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MW STORIES IN 1999



Why the Murdoch Press Didn't Report the Rabbitohs Rally in Sydney; Marina Go Takes a Peek and Doesn't Like What She Sees; Victorian Liberal Party Pays for 4 Hours of 3MP Broadcast Times Before the Frankston East Re-election.

18/10/1999

"Lucy blooms in the garden"
(Mercury, 30/08/99)

Richard Ackland: The Hobart Mercury gushed as it honoured:

"Centurion Lucy Symmonds"

Richard Ackland: Yes, Lucy's a real soldier!

Welcome to another edition of Media Watch - where we're delving into all manner of slips and sleights of hand.

First a miracle that went unremarked at the time. The Maitland Mercury struggled with the story of:

Feride Halimi, ... a 71 year-old Kosovar who is blind and hard of hearing.
(The Maitland Mercury, 02/06/99)

Richard Ackland: The blind woman and her family:

Fled after watching their home ... Burn to the ground...
(The Maitland Mercury, 02/06/99)

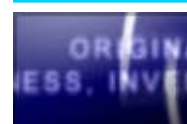
Richard Ackland: Marvels will never cease.

The recent changes to the rugby league competition has had fans in a tumult. It sparked a sizeable street demo in Sydney:

Rallying for the Rabbitohs, thousands of supporters rally through Sydney...
(ABC News, 10/10/99)

Richard Ackland: The rally was the biggest Sydney has seen for years. It was the lead story that night on the Bullmore Sydney news.

Generations of fans are angry their beloved team is set to be axed when the NRL culls the competition to 14 teams.



At the town hall, the sea of red and green.
(Channel 9 News, 10/10/99)

Richard Ackland: Perhaps a twinge of the regrets with this story.

You may remember the big super league fracas a few years ago - Mr Packer fought it and lost. Chopping out the South Sydney Rabbitohs from the competition is part of the legacy.

Channel Nine neglected to name the mogul who's behind it all. Channel Seven wasn't so shy.

Reporter: The National Rugby League and News Limited's Rupert Murdoch firmly in their sights.
Man: We'll fight to the death, but if he kills the bunny, he'll kill the game, don't worry about that.
(Channel 7 News, 10/10/99)

Richard Ackland: Rupert Murdoch has spent an estimated 400 million dollars forging the new league - the NRL, and he's now secured pay TV rights over the trimmed competition for the next 20 years. But Murdoch's still massively subsidising the game.

As the Financial Review noted in September:

News Corp's continuing need to pump new cash into the NRL serves as a lesson to media moguls all over the world about the dangers of trying to 'own' a sport in order to obtain the media rights.
(Fin Review, 25/9/99)

Richard Ackland: With so many of the Sun King's dollars on the line, how did the Murdoch organs respond to the outpouring of grief over the Rabbitohs?

The working man's paper, Rupert's Telegraph, found it significant enough to bury on page 44... with a pointed bit of spin:

"A bumper crowd... but where were these fans during the season."
(Daily Tele, 11/10/99, Headline)

Richard Ackland: And not even dignified with a question Mark.

On the morning of the rally, Fairfax readers were treated to a preview

Passionate: ...some local juniors in preparation for the 'reclaim the game' march today.
(Sun-Herald, 10/10/99, p121, 'It's a disgrace')

Richard Ackland: But the News Limited Sunday tissue, neglected it altogether. Not that it didn't have a story on the Rabbitohs rally - it did. Regular contributor and league specialist, Ian Heads submitted one. This is it:

To: Bill Rule, Sunday Tele sport.

From: Ian Heads.

"The rally march ... looms as potentially the largest and most emotional protest event in the history of Australian sport..."

(Ian Head filed story, 8/10/99)

Richard Ackland: The editor tossed Ian Heads' story in the bin, and as no story featured on the rally at all in the paper, Heads resigned in protest. He told Media Watch it was because of:

My deep professional disappointment as a journalist.

Richard Ackland: When the right to know rubs up against the commercial stakes of a mogul, you know which cause will win the day.

