

Rupert's out to get the ABC

Partisan political campaigning is not new for Rupert Murdoch and his News Corp media outlets. It has, however, become even more overt.

Before editorialising on what voters should do at the ballot box, newspapers usually wait for an election campaign to be conducted. This allows for the policies and promises which are revealed in an election campaign to be considered and the performance of parties contending for government compared.

Not so, Sydney's *Daily Telegraph*. Blazoned across its front page on the day after the election had been announced, was: 'Finally you now have the chance to KICK THIS MOB OUT'.

The dominance of the Murdoch media in this country, which also sets the agenda for commercial talkback radio shock-jocks, and its lack of impartiality on important political and social matters is a danger to our democracy. It provides a stark reminder of why it is important that Australia maintain a robust public broadcaster that reports without fear or favour and analyses important matters with a view to the public interest.

Yet the power which the influence of Rupert Murdoch's media outlets deliver to him also endangers the ABC.

There has been speculation that Murdoch may want the Labor Government thrown out because the rollout underway of the National Broadband Network poses a threat to the

Foxtel subscription cable TV business that News Corp jointly owns with Telstra. But that is debatable. The Coalition's proposed broadband scheme would also make it possible for viewers to access more content directly and by-pass an intermediary such as Foxtel.

So why is Murdoch working for the election of the Liberal-National Coalition? What political and commercial advantages does he expect a Tony Abbott government to deliver – whether it be because the Coalition already has them in mind, might feel indebted to Murdoch for his assistance and/or be fearful of what may happen if they don't meet his expectation?

What we do know is that the Murdochocracy has made clear its strong opposition to public broadcasting.

Attacks in *The Australian* newspaper on the integrity of the ABC and the need for it to exist and be well-funded have been relentless over many years. News Corp perceives ABC television and online news and entertainment as a threat to its commercial ambitions. It has argued that Australia's international television network provided by the ABC should be outsourced to the part-Murdoch owned Sky TV, along with a public handout to run it.



Illustration by Spooner. First published *The Age*

The IPA's out to get the ABC

The 70th birthday celebration-fundraiser of the right-wing think tank the Institute for Public Affairs in April was a glittering event at the National Gallery of Victoria. It was also an exclusive event. The minimum ticket cost was \$495, or double that to meet Rupert Murdoch.

Murdoch was the keynote speaker, and was presented with a drawing of himself as a knight in shining armour for extolling the "morality" of free markets.

Others to address the gathering were Gina Rinehart and Opposition leader Tony Abbott. Andrew Bolt was MC.

Abbott praised his fellow key-note speakers, especially Rupert. Without specifying what items on the IPA's list to radically transform Australia he would not implement, Abbott's broad response was: "a big 'yes' to many of the 75 specific policies you urged upon me".

So what would be the result if the IPA's policy for the ABC was implemented? Public broadcasting – gone. The ABC to be broken up and sold off, and SBS to be fully privatised.

Some Liberals are out to get the ABC

Some parts of the Liberal Party have made clear their wish to dismantle the ABC.

A motion which urged the federal Coalition to privatise the ABC was originally scheduled for discussion at the Victorian Liberal Party's May convention which was addressed by Coalition leader Tony Abbott.

The motion was quietly dropped after it became public – the result, it was said, of the mover of the motion not being in the country at the time of the convention. It has since been reported in the media that the motion has been deferred to a later conference.

The party's Warragul branch which moved the motion says the public ownership and operation of the ABC and SBS are "no longer valid in 2013". It proposes a full scale "operational review" of the ABC and SBS to consider the "partial or full privatisation of both".

ACTION

You need to let key candidates for your electorate know NOW that you expect them to put the public interest ahead of the interests of Rupert Murdoch.

It is unlikely that any government would risk the public wrath of attempting to privatise the ABC openly. They are more likely to seek to achieve the same end by eroding the ABC's funds.

So seek a commitment that they will not cut the ABC's funding, and, at the very least, will maintain in real terms the level of funding committed to the ABC in the last Budget.

