



WE THE PEOPLE

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, AND EXPLOITED IT FOR PRIVATE PROFIT.

Facebook and Google and Co are doing the same thing in our century.

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 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. Yet the radio spectrum and the television air 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, which 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, in the widest sense, belong to us, the people of NZ.

An example is our own Broadcastings Standards Authority, which processes viewers and listeners complaints, and rejects 80% of those made to them. This would indicate to most people, which side of the divide between public and private interests, that the Authority sees itself as belonging on. The entity known as the B.S.A. was created 30 years ago when we had a one channel television system. Subsequent regulation, so light handed as to be non-existent, has resulted in the present-day worst-of- both- worlds for consumers like ourselves, with multiple channel offerings, and subscriber TV, together with live streaming now available to the viewer. A whole different consumer experience now exists, for some of which we pay twice over, once through NZ on air, and again through the ceaseless interruption caused by commercials.

So it is, too, with the print media, for 50 years subject, in terms of complaints, to the adjudication of the Independent (?) Press Tribunal, not really independent because a majority of its members were industry people. This led to the same 80:20 ratio of successes, awarded against the complainants, that is against the consumers, you and me. This rather obviously skewed arrangement in favour of the



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Media, was recently replaced by another industry appointed body called the Media Council. This step, taken by the Media owners was, one can assume, intended to pre-empt the incoming Labour Government from enacting its policy which includes taking a leaf out of the British parliamentary playbook and appointing a truly independent complaints body, one covering all Media.

In the same way, the corporate behaviour of Facebook, Google, Twitter and the like, has been allowed by Governments around the world to treat the air space as their own, to be exploited for their own private commercial aggrandisement, at the expense of the consumer, who are actually the sovereign owners of that space, by failing to act to restrict these mega-companies from profiting from a publicly owned asset. This power vacuum has permitted global media conglomerates to take over vast tracts of what is public space in exactly the same way that European land grabbers in the 19th Century like the British, French, Spanish, Portuguese and so on, took the land of the indigenous peoples in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, from under the occupants feet, by force of arms.

While we properly deplore the way, the Crown allowed pakeha settlers to alienate Maori land, something quite similar is happening under our noses again by Mark Zuckerberg and his ilk, with nary a peep from our Governments.

Wily and powerful media magnates like Rupert Murdoch have used their influence over Governments to perpetuate the fiction that their being Allowed protection from interference in the affairs of the Media, is essential to freedom itself, and 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 Sovereignty of the People.

As reported in the Listener in its excellent recent cover story "Media Monster", the government is currently sitting on a report to it, by its own appointed "experts", (it's said that experts are defined thus: "Ex" is a has-been, and "spurt" is a drip under pressure).

This report, on the future of media governance in NZ, will hopefully allow us to begin the process of decolonization of the NZ radio spectrum and its television equivalent, which as a sovereign people, belong to us. This can only be done if this report is then be the subject of a national discussion which will include public forums where consumer views will be front and centre, as opposed to the views of the "experts" and those who currently "own" bits of our Media without any licence to do so from us as consumers. We, the People. Perhaps we need a Media Tribunal like the Waitangi Tribunal, which protects the rights of Tangata Whenua under te Tiriti?

This is not about interfering in editorial decisions, but acting to defend our sovereign right to the oversight of our own media landscape.

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President

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