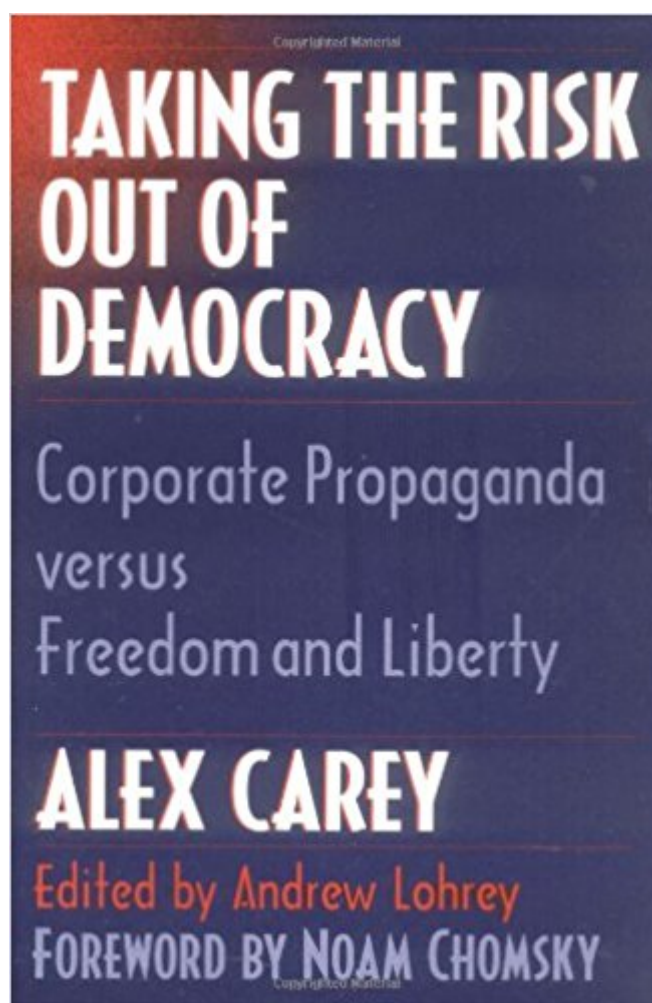


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Taking The Risk Out Of Democracy: Corporate Propaganda Versus Freedom And Liberty (History Of Communication)



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Customer Reviews

Have been enjoying this book so much I can't get through more than a few pages at a time without my blood pressure rising to dangerous levels. Numerous citations and examples make this a somewhat dense experience, but the author does a great job of keeping the narration interesting and his arguments clear. Will be lending this to friends as soon as I am done with it.

Mr. Andrew Lohrey informs us in his introduction, to this collection of essays by the late Australian psychologist Alex Carey, that Carey was prevented from going to college by his parents after he finished secondary school as they wanted him to manage their sheep farm which he did with such success that he could sell it about a decade later and enter a university. Here and there this book is dreadfully dry, particularly towards the end. His ideas probably would have been made clearer and much better organized if he would have been able to put together a regular book instead of a book of essays put together by someone else but he died in 1988 before he could get it done. But the topics he discusses are very important especially now when business and government propaganda has never been more powerful. The main title of this book describes what big business and their intellectual and political minions have tried to do particularly in the United States as rights to vote and to organize in this country were extended to large segments of the population of this country

