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## How to Defeat the Corporate Ideology Mills

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Despite having zero credibility in real economics, corporatist / trickle-down ideology continues to be pervasive throughout US media and politics, and for a very simple reason: Those with an interest in spreading it have created a vertically-integrated propaganda machine that *simulates* the propagation of real information across society and cuts off the public from reality. I break down the process of how this works below, and how to combat it.

In the reality-based information system, policy change begins with academic organizations such as universities and also smaller institutions called "think tanks" where experts collaborate to infuse politics with scientific and scholarly leadership. Based on consensus views in a given field, as well as studies undertaken by a given institution, recommendations are made in the form of letters to political leaders, white papers targeted at policymaking professionals, and occasionally mass-media articles aimed at the public. From there, journalists may or may not cover the think tank findings, depending on their relevance to a general audience and the credibility of the organization that released them, and policymakers/politicians may or may not change something they do accordingly if the information is highly relevant, reliable, and can be addressed practically.

This was how American government largely functioned from WW2 until the Reagan administration, producing the greatest explosion of wealth, general prosperity, and general freedom in human history: The opinions and recommendations of experts were usually treated as what they are, and given nonpartisan weight in the normal course of politics, while those that didn't meet basic academic standards were ignored as what they were - unsubstantiated opinions. But ever since Reagan made it a statement of moral principle to just ignore facts, this system has been pushed aside, and is now an exiled minority of what goes on - especially as it concerns fiscal and trade policy.

Instead, corrupt forces have created a kind of zombie facsimile of that system that obeys their orders every step of the way, with both the content of recommendations and their ultimate adoption by political authorities guaranteed in advance. In place of think tanks, they've created a system of **ideology mills** such as the **American Enterprise Institute** (AEI), **Cato Institute**, and similarly dogmatic institutions whose only purpose is to create the form and pretext of

academic recommendations while basically just being a front for directives issued by wealthy conservatives on behalf of their personal interests.

There is never any doubt about what these organizations are going to recommend, what conclusions they will reach, and what information will be presented (and what will be ignored) in their papers, press releases, and "findings" presented to legislators: Their function is not to think about anything or produce any real intellectual content, but simply to proselytize ideology that venerates the wealthy, advocates laissez-faire markets as the solution to all problems, and demonizes everyone whose experiences in such a market prove otherwise. In essence, these organizations function more like a priesthood than an academic system, and what they promote are not practical ways to address practical problems, but rather expressions of faith in thoroughly indefensible assumptions and dogmatic beliefs.

If you've ever read a paper from Cato, AEI, or any similar organization you know what I'm talking about: The underlying premise and unstated assumption is always that exempting the wealthy from taxation and corporations from the rule of law is inherently a good thing that will bring about paradise on Earth, and like all articles of faith they don't even bother trying to argue the issue or provide evidence that anything they say is remotely justifiable - they just treat it like it's something obvious and established, and count on people unconsciously adopting the assumption. Like all dogmas, their approach to promoting it is to start by holding it as unquestionably correct and then methodically undertake every possible tactic to deceive and manipulate people into accepting it.

Of course, even dishonest persuasion is not the principal purpose of right-wing ideology mills - critical thinkers are not deceived, and non-critical thinkers mostly don't care enough to read papers from policy organizations. No, the main purpose is to create a pretext for the next step in the corrupt system - coordinated media propagation. Real policy researchers and real journalists exist in separate professional spheres and make their own independent decisions about what to say and how to say it: A real think tank doesn't design its findings around propaganda value, and a real news organization doesn't just Xerox whatever it receives from organizations ideologically pre-approved by corporate management. But this is exactly what happens in the Bizarro World, alternate-universe information track conservatives have created.

