

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.



KEIR STARMER AND THE HERD OF INDEPENDENT MINDS

“Intellectuals are a herd of independent minds”¹ wrote the art critic Harold Rosenberg.

Few things chime with the phrase like the reaction of mainstream journalists to Keir Starmer’s first Prime Minister’s Questions as leader of the Labour Party:

“Watching PMQs there’s one clear conclusion: after a 5 year absence, Britain has an opposition again” tweeted ex-Chancellor George Osborne, now editor of the London Evening Standard.

“After today’s exchanges at PMQs it is clear that the United Kingdom now has a functioning, probing, measured, informed Official Opposition”² said the BBC’s Andrew Neil.

“Curious to watch @KeirStarmer making his PMQS debut in such strange circumstances. No less striking is how good it is to have a functioning Opposition for the first time since 2015”³ tweeted Matthew D’Ancona, editor at Tortoise and a contributor to papers such as the Telegraph and Guardian.

The similarity in language used by journalists with a right of centre track record is instructive. Presumably the three did not have a prior conversation in which they decided that Jeremy Corbyn’s opposition didn’t function and Starmer’s, after mere weeks, functions serenely. Yet they appear to be trampling in each other’s footsteps.

The propaganda model offers some important insights into the movement of the herd.

Firstly, it would call into question the basis of their claim that the prior Labour opposition was ineffective. How journalists operating from within the confines of the corporate-dominated media measure the value of “political opposition” is questionable.

Corbyn led Labour from 2015-2020. In this time the Tories changed leaders three times, with David Cameron and Theresa May leaving under a cloud, and Corbyn recording the biggest vote share increase at a single election since 1945⁴ (in 2017). Corbyn presented a clear and consistent policy platform: continually arguing for an end to austerity, against military interventions in the Middle East and for a fairer, greener economy.

The Tories were well aware of the appeal of Corbyn’s anti-austerity standpoint to the public. “I personally think that an election would be disastrous, I think we’d let Corbyn into Number 10”⁵ said Jeremy Hunt during the 2019 Tory leadership campaign.

It is worth remembering, in the current climate, that in 2017 the Tories voted to block an amendment put forward by Corbyn that would have increased the pay of nurses and other public sector workers. Boris Johnson, Michael Gove, Matt Hancock and Dominic Rabb⁶, virtually the entire coterie running the country and hailing nurses as heroes, voted against the rise.

A video showing the Tories cheering in the House of Commons when the result was announced has gone viral in recent weeks. Why cheer if the opposition present no threat?

Fortunately for Johnson, Hunt et al the media ensured that Corbyn was severely hampered when it came to the 2019 election.

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As we detailed in our January issue⁷, perhaps the greatest ever sustained effort from the “herd of independent minds” - over 5,000 articles linking a committed anti-racist and his party to anti-Semitism - tainted Corbyn and led voters to believe that 34% of Labour members had been investigated for anti-Semitism (when the true total was less than 0.1%).

Again, it is worth highlighting that the writers of those articles did not gather in a room and decide to damage Corbyn in this way. As predicted by the propaganda model, mainstream journalists will hold to the consensus views of the economic elite (e.g. privatisation, low tax rates) so when a political figure emerges that threatens these values it is only natural that the journalists will be drawn to narratives that harm them.

After years of determined struggle the media finally inflicted maximum harm on Corbyn, unseating him as Labour leader, and the outpouring of relief is palpable.

The first thing to note about Keir Starmer is his full title – Sir Keir Starmer. If you are a part of the Establishment the title is likely to be more reassuring than “Red” Jeremy

Of course, it is a leader’s policies that should be important in a democracy. Strange, then, how the BBC’s Laura Kuennessberg appeared to celebrate Starmer’s lack of stance. “For now (Starmer’s) particular personal politics are something of a mystery,” she wrote in a blog on the day of his election. “Firm ideologies have been the source of many Labour woes in the last few years, so competence and internal calm seem like real prizes”⁸.

Competence and internal calm are not qualities often associated with Boris Johnson. Having assisted Johnson to his parliamentary majority through their disproportionate focus on anti-Semitism in Labour, the media now watch with the rest of us as his inner circle mismanage the Covid-19 crisis.

The Sunday Times published a damaging article⁹ in which they suggested that Johnson skipped key early meetings on coronavirus and present him as highly complacent about the threat. The Guardian have also become increasingly critical, noting in a recent editorial that “damaging ideas within the Conservative party have weakened our ability to defeat the (corona)virus”¹⁰.

The herd is turning once again. With Labour now in the hands of a “principled pragmatist”¹¹ rather than a man with a “firm ideology”, the media elite can flock to the good ship Starmer and leave BoJo’s leaky ark to sink beneath the waves.

It isn’t Starmer’s opposition that Osborne, Neil and the rest of value, it is the lack of opposition.

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?**

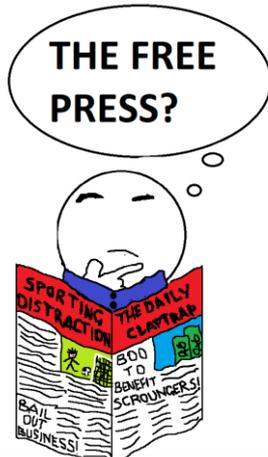
Not likely. Do **you** try to earn job security by going against the values of the institution that employs you?

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:

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



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

HOMEWORK – An Exercise in Disorientation!

One evening, rather than watching your regular UK news programme, watch a bulletin on a foreign news station like Al Jazeera or Russia today. Pay particular attention to how they present news stories on the UK or USA.

Can you detect a difference in the tone or directness of their coverage compared to UK news?

Consider, in turn, how a Russian or someone from a nation where Al Jazeera is mainstream news may feel watching UK news.

Would they consider our news more “objective” or “impartial” than we consider their news? What are the implications of this?

E-mail us at thefreepress@yahoo.com to let us know what you think! Stations like RT and Al Jazeera have biases of their own but often cover stories relating to the UK with greater critical insight than the British press (often they cover stories the UK press ignore)

* Visit www.the-free-press.co.uk for a list of sources, an online version of the main article and more information on the media and propaganda