

The Political Economy of Communication: A Reader

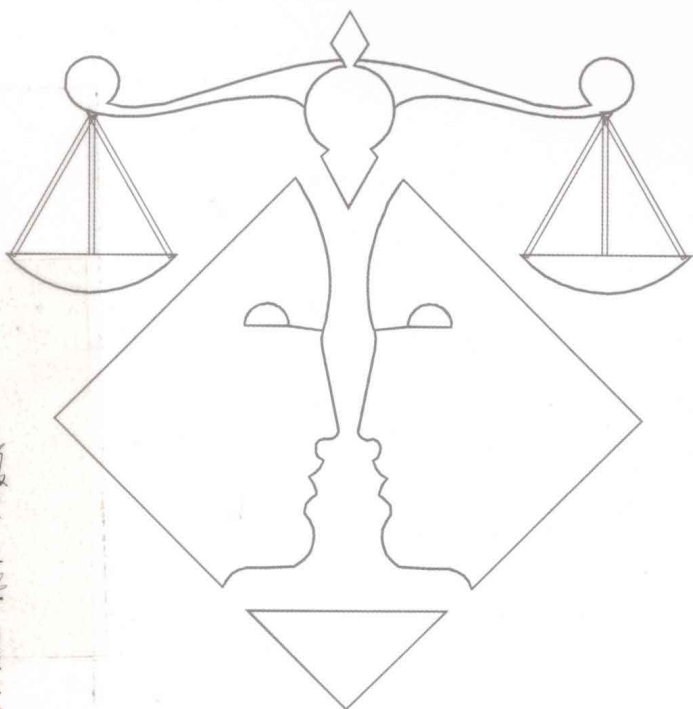
# 传播政治经济学

英文读本

曹晋 赵月枝 / 主编

(下册)

复旦大学国家哲学社会科学新闻传播与媒介化社会创新基地数字传播与新闻出版专业建设项目  
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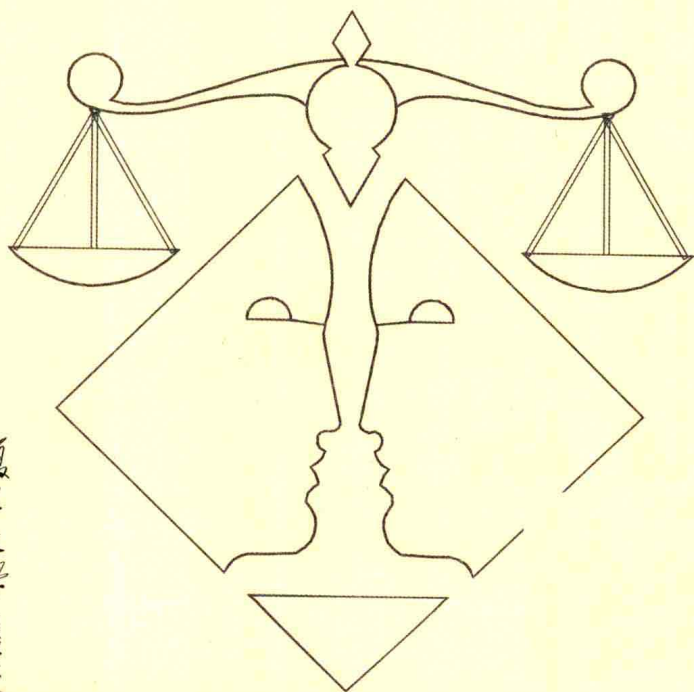
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## 内 容 提 要

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读本以传播政治经济学所主要关切的研究议题为核心，分别从该学派的历史起源与理论基础，方法思索与跨学科对话，广告的权力与受众商品的塑造，产权与盎格鲁—美国语境下的控制，资本主义整合的全球、民族与本土动力，转型的场域、能动性、与进程等六个方面建构这个学派批判性的阐释路径。读本的论文组织以英美为主，兼顾其他国家与地区，主流批判中涵盖另类建设，突出对话，在传播与政治经济相互关联、作用的过程中关注多样化的论题，并贯穿阶级、社会性别、种族、国家与区域的研究视野。

