where essentially our journalism is controlled by the same people who control our society...

MF: So are you only fact based or are you opinionated? And do you write commentaries and all that?

AM: We have our opinions, but the facts always come first. And what makes us stand out, I think, is that so many of our colleagues, unfortunately, have abandoned that tradition of not putting the facts first. And, you know, look, the most hilarious example to me was when for four years it was fashionable in the US to believe that the president of the US was a Russian asset and was being compromised with p-tapes and other forms of blackmail. It was transparently ridiculous. It was a scam, but everybody went along with it, not because I think they actually believed it, because that was the dominant partisan narrative of that time and we were above that.

MF: I guess it's fair to say that most people here also in the audience and myself don't trust all the mainstream media because we have so many different platforms right now, social media; we get a lot of sources sometimes, it's of course, an overflow of news as well. So it's really important that we select wisely and we make our judgement afterwards. But would you say that the trust in the mainstream media will decline further from here, or has it reached the lowest point already?

MB: Hopefully it will. People need to see that the mainstream media has functioned as a mighty Wurlitzer for the policy makers that are engaged in a controlled demolition of our economy. A new survey reported by the Quincy Institute in Washington shows that US media reported more on Ukraine, all with one voice, one message, one line which was completely identical to the line of the Defence Department and the State Department, which is also the line of the Canadian government, more than it ever reported in any month on the US assault on Iraq and Afghanistan. And so it's the mainstream media that's been driving what Congress now acknowledges is a NATO proxy war in Ukraine. And what is it led to? It has led to hyperinflation through the sanctioning of one of the world's largest exporters of oil. It has led to record gas prices. It's led to economic ruin on the horizon, a global recession, famine in the global south. And the media was telling you that Ukraine was going to win. The Russian economy would be ruined. These sanctions were just and everything's going to be fine. And the public is not on board anymore. Maybe this is a bubble and you don't feel that here, but go outside and talk to regular people. The people who were ignored and demonised by the Canadian media, like the people who are protesting in Ottawa, who had their bank accounts seized, who were called hatemongers and white supremacists. Those people are not going to be happy.

AM: There are so many reasons why the public has lost confidence in the media. I mean, we all remember Iraq, WMDs [Weapons of mass destruction]. Even in the run up to the 2020 election, some anonymous intelligence officials decided to say that Hunter Biden's laptop was just Russian disinformation, and that was enough for pretty much every single media outlet, with a few exceptions, to say, okay, we're not going to cover it. And then now we have to acknowledge, Oh, yeah, right; we were wrong about that. But there are so many examples of this. And so when it happens enough times, no wonder people are losing trust. You know, and by the way, there are stories that the media won't even cover, that we cover like the OPCW [Organisation for the Prohibition of chemical weapons] cover up scandal, which is a story about an alleged chemical attack in Syria. And then you had the world's top chemical weapons watchdog go and investigate it. Their own investigators found no evidence of that, but they were censored. We've gotten leaks from that investigation and we report on it. The rest of the media won't even acknowledge the existence of these whistleblowers. And so when you have enforced censorship like that from the media outlets themselves, people are going to lose trust and go to alternative sources.

MF: I remember when Al Jazeera launched in Qatar, one of their main mottos and goals was, well you probably understand: one opinion and the other opinion. It's always important of course to show all sides of the story. But to me it seems that your work is activist journalism, right? You don't want to just show the second side of the story. So what is your ultimate goal?

MB: All the mainstream media are activist journalists. They're activists for neoliberal capitalism and for the political establishment. That's why they spend hours and hours on January 6th, instead of doing hours and hours of reporting in the trenches in Appalachia of people who are dying of opioid deaths and being flooded with this poison. There are so many issues they could be talking about. Why are they talking about January 6th constantly? It's because they are activists for their cause. And we are transparent about what we believe. So you can trust that we have these beliefs. And for that reason, we are accused of disinformation. There's actually a speaker yesterday from a group called the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, funded by the UK and US Governments that has published a paper accusing Aaron of being one of the most prolific spreaders of disinformation on the globe on the issue of Syria. But they never pointed out one piece of disinformation. They've refused our request for an interview.

AM: But just that claim itself is enough for an outlet like The Guardian, a mainstream outlet, to then repeat that study, to do an article about it and repeat the claim that I spread disinformation without identifying a single case or actually allegedly spread disinformation.

MF: Right. So, Aaron, are you getting death threats? Have you come under attack, physical verbal attacks?

AM: No. I mean, I'm fortunate to not have face, for example, what Julian Assange is facing right now where he's being caged and tortured because he is really the foremost person in the world of exposing western state crimes. And he's actually a great example of what we're talking about when you really do your job as a journalist; when you educate humanity about the inhumanity of our rulers, they are going to pour down on you all the inhumanity that they have. And that's why he's now stuck in a prison and facing possible extradition to the US.

