



THE FREE PRESS?

A MONTHLY JOURNAL AND TEACHING TOOL EXPOSING PROPAGANDA IN THE MASS MEDIA

A news resource which is **not:**

Owned by **billionaires**
Beholden to **advertisers**
Staffed by **the elite**

Unlike other journals we **declare our interests:**

No **profit motive**
No **cronyism**
An interest in exposing **media bias** by applying the **propaganda model**

What is the propaganda model?

The vast majority of “headline news” providers in the UK are profit-driven corporations, affiliated to even larger corporations, who make most of their money from selling advertising space to other businesses.

The propaganda model predicts that such media will generate a view of the world that is overwhelmingly favourable to the interests of big business and marginalises, ignores or attacks opposing views.

A wealth of evidence supports the model. Head to www.the-free-press.co.uk for an overview.

Wondering why you’ve never heard of the propaganda model?

Perhaps you’ve been getting your news from...the news.



ALEX SALMOND: CLEARED BY COURT...

...INDICTED BY MEDIA!

“The media is the most powerful entity on earth” wrote Malcolm X. “They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent.”

First, a disclaimer: the contributors to this article are both male. We appreciate that women experience situations we may not be able to relate to and acknowledge the low conviction rate in sexual abuse cases and the bravery shown by female complainants in a society which is still largely patriarchal.

It is not our intention to judge Alex Salmond or his accusers guilty or not guilty. Our focus is on media coverage of the former First Minister’s trial – and the curious fact that almost all mainstream media outlets and commentators appeared to presume Salmond’s guilt before the verdict and to consider him “tainted” even after the High Court cleared him of all 13 charges brought against him.

Consider the Sunday Times headlines in the week of the court verdict: *Alex Salmond Was A Bully And a ‘Sex Pest’*, *His Own QC Says On Train*; *We Are Devastated, We Still Hope For Change*; *Say Alex Salmond Accusers*; *Cleared But Tainted*, *‘El Presidente’ Alex Salmond Turns Guns On SNP Enemies*; *David Mundell Calls For Inquiry Into Civil Service Conduct Under Salmond*; *Kevin Pringle: Perhaps Alex Salmond Can Emerge From This Nightmare As a Better Man*; *Alex Salmond Is Not Guilty — Just Like Woody Allen*; *Salmond’s Victory Comes At High Price*; *Alex Salmond’s QC Gordon Jackson Described Him As a ‘Sex Pest’*.

The headlines have not been cherry-picked. They are the only seven headlines on Times Online for Sunday 29th March 2020 featuring the word “Salmond”!

“Salmond left court a free man with a smug, injured air of vindication,”¹ wrote Sarah Baxter in the most overtly hostile piece, though she was outdone by a remarkable contribution by The Herald at the opposite end of the trial.

MP John Nicholson tweeted on March 8th that “The @heraldscotland illustrates its centre spread ‘Big Read’

today - opening line “The trial of Alex Salmond starts tomorrow” - with a photo montage including the Yorkshire Ripper, the Moors Murderers, Adolf Eichmann, & Charles Manson.”²

The webpage for the article is now listed as “Not Found”³ – an admission by the paper that conflating pre-trial Salmond with convicted rapists, mass murderers and war criminals may not have met the “highest professional standards”⁴ boasted of in the Editor’s Code of Practice?

Why would the media show such unremitting hostility to Salmond, pre- and post-trial?

The propaganda model has an insight to offer. Alex Salmond is the undisputed figurehead for Scottish independence, a hugely unpopular movement with wealthy individuals who profit from the British nation state. The attitude of wealth was demonstrated by numerous threats that capital would flee Scotland if it voted for independence in 2014, most memorably the Royal Bank of Scotland’s declaration that it would move its HQ to London in the event of a Yes vote⁵.

IndyRef 2014 was a closely fought thing. Though the No to independence vote ultimately prevailed, a YouGov survey ten days before the referendum put the “Yes” side in the lead by 51% to 49%⁶

Anyone who doubts the overall stance of the mainstream media on the issue would do well to survey newspaper headlines the day after the poll: *‘Ten Days to Save the Union’* (Daily Telegraph), *‘Parties Unite in Last-*

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How does the propaganda model work in practice?

Critics of the propaganda model claim that it is a “conspiracy theory.”

This, perhaps purposefully, misses the point of the propaganda model.

A conspiracy will not happen of its own accord. People must gather in rooms and have meetings to instigate a conspiracy.

The beauty of modern media propaganda is that it simply **follows from the institutional structure of large media companies.**

Consider someone at the bottom of this structure: a young journalist at Rupert Murdoch’s Sun newspaper: **Will this journalist have to be told, in a conspiratorial manner, not to pursue stories about unrest in the News International boardroom and corporate malpractice by one of the paper’s leading advertisers?**

Not likely. Do **you** try to earn job security by going against the values of the institution that employs you?

Of course, like us, journalists are unlikely to reflect on the institutional parameters that confine them. Far easier to subconsciously adopt these values and *believe* that you believe them.

If 90-95% of mainstream journalism positions are filled by people who share the same framework of values, know which stories to pursue and which to ignore, what can be said and can’t be said, that makes for a robust propaganda system.

You will, of course, have a hard time convincing journalists that this is what they’re doing. Then again, as Upton Sinclair famously said:

(...Main article continued)

*Ditch Effort to Save the Union’ (The Times), ‘Ten Days to Save the United Kingdom’ (Independent), ‘Last Stand to Keep the Union’ (Guardian), ‘Queen’s Fear of the Break Up of Britain (Daily Mail) and ‘Don’t Let Me Be Last Queen of Scotland’ (Daily Mirror)*⁷.

Scotland has a range of its “own” newspapers, but they didn’t come close to reflecting the public split on the case for independence either. It was headline news four months before the election when The Sunday Herald became “the first, and potentially only,” paper to declare itself in favour of independence⁸ - note that’s only the *Sunday* edition of the Herald.

There can be few clearer examples of the propaganda model proposition that the media reflect the views of owners/advertisers, *not their readers*, than the IndyRef – and with IndyRef 2 on the agenda the media have a continued interest in stories that damage Salmond.

Those who doubt whether the press are capable of carrying political motivations into criminal proceedings may wish to consider the case of Julian Assange of Wikileaks. Like Salmond, Assange is an evident threat to the Establishment (e.g. revealing Western war crimes and population surveillance) and has been accused of sexual assault.

Again, like Salmond, there are curiosities in media reporting of the case against Assange. Peter Osborne notes that “critics attach special weight to rape charges laid against Assange in Sweden... This is a myth reported literally hundreds of times (in the media). There has only ever been a “preliminary investigation” in Sweden looking into allegations of rape.”⁹

Nils Melzer, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and Human Rights Chair at the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights

revealed in January that one of Assange’s two accusers had her testimony “changed by the Stockholm police without her involvement in order to somehow make it sound like a possible rape. I have all the documents in my possession, the emails, the text messages.”¹⁰

The media must have been all over this explosive revelation from a credible source! Not according to Media Lens. Their search of the ProQuest newspaper database found that Melzer’s comments had “not been mentioned in any US or UK media outlet.”¹¹

Similarly, independent journalist Craig Murray has gone to great lengths to document aspects of Salmond’s trial that were under-reported by the mainstream media¹². Points Murray raises such as potential collusion between complainants and political officials are not mere hearsay, a civil court ordered the Scottish Government to pay £600,000 in costs after it “breached its own procedures by appointing an official, Judith MacKinnon, to conduct an apparently independent investigation (into Salmond) even though she had already met and counselled both complainants.”¹³

It is clear that in the eyes of the media Salmond and Assange are guilty irrespective of trivialities like evidence, court verdicts and due process. As figures who pose a threat to the “Establishment” they are condemned by a key part of that system, their sentence handed out by the “free” press, judge, jury and executioner.

**“Whoever controls the media, controls the mind”
Jim Morrison**

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“It’s difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon him not understanding it.”

HOMEWORK!

Read the article “Scotland After the Trial of Alex Salmond” on Tortoise Media (available online) by journalist Dani Garavelli.

The article presents as a “neutral” piece of journalism, but read the piece critically – between the lines, if you like – and see if you can pick out three ways in which Garavelli reveals or advances an agenda which isn’t neutral.

Examples may include:

- Selection of interviewees
- Which people in the story does the journalist “humanize” or encourage us to sympathize with / does she *not* encourage us to sympathize with
- Unsubstantiated statements attributing agendas to individuals which paint them in an unflattering light

E-mail us at thefreepress@yahoo.com to let us know what you found or visit www.the-free-press.co.uk for a link to a critical analysis of the piece, a list of sources for the main article and more information on the media and propaganda