



Episode 1,078: Lew Rockwell on the Media, the Regime, and Their Relationship

Guest: Lew Rockwell

WOODS: I thought this was an opportune moment to think a little bit about the media and the U.S. regime and what the relationship is, because it's gotten a bit cloudy under Trump because the opposition is so unrelenting that it gives the impression that the media is in fact an opposition force. But I wonder how true that is. I wonder if that's misleading, if that's just because not only do we have a Republican president in office, which can complicate things, but we have a totally unique Republican president, maybe unrepeatable, in Trump.

So let's maybe start there. Well, for example, Trump just had these fake news awards where he awarded the ten most ridiculous lies that were made up about him over the course of the year, which was a shocking thing that he actually went ahead and did that. Paul Krugman came out number one for claiming that markets would never recover. He used the word "never." The professional economist, markets would never recover from the election of Trump. And Krugman has had to walk that one back for obvious reasons.

Anyway, first of all, what do you make of Trump's relationship with the media after a year?

ROCKWELL: Well, I think it's turned out to be more antagonistic than even I thought it would be. On the other hand, I don't know how well it's working. There was a CNN guy who recently said, all we talk about this Russian collusion but the people don't seem to care about it. And I don't think people do care about it. On the other hand, if we look back on American history — excuse me for bringing this up in your presence, since you're the great expert. But if we think of, say, the way the media treated Thomas Jefferson — or the Federalist media — and the lies and the smears and the libels and so forth, I mean, this has been going on a very long time, and the only thing different in — for example, the media under Franklin Roosevelt was pretty much antagonistic to Roosevelt. Those were the good old days.

Today, it seems like they're all fanatically anti-Trump, and I think that's hurt them. I think the regular people pay very little attention to the news. And why shouldn't they? I mean, they do think it's fake news. And of course, this was originally a left-wing comment, "fake news," and Trump took it and made it his own, and now they're all complaining that he's saying that. But I think that the media doesn't quite know what to do there.

I think the Russian thing is not working. Will we see the actual FISA memo? I mean, Trump — does anybody remember that Trump can open up anything? Anything that is under any kind of security, he can open it up and reveal it to the public just on his own. So why doesn't he do that with the FISA memo? I must say I don't trust the Republicans, either, so they're talking

about, oh, the FISA memo's going to solve and show that the media's been lying. Of course the media's lying, but —

WOODS: Now, what's the FISA memo in case people aren't following it?

ROCKWELL: This is allegedly the memo that shows that the Obama administration used the GPS Fusion report in order to get the government to spy on Trump, the Trump campaign, the Trump transition, and the Trump presidency. So if that's true, and supposedly it shows Obama asking for this stuff, it would be a striking thing. It would be — and I must say I was cheered when Adam Schiff, the horrible congressman of California, said, look, we can't show this to the American people. They wouldn't understand it.

WOODS: Yeah.

ROCKWELL: That was his reason for why it can't be shown.

WOODS: Yeah, yeah.

ROCKWELL: So I hope that this is what the Republicans claim it is. On the other hand, the Republicans are such liars just like the Democrats that I'll sort of believe it when I see it.

But the media is very much still in league with the regime. It's in league with the Pentagon. It's in league with the military industrial complex. It's in league with all of the security agencies. It's in league with the welfare agencies. So the fact that they don't like Trump doesn't mean that they're against the American government, so the media is a bugle for the American government always and everywhere. And of course they accuse Trump of being un-American, of colluding with this horrible Russkis and doing other things of that sort. So there they're really taking the same line. They are maybe a little bit more leftist, a little bit more warmongering than has been seen recently. They're slightly less warmongering than George W. Bush, for example. Now they're accusing Trump of not being warmongering enough. I wish. I wish Trump were less warmongering.

And they're not of course — if they were actually opposed to Trump in fundamental ways, they would be criticizing his North Korean policy, but in fact, they want him to step up the North Korean policy, nuke those people, those horrible people. Starve them to death. Who was it? The evil Rex Tillerson the other day said that we know that American foreign policy is working because so many people are starving in North Korea. Thanks, Rex.

WOODS: Yeah, exactly. So that's my next question. The media has been focusing, as you say, on the Russia question, and they've been focused on Trump's rudeness and his tweets and things like that. But if we had a truly adversarial media that were adversaries not of an individual, but really of the regime, what would that media look like and what kind of stories would they be reporting on?

