

Big Media and The New World Order

The Murdoch Empire

By [Stephen Lendman](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

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For Big Media, truth is a scarce commodity and in times of war it's the first casualty, or as esteemed journalist John Pilger noted: "Journalism (not truth) is the first casualty (of war). Not only that: it('s)....a weapon of war (by its) virulent censorship....by omission (and its) power....can mean....life and death for people in faraway countries, such as Iraq."

Famed journalist George Seldes put it another way by condemning the "prostitution of the press" in an earlier era when he covered WW I, the rise of fascism, and most major world and national events until his death in 1995 at age 104. He also confronted the media in books like "Lords of the Press." In it and others, he condemned their corruption, suppression of the truth, and news censorship before the television age, and said "The most sacred cow of the press is the press itself, (and the press is) the most powerful force against the general welfare of the majority of the people."

Orwell also knew a thing or two about truth and said telling it is a "revolutionary act in times of universal deceit." Much else he said applies to the man this article addresses and the state of today's media. He was at his allegorical best in "Animal Farm" where power overwhelms freedom, and "All animals are equal but some....are more equal than others." And he observed in "Nineteen Eighty-Four" that "Those who control the present control the future (and) Those who control the future control the past."

Today's media barons control the world as opinion makers. Like in Orwell's world, they're our national thought control police gatekeepers sanitizing news so only the cleansed residue portion gets through with everything people want most left out - the full truth all the time. They manipulate our minds and beliefs, program our thoughts, divert our attention, and effectively destroy the free marketplace of ideas essential to a healthy democracy they won't tolerate.

None more ruthlessly than Murdoch and the info-entertainment empire he controls. Its flagship US operation is Fox News that Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) calls "the most biased name in news....with its extraordinary right-wing tilt." In response, Murdock defiantly "challenge(s) anybody to show me an example of bias in Fox News Channel" because in his world the entire political spectrum begins and ends with his views. For him and his staff, "fair and balanced," we report, you decide" means supporting the boss. Alternative views are biased, verboten and rarely aired. But they're hammered when they are as the "liberal" mainstream that's code language for CNN and other rivals at a time all media giants match the worst of Fox and are often as crude, confrontational and unprofessional.

Distinguished Australian-raised journalist Bruce Page wrote the book on Murdock called "The

Murdoch Archipelago.” It’s about a man he calls “one of the world’s leading villains (and) global pirate(s)” who rampages the mediasphere putting world leaders on notice what he expects from them and what he’ll offer in return. It’s “let’s make a deal,” Murdock-style that’s uncompromisingly hardball. Acquiesce or get hammered in print and on-air with scathing innuendo, misinformation and outright lies. Few politicians risk it. Others with alternative views have no choice, and world leaders like Hugo Chavez are used to this type character assassination.

He mostly worries about the other kind and with good reason as long-time Latin American expert James Petras reported November 28. Four days before a crucially important constitutional reform referendum, he published an article headlined: “Venezuela’s D-Day – The December 2, 2007 Constituent Referendum: Democratic Socialism or Imperial Counter-Revolution.”

In it, he reported that the Venezuelan government “broadcast and circulated a confidential (US embassy) memo to the CIA” revealing “clandestine operations....to destabilize (the referendum) and coordinate the civil military overthrow of the elected Chavez government.” It’s because independent polls predicted the referendum would pass even though they proved wrong. The dominant media readied to pounce on the results but instead went into gloat mode on a win Chavez called a “pyrrhic victory” but Murdock headlines trumpeted “Chavez’s president-for-life-bid defeated.” This is the type vintage copy Page covers with reams of examples in his book.

Its central theme is that the media baron wants to privatize “a state propaganda service (and manipulate it) without scruple (or) regard for the truth.” In return he wants “vast government favors such as tax breaks, regulatory relief, and monopoly” market control free from competitors having too much of what he wants solely for himself and apparently feels it’s owed to him.

Because of his size and media clout, he usually gets his way and mostly in places mattering most – in the biggest markets with greatest profit potential in a business where truth is off the table and partnering with government for a growing revenue stream and greater influence is all that counts.

The Murdoch Empire from its Inception

Murdoch’s empire is vast and is part of his News Corporation that was incorporated in Australia in 1979 (Murdock’s home). It was then reincorporated in 2004 in the US in the corporate-friendly state of Delaware with its headquarters in New York. The company was huge when media experts Robert McChesney and Edward Herman wrote about it in their 1997 book, “The Global Media Giants.” Back then, it ranked fifth in size among the giants (it’s now third after Time Warner and Disney) with \$10 billion in 1996 sales when the authors called the company “the archetype for the twenty-first century media firm....and the best case study (example) for understanding global media firm behavior.”

