

## HOME

### Demonstrators call Fox News 'blatantly racist' By Daniel Sturm

A group of 25 people rallied at the WSYM-TV/FOX 47 building in downtown Lansing on Monday to "Resist Fox News and Media Propaganda." The organizers, which included Direct Action!, Students for Palestinian Human Rights, and People for Positive Social Change, protested against corporate media's presentation of continued war as the only response to the Sept. 11 attacks.

"We chose Fox 47 because it represents Fox News," said Steve Swart, the Direct Action! co-organizer. He said drawing attention to local stations was the best way to voice their critique. Before organizing this rally, he'd spoken with many people who were upset about Fox News coverage.

"They can be just blatantly racist and can pretend that they're an objective source for news, while really they're further to the right than any other network. And in general we want to raise awareness about the corporate media broadcasting just one view point on the war."

Swart pointed out that after Newsweek carried a special report on the "Death Convey of Afghanistan" on Aug. 26, only very few media followed the story. The report substantiated with eyewitness accounts that U.S. forces were on scene when perhaps more than 1,000 Taliban prisoners were killed in cargo-container trucks. "Don't hold your breath waiting to see that covered on FOX News," said Swart.

Fox 47 General Manager Judy Kenney said she didn't understand the protest in Lansing. "We're not the Fox news channel, which is located in New York, we're just a local affiliate." She said that the station selects national news from the Fox News Wire as well as from other media sources. Kenney said it was unfair to point a finger at FOX 47, because other stations like WLAJ (ABC53) and WLNS News Center6 (CBS) also depend on large corporate television networks. News directors from these stations could not be reached for comment.

As they marched toward WSYM-TV/FOX 47 on St. Joseph Street, activists verbalized slogans such as “Ha-ha, ho-ho, corporate lies have got to go” and held up posters with sayings like “Fox 47, Partner in Crime.” Jil Naimansoui, a pre-law student at MSU, said this demonstration would be a good opportunity to begin grassroots activism against war. “Our community is giving us false information through corporate media, and corporate universities. We need education and knowledge, knowledge, knowledge,” said Naimansoui who’d just returned from a trip to Palestine, where she was involved in peace work with a group called the International Solidarity Movement.

Swart said the “Resist Fox News” could be the starting point of a series of similar events to raise awareness about the U.S. media, more than 80 percent of which is owned by 10 different multinational corporations. Lansing offered the perfect opportunity to become active locally, because one of these big corporations, Gannett, owns the Lansing State Journal. “Right now they’re trying to wipe out one of our local independent media outlets, City Pulse, by bringing in an ‘independent’ weekly,” Swart said. “Of course there won’t be independent news, but ads, entertainment and the stuff their focus groups says will sell.”

Swart said the media should stimulate debate in a democratic society “instead of just beating the drums of war.” He recalled an executive of CNN admitting public support prompted them to censor reports or images of civilian casualties in Afghanistan. “It’s a consistent theme that things coming from the U.S. government are treated as fact, whereas things from anybody else are treated like ‘that’s your opinion’.”

Researchers at Washington University, in St Louis, back Swart’s observation. David Domke, an assistant professor of communication, recently released a report showing that American news coverage of Sept. 11 and its aftermath has been complicit with government and military communication strategies to rally public support. A total of 210 stories were analyzed over five weeks of coverage, and a significant majority of the rhetoric could be attributed to U.S. government and military sources.

The groups rallying in front of FOX 47 suggested intensifying support for independent media sources. They handed out fliers showing a list of seven alternative sources in Michigan such as City Pulse in Lansing, The Michigan Citizen in Detroit, and the Indymedia web network. One education student said she long ago stopped believing in information reported by the mainstream media and relied instead more heavily on Internet sources. Kathie Kuhn, an activist from People for Positive Social Change, pointed out that she preferred to watch Scola, a cable channel broadcasting international news programs. “Even if I don’t understand the language, I gather more truths from the photographs.” Rana Chang, an MSU medical

student, said she hasn't watched television news since the "turn-off your TV week." "What's true is always distorted by the corporate media. FOX is the worst. It's a parody of itself."

FOX 47 reporter Alysia Sofios, who covered the event in front of her own work place, said she didn't feel offended by the protests, because she was working for "a separate entity." As a journalist she'd always listened to Palestinians' complaints that the national media were unfair and unbalanced. Sofios emphasizes that she tries to she integrate these critical voices into her reports.

"I make a definite effort to listen to both sides. That's our job as journalists."

In its 5.30 news program on Monday, FOX 47 ran a news story on the rally. The 25-second news clip contained two mistakes. The report claimed that the organizers weren't aware that FOX 47 wasn't identical with FOX News Channel. However, before the rally Swart had in fact explained the difference between the station and the network to City Pulse. The broadcaster also reported that the rally was headed to "a local newspaper" (apparently the Lansing State Journal). However, this had never been the intent of demonstrators, who ended their march in front of the Fox 47 building, as planned.

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