

The Mass Media Monopoly

Transcript of a Commentary by Ambrose I. Lane Sr.
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****NOTE:** Transcript of Commentary portion of the show only. ******

You know, it should be clear to all of us that our Constitution based government is in danger. By the year 2003 our country witnessed a consolidation of our mass media that moved us farther down that dangerous slippery slope into fascism.

Author Ben H. Bagdikian described it best in his book *The New Media Monopoly*. This is what he wrote. He said;

“In 1983, the men and women who headed the 50 mass media corporations that dominated American audiences could have fit comfortably in a modest hotel ballroom. The people heading the 20 dominant newspaper chains probably would form one conversational cluster to complain about newsprint prices; 20 magazine moguls in a different circle denounce postal rates; the broadcast network people in another corner, not being in the newspaper or magazine business, exchange indignation about government radio and television regulations; the book people compete in outrage over greed of writers’ agents; and movie people gossip about sexual achievements of their stars.”¹

By 2003, five men controlled all these old media once run by the 50 corporations of 20 years earlier.

This five men and the corporations they represented were Richard Parsons who was chairman and CEO of Time Warner, Michael Eisner who was CEO of Disney, Sumner Redstone who was CEO of Viacom, Rupert Murdoch - News Corporation, and Reinhard Mohn, CEO of Bertelsmann about whom Bagdikian wrote and I quote;

“He is head of the world’s largest publisher of English-language books, but not long before had been caught lying about his firm’s Nazi-era history.”²

Now these five men and corporations have been permitted by America's political structure to absorb the lion's share of the 37,000 different media outlets in the United States of America. That number jumps to 54,000 if one counts all weeklies, semi-weeklies, and advertising weeklies, and all periodicals including strictly local ones. The number becomes 178,000 if one counts all information industries.

In short in 5 hands and in 5 corporations lay the ability and well to fully inform the American people about the great issues confronting us or not inform us. In reference to the war in Iraq and the lies our government told us and keeps telling us about it, and our government's continuing attacks on our constitutional system of government they have failed and continue to fail the American people.

Scott Thill writing in AlterNet quoted Ron Suskind. Suskind, writing in the New York Times revealed that a senior advisor to President George W. Bush told him that guys like him – like Suskind - were and I quote;

“...in what we call the reality-based community,” which he defined as people who “believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality.” I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. “That’s not the way the world really works anymore,” he continued. “We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you’re studying that reality—judiciously, as you will—we’ll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that’s how things will sort out. We’re history’s actors...and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.”³

The 1980's Wall Street movie told the American people that greed is good. People like Michael Milken, Ivan Boesky and Rupert Murdoch have been the show persons that the American people were told to look up to because they were the epitome of the greed culture. In 1986 Ivan Boesky gave a commencement speech at Berkeley California, and said, and I quote;

“Greed is all right, by the way. I want you to know that. I think greed is healthy.”

One year later the film came out and people were saying "Greed is Good". It did not seem to matter that both Milken and Boesky served time in prison but got off with just a few short years. And Milken is said to have come out with a rumored net-worth of over \$2 billion dollars or so. And people say that's more than worth the few years in prison he spent.

There financial instruments that suckered people out of their money were accurately called "junk-bonds". We've come a long way from junk bonds although they are still around suckering people. The instruments that are used today are hedge funds, sub-prime mortgages loans and other mortgage backed securities. As a person a hedge fund specialist had this to say. He said

"We've divorced the system from paper since it's become easier to divorce it from reality. But the problem is that so much has been drained out of the system using these tools that the money is not there. If this gets exposed the money is not there. It's been turned into Ferraris and mansions in the Hamptons. It can't be paid back. The system is going to vapor lock." ⁴

Not what drives the greed merchants is the voracious desire to take all the money you and I have earned and make it theirs. They spend most of their waking hours developing schemes to take your money with your uninformed cooperation and the uninformed cooperation of the poorest among us since they will not be able to afford lawyers and accountants to protect their interests.

The sub-prime housing scam feeds off the desire and dream of most Americans to own their own home. For most this was not possible until the Great Depression moved Congress and Franklin Delano Roosevelt to create a Federal law and Federal agency, the FHA, to make home ownership possible and affordable, and for decades only possible and avoidable for white Americans because those who ran the program excluded blacks from the program.

For the first 25 years of FHA's existence, racism kept home ownership federal help mostly white, just as Social Security benefited mostly white Americans because of the categories of workers excluded by a racist Congress who passed the laws.