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# **Part Four**

## **Ownership and Control in the Anglo-American Contexts: Capital, the State, and Other Social Forces**

# The Process of Legitimation- ||

Ralph Miliband

## I

In no field do the claims of democratic diversity and free political competition which are made on behalf of the "open societies" of advanced capitalism appear to be more valid than in the field of communications — the press, the written word generally, radio, television, the cinema and the theatre. Even where, as is often the case for radio and television, agencies of communication are public institutions, or mixed ones, they are not simply the mouthpieces of the government of the day and exclusively the organs of official policy or opinions; opposition views are also heard and seen.

Nor, as occurs in many regimes where communications are *not* monopolised by the state, do those who work for them have to fear extreme retribution because what they communicate or allow to be communicated happens to offend their government or other public figures or bodies. No doubt they are subject to various legal and other official restraints and pressures, sometimes of a severe kind. But these restraints and pressures, which will be considered presently, only qualify the notion of independence of the communications media from state dictation and control; they do not nullify it.

Indeed, it cannot even be said that views which are profoundly offensive to various "establishments," whether they concern politics or culture or religion or morals, are narrowly confined to marginal and *avant-garde* channels of expression, patronised only by tiny minorities.

Such "controversial" views do find their way, in all these countries, in mass circulation newspapers and magazines; they are presented in book form by large publishing houses, often in vast paperback editions;<sup>1</sup> they are heard on the radio and seen expressed on television; they inspire films which are shown by major cinema circuits, and plays which are performed in the "commercial" theatre — and no one (or hardly anyone) goes to jail.

The importance and value of this freedom and opportunity of expression is not to be underestimated. Yet the notion of pluralist diversity and competitive equilibrium is, here as in every other field, rather superficial and misleading. For the agencies of communication and notably the mass media are, in reality, and the expression of dissident views notwithstanding, a crucial element in the legitimation of capitalist society. Freedom of expression



is not thereby rendered meaningless. But that freedom has to be set in the real economic and political context of these societies; and in that context the free expression of ideas and opinions *mainly* means the free expression of ideas and opinions which are helpful to the prevailing system of power and privilege. Indeed, Professor Lazarsfeld and Professor Merton once went as far as to suggest that:

Increasingly the chief power groups, among which organised business occupies the most spectacular place, have come to adopt techniques for manipulating mass publics through propaganda in place of more direct means of control.... Economic power seems to have reduced direct exploitation [?] and turned to a subtler type of psychological exploitation, achieved largely by disseminating propaganda through the mass media of communication.... These media have taken on the job of rendering mass publics conformative to the social and economic status quo.<sup>2</sup>

The ideological function of the media is obscured by many features of cultural life in these systems, for instance the absence of state dictation, the existence of debate and controversy, the fact that conservatism is not a tight body of thought and that its looseness makes possible variations and divergencies within its framework, and much else as well. But obscured though it may be, the fact remains that the mass media in advanced capitalist societies are mainly intended to perform a highly “functional” role; they too are both the expression of a system of domination, and a means of reinforcing it.

The press may be taken as the first and most obvious example of this role. Newspapers everywhere vary enormously in quality, content and tendency. Some are sober and staid, others sensational and shrill; intelligent or stupid; scrupulous or not; reactionary, conservative, liberal or “radical”; free from outside allegiance, or vehicles of a party faction or interest; critical of authority or blandly apologetic; and so on.

But whatever their endless differences of every kind, most newspapers in the capitalist world have one crucial characteristic in common, namely their strong, often their passionate hostility to anything further to the Left than the milder forms of social-democracy, and quite commonly to these milder forms as well. This commitment finds its most explicit expression at election time; whether independent of more or less conservative parties or specifically committed to them, most newspapers may be relied on to support the conservative side or at least to be deeply critical of the anti-conservative one, often vociferously and unscrupulously so. This conservative preponderance is normally overwhelming.

