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Behind the rise of Donald Trump in US politics is the media mogul Rupert Murdoch

Rodney Tiffen, Emeritus Professor of International Relations at the University of Sydney, recently compared Rupert Murdoch to Dr. Frankenstein from Mary Shelley's famous novel. Like Murdoch, he created a monster that took on a life of its own and that he could no longer control.

Worse still, Murdoch has unleashed two such monsters, both of which now threaten to cause irreparable damage to US democracy: Firstly, the audience of the US broadcaster Fox News, which "after a long period of cultivation" by its "fantasy land" refuses to believe news that does not correspond to its prejudices, and a Republican Party dominated by Donald Trump. Murdoch recently wanted to reverse the latter and make Trump a "non-person", but it has already become clear that he now dominates the party like no one ever before.

US conservatism born in Australia

The fact that Murdoch gained great influence on US politics is astonishing, given that the 93-year-old was not born in the USA, but in Australia. The roots of his empire lie in 1952, when he inherited a majority stake in News Limited, the publisher of a newspaper in Adelaide, Australia. He then built his empire in Australia and later in Great Britain.

Murdoch laid the foundation for his success in the USA in 1973 when he bought the "San Antonio Express-News". One year later he moved to New York, from where he systematically conquered the US market - without, however, giving up his media in Australia and Great Britain. Murdoch even became a US citizen to do so. Today, the media

conglomerate, which is now run by Murdoch's equally arch-conservative son Lachlan, includes Fox News and the News Corp media group, as well as the "Wall Street Journal" and the "New York Post", Australian newspapers such as "The Australian" and the "Herald Sun", and British papers such as "The Sun" and "The Times".

Fox was a propaganda machine from the start

"It's overwhelming," said former Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull in an interview with ABC Melbourne radio last year. According to Turnbull, no other Australian has ever "had such a big impact around the world." Not only are the Murdoch media the ones who have denied the reality of global warming and delayed action to combat it, but with Fox News, Murdoch has also "created an 'anger-tainment' ecosystem in the United States." This has divided society to a degree not seen since the Civil War between 1861 and 1865.

Professor Tiffen also writes that Fox News was never just a mainstream news service with a more conservative focus. "From the beginning, it was more of a propaganda machine, and this became more and more apparent over the years." The prime-time program consisted more and more of commentary rather than news programs. When Barack Obama became US President, for example, Trump was given a permanent place on the program "Fox and Friends": "Bold, brash and never shy," the promo proclaimed at the time, and: "The Donald now makes his voice loud and clear every Monday." Here, for example, Trump propagated the claim that Obama was not born in the USA and was therefore not eligible for the presidency.

How close the ties between the broadcaster and the politician were became apparent when Trump won the election. While researching his book "Hoax: Donald Trump, Fox News, and the Dangerous Distortion of Truth," journalist Brian Stelter identified 20 people who moved from Fox News to the White House between 2017 and 2020. Trump himself is said to have been addicted to Fox News broadcasts. And as president, he probably relied more on the broadcaster for information than on the briefings of his subordinates.

Fox News then moved into the dangerous milieu after Trump's election defeat in 2020, when he began to talk about election fraud. According to Tiffen, the majority of the key players at Fox News and other Murdoch media actually believed that the election was fair. Murdoch's New York Post initially even urged Trump to accept the results. In an editorial at the end of December 2020, the tabloid wrote: "If you insist on spending your last days in office burning everything down, that's how you'll be remembered. Not as a revolutionary, but as a match-holding anarchist."

However, Fox News was quickly overcome by a sense of crisis, writes Tiffen. Primetime ratings dropped. Just six days after the election, on November 9, 2020, Fox News executives committed the channel to "spreading narratives that would lure their audience back," according to Tiffen. This was officially formulated with a positive spin: They wanted to "respect" the audience. This meant that they wanted to believe Trump's claims of election fraud. According to the NGO Media Matters for America, Fox News then questioned the election results 774 times within two weeks.

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Fox News: A Frankenstein of Propaganda