MB: And let's be clear, WikiLeaks has never published anything false. They've never published a false document. And that's why he's jailed. That's why the Biden administration is seeking to extradite him. That's why the Trump administration sought to poison him when he was trapped in an embassy in London. And that is why he is not only being demonised, but the rest of the media seems sort of disinterested in this case. This is the single press freedom case of our lifetime that will determine if the press will be free. And it seems to me that the corporate press is not very interested in Julian Assange because they don't want to bite the hand that feeds them, which is the intelligence services that are seeking to kill him.

MF: And of course, we also have to talk about business and the background of your operation. So I think the audience would love to know also how you are funded and how you select the stories and who your audience is? Can you talk to me about that?

MB: Well, we're funded by hundreds and hundreds of people just like you through Patreon. We're still on PayPal somehow. I don't know how long that will last. And we bring in revenue through my Rokfin show, through our live streams. And anyone who might like to donate a little more, which is not a lot, it's basically enough for us to barely continue this three person operation.

MF: Three people?

MB: Yeah, we have three people. And I pay contributors small fees for articles. Anyone else is a friend of mine in the US who are usually people I met through the Palestine Solidarity Movement, which I participated in as a reporter for many years, which helped me get kicked out of the media.

MF: Let me ask you, Aaron, what is the future for fact based reporting? Do you think we will have more political interference, less freedom of speech? What do you tell, especially the next generation of journalists, if there still are?

AM: Well, in the future, I mean, I think so much rides on the case of Julian Assange. If the US succeeds in extraditing him and imprisoning him and killing him as I think they want to do, I think that's the end of fact based journalism. Because look, the case they're bringing against them is based on the Espionage Act. They're essentially criminalising him for publishing factual information. So if the case against Assange prevails, then journalism loses,

I think for good. And it's losing right now already with- as Max talked about- the absence of outcry from people in the media who should be leading the charge to save Julian Assange's life. And your second question, sorry?! Oh yes, that advice to journalists. Listen, if you want to really be independent, it depends what you want to do. If you want to get in the corporate media, they're avenues to do that. You go to journalism school, as it's called, and you go that route if you want to be an independent journalist, which in my view, means having your integrity and your honesty intact. I would recommend finding another way to support yourself because it's very difficult to do. And we're fortunate we found an audience and people who support us and it's great, but it's a hard path to follow. The system is designed to rob you of your integrity and your independence. So it's difficult and just keep that in mind if you're trying to go into it.

MB: Can I take a stab at that question? Our public commons are not Hyde Square where there's a speaker in the corner. We don't have an actual public media. We have a social media infrastructure that is controlled by oligarchs. And those oligarchs, as we saw with Eric Schmidt talking about his work with the Pentagon and with figures like Henry Kissinger, are deeply embedded and invested with the state and specifically the NATO states. And when you have someone like Barack Obama running around talking about getting hate and violence off of social media and getting more government involvement in there, but not with any transparency, we have to question that and resist that because it's Barack Obama who spread so much violence around the world, who lied to the public to topple the government of Libya, destabilise an entire region, and bring slavery back to the African continent. We saw slave auctions as a result of Obama's regime change war in Libya, and he wants to lecture us about disinformation and truth and reality and tell the social media platforms who to censor, who to remove, and what the algorithm should be. No, we need to resist these figures, and that's what we will do as independent media until there can be an actual talk about real media reform.

MF: We only have 30 seconds left. We could continue for ages. It's fascinating, whatever your opinion is. Aaron, last question to you. What do you think is the role of social media in promoting fake news, in the future, especially?

AM: Well, look, I think this concern about fake news has been overblown. I think the biggest purveyors of fake news are our establishment media, outlets that lie to us on any issue, that the powers that control our media and our government basically tell them to. So I think, you know, obviously there are problems with social media and it's very easy for fake stories to spread. But I'm most concerned with the fake stories that kill people, that kill children around the world based on lies that lead us to war and justify murderous sanctions that cripple entire economies. That's what I'm concerned about.

MF: Very, very, very last question, I promise. Max, in five to ten years, where do you think will The Grayzone be?

MB: In five to ten years I hope that Julian Assange will be free and will be able to be with his family and we'll still be able to have conversations like this. And I'm not sure that that's the case. And the corporate media, which is represented well at this conference, will be to blame.

MF: Maybe even Julian Assange will join your company one day.

MB: I would love that. I've become close to his family and it's really painful to see the destruction of someone simply for publishing facts.

MF: Very interesting discussion, very controversial. As I said, the guys will be outside taking your questions as well. Please be gentle and polite. And some food for thought here for sure. Take care and thank you very much.

AM + MB: Thank you. Thanks.

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