At the core of the commitment lies a general acceptance of prevailing modes of thought concerning the economic and social order and a specific acceptance of the capitalist system, even though sometimes qualified, as natural and desirable. Most newspapers accept a certain degree of state intervention in economic and social life as inevitable and even praiseworthy; and some, greatly daring, may even support this or that piece of innocuous nationalisation. Even so, most organs of the press have always been utterly dedicated to the proposition that the enlargement of the “public sector” was inimical to the “national interest” and that the strengthening of private enterprise was the condition of economic prosperity, social welfare, freedom, democracy, and so forth.

Similarly, and consistently, the press for the most part has always been a deeply committed anti-trade union force. Not it should be said, that newspapers in general oppose trade unions as

such. Not at all. They only oppose trade unions, in the all too familiar jargon, which, in disregard of the country's welfare and of their members' own interests, greedily and irresponsibly seek to achieve short-term gains which are blindly self-defeating. In other words, newspapers love trade unions so long as they do badly the job for which they exist. Like governments and employers, newspapers profoundly deplore strikes, and the larger the strike the greater the hostility: woe to trade union leaders who encourage or fail to prevent such manifestly unsocial, irresponsible and *obsolete* forms of behaviour. The rights and wrongs of any dispute are of minor consequence; what counts is the community, the consumer, the public, which *must* be protected, whatever the cost, against the actions of men who blindly obey the summons of misguided and, most likely, evil-intentioned leaders.

...

All this, it should be stressed, has not been and is not simply *a* current of thought among many; it has been and remains *the* predominant, generally the overwhelming, current of thought of the national (and local) press of advanced capitalist countries.

As has also been stressed repeatedly in preceding chapters, this profoundly conformist outlook admits of many variations and deviations: it certainly does not preclude a critical view of this or that aspect of the existing order of things. And while social-democratic governments, however conservative their policies, must expect very much rougher treatment at the hands of the press than properly conservative ones, the latter are not at all immune from press criticism and attack. In this sense the press may well claim to be "independent" and to fulfil an important watchdog function. What the claim overlooks, however, is the very large fact that it is the Left at which the watchdogs generally bark with most ferocity, and that what they are above all protecting is the *status quo*.

Many "popular" newspapers with a mass circulation are extremely concerned to convey the opposite impression and to suggest a radical impatience with every kind of "establishment," however exalted, and a restless urge for change, reform, progress. In actual fact, most of this angry radicalism represents little more than an affectation of style; behind the iconoclastic irreverence and the demagogic populism there is singular vacuity both in diagnosis and prescription. The noise is considerable but the battle is bogus.

For their part, radio and television similarly serve a mainly though again not exclusively conformist purpose. Here too the appearance is of rich diversity of views and opinions, of ardent controversy and passionate debate. These media, moreover, whether commercially or publicly owned, are either required, or in any case wish to suggest, a high degree of political impartiality and objectivity. Newspapers can be as politically involved and partisan, as biased in their presentation of news and views, as they choose. But radio and television must not.

In most ways, however, this assumed impartiality and objectivity is quite artificial. For it mainly operates in regard to political formations which while divided on many issues are nevertheless part of a basic, underlying consensus. Thus, radio and television in such countries as Britain and the United States may preserve a fair degree of impartiality between the Conservative, Liberal and Labour parties, and the Republican and Democratic parties, respectively; but this hardly precludes a steady stream of propaganda adverse to all views which fall outside the consensus. Impartiality and objectivity, in this sense, stop at the point where political consensus itself ends — and the more radical the dissent, the less impartial and objective the media. On this view it does not seem extravagant to suggest that radio and television in all capitalist countries have been consistently and

predominantly agencies of conservative indoctrination and that they have done what they could to inoculate their listeners and viewers against dissident thought. This does not require that all such dissent should be prevented from getting an airing. It only requires that the overwhelming bias of the media should be on the other side. And that requirement has been amply met.

