

Rupert Murdoch may be a Convenient Demon, but the Media is a Junta

By [John Pilger](#)

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Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

Australia is the world's first murdochracy. US citizen Rupert Murdoch controls 70 per cent of the metropolitan press. He has monopolies in state capitals and provincial centres. The only national newspaper is his. He is a dominant force online and in pay-TV and publishing. Known fearfully as "Rupert", he is the Chief Mate.

But Murdoch's dominance is not as it is often presented. Although he is now one of the West's accredited demons, thanks to his phone-hackers, he is but part of a media system that will not change when his empire is broken up. The political extremism that is the concentration of the world's wealth in few hands and the accelerating impoverishment of the majority will ensure this. A Melbourne journalist, Paul Chadwick, one of the few to rebel against Murdoch, described this as "akin to a small group of generals who sit above the main institutions... a junta in all but name."

Consider the junta's rise. In the US, at the end of the Second World War, 80 per cent of newspapers were independently owned. By 1987, most were controlled by 15 corporations, of which six dominate today. Their ideological message is a mantra. They promote global and domestic economic piracy and the cult of "perpetual war". This is currently served by a "liberal" president who pursues whistleblowers, dispatches drones and selects from his personal "kill list" every Tuesday. In Britain, where the propaganda of big capital also dominates, the historic convergence of the two main political parties is rarely news. Tony Blair, a conspirator in the greatest crime of this century, is promoted as "a wasted talent". In all these agendas, notably the promotion of war, the Murdoch press often plays a supporting role to the reputable BBC. The Leveson inquiry has shown not the slightest interest in this.

In Australia, there is the Order of Mates. A struggle for the mantle of Chief Mate is currently under way. From out of a vast Aladdin's Cave of mineral wealth, comes Gina Rinehart, said to be the richest woman in the world. The daughter of iron ore billionaire Lang Hancock, Rinehart and her fellow mining oligarchs all but got rid of Labor prime minister Kevin Rudd in 2010 when he proposed a modest tax on their huge profits. Rinehart believes Australia's media is basically communist, especially the Fairfax group of which she has now acquired almost a fifth of the stock.

Fairfax publishes the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* and this week announced the sacking of 1900 employees, including senior editors. The papers are to be shrunk in size. Such a "bloodbath", it is said, will deny Australia the last of its "independent press". In fact, like the Murdoch press, both titles have long been the voice of deeply conservative colonial and bourgeois power in a country whose rapacious past, inequities and racism are routinely

suppressed, along with any sustained critique of a glorified militarism that has made Australia, in effect, a US mercenary.

“Give me tits, tots and pistol shots,” declared long-gone Sydney newspaper proprietor Ezra Norton. Although Norton’s guidelines remain intact today, the “independent” press prefers a set menu of “free market” journalism: personality politics and its skulduggery, shopping, the joys of private education, the vagaries of real estate and war-patriotism. There are honourable exceptions, of course, but going against the media/political cronyism requires not only courage but a publisher.

As in Britain and the US, the most insidious power is public relations. Leading Australian journalists travel to countries such as Israel on sponsored freebies. The day Fairfax announced it was sacking a fifth of its workforce, an executive of a PR firm whose accounts include McDonald’s, wrote, “I believe these evolutions will result in improved PR campaigns, with stories running across multiple platforms... Great news for our clients.” Described as “insensitive” and “harsh”, her honesty had touched upon the transformation of western societies by the “invisible” power of PR and lobbying. In 2003, Fairfax senior executive Mark Scott, said, “Smart clever people are not the answer. What you want are people who can execute your strategy and Fairfax’s strategy to create editorial to support maximising revenues from display advertising.” Rupert or Gina could not have put it better.

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