ROCKWELL: You mean when they were let out of jail? Such a thing would not be allowed in this country today.

WOODS: Yeah.

ROCKWELL: But it's a very nice thing to think about. And you would have strong anti-militaristic aspect to it, and you'd be questioning what the government does. The great Jim Bovard has written a number of books on various federal departments, how much they spend, what they do and so forth. And I always think, how come nobody in the American media never looks at, say, the HUD budget? Billions and billions of dollars wasted and stolen and so forth. And of course that's true in all these agencies. The media never examined what the government does, never, because of course they're for the government, they're part of the government, they cheer the government. But we would have a media that examined the Pentagon budget, how many billions and billions of dollars have just disappeared.

We might have a media who would examine — for example, we found out this morning that the FBI lost or can't find a bunch of the emails between these two FBI agents who were colluding against Trump, and I think these were from December to May. Thousands and thousands of text messages, excuse me, not email messages. These two guys texted each other. And so how can the FBI, this magnificent agency of all goodness and power and light, how can they just lose all these text messages? *Oh, sorry, we lost them.*

And of course we see that NASA just happened to lose all the surveillance data that they had gathered during the two George W. Bush administrations, and they had to say, *Oh, gosh, sorry, we lost those.* Of course they didn't lose them. They didn't want them to be seen. Same with the FBI, which I think is an entirely corrupt agency, probably always has been. So an actual antagonistic media, even just a questioning media, even just a media that looked askance at the government would be a very, very different thing. But none of them are like that.

Now, there is the alternative media. There's *The Tom Woods Show*. There's a lot of websites that go after this sort of thing, and we're small, but I think we have some influence. They don't like us. We have Google and YouTube, Amazon, Twitter all cracking down on alternative media because allegedly we're extremists. Well, of course being totally pro-government, of course that's not extreme; that's just right.

So all kinds of things going on. It sure would be nice to have an alternative media that was significant in size. It would be so great to have a media that actually questioned the government. Murray Rothbard pointed out that in the 19th century, before the 20th century, you had a media that really didn't like the government and hated each other. So you had early on the Federalists and the Republicans, and then later the Republicans and the Democrats, they really hated each other's guts and really went after each other and thereby went after the government too. But in the 20th century, that all disappeared and they all became pretty much agents of the state.

WOODS: Well, the thing is you and I talk about the decline of the mainstream media and there's the rise of alternative media, the decentralization of information transmission. And all that is well and good, but under Trump, I don't know what the numbers are, but I just seem to recall that, actually, *The New York Times*, for example, is doing better. It has more subscribers. Its numbers are up. Now, I don't know if they're up as compared to where they were 15 years ago or if it's just a small blip over the past year. I don't know what you've heard about this, but is the mainstream media in decline, or are they actually getting a shot in the arm at least from their own base, their base being just the regular, center-left to hard-left voter? Maybe they're getting a shot in the arm from Trump.

ROCKWELL: Well, I think they are, and MSNBC's ratings are up and CNN's ratings are up, although CNN's are still quite low as compared to just a few years ago. *New York Times* is up; *WaPo* is up; *Wall Street Journal*, I don't actually know, but I think *The Wall Street Journal* is up as well. All these people who hate Trump and, yeah, it stirs their base. People hate Trump, and whether they're marching in the Women's March yesterday or doing whatever else they're doing, Trump is the guy they love to hate and so they are benefitting in some ways.

On the other hand, I think that, again, more and more Americans don't listen to the media. They don't watch MSNBC. They don't watch Fox. They don't watch CNN. They don't watch any of these big establishment media places because they think of them as just being liars — and of course, they are liars. I think even Fox is to the left of where it used to be. And it's all very interesting.

I just hope — I'm a little bit concerned about the economy. The Republicans and Trump are going to take the blame when the whole thing blows up, and I think it will blow up. There's very exciting times ahead, interesting times ahead, if only Trump doesn't nuke North Korea or do something similar. He's doing very bad things in Syria, going back into Syria. Just terrible things in the Middle East, period. So I must say, I don't know whether to believe Trump or not. I don't know whether he's ever honest or is he entirely a fraud. Is he sometimes honest?

