

Politics and the Mass Media

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The Traditional Paradigms: Political Theories of the Mass Media

Introduction

(The mass media have) become overwhelmingly the dominant medium of the late twentieth century: the paramount place where elections are conducted and where fictions are disseminated. How (they are) run, by whom and in what interests, is arguably a more important issue for any modern society than control over major industries, the law or finance.

Geoff Mulgan *Politics in an Antipolitical Age*

The mass media provide powerful channels of information between the political elite and the electorate. Traditionally, the press and broadcasting act as proactive devices for encouraging the citizen to participate in the democratic process. The mass media, by disseminating the full range of political opinions, enable the public to make political choices and enter the national life. Therefore, they are understood as important mechanisms in ensuring the principles of modern democratic societies.

Their political role covers several features including being a public watchdog, agenda setting and message production. Consequently, the organization of the print and electronic media plays a vital role in furnishing individuals with their rights. The concepts of the fourth estate and freedom of information have underpinned the development of British and other Western democratic media systems. The press and broadcasting (in a more complicated variant) are meant to act as impartial, objective and independent brokers of information. To safeguard this freedom, governments have remained vigilant in evolving policy to regulate the ownership of media institutions and guarantee the flow of information.

2 Political Theories of the Mass Media

In this way, the press and broadcasters are meant to act as neutral observers of the political process. However, as Judith Lichtenberg has commented, an ambiguity exists as the media not only act as onlookers, but are political actors themselves. Whilst media organizations claim to be critical outsiders, they are simultaneously political participants who shape the public's world view:

The press today – the mass media in particular – is one of the primary actors on the political scene, capable of making or breaking political careers and issues.¹

Formally, the press and broadcasting both perform a negative political liberty by protecting freedom of speech, and enjoy a positive function by brokering information across society and setting the agenda. However, throughout the years the democratic role of the mass media has been challenged. The concept of a free press has been replaced by a more critical analysis. Principally, the media have been seen to perpetuate the values of the political, social and economic elites. Effectively, the mass media reinforce the dominant ideology over the mass of citizens.

A number of schools have emerged questioning the traditional orthodoxy of state-media-audience relations. These have been drawn from several sources: anti-statist liberalism; market-liberalism and the many variants of Marxism. This has led to different analyses of the media and the call for reform and this chapter will provide the context to this study of the political role of media systems. It will compare and con-

Table 1.1 Alternative perspectives of the media

	<i>Liberal</i>	<i>Marxist</i>	<i>Communist</i>
Public sphere	Public space	Class domination	
Political role of media	Check on government	Agency of class control	Further societal objectives
Media system	Free market	Capitalist	Public ownership
Journalistic norm	Disinterested	Subaltern	Didactic
Entertainment	Distraction/gratification	Opiate	Enlightenment
Reform	Self-regulation	Unreformable	Liberalization

Source: Peter Dahlgren and Colin Sparks (eds) *Communication and Citizenship: Journalism and the Public Sphere*, 1991

contrast the disparate theories of mass communication and citizenship which have been deemed vital in democratic societies.

The alternative concerns for the media within different state organizations

Whilst this chapter will focus on the media in liberal democratic regimes, it may be useful to consider how media systems have operated in alternative state structures. An explicit comparison between the media in feudal and totalitarian states can aid our understanding of what is attempted in a liberal democratic system.

The print media which existed during the feudal, pre-capitalist era was subject to extensive state intervention. The authoritarian rule of societies, governed by absolutist monarchs, meant that the press advanced the elite's interests. The press was subjected to pre-publication censorship and supported state despotism. To maintain this arrangement, the government determined media rights by granting royal patents. The media was effectively controlled by the guilds, licensing and overt censorship. Although the press was privately owned, it propagated governmental policy. Criticism of the political machinery was forbidden. Whilst this has been defined as a historical phase for Western nations, in absolutist states such as Saudi Arabia this remains the media's role.

Similarly, in totalitarian states such as Stalin's Soviet Union (and in many respects in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy), a subservient media existed. This emerged out of the amalgam of Leninism and Stalinism practised there. The media was subordinate to the aims of the revolution. These included the continuation of the Soviet socialist system and the dictatorship of the Communist party. Stalin's expansion of the corporate state, governed by an inner and outer circle of party bureaucrats, meant it controlled all areas of civil life including the media institutions. Consequently, loyal party members had the right to make use of the media. Further, the media was forbidden to express criticisms of party objectives and was subject to censorship through surveillance; the state-owned media system could be controlled by the government's economic or political actions. Within totalitarian societies the media was an arm of the state and served the ends of the dominant elite.

This model was spread by the Soviet Union's control of Eastern Europe for over forty years. The subsequent collapse of Stalinist state capitalism brought to attention the democratic functions of the media. After many years of state and party control, underpinned by the secret surveillance forces, the individual's right to freedom of speech was deemed vital. The media's influence in the successive liberation drives

of Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, East Germany, Czechoslovakia and most especially Romania (where rebel and state forces engaged in running gun battles to control the television stations) has been crucial. However, throughout the post-Stalinist period the respective rewards of a capitalist, liberal democratic political system have been double-edged. The media proved to be no exception as the issues of ownership, financial control and regulation which have affected advanced Western nations have emerged. The following table signifies that there are competing views of the media in democratic societies:

Table 1.2 Dominance and pluralism models compared

	<i>Dominance</i>	<i>Pluralism</i>
Societal source	Ruling class or dominant elite	Competing political, social, cultural interests of groups
Media	Under concentrated ownership and uniform type	Many and independent of each other
Production	Standardized, routinized, controlled	Creative, free, original
Content and world view	Selective and coherent; decided from above	Diverse and competing views; responsive to audience demand
Audience	Dependent, passive, organized on large scale	Fragmented, selective, reactive and active
Effects	Strong and confirmative of established social order	Numerous, without consistency or predictability of direction, but often 'no effect'

Source: Denis McQuail *Mass Communication Theory*, 1987

To ascertain why these two models have been advanced, it will be necessary to consider the press and broadcast media in a liberal democratic state structure and the arguments which called for the press liberty.

Communications and Citizenship

It has been commonly suggested that there are civil, political and social dimensions to the exercising of citizenship within a democracy. Civil

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rights and liberties are guaranteed by laws to curtail state power. They comprise freedom of speech, movement, association and consciousness. A democracy should safeguard open debate and competition for power. The rights to own and dispose of personal property are an essential curb to state power. They establish countervailing power centres and ensure that individuals are not dependent on government subsidies.

