

Ted Turner Protests Against the Death of Democracy

John Avery, Chairman, Danish Peace Academy

April 10, 2005

Ted Turner's name is a famous one, but let me tell you a little more about him.

On the 20th of April, 2005 Ted Turner will be presented with the Alan Cranston Peace Award at the United Nations. The presentation ceremony will be honored by the presence of Nobel Peace Prize winner Mikhail Gorbachev and the Rt. Hon. Kim Campbell, former Prime Minister of Canada, as well as Jane Goodall and Michael Douglas. At the ceremony, Mr. Turner and President Gorbachev will engage in a dialogue of visionaries for a sustainable future.

No one deserves a peace award more than Ted Turner. In the late 60s and early 70s, he founded CNN, which was, at the time, a strong force for peace. Turner introduced the global weather forecast on CNN, and it was later also adopted by the BBC. This brilliant and simple device might not be helpful in planning picnics, but it gives the viewer a vision of the world as a single unified community.

In 1989, Ted Turner created the Better World Society, whose aim was to use the mass media to solve global problems. Members included prominent Hollywood figures, several former US presidents, and leading environmentalists including Jacques Cousteau and Al Gore.

Ted Turner is also famous for donating 1 billion dollars (\$1,000,000,000) of his own money to the United Nations. It was one-third of his fortune, and it was approximately equal to the amount that the United States owed to the UN at the time and was refusing to pay. Turner was asked to comment on his gift. He had two comments: 1) "It's only money", and 2) "I hope that Bill

Gates is watching”. I almost forgot: Ted Turner is also famous for marrying Jane Fonda (but you probably already knew that).

Everyone will have noticed that CNN has changed in recent years. It can no longer really be called an active force for peace. This is because Ted Turner no longer owns it. When he sold CNN to Time-Warner, Turner lost control of the programming, and today CNN broadcasts the views of the establishment. For example, during the US-led invasion of Iraq, CNN broadcast the official US government view of the invasion.

Although, very sadly, Ted Turner’s voice can no longer be heard through CNN, he is not entirely silent. His long, detailed, and cautiously-phrased article, “My Beef With Big Media”, is of the utmost importance, since it points to the gravest imaginable problem - the death of democracy. This vitally important article was published last year in the “Washington Monthly”, but for those without access to the magazine, it can easily be read on the internet at (<http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2004/0407.turner.html>)

In this article, Ted Turner documents his own experience as an independent voice, forced out of broadcasting by new laws favoring enormous media conglomerates. He hints at the real danger, although he is very cautious (perhaps to protect his family from government harassment). The real danger is that since the mass media have increasingly become the key to political power, governments (e.g. the present Bush Administration) seek to control the media. They do so by making the way easy for mammoth media corporations, whose control is both vertical and horizontal, and whose views are identical with the views of the administration. Although it is still possible, in principle, to vote against the government, the grip of the media is so strong that the majority of citizens do as they are told by the voices on small and large screens: Hence the death of democracy. The situation is truly Orwellian.

As Ted Turner says in his article, “This is a fight about freedom - the freedom of independent entrepreneurs to start and run a media business, and the freedom of citizens to get news, information, and entertainment from a wide variety of sources, at least some of which are truly independent... No one should underestimate the danger. Big media companies want to eliminate all ownership limits. With the removal of these limits, immense media power will pass into the hands of a very few corporations and individuals.” But a small quotation does not do justice to the article; you must read it yourself.