

Rupert Murdoch, a hands-on newspaperman

REUTERS, London

To illustrate the extent to which Rupert Murdoch used to micro-manage his newspapers, a one-time Murdoch editor told an anecdote about a typical board meeting at the mogul's UK newspaper arm in the 1980s.

News International directors, including some of the most powerful newspaper editors in Britain, would solemnly assemble in a board room within Murdoch's fortress-like publishing compound at Wapping, not far from the Tower of London.

Once assembled, Kelvin MacKenzie, the editor who ran Murdoch's raucous daily tabloid the Sun between 1981 and 1994 and made it the most influential newspaper for much of the Thatcher era, would ask: "Right. Who's going to ring Rupert, then?"

The anecdote was delivered with a smile. But senior journalists and corporate officials who have worked at the highest levels of the Murdoch organisation in Britain say it encapsulates a deep truth about the way the Murdoch newspaper empire has traditionally been run.

Former senior Murdoch employees in Britain, Australia and the United States say Murdoch is a hands-on media proprietor, as ready with an opinion on a story as he is to dispose of any editor who regularly takes a different stance from his own.

Reports of Murdoch pressuring editors until their newspapers reflected his own political leanings are common -- if more frequent at his tabloids than at his quality publications. Sometimes, Murdoch does not even have to pick up the phone.

"When I was last at News I was astonished how some editors would almost factor in Rupert even though he was 12,000 miles away," Bruce Guthrie, a former editor at Murdoch's Herald Sun in Melbourne, told Reuters.

"You could almost see them thinking, 'what will Rupert think of this?'"

News International told Reuters it does not comment on Murdoch's level of involvement in his newspapers. Dow Jones & Company, which owns the Wall Street Journal, declined to comment. Parent company News Corporation would not comment.

Reuters is a competitor of the Journal and of Dow Jones Newswires, the financial news agency that News Corp acquired along with the Wall Street Journal in 2007.

ANTICIPATING THE BOSS

To get an idea of how deeply Murdoch sometimes sought to steer what his newspapers were saying,

former Wapping insiders point to his relationship with one of the more respected of his British media properties, the Sunday Times.

Towards the end of a typical week, says a former senior News International figure, the owner would routinely ring the paper's editor -- from the mid-1980s a voluble Scotsman named Andrew Neil but more recently John Witherow, a genial, low-profile South African -- and grill them about the stories being worked on.

One person who was present at one of these sessions said Murdoch would ask his editor to run through the list of stories reporters were chasing. He would then critique them one by one.

Eventually Murdoch would hear a story he liked and make his interest apparent. That story would then become a main candidate for the front page.

Roy Greenslade, a media commentator for the Guardian who worked as a senior editor at both Murdoch's Sun tabloid and the quality Sunday Times, said that from what he saw and heard, Murdoch's personal editorial involvement was much deeper with his British tabloids than with his two up-market papers, The Times and the Sunday Times. Current and former employees of the Wall Street Journal say that's the case at that paper as well.

In his earlier days as a UK media mogul, Murdoch was known for literally dictating what tabloid editors would put in their papers, Greenslade told Reuters.

But Greenslade and other News Corp editors also said that as Murdoch's empire expanded, the Australian-born mogul had less time to micro-manage operations at individual papers.

At the same time he was still able to exert editorial influence by selecting editors who would anticipate his editorial views and whims.

"As an editor you were never in any doubt about what pleased him," Greenslade said.

In 2007, Murdoch himself told a House of Lords committee looking at media ownership and the news that he was a "traditional proprietor" at the Sun and News of the World, according to the committee's minutes of a meeting with the media boss. "He exercises editorial control on major issues -- like which Party to back in a general election or policy on Europe," the committee noted.

Rebekah Brooks, editor of the News of the World when some of the phone hacking occurred and head of News International until last week,



Rupert Murdoch

told the same committee that she was "very lucky to have a traditional proprietor like Mr Murdoch, coupled with always having Les Hinton (then head of News International) there as well, who, as you know, was a journalist. Yes, I do seek advice from them and, yes, it is a consensus issue."

Murdoch's influence, former News Corp staff say, was not restricted to Britain and explains why so many of his titles around the world took the same editorial stance on major issues, such as the Iraq war.

Guthrie told Reuters that Murdoch regularly hosted editorial conferences at which he would make his feelings known.

"You leave the conference kind of inculcated with a culture," said Guthrie, who won damages from the company in 2008 for unfair dismissal.