In countries where political life is dominated by parties which operate in a framework of consensus, this bias, to which otherwise opposed parties make a joint contribution, is easily overlooked. In countries such as France and Italy, where large Communist parties form the main opposition, the notion of political impartiality is more difficult to sustain. In the former countries, a general ideological bias has fewer immediately obvious political connotations, since the parties and movements which most suffer from hostility and discrimination form a small and even negligible political factor. In the latter, radio and television are much more directly involved in the political struggle and are in effect the instruments of the government parties, to be used against the opposition, with no nonsense about "equal time" or any such liberal luxury which political circumstances renders inappropriate. In France, both radio and television have been quite deliberately turned into Gaullist institutions, to be used to the advantage of the general, his government, and the party which supports them;<sup>3</sup> and similarly in Italy, these media have predominantly been the instruments of Christian Social-Democracy and its governments.

In strict *political* terms, this is a very different situation from that which has prevailed in a country like Britain, where the Labour leaders have been assured since the war of some kind of parity with their Conservative opponents. In larger *ideological* terms, however, the contrast has been rather less dramatic; and the point applies with even greater force to the United States where, it has been said, "organised business and such lesser interests as the major political parties and church groups have virtually a 'psychological monopoly' of the media. News and comment, entertainment, advertising, political rhetoric and religious exhortation alike are more concerned with channelling existing beliefs than with radically changing them."<sup>4</sup> As between all shades of the consensus on the one hand, and all shades of counter-ideology on the other, radio and television in all capitalist countries have ensured that the former had by far the best of the argument.

So far the mass media have been discussed as if their sole concern was with politics and ideology. This is of course not the case. Mainly political magazines and books form a very small part of the total, and all newspapers devote much space to matters which bear no direct or even indirect relation to politics — many newspapers in fact devote much more space to such matters than to political ones. Similarly, radio, television, the cinema and the theatre are not run *as* agencies of political communication and indoctrination; they are also, and even predominantly, concerned with "entertainment" of one sort or another. Indeed, in the case of the mass media which are privately owned and controlled, the overriding purpose and concern is with profit. This is also true of newspapers. Lord Thompson was not expressing a unique and eccentric view when he said that what he wanted from his newspapers was that they should make money.

On the other hand, making money is not at all incompatible with making politics, and in a more general sense with political indoctrination. Thus the *purpose* of the "entertainment" industry, in its various forms, may be profit; but the *content* of its output is not therefore by any means free from political and ideological connotations of a more or less definite kind.

The mass media are often attacked for their cultural poverty, their debased commercialism, their systematic triviality, their addiction to brutality and violence, their deliberate exploitation of sex and sadism, and much else of the same order. The indictment is familiar and largely justified.

But that indictment also tends, very often, to understate or to ignore the specific ideological content of these productions and the degree to which they are used as propaganda vehicles for a particular view of the world. "A superficial inventory of the contents and motivation in the products of the entertainment and publishing worlds in our Western civilisation," Professor Lowenthal has observed, "will include such themes as the nation, the family, religion, free enterprise, individual initiative."<sup>5</sup> Such an inventory would in fact do more than include these and other highly "functional" themes; it would also have to note the marginal place allowed to themes of a "dysfunctional" kind. Professor Meynaud has said, in regard to the world of magazines that "ils contribuent par la structure de leurs rubriques et l'apparente neutralité de leurs articles à la formation de ce climat de conformisme qui est l'un des meilleurs atouts du capitalisme contemporain. A cet égard, le rôle des hebdomadaires féminins qui donnent, sans en avoir l'air, une vue entièrement falsifiée de notre monde est capital."<sup>6</sup> The point is of more general application, and so is Raymond Williams's remark about what he calls "majority television," namely that it is "outstandingly an expression of the false consciousness of our particular societies."<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, it is worth noting that much of the "message" of the mass media is not diffuse but quite specific. It would of course be ridiculous to think of such authors as Mickey Spillane and Ian Fleming (to take two writers whose sales have been astronomical) as political writers in any true sense. But it would also be silly to overlook the fact that their heroes are paragons of anti-Communist virtues and that their adventures, including their sexual adventures, are more often than not set in the context of a desperate struggle against subversive forces, both alien and home-grown. As has been said about the anti-communism of the Spillane output, "it is woven into the texture of assumptions of the novel. Anyone who thinks otherwise is taken to be either treasonable or hopelessly naive."<sup>8</sup> This kind of crude "ideology for the masses" does not permeate the whole field of "mass culture"; but it permeates a substantial part of it in most media. Nor of course is the rest of "mass culture" much permeated by counter-ideological material. There are not, on the whole, many left-wing and revolutionary equivalents of James Bond. It may be that the *genre* does not lend itself to it; and the political climate of advanced capitalist societies certainly does not.

