Right-wing billionaire Koch Brothers acquire major stake in Time Magazine

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On Sunday evening, lifestyle magazine publisher Meredith Corporation agreed to purchase multinational mass media organization Time Inc. in an all-cash transaction valued at close to $3 billion. Under the terms of the transaction Time Inc.'s shares will be acquired at $18.50 each, with the deal set to close during the first quarter of 2018.

The acquisition was made possible by an infusion of $650 million from two of the world's richest men, right-wing billionaire brothers Charles and David Koch, made via their private-equity firm Koch Equity Development.

Koch Industries is one of the largest privately operated companies in the United States, second only to Cargill, with annual sales revenue of more than $100 billion. The company operates oil refineries in many states and has a hand in a large range of other businesses from fertilizers to finance.

The Koch brothers have long sought to influence political policy, which they mostly operate through their nonprofit conservative advocacy group, Americans for Prosperity. In the run-up to the 2016 presidential election, the group spent more than $720 million supporting conservative policy positions and candidates.

The deal between these two giant media outlets, Meredith and Time Inc. ushered in by the billionaire Koch brothers illustrates just one aspect of the complete domination of the financial oligarchy throughout the mass media and information industries.

Time, Inc. owns over 100 of the largest media brands in the US including Time, Sports Illustrated, Travel + Leisure, Food & Wine, Fortune, People, InStyle, Life, Golf Magazine, Southern Living, Essence, Real Simple, and Entertainment Weekly. Several of the brands are iconic names and leaders in their media categories, most notably Time and People magazine. Additionally, Time, Inc. co-operates over 60 websites with a combined reach of over 150 million digital readers.

With a similar magnitude, Meredith Corporation owns Shape, Parents and many other mass-market titles. Its most popular magazine, Better Homes & Gardens, has the fourth highest circulation of US magazines at 7.7 million, according to the Magazine Publishers of America.

Combined, the two brands will have a readership of approximately 135 million people and paid circulation of nearly 60 million. The deal will also create a digital media business with 170 million monthly unique visitors in the United States and more than 10 billion annual video views.

Both companies issued cursory statements assuring the public that KED and the Koch brothers will not have "any influence on Meredith's editorial or managerial operations." But given the Koch brothers' massive stake in the news magazine, these perfunctory assurances are difficult to believe.

The influence that the Koch brothers may now have over major forms of communication is staggering, but not unique. In the US, billionaires have a hand in virtually every one of America's influential national newspapers, including The *Washington Post*, The *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times* in addition to major magazines, local news outlets and newspapers and online publications. To name a few,

• Rupert Murdoch is executive co-chairman of 21st Century Fox and is also chairman of News Corp, which owns The *Wall Street Journal*, among other publications. Combined with his other family members he controls 120 newspapers across five countries.

• Jeff Bezos, whose wealth just this week surpassed

$100 billion, bought The *Washington Post* for $250 million in 2013 and has since turned the newspaper into a leading advocate of internet censorship and anti-Russian hysteria.

• Mexican billionaire Carlos Slim more than doubled his stake in The New York Times in June 2015 to approximately 17% of the media company. He now owns the largest individual stake in the paper.

• Warren Buffett, as CEO of Berkshire Hathaway owns about 70 dailies today. In 2012, Berkshire Hathaway acquired 63 daily newspapers and weeklies in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Alabama from Media General for $142 million.

The further consolidation of these massive conglomerates into the hands of fewer and fewer individuals has been ushered in through decades of deregulation efforts. In the early 1980s over 90 percent of US media was held by just 50 corporations. Over the past four decades that number has dropped to only six major corporations.

Through the 1970s, the FCC was largely shackled by longstanding laws to prevent media consolidation put in place to discourage or prevent any single corporation from dominating too many media platforms.

The stripping away of these restrictions began in the 1980’s under Ronald Reagan’s FCC Chairman Mark Fowler. But the most significant and drastic of the deregulation efforts came under Democratic President Bill Clinton when he signed the Telecommunications Act of 1996, which dramatically raised caps on the number of local newspapers and television stations a single corporation could own, and the percentage of the national audience a single corporation could reach.

As recently as this month, the FCC oversaw the dismantling of the remaining decades-old rules meant to prevent the monopolization of the media. The regulations were eliminated to make it easier for media outlets to be bought and sold. Some of the rules eliminated included one preventing a company in a given media market from owning both a daily newspaper and a TV station. Another blocked TV stations in the same market from merging with each other if the combination would leave fewer than eight independently owned stations. Another restricted the number of TV and radio stations that any media company could simultaneously own in a single market.

This last wave of deregulatory efforts came as conservative broadcasting company Sinclair was making moves to buy up Tribune Media for $3.9 billion in a deal very similar to the Time Inc.-Meredith corporation deal. Under the revised regulations, Sinclair will be able to buy the company without having to sell off many stations to receive regulatory approval. If the deal goes through, Sinclair would own 223 TV stations nationwide reaching roughly 72 percent of U.S. households.

The monopolization of the media by a small number of corporations, backed by an even smaller number of billionaires, is part of a process inherent in the capitalist system in which “free competition” inevitably leads to monopoly. However, in the age of the internet, where both the spread of non-state-sanctioned information, and access to free communication for the working class is more available than ever, the control of these tools becomes all the more critical for the ruling class to maintain power.

The further consolidation of the media, the recent moves by the Trump administration to end net neutrality, and the ongoing censorship campaign by search engines and social media outfits must all be seen as part of an offensive by the US government and major corporations to strip away basic democratic rights, and pave the way for widespread government censorship of oppositional views.