

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**?

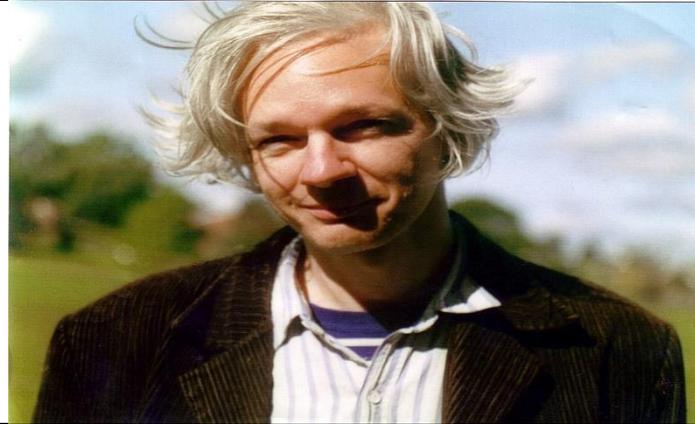
The vast majority of “headline news” providers in the UK are profit-driven corporations, affiliated to even larger corporations, who make most of their money from selling advertising space to other businesses.

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.



Julian Assange: The Journalist Trial of the Century (Journalists Didn’t Want to Cover)

In 2011 Julian Assange was presented with the Martha Gellhorn Prize for Journalism, awarded to figures “whose work has penetrated the established version of events and told an unpalatable truth that exposes establishment propaganda.”

The previous year, working in collaboration with The Guardian, The New York Times and Der Spiegel, Assange and Wikileaks released classified US cables. The “Cablegate” revelations included a secret US bombing campaign in Yemen, footage of a US airstrike in Iraq that killed journalists and the fact that US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton ordered diplomats to gather “credit card numbers, DNA, fingerprints, and iris scans” on UN figures (including General Secretary Ban Ki Moon) – an apparent violation of international law.

“With WikiLeaks, Julian Assange did what all journalists should aspire to do,” wrote Patrick Coburn in The Independent.

Indeed, you’ll be hard-pressed to make it through an interview with leading journalists without hearing them boast of their determination to be a “thorn in the side of government” (David Dimbleby), to “question the status quo” (Jeremy Paxman), “challenge those in power” (Nick Robinson), “we believe in holding the powerful to account” (Katherine Viner).

None of the above journalists have been put on trial for their work. Assange has. Having been held for the past year in London’s Belmarsh prison, despite “serious concerns” from doctors over his wellbeing and the additional risks posed by coronavirus, Assange entered the Old Bailey courtroom on September the 7th 2020 to fight extradition to the US, where he would face charges under the US Espionage Act and a sentence of up to 175 years.

According to journalist Mohammed Elmaazi Assange’s trial “is probably the most significant case involving press freedom, the right to know and the Rule of Law, in the Western world in half a century, if not more so.”

In a very real sense, Assange is fighting for the right of journalists to challenge power – so what support has he obtained from within the corporate media?

Extraordinarily little is the answer. Media Lens have documented, at length, the breathtaking lack of coverage of Assange’s trial by the BBC and token cover from the Guardian.

ML report that, throughout the four weeks of his trial, Assange was mentioned a maximum of once on the BBC News at Ten and was the subject of only four articles on the BBC website. One of these articles was titled ‘Julian Assange: Campaigner or Attention Seeker’ – lending credence to attempts to smear Assange that have been increasingly common in corporate media circles since 2011.

The Guardian, who may be expected to “have Assange’s back” given that they assisted with (and profited from) the Cablegate revelations, have produced headline after headline casting aspersions on his personal traits and motivations in recent years. These include “The Treachery of Julian Assange” (Nick Cohen), “Julian Assange: From Hero to Zero” (Karin Olsson) and “Wikileaks founder Julian Assange was Obsessed With Power, Ex-Insider Claims” (Helen Pidd).

“For my money,” Marina Hyde wrote in the Guardian in 2016, “(Assange) looks more and more like just another guy failing to face up to a rape allegation.”

Hyde refers to allegations of rape made against Assange in Sweden. These have understandably damaged his reputation and dented public sympathy for his cause.

