

The Tricks of the Trade
Integrity and The Yale Daily News
(October 2002)

In this the age of unprecedented and increasing corporate control of information, I don't think anyone really believes that our press is much freer than that of the old Soviet Union. That's not to say there aren't a lot of fair and honest reporters. We've got plenty of them in New Haven. But they're kept on an increasingly tighter leash by editors who answer to the suits upstairs.

The usual tactic is simply to ignore what the editors don't believe we should know about. For example, when Bill Kaempffer filed his Register story on the Yale unions having engaged in the largest civil disobedience action in the history of the state, I'm sure he expected it to be front page news although I doubt he was entirely surprised that it ended up on page 3.

It's rare that one finds baldfaced lies in the pages of the Register. For that, you have to turn to the Yale Daily News. The cub editors at the YDN who will in short order take their places at the nation's elite media, have well learned the lesson that a lie runs half way around the world before the truth can get it's boots on. The Yale unions are the main target of the YDN's smears. The Green Party is somewhere lower on the totem pole, but we can be counted on to get the back of the YDN's hand when given opportunity strikes.

Two recent instances give a pretty good indication of how slander at the YDN works. A story reporting on the decision by the board to the IKEA development at Long Wharf referred to me as "having led the small squadron of agitators who objected to the proposal." In fact, while I raised some questions about it, I made clear in my remarks that I supported the project, and I voted in favor of it. According to the reporter who wrote the story, he reported the facts accurately but the editor rewrote the passage in question. When I wrote to complain, they dutifully issued a correction knowing perfectly well that the damage was already done. No one reads corrections. The hit piece was a success-making me, and the Greens conform to the stereotype of irresponsible Luddites who can't be trusted with important decisions.

Another smear occurred a week before election day when the YDN reported a poll indicating that (Green Congressional candidate) Charlie Pillsbury was running at 15 percent, with DeLauro and Elser running neck and neck at 45 and 40. On the basis of this poll, Dems phoned banked the whole congressional region scaring Dems back into the fold with the usual bogeyman of the Greens as spoiler.

What the YDN didn't say was that the poll was bogus, something they later admitted in a correction, and probably knew at the time. But even after the correction, the Dems continued to use the bogus poll in their phone banking, probably driving Charlie's numbers down. Again, the hit piece worked.

Sooner or later, the YDN will be seen for what it is-a house organ parroting a party line-with an occasional note of constructive criticism entered in to create the verneer of journalistic objectivity. Until the time that it and establishment media lose their credibility, they will continue to be an obstacle to understanding how power and politics work both locally and globally.