From there, conservative bloggers and wholly-owned media subsidiaries of the companies that support the ideology mills promote their "findings" as credible research, and use them as a basis to criticize Democratic political leaders and praise Republican corruption. One "news" organization that continues to burn my ass every time I foolishly scan it for something worth reading is the Los Angeles Times, in which I keep finding articles uncritically promoting the fringe opinions of AEI, Cato, etc. as being authoritative and relevant, and even C-SPAN (which, contrary to popular belief, is created by cable companies, not the public) has at times seemed to be in love with panel "discussions" by these groups while

almost never doing the same for real think tanks. Even ostensibly "reliable" media will often hop on the bandwagon and uncritically ditto the story, perhaps noting in passing that such groups are conservative without explicitly challenging their academic credibility (since that would call into question the validity of even mentioning their views in the first place).

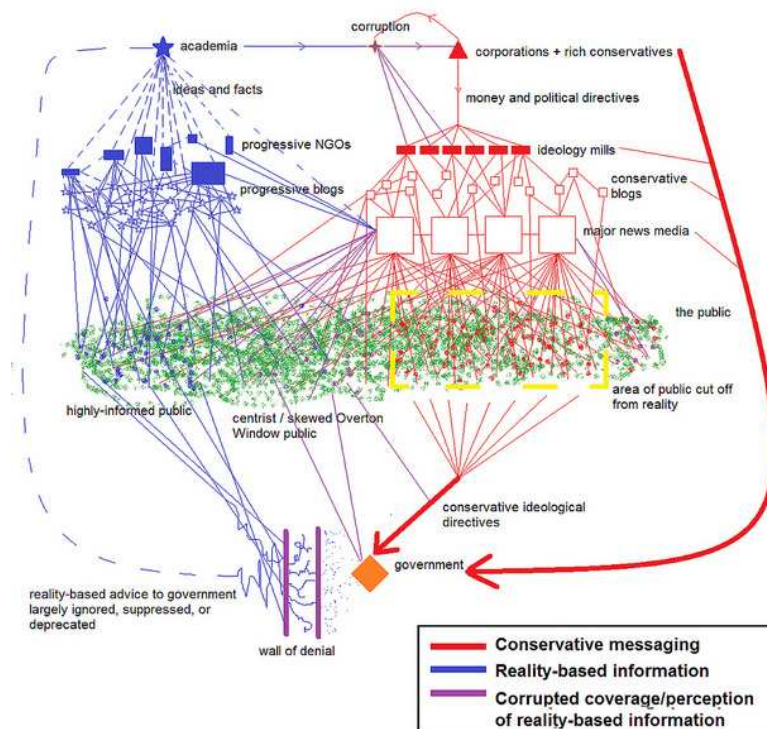
So, basically, if you were a normal person who didn't know anything about these issues and relied completely on media coverage to know what "mainstream" policy debates consist of, you would think right-wing fringe opinions were a consensus view in America while real economics - if you ever heard it to begin with - is some kind of totally alien, bizarre fringe opinion that only exists in the Bay Area and France. This lubricates the wheels of politics for Republican leaders who are already corrupt to dress their bribery and thievery in a cloak of fabricated ideas. Instead of just saying Republicans are corrupt thieves who pursue whatever policies their paymasters tell them to, we are unconsciously led to issue the less damaging charge (because it's less familiar to average people) that they are conservative ideologues - a charge of irrationality rather than deliberate criminality. And even that milder accusation is shouted down by the constant drumbeat and false consensus in favor of this ideology created by corrupt media coverage.

What has resulted is a system that bears more resemblance to the Soviet Union than to anything in American history, only in this case the **nomenklatura** are wealthy conservatives, and the ideology they cram down the throat of society is anti-government, laissez-faire market religion that maximizes their power over the majority of the people. And like the Soviet Union, the complete demolition of reality-based decision-making has degeneratively eroded the economic and social foundations of our civilization. The Politburo (ALEC / the US Chamber of Commerce) decides what is in its own best interests and then directs the political (Republican Party) and pseudo-academic (ideology mill) organs to come up with excuses for it, which they do, and then direct the machinery of society to act accordingly under the pretext that this is expert consensus about how best to proceed with Communism/capitalism.

