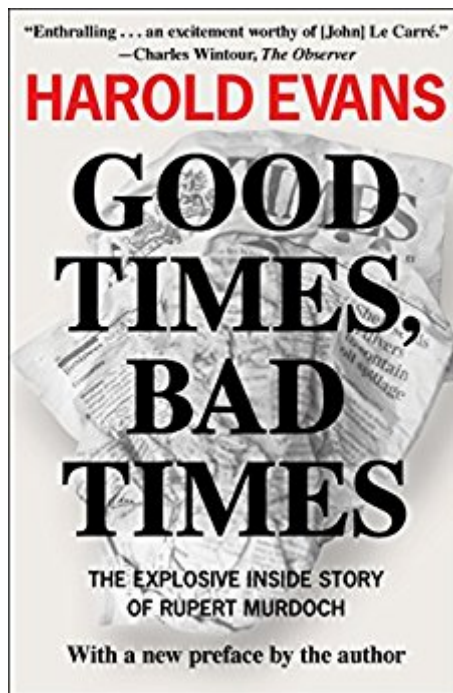




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# Good Times, Bad Times: The Explosive Inside Story Of Rupert Murdoch



## Synopsis

In Harold Evans's classic memoir, he tells the inside story of Rupert Murdoch's takeover of the Times of London and his rise to become a global media power. In 1981, Harold Evans was the editor of one of Britain's most prestigious publications, the Sunday Times, which had thrived under his watch. When Australian publishing baron Rupert Murdoch bought the daily Times of London, he persuaded Evans to become its editor with guarantees of editorial independence. But after a year of broken promises and conflict over the paper's direction, Evans departed amid an international media firestorm. Evans's story is a gripping, behind-the-scenes look at Murdoch's ascension to global media magnate. It is Murdoch laid bare, an intimate account of a man using the power of his media empire for his own ends. Riveting, provocative, and insightful, *Good Times, Bad Times* is as relevant today as when it was first written. This ebook features a new preface by the author, in which he discusses the Rupert Murdoch phone-hacking scandal.

## Book Information

File Size: 2076 KB

Print Length: 602 pages

Publisher: Open Road Media (September 20, 2011)

Publication Date: September 20, 2011

Language: English

ASIN: B005NY4QFI

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #116,705 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #31

in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Business & Money > Industries > Media & Communications

#75 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Biographies & Memoirs > Professionals & Academics >

Journalists #146 in Books > Business & Money > Industries > Media & Communications

## Customer Reviews

great read, a historical book, we should all read. Highly recommend this book. I only put 4 stars, cause 5 at Love it, just seemed wrong with the terrible events and times of the Potato Famine in

Ireland.

The last 35 years have depleted the number of directors who actually sat around the board table with Harry Evans at Times Newspapers in 1981. His book concentrates on the events immediately following the company's acquisition by Rupert Murdoch. Evans has used his acknowledged skills as a writer to portray a clash between a hero and a villain. He casts himself as the hero, fighting to transfer his successes at The Sunday Times to the failing Times. Rupert Murdoch certainly does not need me as his defender and I have nothing to gain from being a critic of this book but the reader needs to be warned that it was largely driven by animus born when Evans' attempts to buy The Sunday Times failed. It was and remains my belief that Evans carefully documented conversations at the board table with the intent of using them in a future book. His skills as a writer and the career he built are well documented but 1981 was not one of his better years and this book attempts to explain that the reason was Murdoch's actions and not his. Prior to the purchase there were tough negotiations with the unions. We sought significant staff reductions to slow down the huge losses. He declared it was "an opportunity lost." This came from an editor and board member who with complete disdain for our budgets went out and hired additional journalists at higher rates of pay. His resignation process was almost theatrical even to the point of a double take when the TV crew arrived late. After his book was released I saw him in Fleet Street where he had been attending a book signing. He asked me if I had read it. I told him I had not. He said "you should, you are one of the heroes." I replied that that was not necessarily a good thing. The book has merit but should not be regarded as an accurate account of what actually happened in the stormy days of 1981.

