

The Angertainer Steps Down: Rupert Murdoch's Non-Retirement

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One particularly bad habit the news is afflicted by is a tendency to fall into discussions about itself. Its members, some of them at least, used to call it the "Fourth Estate," an unelected chamber of scribblers supposedly meant to keep an eye on the other three, yet finding itself at times distracted, gossip-driven, and rumour filled by its own exploits.

The greatest distraction that weathered province falls is coverage of its own moguls and pop-representatives. When it came to covering, for instance, the wiles and frauds of Robert Maxwell, little could be trusted about the brow-beating bruiser's exploits. You certainly could not trust what the likes of his own Mirror Group Newspapers or the New York *Daily News*, printed about his affairs. Editors and journalists were terrified; his inner circle, subservient. When a colossal £460 million gap was unearthed in the pension funds of his empire, feigned surprise was registered.

On September 21, a [press release](#) from News Corp announced that Rupert Murdoch was "stepping down as chairman of each board effective as of the upcoming Annual General Meeting of Shareholders of each company [Fox Corporation and News Corporation] in mid-November."

But stepping down in the post-modernist slushy argot of Fox Corp and News Corp never means retirement in any conventional sense. One continues to read, for instance, that Murdoch "will be appointed Chairman Emeritus of each company."

This announcement should have simply caused a wave of sniggering and guffawing. The most savage and imperialist press mogul of them all had always insisted that he would not release the reins of power, [stating](#) in 1998, at the age of 67, that he was "enjoying" being in charge, admitting it was "a selfish choice. To walk away and retire, it's a pretty dismal prospect - I don't want to do that." Were he to do so, he would "die pretty quickly." One of his sons, Lachlan, seemingly the perennial successor in waiting, [had to concede](#) in 2015 that his father was "never retiring".

One of the reasons Murdoch has cited for refusing to step down has been those heel nipping, unprepared progeny of his. “I don’t think my children are ready yet. They may not agree with that, but I’m certainly planning [to] wait several more years.” That was 1998. But in 2023, now aged 92 years, he has reached a point where he would not so much step down as shuffle slightly to the side. This left Lachlan holding the chairmanship of both Fox Corp and News Corp.

Media outlets dutifully covered the announcement. Politicians were careful, respectful, even servile. Australia’s Labor government seemed terrified to say anything contrarian about the man’s horrific, degrading legacy. “Whether he’s chairman or not, it appears he will play a very big role at Fox and at News,” education minister Jason Clare [observed](#) on Channel Seven’s *Sunrise*. Treasurer Jim Chalmers [told](#) ABC’s News Breakfast that Murdoch had “been an incredibly influential figure on the global media landscape”.

Murdoch’s [open letter](#) to employees was defiant and characteristically arrogant. “Our companies are in robust health, as am I,” went the sinister note. “Our opportunities far exceed our commercial challenges. We have every reason to be optimistic about the coming years – I certainly am, and plan to be here to participate in them.” Threateningly, he promised that an entire professional life dedicated to an engagement with “daily news and ideas” would “not change.” Editors and hacks, remain on your guard.

The letter does not deviate from a formula Murdoch embraced from the moment he became a newspaper proprietor in 1952. This did not involve news as accuracy so much as news for purpose, one armed for the fight. “My father firmly believed in freedom, and Lachlan is absolutely committed to the cause.” As he so often does, Murdoch tries the populist tone for size, attacking the grey suits, the “[s]elf-serving bureaucracies” that seek “to silence those who would question their provenance and purpose.” He persists in having a fanciful idea of elites who continue showing “open contempt for those who are not members of their rarefied class.” He follows with the predictable observation that, “Most of the media is in cahoots with those elites, peddling political narratives rather than pursuing the truth.”

Murdoch is right about the establishment collusion but ignores his own role in the venture. He was the man who, after all, entered the sacred temple and acquired such establishment relics as *The Times* of London and the *Wall Street Journal*, showing that establishments are not always monoliths. At times, they can even be protean, shifting and vulnerable.

The era of Donald Trump and his presidency signalled the arrival of Fox as its own establishment and king maker, the hailer and railing force against the pointy heads, the experts, the technocrats. Foetid swamps were drained of establishment types, only to be replaced by Trumpist types.

In doing so, Murdoch’s corporate attack dogs engendered what former Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull [disparaged](#) as an “anger-tainment ecosystem”. Turnbull has every reason to be bitter; his political career was scalped largely because of the urgings of the News Corp hounds. (His own Liberal Party cheerfully took heed and did the deed.) Looking to the United States, Turnbull also saw the Fox ecosystem and its devastating effects: the enagement and division of the citizenry, while “knowingly” sowing lies “most consequentially the one ... where Donald Trump claimed to have won the 2020 election.” This, as Turnbull should know, is only part of the story.

There will, or at least should be, a good number wishing for the implosion of this insidious

empire. Under Lachlan and Rupert's oppressively cast shadow, everything will be done to prevent that from happening. But the imperium's burgeoning legal liabilities may tickle interest in a sale, though this remains a hypothetical musing by Fox watchers. The [\\$787.5 million settlement](#) with Dominion Voting Systems, reached after Fox's false claims of fraud perpetrated during the 2020 presidential election, has emboldened a number of lawsuits, including another worth \$2.7 billion by Smartmatic Corp.

Whatever the changes, A.J. Bauer is surely right in [quashing any assumptions](#) that Fox News "would suddenly become a bastion of journalistic integrity". The rot, its dank and enervating properties, has well and truly set in, blighting journalism in toto and subordinating political classes too afraid to admit otherwise.

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