Political rights allow individuals to participate in the diffusion of political power through exercising their franchise, occupying public office and sitting on juries. Representational assemblies enable citizens to engage in determining and administering the laws under which they are governed and distinguish them from being subjects.

Social rights ensure the basic living standards through the welfare state and universal access to communications and information facilities. Freedom of speech is the citizen's fundamental right in a modern democratic society. These conditions allow people to become full members of the society.

In this way, the mass media should secure the citizen's civil, political and social rights. The print and the electronic media's ability to disseminate critical information quickly and widely throughout society is crucial. The concept of freedom of information has underpinned the development of advanced media systems; further, within traditional liberal thought, the media should act as a public watchdog or fourth estate to reveal state abuses.

The mass media should facilitate citizenship through the provision of free and accurate information in three important ways. First, individuals must have access to knowledge and information that will allow them to pursue their rights. Second, they should be provided with the broadest range of information, interpretation and debate over public political choices. Thus, citizens can employ communications facilities to register criticism and propose alternative courses of action. Finally, they should recognize themselves in the range of representations on offer within the central communications sectors and be able to develop and extend their representations.

These rights indicate that the communications and information systems have two key features. At the production level, they should afford the maximum possible diversity of provision and the mechanisms for user feedback and participation. At the level of consumption, they should ensure universal access to services that can guarantee the exercise of citizenship regardless of income or area of residence. To this end, the citizen's access to the market-place of ideas has been understood to be an obligation of national governments. Such rights have been established through a variety of laws, policies and regulations. The right to be informed has been sustained through:

- 1 the population's universal education to advance knowledge and to discriminate changes in the world;
- 2 widespread public libraries which are repositories of historical and current information, thereby giving the public access to information about governmental policies and dominant societal institutional practices;
- 3 independent and widespread reporting of fluctuating local, national and international events through the press and broadcast media.²

The role of the press in a liberal democratic state

Freedom of speech is the citizen's fundamental right in a modern democratic society. In traditional liberal thought the press has been advanced as a 'public watchdog' over the state. It occupies a fourth estate which is separate from the Crown, Parliament and the Judiciary. Therefore, it may reveal the authorities' abuses and maintain a mature democracy. This underlying principle has dictated the press's organizational structure. It should be lightly regulated, subject only to libel and obscenity laws and the tenets of taste and decency. Liberals maintain that if the press were regulated it would become a servant of the state. Moreover, its political liberty is guaranteed as it has been independently funded through advertising revenues. Thus, only a privately-owned press competing in a free market can ensure complete independence from the government. This argument has been justified for several different reasons, the first being *consumer representation*. The fourth estate is ensured by the market relationship between the press and its audience. The market enables the readers to register their preference as consumers of a product. As the buying public determines the newspaper's success, the owners must respond to popular demand to make profits. Consequently, it follows that to sell papers proprietors must ensure that a wide variety of opinions are expressed. Therefore, through their buying power consumers act as the controllers of press output.

Following from this exchange between producers and consumers is the informational role of the press. The media market is responsive to consumer need, as it is profit-driven. This aids competition, as papers, in order to be sold, must provide a wide variety of interpretations of the news. Consequently, the consumer's choice of information will facilitate his or her own self-expression and will encourage political participation. In turn, this may promote public rationality and focus collective self-determination. The press promotes the culture of a free-thinking democracy in which no one should be subjugated to another's will but may freely express an opinion. Individual self-realization is guaranteed by the free market.

The liberation of the press is driven by the desire to make profits.

It has been argued that the free market allows a free trade of ideas. This is because a diverse number of owners have the freedom to publish. As this aids competition, popular representation is exercised, as the market allows the citizen to comprehend salient issues. Therefore, the free market creates a media system which reacts to and articulates the people's opinions.³

This free market model has been challenged by a combination of advertising pressures, monopolization and concentration of ownership. However, if the market fails another safeguard can be applied – professional responsibility. Journalistic professionalism has squared the market's flaws with the traditional conception of a democratic media. This is a conscious and an unconscious process. First, proponents argue that the journalists' first duty is to serve the public. This is reinforced through the journalistic codes on truth, accuracy and factual authenticity. Second, as journalists have to verify information by drawing on alternative sources and presenting rival interpretations they will necessarily provide a plurality of opinions. Thus, journalistic professionalism balances against the forces undermining the media's integrity. Whilst free market competition has been qualified, an 'internal pluralism' within the media monopolies counters market pressures to sensationalize and trivialize political information. Further, this professionalism allows the public to analyse important issues. Once again, the stress is on citizen empowerment as professional self-interests coincide with the public interest.

The role of broadcast media in liberal democratic societies

There are several similarities and differences between the role of the press and broadcasting in liberal democracies. The broadcasters' political independence is closely tied to the freedom of the press. They remain neutral observers committed to the principles of accuracy, impartiality and objectivity. Yet society's response toward broadcasting has been different than that of the print media. Whilst broadcasting organizations have been constitutionally independent, they have been regulated by public bodies. The electronic media has not enjoyed the press's immunity. For example, in the United States a constitutional asymmetry between print and electronic media exists. American broadcasters have been regulated by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The FCC, until its partial deregulation by the Reagan government,⁴ was responsible for ensuring that equal-time rules for political parties and a fairness doctrine were applied. If these controls had been directed at the press they would have violated the First Amendment of the US Constitution. Several reasons have justified this state of affairs. One refers to broadcasting's power to shape opinions

over newspapers. Pictures have greater influence over the public than the printed word. Television is more intrusive and less escapable as it dominates the private space.⁴ However, the justification for broadcasting regulation has been the limited spectrum of airwaves. Until the last decade, radio and television broadcasts were limited to a narrow band of nationally available frequencies. This 'limited spectrum' qualified the number of channels and affected broadcasting's organization. The early experience of the American radio system, in which competing radio stations interfered with each other, demonstrated the practical need for a regulated system. However, the mass dissemination of communications raised political as well as technical questions. For policy makers this meant that a central dilemma had to be addressed:

How (is it possible) to reconcile within a limited number of outlets the need of the state to make judgements of national priority as to how these outlets should be used, the need of each individual citizen for maximum freedom of choice in his search for personal satisfaction and the need for the broadcaster to express the truth about the world as he sees it.⁵

In responding to this conundrum, with the exception of the United States, most advanced Western broadcasting systems have followed a variant of the British public service model. This comprises a public broadcaster, the BBC, funded through a licence fee and private channels (ITV and Channel Four) funded through advertising. Traditionally, these organizations have competed for audiences rather than revenues. They are responsible for providing a mixed schedule built on the programming trinity of educating, informing and entertaining.