## II

The nature of the contribution which the mass media make to that political climate is determined by the influences which weigh most heavily upon them. There are a number of such influences — and they all work in the same conservative and conformist direction.

The first and most obvious of them derives from the ownership, and control of the "means of mental production." Save for state ownership of radio and television stations and of some other means of communications, the mass media are overwhelmingly in the private domain (and this is also true of most radio and television stations in the United States). Moreover, these agencies are in that part of the private domain which is dominated by large-scale capitalist enterprise. Ever more notably, the mass media are not only business, but big business. The pattern of concentration which is evident in all other forms of capitalist enterprise is also evident here: the press, magazines and book publishing, cinemas, theatres, and also radio and television wherever they are privately owned, have increasingly come under the ownership and control of a small and steadily declining number of giant enterprises, with combined interests in different media, and often also in other areas of capitalist enterprise. "The Hearst empire," it has been noted, "includes twelve newspapers,

fourteen magazines, three television stations, six radio stations, a news service, a photo service, a feature syndicate, and Avon paperbacks"; and similarly, "in addition to magazines, *Time, Inc.*, also owns radio and television stations, a book club, paper mills, timber land, oil wells, and real estate."<sup>9</sup> The same kind of concentration is increasingly found in all other capitalist countries: the Axel Springer empire, for instance, alone controls over 40 per cent of German newspapers and magazines, and close to 80 per cent of Berlin newspapers. As for films, it has been observed that "in Britain, for example, film distribution is virtually dependent on two companies which run the circuit cinemas, and since films can normally be financed only on guarantees of distribution, this means that two companies have almost complete control over what films are to be made, and what subjects are acceptable."<sup>10</sup> And it is also noteworthy that new ventures in the mass media are easily captured by existing interests in these or in other fields. Thus, Mr Hall and Mr Whannel, speaking of commercial television in Britain, note that "rather than spreading power into new hands, it has increased the power of those already holding it. More than half the resources of commercial television are owned in part by newspapers, the film industry and theatrical interests."<sup>11</sup>

Rather obviously, those who own and control the capitalist mass media are most likely to be men whose ideological dispositions run from soundly conservative to utterly reactionary; and in many instances, most notably in the case of newspapers, the impact of their views and prejudices is immediate and direct, in the straightforward sense that newspaper proprietors have often not only owned their newspapers but closely controlled their editorial and political line as well, and turned them, by constant and even daily intervention, into vehicles of their personal views.<sup>12</sup> In the case of Axel Springer's newspaper empire, it has been remarked that "he runs his papers like a monarch. He denies that there is any kind of central ideological control, and certainly such control is not formalised in any way. But Herr Springer is a man of the strongest political views. Deeply religious, a militant anti-communist, he has also a sense of mission. He may not direct his papers openly but his ideas seep downwards."<sup>13</sup> Much the same may be said of many newspaper owners in all advanced capitalist countries. The right of ownership confers the right of making propaganda, and where that right is exercised, it is most likely to be exercised in the service of strongly conservative prejudices, either by positive assertion or by the exclusion of such matters as owners may find it undesirable to publish. Censorship is not, in a free enterprise system, purely a state prerogative. No doubt, private censorship, unlike state censorship, is not absolute. But where no alternative source of newspaper information or views is readily available — as is mostly the case in many towns, cities and regions in the United States,<sup>14</sup> and elsewhere as well<sup>15</sup> — such censorship is pretty effective all the same, particularly where other media such as radio and television are, as often in the United States, also under the same ownership and control.<sup>16</sup>

