

Confronting the 'Safe', Toxic and Disempowering State-Corporate Version of Journalism, Reality and Dissent

By [Media Lens](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

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One of the weirdest features of contemporary culture is the way even the best corporate journalists write as though under enemy occupation.

Journalists admit, even in public, but particularly in private, that there is much they *just cannot say*. As Noam Chomsky has [noted](#), the best investigative reporters 'regard the media as a sham' trying to 'play it like a violin: If they see a little opening they'll try to squeeze something in that ordinarily wouldn't make it through'.

Of course, the truth of the sham is one of the 'tunes' that doesn't get played. While not typically subject to Big Brother-style threats, journalists are keenly aware that they can be swiftly 'disappeared' by the grey, profit-oriented suits draped in hierarchical chains above them.

To his credit, George Monbiot is one of the better journalists who seriously wrestles with his conscience on these issues. The crisis apparent in his writing and in his reaction to criticism – Media Lens 'drives me bananas', he [says](#) – is characteristic of someone trying, and failing, to overcome the limits on free speech.

Writing in the Guardian, Monbiot [rails](#) against 'the rotten state of journalism' and confesses: 'I hadn't understood just how quickly standards are falling'.

It is a classic moment of semi-quixotic, Monbiotic dissent. The 'rotten state of journalism' *could* be a reference to the inherent contradictions of a corporate 'free press', the Guardian included. On the other hand, the article has been carefully titled, 'Our "impartial" *broadcasters* have become mouthpieces of the elite.' (Our emphasis)

And who is the target when Monbiot notes that 'those who are supposed to scrutinise the financial and political elite are embedded within it. Many belong to a service-sector aristocracy, wedded metaphorically (sometimes literally) to finance. Often unwittingly, they amplify the voices of the elite, while muffling those raised against it'?

These criticisms could also implicate the 'quality' liberal press. But Monbiot quickly scurries down to lower moral ground by supplying specific examples from, who else?, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and everyone's favourite media punch bag, the BBC. The Beeb, of course, is sufficiently different from the Guardian to spare the latter's blushes.

As Monbiot says, the BBC 'grovels to business leaders', supplying "'a Conservative,

Eurosceptic, pro-business version of the world”’. And this, he notes archly, ‘is where people turn when they don’t trust the corporate press’. Again, this widens the target for a brief moment before Monbiot concludes:

‘Those entrusted to challenge power are the loyalists of power. They rage against social media and people such as Russell Brand, without seeing that the popularity of alternatives is a response to their own failures’.

But he points away from his own employer:

‘If even the public sector broadcasters parrot the talking points of the elite, what hope is there for informed democratic choice?’

The concluding comments are ironic indeed, for while the Guardian does host Brand’s output, it has also led the ferocious liberal assault on his reputation, as we noted [here](#). And it has performed the same role in attacking [Julian Assange](#), [Hugo Chavez](#), [Noam Chomsky](#) and many other dissidents.

On the face of it, Monbiot would appear to be rationally and ethically obliged to remind his readers that the paper hosting his condemnation of broadcast media is itself a prime example of the problem he is describing. We [tweeted](#) him:

“‘Those entrusted to challenge power are the loyalists of power.” Isn’t that also true of Guardian/Independent journalists?’

[And:](#)

‘Also true of journos who write, “Our broadcasters have become mouthpieces of the elite”, without mentioning their own media?’

Monbiot did not respond. A fellow tweeter, however, [chirruped](#) back:

‘undoubtedly true, but even GM [Monbiot] can’t stop sea levels rise. Besides, no job no platform. He’s an ally, even if works for Graun.’

[And:](#)

‘GM written an article I am sure you agree with? Unrealistic to expect direct criticism of his employer. Be happy!’

This is pretty much what we receive every time we challenge a ‘mainstream’ dissident: they are doing their best within the constraints of the system; we should support rather than criticise them.

From this perspective, rational questions, even polite challenges, are viewed as a betrayal of ‘solidarity’. This might be arguable if the world was making steady, positive progress rather

than hurtling to hell in a climate-denying handcart. But anyway, as Glenn Greenwald [writes](#):

‘Few things are more dangerous than having someone with influence or power hear only praise or agreement.’

A Feral Roar From The New York Times

In the same week, in a piece published in the New York Times, Monbiot [writes](#):

‘Live free or die: This is the maxim of our age. But the freedoms we celebrate are particular and limited.’

True enough. And ironic indeed, given the limited freedoms celebrated by Monbiot in the Guardian that very week. He continues:

‘Even the freedoms we do possess we tend not to exercise... It’s no wonder, when we possess and use it so little, that we make a fetish out of freedom.’

