



WHAT IS HATE RADIO?

During the past decade, "Conservative" radio commentators have completely overtaken the AM airwaves. AM radio is uniquely valuable for "talk" radio, and the industry moved from the traditional "TOP 40" format of music to the talk-radio format in the 1980s and 1990s when it was no longer possible for (mono) AM radio stations to compete with (stereo) FM stations as music providers.

RUSHING TO LIMBO

The most successful purveyor of the new "Republican" format is Rush Limbaugh, who rose to national prominence following the FCC's abandonment of the "Fairness Doctrine," which said, in essence, "The public airwaves are limited, and to preserve robust debate of issues in the public interest, editorial time on the airwaves must be matched by 'equal time' so that all points of view are heard."

In the absence of "equal time" Limbaugh pioneered his format of long solo talk spiels, generally without guests, using screened callers who will spout the party line, and/or are easy debate subjects. The Limbaugh Method, as it can be called, is to completely control debate so as to make whatever points the talk-show host intends. These discussions are about as "fair and balanced" as a Cuban election.

These generally follow a prescribed party line, and in the example of the recent stolen election, one can begin to see the outlines of how effective this carpet-bombing of propaganda (there is no better term for it) has become. The "party line" is the only reality, and after several hours of indoctrination, the listener begins to "understand" that only one point of view is possible – the "Republican" or "Conservative" point of view (the two are used interchangeably).

PROPAGANDA CARPET BOMBING

Here in Eugene, Oregon, where I live, there have been as many as ten to thirteen hours of continuous "hate radio" on the air (shows that have been on the air in the last several years include, Rush Limbaugh, 3 hour block per day; Michael Medved, likewise, 3 hours; Michael Reagan, 4 hours; "The Black Avenger" 3 hours; Oliver North, 3 hours, and others, with reactionary moralists like

"Dr. Laura," debatably part of this movement, also weighing in at 3 hours.)

When one stops to consider that a local Congressman or Senator, or even a national Presidential candidate can, at best, get perhaps 30 seconds of "sound bites" on the air on any given day, you begin to realize how enormous the disparity between hatespeak and balancing "fairness" would be. Were the "Fairness Doctrine" still in effect, such unanswered hatred, slander and sniggering would be unprofitable for stations, who could not afford to carry these programs. BUT, the Reagan Administration "found" that there were "plenty" of airwaves, and the "market" would produce astonishingly intellectual, brilliant and reasoned political debate were the airwaves "deregulated."

THE FALLACY OF EQUIVALENCE

The first question I am invariably asked is "Why don't WE put progressive talk radio shows on the air, too?"

The answer comes in several parts:

First, it's been tried. There was a conscious attempt to do same in the mid-90s, but no one wanted to hear "liberal" commentators, and they have never really caught on. Part of this, I think, is that "Hate Radio" thrives in the Jerry Springer arena of gladiatorial spectacle – people tune in to hear Rush talk about "Feminazis" about "Tree-huggers" and "Environmental Wackos." The low guffaw and the gutter humor of throwing feces at "liberals" (and "intellectuals" and "free thinkers" when you think about it) is part and parcel to the spectacle.

It is said that patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel, and so it is, at least here. Each host, from Felonious Ollie to Rush Hisownself makes a great show of playing patriotic songs, of turning the flag into a fetishistic totem, and, of course, of reveling in (imagined) military glory. In 1993, Rush literally shoved his show down the throats of Armed Forces Radio, and if you don't understand WHY those military absentee ballots in Florida came in overwhelmingly for Bush, well, you haven't been paying attention.

Taken to its logical conclusion, "Hate Radio" is the pep rally for SEVEN DAYS IN MAY. For those old enough to remember Joe Pyne, one can only wonder how Pyne's rabid jingoism came to dominate national discourse. Make no mistake, "Hate Radio" is

the first chapter in "It Can't Happen Here," or, a right-wing coup d'etat. (Some would argue that this has already occurred.)

Finally, I am all for "progressive" talk radio, but "hate radio," as far as I'm concerned, is "hate speech" written in stone, supported by local businesses and clothed in an aura of respectability. These are fundamentally the folks in the white sheets: they don't say "nigger" or "kike" anymore. But when they say "liberal" or "Democrat" they MEAN exactly what they meant using those other words.

It's time that "hate radio" was ended.

FREE SPEECH and THE FIRST AMENDMENT

But am I asking you to engage in censorship?

Censorship isn't the answer. I believe in the NOW's campaign, but I don't think that sending a petition to the FCC to reinstate the "Fairness Doctrine" has any chance of working, nor do I think it's a good idea.

No. I believe in free speech. Even in unpopular speech. But, and this is the BIG "but" ... radio stations do NOT believe in unpopular speech. They have to have advertisers — local advertisers — to remain in business.

And this is at the heart of the proposal.

WHAT I PROPOSE.

First, that we engage in that time-honored American tradition of the boycott. We need to say: "You can sponsor Rush Limbaugh siggering at my beliefs, and slandering and smearing those things that I believe in."

"But I don't have to shop at your store. And neither do my friends and neighbors!"

Secondly, that we be smart about our boycott. The usual progressive response to something that really angers us is to boycott ineffectively and over no specific length of time.

We need to pick the weakest local hate radio show and go after it, much like the NAACP is doing in only going after one state at a time with their "Confederate flag" campaign. It's pointless to try and take them all on at once. Pick the weakest, and let the momentum of a first victory lead to a second and so on.

We need to work LOCALLY! The NAACP has a tough road to hoe, taking on an entire state. And the Gay community has a tough road to hoe taking on the Dr. Laura show NATIONALLY. I believe that the easiest and most effective

pressure can be put on LOCALLY. (Think about that bumper sticker.)

Thirdly, I believe that we take on that local station by going after its advertisers with a two-pronged approach:

- A) We list advertisers on the internet so that allied progressive groups know WHO they are.
- B) We WRITE to those advertisers to let them know that we will not buy from them until they cease advertising on the targeted show.
- C) We offer a "We Respect our Customers' Beliefs" sign for the windows of advertisers who agree that insulting our beliefs is no way to gain customers.
- D) We engage in a program of recruiting similar-inclined groups to help us with the monitoring of the targeted radio program. *

[*Trust me, one three hour show is just about all one can stomach, or that I'd ask. Asking ANYONE to monitor for a week or more is really an inexcusable imposition. So, we'll need bodies. But that is an ASSET! We, as Democrats, can contact, say, the Greens, or NARAL, or the local NAACP chapter ... etc. We progressives can network among ourselves while we're going after "Hate Radio" — after all, we DO have at least that much in common!]

CONCLUSION

When you stop to consider that the pocketbook nerve is usually the most sensitive nerve in a businessman's body, you'll see that we're cutting to the heart of the matter.

Now, as we show local success (and as "Hate Radio" starts to talk about US), we can move to take on national advertisers. (Usually, a syndicated show has a certain number of "National" spots which come embedded with the show, and which the show's producers sell for extra money.)

This should be a work in progress, as we learn and streamline our approach. Within a matter of months, a successful program OUGHT to be capable of taking on Rush himself, and Premiere Networks, who syndicate Rush, Reagan, Dr. Laura and many others. This has to be our goal.

But let's succeed in the wading pool first before we try to take on the platform diving in the big pool. Let's get to know our local allies, and make this a truly "grass roots" operation. After all we have always had the edge in bodies.

Let's put that edge to work.

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December 18, 2000**