"That's the way it's done, it's almost by stealth, but you leave those conferences with an almost collective view -- certainly with the knowledge of what the boss wants."

Another former News Limited journalist in Australia, who asked not to be named, agreed that Murdoch liked to employ people who could anticipate his next step.

"They know how to think," the former journalist said. "People are put in these jobs because they understand News Corp and how Rupert thinks so they don't have to be micro-managed."

Neil, the editor of Britain's Sunday Times for 11 years, told a House of Lords committee looking into media ownership in 2008 that he was never in any doubt what Murdoch wanted, even though he could not recall a direct instruction telling him to take a particular line.

"On every major issue of the time and every major political personality or business personality, I knew what he thought and you knew, as an editor, that you did not have a freehold, you had a leasehold... and that leasehold depended on accommodating his views," he said.

"Rupert Murdoch is obsessed with what his newspapers say. He picks the editors that will take the kind of view of these things that he has and these editors know what is expected of them when the big issues come and they fall into line."

In the 1980s, the Sun's MacKenzie would hear from Murdoch on a daily basis -- not quite to discuss exact headlines, but to make sure the news-

paper would report the major issues as the press baron saw fit.

Greenslade, recalling the relationship between Murdoch and MacKenzie, told the same House of Lords committee that the editor would regularly come off the phone "rubbing his backside as if he had been given a good kicking on the phone".

Three former News of the World reporters who spoke to Reuters also remember a hands-on owner.

"Rupert comes across as quite unassuming," said one. "The quiet assassin,' we used to call him. He used to turn up unannounced -- you wouldn't know he was there. No jacket, sleeves rolled up, at the back bench, quite hands-on."

Another said: "If the Murdochs were in town, there'd be massive pressure to get some sensational story that weekend."

A third, a correspondent for the News of the World in New York for a period, agreed that Murdoch liked to get involved. But based on practices in his U.S. newspapers, this person said, "I think the whole thing (alleged phone hacking and police bribery) will have horrified Murdoch."

PLEASING THE BOSS

The pressure from the boss was -- and is -- less intense at Murdoch's quality papers. Neil told the committee that during his time as editor at the Sunday Times he would hear from Murdoch perhaps once or twice a week and receive regular cuttings from Wall Street Journal editorials, sent to show Murdoch's take on an issue.

"Part of the process of him letting you know his mind, in addition to calls and conversations, is to clip out editorials from, above all, the Wall Street Journal," he said. "He loved the Wall Street Journal, and he will love it even more now that he owns it."

According to current and former employees of Dow Jones, Murdoch chats on a daily basis with the editor of the Journal, Robert Thomson, both by phone and by wandering down to the Journal newsroom at News Corp headquarters on Sixth Avenue. Murdoch enjoys occasionally bantering and gossiping with other editors and reporters whom he has come to know in the Journal newsroom, these people say.

A News Corp insider agreed Murdoch occasionally trades gossip with editors and reporters, but said it never went further than that.

But the experience at the New York Post, at least on one occasion, was different, according to a former employee at the paper.

"You kind of knew what he wanted and what he didn't want. You knew what kind of stories to do and what not to do. But the only time I really

saw him hands-on in the newsroom for any sustained period was the seven week Gore-Bush (electoral) recount. He was there and he wanted to make sure we were on it the way he wanted us to be on it.

"There is no doubt obviously who they wanted to win the election."

A former veteran New York Post reporter described Murdoch as having had "his hands all over the Post. I used to see him in the newsroom something like twice a week sometimes when he was in New York, especially if something big was happening in politics or business."

While Murdoch "used to give us tips about people he wanted us to go after especially in business and politics," this reporter said the Post did not use things like private investigators or phone tapping.

"When he bought the Journal we started to see him a lot less," the former reporter said. "It seemed the Post had lost its lustre and he had this new plaything. Some people started wondering if the Post was long for this world."

SCHADENFREUDE

In an editorial on July 18, the Wall Street Journal argued that readers should "see through the commercial and ideological motives of our competitor-critics. The Schadenfreude is so thick you can't cut it with a chainsaw. Especially redolent are lectures about journalistic standards from publications" -- a reference to the Guardian which has led much of the coverage on the hacking story -- "that give Julian Assange and WikiLeaks their moral imprimatur. They want their readers to believe, based on no evidence, that the tabloid excesses of one publication somehow tarnish thousands of other News Corp journalists across the world."