He sure is interesting, however. He's the most interesting president. And I must say I love the Twittering, not only because the mainstream media hates it so much, but because it seems to me a great thing for a president to be directly in contact with the people, even if, as is normally the case, he's lying to them. So I think anything that circumscribes *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* and *Wall Street Journal* and *Chicago Tribune* and *Los Angeles Times* and the rest of these creeps is a good thing. It's interesting, but Tom, I don't know where the heck it's going. I don't know what the media say behind their doors. Are they all toasting Trump for being such a great guy? I don't know.

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Speaking of Twitter, I actually thought he handled the Women's March pretty well with that tweet about, "What a great day for you all to get out and demonstrate and celebrate that female unemployment is at its lowest point in 18 years."

ROCKWELL: [laughing]

WOODS: That is so beautiful. Whereas you know, if they had had a Women's March at all under Mitt Romney — which maybe they wouldn't, but who knows? — Romney would have been cheering them on. I mean, he wouldn't have agreed with their more radical positions, but he would have put out some milquetoast tweet about the importance of equality and maternal leave or whatever — which Trump favors, by the way. But he would have put out a tweet like that. Trump instead says, "Get out there and celebrate that there's lower female unemployment than we've had in 18 years." And I thought to myself, if I were president, that is exactly how I would have gotten to these people, because I know that would have gotten under their skins. That'd be my complete goal.

ROCKWELL: They all flipped out.

WOODS: Yeah, exactly. He's not in any way rattled by this. He just smacks them down with one statistic and then just leaves it. And what is the statistic also about black unemployment is at its lowest point in, I don't know, at least as many years?

ROCKWELL: Yes.

WOODS: It's way, way down. So again, he's waiting for the credit he's going to get for that. I mean, who knows? We are the first to say that there are so many factors that go into why an unemployment rate is where it is, and very often a president is not even in the top five of those reasons. But you could make a case that he had a hand in it at least. But regardless, these are the same people who, if under Obama this had happened, it would have been, *Well, that's because we have our first black president. He cares about those people.* But when we have Trump, it's, *We can't even report on this.*

ROCKWELL: [laughing] No, it's true, and I must say I was impressed by his pro-life talk. I think other Republican presidents have phoned in to the pro-life march, so he was still in the Rose Garden of the White House, but he was speaking to the crowd and I thought it was an eloquent speech. So that was good.

WOODS: Yeah. Now, I think my analysis of that is part of that is sincere. I don't think there's reason to think that he's completely insincere on it. But part of that I think is his way of telling these people, *For years and years you've elected people you thought would be your champion and they left you hanging out to dry. I'm actually going to do the thing that wouldn't really have taken that much effort for them to do, but I'm actually going to do it.* Now, how much he winds up really delivering on pro-life stuff I don't actually know, although his Supreme Court appointments could — you never know what that could do. Although even there, of course, because Roe vs. Wade goes all the way back to 1973 and is therefore a sacred and hallowed tradition, even conservatives on the court would say we would disrupt American society if we violated one of our hallowed traditions. So who really knows about that?

Now, 20 years ago maybe a week ago, something like that — 20 years ago, we had the Drudge Report, we had Matt Drudge breaking the Monica Lewinsky story, which, in the grand scheme of the Clinton presidency, the Monica Lewinsky story is to me like Trump's rudeness. It's beside the point. It's not the thing that I would be primarily complaining about, but if it gets people thinking the president's a creep, I'm all for it. But the reason Matt Drudge rose up was that *Newsweek* refused to run that story. They knew about the story, and they wouldn't run it and he did.

And he commemorated that anniversary on his website, obviously. His website is maybe the ugliest website ever. I mean, it looks like it did — whatever it looked like 20 years ago couldn't have been much different from how it looks now. It looks terrible, and yet it is an amazing revenue generator and it's amazing in terms of traffic. So what's your thought about the significance of Drudge and also who he is ideologically?

ROCKWELL: Well, of course, he's probably the most significant journalist in the world. I must say I like the look of his website. I think that he made a decision not to change it, and I think

it was a very smart decision, and I think everybody likes something that doesn't change. So that's just one aspect of it.

Ideologically, he's a right-wing neocon. So he's good on a lot of stuff; he's bad on a lot of stuff. But he sure is influential. I mean, I look at it every morning, and I'm sure there are hundreds of millions of people all over the world who do that too. So if you're on Drudge either from a negative or a positive standpoint, it's a huge deal. And he started out working in the gift shop at CBS, and then he became I think a runner, a gofer guy for NBC. But eventually, he started a previous website; then he started this website, and boy, it just, as you say, consonant with the Clinton scandal, took off like a rocket and it hasn't landed. I mean, it really is something to — you have to congratulate the guy. He's very, very talented, very smart.