In Britain, the broadcasting institutions proclaim their political independence from state control, as an arm's-length relationship is seen to exist. This liberal-pluralistic position contends that through legal, institutional, funding and ideological devices broadcasters have resisted the external pressures of government intervention. They are free to broadcast within the confines of the law. The BBC is governed by a Royal Charter which enables it to be resistant to overt state pressures. Whilst the licence fee has provided assured funds for programming requirements, it has preserved the corporation's political independence from the state. It means that the BBC is not dependent upon state funding for its revenue.⁶ The corporation has been guided by the notion of impartiality in its representation of political affairs. However, in Britain and several Western states the media's 'public watchdog function' has been formally exercised in the press rather than the broadcasting system. Constitutionally, the BBC was described by its first Director-General, John Reith, as an 'institution within the constitution',⁷

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as it was subject to the Crown but simultaneously followed the pluralism of parliamentary democracy. Whilst the BBC rejects any political control of content, its public accountability, in contrast to the press, is mediated through the governors and by '(its acceptance of) Parliament as a natural pole and . . . (its interpretation) . . . (of its) task as one of reproducing "a picture of political discourse dominated by Parliament. [Broadcasting] . . . operates (an) impartial brokerage within a prevailing political system."⁸

The ITV system's political independence has been ensured through a mixture of advertising revenue and regulatory control. ITV's finances were indirectly drawn from the public rather than the state. Until the 1990 Broadcasting Act, the Independent Broadcasting Authority's (IBA, now reformed as the ITC) position as a broadcaster meant that state intervention could be offset, as the regulator was a buffer between the government and the programme-makers. Thus, the IBA was the legally responsible party instead of the regional contractor. As with the BBC, the IBA has seen parliament as its natural pole and has understood that it should provide impartial information within the dominant political system.

Moreover, minimalist broadcasting legislation (meaning that the BBC Board of Governors and the IBA had a relatively free hand in how they interpreted directives) has been developed to stem state intervention and enhance broadcasting freedoms. Further, pluralists would argue that as the Home Secretary has never employed his veto power over broadcasting democracy has been served. Whilst broadcasting has not enjoyed the same liberties as the press, it has remained independent within the mainstream political consensus, determined by Parliament as a sovereign representative body, and has adhered to the goals of impartiality, objectivity and accuracy.

The philosophical origins of a free press

Having established the press and broadcasting's political position in a liberal democracy, the origins of a free press may be considered. The concept of press freedom emerged as a distinctive principle during the wave of democracy which affected modern European and North American states during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The call was strongest in Western Europe where it coincided with the collapse of the *ancien régime*. This campaign was led by an educated bourgeoisie who fought against the power vested in the monarchy and aristocracy. They intended to transform society by providing alternative political institutions rather than merely tampering with the existing state apparatus. From the English revolution onwards, there was a

search for new, more secular and democratic methods to organize the state. The disintegration of absolutist monarchical power went hand-in-hand with the arguments articulating greater press freedom.

The seed of press freedom was sown in Britain and transported through the American and French revolutions to the Continent. These arguments were sustained by several imperatives: cheap presses; the English Revolution (1641-60); the Levellers; the 1694 expiry of the Regulation of Printing Act; the writings of Cato and John Wilkes; the popular discontent engendered by the Corn Laws; middle class enfranchisement; the radical press; and the parliamentary debates repealing the advertising and stamp duties known as the 'Taxes upon Knowledge'.

John Keane has identified four concepts underpinning the call for press freedom:

Theological: John Milton argued in *Areopagitica* that press freedom equated with a love of God and a free and knowing spirit. As God had allowed man to deduce between good and evil, the press must provide information. Good can only be appreciated when compared to evil. This argument criticized state censorship, as the individual had a God-given faculty for reason. From this perspective, control of the press was repugnant, inefficient and unworkable. Further, censors could not decide how others live as they were fallible and corrupt themselves.⁹

Individual rights: The natural rights theory of the press was articulated by John Locke, Cato, John Asgill, Tom Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft and most especially Matthew Tindal. Tindal rejected any religious justification of press censorship, arguing that theocratic rule should be replaced by man's ability to decide the truth. As it was man's right to judge information in religion and politics, there was a natural tendency to publish by stealth against court rulings. Press freedom guaranteed liberty from the political elite. It allowed for good government, based on the natural rights of rational citizens who were able to live, with their elected representatives, under the rule of law.¹⁰

Utilitarianism: From this position, press censorship was a licence for dictatorship and undermined the public's maximum happiness. William Godwin, James Mill and Jeremy Bentham argued that the best government and laws would produce the greatest happiness for the majority of the people. Bentham, however, believed that most governments were motivated by the politician's self-interest. Therefore, to check state despotism a separation of powers, a broadening of the franchise, secret ballots and frequent elections were required. Further, press

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freedom meant that politicians had to use newspapers during elections and there would be a free and effective expression of opinions. It would add to the general happiness by reducing the power held by the minority of governors:

A free press is the ally of happiness. It helps control the habitual 'self-preference' of those who govern. It exposes their secretiveness and makes them more inclined to respect and to serve the governed.¹¹

Attaining truth: This tradition countered Utilitarianism, arguing that it said too much on utility and too little about the truth. Utility may allow people to feel secure in their opinions but these need not be necessarily true. In John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* truth is fundamental to utility. Three reasons were given to guarantee truth. First, those who censor potentially true opinions have naturally denied the truth itself and assume the infallibility of their opinions. Therefore, such an assumption suppresses potential truth and stems the digestion of counter-arguments. Second, prevailing sentiments often contain falsehoods; only by countering them with alternative convictions can the truth be attained. Finally, even if an opinion is entirely true it will degenerate into dogma if it is unchallenged. Truth needed to be protected as it could not protect itself. A free press would supply an abundant amount of facts and thereby a general questioning of views by voicing truth over falsehoods.¹²

These rationales led to the rise of a free press which would dismantle prejudice and foster reflectiveness. The print media constituted a public sphere in which political sentiments could be elaborated. In such a manner, popular opinion could be directed against secretive and arbitrary state action. It was contended that state despotism fed on the blind obedience of subjects and attempts to outlaw open discussion. The press could stem the concentration of secular power by criticizing the government when it overstepped its legitimate power. Collective popular representation stood against secrecy, it demanded governmental checks, was for civic humanism and for self-restraint. Thus, it would give arcane and bossy government a bad name. A free press was the stabilizing force in the precarious balance between the state rulers and the public.¹³

In Chapter 2 we shall consider how these ideas tied in with the British press debates in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As we shall discover, the following issues all shaped the structure of the press: the incorporation of advertising encouraged by the repeal of the Stamp duties; the plurality of private ownership; lower cover prices and the greater commercialization of the system.