That may be true. There is no suggestion that hacking took place at the Wall Street Journal or Murdoch's Times and the papers continue to provide serious, in-depth coverage of politics and business.

But critics, including some former Murdoch editors, argue there's no getting around the fact that Murdoch's personality and the pressure he creates have helped create a culture where reporters felt it was acceptable to hack into phone messages to get scoops.

"The culture that exists at his newspapers is a culture he has developed," Guthrie said. "It's in some ways an amoral culture. Essentially Rupert is this hard-driving proprietor who pushes all his editors for more sales, bigger stories, he wants bigger splashes and he puts his editors under enormous pressure to deliver on that."

'Air-conditioned clothes' help Japan beat heat

AFP, Toda, Japan

As jackets go it looks far from fashionable, but its Japanese maker cannot meet sky-rocketing demand for "air conditioned" coats with built-in fans.

Kuchofuku Co. Ltd -- whose name literally means "air-conditioned clothing" -- has seen orders soar amid power shortages in Japan after the devastating March 11 earthquake and tsunami.

As parts of the nation sweat out an uncomfortable summer shackled by restrictions on electricity use, demand has grown for goods that provide guilt-free respite from the unrelenting summer heat.

Two electric fans in the jacket can be controlled to draw air in at different speeds, giving the garment a puffed-up look. But this has not deterred those happy to be cool rather than "hot" when it comes to fashion.

"I work in a very hot place and have to wear long sleeved outfits, so I came over to buy this to stay cool and to prevent heat stroke," said Ryo Igarashi, 33, as he left the Kuchofuku office after buying an air-conditioned jacket.

Igarashi said the clothing offers him relief at hot construction sites where he, coincidentally, installs air conditioners in buildings.

Nearly 1,000 companies in Japan use Kuchofuku, including automobile giants, steelmakers, food companies and construction firms.

Among its other products, the company also sells air-conditioned cushions and mattresses that use Kuchofuku's patented plastic mesh system that allows air to circulate while supporting weight.

The products have taken on extra significance since the closure of the tsunami-crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant and



Hiroshi Ichigaya, (L) president of Japanese power-saving goods venture Kuchofuku, meaning air-conditioned clothing in Japanese, displays a jacket which has cooling fans on its back, at the company's headquarters in Toda city, Tokyo.

a government decree obliging big companies in the Tokyo and Tohoku northern region to reduce power usage by 15 percent to avoid blackouts.

Initiatives such as "Super Cool Biz" encourage employees to ditch jackets and ties and turn down air conditioning, while the power-

saving drive has also sparked demand for cooling gadgets.

Imports of electrical fans through Tokyo port hit a record high in May, jumping 70 percent from a year earlier to 1.24 million units, according to the customs office.

The fans in the Kuchofuku jacket are con-

nected to a lithium-ion battery pack that lasts for 11 hours on a single charge, consuming only a fraction of the power used by conventional air-conditioning, said company president Hiroshi Ichigaya.

Ichigaya says that his clothing offers a counter-intuitive solution: that by wearing more, a person can feel cooler than if baring it all.

"People are now trying to wear as little as possible in such campaigns as Super Cool Biz, but wearing more Kuchofuku makes you feel much cooler," Ichigaya told AFP.

Up to 20 litres per second of air circulates throughout the jacket and escapes through the collar and cuffs, drying off sweat and cooling down the wearer.

The idea of "personal air-conditioning" struck Ichigaya -- a Sony engineer for two decades until the early 1990s -- when he was trying to invent an air conditioner that would use little electricity.

"It came to me that we don't need to cool the entire room, just as long as people in it feel cool," he said.

Kuchofuku, first launched in 2004, typically draws demand from factories and construction sites but the company has recently seen orders come in from office workers and housewives.

A standard air-conditioned jacket sells for around 11,000 yen (\$140), with others priced higher.

A central government official recently approached the company to buy half-a-million jackets, but Ichigaya said he had to turn the order down because the company was unable to boost production in time to meet demand.

The company will sell a total of 40,000 jackets, cushions and other air-cooled products this year, double last year's figure, Ichigaya said, adding that sales would reach 80,000 if he could manufacture enough.

The products have taken on extra significance since the closure of the tsunami-crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant and a government decree obliging big companies in the Tokyo and Tohoku northern region to reduce power usage by 15 percent to avoid blackouts