

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**?

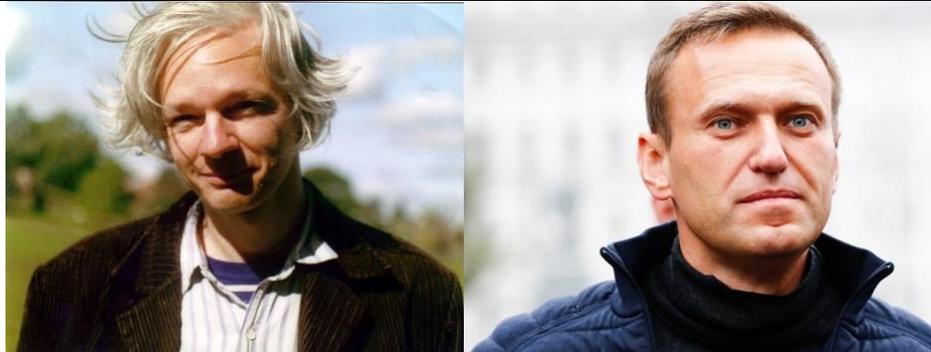
The vast majority of “headline news” providers in the UK are profit-driven corporations, affiliated to even larger corporations, who make most of their money from selling advertising space to other businesses.

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.



Assange-Navalny: A Case Study in Hypocrisy

“Alexei Navalny’s decision to return to Russia after being poisoned was a truly brave and selfless act. In contrast, today’s ruling was pure cowardice and fails to meet the most basic standards of justice. Alexei Navalny must be released immediately.”

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson tweeted the above on February the 2nd 2021.

Who could disagree with him? The poisoning of Navalny, the Russian opposition leader, was an outrageous act and has been linked to Russian security services. The fact that Navalny was jailed on his return to the country only adds to the injustice – and the sense that Vladimir Putin would like his rival silenced.

Leading lights in the UK corporate media were quick to echo Johnson’s words: “*The Guardian View on Alexei Navalny: Such Bravery Needs Backing*”. “*Navalny’s brave battle should be ours too | Comment | The Sunday Times*”

One of The Times articles notes that Navalny “came to prominence as an anti-corruption blogger,” but highlights that “he is no keyboard warrior”. Another calls him a “determined anti-corruption campaigner.”

Sound familiar? A tech-savvy blogger out to highlight corruption and government misdeeds?

The name Julian Assange may spring to mind. As we highlighted in our October Edition, Assange has been rotting in Belmarsh prison for over two years – at the behest of Boris Johnson’s government.

A UK judge finally reached a verdict in his trial in early January, decreeing that Assange, an Australian by birth, couldn’t be extradited to America as he would pose a suicide risk. However, his application for bail was denied – on the basis that the US may wish to appeal the ruling.

As Noam Chomsky has noted, the real world doesn’t generate precise paired studies, but it often comes pretty close.

Assange and Navalny is one such study. A truly free press would not treat Navalny and Assange in exactly the same manner, but the broad strokes of their treatment would have to be similar – both rose to prominence through disruptive use of evolving online media, both dedicated

themselves to exposing the corruption and malfeasance of world superpowers, and both are now facing dubious, high-profile judicial proceedings as a result.

Has their treatment been the same?

The raw data suggests not.

Clicking on the Guardian tag for [Alexei Navalny](#) returns 61 articles/videos in January and February.

Clicking on the Guardian tag for [Julian Assange](#) returns 14 matches in the same period.

Remarkably, even when we extend this all the way back to the month of Assange’s trial, October 2020, there are only a further 7 Guardian articles on Assange – who, keep in mind, *worked with the Guardian to leak the information that led to his trial!*

Many of the articles offer tepid support for Assange – “*The Guardian view on Julian Assange: do not extradite him*” - but this must be considered in the context of a long-running smear campaign against him, summed up in 44 negative Guardian headlines compiled by [fivefilters.org](#).