However, it is not always the case that those who own or ultimately control the mass media do seek to exercise a direct and immediate influence upon their output. Quite commonly, editors, journalists, producers, managers, etc. are accorded a considerable degree of independence, and are even given a free hand. Even so, ideas do tend to "seep downwards," and provide an ideological and political framework which may well be broad but whose existence cannot be ignored by those who work for the commercial media. They may not be *required* to take tender care of the sacred cows that are to be found in the conservative stable. But it is at least *expected* that they will spare the conservative susceptibilities of the men whose employees they are, and that they will take a proper attitude to free enterprise, conflicts between capital and labour, trade unions, left-wing parties and movements, the Cold War, revolutionary movements, the role of the United States in

the world, and much else besides. The existence of this framework does not require total conformity; general conformity will do. This assured, room will be found for a seasoning, sometimes even a generous seasoning, of dissent.

In 1957 Mr James Wechsler, the editor of the *New York Post*, delivered himself of some remarks about the American press which are worth quoting at some length, since they are of wider application:

The American press [ he said ] is overwhelmingly owned and operated by Republicans who fix the rules of U.S. political debate. And I use the words "fix" advisedly.

... It is a press that has generally grown comfortable, fat and self-righteous; and which with some noteworthy exceptions voices the prejudices and preconceptions of entrenched wealth rather than those qualities of critical inquiry and rebellious spirit we associate with our noblest journalistic traditions.

It is a press that is generally more concerned with the tax privileges of any fat cat than with the care and feeding of any underdog.

It is a press that sanctimoniously boasts of its independence and means by that its right to do what its Republican owners damn please. The press used to be regarded as a public trust, not a private playground.

It is a press that is far more forthright and resolute in combating Communist government in Hungary than in waging the fight for freedom in the United States.<sup>17</sup>

With appropriate local variations, and with some few exceptions,<sup>18</sup> these strictures would not seem irrelevant to the press of other capitalist countries.

A second source of conformist and conservative pressure upon newspapers and other media is that exercised, directly or indirectly, by capitalist interests, not as owners, but as advertisers. The direct political influence of large advertisers upon the commercial media need not be exaggerated. It is only occasionally that such advertisers are able, or probably even try, to dictate the contents and policies of the media of which they are the customers. But their custom is nevertheless of crucial importance to the financial viability, which means the existence, of newspapers and, in some but not all instances, of magazines, commercial radio and television. That fact may do no more than *enhance* a general disposition on the part of these media to show exceptional care in dealing with such powerful and valuable interests. But that is useful too, since it provides a further assurance to business interests in general that they will be treated with sympathetic understanding, and that the "business community" will, at the least, be accorded a degree of indulgence which is seldom if ever displayed towards the labour interest and trade unions: *their* displeasure is a matter of no consequence at all.

Moreover, the point made in the last chapter concerning the vastly superior resources which capitalist interests, as compared with any other, are able to deploy in the field of public relations is here acutely relevant. For these resources are also used to "soften up" the appropriate mass media, notably the press, which further contributes to the representation of the "business case" in the best possible light.

Professor Meynaud has suggested that the control which capitalist interests exercise over a large part of the press in Italy produces an "exemplary docility" on its part towards their "theses

and preoccupations.”<sup>19</sup> For France, it has been suggested that “les consignes que l’argent fait peser sur la presse consiste beaucoup plus en interdictions, en sujets à ne pas évoquer qu’en instructions sur ce qu’il faut dire.”<sup>20</sup> The emphasis is bound to vary from country to country and from paper to paper. But whether the direct pressure of business interests is great or small, or even nonexistent, it is greatly to the financial disadvantage of newspapers and magazines everywhere to be “anti-business.” Not surprisingly, organs of the extreme left, even where, as occasionally happens, they enjoy a substantial circulation, cannot rely on much advertising revenue from business sources<sup>21</sup>—or from government.<sup>22</sup>

A third element of pressure upon the mass media stems from government and various other parts of the state system generally. That pressure, as was noted earlier, does not generally amount to imperative dictation. But it is nevertheless real, in a number of ways.

