

Beyond Fake News | Items

By Angelique Haugerud

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Angelique Haugerud unpacks the politicized notion of “fake news,” understanding the concept as a matter of ideology and discourse. She goes on to argue that a media ideology that “views journalism as a public good” and combats the financialization of the news industry is the best opportunity to fight mis- and disinformation.

A more effective approach to journalism’s crisis, writes [Will Meyer in Jacobin](#), is “a public subsidy that supports in-depth journalism and serves the public, not shareholders and advertisers.” Meyer suggests that news production, “like other universal goods—public education, libraries, roads, post offices—[is something] we should all pay for... collectively.” Doing so of course would require more progressive income taxes at both federal and state levels, and wider recognition that US income tax rates—especially on the ultra-rich—are at historically low levels and have been quite a bit [less than those of other wealthy nations](#) for a couple of decades. Hence influential billionaires such as Warren Buffett and Netflix CEO Reed Hastings say “[please raise my taxes](#).” “If people really think that something should be done about the fake-news problem,” [Nicholas Lemann writes in the New Yorker](#), “they should be thinking about government as the institution to do it.”

Lemann and others who favor press subsidies caution against simplistic dichotomies between an utterly “free” press on the one hand and puppet journalists or propagandists on the other. Government already shapes the rules of the game in any market competition, and journalism is no exception—as the repeal of the Fairness Doctrine and other regulatory changes illustrate. Furthermore, “news itself,” as Robert G. Picard writes, “has never been financially viable as a market-based good.”¹² At issue is how to enhance the capacity of independent journalists to hold the powerful accountable. While many other countries have instituted press subsidies, there is no one-size-fits-all formula, and this is a difficult conversation to sustain in the public sphere today in the United States.

Reframing journalism as a public good that has depended on public resources

since this country's founding, as well as reframing higher taxes as a patriotic duty of those who easily can [afford to pay more](#), are possible steps to reinvigorate professional news production—and thereby enhance capacities to counter misleading or false accounts. Media ideologies that favor a shift from profit machine to public service invite us to imagine alternatives to Wall Street's vision of news.

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