And I wish he were more libertarian. I wish he were more antiwar. I wish he weren't a right-wing neocon, but a right-wing neocon's better than a left-wing neocon, I guess. But he puts the stuff out there, and it has a tremendous effect, and all power to him.

WOODS: He basically monetizes that site just through ads, which is almost impossible to do. You have to have immense web traffic for ads to really do that much for you, but when you have immense traffic, you need just that tiniest sliver to click on an ad. And I know a lot of people listening think, *I never click on the ads*, but the truth of the matter is you just don't remember doing it. You probably click on it twice a year and you just forgot that you did it. And that's all he needs you to do, and it's an amazing model. So a lot of these are Google ads, and these are ads that will pop up because you visited some other website and this ad will remind you, *Hey, don't forget to get your Macadamia nuts for 5% off*, or whatever it is.

Or also, Amazon will do re-targeting as well. You go and visit a product page on Amazon, and then you go to Drudge, and doggone it, there's that product staring you in the face. And Drudge of course earns a commission. Now, you're not allowed to say anymore — because Amazon's really cracking down on this, you can't say, "Help out my website by clicking on my Amazon links," because they really get — they will come down on you. So I just say — as a matter of news reporting, I'm simply telling people that if there are websites that you like that feature Amazon ads, you are generating commissions at no extra cost for the owners of those sites, and that's basically how Drudge stays afloat.

And not just stays afloat, but he's just a monster in terms of revenue. And that's it. It's that basic and straightforward. When you're that big, you don't need to know all the ins and outs of Internet marketing. You just throw some ads up. And they're ads that — this is the amazing thing — that are tailored to the user. And I know we're supposed to hate ads and be creeped out by them, but look, I like advertising. I think it's a noble profession, and I'm fascinated by it. And the fact that he's got ads — I'm looking at it right here — of things that I am indeed interested in, and I think, well — I personally think, fine, that makes my life easier. I don't have to go looking for these things. I mean, I know not everybody feels that way.

Anyway, the point is he's able to do this because his reach is beyond, just absolutely beyond imagination. And that is the thing that makes me feel somewhat better about our current situation, that even though, man, do we have an uphill battle, at the same time, this one guy with an ugly website stood up against *Newsweek*, and where's *Newsweek* now? Who even cares? And there's the Drudge Report still hanging on. Or there are a lot of content creators out there who just make simple, simply YouTube videos. No bells and whistles. And they have hundreds of thousands, maybe even millions of subscribers. This would have been completely

out of science fiction in the past, and I just wish, Lew, that there could have been a Rothbard YouTube channel, you know?

ROCKWELL: Or a Rothbard Report or a —

WOODS: Yeah, Rothbard podcast with an occasional video version. And you wouldn't even have had to teach him technology. Just get him on his phone. Chad or Clay over at the Mises Institute could have just called him up on the phone, recorded his side of the conversation. Nobody would have cared about the sound quality. It's Rothbard. Ugh. You know, but instead of just regretting would could have been, we have all these amazing resources now with so many good people. So there is that. There is that, and that's more than we had in the days of the three TV networks. And it's important to recall that, because people who did not grow up with three channels I think are more discouraged than they ought to be in light of that progress.

ROCKWELL: No, I think it's true, and Drudge's traffic was so big, so early, that I can remember when people would be practically put out of business if they were linked to by Drudge because they might get \$25,000 in extra charges from their web hosting company. And so people were of mixed feelings. Thank goodness, of course, everything is so much cheaper these days that that never happens. But Drudge, amazing guy. Just an amazing guy.

WOODS: Yeah. And the thing is I know somebody who's been linked to by Drudge a few times who has a decent amount of traffic and does run some graphic ads, and on those few days that he's been linked from Drudge, suddenly those ads that generate next to nothing for him generate real money, because there are so many people there that you do get those few who click through and buy something. So it's lucrative for everybody if you can somehow figure out how to get linked there.

ROCKWELL: No, it's true. He linked to LRC once a long time ago, and it brought in a lot of traffic and money, just from that one day.