Now the mess we're in now begin between 1972 and 1974 when the corporate world decided it had had enough of federal oversight and federal laws governing their operations. They had been under those laws and those operations oversight since they had brought the country to its knees during the Great Depression. But these folks since 1972 were especially angry that one of their own politicians, Richard Milhous Nixon, had pushed through the Environmental Protection Act.

In two years the Big Business Round Table was created by the Fortune 500 companies to put their money together to try to control Congress through lobbyists and campaign contributions. Soon Congress and the Presidency had become expensive house of political prostitution. With the election of Ronald Reagan, the racist Democratic South soon became the racist Republican South with Strom Thurmond from South Carolina leading the way. Although they called themselves Conservatives they were racists, pure and simple. No real conservative would have wasted the nation's treasure as the Republicans have done since they took power under Ronald Reagan.

When Reagan and Bush – the elder Bush, George Herbert Walker Bush – took office our federal deficit was \$994 billion, a debt that had been accumulated over our 200 plus years of history. We were the world's greatest creditor nation. But when they left office we were and remain the world's greatest debtor nation; our deficit exceeding \$3 trillion then and now exceeding \$9 trillion.

When Democratic president William Clinton ended his eight year term and left the office the office in the hands of the second Bush – the Lesser Bush – the nation could see surpluses as far as the eye could see. But as his Vice-President Dick Cheney told his staff “deficits don't matter.” Bush – The lesser Bush - brought to government a bunch of Neo-conservatives, a bunch of Neo-cons who foolishly have talked about and tried to put in place their vision of an American Empire. “We are the only super power left on earth” the arrogantly told the world, or as a senior aide to President Bush told Ron Suskind;

“We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality—judiciously, as you will—we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors...and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.”⁵

It was that kind of arrogance that led this administration to lie this nation into the most grossly stupid war in our history. And that is saying something because we have waged other stupid wars that benefited only the corporations that supplied our war machine. You know arrogance often leads to incompetence. And incompetence leads to disaster and chaos.

In war, arrogant incompetence leads to unnecessary deaths, dismemberments, and mental and emotional disorders. Arrogant incompetence seldom leads to victory. That is where we are now in Iraq and Afghanistan while these same arrogant leaders incessantly talk about waging battle with or at least dropping bombs on Iran. Arrogance is also often a blinding force that disables our ability to see and understand the impact of our incompetent actions.

Brent Scowcroft, National Security Advisor to two Presidents recently wrote that we and I quote;

“We are aggressively being wrestled to a draw by opponents who are not even an organized state adversary.”

Yet the blustering fools in charge are apparently too arrogant to understand that simple truth. If we are the worlds only remaining super power what does it mean? What is our standing in the world?

If opinions polls are to be believed our standing is scrapping the bottom. Yet in a NATO country like Turkey we are viewed favorably by only 9% of its population. Five years we were viewed favorably by 52% of their population.

And while the Neo-cons have been running their mouths bragging about our single superpower status what have the other nations of the world been doing? Well Russia has become the second largest oil producer in the world with oil income of \$679 million per day. Britain, Germany, Poland, and Hungary are now dependent on Russian oil. Russia is also the largest producer of natural gas on this earth. Three-fifths of its gas exports go to the 27 members of the European Union. In 2006 Russia’s foreign reserves were \$315 billion up from only \$12 billion in 1999.

Russia’s leader Putin told a 43rd Munich Trans-Atlantic Conference on Security Policy in February 2007 that and I quote;

“One country, the United States, has over stepped its national boundaries in every way. This is visible in the economic, political, cultural, and educational policies it imposes other nations. This is very dangerous.”⁶

And he condemned the concept of a unipolar world.

“However one might embellish this term at the end of the day it describes a scenario in which there is one center of authority, one center of force and one center of decision making. It is a world in which there is one master, one sovereign, and this is pernicious.”⁷

In the capitals of many Asian, African, and Latin American countries his views probably fell on many receptive ears.

Commentary Footnotes:

- 1) Ben H. Bagdikian, *The New Media Monopoly* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004).
- 2) Bagdikian, *The New Media Monopoly*
- 3) Thill, Scott. "The Crash of 1929: Are We on the Verge of a Repeat?" *AlterNet*. 26 July 2007 < <http://www.alternet.org/story/56443/>>.
- 4) Thill. "The Crash of 1929: Are We on the Verge of a Repeat?"
- 5) Thill. "The Crash of 1929: Are We on the Verge of a Repeat?"
- 6) Putin, Wladimir W. "Speech at the 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy" *Munich Conference on Security Policy*. 10 February 2007 < http://www.securityconference.de/konferenzen/rede.php?menu_2007=&menu_konferenzen=&sprache=en&id=179&>
- 7) Putin, Wladimir W. "Speech at the 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy"