Extending and Refining the Propaganda Model

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Abstract
The 'propaganda model' of news production in capitalist democracies elaborated by Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky in 1988 was met with initial hostile criticism and then more or less complete neglect. In the last five years, there has been a renewal of interest, although opinion remains seriously divided. This article adopts a sympathetic stance towards the main ideas of the model, but suggests that there are a number of ways in which in its classical iteration it is insufficiently sensitive to the nature of the pressures and constraints on news production arising from the economic and political realities of capitalist democracy. If one takes account of these complexities and modifies the model accordingly, it is possible to give a much more complete account of processes of news production and to respond effectively to the main criticisms that have been advanced against Herman and Chomsky's views. From this perspective, rather than the tendency towards uniformity predicted by the classical iteration of the model, it becomes possible to account for the real, if limited, variety of news and opinion that are observable features of mass media. It further follows from this account that the majority of ordinary journalists, far from being the more or less willing collaborators in propaganda, are potentially allies of those who wish to build a different and better world.

Introduction

The exposition of the Propaganda Model (PM) is a model of clarity. In the original formulation, and in a number of subsequent elaborations, the main features are laid out clearly and unambiguously and their implications are plain for all to see (Herman and Chomsky 1988; Herman 1998; Herman 1999; Herman 2000). There have also recently been two systematic presentations of the model that rehearse its elements in considerable detail (Klaehn 2002; Klaehn 2003). So well have the authors of the model expressed themselves, and so thoroughly have commentators glossed them, that there really is no need to repeat the five filters that constitute the core of the PM once again. Alongside that clarity of exposition,

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there are testable hypotheses, articulated with similar precision, which have been subject to extensive investigation. The serious critics of the model have drawn attention to issues for which they believe the model cannot account, or to theoretical dimensions in which it appears deficient, but so far as the current author is aware there have been no falsifications of its main hypotheses (Schlesinger 1989, 295-306; Hallin 1994, 13 and 73; Corner 2003). Again, these exchanges have been extremely clear and there is little need to rehearse the findings either of the original authors or of those who have criticised or complemented their work.

This article therefore dispenses with a formal exposition of the PM. Instead it starts by recognising the status of the PM as one of the best available attempts to provide a robust analytic framework for understanding the performance of the news media. The aim is not to provide an alternative to the PM but to suggest ways in which it can be extended and improved and thus rendered more convincing to those radical writers who currently, and unaccountably, tend to ignore it, even when their own findings and arguments match those of the model so closely (Anderson 2006; Altheide 2006). To the extent that this paper is critical of some features of the model, this is intended as sympathetic criticism, similar to that advanced by Oliver Boyd Barrett, in that it recognises the strengths of the model while seeking to extend its explanatory power (Boyd Barrett 2004). It is suggested that the aim of any adequate revision of the model must be to provide a more comprehensive framework that can give a better account of the evidence that critics advance to challenge the theory.

The status of a theory is determined by three things: the extent to which it is beautiful (that is, it gives an internally-consistent and logical account of the reality to which it relates); the extent to which it is true (that is, it is subject to a process of evidential testing); the extent to which it is comprehensive (that is, it can account for all of the observed phenomena in its sphere of relevance). Of course, very few theories, even in the natural sciences, can claim to meet all three of these criteria in full, but we can judge their value by the degree to which they approximate to these ideals. In its current form at least, the PM performs extremely well on the first of these criteria, but patchily on the second and third. If it is to win the wider acceptance which it certainly deserves then it needs modification in order to improve its rating in the final two categories and, it goes without saying, these modifications must be such as to at least retain, if not enhance, the beauty of the theory.

In order to achieve these objectives, the paper first reviews the differences in perspective between the originators of the PM and the current author. It then reviews some points in which the current iterations of the model appear inadequate. Finally, it suggests ways in which the model might be modified in

order to give a better account of the propaganda functions of the mass media.

Locational Biases

Although the present author shares many positions, both theoretical and political, with Herman and Chomsky, it must be made clear from the start that there is not an identity of perspective. This paper is written from a viewpoint that is different in at least three ways from that of the originators of the PM:

Firstly, the current author identifies rather more firmly with the tradition of classical Marxism than one suspects either of the progenitors of the model would be prepared to do (Sparks 2006). In most ways, of course, what these different perspectives have in common is much more important than the trivial differences of nomenclature. Both sides are happy with using the language of class struggle to discuss the media, for example, and this means they have more in common with each other than with the majority of scholars in the field. The approaches are, however, in important ways distinct and their elaboration may lead to some significant differences of emphasis. While we all start from a recognition of the centrality of political economy in understanding how the media work, it might be that some of the ways in which that approach is developed below differ from the paths that the original authors wish to follow.

Secondly, the current author writes from a different geographical place, and the frame of reference employed is thus significantly different from that of the original work. Since the PM in its classical expositions is primarily concerned with the US media, this might seem irrelevant, but in fact the model makes a broader claim: 'In this book, we sketch out a 'propaganda model' and apply it to the performance of the mass media in the United States' (Herman and Chomsky 1988, xi). On this account, the propaganda model itself is distinct from its application to the particular social and economic circumstances of the USA. If it is to work as a theory at the general level, then it must also be able to explain the workings of the mass media in societies other than the USA: for example, in contemporary Europe.

The third way in which the current author is distinct from the originators of the PM is that while, like them, he is a professional scholar (albeit nowhere near as distinguished) and an amateur politician (and every bit as marginal), he has spent his academic career in the field of media and communication. That might well have the consequence of making the author too susceptible to the claims of uncritical scholarship, but it also means that he has been much more exposed to some of the quite intense, and quite important, debates that have marked his field. In particular, it has meant a close engagement with the content of those sections of the mass media, notably tabloid newspapers, which address a largely working

class audience. The importance of this material has been the subject of a long and heated debate, which we do not need to explore here, but whatever position is adopted it is necessary to recognise that the sort of formal political news stories that the PM seeks to explain are not necessarily central to the mass media. What is more, the audience for much of the mass media is very far from being an elite group. On the contrary, it consists overwhelmingly of people who are, on almost any account, working class. The PM needs to explain not just the content of newspapers produced by and for the elite, but also those media produced by the elite for the masses.

These differences of perspective do not raise fundamental issues about the role of the mass media in capitalist society. It is clear that ownership, advertising, sources and flak remain central to our understanding of what is present in the news. Perhaps anti-communism, which dominated the US scene from the Palmer Raids to the fall of the Soviet Union, takes backstage today to the War on Terror, and tomorrow to the Struggle with China, but the role of a central unifying ideology in providing a framework of common sense within which reporting and commentary takes place remains essential to the workings of the mass media in the wider world as much as in the USA. There are, however, six ways in which the detail of the PM can be modified to allow it to present a better, and much more comprehensive, account of the news media in a capitalist democracy.

The Economic Nature of the Elite in a Capitalist Society

The PM not only claims that the mass media are owned by a small number of rich people. It also assumes that the elite of which the media owners are a part is essentially an homogenous body. As Herman put it in an early iteration of the model:

> The mass media of the United States are a part of the national power structure and they therefore reflect its biases and mobilize popular opinion to serve its interests. This is not accomplished by any conspiratorial plotting or explicit censorship – it is built into the structure of the system, and flows naturally and easily from the assorted ownership, sponsor, governmental and other interest group pressures that set limits within which media personnel can operate, and from the nature of the sources on which the media depend for their steady flow of news. (Herman 1982, 139)

In large measure, this is a wholly reasonable point. Although there are clearly differences between the political elite, the business elite, the journalistic elite, and so on, they are tied together by common class interests and will tend to share a range of basic assumptions about the world that will inform their actions, and their media, and that therefore there will be a tendency towards uniformity in the coverage of important stories.

The PM does not make the claim that the content of the media will be absolutely uniform. As Herman and Chomsky made clear in their classical account, and as Herman has reiterated in many of his defences of the model, there will be plenty of room for disagreements. Their original formulation was quite explicit about this: 'As we have stressed throughout this book, the U.S. media do not function in the manner of the propaganda system of a totalitarian state. Rather, they permit – indeed encourage – spirited debate, criticism, and dissent, as long as these remain faithfully within the system of presuppositions and principles that constitute an elite consensus' (Herman and Chomsky 1988, 302). This debate and criticism, it is frequently elsewhere emphasized, will be overwhelmingly of a 'tactical' nature, questioning the implementation of a policy, although it will very occasionally permit a questioning of the aim of the policy itself (Herman 2000, 103).

There are strong empirical grounds for arguing that this is not an accurate picture of reality. There are numerous rather well-known examples in which the mass media stood on opposite sides on quite central issues, for example the invasion of Iraq. Burrett provides a detailed account of the UK newspaper press during the run-up, demonstrating that there were clear and substantial differences as to the legality and advisability of the invasion in different titles (2004). In part, what is at stake is the precise meaning one attributes to the word 'tactical.' If outright opposition to participation in the most reckless imperialist adventure since Suez is recuperable into the PM's concept of 'tactical' there is little to argue about at this level, but such a term is probably better used to describe differences over issues like whether the invasion required a separate UN resolution authorising it rather than something as fundamental as the launching of a major war. Such issues, surely, are better conceived of in terms of strategy?

In fact, behind the linguistic dispute there is a rather substantial theoretical issue. Despite the differentiation between the mechanisms of totalitarian rule and that prevailing in the USA, the PM does not adequately theorise either the economic or political nature of the latter. If we do this, we find that theory predicts a rather different outcome than that suggested by this version of the PM.

From an economic point of view, the business elite who actually own the private media have one very obvious characteristic: they are part of a capitalist class. This form of property has two major dimensions. On the one hand it supposes a division between the owners of capital and the proletariat, who are devoid of productive property and have only their labour power to sell. On this dimension, the capitalists most certainly do have a common, class interest: they want to maintain unchallenged their right to dispose of the means of production as private property and to ensure that they are able to expropriate the surpluses generated in production. They seek to eliminate any threat to those rights.

On the other hand, except in those cases of complete monopoly, there are always many competing capitalists, and they each individually have different, indeed conflicting, interests. The owners of pharmaceutical companies want high prices for prescription drugs, for example, because that will improve their profit margins, while the owners of US car companies want those prices driven down, not because they are charitable but because health cover for unionised workers is a burden on their profit margins. On the grounds of economic theory, we would expect capitalist-owned media to be united in opposition to threats from the working class, but deeply divided in terms of the interests of different groups of capitalists.

The Political Structures of Capitalist Democracy

From a political point of view, the capitalist class is historically closely intertwined with the nation state, and even the progress of globalization has not gone far towards untying that knot. It is this collusion between the interests of capital and the policy of the state that is the substance of modern imperialism. To take an obvious example, as David Harvey put it: 'Whoever controls the Middle East controls the global oil spigot and whoever controls the global oil spigot can control the global economy, at least for the near future' (Harvey 2003, 19). It is, of course, the warships of the US Navy, not the tankers of ExxonMobil, that control the Straits of Hormuz and it is the President of the USA, not the CEO of ExxonMobil, who can turn the oil spigot on or off as he wishes. We would therefore expect to find some disagreements over foreign policy within the elite, but these would indeed, as the PM suggests, be tactical in nature. It is hard to see how any significant section of US capital could today abandon imperialism in one form or another, although they will certainly argue over what form it should take.

Internally, however, the US is a capitalist democracy. It is characteristic of such societies that there is legitimised public debate about policy between different sections of the elite that are more or less autonomous of each other. The contrast is precisely with 'totalitarian' societies in which the various sections of the elite are fused together in the nomenclatura of the communist (or fascist) party. These debates extend to include political forces that are not necessarily committed to the continuation of the capitalist system. Although it is clearly the case in the USA that there has been no significant political force overtly committed to replacing capitalism since Eugene Debbs ran for President, that is very far from being true of all capitalist democracies. In some, for many years, there have been parties that called themselves socialist or communist who at least believed that the aim of their political activity was to end the capitalist system. In many European countries these parties had very substantial popular support and controlled newspapers with substantial circulations. In Italy, between 1987 and 1992, the Communist Party (PCI) more or less openly controlled RAI3, one of the three state TV channels,

which specialised in successful news and current affairs programming (Padovani 2005, 112-20). In such circumstances, the range of debate about issues of domestic policy tends to be rather wider than is accounted for by the classical iteration of the PM. Even in the USA, while the coverage of internal disputes between capital and labour is usually, but not always, uncritically on the side of big business, there are exceptions where the voice of labour has been given a substantial hearing in the mainstream press (Kumar 2007). We would expect to find, therefore, that the political realities of a capitalist democracy entailed a much wider and far-ranging set of arguments in the media than simply in-house disputes between different wings of the capitalist class.

The Political Economy of the Mass Media

The PM notes, quite correctly and hardly contentiously, that the bulk of the mass media in the contemporary world are businesses and that many of them are run by large corporations. In the wider perspective, this is not entirely true since there are some notable media that are either state or publicly owned. What is true, however, is that even these media are more and more obliged to behave as though they are businesses and they have always been characterised by the same systems of hierarchical control as are present in the private media. As is well-known, the traditional business model for the media industries is that they seek to aggregate substantial audiences in order to sell their attention to the mass media. Again, this is not an entirely accurate account of the wider situation since dependence on direct payment is a significant part of the business models of some newspapers and the basis for subscription and pay-per-view television services, and this produces slightly different types of behaviour. Despite these slight reservations, however, Herman is clearly correct about the essential realities of the contemporary media when he writes:

> The force of competition and stress on the rate of return on capital, which comes to prevail in a free market, compels firms to focus with increasing intensity on enlarging audience size and improving its `quality,' as these will determine advertising rates….Managements that fail to respond to market opportunities of this magnitude will be under pressure from owners and may be ousted by internal processes of takeovers.' (1999, 33-34)

The concomitant of the fact that the media are primarily capitalist corporations means that in the long run their content must be tailored carefully to fit with the business model of the particular company.

As Herman notes, winning an audience has two important aspects: the size of the audience and its social composition. There are different kinds of audiences and they demand different kinds of content: 'The Inky sees its market as mainly the

affluent suburbanites of Philadelphia; the affiliated Daily News is for the lunch pail citizens of the city' (Herman 1999, 120). This is not an aberration specific to Pennsylvania. The identification of a particular and distinctive audience is a necessary aspect of running a commercial media operation.

Herman goes on to spell out the fact that reaching different audiences implies different editorial strategies: 'The Inky management has long perceived that this [affluent surburbanite] market segment wants a generous treatment of conservative and right-wing pundits and the Inky has provided such treatment for decades' (Ibid.). Again, this is a commonplace of commercial media management. Different kinds of content attract different audiences and the content of media artefacts is selected in order to deliver the particular target audience. Publishers know, for instance, that sport is attractive to a male audience and, since that is one they wish to attract, the classical newspaper has a substantial sports section.

These obvious facts, which are well known to Herman, have a logical corollary, of which he is almost certainly aware but which he does not discuss at any length: the commercial media are owned by the elite but most of the time they are not directed at the elite. On the contrary, for most media the bulk of their audience is made up of working class people, since this group forms the overwhelming majority in a developed capitalist society. This reality may be less apparent to the authors of the propaganda model because they are speaking most of the time about elite newspapers like the New York Times, which one may suppose do have a very substantial proportion of elite readers, but it is a necessary concomitant of the model itself. If the audience for a newspaper was simply the elite then the primary objective of its propaganda function would lie in securing the internal cohesion of the elite itself and setting the direction of its preferred policies. The PM, however, is fairly clearly designed to explain what is present in media that seek also to propagandise on behalf of the elite: 'The power of the US propaganda system lies in its abilities to mobilize an elite consensus, to give the appearance of democratic consent, and to create enough confusion, misunderstanding, and apathy in the general population to allow elite programs to go forward.' (Herman 1999, 261). Indeed, both Herman and Chomsky expresses a personal preference for newspapers like the Wall Street Journal and the Financial Times because these are directed quite clearly at the elite and therefore, in Herman's words . 'The function of the news pages is to provide reliable information about matters relevant to the Journal's readership. Ideological corruption would undermine the performance of this function, and it is mainly on issues like `terrrorism' that the news department allows ideology to submerge the world of reality' (Herman 1992, 102). In general, however, the 'propaganda model suggests that the `societal purpose' of the media is to inculcate and defend the economic, social and political agenda of privileged groups that dominate the domestic society and the state' (Herman and Chomsky 1988, 298).

