

CBC and The Fifth Estate's biased and unfair portrayal of the Vancouver-based mining company Nevsun and the Eritrean State

To the astonishment of many, CBC's The Fifth Estate recently released a so-called documentary, titled 'Nevsun in Eritrea: Dealing with a Dictator,' that was biased, shoddily put together, and highly unprofessional. The Fifth Estate used questionable interviews, the manipulative sequencing of stock footage, and innuendo to make the case that Eritrea is a state sponsor of terrorism and "the North Korea of Africa." This smoke and mirrors approach was adopted in lieu of a single shred of hard evidence. Maybe The Fifth Estate believes that the average viewer with little or no knowledge of Eritrea will be unable to detect the glaring flaws that characterized this narrative.

A legitimate fact-based criticism of the Eritrean government is one thing. Exaggerating an unsubstantiated link between Eritrea and Al Shabaab, perhaps for dramatic effect, is profoundly unethical. The host, Mark Kelley, travelled to the mostly Somali suburb of Eastleigh in Nairobi to interview a dubious man, Abdinur Soyán. Soyán met Kelley in public and in broad daylight to discuss how he supposedly smuggled guns from Eritrea to Al Shabaab, a group that has carried out attacks on that city and that is at war with the Kenyan government. One can't help but wonder how a self-admitted illegal arms smuggler for Al Shabaab could walk freely within the borders of Kenya. His credibility is highly questionable, yet he is used as a central figure in supporting the Fifth Estate's narrative.

The Fifth Estate also tried to use the former Chief of Somalia and Eritrea Monitoring Group's (SEMG) Matthew Bryden to substantiate the allegation. Yet, according to a report that Bryden helped to author for United Nations (UN): "The Monitoring Group has found no evidence to substantiate allegations that Eritrea supplied Al-Shabaab with arms and ammunition by air in October and November 2011. However, the SEMG has established that Eritrea maintains relations with known arms dealers in Somalia and has violated the arms embargo." Bryden's findings, though vague and inconclusive, have been instrumental in imposing unjustified sanctions on Eritrea. In any case, the onus was on the CBC to exercise due diligence presenting the UN and Bryden's report in the context of Eritrea's strained relationship with Ethiopia and its powerful allies in the UN Security Council. The CBC is unwittingly lending credence to a deliberately distorted narrative, in a manner reminiscent of the US media's uncritical coverage of the purported evidence of weapons of mass destruction in the run up to the Iraq War. The Fifth Estate reporter ignores the political maneuvering and geopolitical factors as the main reason of all of the allegations against Eritrea. Please read WikiLeaks from November 2009 for further details: <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/11/09ADDISABABA2817.html>

The VP for Corporate Social Responsibility at Nevsun Resources, Mr. Todd Romaine, was consistent and professional in putting forward strong arguments to support the fact that the money received from Bisha mine has been used by the Eritrean government to improve the lives of Eritreans as a whole, and communities around Bisha in particular. Nonetheless, the Fifth Estate ignored the fact that the funds generated from the Bisha mines are used to help alleviate poverty and improve the average Eritrean's standard of living. The reporter preferred to show stock footage of Al-Shabaab atrocities committed against Kenya to support his narrative, and draw on the emotion of viewers, rather than taking an investigative journalistic approach to produce an unbiased documentary.

Another issue that the Fifth Estate raised was regarding the alleged use of conscripted Eritrean workers to build a non-existent tunnel for the Bisha mine. The Fifth Estate puts a great deal of emphasis on the UN SEMG report without investigating the validity of its contents. The report claims that collected testimonies indicate that some conscripts were used to construct an underground network of tunnels

for future mine operations. Nevsun VP of Corporate Social Responsibility, Todd Romaine, later establishes that there was no tunnel in 2008, and that there is still no tunnel in 2016 because Bisha is an open pit mine. The existence of such a glaring falsehood in the report, combined with a basic understanding of the geopolitical factors that have corrupted the integrity of the UN's treatment of Eritrea, would have set off alarm bells in the mind of any serious investigative journalist. Consequently, the statements made by the UN SEMG report's author should have been received with a healthy dose of scepticism. In both cases, these inflammatory statements were taken at face value without so much as one challenging question being raised. I find it odd that the author of the UN SEMG report (and the arms dealer) were given deferential treatment, while Nevsun's Todd Romaine was grilled so relentlessly by the host. Perhaps the Fifth Estate was eager to gobble up any sensational statements that confirmed his preconceived notions and/or spiced up the narrative. The Fifth Estate weren't searching for truth, but were digging for dirt; any dirt, no matter how unsubstantiated. Ultimately, it made for a thrillingly scandalous story, but one that wasn't backed up by the rigours that normally underpin responsible journalism.

The Fifth Estate did not mention that the Eritrean government, unlike many rich nations, provides free education for all students at all levels. The documentary also failed to mention that the new nation of Eritrea is building a country that is recovering from a thirty-year war of independence, and a two-year border war. Eritrea is building new roads, new schools, and new hospitals as well as working hard to eradicate malaria, HIV, Polio and other deadly diseases by providing free health care to all. In fact, Eritrea is one of the few African nations to reach the 2015 Millennium UN Development Goals. Eritrea is recognized with the 2016 African Leaders Malaria Alliance (ALMA) Award in recognition of the country's progress in fighting malaria and meeting the Millennium Development Goals. The funds generated from the Bisha mine have been used to support all of these aforementioned developments, and have not been used to support terrorism activities as the reporter wants the audience to believe.

The most disturbing part of the documentary is when the Fifth Estate showed the suffering of Kenyans at the Westgate shopping Mall in Nairobi at the hands of Al-Shabaab. The Fifth Estate showed the Al-Shabaab footage repeatedly to deceive viewers and link the Eritrean government with Al-Shabaab, a futile effort combined with a lack of judgment and journalistic ethics. Eritrea has never supported terrorism, and while fourteen out of the fifteen nations of the UN Security Council agree, the reporter failed to mention this in the documentary.

The significance of showing video clips of Eritrea's president, Isaias Afewerki, while he was on State visits to Uganda and North Sudan surrounded by the respective foreign guards in military uniforms is not clear. Could this be another mischievous act to portray the president as a dictator who is always surrounded by military guards? The Fifth Estate would of course not find these types of videos or photos from within Eritrea. Does the Fifth Estate know that President Isaias is the least guarded government head who can freely walk among his people in Eritrea or abroad? Please see the following video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xmAlFKTwnz0> taken in 2011 in New York and decide for yourself if this looks like the reception that a dictator deserves.

The Fifth Estate attempted to propagate the biased message in order to convince the audience that the Canadian company, Nevsun and the Eritrean government are violating human rights. The evidence provided includes unsubstantiated evidence from two individuals, Elsa Chyrum and Aron Berhane who are known for their hostile approach against the government of Eritrea. The Fifth Estate has been very selective in choosing their guests; if the idea was to produce a genuine report then I would imagine that

the host would invite people with differing opinions as he would find them in abundance. It is a known fact that these individuals have been instrumental in many previous accusations. For example, in regards to Nevsun's subcontractor, Chyrum said to the International Human Rights of the Standing Committee of Canada: "The subcontractors are the government-owned companies, construction companies, and they employ about 3,000 Eritreans. Those 3,000 are poorly paid. They sleep in a makeshift-like camp. They eat very poorly. They work up to 16 hours." This was refuted by the Nevsun's Chief Executive Officer, Director Mr. Cliff T. Davis. This is the answer he gave to the Standing Committee: "The average workforce of the Eritreans and the subcontractors was 440. It never reached anything near 3,000; that's just not appropriate". Chyrum's number was exaggerated by a factor of almost 700 percent! In my opinion, Chyrum's statement should be constituted as defamation for providing false evidence in order to support her cause.

The Nevsun management team, the Canadian ambassador to Eritrea, and an internationally respected Canadian human rights lawyer, Lloyd Lipsett, have all been to the Bisha mining site in person. They all presented tangible and sufficient evidence to the Canadian Standing Committee, which in my opinion, refutes all of the aforementioned false allegations. In order to investigate the claims of human rights violations at the Bisha mines, Mr. Lipsett has travelled to Eritrea at least six times and has been unable to substantiate any of the allegations against the state of Eritrea.

The Fifth Estate was desperately trying to equate the Eritrean nation to North Korea. The reporter incorporated a video clip regarding North Korea from the Subcommittee repeatedly in the forty-five minute video. However, this is no longer a selling point as many international delegates, influential people including the chair of International Human Rights of the Standing Committee, Mr. Scott Reid, are visiting Eritrea to witness the opposite of all the negativities that they have been told all along.

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