Gross revenue today tops \$28 billion, operating income is nearly \$4.5 billion, the company has over 47,000 employees, it operates on six continents, 75% of its business is in the US, and one industry analyst told McChesney and Herman 10 years ago “Murdock seems to have Washington in his back pocket” as he keeps getting favorable rulings to do what he wants. And that was under Bill Clinton who signed the outrageous 1996 Telecommunications (giveaway) Act for Big Media and Big Telecom that let them consolidate further through

mergers and acquisitions and be able to squash competition and diversity.

In those days and earlier, Murdoch aimed high to control “multiple forms of programming – news, sports, films and children’s shows–and beam them via satellite or TV stations to homes (around the world with) Viacom CEO Sumner Redstone (once saying) Murdock ‘want(ed) to conquer the world.’ ” Other media chiefs said he was doing it, and he’s “the one media executive they most respect and fear, and the one whose moves they study.”

Murdoch inherited his father’s Australian News Limited newspapers in 1952. He had no journalistic background but compensated by cultivating political influence through favorable electoral coverage. He became managing director of News Limited in 1953 and then took over running Adelaide News in 1954. He founded News Corporation in 1979 but years earlier concentrated on acquisitions and expansion to build his business. In 1964, he launched Australia’s first national daily, The Australian, later acquired The Daily Telegraph in Sydney, and in the late 1960s entered the UK market by snaring The News of the World. In 1950, it was the world’s most popular English language newspaper with a peak circulation of around 8.4 million. It was about six million when Murdock got it in 1968.

More acquisitions followed. They included The (London) Times and The Sunday Times in 1981, and by the 1980s he was a dominant force in the US. He bought the film studio, Twentieth Century Fox, that launched Fox Television and now notorious Fox News.

Today, the company is in everything media-related (except music) and describes itself on its web site as “Creating and distributing top-quality news, sports and entertainment around the world.” That’s in the eye of the beholder where there’s considerable disagreement with the official company position. Nonetheless, the site lists a vast array of News Corporation operations:

- Filmed entertainment: 20th Century Fox, 20th Century Fox Espanol, 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 20th Century Fox International, 20th Century Fox Television, Fox Searchlight Pictures, Fox Studios Australia, Fox Studios Baja, Fox Studios LA, Fox Television Studios, and Blue Sky Studios;

- Television: Fox Broadcasting, Fox Sports Australia, Fox Television Stations, FOXTEL, MyNetworkTV, STAR; and the newest entry, Fox Business, to compete with CNBC and Bloomberg;

- Cable: Fox Business Network (just launched), Fox Movie Channel, Fox News Channel, Fox Sports Channel, Fox College Sports, Fox Sports Enterprises, Fox Sports En Espanol, Fox Sports Net, Fox Soccer Channel, Fox Reality, Fuel TV, FX, National Geographic, Channel United States, Channel Worldwide, Speed, and Stats, Inc.;

- Direct broadcast satellite television: BSkyB, DirectTV, and Sky Italia;

- Magazines and Inserts: Big League, Inside Out, donna hay, ALPHA, News America Marketing, Smart Source, The Weekly Standard, and Gemstar – TV Guide International Inc.;

- Newspapers: 21 in “Australasia” including the Daily Telegraph and Sunday Telegraph, Herald Sun and Sunday Herald Sun, Post-Currier, Sunday Mail, Sunday Times, The Australian, The Mercury, and the Weekly Times; 6 in the UK including The Times, The Sunday Times, The Sun, and News International; and two in the US – the New York Post (the

Columbia Journalism review calls “a force for evil”) and Wall Street Journal as of December 13 when News Corporation announced the completion of its acquisition of Dow Jones & Company;

— Books: HarperCollins Publishers, Australia, Canada, Children’s Books, United States, United Kingdom, Zondervan;

— Other assets: 25 are listed including Broadsystem, Fox Interactive Media, IGN Entertainment, FoxSports.com, Fox.com, News Outdoor and others.

News Corp. even claims to be addressing climate change, says it’s “committed” to “lowering the energy use of its businesses” across the globe, will “switch to renewable sources of power when economically feasible,” and will “become carbon neutral by 2010.” True or false, it’s likely the company does address its energy consumption to cut costs as most other businesses also do, climate change or not.

Bruce Page picks up the story in “The Murdoch Archipelago” published in 2003. Even while attacking the media baron, he says he and others do some good. Murdoch, for instance, “exposes numberless sexual peccadilloes, and much lesser crime – but not dud military campaigns or Enronesque frauds.” He specializes in sensationalist pseudo-journalism that distorts the truth on the news and loads it with juiced-up reports on murder, mayhem, mishaps, celebrity gossip and soft porn. Page goes on to say “the world would be better off without News Corp.” and before he ever bought it “There’s certainly a good case that he should not own The Wall Street Journal.”