Criticisms of the pluralistic model

The pluralistic model of the relationship between media and the state has been subject to extensive criticism. From a liberal-pluralistic position a number of revisionist histories have emerged alongside those advocating anti-statism and market-liberalism. In particular, the liberal tradition has been criticized by Marxist interpretations of the media. These have ranged from political economic approaches focusing on issues of production and concentration of ownership to accounts analysing ideology, class and control.

Revisionist Histories of the Freedom of the Press

Some revisionist histories have suggested that a free press remained a utopian ideal.¹⁴ For instance, universal public access to freely circulating books, newspapers and pamphlets was never realized. A number of qualifications existed including advertising controls, the low circulation of papers, limited distribution and working class illiteracy. However, the principal problem in Britain referred to the introduction of stamp duties (taxation on pamphlets, newspapers and advertisements) in 1712. There were many constraints on a free press as the political elites and the establishment wished to retain social control.

Yet, as John Keane has commented, there was not only a significant chasm between the free press utopianism and the reality of a poorly circulated, harassed and deeply corrupt print media, but this early European and American vision included several blindspots.¹⁵ A series of internal pressures existed. One issue was media self censorship which contradicted the assumption that the state's political power was the main threat confronting the individual's liberty. Throughout this period pre-publication censorship occurred through the inspection of content, the provision of rewards to publishing monopolies and the various apparatus of surveillance.

The advocates of press freedom pursued an information-flow paradigm which failed to address how the media could pre-structure or bias the audience's reception of opinions. They did not recognize that information could be structured through symbolic codes determined by the citizen's ability to interpret and select material. These referred to the manufacturing of the news in which information was processed through institutional routines and technical tricks. **The dissemination of data was shaped by media practices which set agendas, constrained the contours of possible meanings and determined how individuals thought about political issues.** The early proponents did not understand that readers were situated interpreters.

Finally, this understanding did not appreciate that censorship has been subject to different meanings and motivations. As readers were situated interpreters, they could voluntarily restrict their comprehension of information through internal censorship. The internal censor often determined that certain information must be rejected as it undermined the individual's reputation, family, career, or could result in legal action being taken. The early modern view therefore suffered from a hidden classical bias. The face-to-face model of communications supposed that everyone could enter into public life on an equal basis:

The early modern assumption that communications media recreate the intimacy and directness of the *polis* neglected the problem of how freedom of communication among citizens could be institutionalized peacefully in a dispersed, complex civil society.¹⁶

Another set of historical revisions have suggested that the fourth estate was a myth. George Boyce has shown how different motivations shaped the organization of the British press in the late nineteenth century and early 1900s.¹⁷ Throughout this period, newspaper circulation increased and was aimed at the prosperous, literate lower middle-classes. Alongside the improvements in printing and distribution, news was parcelled into short and easily digestible packages. Underpinning these developments was advertising finance. Economic controls existed, as the paper's respective advertising, news and deliberative heads had different priorities. Boyce has gone as far as to comment:

The paradox of the Fourth Estate, with its head in politics and its feet in commerce, can, however, only be understood if it is appreciated that the whole idea of the Fourth Estate was a myth. A myth can combine fact and fiction without any uneasiness existing between the two: nowhere is this dualism – this ability to mix mythology with reality – more apparent than in the examination of the British press at the height of its power and prestige, between 1880 and 1918.¹⁸

Throughout this era, newspaper editors *apparently* wielded greater power than the politicians. The press appeared to initiate policy, criticize its application, control the executive and act as an organ of public opinion. For example, the press forced the partisan truce during the First World War so that political in-fighting could be avoided and the coalition wartime government would receive all-party support. However, this understanding may be seen as an illusion when the source of this apparent power is discussed. Instead of the press being free, professional and in touch with public opinion, it was part of the political machinery and enjoyed a close affiliation with the contemporaneous

partisan groups.¹⁹ Ultimately, the press was an extension of the political system. Rather than acting as a check or balance, it was inextricably linked to the parliament and political executive. In reality government by journalism masked government by politicians, with the journalists and editors performing as advisers, brokers and, sometimes, opponents for the political elite. Moreover, many journalists aspired to enter the political mainstream. Therefore, the press and politicians worked closely for common ends. For example, the *Morning Post* editor H. A. Gwynne appeared to control the content of the paper rather than his proprietors. He was apparently free from any one party's financial commands. However, Stephen Koss has shown that a 'Byzantine network of relationships' existed between editors and politicians.²⁰ Gwynne, for instance, had developed a number of relationships within the political and military elites and 'was certainly not independent of the political system, nor . . . (wished) to be: the influence he possessed derived, not from any aloof, distinct posture, but from his contacts and friendships with the people at the very centre of power.'²¹

Boyce's arguments have been complemented by James Curran's analysis of the parliamentary debates surrounding the repeal of the Taxes Upon Knowledge during the 1830s and 1850s.²² As we shall see later, the economic reform of the press precipitated by the introduction of mass advertising may equally be seen as a method of social control, incorporating the press into the dominant political sphere rather than liberating it.

Anti-statist and market-libertarian critiques of British broadcasting

The critique of the pluralistic tradition has been particularly directed at the British broadcasting institutions. In many respects, they have been unfavourably compared to the press. Whilst public service broadcasting has been governed by the imperatives of impartiality, objectivity and accuracy, a number of criticisms have emerged which have cast doubt on the traditional wisdoms.

As we have seen, broadcasting institutions have been contained within the state as they conform to parliamentary sovereignty. Supporters of the pluralist position argue that broadcasters have remained independent actors in mainstream politics. Further, it has been propagated that, as the Home Secretary has never employed his veto power over broadcasting, democracy has been served. Against this, it may be contended that the Home Secretary has never had to effect such powers due to the inbuilt self-restraint and ideological adherence of the broadcasting institutions to the dominant political culture.

