Late Night Live 20 October 2025

David Marr: Australia's National Press Club was due to host one of its own. Pulitzer Prize winning journalist and the New York Times' former Middle East Bureau Chief Chris Hedges. That he would be a fearless critic of Israel and a committed supporter of Palestine was a given. After all, his tour down under is sponsored by the Australian Palestine advocacy network. A date was set. Monday night, October the 20th, but three weeks ago, out of the blue, the Press Club cancelled in the interests, it explained, of balancing out our program. A furious Chris Hedges accused the club of failing the journalists of Gaza. They wouldn't have him as a speaker, he said, but they were going to have Israel's ambassador to Australia. "No doubt it is spared the attacks that would come from allowing me to speak". He wrote, "but please have the decency to remove the word 'press' from your club".

David Marr: Chris, welcome to Late Night Live.

Chris Hedges: Thank you.

David Marr: Just on some of the basics. Are you troubled at all as a journalist by being sponsored by an advocacy group?

Chris Hedges: No.

David Marr: Why not? It seems kind of a fundamental breaking of the rules.

Chris Hedges: Well, it depends, you know, who you work for. And in my case, I spent seven years in the Middle East, and I'm an Arabic speaker, and most of that time was in Gaza and dealing with both the pressure of the Israel lobby and the acquiescence of most of the mainstream press, including my old employer, the New York Times, to the pressure of the Israel lobby. It was extremely difficult for those of us who reported from Gaza to lift up the voices of Palestinians or describe accurately what was happening. There were two ways that this was essentially shut down. The first was the decision on the part of my colleagues to repeat Israeli lies, which they knew were lies. It's very cynical. But of course, when you work for the, a publication like the New York Times, it's all about access. You can't cut it off.

David Marr: We shall come to that.

Chris Hedges: And then secondly, and this didn't happen, I covered the war in the former Yugoslavia for instance, I was the Balkan bureau chief for The New York Times. So if I went out and reported about a Serb atrocity, and there were many in Bosnia, there might be a response from Belgrade in the second or third paragraph. But when I was reporting on, for instance, Israeli bombing campaigns against refugee camps. We're talking about F-16 fighter jets, they would insert every other paragraph. I mean, so I was interviewing eyewitnesses, but riddled throughout the story were the responses of the Israeli military. So Israel is, except - I don't know

how it is in Australia, but within the United States, the power of the Israel lobby is such that it is extremely difficult for journalists who are reporting on the ground, as I was, to transmit the truth of what was happening. And, so I don't have any problem being sponsored by - [attempted interjection] -- I've been very critical, for instance, of Hamas. I'm no friend of Hamas. I don't -- but I think that that what these Palestinian groups in the United States and throughout the world have done and done correctly is, is attempt to hold up the reality of the genocide. And I think most of the Western media has done its best to obscure the reality of the genocide.

David Marr: But why, why do it under the umbrella of an advocacy group when you are a famous journalist with an independent reputation, a big reputation, why not come here as yourself?

Chris Hedges: Well, I was invited to give the Edward Said lecture, and that's how I got here. So everything was built around the Said lecture. right, right.

David Marr: What evidence did you have that Israel had been invited, or would be invited, to speak - Israel's ambassador?

Chris Hedges: That was a source at the – it wasn't to replace me. I never said that.

David Marr: No.

Chris Hedges: But that apparently, according to a source within the Press Club, they had reached out. He has spoken there before, by the way, and they had reached out. They had just done a program that apparently had angered Israel and angered some of the Zionists, and they had approached him about speaking again.

David Marr: That's absolutely denied by the Press Club.

Chris Hedges: Well, it saw the Press Club also denied that that it was confirmed that I would speak, they also denied that they had posted anything on their website announcing my talk. And both of those were lies, because we, I have the confirmation letter, which we gave to numerous media sources --

David Marr: Which I have seen, and very clearly there was a date for you to speak.

Chris Hedges: And it was posted. Somebody took a screenshot of it, thankfully, so we actually have the physical evidence --

David Marr: The Press Club denies that --

Chris Hedges: They were very dishonest. I mean, and I think they kind of shredded their credibility. If they wanted to cancel the talk, you would have thought they would have done it with a little more finesse.

David Marr: But how's your credibility? Because they absolutely deny the Israel Ambassador invitation, absolutely. And your statement, which is a, an absolutely

splendid piece of rhetoric, it's, it's, fighting stuff, is largely built around the lies you expected the Israeli ambassador to tell.

Chris Hedges: Not expected, those are the lies I went back and checked. Those are the lies he has repeated since October 7, it wasn't expected.