If most media are attempting to reach the mass of the population, it follows that they will only succeed to the extent that they are able to report and discuss issues that are of interest and relevance to their readers, and if they are able to present interpretations of those events that are at least palatable to them. In other words, it is a condition of successful propaganda that media engage with their audience. This explains why newspapers, alongside their overt propaganda content, also characteristically contain rather larger amounts of material that, while it might be propaganda for capitalism as a system, is not directly concerned with selling this or that policy: sport, arts, culture, human interest and so on that make up the 'bundle' of different kinds of writing that have historically constituted the content of newspapers and which, along with entertainment, are even more predominant in television.

Given that different media address different audiences, we would also expect to find, as Herman hints in his distinction between the two Philadelphia newspapers, that the content of these 'bundles' is organised differently depending on the target audience. The balance of material will certainly be different in a newspaper aimed squarely at a manual working class readership than one aimed at an educated and professional white collar audience. If, as is often the case, political views are correlated quite closely with social position, then it follows that media addressing different social groups will reflect, at the very least, different perspectives on those matters depending upon the sensibilities of their audiences. The political economy of the commercial press thus suggests there should, theoretically, be rather greater variety of views than the central formulations of the propaganda model currently claim.

They do Things Differently Elsewhere…

If the PM is to sustain the general status its progenitors make for it, then is must be able to account for the performance of the mass media elsewhere than in the USA, at the very least in societies where circumstances are similar. Perhaps the PM will not explain the media in the French Revolution, or in contemporary China, but it should be valid for other advanced and relatively stable capitalist democracies, like those in Europe, for example.

The PM is not indifferent to different social circumstances. Curran's historical account of the marginalization of the British radical press is cited positively in support of the model, and elsewhere the dynamics of contemporary European media are briefly discussed (Herman and Chomsky 1988, 15; Herman 1999, 301-02). The main burden of the analysis is, however, concerned with US media and US politics. In some ways this is an admirable instance of following Karl Liebknecht's dictum that 'The main enemy is at home!' On the other hand, both US media and US politics have important features that are not universally shared

by all capitalist democracies, and an adequate theory must be able to account for the latter as well.

In the European media, we can identify two distinctive features which are not present in the contemporary US case. The first is the obvious centrality of 'public service' media to the broadcasting environments of major countries. A public service organisation like the BBC or ARD has a radically different place in the media landscape than does PBS in the USA. The news arms of these organisations are large and relatively well-resourced. They usually command a large audience for a news agenda which differs markedly from those of the mass circulation press. They are central to any discussion of news in the societies in which they function.

Public broadcasters are generally distinguished by a constitutional obligation to represent a range of opinions – in practice those of the government and the substantial oppositional parties. While this is usually a very limited range of views, since on many issues there is a substantial unity of viewpoint between the main parties, the evidence is that it can and does allow for the presentation of genuinely divergent opinions. One good recent example of this, once again involving the invasion of Iraq, was the BBC's coverage of the anti-war movement. While the evidence suggests that the BBC leant towards the government, it is also true that it gave airtime to the opponents of the invasion. The then Director General (CEO) of the BBC wrote later that: 'Our job was to report the events leading up to the war, and the war itself, as fairly as we could. It was certainly not the job of the BBC to be the Government's propaganda machine' (Dyke, 2005, 251-52). Certainly, the BBC was not as even-handed as Dyke claims, but at least it did give some airtime to the opponents of the war, and this coverage was evidently a contributory factor to the struggle with the government which eventually led to his forced resignation.

