

# THE FREE PRESS?

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

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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](http://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.



## Playing the Trump Card: Corporate Media Collaborators

“After the Nazis were defeated, almost everyone in France became a member of the Resistance.”

So tweeted The Guardian’s George Monbiot on January 7th, the day after shocking footage of the US Capitol building being stormed by a pro-Trump mob made worldwide headlines.

The madness of Trump’s four years as President – posturing, self-contradiction, prescriptions to drink bleach – came to a head in spectacular fashion: five dead, including a police officer, as protestors responded to Trump’s refusal to acknowledge election defeat and inflammatory comments like “you’ll never take back our country with weakness”.

Monbiot, like many on the UK left, was keen to highlight the U-turns of right-wing colleagues as they hurried to distance themselves from “The Donald”.

As President, Trump was a powerful man. However outlandish he may have been, Trump understood the concerns of wealth – he was propelled to the presidency by the ostentatious wielding of his own fortune, after all – and never disguised the fact that he would bang the drum for business.

The propaganda model - highlighting, as it does, the connections between media ownership and journalistic output - predicts that corporate journalists will be receptive to any pro-business figure with power. Some would hold their nose at Trump’s vulgarity, but their articles would treat with him, legitimise him, even praise him.

Monbiot’s colleague at The Guardian, Owen Jones, highlighted some headlines by The Spectator – proclaimed as a “centre-right” publication by its Chairman Andrew Neil – which demonstrate this tendency:

“The intelligent case for voting Trump”, “Trump will be much, much better for Britain”, “A new, more reasonable Donald Trump presidency might just be on the way”.

As Trump played his final, deadly card – persistently claiming that his election defeat was fraudulent (with no supporting evidence) – Spectator headlines included “Trump is right not to concede” and “Can you really blame Trump for refusing to accept the election result?”

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Andrew Neil did not take kindly to Jones’s article. “He tries to hold me responsible for what The Spectator has written about Trump,” Neil raged on Twitter. “Mr Jones might consult the Guardian’s Scott Trust before he opines. But editor + writers of the Spectator do not consult me about what to write.”

Neil’s defence is a classic example of the evasion tactics journalists and editors employ when challenged. No-one, least of all Jones, suggests that Neil tells his journalists what to write.

The point of the propaganda model is that no-one has to tell journalists what to write. Media mangers like Neil are part of a system that, like any hierarchy, selects for obedience. Journalists survive and thrive in this system because employers trust they will reflect the values of “centre-right” mouthpieces like The Spectator – in this case lending credence and legitimacy to a deranged demagogue even as he threatens the very foundations of democracy and civic debate.

The real test of how willing someone is to stand up to power, of course, is how they behave when resistance is unpopular, detrimental, dangerous.

Trump’s state visit to the UK in 2019 provided one such litmus test. On state visits the British Establishment rolls out the red carpet and, in the words of one UK parliamentarian, offer “the honours of our monarch, and our historic Parliament.”

As Leader of the Opposition, Jeremy Corbyn stepped up to the mark and opposed power: “Theresa May should not be rolling out the red carpet for a state visit to honour a president who rips up vital international treaties, backs climate change denial and

*(Article continues over page...)*

**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:

uses racist and misogynist rhetoric.”

How did the press respond to Corbyn’s stance?

“When It Comes to Trump, Corbyn is Another Metropolitan Elitist,” wrote Robert Peston...in The Spectator, of course.

“The Times View on Jeremy Corbyn Attacking Trump: Student Politics” sneered Rupert Murdoch’s most prestigious paper. “Jeremy Corbyn’s decision to join a protest against President Trump and boycott the state dinner shows Labour’s puerile disregard for the national interest.”

“Corbyn, boycotting the state banquet over Trump is easy” wrote Sarah Arnold in The Independent. “The Labour leader seems more comfortable being in an echo chamber with his closest pals than representing the UK in an official capacity. He’s not fit to lead his party into the next general election.”

Note that these examples go from the right of the corporate media spectrum (Spectator) to the centre (Times) and the centre-left (Independent).

Now watch them switch gears when Trump is a spent force, days away from leaving office.

“Certain individuals are growing tired of Trump’s endless tyranny, choosing to take a stand for the greater good...it’s about time” wrote another Independent columnist, Sandra Salathe, who presumably missed Arnold’s memo on Corbyn.

“With the world’s most powerful democracy in chaos, and the serving president still fanning the flames, we’ve torn up the running order for the #Peston show” Robert Peston tweeted in the aftermath of the Capitol insurrection.

“The Times view on Trump’s incitement of the assault on the Capitol: Day of Infamy”

It is worth reading a chunk of this particular Times Leader to get a sense of the tone.

“The seeds of what happened had been sown long before and were the logical consequence of Mr Trump’s five-year

political odyssey. Those seeds were clear in his repeated denigration of political opponents that went far beyond the normal boundaries of democratic discourse, his use of social media to whip up public hostility against his political foes and even international allies. It was clear in his demagogic rallies, in his encouragement and embrace of wild conspiracy theories.”

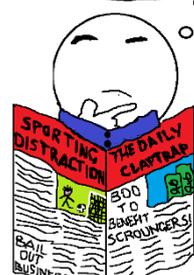
If the seeds were so clear, why didn’t The Times join Mr Corbyn in protesting when it may have had some effect? Why did they (and the rest of the corporate media) criticise the Labour leader for opposing a demagogue who peddled conspiracy theories?

The answer lies in telling lines from The Times and Sarah Arnold. Standing up to Trump showed “disregard for the national interest”, a failure to represent “the UK in an official capacity” that made Corbyn “puerile”, playing “student politics” and “not fit to lead his party”.

When Trump had power it was in the national (corporate) interest to bow and beg for scraps from the table. So corporate journalists appeased a megalomaniac right up to the moment he lost control - then set about covering their tracks by claiming the moral high ground they sneered at others for assuming when it might have made a difference.

Their treatment of Trump proves that, when it comes to power, corporate media are never the Resistance. They are Collaborators. Corporate journalists will string you up with piano wire, alongside Corbyn, if they think it’ll put a dollar in their proprietor’s pockets. Then, like Andrew Neil, they’ll wash their hands of the whole business.

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

**HOMEWORK!**

- Look for some other mainstream media articles responding to Trump’s state visit.
- Do they suggest that the media tried to “have their cake and eat it” as regards Trump? That they appeased him when he was the most powerful man in the world then condemned him when he was finished?
- Some would call this “pragmatism”
- Do you think that is a fitting description?
- If so, how does this tally with the way the media present themselves in general (“fearless, independent, telling truth to power”) and the way they presented themselves after the Capitol riots (idealistic concern for democracy)?
- E-mail us and let us know your thoughts!
- thefreepress@yahoo.com**

\* Visit [www.the-free-press.co.uk](http://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