David Marr: The Press Club has, of course, had a number of speakers who are deeply hostile to Israel's campaign in Gaza, haven't they?

Chris Hedges: Well, I mean, I think you're characterising them as hostile. I would characterise them as fact-based. Were these people?

David Marr: Is fact based a criticism?

Chris Hedges: I don't - I think they're – those were, as I understand it, I didn't sit in on the talks, but they were fact-based reports about the genocide. None of us are carrying out screeds against the State of Israel. We're attempting to explain what the state of Israel is doing in its genocidal campaign in Gaza.

David Marr: Sure, but you know, Chris Sidoti is one of the commissioners of the UN who decided that a genocide was being committed in Gaza --

Chris Hedges: Because, because it is –

David Marr: Yes but –

Chris Hedges: Because it is, I mean, it's incontrovertible at this point. I mean, genocide, scholars –

David Marr: We've had Chris Sidoti on the program, I'm not disputing that –

Chris Hedges: Including B'Tselem, Israeli human rights organisations, I don't think at this point - 90% of Gaza is destroyed. I mean, how can, I don't think that that's I mean, the you know, other than Israel and its supporters, very few people.

David Marr: You misunderstand Chris, you misunderstand me. Perhaps I put the question in too clumsy a way. I'm just asking you whether you acknowledge that the Press Club has programmed a number of speakers whose addresses would be uncomfortable to Israel as yours would have been.

Chris Hedges: Apparently, yes, yeah.

David Marr: Now let's get back to the theme of what you are actually going to talk about. And this is your argument, if I have it right, that Western news agencies, and you, and you cite the biggest, the ones with the biggest reputations, have betrayed the journalists of Gaza, those who have been killed gathering news in Gaza. In what way have they been betrayed?

Chris Hedges: By amplifying Israeli lies, they're discrediting the work of my colleagues in Gaza. We have had more journalists, Palestinian journalists killed than in all of the conflicts since the Second World War combined. Some to the numbers --

David Marr: Some count, some count back earlier than the Second World War. Some people go back –

Chris Hedges: Yes, some people go back. Some people include World War One too. I know, but I mean, the point is –

David Marr: A staggering number of dead.

Chris Hedges: I covered many, I covered many wars. We never had numbers like that. I mean, I covered five years of the war in El Salvador, I covered the war in Bosnia, Yugoslavia, first Gulf. I mean, I've covered many conflicts. We've never seen journalists killed in this quantity and, and discrediting, when we've had, you know, John Simpson at the BBC talk about, there isn't good and objective reporting because we're not there. When, in fact, all of these journalists are ensconced in very nice hotels in Jerusalem and being given background briefings. And have, and I, and I, you may have seen the article that I wrote, I give examples of headlines that are just completely mendacious.

David Marr: Well let's go to, let's go to those examples, because I found them very interesting having, you know. So you take as a key event, and who can deny this, a key event is the bombing of the --- hospital in the south of the Gaza Strip on August, on August the 25th, in which 20 people were killed. Including -- it was the double tap operation, which was designed in order to kill those who came to the help of the people.

Chris Hedges: That's very common by Israel, by the way, yes.

David Marr: And it was a double tap operation, and five of the people killed were journalists. And the IDF, the Israeli defence forces, put out a line that they, that their real target was a camera on top of the building.

Chris Hedges: They called it a Hamas camera.

David Marr: That's right, a Hamas camera. And you cite a number of headlines as evidence of betrayal by the by the big news agencies. Why don't we look at some of the stories? For instance, you cite Reuters and you cite the headline "initial inquiry says Hamas camera was target of Israel strike that killed journalists". That's the one you quote. Okay, and that is indeed a headline from Reuters. Two days later, Reuters clearly reported that the supposed Hamas camera was probably a camera of theirs, a Reuters cameraman.

Chris Hedges: Well –

David Marr: So, so they had not, they did not accept the IDF line. They questioned it.

Chris Hedges: Come on, you're a journalist, and so am I, and you know very well that the initial report is the one that carries, I mean, for instance, when they assassinated, which is the right word, the Palestinian journalist, Shireen Abu Akleh, they lied. The Israelis lied repeatedly that she was killed by Palestinian militants, and then it was actually the Israeli human rights group B'tSelem that showed that the footage that Israel had used of supposed militants that had killed her was taken somewhere else -- let me just finish. And, and, and eventually, months later, they conceded. That's always the game that they play. But by that time, the narrative has moved on. So I'm saying that the initial report, the initial reports which repeat Israeli lies are ones that essentially mask the truth. Now remember, I don't --

David Marr: But let's stick to your examples, because they are the ones you cite in your argument.