WOODS: Yeah, that's just tremendous. Now, Lew, at the same time — this is why I'm not 100% enthusiastic. I'm 91.7% enthusiastic, because, on the one hand, you can spread good stuff quickly and efficiently and to a large audience. But on the other hand, you can be smeared quickly and efficiently and your name can be dragged through the mud before a large audience. Not that you or I would know anything about that, Lew, but that too can happen. And I wonder how do we calculate the pluses and minuses of that, given that that's another factor of the Internet. I mean, there are people who, they put out a funny tweet before they got on an airplane and by the time their plane lands, their career is destroyed. There's that.

ROCKWELL: Yes. No, it's true, and the social media are more and more engaged in this. YouTube, which is a subsidiary of Google, of course, hired the ADL, the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith to decide what YouTubes should be on their channel and what ones shouldn't be because they were hate or extreme or shouldn't be read by nice people or whatever is the criterion. That's highly unfortunate. Facebook and Google — Google's got all kinds of secret content police, and there are companies that have secret deals with Google to let them go through all their content and take out anything that's extreme or nasty or shouldn't be read by decent people.

On the other hand, it seems to me that I'm picking up a lot of popular resistance to this. In Germany, for example, there was the horrible law put into effect to allow the government to crack down on anything that criticized vast migration and that sort of thing. Germans are very upset about it, and there's a huge amount of backlash. I think the same thing is happening here. I don't think people like Facebook or YouTube or Google or whatever deciding what they can read and what they can't read. So I'm encouraged. Even though these people are I think very, very talented and smart and rich, of course, as a result, I don't like what they're doing. I think it's very, very negative for the country and for individuals and for the cause of liberty, for that matter.

But I think that they are going to find out that Americans don't like it. I think they're already finding that out. There's already a lot of pushback against Facebook. I noticed that Tim Cook advised his nephew: don't look at social media because it's damaging to young people. And of course there are a lot of studies that have shown there's something funny about a kid who has an iPhone with him all the time and is looking at the iPhone, that it has bad effects. So I think that there's going to be a return to more of a balanced sort of social media situation, where people are not entirely wrapped up in it and where they don't trust YouTube or Facebook or Google or any of these things just on their own. They question them. So I think that's all to the good.

But you're exactly right, of course. They are expert smear artists, and while they're claiming to be getting rid of extremism — of course, as Murray Rothbard always said, all the truth comes from the extremes. I'll just make that point, that the middle of the road is not the source of honesty or integrity or anything good. It's the regime's — the regime is in the middle of the road, and anybody to the left or right is supposed to be evil. Murray said this is where you can find out the truth, most of the time, from the extremes.

WOODS: Well, if you doubt that, just ask yourself, "How many times did Bob Dole tell me the truth?" Just ask yourself that. There it is. Never. So I think there's something to it.

Well, let's say 2.99 cheers for the revolution, let's say that we've observed, the decentralizing revolution. And I believe that, as I think we've established here, that what we're seeing with the media today is really an aberration, number one, and number two, it's directed primarily at a personality. It's not directed at the regime. If anything, it's in defense of the regime. It's in defense of the deep state. These reporters are not reporting about deep state activities and the dangers of those sorts of things. We're supposed to be concerned about presidential tweets. And there are plenty of things I should be concerned about with Trump and I rarely read about them, because those things are things that the regime is okay with and the deep state is okay with. So instead, I have to be lectured to about inane things.

But keep an eye on these people. You can't trust a word they say, and you can't trust a word the politicians say either. All you can trust are, you know — I'll just say it. All you can trust are the extremes these days — the so-called extremes. I mean, they've occupied so much space out there, they make it seem like there's this huge chasm separating Chuck Schumer and John McCain, and therefore, if you're not in that huge area, then you must be extreme. Whereas our view is those people are extreme. Those are the people who left a trail of death all through the Middle East. We didn't do that. I'd call that extreme. That's extreme right there. And by the way, anybody who would ever smear us as being so-called extremists would never quote that line I just said. Lew, I'll donate \$1,000 to your favorite charity if they're

honest enough to quote that line, that the real extremists are the ones who leaves bodies of corpses everywhere. I would say those are the extremists.

But anyway, how can you believe me? I'm an extremist talking here. All right, Lew, thanks so much. Always great to talk to you.

ROCKWELL: Thank you very much, Tom.