For one thing, governments, ministries and other official agencies now make it their business, ever more elaborately and systematically, to supply newspapers, radio and television with explanations of official policy which naturally have an apologetic and tendentious character. The state, in other words, now goes in more and more for “news management,” particularly in times of stress and crisis, which means, for most leading capitalist countries, almost permanently; and the greater the crisis, the more purposeful the management, the evasions, the half-truths and the plain lies. In addition, governments now engage more extensively than ever before in cultural management, particularly abroad, and use education and culture as instruments of foreign policy. By far and away the greatest effort in this field since the war has of course been made by the United States whose endeavours, notably in the Third World, have given an entirely new dimension to the notion of “cultural imperialism.”<sup>23</sup> Not, it should be said, that these endeavours, as shown by the uncovering of C I A activities in the cultural field, have neglected the advanced capitalist world, including the United States.

As far as newspapers are concerned, governments and other agencies of the state system may, in their desire to manage the news, resort to a variety of pressures and blandishments<sup>24</sup>—even threats<sup>25</sup>—which may be more or less effective. But they are, for the most part, forced to rely very largely on the cooperation and good-will of publishers, editors and journalists. In many cases, that cooperation and good-will are readily forthcoming, since a majority of newspapers tend, broadly speaking, to share the view of the national interest held by governments which are mostly of the conservative persuasion. But where newspapers are recalcitrant, as is often the case for one reason or another, there is relatively little that governments can do about it. In this sense too, newspapers are independent institutions; and for all their shortcomings, that remains an important fact in the life of these countries.

Publicly owned radio and television, on the other hand, are “official” institutions, and as such much more susceptible than newspapers to a variety of official pressures. They may well, as in Britain, enjoy a high degree of independence and autonomy from government, but they remain nevertheless steeped in an official environment and permeated by an official climate, which ensure that in political and general ideological terms these media fulfil a conformist rather than a critical role. This does not prevent governments and official policies from being criticised and attacked. But criticism and attack tend to remain within a safe, fairly narrow spectrum. To paraphrase Lord Balfour’s remark about the House of Lords, whether the Conservative or the Labour Party is in office, it is generally the conformist point of view which prevails. At the time of the General Strike, John Keith, as he was then, wrote to the Prime Minister in his capacity of General Manager of the

BBC that, "assuming the BBC is for the people and that the government is for the people, it follows that the BBC must be for the government in this crisis too."<sup>26</sup> Things may have moved somewhat since then, but not as dramatically as is often claimed or as the notion of independence and autonomy would suggest. Writing of BBC Television in recent years, Mr Stuart Hood has noted that judgments of what is to be produced "are based on what can be described as a programme ethos — a general view of what is fitting and seemly, of what is admissible and not admissible, which is gradually absorbed by those persons involved in programme-making."<sup>27</sup> This "programme ethos" is much more likely to produce controversy within the consensus than outside it. And where programmes are consistently, or appear to be consistently anti-Establishmentarian, official pressures come into effective operation, not necessarily from the government itself, but from such bodies as the board of governors of the BBC (and the Independent Television Authority). The latter are impeccably Establishment figures, whether Conservative, Liberal, Labour or "non-political."<sup>28</sup> Thus, it was "on his personal responsibility" that the Director General of the BBC took a sharply satirical programme such as *That Was the Week that Was* off the air. But, as Mr Hood also notes, "no one with knowledge of the strength of feeling on the part of some governors at that time can doubt that the Director-General had no real alternative if he wanted to continue in his post."<sup>29</sup> It is also worth noting that, for all its irreverence and bite, *TW3* eschewed any political commitment; indeed it was largely constructed around the notion that any such commitment was absurdly *vieux jeu*. Had it been otherwise, it may be surmised that it would not have lasted as long as it did.

The general point about governmental and official pressures on the mass media is not simply that they occur, and are more or less intense; it is rather that, given the usual political and ideological coloration of governments and state elites, these pressures reinforce the tendencies towards conservatism and conformity which already exist independently of them.

Yet an explanation of the character and intended role of the mass media in terms of the pressures, private and public, so far considered is inadequate. For it suggests that those who are actually responsible for the contents of the mass media — producers, editors, journalists, writers, commentators, directors, playwrights, etc. — are the unwilling tools of conservative and commercial forces, that they are suppressed rebels, cowed radicals and left-wingers, reluctant producers and disseminators of ideas and opinions which they detest, angry dissenters straining at the capitalist leash.