I grew up reading Harold Evan's Sunday Times - in the late 1970s it provided a window on the world that few other papers could. I particularly remember comprehensive coverage of Egyptian President Sadats historic visit to Jerusalem; ongoing coverage of Soviet dissidents and a very welcome (I'm Irish) editorial urging Britain to consider withdrawal from Northern Ireland. However, from today's perspective, the paper's foreign coverage seemed to be written from a point of view which could be summarised as 'what would the world do without Henry Kissinger?' [Indeed this has always seemed to be Mr. Kissinger's view also]; and that Soviet unreasonableness was a product of American hawkish unreasonableness and that balance, compromise and reasonableness were achievable with enough negotiation. My memory is of positive disdain for the emerging tax revolt in California and absolute dread at the more confrontational foreign policy approach being urged by followers of Governor Reagan. A major positive for me was the explanatory diagrams and the furtively taken

photographs of Soviet missiles (SS-20s?) being deployed in Russian forests. I was reminded of these diagrams in 2002/3 when the modern Sunday Times gave excellent descriptions - supported by diagrams - of Saddam's mobile chemical/biological weapons labs - which turned out not to exist. In saying all the above, I mean both to pay tribute to Harold Evans and to put in context the criticisms I have of this book - which contains descriptions of his triumphs as Sunday Times editor and his difficulties as Times Editor under Rupert Murdoch. The book has three sections - the first describes some of the episodes which made Evan's Sunday Times great - the investigative reports from the Insight team and others, of malicious cover-ups of poor quality in the pharmaceutical industry (Thalidomide) and the aircraft industry (McDonnell Douglas); the publication of the Crossman Diaries - laying bare the rivalries and mutual disdain of the members of the British Labour Cabinet. Having established his credentials as a 'vertical' journalist - Evan's term, which he describes as 'seeking to get to the bottom of things' - and lauding his proprietors, the Thomson's, for allowing him to do so, the second part of the book deals with the advent of Mr. Murdoch as owner. The machinations of Murdoch to gain control are fascinating, the Thomson's were drained both financially and personally by the losses induced by union activity, and they secretly dealt with Murdoch while other offers were being pursued by the editors. Murdoch eventually won ownership of both the Times and Sunday Times, having given guarantees of editorial freedom to a board of 'national directors', guarantees, which if breached, were theoretically amenable to criminal legal sanction. As part of the change of ownership Evans was offered the editorship of the Times - one of the free worlds most revered titles. In his description of the paper, Evans reveals an almost po-faced reverence for the place of the Times as part of the British Establishment - he sees it as the paper of record, upholding fair, non-partisan and accurate journalism which British society has come to expect. One feature of this is his constant enumeration of people's educational background, almost every colleague is named and then his/her school and university are listed - for example Joe Smith, Winchester, Oxford, to establish both social class and academic (perhaps intellectual) credentials. He documents the 'four pillars' of the Times as its reporting of Parliament, its legal coverage, its obituaries and its leader columns. Oh dear! Stolid stuff, from the fearless, vertical, investigative editor. Nonetheless this section contains fascinating accounts of Evan's new broom editorship coming to terms with the rather lazy attitude to scoops and freshness of news which, by implication, criticise his predecessor as editor (William Rees Mogg); and show that change was indeed necessary at the institution. Looming behind this story is Murdoch's general management style - haphazard interventions, secretive finances and lack of budgeting and planning. From the text it seems to me that Murdoch was overstretched with transatlantic acquisitions, rather than covertly

scheming to undermine Evans. The third section of the book reads a bit like Macbeth - Murdoch plots to renege on his guarantees and to impose his will on the editors. The text here is well paced and descriptive - the tension plays havoc with everyone, save perhaps Murdoch, Evan's second-in-command betrays him, various functionaries within the paper either resign or become lackeys, the 'national directors' turn out to be paper tigers (this is too good a pun to delete), the Thatcher government sides with Murdoch and fails to taken any action as the guarantees are broken, piecemeal. The thrust of this section reveals Evans as tragic hero, valiantly striving to uphold freedom of speech against the devious, double-dealing Murdoch, whose lackeys live in fear of his disapproval. However, by the time I got to this section I had, sadly, lost a lot of respect for Evan's impartiality, his defence of press freedom seemed to me to cloak an innate inability to face change in the form of new commercial and political realities. This was reaffirmed in my mind when, on the day that Evan's agreed to reign, who should phone to commiserate but Henry Kissinger! In the end I think the book is important in that it is illustrates that one important feature of change and leadership is that they are neither comfortable nor, initially at least, popular. Evans, though personally engaging - and I'm sure mercurial and demanding - came to represent a set of fading political beliefs. The change occurring at the times these events described were taking place saw the emergence of economic individualism unleashed by lowering taxation rates; the antipathy to organised labour and active military competition with the Soviet Union. The fading, indeed failing, Social Democratic consensus was overthrown by a more individualistic and competitive set of beliefs and the process was quite ugly, given the sincerely held beliefs on both sides. I believe Evans and Murdoch were representative shadows of this change. The rest of the story - Evans attractive forthrightness, Murdoch's furtive acquisitiveness - while the human interest focus of the story, are ultimately a side show. This book is well told, highly dramatic and engaging, however seen at a remove of twenty five years it is a lament from someone who worked hard to become part of an establishment whose day was done.

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