Too late, now that the Bancroft family sold it to him for the billions he offered and muscle he applied to get it like he always does. They might have considered former Chicago columnist Mike Royko’s comment when he left the Sun-Times after Murdoch bought it (and later sold it Hollinger, Inc.’s fraud convicted Conrad Black). Moving to the Tribune, he remarked “no self-respecting fish would (want to be) wrapped in a Murdock paper....His goal is not quality journalism (it’s) vast power, political power.” Murdock’s own private joke also should have scared them off that “God doesn’t trust (him) in the dark.” Nor should anyone anywhere, anytime.

Page’s polemic traces Murdoch’s history in his lengthy book covering his rise from early beginnings to his unrivaled status in today’s media world. It’s the story of power and a man who wields it ruthlessly as a world class predator – with deception and chicanery, arrogance and artfulness, charm and cunning and sheer muscle, will, intimidation, poisonous influence and toadying to get his way as he generally does. Whatever Rupert wants, Rupert gets, and nothing stands in his way. That goes for governments and his editors as well as reporters in print and on-air. No one crosses Murdoch. Anyone practicing real journalism gets dispatched elsewhere to pursue it.

Page explained from firsthand accounts that Murdoch newsrooms aren’t fun places to work. He upbraids editors and interferes with their work. Also, as explained above, he uses his operations for power play politics to bend governments to his will. As his influence grows, so does the bending, and along with it, fake journalism bearing no resemblance to the real kind. It’s a Murdoch specialty by a world class pariah in a media world beset with them, but Murdoch’s the worst. He’s bereft of ethics, an authoritarian boss, and the book is full of examples of how he throws his weight around, bullies people and prevails. It also expresses particular displeasure about the way he cozied up to the Chinese in 1994 by removing BBC

World News (no media paragon, just classier than Murdoch) from Satellite TV Asia Region in return for special favors he got.

Page also exposes Murdoch's absurd claim to be an enemy of the establishment, a populist, and battler for the common man. This from someone raised in privilege, courts the powerful, represents entrenched wealth, is now a billionaire, benefitted from nepotism, is passing his empire to his children, smashes print unions, runs a "bordello of papers" as the Sunday Times called it before he bought it, and has easy access to Number 10, the White House and other seats of power.

Page worries that media barons cause serious harm by undermining democracy, and Murdoch's the worst of the bunch. He targets the vulnerable, attacks disenfranchised minorities and bashes gays, Muslims, innocent victims of war and oppression, and anyone getting in his way. Page warns that unless we see his threat and confront it, all free societies are at risk.

Page also exposes the Murdoch myth of an archetypical entrepreneur whose "journalistic (and business) genius" got him where he is. Nonsense about a man, like his father, who uses press power for business favors to gain more power. Yet he audaciously told his biographer, William Shawcross, to "Give me an example. When have we ever asked for anything?" Page has reams of it exposing Murdoch's guile and mendacity about wanting a "level (media) playing-field." Just the opposite. He's obsessed with monopoly control and smashes competition for it.

He also smashes editors who disobey him. One observer called him unhinged, out of control and completely amoral while a former Sunday Times editor, Andrew Neil, describes the "terrorism" Murdoch spreads throughout his empire to get his way. Neil also wrote: "Rupert expects his papers to stand broadly for what he believes - a combination of right-wing Republicanism from America mixed with undiluted Thatcherism from Britain."

Murdoch's US Fox News Flagship

Fox News smoothes the way for him as a round-the-clock Bush administration commercial imitating real news. It debuted in 1996 and one of its on-air hosts explained the "Channel was launched (because) something was wrong with news media....somewhere bias found its way into reporting....Fox....is committed to being fair and balanced (covering) stories everybody is reporting-and....stories....you will see only on Fox."

Later, the Columbia Journalism Review had a different view. It reported "several" former Fox employees "complained of 'management sticking their fingers' in the writing and editing of stories to cook the facts to make a story more palatable to right-of-center tastes." One of them complained about never running into that before before while FAIR reported "Fox's signature political news show, Special Report with Brit Hume, was originally created as a daily one-hour update devoted to the 1998 Clinton sex scandal." So much for "fair and balanced" real news.

This type attack never happens to a Republican and hasn't for Fox's presidential favorite, Rudy Giuliani, who was sinking fast, fared poorly in early primaries and now has withdrawn from the race. Nonetheless, his leadership failures and marital transgressions were ignored, and so were his ties to friend, business partner and former New York City Police Commissioner, Bernard Kerik. He was indicted on 16 counts of federal corruption, including

bribery, conspiracy, tax fraud, and lying on his federal disclosure forms for not reporting a \$250,000 “loan” (a likely payoff) from an Israeli billionaire that may have been sent to him for Giuliani for favors rendered.