And if any experts said otherwise, they'd find themselves breaking rocks in Siberia - in our case, expelled from all future media coverage, never again invited to testify before Congress, and basically erased from political existence for daring to be right when the financiers of political authority are wrong. If we don't want to face the same fate as the Soviet Union, we cannot allow our citizenry to be suffocated by propaganda, our officials to have fig-leaf excuses for rampant corruption, and our institutions of true leadership (academia) treated like enemies of the state for doing their jobs and telling the truth.

Also like the Soviet Union - and very much unlike a reality-based information system - there are no independent echelons, just segments of the same closely-controlled top-down process: A frictionless slide from the decision of a wealthy corporatist that they want something, to AEI et al declaring that society would

benefit from it, to conservative bloggers and fictional "news" organizations covering it as credible research, to "mainstream" news organizations repeating it without critical analysis, to political leaders citing the recommendations as a basis to act on them. In other words, the reality of the process boils down to Donald Trump saying he wants something, and John Boehner saying "*Jawohl, mein Kommandant!*" Nothing really happens in between - the intermediate stages are just pure pretext designed to drown out real information that might get in the way, and the people involved are paid to simply ditto what they're told. A graphic illustration of the corrupted system - sorry if it's a bit involved, but I wouldn't have to say any of this if these things were obvious:



It would be easy to dismiss this as a product of lazy journalism if not for the fact that only conservative ideological mills are treated with such careless stenography, while actual think tanks populated with people at the top of their fields are treated with anywhere from contemptuous indifference to naked hostility. I've been watching the process of corruption unfold for more than a decade, and it's clear that the level of coordination among corrupt actors at each step of the way has greatly increased while no such innovations have taken place on the part of reality-based communities to defend their proper role in politics.

That needs to change if we are to reestablish effective political leadership based on facts, science, and real guiding-light scholarship, especially in Congress - a

prerequisite to achieving any lasting progressive change in America. First of all, we need to reestablish actual think tanks, reemphasize those that have been ostracized from the corrupt media for refusing to toe the corporate line, dismiss ideology mills as what they are, and let go of previously credible institutions that have since been bought. Blogs such as Daily Kos sometimes offer think tank-worthy content, and there's no reason that output can't be concentrated and accelerated into an effective policymaking force.

Once that is the case, the information generated by real think tanks has to once again be promulgated, so on this too the progressive blogs can be of great use bringing attention to them and asking media that ignore them why they're doing so. We already do this to some extent on an uncoordinated, loose basis, but usually only if some explosive study comes to our attention by accident or because some elements of the media *are* covering it. We should not depend on that - we should have direct pipelines to the generators of politically-relevant academic content and be profuse in directing them to the attention of the media and elected officials. And when I say elected officials, I don't just mean Democrats: We can show them to Democrats to give their arguments strength, but we can also show them to Republicans and publicly demand to know why they're ignoring them.

In other words, instead of just having loosely-connected information domains where professionals act in ignorance of each other, and important facts only translate across borders through some uncoordinated organic process, we can vertically integrate the reality-based information process in the same way that conservatives have vertically integrated their faith-based propaganda system. This would not remove the independence of any given domain - if you don't find the import of a policy paper relevant or engaging to anyone other than other academics, then there's no reason to highlight it, and no reason to demand that professional reporters do so on a wider basis - but it would greatly increase the efficiency with which pertinent, important information is disseminated, and reassert a reality-based information *process* in competition and contrast with the schizoid incoherence of conservative propaganda.

There should be a direct, rapid, highly organized information pipeline between the origins of reality-based information in academia and public institutions and the public, the media, and policymakers - one that is not merely informative, since so much is already deliberately ignored, but strongly assertive with automatic political consequences for ducking issues or playing denial games. We can, should, and must reengineer American media and politics back to sanity.