Chris Hedges: Well, but those, you just -- that's, that's just the point. The initial report was, it was a Hamas camera. Then two days later, Reuters changed the story.

David Marr: No, the initial report is "IDF says". Now, whether we like it or not, as journalists, we have to report the excuses made by outfits like the IDF, don't we? We have to, we have to report their explanations. That's our job.

Chris Hedges: No, our job is to report the truth. And if you're on the ground and it's clear, I mean, you can within the body of the story, say that, for instance, the IDF may have claimed that it was a camera, but by putting it in the headline, you're giving it a kind of credibility it shouldn't have. And listen, seven years in Gaza, which is how long I was there, this was a repeated problem. So for instance, Israel would carry out a bombing strike against Jabalia or another refugee camp, and they would say that it was a surgical strike against a bomb-making factory. I can't tell you, I was in the camp. I counted the bodies, including children. I am not going to run in my headline that Israel said they carried out that, as a headline, because it was factually untrue. You can put that, in fact you should put that in the story, but I quoted numerous examples of headlines that gave credibility to Israeli lies and discredited the reporting on the ground by Palestinian journalists.

David Marr: Okay, let's take another one of your examples, which is a CNN Headline. Israel army says six, and then in inverted commas, "terrorists", killed in Monday strikes on Gaza hospital. That was the headline. In the body of the copy, "Israel did not offer evidence for its claims. The location is regularly used by reporters and news architects for live streaming. Israel did not explain whether it had attempted to distinguish between journalists, cameras aren't set up by Hamas". Are you just complaining about headlines? Because these reports, these reports are sceptical of

the IDF claims. They report them, but they're sceptical of them. They go on to investigate. You're very, you're very tough. You're very, very tough on Reuters. Reuters investigated this with extreme precision, and came and, and without any equivocation, said that was a Reuters camera.

Chris Hedges: Not initially. They did not.

David Marr: Well, no, they had to investigate. It's something we do as journalists, isn't it?

Chris Hedges: They knew, come on, they knew that it wasn't a Hamas camera because they had given the coordinates of their film crew to the IDF.

David Marr: But they reported almost at once --

Chris Hedges: Not almost at once. That's the problem.

David Marr: Well within, well within hours. You cite Sky News, I'm getting a bit over excited here.

Chris Hedges: Well Sky News is not a particularly credible news organisation.

David Marr: Sure. I watched the initial report on Sky News television in Britain of this massacre at the hospital. It was sceptical, careful, and it did not accept the IDF line. And yet you cite it as a betrayal –

Chris Hedges: I don't know how you can sit here and try and make the case that the Western media doesn't amplify, beheaded babies –

David Marr: I'm looking at your evidence of the of this story.

Chris Hedges: I cited mendacious headlines, but the fact -- and I also write in the story about all of this, you know, mass rape. You know, Screams Without Words in the New York Times, babies in ovens. You know, this is just constant on the part. It's Hasbara, what they call it in Israel. It's constant propaganda. And unfortunately, and I speak as somebody who reported on the ground, it usually overpowers the work that those of us on the ground are doing. And that's not conjecture, that is based on my own experience, because I was based in Gaza, and, you know, I'm an Arabic speaker, and that was constant, and it's extremely frustrating. You haven't been in Gaza. You don't --

David Marr: When were you last in Gaza, Chris?

Chris Hedges: Last in Gaza? 20 - I don't know, 2005, something like that.

David Marr: Yep, you haven't been in Gaza during --

Chris Hedges: Well, nobody's in Gaza. They've blocked the press for the whole - that's the other point.

David Marr: That's right.

Chris Hedges: The Foreign Press is blocked from getting into Gaza.

David Marr: We know that. We know that. But some people might read the statement you put out after the Press Club blocked you. They might read that statement to sound as though you had been there recently. This would be a mistake.

Chris Hedges: I didn't, I didn't say I'd been there recently. Nobody's been in there for the genocide. No one.

David Marr: Might the Press Club have wanted as a speaker, somebody who had been there more recently than you?

Chris Hedges: I think the Press Club did not want the Western media called out and, and that's why I wasn't there. But you know, the fact is, the only people that have been in Gaza since the genocide started are Palestinian, and of course, huge numbers of them are dead.

David Marr: I used to run a show on this, at the ABC called Media Watch. It's a unique show where we look at the, you know, the sins of the media. And there have been lots of sins of the media. I agree with you. But I think your evidence of these sins around the supposed Hamas camera are really, really thin.