Although minimalist broadcasting legislation has allowed the BBC Board of Governors and the IBA to enjoy a relatively free hand in their

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interpretation of policy, this position disguises as much as it reveals. Governments have been engaged in political patronage in the appointment process. Broadcasting regulators have been drawn from a list of the great and good from the political and cultural establishment. Most notably this occurred when Harold Wilson chose Charles Hill in the 1960s and Margaret Thatcher selected Marmaduke Hussey in the 1980s to chair the BBC.²³ Moreover, the setting and collection of the licence fee has provided governments with a political lever to influence the BBC. Finally, it has been suggested that the monopoly of funding and resources, and the vertically-integrated structure of a system founded on broadcast producers has stemmed creativity, access and ultimately a plurality of independent voices on the airwaves.

Kenneth Dyson has shown how ~~two alternative models have criticized the system's norms and reformed it.~~²⁴ The first referred to what could broadly be called an **anti-statist, culturalist set of arguments**. The second was more directly drawn from the traditions of Adam Smith's **market-liberalism**. The importance of these positions was reflected in the two most recent cycles of British broadcasting policy-making centred around the 1977 Annan and 1986 Peacock Reports respectively. In Chapter 4 we shall see that these ideas were to fall on fertile soil during the seventies and eighties as the political discourse changed.

Culturalist, anti-statist traditions

The literary critic Raymond Williams has argued that the central concern of mass communications or the long revolution was the extension of social communications to enhance the learning process and restrict elitism. To achieve this, a suitable broadcasting system was required. Williams rejected the market, as it qualified human experiences and as broadcasting represented social rather than fiscal capital. He argued for a cooperative trust which would encourage communal broadcasting and democracy. Thus, the public service broadcasting system was perceived as anachronistic in solving the dilemma between the state and the democratic flow of information. First, it was accused of insularity due to the closed entry for independent producers. Second, it was unaccountable to its audience. The system was seen as unrepresentative, monopolistic and unable to respond to the public. The state's need to control a scarce national resource outweighed the citizens' rights to freedom of choice and the broadcasters' need to express their perception of the truth.

By focusing on the fourth channel, this 1970s debate raised issues pertaining to editorial control, finance, organization and the relationship between broadcasting and the state.²⁵ As a result, a ~~number of~~ **different broadcasting models were proposed to encourage pluralism,**

diversity and viewer choice. Public lobbies called for a central funding scheme, increased worker participation within managerial policies, and a school for research. In particular, Anthony Smith advocated an open access policy in which freelance broadcasting groups would produce their programmes under contract. They would be offered the technical back-up to make alternative programmes.

To realize this aim Smith advocated an electronic publishing model for broadcasting. At the centre of this commissioning system stood the National Television Foundation (NTF). This would operate like a publisher, broadcasting programmes made by independent companies rather than producing them. In contrast to the vertically integrated system, the fourth channel's schedule could consist of independent productions which would encourage community access and democracy. Smith contended that institutional controls should be wedded 'to a doctrine of openness rather than balance, to expression rather than neutralisation'.²⁶ As we shall consider, the Annan Report replaced the foundation with an authority – the Open Broadcasting Authority (OBA). The OBA would be limited in liabilities, intervening if programmes were libellous, incited riot or were obscene. The authority was to be light in its touch, enjoying as much freedom as parliament deemed possible.

In many respects, these ideas would be echoed, within a different theoretical framework, in the 1986 Peacock Report's market-liberal model. A substantive difference between Annan and Peacock was the funding method that was recommended. Annan proposed the OBA should be financed through a mixture of sponsorship, interest groups and block advertising in competition with ITV. This multiplicity of funding was conceived to ensure political independence. Moreover, in contrast to the later report, Annan's reforms were pitched upon the social rather than economic purpose of broadcasting to provide a plurality of voices.

Market-liberal developments

The libertarian interpretation of broadcasting originated from Adam Smith's market-liberal/utilitarian conception of society as a competitive market. In this construct no 'fixed' societal order exists. Instead, society was composed of interactive and independent individuals. Thus 'the individual is the axiom, the society the derivative.'²⁷ Following upon this, the individual is the principal source of economic activity through his or her enterprise. Individual economic liberalization equated with societal benefit. Social welfare was maximized by the individual's preferences which were supported by pro-competitive policies and minimal public regulation.²⁸

By extension, state powers have to be limited so that individual enterprise may be fully realized. For example, government policies can only be justified if their sum benefit outweighs their costs to the individual. The notion that political or societal elites can act in their own interests for the greater good is rejected, as it qualifies the individual's freedom. This contrasts with other philosophies which perceive society as embodying 'some other or higher force or purpose than simply the welfare, however, broadly interpreted, of the individuals who comprise (it)'.²⁹ Within this conception, social communication should satisfy individual preferences, rather than attempt to act as an unprovable public service good. As long as the public service tenets do not impinge upon the individual's right to choose, they remain acceptable. However, for libertarians, this had rarely been the case in British broadcasting.

It should be noted that whilst this conception underpinned the market-liberal analysis, this model was often developed by individual actors working within a market-liberal tradition. This was a broad approach rather than constituting a particular 'school' of thought. However, market-liberals have been unified in their unfavourable comparison between broadcasting and the press. Where the press operated as a free market, broadcasting had been duopolistic and subject to political pressure. This critique provided the basis of the two main market-liberal approaches to broadcasting. First, they have determined that a form of regulatory capture has characterized relations in broadcasting. Gordon Hughes and David Vines maintain that in the ITV sector the normative objective of regulation has been to enforce franchise agreements located around the concept of quality upon which there can be no defined agreement.³⁰ Invariably, the IBA reacted to interests of the ITV companies rather than to the public. Second, a significant contribution to the market-liberal approach was made by the libertarian economist Peter Jay.³¹ Throughout the 1970s, Jay constructed an integrated thesis on the financial reform of broadcasting.³² He argued that two imperatives heightened the need for reform: the incremental growth of the broadcasting organizations made them susceptible to state interference and technological developments had placed history on the side of the market. Jay contended that it was no longer acceptable to judge British broadcasting as being good through the normal criterion of its ends (programmes), instead it was necessary to assess the quality of the system by the level of access it afforded to the individual to determine what s/he wanted to view or listen to. The process, rather than the product, was what mattered. Therefore, he argued that the new technologies (cable, satellite), by removing the limited spectrum, provided the means through which the viewer might fully participate in a form of electronic publishing. He envisaged that a nationally integrated cable system could be developed through a mixture

of public and private funds. This network would be generally available to the public who would then subscribe to view individual programmes. As a consequence, a true market-place could exist, as the consumer would call up the programme by dialling the correct code and paying an appropriate charge in relation to the programme's popularity or desirability.³³

