

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.



“Without Fear or Favour”: The BBC and Political Protest

“The BBC is the world’s most trusted international news broadcaster, reporting to a global audience of more than 400m people weekly without fear or favour”

The BBC released the above official statement in February 2021. Such declarations are typical of British media outlets and journalists, who loudly proclaim their fearlessness, impartiality and willingness to stand up to power.

The job “for the BBC, for journalism in general, (is) to challenge those in power,” according to BBC journalist Nick Robinson.

“The BBC is not doing its job if the political class in power doesn’t hate it. The BBC is a thorn in the side of government and that is its job,” bragged long-time BBC staple David Dimbleby.

Wonderful words – and vital principles to uphold when confronted with the creeping authoritarianism of the current Conservative government.

The Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, tabled this month in The House of Commons by Priti Patel, is a direct assault on the right to peaceful protest enshrined in the Human Rights Act.

The bill decrees that protests can be shut down by the police for being “noisy” or causing “annoyance” and threatens maximum prison sentences of 10 years for protestors.

Such a bill would represent “the biggest widening of police powers to impose restrictions on public protest that we’ve seen in our lifetimes”, according to barrister Chris Daw QC. Human Rights groups Amnesty International and Liberty have also been critical, with the latter highlighting the bill’s potential to “undermine protest, which is the lifeblood of a healthy democracy”.

The bill has, understandably, generated its own protests. These have been particularly vociferous in Bristol, where “Kill the Bill” action on the 21st of March led to shocking scenes of protestors setting police vans on fire.

The BBC, like the rest of the media, broadcast footage from the protest far and wide. **Bristol protest: Police attacked as “Kill the Bill” protest turns violent** ran a

headline on the BBC news website that day.

“Protesters have attacked police after thousands of people turned up to a demonstration that officers had “strongly advised” against attending,” the article began, foregrounding the perspective of the police. “Officers suffered broken bones and police vans were set alight as angry scenes unfolded in Bristol city centre.”

The contrast with coverage of violence at a Bristol protest less than a week later (26th March), where the police appear to have been the aggressors, is stark.

The @bbcnews Twitter feed shows that the corporation had an eye on the March 26th protest. They posted early in the evening – “protestors gather in Bristol for third time in less than a week” – but issued no further tweets on the story as shocking footage of police violence (officers chopping prone protestors with shields, assaulting a journalist, striking a woman with extreme force) went viral.

The BBC did cover the protest on their website - **Bristol Kill the Bill protest: Riot police disperse protesters** – but, as we noted in a tweet to @bbcnews at the time, they made no mention of the acts of police violence spreading like wildfire on social media.

Indeed, the only violence mentioned in that article again refers to protestors – an embedded tweet from Avon and Somerset Police suggesting that protestors were throwing objects at police.

Perhaps the BBC, inveterate interrogators of power that they are, consider the police a reliable source in the heat of the moment?

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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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They had every reason not to that week. A statement by Avon and Somerset Police had just made clear that the “broken bones” reported by the BBC in the first protest hadn’t occurred. “The clarification came later than we could have done” Superintendent Mark Runacres, the Bristol area commander, admitted, and led to “mistrust for some”. Not the BBC!

As the night wore on we tagged @bbcnews into further tweets showing footage of police violence, notably this one posted by Daily Mirror journalist Matthew Dresch: “Police assaulted me at the Bristol protest even though I told them I was from the press.”

The @bbcnews Twitter feed remained silent. The following morning, when the protests suddenly existed again on BBC social media, they existed from the perspective of an even higher power than the police: **“Kill the Bill: Violence at protest 'disgraceful', says prime minister”**, referring exclusively to violence against the police.

In a bid to gain an objective measure of BBC coverage of the Bristol protests we conducted the following Twitter search: “(bristol OR protest OR police) (from:bbcnews)” between the dates of the two protests: 21/3/2021 and 27/3/2021. The results relevant to protests in Bristol are listed below:

Footage of moment man tried to set fire to police van while an officer was inside during violent protests in Bristol released by police

In pictures: Kill the Bill Bristol protest turns violent Chief constable defends use of force at Kill the Bill protests in Bristol

Violent clashes during Bristol's Kill the Bill demonstration "shameful", says Mayor Marvin Rees

Police hunting protesters who attacked officers at Bristol Kill the Bill protest release images of wanted people

14 people arrested at second night of protests in Bristol, police say

Police publish eight more images of people they want to trace after protest in Bristol turned violent over the weekend

Avon and Somerset Police Chief Constable Andy Marsh says anyone at last night’s violent protests in Bristol should “look in the mirror... and be concerned that we’re coming looking for them”

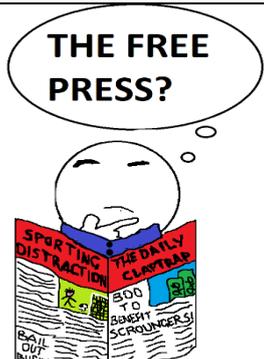
The recurring theme is so obvious it’s almost comical: “the police say”, “constable defends”, “authority figure says” etc. Where is the perspective of the protestors, the public? Why are the BBC, funded by the public, “fearless”, “impartial”, “balanced”, “a thorn in the side of power”, presenting themselves as the PR wing of Avon and Somerset Police?

It is clear that the BBC did not report the Bristol protests “without fear or favour”. Rather, their coverage was shaped by the needs of powerful entities like the police and government.

This is highly predictable. The BBC are, after all, an institution of power. The corporation are granted their broadcast charter by the government, heads of the corporation are appointed directly by the government (hello Richard Sharp, Tory donor to the tune of £400K) and there is a long and inglorious history of BBC support for the government on divisive issues like the Iraq War and general strikes.

Here’s Lord Reith, founder of the BBC, speaking during the 1926 General Strike when Winston Churchill wanted to directly commandeer the BBC for propaganda purposes: “they (the government) know that they can trust us not to be really impartial”.

Propaganda is so much more effective when the population don’t realise they’re being propagandised. Spread the word: the BBC is a tool of the powerful. Like the rest of the media, it reflects the values and interests of ruling elites, not the population – and certainly not protest, as their recent coverage of Bristol makes clear.



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

HOMEWORK!

Read this BBC article on protests in Russia - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-55778334> - and compare it to **any** of the BBC articles on the Bristol protest.

Note that in the Navalny article:

- Protestors are quoted but NEVER the police
- Police violence is easily visible to the journalist ““AFP footage showed riot police running into a crowd, and beating some of the protesters with batons.”
- The general framing encourages sympathy with the protestors

How do you explain the difference in coverage?

E-mail us and let us know your thoughts!
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