Don't expect more protest from Mr Packer - he is now part of league's wondrous Pay TV future, having bought half of Fox Sports.

But none of us should feel left out. The full Murdoch vision for the future is something we can all share.

The successful media company of the future is one that will touch consumers' lives throughout the day, in every phase of their lives.

(SMH 9/10/99, 'Every step you take, Rupert will be there.')

Richard Ackland: Rupert told 500 of New York's finest financial types at a Goldman Sachs media lecture what we're in for. When we wake up:

We give them their morning weather and traffic reports through our television outlets around the world.

(SMH 9/10/99, 'Every step you take, Rupert will be there.')

Richard Ackland: Over breakfast:

We enlighten and entertain them with such newspapers as The New York Post and The Times in London...

(SMH 9/10/99, 'Every step you take, Rupert will be there.')

Richard Ackland: During the day - more Murdoch:

We update their stock prices every day and give them the world's biggest news stories through such news channels as Fox or Sky News...

(SMH 9/10/99, 'Every step you take, Rupert will be there.')

Richard Ackland: In the evening, Rupert's still with us:

We entertain them with ... the day's biggest game on our broadcast, satellite and cable networks, or the best movies from 20th Century Fox Films...

(SMH 9/10/99, 'Every step you take, Rupert will be there.')

Richard Ackland: There's no escape!

Then hopefully they can fall into bed with one of our hundreds of new titles published every year through Harper Collins.
(SMH 9/10/99, 'Every step you take, Rupert will be there.')

Richard Ackland: The speech was recorded for posterity by Fairfax journalist Mark Riley. But we couldn't find it reported in any of the diverse arms of the Murdochian utopia. The future might be multi-faceted, but we may get only half the story. Uncle Rupert's half.

When it comes to the media covering the media, a slippery and treacherous path often has to be negotiated. It's something of which the new princess at Pacific Publications, Marina Go is only too aware. Marina was recently elevated to lofty dominion over glossies like 'Elle', 'Girlfriend', 'Home Beautiful' and 'B'. The new job meant Ms Go was in for some publicity.

At The Australian's Media Guide, reporter Helen Hawkes was assigned the job of profiling the dazzlingly successful editor. The article was written, yet only this little snipe appeared in last Thursday's media section:

Marina Go's ... a take charge kind of woman. The story now sits on the spike. Go knows why.
(Australian Media, 14/10/99)

Richard Ackland: Behind the spiking is a messy tale of insider access and manipulation.

Ms Go wanted to have a peek at the story. She rang a friendly sub-editor at The Australian who dug into the computer system and decided to give her a copy.

Go saw things she didn't like.

She instructed her PR person to send changes she wanted made to the story to the section's Assistant Editor.

Changes to be made to the Australian Story.
(E-Mail from Go to Sarah Bryden-Brown)

Richard Ackland: The assistant editor was told:

Not true.

Richard Ackland: About one detail. On another she ordered:

Delete this and add...

Richard Ackland: The original story had ended on a personal note:

"We could survive on Graeme(s) salary", she says. "But I'm not a woman who can stay at home..." Don't expect her to get too comfortable at Pacific for too long though.
(E-Mail from Go to Sarah Bryden-Brown)

Richard Ackland: To which Go insisted:

Delete these two paragraphs.
(E-Mail from Go to Sarah Bryden-Brown)

Richard Ackland: This glossy editor had just breached a cardinal rule of journalism. Articles are not supposed to be vetted by the subject of a story.

The reporter, Helen Hawkes tried to address the problem by adding a prelude to her article.

After 21 years in newspaper and magazine journalism, I thought I had seen it all. I hadn't... (Go) knows what she wants and what I had underestimated... was her attempts to get it.
(The Australian spiked article about Go by Helen Hawkes)

Richard Ackland: But how had Go got it?

The friendly sub-editor who slipped her a copy was her husband, Graeme Pringle.

