

HOW FACTS CEASE TO BE SOLID

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The establishment's cowardice leaves no place for honesty. It is a safe, risk-averse, and timid strategy for those without guiding principles or will to follow them. As Mikhail Bulgakov once wrote, "cowardice is

the most terrible of vices.”

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Every record has been destroyed or falsified, every book rewritten, every picture has been repainted, every statue and street building has been renamed, every date has been altered. And the process is continuing day by day and minute by minute. History has stopped. Nothing exists except an endless present in which the Party is always right.

So wrote George Orwell, describing the dystopian system in which there is only one correct opinion, and if reality disagrees with it, then reality is wrong. Fortunately, we do not live in such a world, but the alarming trend is that our agreement over the facts are becoming less and less stable. Every side has its own truth. It may initially seem that this situation is the opposite of Orwell's, but the current situation is, in fact, nothing but the result of one of the contestants' victory. The principle is the same: each fact has its certain meaning, and each action speaks of a certain character feature. Everyone should support the current thing, else they are deemed bigots, racists, sexists, and oppressors. Alternatively, they may be named traitors. And should the current thing change, everyone must update their opinions accordingly.

The problem is that the leading narrative can no longer be questioned. There can only be one interpretation of events and only one judgement. Once it is established that a particular event has taken place, the case is all but closed; if a man has killed, he must be a murderer, and nuances do not matter. At the same time, the smallest of details is enough to condemn, regardless of its relevance or importance. This is a simplistic approach of a town square mob conquering governments and courts. Moral outrage replaces debates, and facts are sacrificed to avoid it.

This becomes evident in the controversies such as the teaching of critical race theory or propagation of queerness at schools. While the conservative camp insists that such topics are, at the very least, inappropriate for children, the progressive one often claims no such things take place at all, accusing its opponents of spreading conspiracy theories but somehow being extremely upset when CRT and LGBT propaganda gets banned from the state education.

This is evident in the British Labour Party's inability to define a woman and their treatment of John Cleese, who dared to utter a great heresy of calling London with its 43.4% of native white British population "not really an English city any more."

This is evident in the infamous CNN coverage of the Kenosha, Wisconsin riots in 2020 when the correspondent was filmed in front of the burning vehicles, while the banner on the bottom read "fiery but mostly peaceful protests."

Finally, this progressive hegemony is evident in COVID-19 information policies: whatever the doctors employed by the government said was automatically true, even if their opinions have changed back and forth during the two years of lockdowns. Scientific theories are not written in stone, which is one of science's beautiful sides. Another is that no opinion is ever above scrutiny, and denying inconsistencies goes against this core principle. Time and again, we are met with the response that nothing is happening, and we must be imagining it—right until the point when it becomes the official policy, and the narrative changes.

It is not only the West that is guilty of obscuring, arguing, and denying the facts rather than owning up to them and discussing the reasons behind them. The ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war is a perfect display of this point. While it has long been noted that lies flourish in the ground bestrewn by corpses and powder, this conflict has provided us with a few especially egregious examples. Back in 2014, Russia sent its troops to Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, stubbornly claiming that it had never done so. Then, at the beginning of the full-scale invasion and for some time before that, the Kremlin insisted that the

Ukrainian government was composed of Nazis, an accusation so demonstrably false that one would be at a loss as to where to start unpacking it. And, of course, there is the favourite Russian argument of “the eight years of crimes in Donbas,” used as another pretext for the attack, the legend of the Ukrainian army shelling Donetsk and Luhansk. Is it true? The eyewitnesses’ accounts depend heavily upon their allegiance. Russia is steadfast in its accusations. International investigators tend to blame Russian and separatist forces. Something as simple as the identity of the artillerists becomes a point of contention rather than their ideological or tactical rationale.

A nice little game is being played around the world, on all sides and across the political spectrum: call your opponent a Nazi. It is as disingenuous as it is childish. Some look no further than visual similarities, forgetting that the problem with Hitler’s regime was not in its parades, salutes, and Hugo Boss uniforms but in its genocide and devastating war. Others search for anything even vaguely despotic, rushing to exaggerate the resemblance. And even if there is an historical parallel to be drawn, every dictatorship has its own traits, unique to the region and time. Germany in the 1930s was not the only authoritarian state ever known to history. Many others were much better fitting to describe modern situations, but the comparison is no longer about intellectual honesty. It is about manipulating emotions, discrediting and denigrating, and judging appearance rather than ideas.

So why is this sort of argument becoming so prevalent within the educated circles supposedly trained to think critically? With the rise of social media, the debate has, in theory at least, been democratised. It has also been reduced to slogans; arguments about the most complicated issues of the day cannot be longer than a few lines, or even a few words. These short texts rely upon widely recognised social codes; for example, a single word “problematic” can be loosely translated as “failing to meet a certain sensitivity standard and thus causing offence and mental distress to a community in question.” There is usually no need to explain the nature of the offence or the extent of its alleged damage. Both positive and negative responses follow the same fashion, leaving no place for an in-depth analysis. This is the dialogue of slogans: they have to be clear, catchy, and unambiguous.

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Individuals, corporations, and governments all condense their positions into slogans, preferably the socially acceptable ones. Therefore, the narrative around the facts is formed of the puzzle-like pre-made constructs, further limited by the constant virtue signalling. And if the narrative does not offer enough flexibility, our perception of reality is forced to compensate.

In the end, it appears that the facts actually *do* care about your feelings, or at least about the feelings of the crowd. What can better illustrate the establishment's cowardice than this sorry situation? It leaves no place for honesty or genuine commitments. It is a safe, risk-averse, and timid strategy for those who wander around without the guiding principles or will to follow them. And, as Mikhail Bulgakov once wrote, "cowardice is the most terrible of vices."

Let us have the courage to get our facts straight. Let us admit the truth freely, however ugly it may be. Let us consider the nuances behind the slogans. Healthy conversation is becoming increasingly hard to find, but it is vital to bring it back.