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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 media dedicated a great deal of attention to the sexual assault allegations. It seems unusual that with such intense focus on the issue some details do not appear to have been reported.

Nils Melzer, United Nations special rapporteur on torture, is a pretty authoritative figure. Having been “subconsciously poisoned by the relentless smear campaign” against Assange he nonetheless agreed to look into the case in Sweden. His op-ed on the issue (and wider treatment of Assange) is worth reading in full.

Melzer observes that when he looked into the Swedish evidence he was astonished to discover that “the women themselves never claimed to have been raped, nor did they intend to report a criminal offence... One woman even texted that she only wanted Assange to take an HIV test, but that the police were “keen on getting their hands on him”.”

His op-ed concludes with a note stating that it was “offered for publication to the Guardian, The Times, the Financial Times, the Sydney Morning Herald, the Australian, the Canberra Times, the Telegraph, the New York Times, the Washington Post, Thomson Reuters Foundation, and Newsweek. None responded positively.”

The corporate media appear to have suffered from similarly limited vision when it comes to Assange’s trial.

Declassified UK document connections between the trial judge, her husband and “areas of the British military establishment exposed by WikiLeaks” that cast serious doubt on her impartiality. This follows extraordinary claims that a company linked to the CIA spied on Assange and his lawyer in the Ecuadorian embassy – allegations US prosecutors are “reportedly refusing to cooperate with” and that would have most cases thrown out of court.

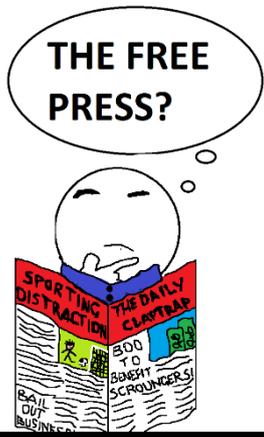
Explosive revelations from the trial itself (mostly propagated by independent journalists like John Pilger, Craig Murray and Richard Medhurst, who went to great lengths to do what heavily funded media wouldn’t)

included allegations that the US had plotted with a private security firm to kidnap or poison Assange while he sought refuge in the Ecuadorian Embassy and the testimony of Khaled El-Masri, a German shop worker who was mistaken for an Al Qaeda suspect while in Macedonia, “rendered” to Afghanistan by the CIA and subjected to brutal interrogation before the operatives apparently “realised their mistake” and abandoned him in Albania.

So there we have it. The perfect storm for journalists dedicated to “holding power to account”. An iconic figure well known to the public (Assange was portrayed by Benedict Cumberbatch in a recent Hollywood blockbuster), fighting for the very right of journalists to expose power, in a London courtroom hearing daily about US geopolitical crimes and with an undercurrent of suspect processes...

The fact that the corporate media collectively shuffled their feet and looked away, continuing to mutter that they don’t really like Assange anyway, says it all about their true perspective on power. Once in a blue moon outlets like the Guardian indulge their fantasies and push a story like Cablegate, but when power pushes back they quickly close up shop and revert to type.

The ultimate power that Assange tried to expose – US “exceptionalism” and its accompanying crimes – is the status quo corporate journalists preserve rather than challenge. By declining to draw the public’s attention to Assange’s cause they will bear a large part of the responsibility if he becomes the next victim of that power.



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

HOMEWORK!

Paired studies are an excellent way to explore the media’s priorities. Comparisons are rarely exact – certainly not in this case – but Johnny Depp’s libel action against the Sun saw another high-profile figure in a London court this year.

Go to The Guardian website and search for “Johnny Depp trial” then do the same for Assange.

Which trial do you think The Guardian devoted more coverage to (and more detailed coverage): the intensely serious case of Assange (whose revelations they helped publish) or the celebrity gossip libel trial of Johnny Depp?

What (if anything) does this tell you about the priorities of The Guardian as an institution?

********As always, let us know at thefreepress@yahoo.com. We’d love to hear from you!***

**** 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***

This journal has been designed with double-sided printing in mind. Reproduction of the journal is not only permitted but encouraged. The corporate media will not voluntarily become more representative. Public understanding of the role and function of the media is vital to the creation of a functioning, representative democracy.