We were shocked and appalled...
(The Australian spiked article about Go by Helen Hawkes)

Richard Ackland: Wrote Hawkes. Media Editor Eliot Taylor was so shocked and appalled in fact, that he spiked the story. Hubby Graeme was 'counselled' by the higher-ups, and Marina Go-getter is still queen bee editor of the glossy galaxy.

The world of vanity publishing is utterly fraught.

We should also expect more than a few fraught moments at the inquiry into John Laws, Alan Jones and radio station 2UE - which starts in earnest this week.

While the broadcasting authority probes the blurring of lines between editorial and advertising, another crafty example emerged last week on Victorian radio station 3MP.

3MP is an easy music station, but it's also based in Frankston, the scene of last weekend's hotly contested re-election. Listeners used to the light format were surprised when they tuned in on Wednesday to a feast of political interviews.

Carter: And we're sitting at the Karingal Hub shopping centre today, with our caretaker Premier...

(3MP 13/10/99)

Richard Ackland: Presenter Mark Carter kicked-off the shopping centre chat with a whole pile of really tough questions for Jeff Kennett:

Carter: ...and it's an amazing thing to me to think about the track record of the Liberal Party over the last few years, and how they've increased business and all the good things that the Liberal Party has done. How do you feel about that?

Kennett: Well, I was, I must admit in the last week of the campaign I was bit concerned...

(3MP, 13/10/99)

Richard Ackland: How could Jeff handle impossible questions like that? It got worse.

Carter: OK. Well you've got the State's Triple A credit rating back. Do you think people have actually forgotten what happened all those years ago...?

Kennett: ...I think most of the electorate have forgotten just what a diabolical state Victoria was in Seven years ago...

(3MP, 13/10/99)

Richard Ackland: Carter urged his listeners to remember:

Carter: ...good luck...with this ah, supplementary election. Hopefully the voters won't forget...

(3MP, 13/10/99)

Richard Ackland: Another pollie just casually and coincidentally popped in:

Carter: Cherie Mclean has dropped by. Cherie's the candidate for Frankston East. Hello Cherie.

Mclean: Hi Mark.

(3MP, 13/10/99)

Richard Ackland: Cherie wasn't the candidate, she was the Liberal flag-bearer for the seat. Again, the probing was intense:

Carter: ...just tell us a little about your fairly inspirational life.

Mclean: I've never really thought of it as inspirational...

(3MP, 13/10/99)

Richard Ackland: Drove of Liberal luminaries just happened to be wandering aimlessly about the shopping centre.

Carter: 3MP live today at the Karingal Hub Shopping Centre...and we're talking to some passing politicians...there just seem to be a lot in this shopping centre today, just happen to be passing by.

(3MP, 13/10/99)

Richard Ackland: After one and a half hours a little gleam of reality

shone out from the prattle:

3MP with a live broadcast till 2:00, paid for by the Liberal party of Victoria...
(3MP, 13/10/99)

Richard Ackland: For the next one and a half hours, that was the sole disclosure acknowledging the Liberal party had bought a four hour slab of 3MP's time. All in all eight Liberal politicians gave us the benefit of their views. One was the then caretaker Treasurer:

Carter: The Cain-Kirner era was a very expensive one wasn't it?
Naphthine: That's right...
(3MP, 13/10/99)

Richard Ackland: Carter's questions were based on briefing notes supplied by the Liberal Party. In the final hour of the promotion there were two other tilts at disclosure. That's it - desperately inadequate for all but the most wrapt of listeners.

3AW's afternoon announcer hopped into the 3MP station manager, Ian Toull about the shopping centre affair:

Price: So did each of these interviews carry a disclaimer?
Toull: No they didn't.
Price: Doesn't the ABA require political broadcast material to carry such a disclaimer?
Toull: Ah well they were interviews, not commercials.
(3AW, 10/10/99, Steve Price)

Richard Ackland: Interviews underwritten by some nice sponsorship moolah. Stand-by for similar gobbledegook at the ABA inquiry.

While 3MP "targets the money generation" [station logo], One of its directors is media guru Mark day who may take more than passing notice of this version of 'cash for comments' at his Frankston outpost.

Till next week, goodnight.

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