The Times website returned 54 hits for “Navalny” in January and February. Most headlines were notably supportive of the Russian – “*Alexei Navalny should get the Nobel peace prize*” and “*Marvin Rees: ‘When my pal Alexei Navalny is free, I’ll give him a grand tour of Bristol’*”.

During the same period, The Times website returned a mere 5 results for Assange, including two personal stories that attack him (unlike Rees’ personal story praising his “pal” Navalny) – “*Julian Assange humiliated and abused me, claims Swedish accuser Anna Ardin in new book*”

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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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and “*Julian Assange is no hero. I should know — I lived with him and his awful gang*”.

Perhaps Assange deserves the smears he has received from The Guardian and The Times. Maybe Navalny is a good guy and Assange is a bad guy?

Everyone knows that Assange was wanted in Sweden to answer complaints of sexual assault. We note that Nils Melzer, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, has cast doubt on the credibility of the complaints and suggested political interference.

Serious allegations, nonetheless. Does Navalny have any potential skeletons in his closet?

It may surprise you to learn that Navalny has been convicted twice for fraud/embezzlement. Like Assange, he disputes the charges and has suggested political motivations behind them.

Navalny is unable to dispute dubious political statements he’s made in the past. Young Russian writer Katya Kazbek points to outrageous nationalist and racist comments he has never apologised for.

Kazbek states that Navalny “recorded blatantly xenophobic videos where he compared people from South Caucasus to dental cavities and migrants to cockroaches”. There appears to be an anti-Muslim undertone to some of the videos. “I recommend a handgun” said Navalny in one that portrayed him shooting a cloaked attacker shouting “Allahu Akbar”.

Unpleasant stuff. Perhaps The Times and Guardian have overlooked it because Navalny’s cause is righteous and Assange’s is abhorrent?

Leading human rights organisation Amnesty International recently withdrew support for Navalny as a Prisoner of Conscience as they had “given insufficient weight to some of his previous comments which, as far as Amnesty is aware, have not been publicly renounced.”

Nonetheless, they highlight that “nothing Navalny has said in the past justifies his current detention, which is purely politically motivated. Navalny has been arbitrarily detained for exercising his right to freedom of expression.”

What do Amnesty have to say about Julian Assange?

“You don’t need to know the vagaries of extradition law to understand that the charges against Assange are not only classic “political offences” and thus barred under extradition law, but more crucially, the charges are politically-motivated...”

“The flagrantly unfair prosecution of Assange is an example of how far the US will go to “manage” the flow of information about government wrongdoing and thus undermine the public’s right to know.”

Amnesty clearly consider both Assange and Navalny to be on trial for exercising freedom of speech and that political motivations (of superpowers) are behind their imprisonment.

How, then, do we explain the fact that the UK corporate media are vastly more concerned by the injustice facing Navalny than the ill-treatment of Julian Assange.

After all, logic should dictate that they are *more* interested in Assange’s case – UK media can affect what their own government does but have next to no control over what Russia do – but logic must also allow for the propaganda model’s observation that the corporate press are institutions owned by (and therefore in the service of) Western wealth and power.

From the perspective of Western power Alexei Navalny is exceptionally useful: by opposing and undermining the nationalist Putin he weakens an enemy regime and is the most likely, pro-Western replacement for Putin. Julian Assange, in contrast, threatens to weaken Western power by drawing some of its darkest deeds towards the light.

The propaganda model is, therefore, able to explain the otherwise inexplicable: why a supposedly free press would fete a Russian dissident but denigrate and smear his closest counterpart in the West.

It is not a pretty picture.



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

HOMEWORK!

Have a look at the below two quotes from The Guardian:

“The official government line is that Navalny’s campaigns are espionage and terrorism; that he is a sower of chaos and a corrupter of young minds”

“Russian officials and state media are already busy portraying Mr Navalny as a western stooge”

Now consider the portrayal of Assange by Western leaders and journalists. A web search for **“Joe Biden calls Julian Assange a terrorist”** or **“Assange Russia links”** may be instructive.

What does it tell you about our media when they bemoan Russia framing a dissident, while doing exactly the same to OUR dissidents?

Let us know what you think! – thefreepress@yahoo.com

* 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