Chris Hedges: Well, you know, you've never done what I did, you've never been on the ground, you've never endured this. You've been sitting in –

David Marr: And you're just complaining about headlines because –

Chris Hedges: I'm using headlines as examples. Yeah, it's a it was a short piece. I didn't do media criticism. I was just using them as examples of how there's a knee jerk response on the part of Western media organisations to amplify things that those of us reporting on the ground know are completely false. They give credibility to a false narrative. And this has been true for decades, and that is how they have essentially been able to not only just obscure what's happening in places like Gaza, but demonise Palestinians, including Palestinian journalists.

David Marr: Do you think somebody who is following Reuters is watching an organisation demonising Palestinians?

Chris Hedges: No.

David Marr: No.

Chris Hedges: I think that somebody who follows Reuters is going to have a hard time disentangling the Israeli propaganda from the truth.

David Marr: And and you don't see as an obligation of the press to publish Israel's explanations for its behaviour.

Chris Hedges: I didn't say that. I said the opposite.

David Marr: You said, it's about where it goes in the story, not in the headline. It should be in the body copy.

Chris Hedges: Yes, especially when it's untrue. I mean, in the New York Times, when we knew it was untrue, given the Byzantine nature of the New York Times, we would say they "claimed", claiming within New York Times --

David Marr: Like you said, like you said, it is reported that the Israeli ambassador will be addressing the Press Club.

Chris Hedges: No, I didn't even say that.

David Marr: Yes, you did.

Chris Hedges: No, I said it was reported that they'd reached out to the Israeli ambassador.

David Marr: Do you think the coverage of the Gaza campaign has improved over time? Do you think it is braver, truer, more candid now than it was, say, two years ago at the start?

Chris Hedges: Who are you talking about?

David Marr: Well, you have this grand –

Chris Hedges: Who are you talking about?

David Marr: You're talking about this grand generalisation –

Chris Hedges: They're not there. They're not there. How can you report when you're not there? I spent my whole life as a war correspondent. You know, I was in the field in El Salvador. I was in Gaza, I was in Sarajevo. I mean, how can you report accurately if you're not on the ground?

David Marr: But, but that's, we understand that. On the other hand, the New York Times, The Sydney Morning Herald, the ABC CNN, are carrying reports from inside Gaza that are provided by Palestinian reporters on the ground. My question to you is, are those agencies, those broadcasting, those stations, those newspapers, better. Are they using that material better, more bravely, more truthfully now than they were, say, 18 months or two years ago?

Chris Hedges: Not really. No.

David Marr: That's an extraordinary statement to make. You think, your your reading of the press, of the Western press is that they are what covering for Israel?

Chris Hedges: Those are your words. I said –

David Marr: No I'm asking you, is that your attitude –

Chris Hedges: They're amplifying the Israeli narrative, which is almost, having reported out of places like Gaza, is almost diametrically opposed to what's happening on the ground. There's a reason that Israel won't allow foreign press into Gaza, isn't there?

David Marr: Of course there is, and it's outrageous.

Chris Hedges: Well, why is it outrageous for you?

David Marr: Well, because I want to know the truth of what's going on in there.

Chris Hedges: Well you just conceded that you're not getting it from the Western media, are you?

David Marr: No, I'm not conceding that at all. I acknowledge that the journalists, the Palestinian journalists, and surely you would acknowledge too, are showing great bravery and devotion in reporting what's happening on the ground.

Chris Hedges: Of course, but but they do not have, they are not driving the dominant narrative of the coverage of Gaza, because they're Palestinian, because they're often discredited, and because there is a disproportionate weight given to the propaganda that Israel puts out. I mean, let me just, I can, we can go on for hours, but errant rockets. You know, when there's a bombing of a hospital, when people living around a hospital are killed. It's, you know, rockets. This is just complete fabrication. I mean, Israel actually issued, issued a video of rockets that they said, I think it was, it wasn't Al Shifa. I think it was Nasser. I can't remember, and the timestamp didn't even match when the rockets landed.

David Marr: I'm not challenging your claim that the Israeli authorities lie, that they cover up the crimes they commit. We know that. We know that, and we know that because of the reporting that comes out of Gaza. But you, have you ever looked at the raw feed that comes from these journalists and then seen what Reuters or CNN, CNN, make of it. Because that you seem to be saying they take these reports and then misuse them.

Chris Hedges: No that's not what I said.

David Marr: Well.

Chris Hedges: I didn't say they misused them. I said that the weight of the Israeli propaganda buried the truth. That's just --

David Marr: And still buries the truth.

Chris Hedges: Yes.

David Marr: Chris it's been very interesting to talk to you on Late Night Live. Thank you for joining the show.

Chris Hedges: Okay, thanks.