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DEPRIVATIZING THE MEDIA

IT'S INTERESTING THAT MEDIA AND POLITICIANS ARE THE TWO INSTITUTIONS SINGLED OUT FOR PARTICULAR VILIFICATION BY THE PARLIAMENTARY PROTESTERS. THESE ARE THE TWO MOST OBVIOUS TARGETS LIKELY TO BE SINGLED OUT BY THE DISAFFECTED IN ANY SOCIETY UNDER STRESS, AS OURS HAS BEEN THROUGH THE PANDEMIC.



I'M NOT ONE OF THOSE PEOPLE ADDICTED TO PROPHECIES OF ARMAGEDDON ON THE INTERNET, BUT WHAT HAS BEEN GOING ON OVER THE LAST 10 YEARS WITH GLOBAL MEDIA MEGA COMPANIES LIKE GOOGLE AND FACEBOOK, CAN BE LIKENED TO THE ACTIVITIES CENTURIES AGO OF THOSE COUNTRIES OF EUROPE, INCLUDING THE BRITISH EMPIRE, WHO COLONISED VAST SWATHES OF THE REST OF THE WORLD. IN BOTH CASES NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS TURNED AN INDIFFERENT EYE WHILE THE LIKES OF THE BRITISH EAST INDIA COMPANY, AND THE NEW ZEALAND COMPANY TOOK LICENCE TO EXPLOIT THE RIGHTS OF OTHERS TO THEIR LIVING SPACE, FOR PRIVATE PROFIT.

TO TEST THIS PROPOSITION, try asking yourself to what extent our Media heed the criticisms of their performance by their own consumers, the Public? As a media consumer advocate, I have to say, not a lot. Sure, they measure audience likes and dislikes, but that is not the same as really listening to what people are saying. The radio spectrum and the television satellite space are not private property, as they are currently being used, because in the end, the right to operate is a matter of securing a license, or some other form of permission, is in the gift of the Government whom we elect. That right of access, involves the acquisition of a property right, which like our water and its fauna, and our air, belong in the widest sense, to us, the people of NZ. Of course, private radio and television do have a very important role of media dissemination, and competition with public media is necessary for the health of both. However, the Government has an obligation, to set the ground rules, the parameters under which both public and private entities operate, so as to protect the Public Interest, and maintain Community Values.

Meanwhile, the corporate behaviour of Facebook, Google, Twitter and the like, are an existential threat to democracy itself, by being allowed by Governments around the world to treat the radio and television spectrum as their own private playground. Instituted purely for their profit, at the expense of the consumers, who are actually the sovereign owners of that space.

THE RECENT (MARCH 10) RELEASE of the Experts report to the Government on the future of Public Broadcasting in NZ, (merging TVNZ and RNZ) will hopefully allow us to begin the process of deprivatization(ugly word, its true) of the NZ radio and television air space, which is free to all but actually , under the light handed regulatory regime which has been the norm in NZ for the last 30 years, has given us - what? Apart, that is, from unlimited scope for conspiracy theorists and child predators to practice their dark arts, for international actors to subvert the democratic process in Western countries, for violent porn to be fed to minors in unlimited quantities, and for lies to become truth. All this understandably undermines our viewers and listeners confidence in their own institutions.



SURELY THEN, the Governance report should properly now be the subject of a government- facilitated and open-ended national discussion which will include public forums where consumer views will be front and center, as opposed to the views of the “experts” and those who currently “own” bits of our Media without any license from us to do so.



Wily and powerful media magnates like Rupert Murdoch have used his influence over governments, to perpetuate the fiction that his being allowed protection from interference in the affairs of the Private Media, is essential to freedom itself, to keep our popularly elected democracy from turning into a totalitarian state. Certainly, Freedom of Speech is vital to democracy, but more important, surely, is the exercise of the Sovereignty of the People, in reference to how the media

should be overseen. However incoherently, the Parliamentary Protest, for all that it's in many ways an abuse of democratic rights, seems to have got hold of an important notion, which is that democracy is being undermined, not enhanced, by unbridled media power. The British and Australian governments have already undertaken to make their media more responsible to the people, while NZ is being left behind.

This is not about interfering in editorial decisions, but about taking back our democratic right to having our own media landscape subject to our own Governance, just like all our other institutions.

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