



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.



THE MEDIA AND CLIMATE CHANGE

FIDDLING WHILE FORESTS BURN

“Baseless Climate Warnings Wiped from Extinction Rebellion Film,” crowed a Times headline this week. The Times, owned by Rupert Murdoch, was one of several corporate newspapers to take apparent delight in the removal of two claims about the catastrophic effect of temperature rises from the upcoming film “Climate Crisis and Why We Should Panic.”

Extinction Rebellion responded on their website to an “irresponsible piece” that “plants the seed of doubt that will fester and grow in people’s minds.” The film’s producer, Serena Schellenberg, noted that the claims were removed because they “still prove to be a matter of debate” and she wanted the movie to rely on solid, fact-based science.

The scuffle is a minor flare-up in a much longer conflict. Environmentalists have long been frustrated by the corporate media’s failure to emphasise the scientific consensus on climate change and their apparent eagerness to amplify doubts.

FAIR spoke for many when they accused the corporate media of “creating controversy where science finds consensus”.

Raw data appears to back up FAIR’s claim. The U.S. National Academy of Sciences, the UK’s The Royal Society, NASA and the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) all subscribe to a consensus on man-made climate change. At least six independent, peer-reviewed studies have found that 90-100% of scientists agree that climate change is real and caused by humans. Leading climate scientist John Cook estimates the current consensus at greater than 99%.

Nonetheless, according to a recent poll 13% of Americans don’t believe humans are responsible for climate change and an additional 5% don’t even believe the climate is changing! Close to 20% of the population of the most powerful country in the world are in denial, joined by President Trump, who has declared global warming an

“expensive hoax” and hopes to withdraw the US from the Paris Climate Agreement.

The gap between scientific consensus and public understanding brings the role of the media into sharp focus. A key prediction of the propaganda model is that the media, owned by and embedded within business, will reflect the concerns of wealth and power.

A call for decarbonisation presents an existential threat to oil companies, utilities firms, car manufacturers and, arguably, to the foundations of capitalism. It should, therefore, come as no surprise that the corporate media, often part of larger conglomerates that share board members with oil companies, have helped “create controversy” and “plant seeds of doubt” rather than drive home the science.

Some of the most outlandish media hostility to climate change can be found on Rupert Murdoch’s networks. Murdoch, with zero training in science and billions worth of wealth to protect, has surprisingly decided that “we should approach (climate change) with great scepticism.”

A study by Public Citizen found that out of 247 segments on climate change on Murdoch’s leading US network Fox News, “212 or 86% were dismissive of the climate crisis, cast warming and its consequences in doubt or employed fear mongering when discussing climate solutions.”

Moreover, Fox continued a long tradition in corporate news of hosting “legitimized contributors whose climate views contradict

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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:

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the consensus of the climate science community. Many of these contributors have ties to the fossil fuel industry and have been criticized for spreading misinformation about climate change.”

Climate change coverage by Fox has been so controversial Murdoch’s son James was moved to make virtually unprecedented public statements criticising the business. “There are views I really disagree with on Fox,” James said in one interview, before revealing that he was “particularly disappointed with the ongoing denial among (Murdoch) news outlets in Australia given obvious evidence to the contrary” – evidence like the record bushfires raging at the time!

Murdoch’s outlets are, as ever, at the extreme end of the spectrum. What about the liberal media who market themselves as fearless crusaders willing to “tell truth to power”?

Academic Rachel Wetts systematically analysed 1,768 press releases from business, government, and social advocacy organizations from 1985 to 2013 and “ran the press releases through plagiarism detection software to see how often they were featured in the country’s largest-circulation newspapers: The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, and USA Today.”

It turns out that these bastions of the US liberal media were twice as likely to feature information from press releases downplaying the climate threat than they were to cover “the more prevalent press releases arguing for personal, corporate, or political action to tackle climate change.”

Wetts concluded that “in climate news, statements from large businesses and opponents of climate action receive heightened visibility.” Somewhat surprisingly, she ascribed this to the media attempting to *avoid* bias – pointing to an effect known as “bothsideism,” where the journalistic obligation to provide balance “can put unsubstantiated opinions on the same footing as well-established facts.”

Guardian journalist George Monbiot has pointed to a similar phenomenon in the UK: “BBC and Channel 4 are the outstanding examples that gave 15 years of free access to companies like ExxonMobil, by inviting their paid experts to “balance” the views of genuine scientists.”

Monbiot called journalists “suckers” for falling for this. We believe this is charitable, at best. After all, how many journalists “balance” articles on the threat of coronavirus with the claims of anti-vaxxers and 5G conspiracy theorists?

When corporate journalists prioritise the needs of business above all others by giving “heightened visibility” to the views of big companies we shouldn’t be surprised – they do, after all, work for big businesses.

“Idealistic protesters should acknowledge that enterprise and a market economy are friends of the environment,” wrote The Times in a recent op-ed on climate protestors - a statement that contradicts the billions paid by corporations every year in “in environmental fines, settlements and cleanups” (\$10.2 billion in 2014).

Nonetheless, it is revealing. The Times’s predictable emphasis on enterprise and market offers a window into the true nature of the showdown between Extinction Rebellion and the corporate press.

The “idealism” of protecting the planet is all well and good - so long as it doesn’t interfere with the need for private profit. Indeed, if a green recovery is structured the correct way we’ll all be laughing. It will, to paraphrase Noam Chomsky, finally become more profitable for big business to save the planet than to destroy it.

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

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

HOMEWORK!

Search for mainstream media articles written about the recent Extinction Rebellion activities and pay close attention to word choice.

How often are the group or its members referred to as “idealistic”, “middle class”, “disruptive”, “unrealistic” or similar terms (often used pejoratively)?

Would recurring use of these terms reveal a media agenda? After all, is it “idealistic” to try to raise awareness of a problem 99% of scientists suggest is a real and present danger? Is it “unrealistic” to expect action?

* Visit www.the-free-press.co.uk an online version of the main article (fully linked to sources) and more information on the media and propaganda