

***Fundamental media reforms are needed to create a media of, for, and by the people
if we are to have a government of, for, and by the people***

Six giant companies control 90% of what we read, watch or listen to!¹ The management of these huge companies is not representative of the general population and value elite interests over majority interests. Our media is supposed to be a check on political and economic abuse of power, but they commonly fail in this role. Fundamental media reform is necessary. It is inexorably intertwined with broader social and political reform. They will rise or fall together.

The economic elite leaders of the big six media companies, and their companies, are close knit and not fully competitive. They collaborate to maintain and expand their power. The big six have similar boards of directors, they jointly invest in ventures, lend each other money and cooperate in other important ways. According to a Columbia Journalism Review study report, the five largest media conglomerates have 45 interlocking directors (the same board member sits on the board of more than one corporation).² These media corporations also have interlocking directors with many other kinds of large corporations, including banks, investment companies, oil companies, health care and pharmaceutical companies and technology companies. Several studies show that those 15-20% of corporate directors who sit on two or more boards, who are called the "inner circle" of the corporate directorate, unite 80-90% of the largest corporations in the United States into a well-connected "corporate community."³

Adam Smith warned of the impact of just this kind of coordinated domination by a few aligned business owners and managers:

“People of the same trade seldom meet together, even for merriment and diversion, but the conversation ends in a conspiracy against the public, or in some contrivance to raise prices”

Now, the danger is greater due to interlocking directorships and conglomerates crossing industries. And far more destructive outcomes can result from our current media structure than we have already seen. No imperial ruler in history had multiple channels that could permeate entire societies with powerfully influential video and audio messages.

The six dominant media firms, among the largest in the world, and their leaders have the power and use it to serve the interests of the corporate world and economic elites. Their leaders' power to select content and commentators given exposure in our mass media, and to select subordinates who are socialized to have aligned interests or worldviews authorized to do so, is used to bias content to serve their interests. And they have used their power in lobbying and on our election system with little regard for the public interest.

In some cases, media firm managers or owners may believe they are acting in the country's best interest when they distort media content or omit important facts. Some arrogantly believe that imposing illusions to manipulate the "stupid majority" is necessary. But if the majority is ignorant, the media is mainly responsible, since it is the media's most important function to educate the population on the facts at the foundation of good public policy choices.

As media scholar and "world's top public intellectual," Noam Chomsky, points out in the book and movie "Manufacturing Consent" some see democracy and freedom as threats to be avoided rather than values to be treasured and preserved, so avoid disseminating the knowledge that would bring power to those other than themselves. As John Adams wrote *“Power always thinks it has ... vast views beyond the comprehension of the weak; and that it is doing God's service when it is violating all his laws.”* And almost 400 years ago John Milton, the famous English intellectual and poet, complained of essentially the same injustice: "They who have put out the people's eyes, reproach them of their blindness"

Mostly though, the leaders of the mass media are under no illusion on whose interests they are best serving. The mass media have been an important part of the process that has altered regulatory, tax and expenditure policies that better served the public interest, to ones that are now poorly serving the public interest, to serve their interests. And they are a barrier to the necessary fundamental reforms to our economic and political systems that are disserving the majority and resulting in great injustices.

It is true that many people today are ignorant of important facts, and unwilling to seek reliable sources of facts, needed to make wise public policy decisions. But social forces, including those from the media, are largely responsible for the cultural and intellectual pursuits of the “masses,” including the “working class”. This is clearly indicated by the results of social conditions in 19th century England when the “working class” had interests of a character far different than modern day stereotypes arising from today’s social forces.

Research using over 2,000 memoirs, diaries, oral histories, newspapers, surveys, polls, library and school records, and other sources is reported in the book “The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes,” by Jonathan Rose. The cultural and intellectual pursuits of the “masses” during this period were studied based on occupations of the “working classes”. The results are striking: Weavers, miners, cooks, wheelwrights, fishermen, milk maids, mechanics, shepherds, farmers and others in the “working class” commonly read an impressive range of so-called high-brow literature: Dickens, Milton, Tennyson, Ruskin, Marx, and Shakespeare, to name a few. They appreciated and sought out the great works of intellectual and creative merit for their time, due to the social forces around them. From the book:

“Nearly fifty groups in and around London (existed) where working men and women were studying chemistry, geology, mathematics, and astronomy, with all the gravity and deliberation, and confidence, of old and experienced professors.”