over the last hundred years. Carey's old friend Noam Chomsky quotes in his preface the numerous intellectual advocates (Walter Lipmann, Harold Laswell, etc.) of what Thomas Jefferson called late in his life "a single and splendid government of an aristocracy" made up of the "banking institutions and moneyed incorporations" whom he feared would destroy the freedoms gained during the American revolution. Many prominent liberal intellectuals devoted loyal service to the state during World War one particularly in the government propaganda agencies putting out massive bogus atrocity stories about the Germans and turning a largely anti-war population in a short period into a bunch of maniacs looking to destroy everything remotely connected with Germany and German culture. A young German soldier named Adolf Hitler was deeply impressed with the allied propaganda effort and blamed German weakness in this field for their defeat and vowed that Germany would learn its lessons by the time the next war came around. The best part of Carey's text, by far, is about the first five chapters. The first topic discussed is the Americanization movement begun in the few years before World War one by big business associations who were particularly worried about such events as the victory of the IWW led strike of textile workers in Lawrence Massachusetts in 1912. Big business was particularly worried about the influence of IWW-type radicalism on the U.S. immigrant population which mostly worked under very bad conditions at very low wages and set to work with a somewhat successful drive to inculcate immigrants as well as the population at large with "American" values like free enterprise and the status quo and social harmony and against alien values like socialism or the welfare state or non-pliable unions. Out of this campaign came the Fourth of July holiday signed into law in 1918. This campaign culminated in the government crushing of the labor movement during 1919-21 under the cover of chasing communists and German spies. The labor movement, says Carey, did not recover until the Great Depression which forced the U.S. government to enact very basic welfare legislation and protection of unions. This greatly alarmed important segments of big business. The National Association of Manufacturers literature in 1938 warned of the "hazard facing industrialists" of the "newly realized political power of the masses." The end of World War two saw the beginnings of a massive attack on independent thinkers and organized labor under the cover of a red scare. After a lag in the early 1970's, the elites in this country began to steer this country towards a very markedly right wing political climate, seeing the rise of previously regarded fringe elements as represented by such think tanks as the American Enterprise Institute and the Heritage foundation which featured such profound thinkers as former Nixon and Ford treasury secretary William Simon who fulminated about how the Carter administration was steering the country towards collectivist totalitarianism. He goes into some detail examining the right wing apparatus in his native Australia.

He ends with discussion of some matters dealing with industrial psychology and industrial sociology culminating in a study of the Hawthorne studies, laborious research at an Illinois assembly plant made up of female workers in the late 20's and early 30's where a group of industrial psychologists tried to secure evidence that workers don't care about money and just want to be left alone to do the wonderful jobs that the labor market has forced on them. The Hawthorne chapter is in large part almost unintelligible and very dry, probably inevitable given that it is a scientific paper.

"The twentieth century has been characterized by three developments of great political importance : the growth of democracy, the growth of corporate power, and the growth of corporate propaganda as a means of protecting corporate power against democracy." This quote summarizes this book. The author first recalls that between 1880 and 1920 the franchise in the American population increased from 10 to 50 percent. Corporations were afraid that this political emancipation would pose a risk, but they soon discovered that they could "produce public opinion". In the first half of the 20th century, this manipulation was coordinated by National Association of Manufacturers (NAM). The La Follette Committee in the US Congress observed in 1939 : "Radio speeches, public meetings, news, cartoons, editorials, advertising, motion pictures and many other artifices of propaganda have not, in most instances, disclosed to the public their origin within the Association." "Nothing was done to stop this trend. And it went from bad to worse. Corporate propaganda succeeded in turning the values upside down. The general public didn't hesitate to approve ideas that went totally against its own interest. Several examples are given in this book, and I would like to recall the following two important episodes. After the second world war, prices in the US continued being controlled by the Office of Price Administration (OPA). That didn't please industry, but inquiries showed that 80 % of the American people approved of this politics. After a media campaign organized by the NAM, an inquiry showed that in October 1946 only about 26 % of the population "thought" that the OPA made sense. In November 1946 the OPA was closed down. Afterwards, President Truman called the corporate propaganda campaign a "conspiracy against the American consumers". Consumers were betrayed. By December 1946 prices had increased 15 %, much more than salaries had. In 1975 the Advertising Council undertook a media campaign to "re-educate the people in economics", "investing" 1.000 million dollars a year. The brainwashing of the people under the slogan "Take government off our backs" was very successful. The percentage of the American people considering that government was too much involved in their lives increased from 42 to 60 % in 1980, and then Reagan won the presidential election. What happened from then on can be read in Ben Bagdikian's The New Media Monopoly.

Full of insights, such as the distinction between treetops propaganda, as opposed to grassroots, aimed at the intellectual and business classes.

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