Monbiot seems to supply an example of frustrated freedom fetishism in describing his own peak experience:

‘I felt it most keenly when I stumbled across the fresh corpse of a deer in a wood. I hoisted it onto my shoulders. As soon as I felt its warmth on my back, my skin flushed, my hair stood on end and I wanted to roar. Civilization slid off like a bathrobe... These experiences ignited in me a smoldering longing for a richer and rawer life than the one I lead.’

How readers smoulder and long for a feral ‘roar’ of honesty from Monbiot on the role of the Guardian, Independent, New York Times and other liberal media in creating the catastrophe that is corporate, no-choice ‘democracy’, ‘responsibility to protect’ foreign policy and climate-killing corporate terrorism. But, like most people, we *do* understand the silence because the price paid would likely be high.

In truth, the brightest and best of corporate journalism, Monbiot included, have played a key role in persuading readers to continue perceiving advert- and corporate entertainment-drenched newspapers as ‘normal’. They have kept us buying into this ‘safe’, toxic, deeply disempowering state-corporate version of journalism, reality and dissent.

Monbiot calls for ‘a partial rewilding’ of our lives, one that ‘allows us to step into a world that is not controlled and regulated’ to ‘recover some measure of the freedom that has been denied to us’.

Absolutely, and domesticated journalism should lead the way.

So what would a ‘rewilding’ of journalism look like? Where could a genuinely ‘feral’ Monbiotic keyboard roar loudest?

Rewilding Journalism

The freely-given support we receive – often expressed in the form of spontaneous, unsolicited donations every time we send a media alert or [cogitation](#) – tells us that the public is desperate for an alternative to the crass demeritocracy of corporate journalism. With no profile and very little outreach, we are able to work full-time and rarely send direct appeals for support.

It seems to us that the public is sick to the back teeth of corporate media pretending to supply the truth and nothing but, while miraculously satisfying the fanatical demands of media moguls, corporate advertisers, parent companies, supportive state news sources and other business allies. What a pitiful lie this is!

Many readers are aware, on some level, that the profit motive distorts and cheapens every last thing offered by a ‘mainstream’ media system that in fact represents the extreme viewpoint of 0.1% of the population.

Any given journalist might not give a damn about antagonising the White House, BP, or the Royal Family, but he or she knows that the host media does and *must* care. So all corporate media output marinades in an environment of ‘caution’, ‘respectability’ and self-preservational second-guessing. ‘Je suis Charlie Hebdo’ aside, write or say anything construed as ‘offensive’ or ‘outrageous’ by the wrong people, and a vast state-corporate, reputational wrecking ball can be mobilised. *Anyone* can be made a pariah, and journalists and corporate media entities cannot afford the consequences.

To reiterate, we know from our own experience that the public is not indifferent to this – people are very keen to support something positive to change this disastrous status quo. But how to do it? Political parties, corporate media, human rights organisations, and of course organised religions, are almost all fatally compromised. What the public really wants is an inspirational, uncompromised cause that will genuinely challenge state-corporate power and propaganda.

It may sound like wild fantasy, but we can imagine a collective of high-profile writers and journalists willing to detach themselves from corporate and state media, and to place themselves entirely at the mercy of the public.

Two points would be absolutely key for the success of such an initiative: journalistic output should be completely free of charge to the public, a gift; and it should be openly presented as a declaration of intellectual war on the corporate media. Not in any vindictive way – the intention would be to offer an example of honest journalism based on selfless generosity as a contrast to the compromised, greed-based corporate media.

Imagine if George Monbiot, John Pilger, Noam Chomsky, Edward Herman, David Peterson, Jonathan Cook, Mark Curtis, Glenn Greenwald, Nafeez Ahmed, Robert Fisk, Naomi Klein, Russell Brand, Michael Moore, Julian Assange, Chris Hedges, Sharon Beder, Seumas Milne and others rejected the media moguls, billionaires, parent companies and advertisers, and offered their work completely free of charge from a single media outlet. Would the global public be willing to support such a group, such a cause, through donations? The answer, we think, is blindingly obvious.

As the world continues to slide into [the climate change abyss](#), is it not at least worth the attempt to suck as much dissident talent and reflected credibility as possible out of the corporate media and use it instead to expose these media with unleashed insider

knowledge?

Please understand that this strategy has *never* been attempted – even the very best dissidents have tempered their criticism in a conscious attempt to gain access to a wider audience through corporate media. Even at this late stage of the human crisis, no-holds-barred criticism of the ‘quality’ corporate media has simply *never been attempted* in an organised, high-profile form.

We believe the internet makes the global outreach and required level of donations achievable. The support would be vast, *if* the journalism was free, and if it offered a genuine, uncompromising challenge to the corporate stranglehold.

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