This is not a realistic picture. There *are* of course a good many such people working in and for the mass media, who suffer various degrees of political frustration, and who seek, sometimes successfully, often not, to break through the frontiers of orthodoxy. But there is little to suggest that they constitute more than a minority of the "cultural workmen" employed by the mass media. The cultural and political hegemony of the dominant classes could not be so pronounced if this was not the case.

A realistic picture of the ideological tendencies of those who work for the mass media would divide them into three broad categories: those just referred to who belong to various shades of the Left; people with a more or less strong conservative commitment; and a third group, which is probably the most numerous, whose political commitments are fairly blurred, and who wish to avoid "trouble." In effect, such people occupy one part or other of the spectrum of conformity and can accommodate themselves fairly easily to the requirements of their employers. Like their committed conservative colleagues, they mostly "say what they like"; but this is mainly because their



employers mostly like what they say, or at least find little in what they say which is objectionable. These “cultural workmen” are unlikely to be greatly troubled by the limitations and constrictions imposed upon the mass media by the prevailing economic and political system, because their ideological and political make-up does not normally bring them up against these limitations. The leash they wear is sufficiently long to allow them as much freedom of movement as they themselves wish to have; and they therefore do not feel the strain; or not so as to make life impossible.

There is nothing particularly surprising about the character and role of the mass media in advanced capitalist society. Given the economic and political context in which they function, they cannot fail to be, predominantly, agencies for the dissemination of ideas and values which affirm rather than challenge existing patterns of power and privilege, and thus to be weapons in the arsenal of class domination. The notion that they can, for the most part, be anything else is either a delusion or a mystification. They can, and sometimes do, play a “dysfunctional” role; and the fact that they are allowed to do so is not lightly to be dismissed. But that, quite emphatically, is not and indeed cannot, in the given context, be their main role. They are intended to fulfil a conservative function; and do so.

This, however, is not to suggest that the control of the mass media and the “mobilisation of bias” which it makes possible guarantee success to conservative parties in electoral competition, or effectively ensure ideological attunement.

In regard to the first point, it has been noted that in the British General Election of 1966, only one newspaper, the *Sunday Citizen*, with a circulation of 232,000 was “unreservedly on the outgoing government’s side” (i.e. the Labour Government), while the rest of the press (38,000,000) was more or less critical.”<sup>30</sup> The figures tend to give an exaggerated view of the specific commitment of most newspapers to the Conservative Party. But the fact remains that the general bias of the press, then as always, was against Labour. Yet this did not prevent the Labour Government from increasing its parliamentary majority from six to a hundred. And it has similarly often been noted that while the vast majority of American newspapers are Republican-oriented, the Democratic Party, in electoral terms, has not suffered particularly as a result. Again, the Gaullist control of television and the conservative bias of the larger part of the French press did not prevent the opposition from making substantial electoral gains in a number of elections,<sup>31</sup> just as the even more pronounced anti-communist bias of most of that press at all times has not prevented the Communist Party from retaining a remarkably stable share of popular support; and the same point applies even more strongly to the Italian Communist Party. It is simply not the case that the mass media can be counted on to deliver the votes to the conservative camp.

Nor, in larger ideological and cultural terms, is it realistic to believe that nonconformity and dissent can be finally nailed on television aerials. In the article already quoted, Professor Lazarsfeld and Professor Merton speak of the “narcotising dysfunction” of the mass media.<sup>32</sup> The reason why they speak of “dysfunction,” they explain, is based “on the assumption that it is not in the interests of modern complex society to have large masses of the population politically apathetic and inert.”<sup>33</sup> This is a very large assumption. For whatever may be “the interests of modern complex society,” it is certainly in the interests of dominant classes in advanced capitalist societies that very large masses of the population *should* be politically apathetic and inert, at least in regard to issues which are, from the point of view of these classes, politically dangerous. But while the purpose of the mass media may be a “narcotising” one, their impact, from this point of view, may leave