Just as 'electronic publishing' would revolutionize the individual's access to programmes, it meant that the production and regulation of broadcasting would be transformed. The broadcasting system would no longer be vertically integrated, comprised of broadcasting organizations who produced and transmitted programmes. Instead, the new broadcasting market would enable the entrance of a greater number of independent production companies. These programme-makers could produce whatever they liked in exchange for the payment of a transmission fee. Like any product, the programme's success would ultimately be decided by its ability to attract subscribers. The regulators would therefore become an irrelevance as the technological and industrial imperatives which had contributed to their existence had been overcome. This would be beneficial, as regulators had previously censored the individual's economic and societal rights. Jay contrasted the state's control over broadcasting against the freedom and liberty of an independent, printed press. The basic right to publish was contradicted by:

our belief that broadcasting must be closely and minutely controlled . . . by accountable public bodies operating under the laws and charters which specify their duties in exacting terms. Is there any good reason why we should be appalled by the idea of making the market-place the arbiter of what should be broadcast as we would be outraged by the thought of one or two National Publishing Authorities determining what books, magazines and newspapers should be offered to the public?³⁴

In Jay's construct the interventionist regulation of the public service system had no place in the future of broadcasting. Within two decades, there would be no technical pretext for a government-appointed policeman to regulate the air-waves. Consequently, government or legislative intervention could not be justified, except in applying the general print laws of blasphemy and libel.³⁵ In order to create a free broadcasting market-place in which the individual might exercise not only his or her economic but political freedoms, it would not be acceptable to merely tamper with the BBC's funding structure. From this perception, the ITV network also suffered from the ills that had dogged the public broadcaster - monopolization, inefficiency, the stemming of independent producers, a lack of choice in programming, and finally

an overbearing regulatory authority. Essentially, both the public and commercial sectors were perceived as a 'comfortable duopoly'.³⁶ In a number of respects Jay's vision concurred with the arguments made by Anthony Smith during the Annan debate. However, Jay's ideas were drawn upon the market as the provider of economic pluralism and political liberty: 'The thought may have been influenced by my bias against paternalism and corporatism . . . and the general disposition to replace the sovereignty of the consumer in many walks of life by the fatherly dispositions of the benevolent.'³⁷

As we shall see, these ideas were potent in the development of policy toward the British broadcasting institutions during the 1980s. Most especially, the Peacock Report was to provide a challenge to broadcasting's traditions and set the framework for the following policy cycle.

Critiques from the Marxist tradition

Beneath this market-liberal critique sits a view of individualism shaped by eighteenth-century political theories and practicalities. However, it may be asked whether this concept remains consistent with the modern political process and is an appropriate unit to judge the system. **By focusing on the individual as the basic unit of analysis, it harks back to the pre-industrial conception of the polity. This dismisses the role of modern political parties, pressure groups and associations; it ignores the power blocks of an era of mass politics. Consequently, this perspective makes an artificial distinction between information and representation by detaching information from its social context.** This analysis does not show how ideas and systems of representation are ideological weapons which allow societal elites to advance their interests. Whilst libertarians contend that the media should facilitate social agreement through the dissemination of accurate information and contrary opinion, they fail to understand that one class or social coalition may manipulate the media's content. **An elite can naturalize and universalize its interests because it controls the cultural production.** The media may give the impression of distributing accurate information and promoting a conflictual debate. However, **by confining the political discourse to "legitimate" areas of controversy, and by grounding it on assumptions that do not challenge the structure of social power, it may be engineering a contrived form of social consent.**³⁸

These points are made by Marxists, who stress that the mass media have been forged out of the capitalist relations of production underpinning society. Essentially, Marx argued that the economic base has defined the ideological superstructure. In Marx's analysis of capitalism, the bourgeoisie's control over the proletariat has been defined by its ability to shape the ideology. The neo-Marxist critique has descended

from the theory of false consciousness and the basic belief that capitalism not only owns the means of production, but the cultural means of production. In *The German Ideology* Marx commented: 'The class which has the means for material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the production and distribution of the ideas of their age.'³⁹ Thus, traditional Marxists have argued that capitalism no longer simply owns the means of production, but also controls the superstructure through ownership of the media. The public sphere has become an arena for class domination in which elites disorganize their opposition through ideological indoctrination. Therefore, the media was straightforwardly seen to have been structured, controlled and located within the dominant framework of class interests. As Jean Seaton and Ben Pimlott state:

The . . . (Marxist) . . . school . . . sees the media primarily not as a restraint on rules but in effect, as their servant. Thus in modern Britain, ~~the media should be regarded as an agent of consensus directed towards producing agreement, acceptance or the acquiescence~~ of the masses towards policies or attitudes which are not of their making nor necessarily in their interest.⁴⁰

Media ownership is a key element in the mental domination of the capitalist class over the working classes. The mass media's politics are determined by a concentration of capital and the tightening grip of multinationals. However, ~~there is no single Marxist approach to the media~~. Several paradigms have emerged from the many revisions of Marx's work. ~~Throughout the 1970s the political analysis of the media was underpinned by a number of approaches concerning this base-superstructure relationship; political economy, critical theory and an analysis of the workings and mass dissemination of ideology.~~⁴¹ Although these approaches differed in their methodology and analysis, each remained committed to the Marxist view of the media as an agent of the dominant ideology. As Richard Collins comments: ~~The role of media studies was to strip the legitimizing mask from the media and by revealing them as agents of oppression hasten the day justice would triumph.~~⁴²

The political economist tradition

~~This materialist approach asserts the dependence of ideology on the economic base, and centres on the media's financial structures rather than its content.~~ It investigates the inter-relationships between media economies, the processes through which communications are manufactured and their ideological impact within the public sphere. A crude

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Marxist would state that the direct intervention of a press baron like Lord Beaverbrook produced a particular editorial outlook. However, Marx commented that journalistic freedom (of which he had first hand experience as a reporter for the *New York Daily Tribune*) was constrained due to the economic pressure produced under capitalism, regardless of direct ownership. This manifested itself through the expansion of stock companies and corporations. The owners invariably left the running of the companies to business managers. Therefore ownership was not directly comparable to control.

