

How the Global Media Lost Its Way

Institutions and presses that held power to account have become part of unaccountable power, and now only tough reform can reverse the damage.

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Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

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*Herman and Chomsky call it **the age of manufactured consent**. Surrounded by propaganda, unable to determine motives behind selective presentation of content on an illusory spectrum of media choice, we yet depend on mainstream news to edify, inform our knowledge and sensibility. That cartel-like centralised media authority over discourse may be criticised by some on the ultra left, but for many it is still worth having, with a totemic and actual role holding the horrors of power to account. And sometimes they do. Op-ed policy? Political discourse? Let the experts handle it.*

The result is that the big conglomerates, Newscorp and The Guardian group dominating the fore, increasingly modulate the national psyche and the information, stories and investigations it is privy to; they ostensibly articulate the true in a deceit ridden politics.

But that cliché is precisely that and one that has spawned critical complacency on the part of the public and self-appraisal on the part of the press.

In all truth publishing is as wont to be corrupted by dirty agendas as politics. The indictment is most obvious at The Sun following The Guardian's exposure of systematic interception as a policy which targeted vulnerable adult's and dead children's mobile phones.

The story of press ethics, however, runs deeper, begets indictments against adversarial outlets across the opinion spectrum, incriminating the whole industry: publishers are not interested in public interest value but the vacuous flux of the "newsworthy." Since income streams from ad revenue dwarves budgets managed publically it is the vested interests of corporate benefactors that triumphs in the boardrooms, op-eds, opinion, features and news. A disgrace for a fourth estate founded as a check and balance against corruption and no doubt a source of global shame.

The barons of spin are experiencing unprecedented power of persuasion. Internet echo chambers which serve a tension between empowering lively exchange of diverse ideas and reinforcing dogma are serviceable for the self promotion of elite propaganda.

For example the liberal Guardian and radical Intercept too frequently abscond from dispassionate appraisals of public interest stories and spoon feed ideological sermons, joining their tabloid adversaries in giving the megaphone to ideology over ideas incorruptible by agendas. The fourth estate idea against institutional corruption caught on in part because it prevented the powerful from abusing the public in impunity which is, now, systemic in the media itself, simultaneously a setter of hidden agendas alloyed to wealthy interests.

This scandal runs deeper. It asks fundamental questions firstly of the purpose of the media as a functionary of free speech and constitutional integrity, but also about the validity of defunct news institutions.

Are they hand in hand with power, doing more harm than good? Are they corrupt? Are they hurting a lively exchange of diverse ideas?

There are plenty of independent minded commentators like John Pilger who argue that corrupt power and its propaganda is enhanced by large amounts of obscure capital flowing in to authoritarian boardrooms. Concurrently, dependence on corporations for their existence reduces their effectiveness speaking truth to power of a corporate state, in the interests of citizens.

That is precisely what happened after the post-2016 election Russiagate scandal. The rumours flew in and took over the discourse, with vague conspiracies bypassing critique of the real collusion between the CIA and Russian agents, atop the intervention of UK spies in foreign elections. The Russia conspiracy industry created a vacuum that led to a diversion from the truth shadow fronts operate globally and not on simple national polarities, abusing and undermining the public's intelligence. They were there to save us from Russian malpractice, they told us, while they guilty of gross misspeaking. Mueller's disclosures have only partly indicted Russia. Thirteen alleged agents are a symptom of Russia's powerlessness: Western news, its management, its dissemination, its hidden hand, is deliberately, or under duress, inflating the threat of Facebook advertisements published only after the election.

Far away from the op-ed in a radical corner of the Internet is a website marking the spot where a cryptographer and team of researchers communed to found Wikileaks. Their aim was to empower, protect whistleblowers shining a bright light on corruption caused largely by deregulated neoliberal governance exported globally through hyper interventionist military adventurism, the playtime of venture capital. After Iraq, through Libya, Syria, Wikileaks flooded the data commons with robust documentary evidence from the epicentres of global injustice. Along with Snowden, Manning, Ellsberg and a legion of socially conscientious citizens Wikileaks never doubted that sabotage is solidarity where telling the truth is treason.

Yet along the way from the Glasnost moment when they arrested international attention, attitudes changed. After the chase for Assange was enacted and long after Sweden dropped its charges outlets in both the liberal and radical media had to revise their belief that his organisation could prevent abuse and malpractice in states under the totalitarian spell. The left expanded its personal fallacious attacks more comprehensively than the right; The Guardian content to speculate about about personal hygiene. Ironically its pledge "Facts are free/sacred" was bastardised in an endgame to write the obituary the CIA always wanted.

"The (CIA) mission was to destroy the "trust" that was Wikileaks' "centre of gravity" with threats of "exposure [and] criminal prosecution" says veteran dissident John Pilger, who has served speaking truth to power in dozens of conflict zones.

The Iraq War of 2003, waged by US-UK led NATO forces, between them, Sadaam's Baathist regime, and insurgent separatists triggered bloodshed from a moral abyss. Evidence of US forces opening fire in a premeditated attack on innocent, unarmed, peaceable journalists in

a leaked video was a turning point not only for Pilger and Assange but the whole international community. It was televised warfare only unredacted, and seemed to start a new era of dissent: 20 years after the Samizdat press was successful, a new mood for Glasnost from inside the American empire swept across the world.

“Wikileaks has exposed the way America dominates much of human affairs, including its epic crimes” says Pilger. By the time the “wholesale” murder of civilians became public, Assange was a senior threat to the war cartel. Their operations were riskier, no longer securely secret. So they turned their siege on him. Rape, so often a weapon of war, was cynically and reprehensibly weaponised as propaganda. And when the UN motioned his persecution illegal and of high humanitarian concern much of the media joined the UK state in disregarding its expertise, judgement and auditing role, a common trait of states that abuse human rights. His crime was to rehabilitate the media’s role of telling the truth. He uncovered the effacement of democracy and human rights at western hands in cahoots with murderous cartels and guerillas. When he submitted his evidence to the media, he was fired.

Political lying is the world’s worst kept secret. Since Orwell standards have not improved. The scale of abuse has only worsened. Citizen journalism is present with the overwhelming task of undercutting old privilege network discourses, but with technology in our hands, we can confine them to, back them in to their castles, and release truth from the trebuchet. Where media fails its duty to report responsibly, we must write and research for ourselves.

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