An added twist is that a former Kerik lover, Judith Regan, sued Murdock’s News Corp. and accused the company of pressuring her to commit perjury to protect Giuliani’s presidential hopes. Fox News won’t explain or cover it, but it daily airs preferential bias for Giuliani in its slanted reporting. It’s a blatant example of unethical coverage to manipulate news for its own purpose.

FAIR also blasted one of Hume’s regular features – “The Political Grapevine” that’s billed as “the most scintillating two minutes in television” as a sort of right-wing “hot-sheet.” It features anchor Hume “reading off a series of gossipy items culled from other (generally) right-wing” sources. It’s not subtle and is blatantly partisan calling Democrats, environmentalists, the liberal media, civil rights groups, anti-war activists and Hollywood and other liberals “villians” while Republicans are good guys or “heros who can do no wrong.” When critics jump on Fox, it hits back claiming a responsibility to correct the “liberal media’s bias” with Bill O’Reilly saying Fox “gives voice to people who can’t get on other networks.” What it does, of course, is slant the news its way to please the boss, and that means a distorted hard-right point of view only.

It also means the more people watch it, the less informed they are as News Dissector Danny Schechter explained about all TV news in his candid insider’s book “The More You Watch, The Less You Know.” That doesn’t bother Murdoch who spends millions for lobbying and hundreds of thousands more for political contributions – mostly to Republicans but also to friendly Democrats to buy and keep his growing influence. It pays off with senators like Trent Lott once telling the Washington Post: “If it hadn’t been for Fox, I don’t know what I’d have done for the news.” He means a right-wing echo chamber pretending to be unbiased.

Long-time Republican operative Roger Ailes runs it for Murdock with FAIR once quoting former senior Bush aide Lee Atwater saying he operates on “two speeds – attack and destroy.” He also called Clinton a “hippie president,” refers to liberals as “bigots,” and assures all on-air programming conforms to his views. Only Republicans get hired to air them and those screened for jobs are asked to be sure.

As for punditry and political debate, here’s how FAIR characterizes it: on shows like Hannity & Colmes, The O’Reilly Factor and The Beltway Boys it’s like watching “a Harlem Globetrotters game (knowing) which side is supposed to win.” Or maybe pro wrestling. The discussion is so lopsided, it’s impossible hiding Fox’s partisanship, and it shows with on-air hosts like Tony Snow endorsing Republican Bob Dole for President in 1996 and then seamlessly becoming White House press secretary from May, 2006 to September, 2007. Other Fox “journalists” are as bad and collect handsome fees addressing Republican gatherings and corporate interest groups with big name ones like O’Reilly reportedly charging \$50,000 per engagement on the lecture circuit delivering red meat to audiences that love it.

So do hard core Fox viewers who swallow the channel’s pro-Bush, pro-war, pro-occupation America uber alles type journalism combined with juiced-up infotainment reports imitating real news. It makes it hard knowing where one ends and the other begins. In the mainstream, much of it is the same, and all of it defiles what journalism should do –

- be the principle source of political information to create an informed citizenry Jefferson said was “the bulwark of a democracy;”
- provide a wide range of opinion and analysis of all key issues affecting everyone;
- hold governments accountable to the public interest and not just the privileged elite part of it; and generally
- “comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.”

Murdoch and the rest of the dominant media fail the test. Their concentrated power blunt democracy by destroying its essential free marketplace of ideas. Today, social control substitutes for diversity, free expression, and an informed electorate; pro-business ideology trumps the greater good; and the single-minded pursuit of profit triumphs over beneficial social change. Combating it means confronting the media barons who are as determined as Murdoch to squash us.

Organizations like Free Press are doing it. It’s a “national nonpartisan organization working to increase informed public participation in crucial media policy debates.” It aims to “generate policies that will produce a more competitive and public interest-oriented media system with a strong nonprofit and noncommercial sector” promoting greater diversity. The more democratic our media, the more accountable government will be to public concerns. Free Press focuses on four broad areas to help: “media ownership” for greater competition and diversity; “independent and public media” free from the single-minded pursuit of profit; “internet freedom” from corporate control; and “media reform” of a corrupted system aided by government that must end.

To happen, public participation is essential, and for that organizations like Free Press are crucial. Corporate media control is the core issue of our time along with overall corporate dominance with governments as their handmaiden. Democracy and a free society are impossible unless that changes. It’s we the people vs. the Murdochs of the world, and we’ve only just begun fighting back.

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