

Murdoch's 'British' Press Slant Provokes Mutiny At New York Post

Ten months ago Australian-British publisher Rupert Murdoch made national headlines with his near-simultaneous takeover of three large-circulation New York press outlets, the *Village Voice*, *New York Magazine*, and the *New York Post*. Much less press attention was given to the Sept. 29 protest petition 50 of 60 *New York Post* reporters presented to publisher Rupert Murdoch, denouncing his news coverage as "slanted."

On the same day, popular *Post* columnist Robert Lipsyte resigned from the newspaper, charging that Murdoch, who also owns a chain of British and Australian newspapers, consistently censored articles whenever they diverged from his line. Meanwhile, accumulated horror and disgust at the *Post's* ultra-sensational news posture and Murdoch's heavy-handed manipulation of coverage of the New York mayoral campaign led many editorial staffers to defect, spilling the sordid details of working life at the *Post* as they moved on to new jobs or the unemployment line.

At issue in the reporters' protest was the handling of coverage to highlight the mayoral campaign of Ed Koch. It is a well-known fact that Murdoch and Koch have in common a close personal relationship with "Big Mac" (Municipal Assistance Corporation) Chairman Felix Rohatyn. It was equally well known that Rupert Murdoch relied heavily on Rohatyn, also a partner in the British-linked investment firm Lazard Freres, for influence and aid in his takeover of the New York press.

Now safely at the helm of the *Post*, Rupert is repaying his debt by running editorial endorsements of Koch without labelling them as such.

For Murdoch, however, this is not "news." In 1975, the staff of his prestige daily, *The Australian*, went on strike against the paper, which at that time was engaged in a campaign to malign the growth-oriented Australian labor government, leading to its defeat in the 1975 elections. Accordingly, Murdoch had his rejoinder to his New York staff ready—he suggested that anyone who doubted the publisher's integrity should resign. Said one senior reporter, "He doesn't care if all 50 people quit—he's told us he's got so many applications for jobs." According to one recent refugee, many reporters may be taking Murdoch's advice: "If you hear typewriters going in the *Post* newsroom, the odds are they're typing résumés." Latest reports indicate that most *Post* staffers have swallowed their scruples and remained at the paper.

Like Father. Like Son

Murdoch's principal defender on the *Post* editorial staff is his star horror-show writer, Steve Dunleavy, one of the few reporters to have refused outright to sign the anti-Murdoch petition. Dunleavy, like Murdoch an Australian native, was for several years a columnist for the Murdoch empire's pulp sex, crime, and spiritualism weekly *The National Star*, but sprang into national prominence with his lurid coverage of the "Son of Sam"

murders in New York City. Dunleavy, in true "Son of Rupert" style, reportedly developed his nose for the big scoop while still a youngster in Australia, where he once slashed the tires on his journalist-father's car in order to beat him to a story. (His father retaliated some years later by locking his son in the laundry room in another news race.)

This, however, did not clean up young Steve's act. Once in the States, the Chappaquiddick case caught his eye, and he obtained an exclusive interview with one of Kennedy's aides—by wining and dining her and promising his undying love. Among Dunleavy's more creative accomplishments was his promulgation of a theory, fabricated out of whole cloth but nevertheless run with a page-one banner headline, that there were "Many Sons of Sam" on the loose. Dunleavy shrugs off the reproaches of more reputable reporters with the adage, "if the reader buys it, it's moral."

What Dunleavy is selling just now are hoked-up attacks on municipal, service agencies, beginning with the favored target for Felix Rohatyn and the rest of New York's austerity-mongers, the city's beleaguered Board of Education. Under a front-page screaming headline, Dunleavy recently "revealed" to New Yorkers that the Board of Education had stockpiled 18,000 broomhandles, 502 doll carriages, and a set of golf clubs. This monumental "investigative reporting" scoop was underscored by an accompanying lead editorial attacking the city "bureaucracy" and calling for some of these "broomhandles" to be employed in knocking off the "dead wood."

Carnage advocate Dunleavy's sudden interest in municipal finance is no surprise to those who know of his boss's chummy relationship with Felix Rohatyn. Once the *Post* helped secure the Democratic Party nomination for Bess Myerson-consort Ed Koch (whom it now refers to as the "mayor apparent") public attention will be turned to the juxtaposition of the most degrading of atrocity stories with calls for budget-slashing and forced labor. The *Post's* ballyhooing of Carter's tour through the South Bronx—rating a centerfold picture of a bombed-out neighborhood—accompanied by an editorial plea to the President for slave-labor "jobs"—furthered this propaganda binge.

When former columnist Robert Lipsyte said, "People are beginning to talk about the differences between American journalism and English journalism," his words were truer than he knew. Murdoch, protege of the British monarchy's "Fleet Street" press operative Lord Beaverbrook, has joined the "lowest common denominator" of sensationalism—better described as mass psychological warfare—to the City of London's immediate requirements for the destruction of the U.S. dollar and economy. More than a slip of the pen was afoot when Murdoch slipped into "British" and scribbled that Ed Koch was the best candidate "standing for office." (We dynamic Americans, in contradistinction to the morally gout-ridden British nobility, "run for office.")