The second distinctive feature of European media is that in most countries the newspaper environment is very much more competitive than is normal in the USA. There are a large number of newspapers in the US - certainly more than in any single European country – but overwhelmingly these enjoy local monopolies. Even where there is competition as, for example, Herman notes in Philadelphia, the number of competing titles is tiny. Consequently, partisanship and social stratification of readers, which are such strong features of the European press, are much less present in the US case.

A general version of the PM, therefore, needs to be able to give an account of the media which recognises that oppositional voices find at least some space in public service broadcasting and in which political differentiation is a part, albeit a relatively minor part, of the marketing strategies of major commercial newspapers.

Conflicting Sources

The PM does not exclude, but it does not presuppose, intervention by proprietors in order to establish the limits of permissible reporting and debate. Certainly, the model highlights cases of such intervention and the sacking of reporters who do not toe the line, but the main thrust of the model is to concentrate on two structural factors – the routines of newsgathering and the socialisation of journalists – to explain the voluntary conformity of the media. Both of these factors are clearly important, but it is questionable whether they will quite bear the weight that the PM places upon them.

It is a staple of research into journalism that journalists need to establish stable and mutually-beneficial relationships with sources of all kinds. It is also clear that the state machine, and large corporate entities, devote substantial resources to sustaining their own sources: these are the substance of the public relations apparatuses maintained by such organisations (Davis 2002; Miller 2004). Pressures of time, and the relative lack of resources available to most journalists, mean that the routines of production will drive them into at least some form of source dependence, and with source dependence must come also the definitions, perspectives and data of the source. Herman is quite right to argue that: 'Bias is also a consequence of the nature of mass media news sources and the subtle impact of depending on and entering into relationships with them' (1982, 150). All of this is agreed and acknowledged by the PM and it does indeed explain a large part of the prominence of official viewpoints and statements in news reporting, particularly of foreign stories. We need only think of the practice of embedding reporters with military units in Iraq to see an extreme form of source dependence.

On the other hand, the assumption that source dependence will necessarily lead to the acceptance of the official line neglects the existence of conflicts between sources which are a function of the disarticulated and divided elite that we anatomised in a previous section. It is not simply that there are bodies – Amnesty International, Greenpeace, trade unions and so on – that provide alternative sources of information and opinion, but elite sources are themselves often divided. In the case of a capitalist democracy where the political spectrum is wider than in the USA, there are also competing political sources that do not necessarily agree with the official line. The journalist in such circumstances is not therefore constrained to follow the lead given by a particular source for lack of alternatives and, particularly in circumstances where the market position of a news outlet demands certain kinds of news, the preferred source may be one that is highly critical of governmental, or even elite, perspectives. Source dependence does not guarantee journalistic compliance with this or that source's perspective.

The Social Position of Journalists

The socialization of journalists is similarly a staple of academic research, although it is true to say that much of the more empirical work has started from the assumption of journalistic autonomy rather than subjecting it to critical review. The interpretation placed upon the process of socialization in the PM is one that stresses the degree to which selection and promotion tend to favour the conformist journalist who either shares outright from the beginning, or gradually internalises during their career progress, the value system of the news organisation and of the elite groups that run it. As Herman puts it:

> Media staff are…predominantly middle class people who tend to share the values of the corporate leadership, and they are affected by the fact that approval, advancement and even job survival depend on an acceptance of certain priorities. The biases at the top are filtered down by long term penalties and rewards. The mass media top leadership puts into key positions individuals who reflect their values. (Herman 1982, 149)

It is obviously the case, recognised by anyone who has ever been a radical activist, that independent thinking and independent action, while providing enormous rewards in themselves, are not optimal strategies for professional self-advancement (except perhaps in academia in periods of liberalism.)

Socialization, however, is not a process that produces permanent absolute effects. The socialised individual thinks and acts within concrete situations, and when those situations change different kinds of thought and action are possible: anyone who is familiar with the heroic role played by women workers in mass strikes can see how a very strong form of socialization into a certain restrictive type of femininity is incapable of preventing an explosive growth of self-confidence, independence and initiative when the circumstances demand it.