Today the “masses” tend to have pursuits of a different character, but our mass media had a major role in creating them, and creating our divided, coarsened and consumption driven society. Our popular mass media massively reinforces these negatives in pursuit of their own interests. To an overwhelming degree, they abdicate their important responsibility to educate, challenge and inspire.

Although we share with the people of the Enlightenment the experience of unprecedented penetration of new media (although the printing press was not new in the 18th century, the level of penetration and influence of print media was new) and extreme economic and political inequality, the people of the Enlightenment era had an advantage over us: Their mass media, or the media content that reached their majority, was not mainly under the control of their wealthy ruling class. And even when a wealthy owner had control, a sufficient number of them were strongly motivated by a “social conscience” or were more able than our wealthy media owners to see that their well-being depended on the well-being of their society.

Their printing presses published, and there was a wide distribution of material describing ideas that stimulated the majority of people’s imagination of the real possibility of a fundamentally more just way of organizing their societies. The Enlightenment’s beneficial societal transformations depended on this process. The character of our media, especially the mass media, whose content reaches the largest number of people, is a barrier to this kind of process. This critically important problem needs to be solved.

We have unwisely trusted that our media corporations would place the public interest above corporate interests and the private interests of those in control of them. Our dysfunctional media is a threat to our society.

For many more details on the harmful character of our current corporate media see the book *The New Enlightenment, Policy 28, Organizational Structure Reform of Media Enterprises*.

In Summary

A media system dominated by a few huge, powerful and manipulative corporations that control almost all we learn about our society is a barrier to the widespread awareness of the accurate, unprejudiced information we need. When facts are distorted or obscured, as they have been, it creates conflict and makes problem-solving impossible. We need accurate, unprejudiced information, and fact-based policy solutions, clearly, widely and commonly expressed to best deal with our many serious problems

Our media system requires radical reforms for a far more constructive content and tone of our democratic discourse, and for instilling a sense that we all have a responsibility to learn about important public issues, so we can best serve our role in our renewed and well-functioning democracy.

“Every government degenerates when trusted to the rulers of the people alone. The people themselves, therefore, are its only safe depositories. And to render even them safe, their minds must be improved to a certain degree.”

Thomas Jefferson

“Their minds must be improved”, largely, by a greatly improved media.

The Necessary Reform

The media is called the “Fourth Estate” or the fourth branch of government, because of its essential role in democratic governance, so mass media outlets are not just business enterprises. New Enlightenment policies require or motivate a different organizational structure for these enterprises than that of conventional business enterprises that is more appropriate, both because this structure is internally democratic and, largely as a result, the structure will inherently best serve its role in a democratic society.

A media owned, managed and controlled by a small and privileged elite inevitably results in serving the public interest poorly. The New Enlightenment’s major organizational structure solutions are guided by the principle that a well-functioning government of, for, and by the people requires a vigorous media of, for, and by the people. They include policies in these categories:

- Require, and offer financial supports for, local community members’ ownership and control of all communities’ broadcast media. Public ownership of the airwaves allows us regulatory control over air media companies to ensure they best serve the public but this power has not been properly used. All companies owning air media in multiple markets we will require and support divestiture to local worker-owners in an orderly process described in The New Enlightenment.
- Promote by offering financial supports for local community members’ ownership and control of all communities’ print mass media.
- Promote by providing financial supports for worker ownership and control of national content producing media enterprises, including internet media, from which locally owned and controlled media outlets could select content.
- Separate combined print and on the air media companies into separate print and air media companies.

For policy details see The New Enlightenment, Policy 28, Organizational Structure Reform of Media Enterprises.

¹ <http://www.businessinsider.com/these-6-corporations-control-90-of-the-media-in-america-2012-6>

² The New Media Monopoly, 2004, Ben H. Bagdikian, pg. 9

³ The Class-Domination Theory of Power, G. William Domhoff, UCSC