

*May Day 1987*

**IS**

***MURDOCH***

***MAKING YOU***

***MISERABLE?***

The heightened concentration of media ownership presently occurring in Australia, where one owner now controls thirteen out of eighteen daily newspapers, and reaches 90% of the newspaper readership, has received attention.

A lesser known effect of Murdoch's takeover of the Herald and Weekly Times (HWT) has been a further concentration of ownership right across the printing and publishing industries.

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## PRINTING

The takeover of the HWT has put in Murdoch's hands a large part of the commercial printing industry. In Victoria alone, Murdoch's News Limited has acquired Southdown Press, Wilke & Co., Progress Press, Herald Gravure, Brownall Printers, Adpack, Leader Assoc. News, Standard News, Leader Westernport, and West Web, amongst others.

This will give Murdoch a virtual monopoly of mass-market magazine printing in Victoria and of the lucrative direct-mail catalogue publishing on the east coast of Australia. He also owns commercial printers in other states, including John Sands in NSW.

The size of these holdings will make it possible and profitable for Murdoch to rationalize these commercial printers with the consequent loss of jobs and threat to working conditions.

Coupled with his extensive publishing interests, they will give him enormous control and allow him to use printers, journalists and other employees across his many media companies, thereby reducing his workforce. It will also enable syndication of news coverage, which will reduce not only the variety of views presented, but also local content.

## PUBLISHING

Prior to the HWT takeover, Murdoch already owned extensive book publishing interests in the UK, including Collins, Fontana, Flamingo, Pan and Sphere, and in Australia, Angus and Robertson and Bay Books. With the takeover of the extensive HWT holdings, he now also owns the large distributor, bookseller and paper manufacturer, Gordon and Gotch. It is likely that these and his other publishing interests will be consolidated into one major group with central distribution.

He will have his newspapers and magazines to promote books published by his publishing houses.

Murdoch is known for both his interest in profit and his willingness to use his newspapers to support what ever political cause he favours at any given time. Neither motivation will encourage or support a healthy Australian publishing industry. We can imagine that radical books, or the less profitable ones like those by new or challenging writers, won't be high on his list.

Just as importantly, Murdoch's overseas publishing interests are likely to dominate, as it will be more profitable to promote his UK published books here than to develop Australian titles. There has always been a predominance of overseas publishers in Australia and, until recently, the majority of books sold here were imported. This situation was in fact improving a little, with 50% of books sold here now being published in Australia. Murdoch's links with large overseas companies will contribute to reversing this trend.

## AND IT DOESN'T END THERE

The combination of his new holdings with his existing companies has produced a situation where he has control over nearly every component of the printing and publishing industries.

He already owned the Angus and Robertson bookshops at one end of the chain, and he now owns 52% of Australian Newsprint Mills, the supplier of domestic newsprint in Australia. The only real alternative source is northern Europe.

News Limited currently imports the bulk of its newsprint from northern Europe where it is able to do special deals (including exclusivity) because of the high demand for newsprint for its British publications. So in either case Murdoch has considerable influence over the supply of newsprint to any competitor.

Distribution is a crucial and costly component of the publishing industry. As mentioned, Murdoch now owns the major distributor, Gordon and Gotch. News Limited also co-owns Ansett Transport Industries and has a significant interest in TNT Ltd, the major road transport company. The third main method of distribution, especially for newspapers and magazines, is by direct mail. Of the three major direct mail houses, two are now owned by Murdoch, while the third is owned by Fairfax.

The breadth and depth of this concentration is staggering. This concentration of ownership in Australia, combined with Murdoch's interests overseas, gives Murdoch scope to manipulate employees, competitors and the public, across a wide range of print media - books, magazines and newspapers.

The recent massive increase in concentration of ownership right throughout the printing and publishing industries highlights the need for independent left printers and publishers.

**Sybylla Press**, a Melbourne-based feminist printing and publishing co-operative, has been operating now for over a decade.

The interest among feminists and others on the left to establish printeries in the early seventies was intensified in the climate of political uncertainty generated by the sacking of the Whitlam government in November 1975.

In that context, there seemed an obvious need for alternative groups to have access to independent printing facilities, since it is a recurring problem that such groups experience difficulties getting work *printed during periods of heightened conservatism*.

Since then, Sybylla has developed a comprehensive printing and graphic design facility for women's and other progressive groups. As well, Sybylla has established a publishing program committed to publishing women's radical and alternative literature. Sybylla publishes fictional works that reflect on women's personal and political lives and a range of non-fiction including feminist theory, women's history, biographies and autobiographies.

The increasing pressures on small, alternative presses has led in many cases to mergers with larger publishing companies and more "commercial" considerations when selecting books. Sybylla Press is committed to publishing important works that might not otherwise be seen in print, including books by new or unknown writers, and to remaining financially independent. Sybylla is owned and managed by its workers, who receive the (same) union award rate of pay. Any profits generated are used to expand its publishing capacity.

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**SYBILLA**

CO • OPERATIVE