

Who will notice when P-I dies?

Michael Costello

Saturday, March 14, 2009

Any day now, the 146-year-old Seattle Post-Intelligencer will close its doors and turn its ink-stained wretches out onto the street with hand-lettered signs reading "will transcribe propaganda for food."

Jan. 9, the P-I's parent company, Hearst Corp., set a 60-day deadline to find a buyer for the paper. If no buyer came forward, the P-I would either shut down or convert to an online-only publication. The sand ran out of that hourglass Monday and with no suitors, employees learned that their jobs would end sometime between March 18 and April 1. They were told to submit expense claims and to start cleaning out their desks.

So what doomed this iconic Seattle fish wrap? The Seattle P-I's ultra-left-wing columnist Joel Connelly unintentionally and unknowingly sideswiped the answer when he used his column to ask this ironic question: Once the P-I shuts down its presses, "who will speak truth to power?"

I had to laugh. If there is one reason why the P-I is shuttering its doors, it is precisely because it would not speak truth to power. The Seattle P-I never strayed from the mainstream media orthodoxy. To speak truth to power, the P-I would have had to take issue with itself.

Whether it is newspapers, television news, news magazines, Hollywood movies or late-night television comedians, there exists a herd mentality that the the P-I blended into seamlessly. The P-I almost never reported news or composed an opinion that strayed from left-wing orthodoxy. When the P-I shuts down, Seattle will become a one-newspaper town with only the Seattle Times littering porches.

The Seattle Times and the Seattle P-I shared online resources. When one does a story search on their servers, unless specified, the search returns results from both papers. When one searches for news stories that put Democrats in an unfavorable light, such as the numerous ethical scandals swirling around a number of top congressional Democrats, one will always get more hits returned from the Seattle Times than from the Seattle P-I. Often no hits are returned from the P-I. Trust me.

No one would mistake the Seattle Times for a right-wing publication. But its contrast with the P-I is startling. And the Seattle Times seems to be doing just fine. I've heard nothing about the Times being in financial difficulty. Could it be that the Times out-competed the P-I because it distinguished itself, however slightly, from the herd mentality that the P-I ran with?

Just this past week, there were a number of fairly important stories that the P-I did not find fit for its subscribers to read. For example, P-I readers know nothing of the appointment and withdrawal of Charles Freeman as chairman of Barack Obama's National Intelligence Council. Freeman is both an anti-Semite and an apologist for the brutal communist Chinese regime. In 2006, in reference to the bloody Chinese crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators in Tiananmen Square 20 years ago, Freeman wrote, "The truly unforgivable mistake of the Chinese authorities was the failure to intervene on a timely basis to nip the demonstrations in the bud." After all, it was not "acceptable for any country to allow the heart of its national capital to be occupied by dissidents intent on disrupting the normal functions of government, however appealing to foreigners their propaganda may be."

Oh really? What does Freeman think about demonstrations in the U.S. capital? When he withdrew his nomination, he dipped deep into the anti-Israel propaganda that the Saudis paid him to spread when he

blamed the Jews. In his view, the Israel lobby has enforced "an inability of the American public to discuss, or the government to consider, any option for U.S. policies in the Middle East opposed by the ruling faction in Israeli politics."

Would the P-I have found column space in its pages if a Republican administration had nominated someone with such extreme views to serve as the intelligence gatekeeper to the president?

We all know the answer to that. And we all know the reason why. Rather than exhibit the courage to distinguish itself, the P-I sought the shelter and comfort that comes with travelling in a herd.

The Seattle Post-Intelligencer will not be missed. Its passing will barely be noticed because rarely did anything appear in the P-I that could not be found just about everywhere else in the mainstream news media.

Costello is a research technician at Washington State University.
His e-mail address is
kozmocostello@hotmail.com.