While the owners of the media are capitalists, and while the senior journalists are closely related to them and other elites through a thousand channels, the bulk of journalists, even in elite media, have a very different social situation. They are subordinates in a hierarchical division of labour and their activities are directed by their superiors. Their wages and conditions are not princely, and they are subject to severe pressures by the very nature of their job. The bulk of journalists are not, as the PM sometimes has it, 'middle class.' They are, in a phrase, wage workers engaged in alienated labour.

Like any other group of workers, the objective interests of journalists do not always coincide with those of their managers and employers. There is a range of issues – wages, the pace and intensity of work, staffing levels, control of the labour process – where at least the potential for conflict is present even in a stable

society. It is on the basis of these differences that journalists, like any other group of wage workers including professors, have built trade unions and sometimes engaged in the traditional forms of working class struggle like strikes. Even groups of journalists working for very reactionary newspapers are quite capable of taking industrial action if they believe their livelihood is threatened (Glover 2006). Writing of the US example, Hanno Hardt noted that: 'For over a hundred years, newsrooms, like factory floors, have been a laboratory for technological innovation and battleground of economic and social interests' (1998, 173). The processes of incorporation that Herman and Chomsky identify most certainly operate, but there are counter-forces arising from the class position of journalists that can, in the right circumstances, act against their effectiveness. The PM, while it recognises class struggle in society, effectively proclaims class peace in the news room.

This shortcoming means that the PM is blind to some of the important ways in which the dictates of the model are contested by journalists themselves. This contestation is seldom, at least in normal times, articulated in terms of class struggle. More often, it takes the form of an insistence upon professional standards and autonomy. While these are most of the time quite compatible with the efficient running of the PM, they can come into sharp conflict with it. The coverage of the long war in Ireland in the British media provides several clear examples in which journalists proved much more willing to resist the pressures of government than were the management and owners of broadcasting organisations both state and private. The most dramatic incident was in August 1985 when the BBC Governors, under pressure from the government, decided not to broadcast a documentary, *Real Lives*, in the course of which Martin McGuiness, Vice-President of Sinn Féin, denied that he was the Chief of Staff of the IRA. In response, all the National Union of Journalists' (NUJ) broadcasting chapels (locals) in the country walked out on the day the programme should have been broadcast and imposed a 24 hour news blackout in Britain. There was also 'professional' discontent when the British government moved, in 1988, to ban Sinn Féin representatives from speaking on radio or television. Since two members of Sinn Féin were in fact democratically elected members of the British Parliament (albeit ones who refused to take their seats because it meant swearing allegiance to the British Crown) this was a clear transgression of a central element in journalists' professional ideology: their right to report the news and to quote from newsmakers without political interference. Journalists at the BBC did not simply accept and implement this government policy. On the contrary, they fought it. They voted for industrial action against the ban, although in the event they were unable to carry the whole of the National Union of Journalists with them and were unable actually to walk out. In the longer run they helped make it unworkable by finding ways to circumvent the government's orders (Moloney 1991). Examples such as this where journalists have fought to uphold professional values against the dictates of

governments, owners and managers, can easily be multiplied, including recent struggles over the reporting of the war in Iraq.

Refining the Model

The above six considerations provide both strong theoretical reasons and convincing practical evidence that the PM requires some revision if it is to fulfil its promise of explaining the performance of the mass media in general terms. The central departure from the classical formulations of the PM is that, in place of the stress it gives to the uniformity of the media, we now expect to find diversity. The divided nature of the capitalist class, the presence of powerful critical currents which find legitimate public expression in a capitalist democracy, the need to address the concerns of a mass audience, political differentiation as a marketing strategy, all point to the necessity for any viable media system to include a range of different opinions.

To the extent that the PM accepts the existence of 'tactical' disputes, it is of course prepared to accept some diversity, but it poses uniformity as the normal state of the media. Beyond the semantic issue of the precise meanings we might attach to 'tactical' and 'strategic' is the substantive issue of how far dissenting voices are represented in the media. The tendency of the PM is to view such events as rare and marginal but there are compelling reasons for considering them much more normal.