Ownership has also received criticism from arguments concerning managerial revolution and professionalism. James Burnham argued in *The Managerial Revolution* that the development of capitalism on the lines of the Stalinist corporate state had produced an elite of *apparatchiks*. Through their administrative status they exercised control. Power was essentially more diffuse and organized at an allocative level. For example, the BBC is a publicly owned institution run by a managerial elite, dominated by peer professionalism where power operates at a commissioning or producer level and is funded for non-profitmaking purposes.⁴³ In response, **modern media political economists, such as Peter Golding and Graham Murdock**, are critical of this interpretation. First, they **argue Marx predicted that monopolization would occur**. Second, **to focus on the relationship between owners and managers significantly underestimates the interconnections between shareholders of different companies and ignores this potential power base**. Finally, **managerial freedom is still constrained by profit-making**.⁴⁴ Even public service broadcasting cannot operate outside the context of capitalism as it has to compete for audiences and is placed under political pressure to utilize the licence fee.

Golding and Murdock demonstrate that greater concentrations of ownership, media diversification, conglomeration and imperialism have emerged. In effect, a new form of empire-building has evolved.⁴⁵ For instance, Rupert Murdoch's News International has a variety of multimedia interests and involves itself in newspapers, satellite broadcasting, films and book publishing. Most recently, Murdoch has moved to tap the potentially lucrative markets in China and the Asian sub-continent through his purchase of Star Television.

The history of the modern communications media, therefore, is not only an economic history of their growing incorporation into a capitalist system, but also a political history of their increasing centrality to the exercise of citizenship. In relation to this argument, the mass media have been employed as agents of control over the full democratic process of citizenship. The media are part of the information-cultural complex with close ties to the government. Therefore, they are integrated into the political elite and remain generally supportive,

although sometimes critically so, of the capitalist discourse: 'the conglomerate media are not a source of *popular* control over government but merely one means by which dominant economic forces exercise informal influence over the state.'⁴⁶

These arguments occur in Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's analysis of the American media.⁴⁷ Whilst the system appears to compete, attack and periodically expose corporate or political corruption, its watchdog function is qualified by the limited nature of these critiques, the huge inequality of resources held between elites and the populace, and the public's access to the media:

What it amounts to is a technique of control. . . . this was useful and necessary (for the elite) because 'the common interests' - the general concerns of all people - 'elude' the public. The public just isn't up to dealing with them. And they have to be the domain of what (was) called a 'specialized class'.⁴⁸

To operationalize this analysis, Herman and Chomsky have developed a propaganda model which identifies a number of filters shaping the media output. The first is the concentration of ownership. The second is advertising which is the prime source of media income. The third considers the use of legitimate sources in news production which spawns an unhealthy reliance on primary definers such as the government, business and 'experts' funded or approved by these agencies. The fourth concerns flak directed at the media as a means of discipline. Finally, they refer to anti-communism as a national religion and control mechanism. In such a manner freedom of speech is nullified and refers to the interests of the capitalist classes.⁴⁹

The critical theorist tradition

This view is reflected in the work of critical theorists drawn from the Frankfurt School. They shared, with many others, the fears of ~~the mass society~~.⁵⁰ ~~This was a conception of modern society as a mass of alienated, atomized individuals whose social ties were undermined through industrialization and urbanization. Therefore, the isolated individual was more receptive to media messages because s/he has fewer social ties.~~ The power and influence of the media over the 'mass' audience is highly pervasive and problematic. Essentially, it could sway audiences and set the agenda. ~~The Frankfurt School integrated the mass society argument into the Marxist view, commenting that it impeded the proletariat's ability to create socialist political consciousness. Imminent radical social change had been denied because political awareness had been eliminated. To this end, the media expressed the dominant~~

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ideology by industrializing the cultural practices, defining the debate and manipulating the audience.⁵¹

In his influential work, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, the critical theorist Jürgen Habermas provided a concrete demonstration of this abstract. He argued that the public sphere (the space between the state and the public in which mass communications operated) had increasingly been organized in the interests of the bourgeoisie.⁵² Habermas demonstrated that the media's democratic function eroded from the eighteenth century, in which the press was dominated by individual rationality, into the period of mass political power. In the 1700s, the press acted as a medium through which private opinions could be transformed into public opinions. The public benefitted by having access to free discussion and participation from equal parties, thereby enabling a collective, rational arena for debate to emerge to influence public policy and criticize governments. Thus, the media expedited the political process by reorganizing the private citizen into a collective public body through different opinions:

The economic independence provided by private property, the critical reflection fostered by letters and novels, the flowering of discussion in coffee houses and salons and, above all, the emergence of an independent, market-based press, created a new public engaged in critical political discussion. From this was forged a reason-based consensus which shaped the direction of the state.⁵³

However, as monopoly capitalism emerged the press became dominated by corporatism, advertising and ownership. ~~Political public discourse was overridden by power politics~~ in which major organizations negotiated with one another and the state, thereby excluding the public. In turn, ~~the media's political discourse was state-controlled, sensationalist and market-led~~ **Politics was defined as a predigested spectacle.** For Habermas public opinion was no longer a process of rational discourse but resulted from the media's manipulation of publicity and social engineering.

Althusserian and Gramscian criticisms of the media

Habermas's view of the public sphere's decline in the light of encroaching monopoly capitalism reflects a methodology, common in critical political economy, which defined ideology as a reflection of the production process. Essentially, the ideological superstructure was a passive expression of capitalism's economic base. Stuart Hall has argued that this notion of class dominance by overt force or ideological compulsion hid the real complexities of the media's role:

One had also to see that dominance was accomplished at the unconscious as well as the conscious level: to see it as a property of the system of relations involved, rather than as the overt and intentional biases of individuals in the very activity of regulation and exclusion which functioned through language and discourse.⁵⁴

Two influential sources directed this approach; Louis Althusser's analysis of ideology which focused on how the superstructure was necessary to the base's existence and Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony.⁵⁵ These ideas challenged the materialist perspective.