Of course, it is entirely true that the range of dissenting voices is carefully controlled. There tends to be a preponderance of elite voices, and those in turn will tend to reflect the views of powerful groups in economics and politics. It is most certainly not the case that diversity is normally taken to include the ideas and views of working class people or radical political figures. Sometimes, however, radical individuals do get regular exposure in the media (the late Paul Foot, John Pilger, Tariq Ali and Mark Steel in the UK, for example) partly at least for the good business reason that it fits the marketing strategy of particular media to attract the substantial number of radical individuals towards their niche in the market.

The degree to which the mass media in a capitalist democracy will be open to dissenting voices cannot be specified in advance. It depends in part on the political structure of the society, the nature of its media market, and the issues under discussion. In the USA, with its extremely narrow spectrum of official politics and its largely uncompetitive media markets, one would expect a high degree of uniformity, particularly in issues of foreign policy. In this case, it is not a particularly strong confirmation of the theory that the empirical results do not contradict the hypothesis. Even a cursory glance at the record demonstrates that

in societies with a wider range of official politics and a more competitive media market there will be much greater debate, particularly on issues of domestic policy. In those societies in which there are public service broadcasters and a wider range of official politics, there will tend to be an institutionalization of diversity.

The consequences of this theoretical readjustment are twofold: one theoretical, one practical. If we modify the model to allow for the systematic representation of diverse opinions within the spectrum of legitimate politics, rather than positing the unified propaganda function of the media, then we can give a much better response to critics like Hallin who point to the 'professional autonomy' of journalists as a counter to the PM. From this perspective, the fact that the nature of journalistic activity involves (a) positioning oneself between conflicting elite and source pressures (b) attempting to provide an account of the world that is at least comprehensible to the mass of the population and (c) resisting the objectification of one's labour, all mean that claims to professional autonomy are a normal and real part of the system. These claims are, at bottom, genuine attempts at resistance to the subordination of truth to power and money, and to overcome the blight of alienated labour, which was famously identified as being at its 'most grotesque' amongst journalists (Lukács 1968, 100).

The chances of realising these claims to autonomy depend ultimately upon the relative power of the owners and the journalists, or to put it more generally, between capital and labour. A weak and disorganised group of journalists has much less chance of defying the owners and the editors than does a well-organised and united group. As one journalist (who happens to work for an unquestionably capitalist newspaper) remarked in reference to trying to organise against the Iraq war:

> The media are rigidly hierarchical, agendas are centrally established and a chasm of income, outlook and class separates the people at the top from the rest of us. On the rare occasions when activists find themselves in a situation where editorial content is being decided or discussed, it takes a great deal of confidence to stick your neck out. That confidence can only come from feeling part of a movement and from having people in the office who will back you up. (Crouch 2004, 272-73)

The isolated journalist, however professional and however courageous, is an easy target for an employer anxious to assert control over their property. The organised journalist at least has a chance of surviving and perhaps of winning.

This brings us directly to the important practical consequence of the revised model. The presentation of the classical iteration of the model ends, quite correctly, with the observation that there are other channels than the large scale media, and it is in these alternatives that the hope for a better account of the world

is to be found (Herman and Chomsky 1988, 307). In times of relative class peace, this is a reasonable perspective: the current author has spent a great deal of energy writing, editing and selling alternative newspapers, for example. On the other hand, in times of intense class struggle, the social distance between the owners of the media and the people who they employ to run them can become an obvious, unbridgeable, social and political 'chasm'. In extreme circumstances, it can lead to the journalists and other workers taking over the news media that employ them and attempting to run them along different lines. That, of course, is a distant prospect anywhere in the developed world today, but surely it must be a central strategic orientation of any attempt to organise for a better world? Strategy influences tactics. The journalists who write the lies that drive us to impotent rage are not, in the end, the enemy. On the contrary, they can be part of our movement. One of our tasks is to help the most determined and courageous of these journalists, who share our hopes for social change, to survive in these hard times and to organise for better times.

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