First, traditional Marxist analysis failed to explain how social agents, such as the media, operated as ideological actors to create false consciousness. Althusser rejected the base/superstructure model by employing the concept of the social formation. This comprised three practices – the economic, the political and the ideological. Although economic determination occurred in the last instance, capitalism's contradictions never took a pure form. Althusser's idea of structure in dominance meant that whilst the economic remained a key organizing societal principle, it was not necessarily the dominant one during a particular historical period. In feudalism the political sphere was predominant. However, the dominant practice in a social formation was dependent on the economic production's specific form: 'The economic is the determinant in the last instance, not because the other instances are epiphenomena, but because it determines which practice is dominant.'⁵⁶ This economic determination in the last instance suggested that other social practices were relatively autonomous and had a specific effect. Therefore, ideology which is 'a system (with its own logic and rigour) of representations (images, myths, ideas or concepts)' was not an expression of the economic base,⁵⁷ but a practice in itself. As economic practices transformed raw materials into a product through channeling human labour by determinate means (production), ideological practices could transform the individual's lived relations to the social formation. Ideology existed to dispel the contradictions of lived experience by presenting false, but seemingly true, information. It represented capitalism as a totally coherent system lacking any internal conflict.

Althusser contended it was at the ideological level that the reproduction of the entire capitalist system was secured. Ideology was a concrete social process embodied in material institutions entitled 'ideological state apparatus'. These included the family, school, church and the media. They reproduced ideology in a manner which stressed capitalism as being natural and inevitable. Thus, Althusser produced a theory to demonstrate how the media presented an ideological meaning of the world by providing an imaginary picture of real conditions,

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thereby concealing exploitation. The media offered citizens a position in which they misrecognized themselves as free and discriminating:

Put simply, if capitalism is to survive as an ongoing system, then concrete social individuals must be reconciled both to the class structure and to the class positions within it which they occupy. They must be induced to 'live' their exploitation and oppression in such a way that they do not experience or represent to themselves their position as one in which they are exploited and oppressed.⁵⁸

Second, this critique of base-superstructure relations was reinforced by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony. This argued that the elite classes ruled by consent rather than force. The media had a central role in developing public compliance. For instance, it defined apparently common sense values which were a form of ideological indoctrination. Further, the ruling class constantly struggled to retain its hegemony over the proletariat. Therefore, although the media formally allowed for a contestation of ideas between political and social groups, through linguistic codes, concepts, chains of association and common sense values, the ruling classes' interests were perpetuated: 'Put another way, the media's informational role is never purely informational; it is also a way of arbitrating between the rhetorical claims of rival interests - in a form that has an indirect outcome in terms of the allocation of resources and life opportunities between different social groups.'⁵⁹

Finally, the political economist perspective defined ideology which is concrete, identifiable and materialist by referring it to consciousness which cannot be identified. Critics have suggested that ideology did not emerge from an ephemeral consciousness but from the material world. Therefore, ideology was not a product of consciousness, as ideological forms are the producers of consciousness: 'Rather than being regarded as the product of forms of consciousness whose contours are determined elsewhere, in the economic sphere, the signifying systems which constitute the sphere of ideology are themselves viewed as the vehicles which the consciousness of social agents is produced.'⁶⁰

The hegemonic theory of the media differed from the classic Marxist and political-economist arguments through its appreciation of ideology's greater independence from the economic base.⁶¹ Therefore, it focused less on economic or structural determinants of class-based ideology, but more on the media's content. It stressed how ideology created its own forms of expression and signification, and was a mechanism which invaded and shaped the consciousness of its compliant victims (mainly the proletariat):

Ideology, in the form of distorted definition of reality and a picture of class relationships or, in the words of Althusser (1971), 'the imaginary relationships of individuals to their real conditions of existence', is not dominant in the sense of being imposed by force by ruling classes, but is a pervasive and deliberate cultural influence which serves to interpret experience of reality in a covert and consistent manner.

Conclusion: The Political Position of the Mass Media

This chapter has outlined some of the theories concerning the media's political position in liberal-democratic states. These have included: arguments for a free press and broadcasting system; critiques from revisionist press historians, anti-statist and market-liberal advocates for greater independence in broadcasting; and various Marxist perspectives focusing on the media as agents for social control. From these viewpoints we may ascertain that **the political position of the media is contested and debatable**. Underpinning all these critiques is an assumption that the media can not occupy an autonomous position so long as the press and broadcasters simultaneously attempt to remain public watchdogs whilst being political actors.

It should be noted that these theories have been challenged by more recent developments in the academic debate and the changing media environment. To some extent, **the post-modernist ideas have reformulated our view of the media's political position**. They have argued that **the concept of dominant ideology has been undermined as people are faced with a proliferation of images from which no objective truth can be drawn**. In particular, Jean Baudrillard has contended that there has been an implosion between the virtual and reality, so that hyper-reality defines people's thinking, discourse and view of the world. This has coincided with new developments in transmission technology, the greater globalization of the media economy and a changing role for media owners within national and international political affairs. Therefore **new forms of statecraft have emerged to challenge the traditional understandings between the mass media and the state**. This brings into question the press and the broadcaster's position as public watchdogs, as widening technological diffusion and greater concentration of media ownership have started to force a rethink over the media's role.

Throughout the following chapters we shall assess, analyse and explain how media institutions have been developed, principally in Britain, and test the applicability of some of the above media theories. It is our aim to explore the political and philosophical implications of the changing communications landscape as reformed policy agendas develop, new technologies become domestically available and there is

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a greater globalization of the media economy. Therefore, the structure underpinning this approach will be conditional on several major questions:

- What type of media system has existed in Britain throughout the years and how and why did it evolve in such a manner?
- In what ways has it been understood to operate and what criticisms have been levelled at it?
- To what extent have the criticisms been justified and how has the system responded?
- Have certain ideological, philosophical and political positions dominated the discourse?
- What has been the role of political actors, legislators and policy-makers?
- What shifts are beginning to occur and what will they mean to our understanding of the mass media in Britain and the world?
- What appropriate new paradigms can be employed in order to understand the mass media in the future?
- To what extent has the concept of the citizen been replaced by the consumer?

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- 4 When Ronald Reagan took office in 1981, communications deregulation accelerated as it fitted in with the administration's general monetarist policies. Reagan appointed Mark Fowler as head of the FCC, and deregulatory activity peaked during Reagan's first term (1981-5). This began with Congress's extension of radio and television licences to seven and five years respectively, and culminated in the showpiece 1984 Cable Telecommunications Act which massively deregulated cable services. In between, two other decisions shaped the pace of change, both occurring in January 1982. The old AT&T/Bell monopoly was relieved of its local services control and IBM's dominance of the computer market was reinforced by its release from an anti-trust case. All these reforms were significant of an increasingly competitive set of market arrangements. For further details see Jeremy Tunstall, *Communications Deregulation: The Unleashing of America's Communications Industry*, Basil Blackwell, 1986.
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